Spring 2012

Direction of the Play: Dead Man Walking

Michelle Willden
Central Washington University

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Direction of the Play: *Dead Man Walking*

A Project Report
Presented to
the Graduate Faculty
Central Washington University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
Theatre Production

by
Michelle Willden
March 2012
We hereby approve the project report of

Michelle Willden

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts:

Theatre Production

APPROVED FOR THE GRADUATE FACULTY

7/8/12 _______________________
Date of Signature
Mr. Marc Haniuk
Committee Chair

7/10/12 _______________________
Date of Signature
Ms. Elise Forier Edie
Committee Member

7/14/12 _______________________
Date of Signature
Ms. Christina Barrigan
Committee Member

Please note:
The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.
This project entailed the selection, background research and documentation, casting, direction, and post-production analysis of Bingham High School's production of Tim Robbins' *Dead Man Walking*. Documentation includes research and analysis of the play, and an evaluation of the play as a production vehicle for the department of Theatre Arts at Bingham High School.
CENTRAL WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
Graduate Studies

Final Examination of
Michelle Willden
B.F.A. University of Utah
for the Degree of
Master of Arts
Theatre Production

Committee in Charge
Mr. Marc Haniuk
Ms. Elise Forier Edie
Ms. Christina Barrigan

McConnell Hall
Room 117
Day of Orals, July 8, 2012
5:30 PM
Michelle Willden

Courses presented for the Master’s degree

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Total Credit Requirements - 56
BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Michelle Willden

Undergraduate Study:
   University of Utah 1999-2002

Graduate Study:
   Central Washington University, 2009-2012

Professional Experience:
   High School Teacher: 2002-Present
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MASTER’S THESIS PROJECT
PLAYSCRIPT APPROVAL FORM

(PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU HAVE READ THE PLAY SELECTION CRITERIA SECTION IN YOUR GRADUATE HANDBOOK)

SCRIPT TITLE  _Dead Man Walking_

PLAYWRIGHT(S) [If musical, list lyricist/composer] Tim Robbins

NUMBER OF ACTS 2  APPROXIMATE TOTAL PLAYING TIME  2 HOURS  MIN.

CAST (fill in with the appropriate numbers)
MEN 15  WOMEN 11  CHILDREN: 2  OVER 40: N/A

ROLES REQUIRING PEOPLE OF COLOR: 1  ROLES COULD DOUBLE: 13
TOTAL NUMBER OF CAST: 26

OTHER CASTING CONCERNS:
To of the characters could be cast as African American.
Younger brothers of murderer could be children

ARTISTIC STAFF (check those needed for this play or production idea)
MUSICAL DIRECTOR: None  DANCE CHOREOGRAPHER: None
FIGHT CHOREOGRAPHER: None  DIALECT COACH: Yes  SPECIALTY HIRE: None specify what kind
ORCHESTRA/BAND (specify what size) none
Will you be fulfilling any of the above? None  If so, which?

Will a guest artist be fulfilling any of the above? Yes  If so, which? Dialect Coach

SCENERY/PROPS (check those needed for this play or your concept of the play)
UNIT SET? (YES) NO (CIRCLE ONE)  NUMBER OF SETTINGS: 7-8 locations all depicted through light.
HISTORICAL PERIOD: 1980's  GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION: Louisiana
BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF SET CONCERNS OR SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:
- There is one set that will cover many locations.
- Set pieces, i.e. chairs, tables, along with lighting changes will take the audience from one locale to another.
- Projections on screens will provide information throughout the show.
- Where to locate the screen will be a concern

APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF PROPS: 20-30  PERIOD: 1980's
DIFFICULT OR UNUSUAL PROPS? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE) DESCRIBE:

- The gurney and machinery used to execute a man through lethal injection need to appear authentic.

WEAPONS OR FIREARMS? Yes  HOW MANY? 4 DESCRIBE: Side arms for the prison guards
COSTUMES (CHECK THOSE NEEDED FOR THIS PLAY OR YOUR CONCEPT OF THE PLAY)  
APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF COSTUMES PER CHARACTER: 1-3 used to indicate time passage etc; dependant upon doubled roles for each actor.

HISTORICAL PERIOD: 1980's  
SEASON: Multiple seasons over the course of several years  
SPECIAL REQUIREMENTS:  
- Some actors will play multiple roles; costumes should help depict the change in age or status between the characters they are playing.

JUSTIFICATION FOR CHOICE OF SCRIPT  
HAVE YOU SEEN THIS SCRIPT PRODUCED? YES NO (CIRCLE ONE)  
I have never seen a stage production of Dead Man Walking. I have seen the movie version, and read the book.

HAVE YOU DONE THIS PLAY BEFORE? BRIEFLY DESCRIBE YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN THE PRODUCTION:  
I have not previously been involved in any way with this production, but as mentioned above have read the book and seen the movie version.

WHY SHOULD YOUR ORGANIZATION PRODUCE THIS SCRIPT?  
Tim Robbins and Sister Helen Prejean created this project as a discourse. The purpose is to start a dialogue within the students and the community about the death penalty. In order to produce the project, I am required to include at least two other departments in the school in a cross curricular manner as well as involve the community in a discussion. I believe that this is a dialogue that needs to occur, especially in my community in Utah. The educational opportunities are endless.

WHAT ARE THE DRAWBACKS (IF ANY) TO DOING THIS PRODUCTION AT YOUR SCHOOL?  
The strong language and disturbing events depicted within this script are the biggest concerns I have for this script. I live in a very conservative community. I have spoken to the project and have permission to cut whatever I need, however, I am still considering what language is necessary to depict the characters and what is not.

PLEASE GIVE A BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE SCRIPT ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER AND ATTACH.  
PLEASE INCLUDE A COPY OF THE SCRIPT FOR THE THESIS COMMITTEE TO REVIEW.  
Please note: The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.

SUBMITTED BY: (Printed Name)  
Michelle Willden  
Signature:

Thesis Chair Approval:  
Marc Haniuk  
Date Approved: 12/2/10

Thesis Committee Members  
Elise Forrier-Edie  
Date Approved: 12/03/10

Christina Barrigan  
Date Approved: 7/8/11

Graduate Coordinator Approval: Scott Robinson  
Date Approved: 06/19/10
Synopsis of *Dead Man Walking*

In 1982, Sister Helen Prejean begins corresponding with a death row inmate at the Louisiana State Penitentiary, Matt Poncelet. Prejean has recently gone through a spiritual transformation and renewed her commitment to a life of social justice. As a result of this transformation, she has moved to the St. Thomas housing projects in New Orleans, where she witnesses crime and social inequality.

After exchanging several letters with Poncelet, who has been convicted of the rape and murder of two teenagers, Prejean decides to become his spiritual advisor. During her first visit with Poncelet in prison, he tells her about his impoverished childhood and shares memories of his father and brother.

A judge sets Matt Poncelet's execution date. Poncelet says that on the night of the murders, Carl Vitello (the other man convicted of the crime) lost control and killed the two teenagers. The US Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit grants Poncelet a stay pending a review of his petition, but eventually denies it. Prejean contacts a death row attorney in Atlanta, to help with this case. He agrees to help and prepares petitions for the Supreme Court and the Fifth Circuit Court.

While waiting for a decision, Prejean meets the father of one of the victim who reprimands her for not speaking to the families of the victims and wasting all of her time with the killer. The Board of Pardons votes to continue with the execution.

With only four days left until the execution, Vitello writes a letter to the Governor confessing to the murder. Poncelet is moved to the death house. On his last day, Prejean encourages him to die with words of love instead of hate. The Governor, Supreme Court, and Fifth Circuit Court all reject his last appeal. Poncelet has his last meal and speaks fondly of his life. Guards shave his head and lead him to the execution chamber. Prejean walks to the chamber behind him, Poncelet
apologizes to the families of the victims for his crime and tells Prejean that he loves her. At 12:15 a.m. he is pronounced dead.

With the help of Poncelet’s family and the Catholic church, Prejean is able to bury him. She helps raise money for a fulltime Death Row Attorney. For a time, Prejean believes she will never go back to death row, but on a spiritual retreat she decides she must continue to fight against capital punishment.
Note: This form is to be completed as soon as the student has formed a committee and selected an option from the list below. Submit original to the Office of Graduate Studies in Barge 305.

Name: Michelle Wilden
Birth Date
Address:
Student ID
Email:

Check option:

- Written Exam
- Project
- Creative Project
- Studio Project
- Portfolio Review
- Thesis (standard)
- Thesis (journal-ready)

Indicate credits to be received for the thesis or option:

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Provide journal guidelines plus a recent article from that journal in student's field of study.

*Students taking written exam option may omit items 1-5 below.

1. Proposed Title (and title of targeted journal if appropriate):
   Direction of the production Dead Man Walking

2. Purpose of Study:
   Direction of Bingham High's production of Dead Man Walking serves as the culminating experience in the theatre arts graduate studies.

3. Scope of Study:
   Documentation based upon the preparation of pre-production research, post-production, evaluation, the direction of the production (including casting and rehearsal of actors, preparation of the director's production book, and oral examination) shall benefit both the student and theatre arts department.

4. Procedure to be used:
   Three phases of study shall be included: 1) Pre-Production Research and Thesis Documentation in MLA style, 2) Rehearsal and direction of production, 3) Post-Production Evaluation and Documentation.

5. Does the procedure involve collection of data obtained from Human Subjects (including use of surveys)?
   Yes** □ No X

   Use of Animals?
   Yes** □ No X

   **If yes, your procedures must be approved in writing by the Human Subjects Committee or the Animal Care and Use Committee before you initiate your research.

Committee Chair (typed or printed) Committee Chair (signature) Date
Committee Member (typed or printed) Committee Member (signature) Date
Committee Member (typed or printed) Committee Member (signature) Date
Approved by: Approved by:
Dept Chair/Designee* (signature) Date Dean of Graduate Studies Date

Please note: The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.

*In the case of interdisciplinary programs, this form should be signed by the relevant Program Director/Co-Director AND relevant Dept chair. In cases where they cannot come to plan for approval, the approval will be made or denied by the relevant interdisciplinary program advisor.
August 18, 2011

To Whom It May Concern,

Michelle Willden has administrative approval to continue with her planned production of *Dead Man Walking* in March of 2012. I am aware that this production is a part of her Master’s Thesis Project for Central Washington University, and she has permission to use the facilities at BHS to complete this endeavor. Furthermore, Ms. Willden has permission to include activities for this project in the curriculum of her Theatre classes at Bingham High School.

Respectfully,

R. Thomas Hicks
Principal
Bingham High School

Please note: This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
Project Parameters and Schedules

The dates scheduled for this production of *Dead Man Walking* are the first week of March 2012. This is the annual week slotted for our winter play at Bingham High School. With the fall musical ending right before Thanksgiving, it is necessary, due to time restraints, to hold auditions in mid-December, with rehearsals starting immediately after returning from Winter break. We are a self-supporting entity. Ticket sales are our sole source of income for the play. My classroom doubles as a thrust stage, which seats approximately 150 audience members. We will be running four performances, with tickets averaging $7.00 each. It is safe to say we will sell an average of 100 tickets per night which totals $2800.00 in ticket sales. As per the contract of *Dead Man Walking* we cannot profit from this production, so I will set my budget at $2800.00.

