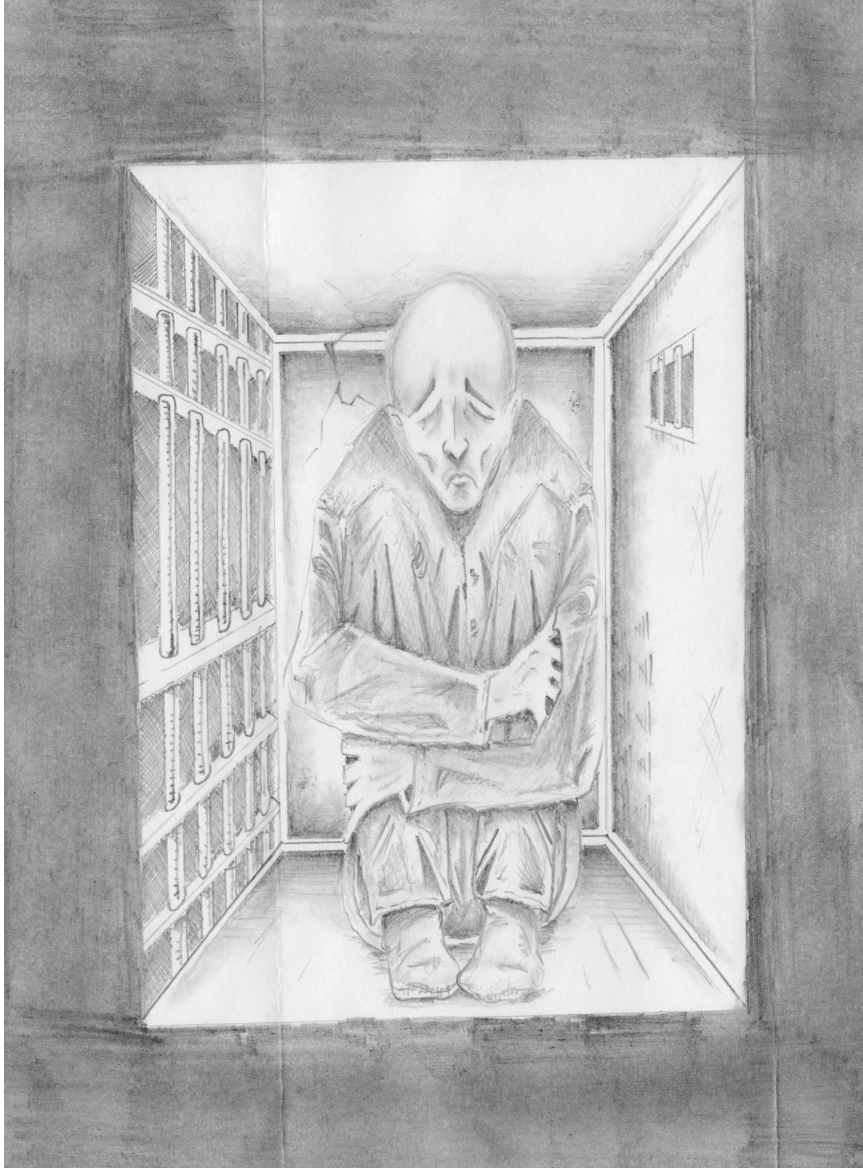


D.C Books to Prisons



Quotes, poetry, and original artwork comes from prisoner letters and has been reprinted with their permission.

Freeing minds since 1999

Mission Statement

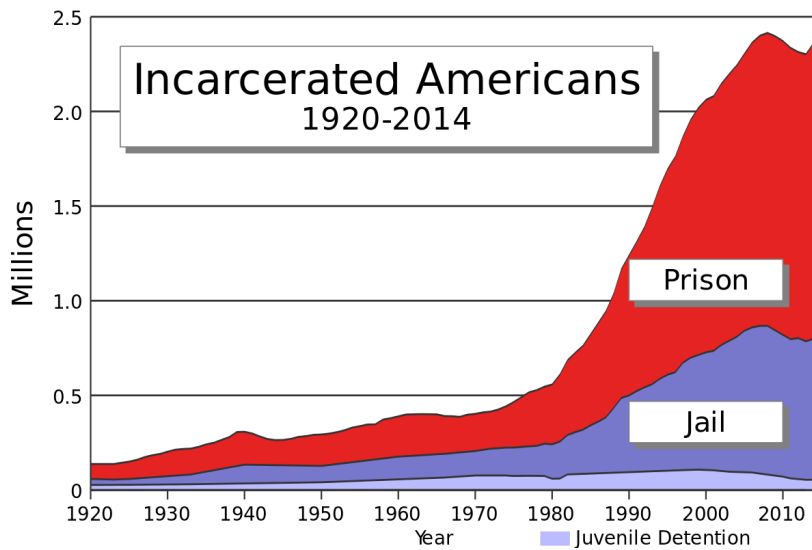
To provide a wide variety of informative, educational and enjoyable reading material, free of charge, to inmates in US prisons. We prioritize inmates in underserved regions and answer individual inmates' requests with secondary projects to address the gap in resources and access to education. We believe that books can change lives. They can change the way people view the world, other people, and themselves, provide an education, provide a vocabulary, and open minds to new possibilities.

