


From Prisoner to PhD: Teacher's Notes

Level (L), time (T), age (A)	Materials	Aims
L: B2+ T: 60 – 90 mins A: Adults  Trigger warning: some students/teachers might feel uncomfortable discussing some of the content of this lesson.	Video: https://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/i-went-from-prisoner-to-phd/p08mpxtt	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To practice vocabulary on crimes and punishments so that students can talk about these issues. To practice listening for general and specific information so that students feel more confident listening outside of the classroom. To practice giving opinions and reasons so that students feel confident doing this outside of the classroom. To practice negotiating and coming to joint decisions so that students feel confident in handling similar situations outside of the classroom.

**Speaking: prisons.**

1 Put students into pairs. Tell them to complete the first activity. For *larger classes*, do this exercise in groups. For *1:1*, give your student some time to think before discussing. Tell students to be prepared to share their ideas with the class. Spend 5-10 minutes on this part of the lesson. Suggested answers:

- Sad because it doesn't look like a nice/happy place. Curious because I want to know more about the place.
- I think the main role of prisons should be to rehabilitate people and provide them with opportunities to make a life for themselves when they leave.
- Prisoner: sad or angry person. PhD: older person. Drug dealer: young person. Father: middle-aged person. *Encourage students to critically think about and question why these words conjure up these images for them e.g. imposed societal 'norms'.*
- Yes, I think somebody who has been to prison can lose the label of a 'prisoner' because I believe everybody deserves another chance.

 **Listening: from prisoner to PhD**

These exercises practice global listening and listening for specific information/detail. You can do them as a watching or listening task or a mix of both e.g. first time you play just the audio, then watch the video or vice versa. Subtitles in English are optional.

2. Tell students to read the instructions. You could have them guess answers to questions a-c before watching and see if they are correct while they watch. Answers:

- a He lectures criminology.
- b He works with students in prisons.
- c The job is personal to him because he used to be in prison.

3 Set a time limit of two minutes to write 8-12 words. Make sure these are only key content words related to the video/topic. You could have students compare their words before watching/listening.

4 Check that students have read and understood the exercise. Play the video/audio. After watching/listening, tell students to compare their lists. Ask students how many words they ticked off and what the words were. The student who ticked off the most words is the winner. Encourage students to share the new words they wrote down and discuss them with the class.

5 Allow students some time to read statements a-f and the task. Students might be able to answer some questions already after the first watch/listen – encourage them to write these answers down and check them while listening again. Check students have understood the exercise. Play the video/audio. After watching/listening, tell students to compare what they wrote down. Go through the answers as a class and check that everyone has the correct answers. Answers:

- a F - Other prisoners and guards asked him why he was wasting his time. They said studying wouldn't matter with his criminal record.
- b F – He served 8 years of his 16-year sentence.*
- c T
- d F – Almost half of all prisoners have left school without any formal qualification.
- e T
- f F – According to Stephen, the word 'prisoner' is just a label.

* You could ask students if they think this is a fair punishment for this crime.

'I went from prisoner to PhD' video transcript. Answers to a-f are in **bold**.

Link to video: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/ideas/videos/i-went-from-prisoner-to-phd/p08mpxtt> (Last accessed 12.07.23)

Prisoner. PhD. Drug dealer. Father. Each of those words conjures up a different picture. None of them tell you exactly who someone is. My name is Stephen Akpabio-Klementowski. I'm a PhD candidate and I'm a lecturer in criminology at The Open University. I work with students in prisons. I love what I do. It feels deeply personal to me, because I used to be a prisoner too. All these labels have been mine. So growing up, life was tough. My father died in a car crash when I was a teenager. And that hit me really hard. I didn't see the world as a meritocracy*. I had to grab what I could. But being sent to prison for dealing drugs was a shock. I was sentenced to 16 years. For the first three months inside, I didn't speak to anyone. Eventually, I started working in the kitchens. And as people got to know me, I was eventually assessed for my educational potential and encouraged after that assessment to enrol at the Open University. But the most difficult barrier was actually inside of me. I'd left school with no qualifications. Nothing. I was scared of my future and I decided to try. My day job working in the kitchens and on the servery meant that I had to study at night. So I had to study on the toilet, while my cellmate snored. So when I finished my first module, it gave me hope, and it gave me something I could focus on. There was no going back now.