Auditions for the cast will be open to the entire student body, but usually consists mostly of students who are heavily involved in the theater department. I plan on a cast of 25-30 actors, which is much larger than the normal play selection for this production. This will give many more students an opportunity to perform, and hopefully rebuild the talent pool in the department. *Dead Man Walking* is part of the “Dead Man Walking Project” which owns the rights to the play. The project requires the inclusion of at least two other departments in the school to participate in a cross-curricular fashion. I have arranged to work with the English and History departments to fulfill this requirement. The administration, faculty and community are very supportive of the program and will be available to me as a support system.

The venue I am using for this production is a three-quarter thrust that measures 20'x20'. It seats about 150 people and has no fly or wing space. There are two brick walls that protrude into the back of the stage which at times can pose a set construction problem. There is a make-shift grid for lighting and 24 dimmers on the dimmer racks. We have 50 fixtures to light the space, but
the lack of dimmers to handle all of the fixtures can impede us from doing all that we want to. 

The ceilings are high enough to build a two story set, and the acoustics are good enough to hear the actors without amplification. This space has been used for a variety of productions over many years and will be a wonderfully intimate space for this project.

It has been the custom in the past to do the play in this slot alone, without the aid of additional staff members. It will be necessary to bring in some professional consultants such as a lawyer, a nun and a guard who works at the local prison to help the students deal with the content and research aspects of this work. We will be using about 7 weeks (125 hours) of rehearsal time to put this show up as well as educate the community about the project. I believe this will be plenty of time as long as I stay organized and stay on time of the list of things I have planned.
Project Schedule

September 30, 2011 - **Section 1 Due**

December 6, 2011 - Production Meeting

December 12, 2011 - Auditions for *Dead Man Walking*

December 13, 2011 - Call backs for *Dead Man Walking*

December 15, 2011 - Production Meeting

December 16, 2011 - Cast Meeting

December 20, 2011 - Production Meeting/ **Section 2 Due**

January 3, 2012 - Read through/Production Meeting

January 4, 2012 - Block Units 1 - Prejean, Neal, Herbie, Montoya

January 5, 2012 - Block Unit 2 & 3 - Prejean, Matt, Guard, Female Guard, Farley

January 6, 2012 - Block Unit 4 - Guard, Female Guard, Prejean, Matt

January 9, 2012 - Block Unit 5 & 6 - Colleen, Prejean, Montoya

January 10, 2012 - Production Meeting

January 11, 2012 - Block Units 7 - Slade, Reporters, Colleen, Prejean

January 12, 2012 - Block Units 8 - Hilton, Prejean, Matt

January 13, 2012 - Block Unit 9 - Prejean, Lucille

January 17, 2012 - Block Unit 10 - Prejean, Matt, Lucille, Reporters /Production Meeting

January 19, 2012 - Block Unit 11 - Matt, Hilton, Gilardi, Delacroixs, Percys, Prejean, Mirabeau, Lucille, Guards

January 23, 2012 - Block Unit 12 - Delacroixs, Prejean, Percys, Lucille

January 24, 2012 - Block Unit 13 - Prejean, Lucille, Hilton, Colleen, Hope, Walter, Mother

January 25, 2012 - Block Units 14 - Earl Delacroix, Prejean, Walter / Production Meeting

January 30, 2012 - Block Unit 15 - Farley, Prejean, Matt

January 31, 2012 - Block Unit 16 - Marybeth, Clyde, Prejean, Emily, Matt
February 1, 2012- Block Unit 17- Prejean, Colleen, Reporters, Matt/Production Mtg
February 2, 2012- Block Unit 18-Prejean, Colleen, Herbie
February 3, 2012- Block Unit 19- Woman #1-#3, Man #1, #2, Earl Delacroix, Prejean
February 4, 2012- Block Units 20 &21-Prejean, Trapp, Matt, Start Building/ Production Meeting
February 6, 2012 - Block Units 22 & 23- Farley, Prejean, Nurse, Beliveau/ Build
February 7, 2012- Block Unit 24- Colleen, Prejean, Percys, Delacroixs, Hilton, Mother/ Build
February 8, 2012- Block Unit 25- Prejean, Warden Hartman/ Build
February 13, 2012- Block Unit 26- Matt, Prejean/ Build
February 14, 2012-Block Units 27&28- Prejean, Hilton, Fredericks, Walter, Hope, Matt, Farley, Mother/ Build
February 15, 2012- Block Units 29 &30- Matt, Prejean, Colleen, Hilton, Beliveau, Mitch, Jim, Troy, Lucille, Guards, Warden / Production Meeting
February 16, 2012- Block Unit 31- Prejean, Hartman, Matt, Beliveau, Warden, Farley/ Build
February 17, 2012- Block Unit 32-Matt, Prejean, Guards, Secretary (Jamie), Man #1, Man #2, Beliveau/ Build
February 18, 2012- Block Unit 33- Matt, Prejean/ Build
February 21, 2012- Block Unit 34-Guards, Prejean, Matt, Hartman, Percys, Delacroixs, Reporters, Attorneys, Beliveau, Farley / Build
February 23, 2012- Block Units 35 & 36- Guards, Hartman, Percys, Delacroixs, Reporters, Attorneys, Beliveau, Farley Hope, Walter, Lucille, Troy, Jim, Mitch , Matt, Prejean, Herbie/ Build
February 24, 2012- Run Act 1
February 25, 2012- Run Act 2
February 27, 2012- Clean Act 1
February 28, 2012- Clean Act 2
March 1, 2012- Paper Tech
March 2, 2012- Hang and Focus
March 3, 2012 - Tech Run
March 5, 2012 - Tech
March 6, 2012 - Dress/Tech
March 7, 2012 - Final Dress
March 8, 2012 - Preview
March 9, 2012 - Opening Night
March 10, 2012 - Performance
March 12, 2012 - Performance
March 13, 2012 - Performance
April 2, 2012 - Section 3 Due
June 11, 2012 - Send in Binder
July - Orals
Evaluation of *Dead Man Walking* as a Production Vehicle

The play *Dead Man Walking* is the product of a project created by the author of the novel of the same name, Sister Helen Prejean, and the screenwriter of the movie based on the novel, Tim Robbins. Sister Prejean had a vision that theatre was another vehicle to be used to investigate the subject of capital punishment. She believed in the possibility of a play that could be presented to the masses by school groups, could in turn create an open dialogue in the high schools and colleges that participated, as well as the communities that surrounds them.

The audiences for our winter play are historically made up of student’s friends and family as well as faculty, which either traditionally attend our productions or know someone in the production. This production will attract a much wider base of the student body and community; therefore I do have a concern about having enough performances to accommodate the interest I anticipate will be generated. I also have a minor concern about whether the content, i.e. the death penalty, is suitable for my community. Given that Utah is a death penalty state, I believe it is vital to begin a dialogue about the death penalty within the school as well as the community with this project.

The themes in *Dead Man Walking* include redemption, personal responsibility and the symptoms of social injustice, the audience will find it hard not to apply the situations to their own lives and wonder how they, themselves, would react in the same circumstances.

One of the main ideas in the play that will resonate with both the teens and adults who attend the production is that of personal responsibility. This idea is brought to light through Sister Prejean’s quest to help Matt Poncelet recognize and in turn accept responsibility for his actions before he is executed. She goes further by challenging the government to take responsibility for their part in the role of capital punishment in our society. She challenges the
Governor, the Warden, the guards and the priest in the prison to look into the burden they assume by participating in the act of carrying out the sentence of death. Her belief is that this role funnels down from the lawmakers to the individuals who are slated to carry out the law in the end. This responsibility seems easy to deny given the law however, “The governor is not personally responsible if he simply ‘does his job’ within the law” (Robbins 70).

Another theme that our audience will identify with is that of vengeance, hatred and the redemptive power of love. Poncelet having been convicted of murder and while sitting on death row proclaims his innocence and regularly spews hateful words in the direction of all involved in putting him in this situation. He revels in white supremacist doctrine and anti-government railings. Everything that comes out of his mouth for 90% of the play is based in anger. The families of the victims are looking for a reckoning; something, anything that will help them heal in the face of the horrific loss of their children. They believe that in the execution of this murderer they will find peace. This verdict will allay their sorrow, “I could’ve taken his gun and shot him, right there. I could’ve killed him that day, I should have. I’d be a happier man” (Robbins 46). Sister Prejean, on the other hand, believes that love not hatred or vengeance is the one power that has the capacity to heal and restore all things. Her journey with Poncelet is one of healing and love rather than vengeance and justice. The love that she shows him in the end is the thing that will bring peace to this appalling circumstance.

Because this play is part of a project, we are required to use at least two other departments in our school in a cross-curricular fashion. This element was one of the big draws for me to produce this piece. The English department will be using the book by Sister Prejean as a part of their curriculum, and the history department is studying a unit on capital punishment in the United States. The visual art and debate departments will also be using the play as a
springboard for projects this next year. The involvement of so many departments will create a
sense of school-wide pride in the project which will feed the audience base. The overriding
concern I have about producing this piece is definitely the content. I teach in a very conservative,
predominately LDS community. There will be an objection to the language, which I have
addressed with the publishing company. I have been given permission to omit whatever profanity
I deem necessary in order to accommodate the needs of the community. That being said, I still
struggle with what to omit and what is necessary to keep the integrity of the characters.

The idea of engaging in an open dialogue with my community of students about the death
penalty is intriguing and important given that we live in Utah where the death penalty is still
being practiced and in the news on a regular basis. The Dead Man Walking project requires that
the instructor/director to never reveal their personal opinion on the issue, instead there is to be an
ongoing conversation amongst the students as well as the community.

The settings of the play are nonrealistic depictions of several locations in a documentary-
like style. The journey is a story not a reenactment. The only scene that any type of realism
comes into play is that of the execution, this should be depicted in a very realistic manner and
should make the audience feel uncomfortable.

Dead Man Walking will be a school-wide, community-wide project that will offer the
opportunity to create a dialogue about the best way to handle the members of our society who
choose to take the lives of others. Participating in the project will challenge my students to
explore many areas of life that are foreign to their existence. The location, content and time
period are very different from what most of my students have ever experienced. From a design
perspective, we will be utilizing projections and a narrative style that uses fragmented sets as
well as technology and the imagination of the audience. This will be a departure from productions we have done in the past and will challenge my actors, crew and audience alike.
Concept Statement for *Dead Man Walking*

Sister Prejean decided to take her story from a novel to film and finally to the stage. This inspiration came from her desire to open up the dialogue regarding the death penalty and according to the Dead Man Walking Project’s website:

Sister Helen Prejean first conjured the idea in 1998 after reading a *New Yorker* magazine article that said Arthur Miller’s play, *Death of a Salesman*, had been performed a million times. Every day, Miller's play was performed somewhere in the world, according to the article. Sister Helen realized that if *Dead Man Walking* could be made into a play, it could also be reproduced endlessly, thereby expanding its impact. (Project)

After consulting Tim Robbins, discussions began and the project was created. Information and dialogue are the vehicles to connect us to one to another and aid us in understanding the human condition. Ignorance and the belief in not speaking about certain things in polite company keep us isolated and ignorant.

As a director I want to explore the concept of isolation. It was said by Orson Wells, “We're born alone, we live alone, and we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we're not alone” (quotationsbook.com). All of the main characters in this play are inherently alone in the world. Matt Poncelet has committed murder which has landed him alone on death row. Sister Prejean lives a life dedicated to God as a nun, which has required her to take a vow of celibacy. The victim's families are alone in their grief, isolating themselves from the reality of what has happened in some cases from one another.