The DC Area Books to Prisons Project (commonly known as "DC Books to Prisons") is an all-volunteer organization based in Washington, DC that provides free books to individual prisoners and prison librarians in 35 states across the country. We support ongoing book groups led by prisoners in select Maryland prisons. In July 2018 we launched 2000 Libros, a program to collect and distribute Spanish and bilingual books to detained undocumented youth. DC Books to Prisons has been in continuous operation since 1999, making us one of the oldest such groups in the country. We are sponsored by the Washington Peace Center, a 501(c)(3) organization and our fiscal agent.

In the last 5 years, DC Books to Prisons has gathered and donated over 80,000 books to individual prisoners and over 5,000 to prison libraries—providing critical resources to tens of thousands of men and women in hundreds of correctional facilities nationwide.

2017 Highlights:

- We gathered and sent 5,787 packages of books and educational materials (pamphlets, non-copyrighted articles) to prisoners in more than 500 facilities in 35 states; a total of more than 17,000 books to incarcerated individuals.
- We donated an additional 4,200 books to help three Maryland prisons stock their outdated libraries.
- We gathered and mailed 341 books to support nine prisoner book clubs at five Maryland correctional facilities.
- As a partner with the federal Bureau of Prisons, we donated 2,390 magazines and more than 4,200 children's books/magazines to the waiting and visiting rooms at all 122 federal prisons.



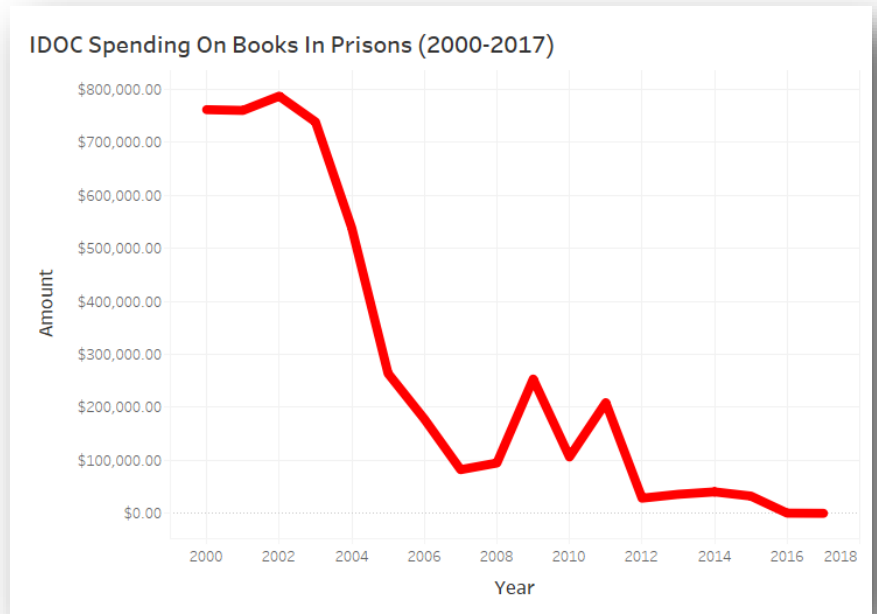
- The United States imprisons drastically more people than other Western countries. We now imprison more people in absolute numbers and per capita than any other country on earth.
- With about 5 percent of the world population, the US hosts more than 20 percent of its prisoners, and the country's incarceration rate has roughly quintupled since the early 1970s.
- About 2 million Americans currently live behind bars in jails, state prisons, and federal penitentiaries, and millions more are currently on parole or probation or have been in the recent past.
- States like California now spend more on locking people up than on funding higher education.