Other prisoners and guards kept asking me why I was wasting my time - studying wouldn't matter with my criminal record. I felt I was changing. I discovered I loved learning. And that was enough to keep me going. **I served eight years of my 16-year sentence.** By the time I left prison, I had completed my first degree. I had also completed two further degrees at Masters level. So, after I was released, I got a job working with students in prisons - not in spite of who I was, but because of it. It's hard to describe how I felt **the first time I went back to prison as a lecturer**, and the governor came down, and shook my hand. What I want people to know is that I'm not different or special - anybody can do this. **Almost half of all prisoners have left school without achieving any formal qualification.** I know how that feels. And it had a massive impact on my confidence. But that does not mean that you're not able to learn. Everyone has the potential and the power to change. I've seen it. And I've lived it. It was Winston Churchill who said: "There is treasure, if you can only find it, in the heart of every man." What do we want from our prisons? Is the primary goal of prison to punish, or to help find a different path? The policy isn't coherent, you see. **Research shows that education does reduce reoffending.** It allows former prisoners to make different choices. So when I sit with prisoners, I say to them: "I was in your shoes. But I am now released, on the outside. I've got a good job. I've got a good life. I'm with my family." Had I met somebody like me when I was younger, things might have been very different. No-one believed in me. I didn't believe in myself either. It's taken two decades to get here. And this is only the beginning. **The word "prisoner" is just a label.** I found freedom within my own mind. You need to remember that you have the capacity to learn. You have the capacity to change your life. There is treasure within each and every one of us.

* A meritocracy: a system where people are successful or get power because of their abilities/talents/efforts, not because of money or their position in society. More info here: <https://www.thoughtco.com/meritocracy-definition-3026409> (Last accessed 12.07.23).



Speaking: over to you

6 Put students into new pairs/groups. Tell them to discuss the questions and to be ready to share their thoughts with the class. Spend about 5-10 minutes on this activity.

Suggested answers:

- Inspired by how he has turned his life around and is now helping people who are in a similar position he was.
- I think schools should provide opportunities for young people to speak to therapists and have a 'buddy' system with older/other students. I think governments should invest in local youth clubs and activities.
- Yes, I think all prisoners should have the opportunity to study or learn a trade so they can build a life for themselves when they leave. It provides equal opportunities and hopefully gives them something to focus on.

+ Extension activity

Tell students to look up Stephen Akpabio-Klementowski on their phones/devices. What more can they find out about him? Ask students to report back to the class after about 5 minutes. Here is his page on the Open University website:

<https://fass.open.ac.uk/social-policy-criminology/phd-student/stephen-akpabio-klementowski> (Last accessed 12.07.23).



Vocab: crimes

7 Tell students to complete the activity alone and then compare their answers in pairs. Perhaps also remind students of the collocation 'to commit a crime'. For stronger groups, hide the box with the crimes and see if students can fill the gaps on their own. Be aware that students might come up with different verbs. Check students know what the crimes

are; use dictionaries and their first language, if needed.

Answers:

2 manslaughter – there is no specific verb or word for a perpetrator. Tell students you have to describe the context e.g. she was convicted of manslaughter. She killed someone accidentally.

3 arson – an arsonist – to set sth on fire/to set fire to sth

4 vandalism – a vandal – to vandalise

5 shoplifting – a shoplifter – to shoplift (or: to steal)

6 drug dealing – a drug dealer – to deal drugs

+ Extension activity: stronger students

Encourage stronger students to look at the vocab list for 'crime and punishment' from the Oxford learner's dictionary. You could suggest they choose three words they didn't know and write them in a sentence:

<https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/topic/crime-and-punishment?level=c2> (Last accessed 12.07.23).

+ Extension activity: fast finishers

Tell students to think of more crimes that aren't on the list (plus the perpetrator and verb). See the link above for potential answers.

Speaking: which crime is worst?