The judicial system sentences criminals to be caged up like wild animals to wait out their fate. Those like Matt on death row are poked with the sticks of appeals, possible pardons and inevitably the walk to the execution chamber. His crime has caused him to be isolated from
polite society. It has also isolated his victims as well as the victims’ families. Sister Prejean believes that this “animal” can be saved on some level through kindness and love. At the least the admission of his personal responsibility in the crime will recognize his humanity. These ideas of isolation and redemption should be reflected in all aspects of the production.

For the color palette I would like to use a variety of browns, prison blues as well as greys and metallic tones in the set, costume and lighting designs. This palette of colors will emphasize the bleak and isolated existence of prison. Isolation will also be depicted by the use of single pools of lights for many scenes. The feeling of cramped quarters in a death row cell should be up on a higher level isolating it from the rest of the action. When Poncelet arrives at the death house, it will be the first time we should see him on the main level of the stage. The first time the audience is that close to him. Shadows should also play a role in the lighting design giving the feeling of looking over your shoulder for someone watching you all of the time.

The audience should feel distanced from the action; this could be enhanced not only by the physical separation of the audience from the “animal” but the coldness of the statistics that are presented through the non-emotional nature of news reports.
Initial Event and Conflict Framing Analysis

The protagonist in *Dead Man Walking* is the character of Sister Helen Prejean. She is the driving force throughout the play that sees the conflict from beginning to the end.

The opposing character is Matt Poncelet, the man on death row, Sister Prejean’s quest to help him find peace through admitting his responsibility in the crime. He is in direct opposition by blaming others, including, his childhood and the government as a whole.

The dramatic question: Does everyone deserve the opportunity to be loved, even the man on death row?

In her closing speech of the play Sister Prejean states, “Matt has just attacked someone I know, someone I love, the fireplace of my childhood home is stained with blood and in my hand I hold a weapon. Will I raise the weapon up to him?” (Robbins 95).

The conflict: Sister Prejean needs to get Matt Poncelet to take personal responsibility for his crimes as well as ask for forgiveness, before he is executed in order to make his peace with God and himself.
Given Circumstances as Noted in the Play

Environmental Facts

Geographic Location

- **Hope House, New Orleans, Louisiana**: Act 1, 1-4, 15-20
  
  SISTER PREJEAN. I worked in a place called Hope House (Robbins 2).

- **Sister Prejean’s room, St. Thomas Housing Project, New Orleans, Louisiana**: Act 1, 4-6, 14-15, 50-52, Act 2, 95-97
  
  SISTER PREJEAN. I was living in the St. Thomas Housing development in New Orleans (Robbins 2).

- **Louisiana State Prison, Angola, Louisiana**: Act 1, 6-14, 20-23, 38-42, 48-50, Act 2, 58-65
  
  SISTER PREJEAN. Prisoner 18375 at Angola Prison’s Death Row (Robbins 4)

- **Lucille’s House, Slidell Louisiana**: Act 1, 24-29
  
  MATT. No one in my family seems able to make the trip out here...It’s a long drive from Slidell (Robbins 6).

- **Courtroom New Orleans, Louisiana**: Act 1, 29-34

- **Sister Prejean’s mother’s house, Baton Rouge, Louisiana**: Act 1, 34-36, Act 2, 70-71
  
  SISTER PREJEAN. Because of the length of the drive from Angola to New Orleans I packed a bag and drove to stay with my mother in Baton Rouge (Robbins 61)

- **Delacroix House, Slidell, Louisiana**: Act 1, 36-38

- **Percy House, Slidell, Louisiana**: Act 1, 42-48
The play takes place in 1980.

Economic Environment

The United States was rocked by a severe recession throughout the early 1980’s. The severe drop in world oil prices was devastating to the economy of Louisiana who saw a rise in unemployment to a record high of 13%. President Ronald Reagan’s economic program which was based on the theory of supply-side economics cut taxes in hopes that people would save more of their income.

The poverty rate in Louisiana in 1980 is 19.6% in comparison to the United States poverty rate of 12.4%. The majority of the non-metro Parishes in the state are considered to be at poverty level or below (New World Encyclopedia). The factors of poverty in Louisiana include but are not limited to, overall poor health care and little or no access to preventative health care, hazardous waste exposure, mental illness, low quality education, lack of recreation opportunities for children and Lastly neglect and abuse.

Between 1980 and 1990 Federal Government cuts its contribution to education by 25% while increasing its allocation for criminal justice by 29% (Dead Man Act 1).

The characters in Dead Man Walking are all affected by their economic situation, Sister Prejean works in the projects, teaching the underprivileged. Matt Poncelet grew up in poverty learning to make do. In the end he turned to drugs and crime and in turn was sentenced to death.
The Delacroixs, the Percys and the Poncelets live in Slidell, LA. which is a small lower income rural town. Hope Percy, one of the victims of Matt’s crime had enlisted in the military as a means of escaping the town as well as the limited job opportunities available in Slidell, “She was to join the Air Force on June 15\textsuperscript{th}, the day it happened” (Robbins 42).

Political Environment

1980 found Americans in a state of malaise about politics and the economy; they were no longer the most powerful country in the world, political scandals had entered the picture and more than ever there was a sense of corruptness toward the government.

The election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 brought with it “can do” attitude and hope for the future that through old fashioned values of hard work and self-reliance America could be restored to its former glory. This attitude brought about deep cuts in social services programs which hurt the already struggling populations of the south.

In the 1960’s the United States was embroiled in the civil rights movement. Throughout the next two decades many strides were made towards equal rights but problems still remained. According to the Civil Rights Conference held in 1980, “the Justice Department reported that the KKK has new vigor all over this country; that there were 44 racial disputes in 1979 in which blacks were injured by people who said they were Klan members (A Civil Rights Agenda for the 1980’s). The continued division of races in the south had a heavy influence on the political races and decisions made by those in government. Matt Poncelet makes reference to the political influence in regards to the executions at his prison, “They already executed one black, Tobias, and tonight Wayne Purcell- two blacks. It’s time for a white; the Governor is under pressure to get a white (Robbins 40).
The political environment and whether someone is running for office can influence everything from taxes being raised to who remains on death row and whose sentence gets commuted. Matt makes reference to this environment as he explains the urgency of setting an execution date, “and the day before Governor Fredericks says he’s running for re-election, surprise! A big announcement with lots of press setting a date for my execution to show how tough he is on crime. (Robbins 43)

Social Environment

Poverty, inferior education systems, broken homes, drug use and crime all make up the environment that Matt Poncelet was raised in. It wasn’t unusual for children to be left to their own devices, running the streets and causing mischief. With single parent homes and no money for day care, children raised themselves and often made poor choices in regards to their friends and activities. This coupled with the racism created an attitude of apathy toward humankind as a whole and death was more common than tragic. Matt Poncelet expresses this view, “Lots of niggers around there. They knock each other like beer cans on a fence” (Robbins 9).

The working poor of Louisiana struggled to keep their heads above water with the depressed economy of the 1980’s. The label of being one of the poorest states in the nation, kept even the employed fighting to make ends meet.

Religious Environment

Religion is a key ingredient of this production, the main character being a Catholic nun plays no small role. How the Catholic Church feels about the death penalty heavily influences the text.

The religious environment of Louisiana in the 1980’s was very similar to the one that exists today. Being made up of 80% Christians (New World Encyclopedia) there has always
been a moral outrage in regards to crime as well as an eye for an eye attitude towards the perpetrators of the crimes themselves. Though the citizens of the state who are made up of mostly Baptists and Catholics would seem to favor the death penalty, according to a sentencing and law blog:

There are parts of Louisiana that are very pro-death, but more than half the parishes in this state have never returned a death penalty," said Richard Bourke, director of the Louisiana Capital Assistance Center in New Orleans. "The death penalty in this state is driven by a small number of individually, locally-elected officials (Bath).

*Dead Man Walking* contains a great number of references to religion, God, redemption and forgiveness. All tenants of the Catholic Church, these themes color the very core of the text and should be considered heavily when interacting with production.
Previous Action

(Page 1) Prejean tells of her transfer to this parish.

(Page 4) Prejean recounts writing to Matt for the first time.

(Page 6) Matt has a dream about being executed.

(Page 7) Farley remembers hearing about the crime Matt committed.

(Page 11, 12) Matt talks about the night of the crime.

(Page 12) Matt talks about his marriage and child.

(Page 14) Prejean talks to Matt about her childhood.

(Page 18) Reporters recount the crime.

(Page 21) Statistics show Death Penalty numbers.

(Page 26) Lucille sees her son’s story on Inside Crime.

(Page 27) Matt’s childhood was rough and his father was abusive.

(Page 30) Executions have been part of history since the beginning of time.

(Page 31) Matt shows no remorse during his trial.

(Page 35) Prejean brings home strays as a child.

(Page 37) Walter’s parents struggle with the loss of their son.

(Page 40) Two inmates were executed in the last year.

(Page 41) Matt has an encounter with black children as a child.

(Page 42) Hope’s mother talks about her last day on earth.

(Page 43) Hope’s father files a police report when Hope is missing.

(Page 44) Hope and Walter’s bodies are found.

(Page 52-53) Families are trying to recover from the aftermath of crimes committed against their loved ones.
Sister Prejean is driven by the need to serve. Her commitment to help the poor obtain the basic necessities of life led her to introduction of Matt Poncelet on death row. By the end of the play her focus had narrowed to the basic necessity of life itself, even for those who have taken the life of others.

Matt Poncelet

At the top of the play Matt takes no personal responsibility for his actions, and wastes much of his energy pointing the finger at the partner in crime, as well as the government and society. By the end of the play he has accepted responsibility for at least his role in the crime he is being punished for.
Earl Delacroix

- **Beginning:** “This is an evil man. That scum robbed me of my only son, my name” (Robbins 34)
- **Ending:** “Yes Ma’am, let’s do that” (Robbins 99).

Earl Delacroix is the father of one of the victims of Matt Poncelet. At the beginning of the play he doesn’t comprehend how Sister Prejean could waste her time with a criminal, when it is the victim’s families that need the care, not him. By the end of the play Mr. Delacroix starts to realize that retribution doesn’t bring back his son. Forgiveness is a healthier path.

Chaplain Farley

- **Beginning:** “So what is this, Sister? Morbid fascination? Bleeding heart sympathy?” (Robbins 7).
- **Ending:** “You have been unable to provide enough spiritual guidance to this man as is evidenced in the fact that he will leave this earth without receiving the sacred sacrament of communion” (Robbins 84).

Chaplain Farley is the prison Chaplain and has become calloused by his years of exposure to the population of criminals. He is skeptical that Sister Prejean will make any impact on Matt Poncelet. When she succeeds in getting Matt to admit to the crime he refuses to acknowledge her progress but instead points out her failure to get him saved.
Hilton Barber

- Beginning: “Well, I’ll do my best. The legal system is a series of gates that shut like one-way turnstiles and you can’t go back once you’ve come out” (Robbins 23).

- Ending: “Let’s not give up on the courts. We still might hit dirt with one of the legal issues” (Robbins 72).

Hilton Barber is the death penalty attorney who takes on Matt Poncelt’s eleventh hour bid for a commutation. He believes staunchly in the right to a fair trial and advocates for the poor who can’t afford a high powered attorney. He is willing to try every avenue to see justice done, even till the end, when all resources have been exhausted.
Analysis of Dialogue

Choice of Words

Robbins has created characters in *Dead Man Walking* based on real life people who based on their location of Louisiana use very common, simple, and short words in their speech. There are, however, instances when more formal language is used, as in the case of the attorneys.