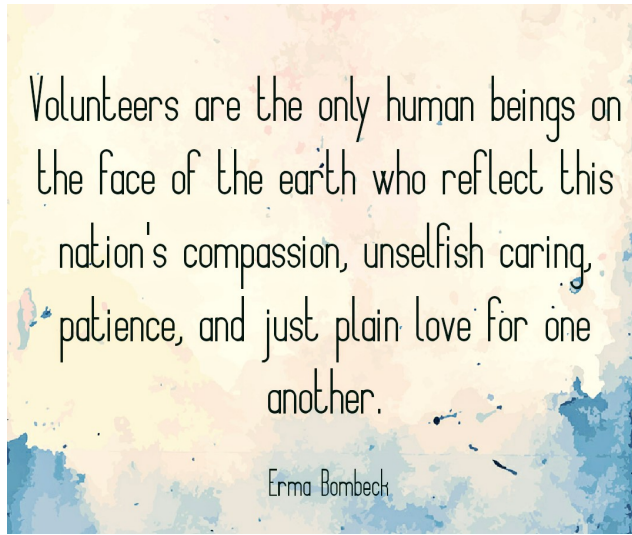
Reasons for this include the war on drugs, stricter enforcement of life sentences, the prosecution of juveniles in adult courts, and expansion of the federal penal code.

Studies have shown that literacy and educational programs help reduce recidivism, and while there is some focus on the need for basic education (we frequently receive requests from prisoners seeking materials to help them prepare for a General Education Development (GED test or "how to books" so one can develop employable skills), a number of studies emphasize the importance of developing social skills, artistic development, and emotional management.

Given access, prisoners with access to books tend to read far more books than those who live outside prison bars, but as prison budgets are slashed, education services suffer, and some prisons don't have libraries at all. Others have facilities that are woefully inadequate and so organizations have sprung up to try to meet that need.

In 2017 the state of Illinois spent less than \$300 total on 28 prison libraries.





Reasons to Volunteer

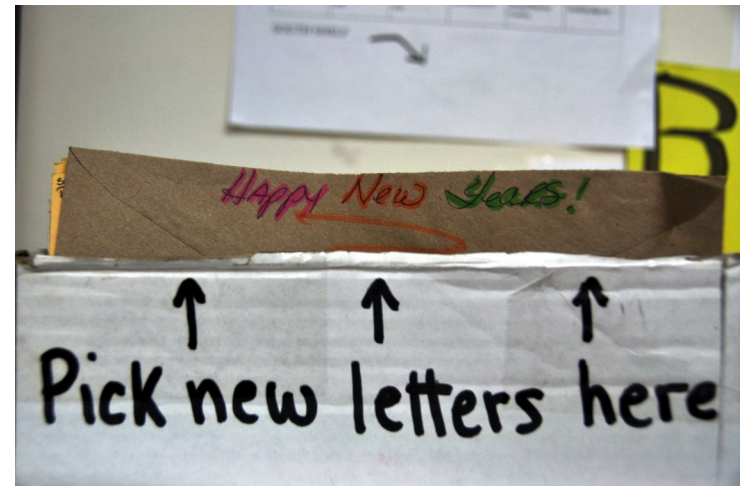
- Volunteers deliver critical services—from serving as volunteer fire fighters or participating in search and rescue, delivering meals to homebound seniors or homeless youth, to manning the phone lines at domestic violence and sexual assault centers.
- Volunteers help to keep our neighborhoods, streets, parks, rivers, green spaces, and water clean and safe for everyone.
- Volunteers tutor, teach, mentor, coach, and support young people with everything from math homework to dealing with personal crises to football and soccer tourneys.
- Volunteers walk dogs, pet cats, clean cages, help with adoptions and feedings, and contribute veterinary expertise to organizations like animal shelters and wildlife rehabilitation centers.

- Volunteers educate the public on health and safety; doctors and nurses donate time and medical knowledge to free clinics and natural/civil disaster areas worldwide.
- Volunteers take tickets at film centers and performing arts events, lead tours at museums and historical societies, and ensure that arts and cultural festivals—from small-scale gatherings to massive multi-stage concerts—run smoothly.
- Volunteers build houses and schools, dig wells, and repair infrastructure around the globe.

On a personal level, doing good is good for you. Most volunteers say that it improves their mood, lowers their stress levels, and gives them a sense of purpose in life. Most say that it gives them a sense of pride and involvement in their communities, and people who volunteer live longer lives than people who don't.

