

College Guild
PO Box 6448, Brunswick ME 04011

CAPTIVITIES

Unit 4 of 5

*I send my work to College Guild
and then I have to wait.
I look for my next Unit
I hope it won't be late.
With joy I get the envelope
by now I'm sure you see
when I'm working on a Unit
at least my mind is free.*

There's not much question that this poem was written by a CG student, though the sentiment expressed through the centuries, by captives of all kinds, is: "My body may be imprisoned but my mind is free!"

PART 1: THE BRAIN

But the mind is not always free. A devastating form of captivity is the betrayal of one's own brain by mental retardation, schizophrenia, Alzheimer's, and other disorders and diseases. Institutions exist to help when other options are gone, but special schools, mental institutions, and nursing homes may feel like maximum security prisons from the inside. In 1996, a psychiatric nurse wrote the book Insanity Incorporated, a statement about a system which:

"...promotes abuse of power, opportunism and exploitation of those of us who fund it and those of us entrusted to its care."

It's not unusual for offenders with mental illness or retardation to be sentenced to prison, even death row.

- 1. The following are very different kinds of mental disabilities. How would you distinguish between: mental retardation, mental illness (psychosis), and senility?**
- 2. If someone with one of these mental disabilities were unable to care for him/herself, or were incarcerated, what kind of special help would be needed?**

Imagine yourself captive to one of these forms of mental disability.

- 3. Describe your home (special school, nursing home, or mental hospital) from inside.**
- 4. If a friend took you out as a special treat, what would be your favorite way to spend the day?**
- 5. How much understanding is there when it comes to mentally disabled inmates?
Are they treated with more or less compassion than the general population by the officers and administration?
How about by the other inmates?**

Two other conditions may be associated with abnormal brain chemistry. Depression is related to the amount of daylight in people with "Seasonal Affective Disorder" (SAD). One treatment is the use of artificial light as the days of the year become shorter. "Clinical depression" cannot be relieved by having things go better in someone's life. It can be long lasting and severe enough to interfere with the ability to function and relate normally to others. In many cases, medication is prescribed to help people cope with their daily lives.

PART 2: EMOTIONS

Most of us are not affected by the abnormal brain functioning discussed in Part 1. All of us, however, feel depressed and angry at times – no person goes through life 100% happy. (Obviously, depression and anger thrive in prisons.)

6. If you are depressed, what is helpful for you?

7. Which of the following approaches do you prefer when feeling down? Why?

Look on the bright side! Smile! Cheer up!
I know how you feel, life sucks.

You've undoubtedly seen those many ads on TV for products treating all kinds of mental, physical and medical conditions, including everything from depression to dandruff! The characters all look suicidal at the beginning of the ad and full of energy and delighted with life after taking the company's pill. The cost of a TV ad is phenomenal, but advertisers keep buying them. They must work.

8. Write a TV ad to convince the viewing audience to buy a product related to dieting. Describe exactly what the audience sees and hears.

There don't seem to be ads that deal with another common emotion – anger. Angry outbursts can lead to violence and violent acts to a prison sentence.

*I miss the sight of sunset
 My window has no view
 I pace in rage within my cage
 There's nothing else to do.....*

Rex Mires

9. Do you feel the same way as Rex?

10. When can imprisonment reduce a person's tendency to anger and violence?

11. What would you do if your friend is out of control with anger at another inmate or officer?

12. Is the amount of anger between strangers increasing in the United States? Why?

13. Write an essay, fictional story, or poem about "road rage."

One of the things behind depression, anger, substance abuse, juvenile crime and violent offenses is lack of self-esteem.

14. What affects a person's self-esteem?
15. How can someone build self-esteem?
16. What is the difference between having self-esteem, being selfish and having a big ego?

PART 3: SUBSTANCE ABUSE

*First the man takes a drink,
Then the drink takes a drink,
Then the drink takes a man!*

[Adage from the Orient]

17. What is this adage saying?
18. Is substance abuse a mental disability?

There is plenty of disagreement on the subject of drug and alcohol addiction, including which of the following is responsible for alcoholism:

- a chemical alteration in the brain
- lack of will power
- a genetic tendency
- the bad example of alcoholic parents
- trying fit in with the teenage social scene
- the desire to escape from life
- another not listed? (_____)

19. Which of these do you think is the major cause leading someone to start drinking and then becoming addicted?
Write an essay or poem explaining your opinion.

20. Are the causes of drug abuse exactly the same as for alcohol abuse?

21. What makes a drug addict's life different from an alcoholic's?

22. Make a list of every law that should be on the books concerning alcohol.

Nicotine is said to be a more addictive substance than mood-altering drugs or alcohol. Most AA meetings seem to be filled with smokers; in fact, non-smoking AA meetings have had to be established.

23. Should laws be made to ban smoking? If so, what should those laws be?

More and more prisons are becoming smoke-free too.

24. Approximately what percentage of prisoners do you think are smokers?

25. What can the prison administration do to make a smooth transition to a non-smoking facility?

Your friend makes a New Year's resolution to stop smoking.

26. Make a plan for him or her to follow (which may or may not include you.)

27. What is the best way to free oneself from substance abuse of any kind?

PART 4: ZOOS

In the beginning of this Unit, we talked about being inside an institution, including a nursing home or mental hospital. A common statement by prisoners is that they are caged like animals in a zoo, or "we are treated like dogs." Two prisoners comment on that imagery:



I understand prison overcrowding has become quite a problem.

- Christian Snyder

*Men and dogs are trapped within
They know the meaning of a pen
Back and forth they paw the ground
Discontent, angry, bored and bound.
Rec yards.
Yard dogs.*

- John Yarbrough, Boiled White, 2002

28. Does it bother you or seem demeaning to include a section on animals in this Unit? Why or why not?

In another College Guild course, one assignment is to pick an animal that comes to mind for different kinds of weather. For example, these 3 wonderfully creative answers pair the following animals with FOG:

- an octopus (it surrounds you with its ink)*
- a skunk (for its spray)*
- an elephant (big gray mass)*

Here's a similar assignment, this time matching animals in a zoo with prisoners.

29. For each of the following animals, pick 1 trait or image the animal has in common with a prisoner. Explain your selection.

- | | |
|----------|-------------|
| lion | prairie dog |
| lizard | flamingo |
| elephant | eagle |
| kangaroo | alligator |

30. What trait from each animal would you like to have? Explain.

31. Name an animal that might fit a prisoner's mood when:

- | | |
|----------|----------|
| lonely | angry |
| sleepy | laughing |
| agitated | peaceful |
| happy | afraid |

32. You have written about the parallels between animals and prisoners. No matter how you are treated in prison, you must know that you are a person of worth with thoughts, values, ideas, and people whom you love. Describe how you think about yourself.

33. What do zoo animals think when they see humans watching them?

There's an animal that stars in a popular and award-winning children's book – *Because of Winn Dixie*. It's the story of a girl and her mangy dog who makes friends with some interesting people: a (presumed) witch, an alcoholic, an epileptic, two bullies and an ex-con. Imagine a popular, award winning, children's book promoting tolerance toward former prisoners! The story's message is that children, their parents, teachers, and other adults in their lives should think about society's outsiders as people like any others – worthy of respect.

Let's say you've written a book about a juvenile offender and her pet.

34. Who are the characters in the story, what is the plot, and what happens in the end?

35. Are people's pets (who are well treated) captives?

- mental illness - condition causing inability to perceive or function in the real world*
- mental retardation - brain damage causing lowered mental functioning*
- dementia - progressive deterioration of brain function*

Remember: First names only & please let us know if your address changes