The economic status and social standing of the characters greatly influence the word choices used in their dialogue. Matt Poncelet who grew up poor and uneducated and chose a life of crime uses poor grammar and words that polite society would find offensive. "Lots of niggers around there. They knock each other off like beer cans on a fence" (Robbins 9). The attorneys and who are more educated use more multi-syllable words and longer sentence structure, peppered with legalese like "Clemency", "Execution", "Hence"

Choice of Phrases

The most evident characteristic of the phrasing and sentence structure Robbins uses is a short, direct and to the point type of language. There are no flowery phrases or extraneous use of descriptive words. Rather a narrative style similar to a news report is most evident throughout the play. The use of statistics is a tool used to drive home the facts of the crimes. "Between 1908 and 1990 Federal government cuts its contribution to education by 25% while increasing its allocation for criminal justice by 29%" (Robbins 20).

The dialogue between the family members is stilted and guarded. The phrasing used by Robbins emphasizes the tension brought on by the crime as well as the feelings that aren’t being communicated. "She wants to put the past behind her. She’s not herself" (Robbins 37).
Choice of Images

The imagery in *Dead Man Walking* is all about being imprisoned and loss. Things are described in terms of cell blocks, and no future. "my 6 by 8 foot cell" (Robbins 5), "chop, chop back to jail" (Robbins 12). In contrast Sister Prejean uses imagery of an afterlife and forgiveness, "There are spaces of sorrow that only God can touch" (Robbins 89).

Choice of Peculiar Characteristics

The peculiar characteristics of the dialogue in *Dead man Walking* are in the portions of the script that feel detached and cold simply supplying the information without any bias. The introductions of flashbacks as well as sound effects relay information in a direct way without being colored by relationships.

Structure of Lines and Speeches

Sister Prejean definitely has most of the lines in *Dead Man Walking*. They are informative at times, and on occasion there are longer speeches that are reminiscent of sermon in church. Both types of structure are used to bring home the struggle she has between what she hears on the news and what God would want her to do. This battle between head and heart is highlighted through the contrast between rapid fire dialogue and heartfelt speeches interrupted by long pauses.

Matt Poncelet’s sentence structure is much less formal and obviously uneducated. This is evidenced in the incomplete sentences that are punctuated with obscenity, "Orphaned our kid, the stupid bitch" (Robbins 10).

Earl Delacroix has a gentile, polite way of putting things, his words are poetic, as if he chooses them carefully and has gone over them a thousand times before. "She wept a river, poor woman, whole days, nights, for weeks, months" (Robbins 37)
Chaplain Farley has a way of talking at someone rather than to them. His sentences are more of a speech than a conversation, "Reconciliation is achieved by accepting God’s love" (Robbins 84).

Hilton Barber and Guy Gilardi are the two attorneys in the play. The structure of the language is unique in the scene between the two of them as they petition the pardon board from opposing sides. Each attorney has their speech, and they take turns addressing the room, at times the speeches seem to be from different times of the day, but as the scene continues, their speeches meld into one another until they are speaking simultaneously and creating a cacophony of sound that is overwhelming to the audience. This approach to writing seems to be very effective in creating the mood.
Analysis of Dramatic Action

ACT II

The death house. The look of these scenes is different than the previous scenes. PREJEAN enters with a guard, TRAPP.

PREJEAN: This is in the middle of nowhere.

TRAPP: Closest cellblock is a mile and a half away.

PREJEAN: Why?

TRAPP: Don't know, Sister. Security I bet. This is Sgt. Beliveau. He is the ranking officer at the death house.

BELIVEAU: Hello, Sister. We don’t get a lot of female advisors here so bear with us as we figure it out. Chaplain Farley called. He’s late. You can see Poncelet until he gets here.

PREJEAN: Thanks, Sgt. Beliveau.

BELIVEAU: Trapp’ll take you to your man.

As TRAPP and PREJEAN walk.

PREJEAN: I saw you outside the gates the night of Purcell’s execution.

TRAPP: Yes.

PREJEAN: You seemed upset.

TRAPP: I'm on the strap down team. I'm on the left leg. That's my job, the left leg. We take the prisoner from his cell into the execution chamber.

PREJEAN: Wow. That's gotta be tough.

TRAPP: It was hard. I got home that night and couldn't sleep. Just sat in the chair all night.

PREJEAN: I think this thing must affect everybody that sees it, whether they're for it or against it.

TRAPP: Well, it's part of the job, ma'am. These people get what's comin' to 'em. Chaplain Farley should be here shortly. Have a seat, Sister.

PREJEAN: Did you read anything in that bible about Jesus?

MATT: Holy man, did good, in heaven, praise Jesus.

PREJEAN: There's passages in there about the suffering of Jesus when he was alone and facing death that you might find interesting.

MATT: Me and Jesus had a different way of dealing with things. He was one of those turn the other cheek guys.

PREJEAN: Takes a lot of strength to turn the other cheek, Matt. You say you like rebels. What do you think Jesus was?

MATT: He wasn't no rebel?

PREJEAN: Sure he was. He was a dangerous man.

MATT: What's so dangerous about love your brother?

PREJEAN: His love changed things, Matt. People that nobody cared about, prostitutes, beggars, the poor, finally had someone that respected them, loved them, made them part of a family, made them realize their own worth. In his eyes they had dignity and were becoming a social force, a threat to the established order and that made the guys at the top very nervous and so they went and arrested Jesus.

MATT: Kinda like me, huh?

PREJEAN: No, Matt. Not at all like you, not at all. He created a better world. He changed it with his love. You stood by and watched while two kids were killed.
Lights change. MATT disappears and FARLEY appears, tidying his desk as he talks.

FARLEY: It's very easy for someone to come in from outside and make a rash judgment on procedure. What may appear on the surface to be irrational or unnecessary proves upon examination to have solid reasoning and experience behind it.

PREJEAN: Father, I was asking to play a hymn on a cassette for Matt before his execution.

FARLEY: And experience tells us that music stirs up emotion, emotion that may produce an unexpected reaction in the inmate.

PREJEAN: Would you mind if I ask the warden for his opinion?

FARLEY: I would discourage it but you may, if you like.

PREJEAN: Well, thank you for your time Father.

She stands.

FARLEY: I understand you were protesting outside the gates during the last execution.

PREJEAN: Yes.

FARLEY: Are you familiar with the Old Testament. "Thou shalt not kill but if thou shed the blood of man by man shall your blood be shed"?


FARLEY: Reconciliation is achieved by accepting God's love.

Poncelet has to understand that Jesus died for his sins if his soul is to live an eternal life. The politics of the death penalty are not what's important here. I certainly hope you're not encouraging him to reject authority. Look at Romans "Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities for there is no authority except from God and those who oppose it will bring judgment upon themselves."

PREJEAN begins to sway and she faints. Black out. In the darkness we hear:

NURSE: What is it? What happened?

FARLEY: She collapsed in my office. I think it may be her heart.

BELIVEAU: She's having a heart attack.

PREJEAN: I'm OK. I think I just fainted.

BELIVEAU: You stay right there, young lady.

PREJEAN: I haven't eaten anything. I'm sure I'm OK. I told Matt I'd be back. Can you tell him what happened?

Lights fade up. PREJEAN on a bed flanked by the nurse and BELIVEAU.

NURSE: We'll do that when we're finished here.

PREJEAN: No. I gotta get word to him.

BELIVEAU: I'll take care of it, Sister.

NURSE: Well good news, this isn't a heart attack.
PREJEAN: I'm just hungry. They have this rule you're not allowed to eat in the death house. They must think we're ferns and can feed off the air.

_A pause._

PREJEAN: Is this machine used after an execution?

NURSE: Yes, ma'am. We just have to be official about the whole thing. Thank god we're off the electric chair. Smell of burnt flesh and all. It's a little easier to take, the needle. Part of the job, you know. Let's get you up and get some food in your stomach.

PREJEAN: Who puts the needle in?

NURSE: That's private information.

PREJEAN: Is it you?

NURSE: We are not allowed to disclose any specifics regarding the execution procedure.

BELIVEAU: C'mon Sister, we'll get you a tray of food and then send you home.

PREJEAN: No, I've got to get back to Matt.

BELIVEAU: Sorry Sister, Warden’s orders. You're through for the day.

Lights shift. COLLEEN holds a man’s suit.

COLLEEN: Got this at Goodwill. I talked to Bishop Norwich. He said he would say the funeral mass. The leaders of the congregation have met and we can use one of our own burial plots. I also found a funeral home willing to donate their services.

PREJEAN holds the suit.

COLLEEN: Guess who Matt Poncelet's going to be buried next to?

PREJEAN: Who was the last to die?

COLLEEN: Sister Celestine.

PREJEAN bursts out laughing.

PREJEAN: Oh, Lord.

COLLEEN: Remember when that sweet little girl came to the convent after her wedding to introduce her husband to us?

PREJEAN: And Celestine says, “I'm glad I don't have to share my bed with any man.”

COLLEEN: She loved her celibacy so much.

PREJEAN: Now she'll have a man next to her forever.

They laugh. Then.

COLLEEN: How'd we ever get involved with this stuff anyway?

Lights change. A hymn plays.

PREJEAN: Because of the length of the drive from Angola to New Orleans I packed a bag and drove to stay with my mother in Baton Rouge. Laying in my bed that night, staring at the ceiling I had stared at as a child. I thought of the folks in my
neighborhood that I had been neglecting. I thought of that fourteen-year-old boy that was shot and wondered if that bullet wound would be a change in his life or the badge of machismo that would lead to worse trouble. I wondered what the badge was with Matt.

*From behind PREJEAN we see the parents of the slain.*

CLYDE: Against the day of vengeance and requital, against the time they lose their footing? Close at hand is the day of their disaster and their doom is rushing upon them.

MARYBETH: Whoever strikes a man a mortal blow must be put to death.

The lights change.

PREJEAN: Hilton called early in the morning.

HILTON: We've got ourselves a private meeting with the Governor. Now listen, from what I know of Governor Fredericks, he's a reluctant supporter of capital punishment. He has the power to save this man's life by commuting the sentence or granting a reprieve, the last vestige of the right of Kings. The trick on this is to appeal to him on a personal level without a lot of fanfare. That's why I've requested a private meeting. Meet me tonight at the State House in Baton Rouge, 7pm.

PREJEAN: It's a lost cause, Mama. I'm wasting my time.

MOTHER: With your criminal?

PREJEAN: There's so many people grieving. He's caused so much pain.

Pause.

MOTHER: Maybe you're looking for a way to love Judas, for a love so big that it takes in the evil.

PREJEAN: I don't know if I can do it, Mama.

MOTHER: Annunciations are common. Incarnations are rare. You do your best, Helen, that's all God asks.

*We hear the sounds of a hymn through a small speaker. Lights change. PREJEAN talks with WARDEN HART-MAN, a short stocky man in his early 60s with a square face and a thick gray mustache. Conspicuously present on his desk is a small cassette player that plays the hymn PREJEAN wants to play for MATT.*

HARTMAN: It's nice enough.

He turns the volume down. It continues to play softly.

HARTMAN: I've been hearing some disturbing things about you.

PREJEAN: Such as?

HARTMAN: That you're too emotionally involved with Matthew Poncelet and unable to fulfill your function as spiritual advisor.

PREJEAN: What gives you that idea?

HARTMAN: You fainted in the death house and caused a lot of commotion for my personnel.

PREJEAN: I fainted out of hunger not emotion.
HARTMAN: As warden one of my major responsibilities in this execution process is seeing to it that condemned inmates get good spiritual counsel and a chance to get straight with God before they die. This man Farley is perfectly capable of doing that.