"Unless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, Nothing is going to get better. It's not."

- The Lorax
Dr. Suess



Why I Keep Sending Books to Prison

I hate Wednesday.

I really hate Wednesday. The day wrecks me. I end up cold, tired and hungry, except in the summer I end up hot, tired and hungry because after work on Wednesday, I spend hours with DC Books to Prisons.

When a couple of friends mentioned the group, I started volunteering and in no time at all, I found myself wrapped in the cogs of this purely-volunteer organization that seemed almost organic in nature, surviving despite itself, because of itself, without rules, without structure, to put books in the hands of prisoners.

Over the years, I have picked and packed books, established a data repository, taken packages to the post office and fought to find a fiscal sponsor. Photography, writing, fundraising – whatever the group needed, I tried to do, but it wasn't until I spearheaded a holiday fundraiser that I realized how wildly unpopular prison issues

could be.

The project doesn't have a steady source of income. The group survives on meager grants and responses to letters of appeal. The only real costs are the cost of the website, the mailbox and shipping (media mail), which continues to rise. Even operating with such lean overhead, the organization struggles to survive.

Over the holidays, a local bookstore gave us the opportunity to tie together our skills – books and wrapping – by gift-wrapping customers' purchases for donations. The first year, I worked eight of the nine shifts we had, serving as the public face of DC Books to Prisons.

We don't have a charming mascot, color or theme. We send books to an underserved and incarcerated population. A lot of people have problems with that. Very few are likely to wear our name on their sleeves and raise funds for prisoners. Many believe that prisoners just ought to be punished.

"Why?" a man asked as I wrapped his books. "Why do you care?"

While I quoted statistics on the current rate of incarceration (higher in terms of both sheer volume and per capita than anywhere else in the world), all I really wanted to say is that I care because somebody has to.

Our system is broken. Our justice system claims rehabilitation as a goal, not punishment, but in a world of diminishing resources, prisoners suffer. Libraries are cut, as are educational programs, and recidivism is high. Those who enter prison on minor drug offenses walk out as hardened criminals without skills, resources or hope

for the future, with criminal connections, without an education and literacy helps stop that from happening. Showing basic human decency helps stop that from happening.

"Maybe in a way it's a form of hope, which is nice considering all this negativity," a prisoner from California recently wrote, expressing his wonder, "to actually know that there are people out there who can do what they want, anytime they want and still donate and volunteer their time, raise money... now that has an effect on a person to make him stop and think."

The (mostly) men who write us don't extoll their innocence. We don't ask them to. We read their letters, try to find books that match their requests and include a brief note wishing them happy reading.

Even such brief notes reach their readers. Sometimes, I feel more than vaguely uncomfortable with the letters I get in response, the ones calling me an angel, a savior, a princess, the ones asking how many bedrooms I have, the ones offering information about impending parole dates. We don't sign our full names or give personal addresses but we would not be hard to find, any of us, and I do get a lot of letters.

A lot of letters.

For some reason, though, I keep going on Wednesdays. Wrecked. Uncomfortable. Unsure of my own motivation but for the fact that someone needs to care. Then, something happens to remind me why I volunteer.

The day before Christmas, with a

broken water heater at home and plans for one final giftwrapping shift, I found myself engaged in a conversation with the plumber's assistant. In the July just past, he was exonerated of a crime he did not commit and released after serving 23 years of someone else's sentence, someone identified through DNA evidence, someone who would never be tried because the statute of limitations had passed.

What do you do after 23 years behind bars? How do you move from 1989 to 2012 without climbing the steps in between? Cameras, music and communication in pocket-sized computing devices with far too much information about everyone ever met with people checking in, checking out and checking their email all at the same time.

How do you explain a 23-year gap in a resume? How do you develop a relationship after 23 years on the inside? How could you ever go back inside any building ever again with the sun shining and a breeze blowing? I gave the man my attention, some cookies and a book on exoneration from my own shelves at home; then, I went to raise money for the project.

Since 1999, DC Books to Prisons has been answering individual inmates' requests for reading material - fiction and nonfiction - with requests from all 50 states. Volunteers work with a donated library in borrowed space (from a local church) to pick and pack books. Requests range from dictionaries, drawing books and westerns (all incredibly popular), to history, psychology, woodworking and electronics. Some of the prisoners are lifers, on death row or "in the

hole" (solitary confinement) looking for a mental escape while others hope to learn a marketable trade for after their release.