This activity leads to a lot of speaking. It aims to practice the language presented in exercise 7 and the vocabulary in the phrases boxes. It is not an easy task and there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer; the exercise is designed to get students talking, giving their opinion and reasons for their opinion, and negotiating with others. Decide how much time you want to spend on it and tell students the time limit. I would suggest 10-15 minutes. If you are not in a rush, take longer.

8 Give students a few minutes to do their individual categories. Put students into new pairs/groups. For *1:1 lessons*, do this exercise yourself and compare with your student. Monitor and take a note of mistakes. Write the mistakes on the board later e.g. before the next speaking activity. Encourage students to find and correct the mistakes in pairs. For weaker groups, underline the mistakes.

Tell students they have a couple of minutes left before stopping this activity. Ask pairs/groups to tell you their lists or to write their lists on the board. Discuss

differences and similarities as a class. If you have less time, you could just ask for one crime for each category from every group.

+ Extension activity

Students find a new partner and compare their negotiated joint lists. Alternatively, see if the whole class can come up with a list they all agree on.



Vocab: punishment

9 Tell students to complete this exercise on their own and then compare their answers in pairs. Answers:

2 to pay a fine: d

3 to be on probation: a

4 to go to prison: b

5 to do community service: e

+ Extension activity: fast finishers


Tell fast finishers to think of other types of punishments. You could tell them to look at different penalties (punishments) for drug law offences in Europe here:

https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/topic-overviews/content/drug-law-penalties-at-a-glance_en

(Last accessed 12.07.23).



Speaking: you be the judge

 Some students might not feel comfortable doing this activity. If so, leave it out or suggest students do it as a writing task (at home) instead.

10 Read the 'example crime' and 'example punishment' out to students so they are fully aware of what they have to do. Put students into new pairs/groups. Give a clear time frame e.g. 10-15 minutes to decide their punishments and tell them to make a brief note of each punishment and reason. Remind students to look at the phrases boxes on the previous page and use the vocab box for help. Students answers will be (very) different so there are no 'potential' answers given but I encourage you to think about how you would 'judge' these crimes and why.

At an appropriate point e.g. time is up or all/most students have completed all/most tasks, put students into different pairs/groups and tell them to compare their punishments.

To finish, you could choose one crime and ask each group for their punishment. You could also ask students if they noticed a difference in their 'judgements' between 1-3 where they knew name and age of the perpetrator and 4-5 where they didn't know this information. If having this information made a difference, encourage them to question why.

+ Extension activity: fast finishers

Tell fast finishers to research what punishments these crimes would receive in their home country or give them a country to research.



Extra/homework activities

Students could read some articles from the Guardian series 'you be the judge: your domestic arguments solved by Guardian readers.' You could set specific articles to read and discuss them in the next class or ask students to write down their 'judgement' of any article they read. The articles can be found here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/series/you-be-the-judge> (Last accessed 11.07.23).

If students have Netflix, they could watch the 'White Bear' episode of Black Mirror (season 2, episode 2). You could discuss their reactions to the episode in the next lesson or ask them to write a short paragraph about what they thought of it and how it relates to the topic of crime and punishment. Information about the episode can be found here *!Spoilers alert!*): <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2542420/> (Last accessed 11.07.23).

Ask students to research a rehabilitation scheme in prisons and prepare a short presentation on it. Here is an example of one called 'Clink Charity' which offers training projects to prisoners: <https://thelinkcharity.org/> (Last accessed 12.07.23)

Quick student reflection

Encourage students to reflect on their learning after the lesson, too. Do this orally or in writing. You could ask them:

- 1 How do you feel after doing this lesson? Why?
- 2 What activities did you enjoy? Why?
- 3 What activities didn't you enjoy? Why?
- 4 Name one thing you really want to remember from this lesson. How are you going to help yourself remember this?

Quick teacher reflection

As busy teachers, we rarely get the time to reflect on how lessons went. Take a few minutes to think about the following:

- 1 What went well in the lesson? Why?
- 2 What didn't go so well in the lesson? Why?
- 3 What would you do differently if you taught this lesson again? Why?
- 4 Any other thoughts...

Use the space below to make your notes:

Acknowledgments:
Photo of empty prison yard in worksheet by Larry Farr on Unsplash
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