PREJEAN: Matt doesn't trust Chaplain Farley and he has the right to choose his own spiritual counsel, doesn't he?

HARTMAN: Yes.

PREJEAN: It's guaranteed in the Constitution isn't it?

HARTMAN: Yes it is. But according to the Constitution we can bar a spiritual adviser from the death house if they are a threat to prison security.

PREJEAN: A threat?

HARTMAN: You were with some protestors outside the prison during the last execution.

PREJEAN: C'mon now, I was singing Kumbaya. You may not like having me around but you know I'm not a threat to prison security.

A pause

PREJEAN: Warden, this man is going to die tomorrow. Doesn't he have a right to some solace?

The hymn ends. There is a pause.

HARTMAN: The hymn is nice but it'll stir up emotion. I can't let you play it for Mr. Poncelet. As far as the other thing I don't want to get into a debate about the Constitution. You can continue to see him.

PREJEAN: Thank you.

HARTMAN: Is his family gonna be there tomorrow?

PREJEAN: Yes sir.

HARTMAN: It's important that they are there for him.

PREJEAN: And you, Warden, you'll be there too?

HARTMAN: Yes, ma'am, all day and all night.

A pause.

HARTMAN: Sister, no one is doing handstands about this execution. It comes with the job.

PREJEAN: The job. A consigned power to oblige the law, the will of the people. How one feels about what the job results in is irrelevant. The warden is absolved of personal responsibility because he is doing his job.

Lights change. The death house.

MATT: Where'd you go yesterday?

PREJEAN: They wouldn't let me come back in.

MATT: Are you all right?

PREJEAN: I'm fine. Just a lot of commotion for nothing.

MATT: I kept asking them here what happened but they wouldn't tell me nothing. I thought you had a heart attack. I thought I was gonna have to go through this by myself.
PREJEAN: I'm sorry, Matt. I tried to get back. They wouldn't let me.

A pause.

PREJEAN: So the Marlboro man doesn't want to ride into the sunset all tough and alone.

No response.

MATT: When they took me away yesterday they wouldn't tell me why. Took me into a room. Started measuring me. Weighed me. I think they were trying to see how big a coffin I needed. When I got back you were gone. Spent all day alone.

A pause.

MATT: You ever get lonely?

PREJEAN: Yeah. I do. Sometimes on Sunday afternoons when I smell the smoke in the neighborhood from family barbecues, hear those kids laughing, I sit there in my room and feel like a fool.

MATT: What I miss most being here are the women and just bein' in the bars and listenin' to music and dancin' till three or four in the morning. And I'm not going to lie to you, ma'am. I believed in doing it. Me and my lady friends we'd get us a blanket and a bottle or a little weed and go into the woods and do it.

PREJEAN: Well Matt. Let's face it. If I had a husband and a family, chances are I'd be with them this afternoon instead of visiting with you.

MATT: True. Glad you're here, ma'am.

MATT lights a cigarette.

PREJEAN: Those things'll kill you, you know.

MATT: They're not going to break me. I just pray God holds up my legs tomorrow to make that last walk. It's the waiting, it's the countdown that gets you.

PREJEAN: We should know about the federal appeal real soon and Hilton and I have an appointment to see the Governor this evening.

MATT: The Governor. Fat chance in hell he'll do anything. Risk his political butt for me?

PREJEAN: Hartman told me there would be no more media interviews.

MATT: Just as well. Shut my stupid mouth up.

PREJEAN: I was able to arrange a polygraph for tomorrow morning.

MATT: Alright. Good news.

PREJEAN: Now the man that runs the polygraph test has serious doubts that they'll get an accurate reading of the truth.

MATT: Why?
PREJEAN: Because tomorrow is the day of your execution and you’re bound to be under stress and the test often mistakes stress for dishonesty.

MATT: Not a problem. I’m home free.

PREJEAN: Have you been reading your bible?

MATT: I tried last night but reading makes me want to sleep. I’m trying to stay conscious as much as possible. Look, I appreciate all the efforts to save me but me and God have squared things away. I know Jesus died for us on the cross and will take care of me when I appear before God on judgment day.

PREJEAN: You know Matt. Redemption isn’t some kind of free ticket admission that you get because Jesus paid the price. You need to participate in your own redemption. You’ve got some work to do. You may want to check out some words of Jesus that might have some meaning for you: “You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free.” It’s in the Gospel of John, chapter 8.

MATT: I’ll do that. I’ll check it out. The truth will set you free. I like that. I pass that lie detector test and I’m home free.

PREJEAN: Matt, if you die, as your friend I want to help you to die with dignity and you can’t do that, the way I see it, until you own up to the part you played in Walter and Hope’s death.

As the lights change, PREJEAN walks to a table and sits next to HILTON BARBER. Lights flash.

PREJEAN: Later that evening as we walked into our private meeting with Governor Fredericks we were bombarded with flash bulbs and a coterie of press. The Governor had set up a dog and pony show and we were the stars.

A bright flash.

FREDERICKS: Now tomorrow, as you know, the State of Louisiana will put to death Matthew Poncelet and today I have invited a couple of people here to talk to us about this case. Who will go first?

Flash.

HILTON: Yes, well...uh...Matt Poncelet had inadequate counsel, a court appointed lawyer with limited experience in trial law and none in defending a capital defendant.

Flash.

PREJEAN: Try as Hilton might I don’t think we were there to change anyone’s minds but simply to show the press that this politician was listening to both sides and in a reasoned and measured way would remain tough on crime and uphold the law of Louisiana.

Many flashes. He moves to collect his paper.

FREDERICKS: But you must understand, I’m the Governor and represent the state and must carry out the laws and must submerge my own personal views to carry out the expressed will of the people. Yes, I’ll look carefully at the case but unless there’s some clear, striking evidence for innocence and gross miscarriage of justice I will not interfere in the process.

Many flashes. He moves to collect his paper.

PREJEAN: Governor.
He looks up at her.

PREJEAN: I am Matt Poncelet's spiritual adviser. If he dies, I will be with him. Please don't let this man die.

FREDERICKS, a deft politician, immediately looks concerned.

FREDERICKS: Can you do that? Can you watch that?

PREJEAN: I promised him, Governor.

FREDERICKS: I'll give the case careful consideration.

PREJEAN: You can spare him. You have the power to prevent this death.

FREDERICKS: I will look into the matter.

And he is gone. Amid the commotion.

HILTON: Let's not give up on the courts. We still might hit pay dirt with one of the legal issues.

PREJEAN: I realize the governor, like other politicians, has found a moral niche in this process, a position from which he can make decisions and still lay his head on the pillow at night and go to sleep. He subordinates his conscience to the will of the people. If it is the law it must be right. The governor is not personally responsible if he simply "does his job" within the law.

PREJEAN walks to her bed in her mother's house and lies down. MOTHER, FARLEY, WALTER, HOPE and MATT appear behind her as she lies down.

WALTER: What song is number one? What is the popular song now?

MATT: I am contemptible, loathsome to my neighbors.

HOPE: Do our friends remember us?

MATT: To my friends a thing of fear.

HOPE: Does anyone cry?

MATT: I am forgotten.

HOPE: Or are we forgotten?

MATT: As good as dead in their hearts, something discarded.

WALTER: Is he sorry?

MATT: As they combine against me, plotting to take my life.

HOPE: Deliver us from evil.

MATT: But I put my trust in you, Yahweh.

MOTHER: Helen, you're looking for a way to love Judas.

FARLEY: A man is going to die in front of you tomorrow.

MOTHER: Follow your heart and your faith. Annunciations are common. Incarnations are rare.

PREJEAN: I didn't sleep that night.
PREJEAN stands and walks to the death-house set. A digital clock reads 8am.

MATT: I didn’t sleep last night. I wouldn’t take that nerve medicine they tried to give me. I’m looking death in the eyes. I’m getting ready to go.

MATT looks down.

PREJEAN: Listen, Matt. I want you to know that I respect your need for privacy. If you prefer to be alone or just with your family today I won’t be offended.

MATT: You should be here ma’am, if it won’t put you out too much. I’m gonna want someone to talk to and be with right up to the end.

MATT shivers, starts.

PREJEAN: A couple of hours passed. Vast expanses of silence. Each quiet moment I felt I was failing him. I talked about trivial things, anything to keep the silence away. The polygraph operator arrived at 10:30.

MATT moves upstage and sits at a table with the polygraph operator.

COLLEEN: Some, driven frantic by their sins, made miserable by their own guilt and finding all food repugnant, were nearly at death’s door. Then they called to Yahweh in their trouble and he rescued them from their suffering, he snatched them from the pit...

PREJEAN on the phone. MATT is taking the polygraph test. We do not hear the questions and answers.

PREJEAN: Any word from the fifth circuit?

HILTON appears, phone in hand.

HILTON: None yet. A good sign. They’ve had it a good while now and maybe that means they see something substantive in the petition. I gotta go.

PREJEAN: Alright Hilton.

BELIVEAU sits at his desk.

BELIVEAU: Tell me something, Sister. What’s a nun doing in a place like this? Shouldn’t you be teaching children? Do you know what this man has done, the kids he killed?

PREJEAN: What he was involved in was evil. I don’t condone it. I just don’t see much sense in doing the same to him. Killing people who kill people to show that killing is wrong...

BELIVEAU: You know the bible says an eye for an eye...

PREJEAN: And you know that Jesus called for us to go beyond that kind of vengeance, not to pay back an eye for an eye, not to return hate for hate.

BELIVEAU holds up his hands.

BELIVEAU: I ain’t gonna get into all this bible quotin’ with a nun cuz I’m gonna lose.
They laugh.

PREJEAN: You know something, the bible also calls for death as a punishment for adultery, prostitution, homosexuality, profaning the Sabbath, trespass upon sacred ground and contempt of parents.

BELIVEAU: Really?

PREJEAN: Yes.

A pause.

BELIVEAU: Prostitution, you sure?

PREJEAN: Sure.

Lights shift. Last Goodbyes

PREJEAN: Another hour passed and Matt’s family arrived. The welcome sound of laughter fell on the death house.

MATT is seated at a distance from his mother LUCILLE and her three sons. MITCH, TROY and JIM are sitting in folding metal chairs by the white metal door. MITCH and TROY sit closest to the door. LUCILLE and JIM sit behind. They are handsome, healthy-looking kids. MITCH, 18, the oldest, is the one keeping conversation going.

MITCH: She was only on the phone a few minutes and there she was falling for the ole Matt charm. I had to take back that phone. Trying to steal my gal, you dog.

MATT: She sounds like a great little lady.

JIM: She ain’t so little.

MATT: You take care of her, Mitch. Don’t do nothing stupid.

MITCH: She looks a little like, what was that girlfriend you had in high school?

MATT: I had a lot of girls in high school.

MITCH: The one with the funny name.

MATT: Funny name?

MITCH: Maddie or Maldy or…

MATT: Madrigal.

MITCH: Madrigal Parmelee! That’s it … She was hot.

MATT: She was a nasty one, boy.

LUCILLE: Matthew!

MATT: Sorry, Mama. Madrigal was a fine upstanding young woman.

MITCH laughs.

MATT: So what about you, Troy. You got a ‘lil girlfriend?

TROY is 10 years old. His ears and the sides of his cheeks and neck turn pink.
TROY: I don’t have time for girls, too much fishing and camping to do.

LUCILLE: Troy just got a new tent.

MATT: What kind of tent you got?

TROY: Army tent. I don’t like those sissy tents with all them colors.