Most of the prisoners who write us weren't wrongfully convicted. They very well might deserve the sentences received, but the ones who write us have nothing, no family or friends for support, no money, no options. We are their last resort, and whatever they did, they are serving their time. We can afford them basic human kindness and maybe a chance to learn, and so every Wednesday, cold, tired and hungry (except when I am hot), I send books to prisoners.



Late in the Spring of 2018, Yale professor James Forman, Jr. donated 70 copies of his Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America," for our prison book clubs (and their libraries).

"I want everyone involved in your project to know that I greatly appreciate you and the effort to make total strangers like me, 'societal outcasts,' happy. You are right on the money in your choices you send to me."

"These books you send me take me on a journey outside these walls. Thank you for offering books to inmates. Reading and learning is freedom."

"I've received a few textbooks from you and I've greatly enjoyed them. Astronomy 101 and Physics 212 have been the books that have most occupied my mind and time over any other books this year! They've given me the greatest sense of accomplishment when I finished them and felt that would be able to take the actual course and pass it with no problems."

"What I got back exceeded my wildest dreams—a personalized note from an intelligent and caring human being. Words can't describe how your quick note connected with me and warmed my heart."

Making Donations

We appreciate donations of books, stamps, postage money, and time.

Books

Drop Off

Books can be dropped off **Wednesday evenings** (6-8:30 PM) at **Foundry United Methodist Church**, 1500 16th St NW, Washington DC 20036.

Due to space limitations, we ask that you donate only one (1) box at a time. If you have a larger quantity of books in the "greatest book needs" genres, please [contact us](#); we may be able to take them.

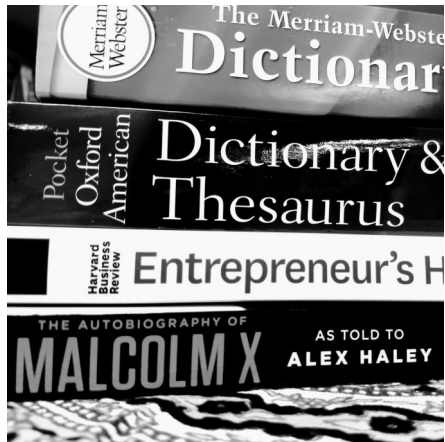
Mail

If shipping books, please consider mailing them directly to a prison librarian. For a list of prison librarians accepting books, contact btopdc@gmail.com with "Prison Library List" in the subject line.

Time

Come and answer prisoners' requests with us on Wednesday evenings between 5:00 p.m. and 9:20 p.m. at Foundry United Methodist Church.

New Volunteer Orientation is held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 6:30.



Book Donations

Due to prison restrictions, we **cannot** accept books that contain the following:

- Spiral/wire binding
- Water damage, mold, and/or stains
- Heavy highlighting
- Excessive handwriting
- Detailed regional maps
- Nudity
- Explicit sexual content
- True crime
- Missing pages
- Martial arts (including Tai Chi)
- Pharmacology/natural medicine
- Hydroponics
- Weapon designs/breakdowns

Greatest Book Needs

Nonfiction

- Dictionaries #1
- Thesauruses
- GED preparation
- Career & Personal Development
- Starting a business (published after 2008)
- Trade or DIY books
- How to Draw
- Farming and Agriculture
- Game and Puzzle Books
- Body weight exercise for men
- World atlases and recent almanacs
- Transgender transition
- History and culture
 - African American
 - Latin American (including Chicano studies)

- Ancient civilizations and mythology
- Native American

- Memoirs/biographies of historic leaders or modern celebrities/musicians

Fiction

- Westerns
- Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Horror
- Gay romance novels
- Novels by
 - David Baldacci
 - Dean Koontz
 - James Patterson
 - Stephen King
- Spanish Novels by
 - Gabriel Garcia Marquez
 - Carlos Ruiz Zafon
 - Laura Gallego Garcia

- | |
|---|
| <p>Languages</p> <p>Introductory language instruction and dictionaries</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spanish • American Sign Language (ASL) • Arabic • Japanese • Biblical Greek • Latin |
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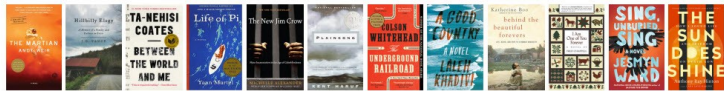
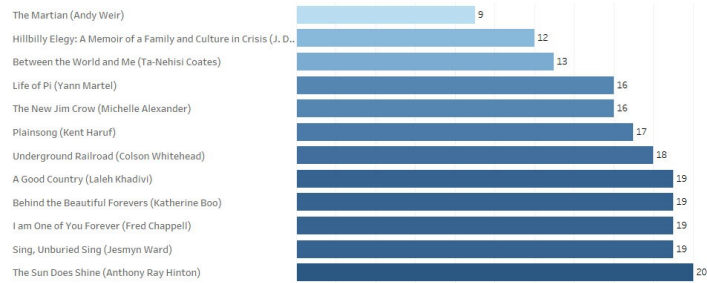


Prison Book Clubs

Some books leave us free and some books make us free. -Ralph Waldo Emerson

Groups Supported	9
Books Donated	410
Books Delivered	359
Books Needed Today	197

Books that we need...



In February 2017, a prison librarian reached out for help in building book clubs at a handful of institutions throughout Maryland. We started with a list of 13 titles and three book clubs. Over the next year and a half, both numbers have grown.

To date, we have:

- * Received a retweet from an author (Rebecca Skloot) kicking off the collection;
- * Added 19 more titles to the list;
- * Expanded to support a total of nine prison book clubs;
- * Received books from volunteers, friends, family members, random strangers, publishers, authors, and book clubs;
- * Collected books more than 400 books (often one donated book at a time); and
- * Refrained from diverting funds from the general DC Books to Prisons operating budget.



2,000 LIBROS

2,000 Libros is a book donation campaign in partnership with DC Books to Prisons and the Washington Peace Center. Many of the organizations that shelter immigrant children have few resources, and they always need

books. Centers across the country, from South Carolina to Texas to California, will receive the books you donate. The biggest recipient will be Southwest Key, which has more than 30 locations in the southwestern U.S. and houses the majority of undocumented children and teenagers. These kids and teens will get to permanently keep any books we send.

Today, you can contribute to 2,000 Libros by buying books in Spanish and Spanish/English from our curated Amazon or Politics and Prose wishlist.

Bookstores in the DC metro area have been designated as dropoff points for gently used books. We have also opened up a monetary donation channel to help us pay for shipping and other costs. Follow our page at <http://dcbookstoprisoners.org> to keep up with the list of dropoff locations or to donate money or books.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts for your help, and reach out to us if you have questions about how you can help or would like to serve as a dropoff point.



"The books you have sent to so many prisoners have changed countless lives and helped them to escape the world of prison. I have personally seen many prisoners become interested in what they have read and often ask questions concerning the topic. In a way, this restores my faith in humanity, forgiveness, and compassion."

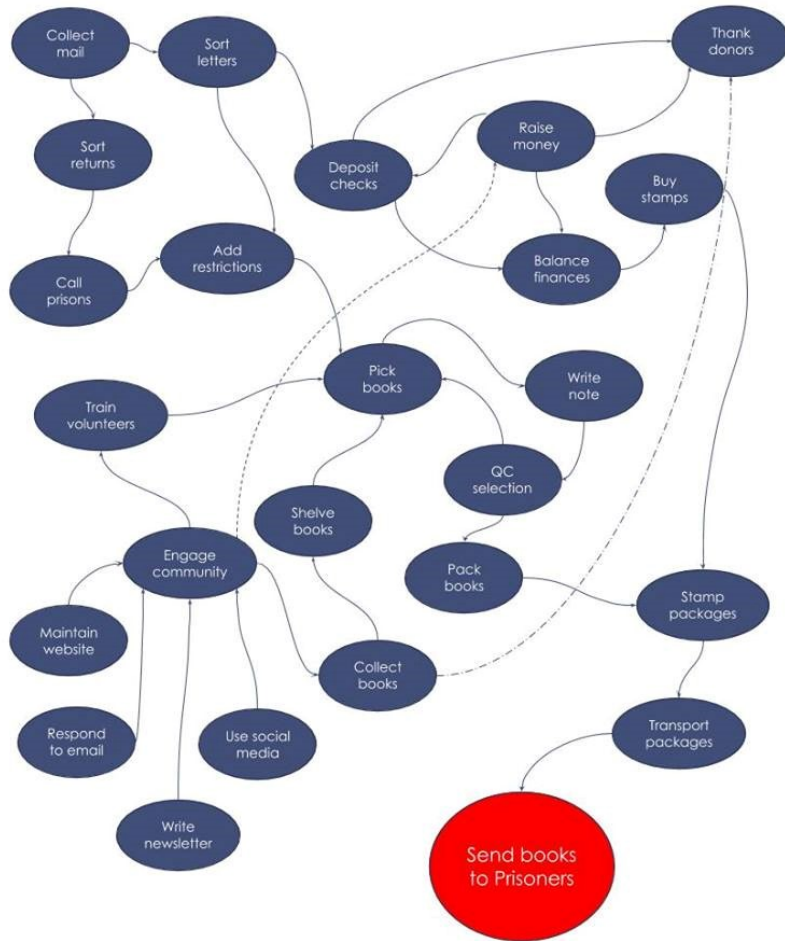
"One of my friends told me if I [wrote] and ask you for a websters Dictionary book ya'll may send me one if you had it. I am trying to teach my self how to read and spell and he said this would help me out some. Thank you very much for your time and conserne on helping people like us with stuff like this."