JIM: Tell Matt about the other night in the backyard.

The others laugh.

MITCH: Camping in the backyard.

LUCILLE: I made him come in. I was worried. I went out there and made him come into the house.

JIM: Tell him.

TROY: Me and my buddy Paul put up the tent and cooked our own dinner. We roasted these potatoes in tin foil on the fire and cooked us some weenies.

JIM: Then what happened?

TROY: Shut up.

JIM: Tell him.

TROY: About midnight we hear some kind of animal walkin’ around and makin’ noises – a strange animal. It was big and nasty.

Everyone laughs.

MATT: Which is it? Did you come inside because of mama or because you was wigged out?

MITCH taps TROY on the shoulder.

MITCH: Tell the truth now, tell the truth.

TROY is shifting from foot to foot. He finally smiles.

Everyone laughs. After the laugh a silence, a long, interminable silence.

LUCILLE: Some people been asking me about your funeral. I get real angry and tell them “He’s not dead.”

Another silence.

PREJEAN: Another hour passed. Interminable silence followed by recollections, family snapshots from a time of less trouble and heartache. Memories that momentarily lifted the dark cloud that hung over this room.

Suddenly a clang and WARDEN HARTMAN appears at the door.

HARTMAN: I’m sorry, folks. We’re going to have to wrap this up.

MATT: Already? Isn’t it kind of early? Rules say they can stay until 6:45.

HARTMAN: It’s time for you folks to be leaving now.

MATT stands up.

MATT: Listen, I put my stuff in two pillowcases and I’d feel
better if you guys took it home with you now. I don't want the prison sending it.

The GUARD on watch at the end of the tier moves to get the white bags.

GUARD: Step back to the wall.

MATT does as he is told as the GUARD opens the door. He gathers the bags and hands them to CAPTAIN BELIVEAU.

MATT: Mitch, you all can see about dividin' it up. Except my boots from Marion. I'm gonna walk to the execution in these here boots. No cryin' now. I don't want no cryin'. I'm not telling ya'll good-bye yet. I'll call you tonight.

LUCILLE moves to hug MATT but the guards flanking him cut her off.

PREJEAN: Can't she hug him?

WARDEN: I'm sorry ma'am, security.

MITCH: See ya, man. Stay strong.

There is a crack in his voice when he says "strong." JIM and TROY are beginning to walk out. TROY'S face is beginning to crumble into tears. MITCH and LUCILLE are moving towards the foyer. LUCILLE keeps jabbing a Kleenex to her eyes.

LUCILLE: We love you, Mattie.

MATT: No cryin'. I'll call you tonight. I'll call you.

PREJEAN puts her arm around LUCILLE and walks her to the front door.

LUCILLE: If I had put my arms around my boy no guard could have got me to let go.

Lights fade on LUCILLE and the boys as LUCILLE collapses in grief. MATT not seeing this calls out:

MATT: Is my mama doin' ok?

PREJEAN: Yes, Matt.


PREJEAN: The next hour was the longest hour I've ever experienced. Not a word was said, the silence making each moment linger. Every second was a second less for Matt, and I wanted desperately to talk but nothing came...until the meal, the last meal.

MATT eats his food. PREJEAN looks down at her food. It is darkening outside.

MATT: Never had shrimp before. They pretty good.

A pause.

MATT: So what's the word on the lie detector test?

PREJEAN: Culp said your answers showed stress, just as he had predicted. He said the results were inconclusive.

MATT: Man! Is the dude sure? Is he absolutely positively sure? I felt cool answering all them questions. Man! I can't believe I failed that test.
PREJEAN: Matt, you'd have to be a robot or insane not to feel stress now.

A pause.

MATT: Man! I just can't believe that test didn't come out right.

PREJEAN: Let's talk about what happened. Let's talk about that night.

MATT: I don't want to talk about that. I'm pissed off. I'm pissed at those kids for being parked out in the woods. I'm pissed that their parents are coming to watch me die. I'm pissed at myself for letting Vitello get over on them kids. But I got my last words coming. And I got a thing or two to say to the Percys and Delacroixs.

PREJEAN: Do you want your last words to be words of hatred?

MATT: Clyde Percy said he wants to inject me himself.

PREJEAN: Well think about how angry he must be. He's never gonna see his daughter again. He's never gonna love her, laugh with her. You've robbed these parents of so much, Matt. They've got nothing in their lives but sorrow, no joy. That's what you have given them. What possessed you to be in the woods that night?

MATT: I told ya, I was stoned outta my head.

PREJEAN: Now don't blame the drugs, Matt. You'd been harassing couples for weeks before this happened. Months! What was it?

MATT: What do you mean?

PREJEAN: What was it? Did you look up to Vitello? Did you think he was cool? Did you want to impress him?

MATT: I don't know.

PREJEAN: You could've just walked away.

MATT: He went psycho on me.


MATT: I ain't no victim.

MATT gives her an intense, hard look. The phone rings. CAPTAIN BELIVEAU answers it. His conversation is brief. He says something to WARDEN HARTMAN. HARTMAN nods his head and walks out of the room. BELIVEAU looks through the grate at PREJEAN and shakes his head, no. WARDEN HARTMAN appears and says, matter-of-factly:

HARTMAN: Poncelet, the Federal Appeals Court turned you down. I'm sorry.

BELIVEAU appears at the door.

BELIVEAU: Sister, please step into the corridor.

PREJEAN: I'll be right outside.
MATT gets up and walks to the phone. MATT answers the phone, listens, then

MATT: Thank you, Mr. Hilton. Thank you for what you and all the others done for me. I got you too late. If I had had you sooner....(silence)....no, Mr. Hilton. NO, you didn't fail. I appreciate everything you and the others have done for me. I shoulda got you sooner. No, you didn't fail. The justice system in this country failed. It stinks. It stinks bad.

PREJEAN stands to the side. CHAPLAIN FARLEY approaches her.

FARLEY: Sister, I will be administering communion to Poncelet before he makes his final walk.

PREJEAN: He has asked me to receive it for the both of us.

FARLEY: Well, that's unfortunate.

PREJEAN: Pardon?

FARLEY: You have been unable to provide enough spiritual guidance to this man as is evidenced in the fact that he will leave this earth without receiving the sacred sacrament of communion.

PREJEAN: Chaplain Farley, how are you at peace with what you do?

FARLEY: Excuse me?

PREJEAN: You take a salary from an institution that takes human life. How can you reconcile that with the teachings of Jesus Christ?

FARLEY: I take a small salary to provide spiritual counsel to people who need it. I try to draw them closer to God in their final days. I do not encourage them, as I assume you do, to reject the authority that leads them to this fate.

CAPTAIN BELIVEAU approaches.

BELIVEAU: Sister, you can go back to the cell now.

PREJEAN: Father.

She turns and walks with BELIVEAU.

CLOCK reads 10:30pm. MATT comes back to the metal chair. His left pant leg has been cut off at the knee.

MATT: They shaved the calf of my leg.

He holds out his leg for her to see. There is a tattooed number.

PREJEAN: Why?

MATT: I guess they was worried they won't find a vein in my arm.

PREJEAN: What's that number?

MATT: That's when I was at Marion. In case anybody killed me. I wanted them to be able to identify my body.

He is wearing a clean white t-shirt. He is no longer wearing his long-sleeved denim shirt. She sees for the first time that his arms are covered in tattoos. He lowers his eyes, not wanting to look at her.
PREJEAN: Did it hurt when you did all those?

MATT: No. You're gonna think I'm a bad person, seeing all these tattoos.

He is very embarrassed. There is a swastika and a skull, women’s names and on one arm a naked woman.

PREJEAN: Nah. You just have more color on you than I thought.

A pause.

MATT: They tried to give me two shots. I wouldn't let 'em. Tried to give me a sedative and an antihistamine.

PREJEAN: An antihistamine?

MATT: Said in case I have an allergic reaction to the first shot that knocks me out. Could get messy.

A GUARD brings in a telephone and sets it next to MATT.

MATT: Time to call home.

PREJEAN gets up to leave.

MATT: Will you stay?

PREJEAN: I’ll stay. I'll just give you some privacy.

She stands by the door. As MATT makes his phone call the lights fade up to reveal the last minute preparations for the execution. The building is buzzing now. Guards are everywhere and men in three-piece suits. A secretary has arrived and has begun typing. You can hear the click, click, click of the typewriter. It sounds like a business office.

PREJEAN: “Be a man my son.” The line from Hemingway, “Big two-hearted river” wells up in my mind, the words of the priest to Sam Cardinella who loses control of his anal sphincter muscle on the way to the gallows. As if one could be brave by simply willing it. I wonder what kind of dignity I could muster if I were facing my execution.

PREJEAN whispers to BELIVEAU.

PREJEAN: What’s she typing?

BELIVEAU: Forms for the witnesses to sign.

The cold, preordained cruelty of it all hits her.

PREJEAN puts both hands against the tiled wall, puts her head down and prays.

PREJEAN: Oh, Jesus. God help me. I’m so scared. This is a terrifying place, God. So cold, so calculated, this death. Just don’t let him fall apart, God. Please help him. Help me, Jesus.

A white tablecloth has been put on a table and ballpoint pens have been placed in the center of the table. MATT is crying, sobbing. He hangs up the phone, blows his nose and quickly regains his composure.

MATT: I just let it flow. I told my mama that I loved her. I talked to each of the boys. I hated to say good-bye. I told them that if I get a chance I’ll call ’em back right before I go.

There is a pause. MATT breaks down. He begins to sob.

PREJEAN: What is it, Matt?
MATT: My mother said, “It was that Vitello. I’ll always regret that you got involved with him.” And I didn’t want her to think that. Something you said. I could have walked away. But I didn’t. I let myself listen to him. I was a victim, a fuckin’ chicken. He was older, tough as hell. I was all boozed up, trying to be as tough as him. I didn’t have the guts to stand up to him. I told my mother I was yellow goin’ along with him. I didn’t stand up to him. My mother kept saying, “No, Matt. It wasn’t you. It wasn’t you.”

He sobs. Long beat.

PREJEAN: Your mama loves you, Matt.

MATT: That boy, Walter...

PREJEAN: Yeah, what Matt?

MATT: I killed him.

PREJEAN: And Hope?

MATT: No, ma’am.

PREJEAN: Did you rape her?

MATT: Yes, ma’am.

A pause.

MATT: Last night when they dimmed the lights on the tier I knelled down by my bunk and prayed for them kids. I never done that before.

The silence is heavy. PREJEAN stands up and puts her hands against the metal screen door, getting as close to him as possible.

PREJEAN: Oh, Matt. There are spaces of sorrow that only God can touch. You did a terrible thing, Matt, a terrible thing. But you have a dignity now and no one can take that from you. You are a son of God, Matthew Poncelet.

MATT: Ain’t nobody never called me no son of God before. (smiling) I’ve been called a son-of-a-you-know-what lots of times but never no son of God. I just hope my death gives their parents some relief. I really do.

PREJEAN: Maybe that’s the best thing you can offer the Delacroix and the Percys, a wish for their peace.

MATT: You know I’ve never known real love, never loved women or anybody all that well myself. Figures I’d have to go to my death to find love.

He looks directly at PREJEAN.

MATT: Thank you for loving me.

They can hear the front door opening and closing over and over. The witnesses and press are arriving.

MATT: Getting busy around here.

PREJEAN looks at the clock – 11:30pm.

MATT: Look at the time, it’s flying.

PREJEAN is terrified. She puts her trembling fingers to her mouth and grabs hold of the crucifix around her neck. He pulls a cigarette from the pack in his shirt pocket and notices that there are just a few left.
MATT: Ought to just about make it.