"i cant read or speall verry good... im trying to teach my self how to read and wright better so me and my mouther can talk becuse the mail is the way we have got to talk for the next year. Thay say reading and stay reading you will git better."

"Thank you for everything that you do. You have no idea how much this not only means to us, but also helps us. Please don't ever stop."

The Cigarette is Lit
By Juan Salvador

The cigarette is lit,
And my shirt don't fit.
The dog came and bit,
But I know how to hit.
He went to the pit,
Because he wouldn't sit,
That damn dog.
The cigarette is lit,
My shirt don't fit
And he's in the pit.



How does it all work?





Heart Speaks
By Ivan Newman

As time leaks, my heart speaks.
Release of anger and love my heart
keeps.
The Knowledge of the heart gives to
the brain.
Thoughts and emotions are how the
love flow remains.
Tears rolls down the face to run from
the pain.
At ease love is easy to feel. A
heartbreak is harsh but, with time,
It shall take to heel. Release of an-
ger and love my heart keeps.

Why I Volunteer at DC Books to
Prisons

I had been sentenced to four days in Los Angeles County Jail for failure to pay a speeding ticket. This crime had been committed in Santa Clarita in the north of the county, and is was there where I turned myself in to the man. This was not my first time in jail, but it was the first time I had been sentenced to anything, and like nearly every other time in my life, I brought something to read with me to make the time pass. I had no idea whether they would let me keep the book or not, but I had to try. The book was *Ten Days that Shook the World* by John Reed, just in case I needed to start a Leninist uprising among the inmates.

I showed up at the courthouse and was put in a cell for a bit, until a group of us was put on a bus for the trip to downtown LA, and I still had my book. I read, but quickly it was not just to fill time. I was scared, and that book was like a security blanket or protective force field, as long as I had a book in front of my face, I was safe. After making its way through the southbound traffic, the bus pulled into the Twin Towers, the downtown LA country jail. There all in my group were officially booked, given our jail clothes, and had everything we brought with us taken away to storage. This would be the end of my book, I was afraid, and I asked if I could keep it and the person said I could. That was quite a relief, but it didn't last very long, for once we were booked and passed into the next room where we were held, I was made to toss it into the trash.

Now I was exposed to everyone else, like I had been invisible and now could be seen. But I didn't want to be seen. I wanted to be invisible.

After a day or so of having nothing to read (real time kind of disappeared), I was put in a room with some fellow inmates, and soon after a cart was brought in with a pile of books with the covers torn off. I jumped off my bunk and started sorting through the possibilities, decades-old books of which I was not familiar with a single one. I finally chose a book called *Mandingo*, a book from the early 60s about the evils of slavery in the south. I sat on my bunk and hid as I devoured the book, safe behind my protective shield as a group of guys beat the bloody shit out of another inmate a few feet away from me for being a narc. But that book only lasted for a few hours, as I was yet again transferred, this time to another jail entirely, and was not allowed to bring the book.

I was put on a bus and ended up at Wayside, the max security country jail full of those convicted or awaiting trial, and so overcrowded I was given a mattress and told to put it on the floor. I sat there for a few hours I guess until some of the deputies came around and started handing out newspapers through the cell room bars. Something to read! But surely there was no way I would get one, people gathered at the bars grabbing them and I wasn't about to attempt to join in the scramble.

Then, "Hey white boy!" someone shouted, and I was the only one in the cell. "Come get your newspaper!" I went up and got my

paper without asking any questions. I began to read every single word in that issue of the LA Times.

Over the course of my time in that cell (maybe eighteen hours I estimate), I finished with my newspaper, and I saw a different one on a table. I rose from my mattress island and sat at the table, and began to read what turned out to be a Spanish-language newspaper as best as I could. I didn't care what language it was in, I just wanted something to read. A worn, skinny, 30ish Latino with gang tattoos on his face sat next to me.

"Can you read that?" he asked.

"A little."

"What does it say?" I told him about a border skirmish between Peru and Ecuador. He looked at me stunned, but interested in what I had to say. I would not be surprised if he didn't know how to read in any language.

Then I was rounded up and put back on a bus, back to downtown, and then released. I haven't done real hard time, just some days in LA County, but I never appreciated something to read more than during that time. I can only imagine what it must be like to people doing real time in prison, but I have read their letters, and I know the work we do at DC Books to Prisons is appreciated. I certainly appreciated having something to read when I did.

David Reeves

20x		12x	30x		72x
1					
	2				
18x		40x	72x		10x
		5			
			3		
60x	36x		8x	2	30x
					5



60x		48x	30x	6x	
6					
	4				
24x		30x	8x		90x
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			4		
18x	10x		36x	2	80x
					5

20x		12x	30x		72x
1					
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18x		40x	72x		10x
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60x		48x	30x	6x	
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18x	10x		36x	2	80x
					5

TOP

1	5	6	2	3	4
4	2	1	5	6	3
3	1	5	6	4	2
6	4	2	3	5	1
5	3	4	1	2	6
2	6	3	4	1	5

In 2008, I participated in protests at the Republican National Convention in St. Paul, Minnesota. Four days of protests were planned to occur while the convention was underway. But I ended up spending those days in the Ramsey County jail.

I was arrested in the afternoon on the very first day of protests. I was with a small group of people walking between rallies on an empty street when hundreds of police surrounded us and began shooting rubber bullets and concussion grenades into the group.

Mind you, this group is best described as a gaggle of people walking around. We weren't even chanting or holding signs. There were no laws being broken.

Nevertheless, we were quickly herded into a parking lot, handcuffed and hosed with pepper spray.

No one was spared from the ambush. Journalists were rounded up and arrested with us. The cops simply ignored their credentials. Later that week, I ended up sharing a cell with a security guard who was arrested on his way to work, where he was supposed to be guarding the convention center where the Republican National Convention was taking place.

We were put into large group cells by the dozens. A few hours after midnight, they marched us down the hall, where we were split into groups of four and taken into small rooms and instructed to strip. The guards confiscated our clothes, performed body cavity searches, and issued us orange jumpsuits and flip flops. We were then marched to a larger cell block, where they issued each of us a "sled" - a large plastic tub with a mattress in it that would serve

as our bed on the floor.

I considered myself lucky - the guards ran out of room in the small cells, even after doubling up each cell, so I ended up being placed in a large rec area along with a dozen other guys. There was a window near the ceiling, about 15 feet above the floor. We spent the next few days taking turns climbing up to the window to look outside.

Our holding area also didn't have a toilet, so we were occasionally released to take turns using a toilet in an empty cell in the block. It was during one of these times that a guard walked in pushing a cart full of books. He pushed the cart into the cell block and left. I scanned the books, but most were duplicate copies of the same Bible. Others were Bible-themed coloring books and children's fiction. Without getting a good look at it, I grabbed the only book that didn't have "Christian" on the spine. At this point, the guard had changed his mind and was barking at us to get away from the cart. I tucked the book in my jumpsuit and got back in line for the toilet.

After the guard left, I took out the book. It was *A Case of Need* by Michael Crichton. I loved reading his books when I was a kid, so once again I felt like I lucked out. But as I read the book, it became clear that this was someone's idea of a sick joke.

The story is about a man who has been wrongfully imprisoned for a crime he didn't commit. It's pretty much the last thing you want to read while you're sitting in jail after being wrongfully arrested at a protest without committing a crime.

As I read the book, I kept telling myself that when I got out I would volunteer with Books to Prisons so this wouldn't happen to anyone else. Christian books overwhelm prisons and it's important to have other options.

Andrew Appleton

If ever - even for a second - you wonder if what you do matters or if it makes a difference, the answer is, without a doubt, yes.

- Mitch Cowa