He shivers.

MATT: It's cold in here.

PREJEAN: Can somebody get him a shirt. He's cold.

MATT: What happened to that song you were going to play me?

PREJEAN: The hymn.

MATT: Yeah, that.

PREJEAN: They have rules forbidding music in the prison.

MATT: Yeah.

PREJEAN: They won't let me play it.

MATT: You can sing it. You know the words?

PREJEAN: I can't sing.

MATT: That's okay. C'mon on.

There is a pause and then PREJEAN begins singing, "Be Not Afraid" softly at first. MATT listens at first amused and then gradually more and more moved.

PREJEAN: If you cross the barren desert, you shall not die of thirst. Be not afraid. I go before you always if you stand before the fires of hell and death is at your side, be not afraid.

As she finishes MATT has a tear in his eye.

MATT: Thank you.

A lean of GUARDS comes into the cell.

GUARD: Sister, please step outside.

PREJEAN: Why?

GUARD: Sister, please.

Lights out. In the darkness,

MATT: Give me back my boots. I want my boots. A grown man and I have to leave this world with a diaper on, walking in slippers. I'll be free from all this. No more cells, no more bars, no more life in a cage.

Lights up. PREJEAN stands outside the cell.

HARTMAN: Time to go, Poncelet.

As he begins to walk, MATT'S legs sag and he drops to one knee beside the chair. He looks up at PREJEAN.

MATT: Sister Helen, I'm going to die.

PREJEAN: But you know the truth now, Matt, and the truth has set you free.

MATT: God knows the truth about me. I'm going to a better place. I'm not worried at all.

But he is shivering and the guard comes and puts his denim jacket around his shoulders. The witnesses, the press, prison official each take a metal chair and form
two rows, facing the audience. We see EARL DELACROIX and the PERCYS.

MATT: Are you okay?

PREJEAN: Yeah, Matt. I'm OK. Christ is here. Look, I want the last thing you see in this world to be a face of love. Look at me. When they do this, look at me. I will be the face of Christ for you.

MATT: Yes, ma'am.

HARTMAN: Let's go.

PREJEAN puts her hand on his shoulder. They walk. The chains scrape across the floor. A GUARD shouts:

GUARD: Dead Man Walking.

PREJEAN carrying her bible reads Isaiah 43:2. As she reads the words she looks up and sees that MATT is walking with the same jaunty little walk, up on the balls of his feet.

PREJEAN: Do not be afraid I have called you by your name, you are mine. Should you pass through the sea I will be with you. Should you walk through the fire you will not be scorched and the flames will not burn you.

CHAPLAIN FARLEY raises his hand in blessing. They stop.

BELIVEAU: That's as far as you go, Sister.

MATT: Sister, will you look in on my mama from time to time?

PREJEAN: You have my word on that.

PREJEAN leans toward MATT and kisses him on the back. The guards guide PREJEAN to a chair with the other witnesses. There is a gurney, gleaming in the bright, fluorescent lights. MATT is strapped in the gurney. We see Matt's mother, LUCILLE, in the distance weeping, her boys watching television. HOPE and WALTER appear.

HOPE: If someone lies in wait for his neighbor out of hatred for him and rising up against him, strikes him mortally and then takes refuge in one of the cities...

WALTER: ... the elders of his own city shall send for him and have him taken from there and shall hand him over to be slain by the avenger of blood.

LUCILLE: Have mercy on me, Oh God, in your goodness; in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense. Thoroughly wash me from my guilt and of sin cleanse me.

MATT: For I acknowledge my offense and my sin is before me always.

CLYDE: Do not look on him with pity but purge from Israel the stain of shedding innocent blood that you may prosper.

LUCILLE: Cleanse me of my sin with Hyssop, that I may be purified. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.

WARDEN: Any last words, Poncelet?

MATT: Yes Sir, I do. Mr. Delacroix, I don't want to leave this world with any hate in my heart. I ask your forgiveness for
what I've done. It was a terrible thing I done in taking your son away from you.

CLYDE: How about us?

MATT: Mr. and Mrs. Percy. I hope my death gives you some relief. I just want to say I think killing is wrong, no matter who does it. Whether it's me or y'all or your government.

The gurney adjusts. The NURSE checks the needles. The WARDEN nods to the executioner. A switch is flipped.

MATT (to Helen): I love you.

HELEN (to Matt): I love you.

A click is heard. There will be three clicks, each starting a needle. Each taking about 45 seconds. The process is slow and anesthetized but for half of it MATT is in terror but speaks in a monotone reliving the scenes of the murder.

MATT: Excuse me, what are you doing?

WALTER: Oh my God.

MATT: This is private property. Y'all are trespassing.

WALTER: We didn't know.

MATT: Get out of the car.

CLYDE: The next morning we waited for Hope to come through her bedroom door. The big day. Our baby was leaving home.

LUCILLE: It's happening. They're doing it. Boys, come to me.

MARYBETH: I called the Delacroixs. It was strange she didn't call. She would always telephone and tell me where she was.

WALTER: Put down that gun and fight me like a man, you chicken shit asshole.

MATT: Kneel down.

HOPE: Please no.

MATT: If you don't do what we say we're going to shoot you. So kneel down.

WALTER: Put down your gun. I'll take you both on.

MATT: If you don't kneel down we're gonna shoot you.

HOPE: Walter, kneel down, please, kneel down. Do it now! I don't want to die.

After a moment WALTER complies, joining his girlfriend. A beat. Then: gunshots.

PREJEAN: A clean heart create for me, O God, and a steadfast spirit renew within me.

MARYBETH: Against the day of vengeance and requital against the time they lose their footing? Close at hand is the day of their disaster and their doom is rushing upon them.

TROY: Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.
PREJEAN: And Peter came up to him and said “Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times.”

DELACROIX: Whoever strikes a man a mortal blow must be put to death.

PREJEAN: And Jesus said to him, “I do not say to thee seven times, but seventy times seven.”

HOPE: You shall give life for life, eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

MOTHER: You have heard that it was said: “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you to resist the evilness, on the contrary, if someone strikes thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.

WALTER: ..foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

PREJEAN: ..take no revenge and cherish no grudge against your fellow countrymen. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the lord.

MATT is not moving now. The lights shift to feature his mother surrounded by her sons who say the Our Father.

LUCILLE AND BOYS: Our father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven ....

DELACROIX: When you lose a child all the memories get sealed like a shrine.

LUCILLE AND BOYS: ...and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those that trespass against us for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, Oh Lord.

Silence.

The body is basically still, a slight reflex in the leg, then the eyes open. MATT is dead. HARTMAN motions to the DOCTOR to approach the body. The DOCTOR who has been sitting with the witnesses goes to the body in the gurney and puts his hand over MATT’S eyes, closing them. The DOCTOR puts his stethoscope against the heart, listens; then turns to the WARDEN and nods his head. As PREJEAN talks the people move offstage.

COLLEEN comes to PREJEAN and leads her stage left.

PREJEAN: We aren’t made to look at our retribution. We don’t see the dying man in the execution chamber. We don’t see the dying man on the battlefield. We are kept from the face of retribution. It is a concept, carried out at midnight, far away, unseen. In death removed from our view because it is unacceptable? Is there a compassion in our hearts that is uncomfortable with seeing death? Can we look at the death of a human being with cold detachment, with indifference? And yet his act, his violent act revisits the Percys and the Delacroixs nightly. And sometimes at night in a dream I come back to his face, wild, torn and without remorse or compassion or any of the calming signs we seek day to day in our companions. I come back to his face and in this dream, his face is unrepentant, his eyes violent and dead, his hand holding a bloody knife. I hear the moaning of a dying person. Matt has just attacked someone I know, someone I love, the fireplace of my childhood home is stained with blood and in my hand I hold a weapon. Will I raise the weapon up to him.

A knock on the door. HERBIE is there.
Titles of Units and Summary of the Action

- Unit 1-“How it Started”
  Sister Prejean recounts how she came to St. Thomas and in turn was asked to write to Matt Poncelet in prison.
  Sister Prejean investigates Matt and Matt reaches out to Sister Prejean.

- Unit 2- “Correspondence”
  Matt and Sister Prejean write to one another and she decides to visit.
  Matt introduces himself to Sister Prejean and Sister Prejean travels to Matt.

- Unit 3- “Going to Prison”
  Sister Prejean meets with Chaplain Farley
  Sister Prejean questions Chaplain Farley and Chaplain Farley suspects Sister Prejean.

- Unit 4- “Meeting Matt”
  Sister Prejean and Matt Poncelet meet for the first time.

- Unit 5- “Reflection”
  Sister Prejean and Sister Colleen discuss Matt’s plight

- Unit 6- “Trust?”
  Sister Prejean and Luis Montoya research Matt’s crime and ponder the possibilities.

- Unit 7- “News Reports”
  Reporters and radio programs recount the details of the crime.

- Unit 8- “I Need a Lawyer”
  An execution date has been set and Matt begins to scramble to find an attorney to plead his case. Sister Prejean finds Hilton Barber.
• Unit 9- “Even Criminals Have Mothers”
  Sister Prejean pays a visit to Lucille Poncelet, Matt’s mother.

• Unit 10- “Reality Check”
  Sister Prejean tries to get through to Matt the severity of his crime.

• Unit 11- “Courtroom”
  Hilton and Barber, the attorneys, plead their cases in court.

• Unit 12- “The Families”
  Earl Delacroix approaches Sister Prejean and questions her motives in working with Matt.

• Unit 13- “Mother Knows Best”
  Sister Prejean discusses the case with her mother.

• Unit 14- “Visiting the Families”
  Sister Prejean explains herself to the Delacroixs.

• Unit 15- “Spiritual Advisor”
  Sister Prejean agrees to be Matt’s spiritual advisor, and the two of them discuss their feelings about life.

• Unit 16- “The Percys”
  Clyde and Marybeth recount seeing their daughter for the last time.

• Unit 17- “The Interview”
  Matt speaks to the press about his feelings regarding race and crime.

• Unit 18- “Facing Reality”
  Sister Prejean accepts the fact that Matt is going to be executed, and starts to think about funeral arrangements.
- Unit 19-“Group Therapy”
  Victims of violence tell their story.
- Unit 20-“Death House”
  Sister Prejean is brought to the death house
- Unit 21-“The Beginning of the End”
  Matt and Prejean face the reality that they have exhausted their appeals and the execution is eminent.
- Unit 22-“Music Please”
  Sister Prejean asks for permission to play music for Matt’s last day.
- Unit 23-“Exhaustion”
  Sister Prejean faints and is attended to by the prison personnel.
- Unit 24- “Giving Up”
  Sister Prejean tells Colleen and her mother of her feeling of failure.
- Unit 25-“Warnings”
  Warden Hartman warns Sister about the emotional involvement in this case.
- Unit 26-“What I Miss Most”
  Sister Prejean and Matt reminisce about their lives and futures.
- Unit 27-“Meeting with the Governor”
  Sister Prejean and Hilton Barber meet with the Governor in an eleventh hour attempt to help Matt.
- Unit 28-“Nightmares”
  Sister Prejean goes to her mother’s house the night before the execution and dreams of the victims.
• Unit 29- “D-Day”
Sister Prejean and Matt face the reality of the execution day!

• Unit 30- “Last Goodbyes”
Matt and his family see each other for the last time.

• Unit 31- “Last Supper”
Matt and Sister Prejean discuss the night of the crime.

• Unit 32- “Exposed”
Matt has been prepared for execution, and his tattoos are exposed to Sister Prejean.

• Unit 33- “The Truth”
Matt makes a phone call to his mother, and then admits to Sister Prejean for the first time his responsibility in the crime. They say goodbye.

• Unit 34- “Dead Man Walking”
The guards come and take Matt to the execution chamber.

• Unit 35- “Acceptance”
Matt has flashbacks to the night of the crime as he is facing death. He apologizes for his part in the crime and the drugs are administered.

• Unit 36- “Reflection”
Sister Prejean reflects on how we as a society deal with retribution.
Character Analysis

Sister Helen Prejean:

Desire: Sister Prejean wants everyone to be recognized as a “child of God” regardless of their actions. She understands that the crimes committed by those in prison are terrible and should be punished but the retribution of the death penalty puts society in the same boat as the criminal.

Will: Her will is very strong. She is a woman who has dedicated her life to the service of God and her fellow human beings by becoming a nun. It is her life’s work to educate the world.

Moral Stance: Sister Prejean has a very strong moral stance from which she bases everything, yet she has an empathy that allows her to have compassion for others that have a moral stance different from her own.

Decorum: Sister Prejean is unassuming in her appearance yet her decorum is that of strength and wisdom.

Summary list of adjectives: Sister Prejean is strong willed, unwavering, and caring but being human she can be stubborn and rebellious.

Matt Poncelet:

Desire: Matt’s desire is to have his sentence commuted to avoid being executed. He also wants to convince everyone that he is innocent to avoid facing the responsibility of what he has done.

Will: Matt has never been a strong-willed person and has spent most of his life following others. It isn’t until he faces his own death that he has any strength of will to do anything proactive.
Moral Stance: Matt will do whatever serves him in the moment without any thoughts or concerns for anyone else.

Decorum: Matt appears to the outside world as a white supremacist.

Summary list of adjectives: Manipulative, racist, victim, uneducated, unfeeling.

When Matt is exposed to his family he is also sheepish, obedient.

Earl Delacroix:

Desire: Earl’s desire is to see Matt Poncelet executed to pay for the murder of his son. Earl is not a vengeful man but feels that the “eye for and eye” retribution is warranted in this case and will see it through to the end.

Will: Earl Delacroix is not a strong willed man. He does however believe that the punishment fits the crime and the death of his son has awoken a desire within him to make this happen, however many years and court appearances it takes.

Moral Stance: Earl was raised a Christian and has always been a God-Fearing man, he never believed that he was capable of the hate and revenge that has encompassed him since the death of his son.

Decorum: Earl is a simple man who has made an honest living his whole life.

Summary list of adjectives: Earl is angry, devastated, tired, hopeful and forgiving.

Hilton Barber:

Desire: Hilton Barber has spent his career fighting for the underdog and believes that he has the ability to get Matt Poncelet a stay of execution.

Will: Hilton Barber is a very strong willed man. He fights the good fight. He will use all available resources to reach the intended outcome. When he faces defeat he feels personally responsible.
Moral Stance: Hilton Barber decided in law school that he wasn’t in it for the money, but instead he would spend his career fighting for what was right. His belief system is far more important than money.

Decorum: Hilton is a well-educated man without being arrogant. His dress may be a bit disheveled but clean.

Summary List of Adjectives: Hilton is educated, honorable, painstakingly dedicated. He is also tired and beaten.
Idea of the Play

Meaning of the Title

On the surface, the title *Dead Man Walking* is in reference to the saying in prison when a death row inmate is taking their final walk to the execution chamber. It also represents societies need to parade its transgressions in front of everyone, as well as pointing out that our judicial system full of required appeals allows these, “dead men” to continue living for decades after they are sentenced.

Philosophical Statements

Robbins makes a variety of philosophical statements in *Dead Man Walking*. Many of them deal with love having the power of redemption and all of us being God’s children.

“Mathatma Gandhi once said: ‘If we were all to take an eye for an eye, the world would be blind.’ Jesus Christ showed us that the only way to stop the mad circle of violence and retribution was through love and reconciliation...Love for everyone, even those that inflict pain”. (Robbins 98)
Moods/Sense Adjectives

- Unit 1—"How it Started"
  Touching: fresh
  Tasting: Strong
  Smelling: stale
  Hearing: dominant
  Seeing: hopeful
  Mood Image: A babe in the woods.
- Unit 2—"Correspondence"
  Touching: apprehensive
  Tasting: acrid
  Smelling: damp
  Hearing: metal
  Seeing: intense
  Mood Image: Working at the soup kitchen
- Unit 3—"Going to Prison"
  Touching: wary
  Tasting: bitter
  Smelling: pungent
  Hearing: condemned
  Seeing: old-fashioned
  Mood Image: Lost in the woods
- Unit 4- "Meeting Matt"
  Touching: prickly
  Tasting: sour
  Smelling: wet
  Hearing: loud
  Seeing: indifferent
  Mood Image: Going into the lion's den
- Unit 5- "Reflection"
  Touching: mushy
  Tasting: warm
  Smelling: sweet
  Hearing: sadness
  Seeing: tender
  Mood Image: Looking at a photo album.
- Unit 6- "Trust?"
  Touching: careful
  Tasting: bitter
  Smelling: suspicious
  Hearing: concerned
  Seeing: grotesque
  Mood Image: All politicians are crooks
• Unit 7- “News Reports”
  Touching: removed
  Tasting: uninterested
  Smelling: cold
  Hearing: detached
  Seeing: robotic
  Mood Image: News reporters have a heart of stone.

• Unit 8- “I Need a Lawyer”
  Touching: angry
  Tasting: bitter
  Smelling: rank
  Hearing: pain
  Seeing: sadness
  Mood Image: Time is of the essence

• Unit 9- “Even Criminals Have Mothers”
  Touching: suspicious
  Tasting: regret
  Smelling: tainted
  Hearing: surrender
  Seeing: fear
  Mood Image: A cornered animal.
• Unit 10- “Reality Check”
  Touching: man-handles
  Tasting: cool
  Smelling: disgusting
  Hearing: forced
  Seeing: intense
  Mood Image: My mind is cloudy

• Unit 11- “Courtroom”
  Touching: skillful
  Tasting: powerful
  Smelling: strong
  Hearing: blaring
  Seeing: dominant
  Mood Image: A boxing match

• Unit 12- “The Families”
  Touching: unyielding
  Tasting: repulsive
  Smelling: piercing
  Hearing: erratic
  Seeing: searing
  Mood Image: A bitter pill
• Unit 13- “Mother Knows Best”
  Touching: tender
  Tasting: steady
  Smelling: medicinal
  Hearing: true
  Seeing: faithful
  Mood Image: A warm blanket

• Unit 14- “Visiting the Families”
  Touching: blunt,
  Tasting: repulsive
  Smelling: stagnated
  Hearing: intense
  Seeing: demented
  Mood Image: A shadow of themselves

• Unit 15- “Spiritual Advisor”
  Touching: biting
  Tasting: feverish
  Smelling: acrid
  Hearing: obnoxious
  Seeing: animosity
  Mood Image: A beacon in the night
• Unit 16- "The Percys"
  Touching: cold
  Tasting: unfeeling
  Smelling: regret
  Hearing: despair
  Seeing: anger
  Mood Image: Bittersweet memories

• Unit 17-"The Interview"
  Touching: unfeeling
  Tasting: racist
  Smelling: dominant,
  Hearing: nerving
  Seeing: forced
  Mood Image: The blackest thought of men

• Unit 18-"Facing Reality"
  Touching: deathly
  Tasting: powerful
  Smelling: dominant
  Hearing: in your face
  Seeing: explosive
  Mood Image: The bonds of friendship
• Unit 19—“Group Therapy”

Touching: rocky

Tasting: prickly

Smelling: caustic

Hearing: callous

Seeing: frenzied

Mood Image: Cloudy memories

• Unit 20—“Death House”

Touching: gripping

Tasting: strange

Smelling: tainted

Hearing: moody

Seeing: abrupt

Mood Image: The skies are growing dark.

• Unit 21—“The Beginning of the End”

Touching: unfeeling

Tasting: repulsive

Smelling: rancid

Hearing: forced

Seeing: rank

Mood Image: Life in the fast lane.
• Unit 22-“Music Please”
  Touching: intimate
  Tasting: melancholy
  Smelling: piercing
  Hearing: melodic
  Seeing: dissonant
  Mood Image: Music calms the savage breast.

• Unit 23-“Exhaustion”
  Touching: homed
  Tasting: prickly
  Smelling: acrid
  Hearing: erratic
  Seeing: brutal
  Mood Image: Dead tired

• Unit 24- “Giving Up”
  Touching: broken
  Tasting: sharp
  Smelling: rotten
  Hearing: despair
  Seeing: defeat
  Mood Image: Misty water colored memories
• Unit 25-“Warnings”
  Touching: tentative
  Tasting: sour
  Smelling: bitter
  Hearing: slow
  Seeing: dangerous
  Mood Image: A full plate
• Unit 26-“What I Miss Most”
  Touching: melancholy
  Tasting: bittersweet
  Smelling: sour
  Hearing: aching
  Seeing: sadness
  Mood Image: On the road to peace
• Unit 27-“Meeting with the Governor”
  Touching: withheld
  Tasting: spicy
  Smelling: ephemeral
  Hearing: bestial
  Seeing: indignant
  Mood Image: Political positioning
• Unit 28-“Nightmares”
  Touching: mundane
  Tasting: moot
  Smelling: nefarious
  Hearing: distraught
  Seeing: murky
  Mood Image: Drowning in the sea of ideas

• Unit 29- “D-Day”
  Touching: powerful
  Tasting: invidious
  Smelling: inflexible
  Hearing: carping
  Seeing: intransigent
  Mood Image: The winds of change

• Unit 30-“Last Goodbyes”
  Touching: irreparable
  Tasting: mendacious
  Smelling: stale
  Hearing: errant
  Seeing: hapless
  Mood Image: Frozen with fear
• Unit 31- “Last Supper”
  Touching: fatuous
  Tasting: irrefutable
  Smelling: bittersweet
  Hearing: macabre
  Seeing: abject
  Mood Image: Sea of grief
• Unit 32- “Exposed”
  Touching: lying
  Tasting: conceit
  Smelling: languid
  Hearing: reputed
  Seeing: indubitable
  Mood Image: Rollercoaster of emotion
• Unit 33- “The Truth”
  Touching: esoteric
  Tasting: consummate
  Smelling: mordent
  Hearing: prudent
  Seeing: truth
  Mood Image: Time is a thief
• Unit 34- “Dead Man Walking”

Touching: tenuous  
Tasting: loathe  
Smelling: crying  
Hearing: imminent  
Seeing: paltry  
Mood Image: Truth is food for him

• Unit 35- “Acceptance”

Touching: intimate  
Tasting: truthful  
Smelling: ephemeral  
Hearing: murky  
Seeing: recumbent  
Mood Image: Fade off to sleep

• Unit 36- “Reflection”

Touching: furtive  
Tasting: remarkable  
Smelling: burning  
Hearing: errant  
Seeing: repentant  
Mood Image: Spiritual treasure hunt
Tempo

The overall tempo for this production is slow and methodical. The information is presented in a somewhat objective manner. The units build slowly to a climax that almost sneaks up on you. The compelling characters and situations will be what hold the audience's attention.

Unit 1-

Unit 2-

Unit 3-

Unit 4-

Unit 5-

Unit 6-

Unit 7-

Unit 8-

Unit 9-

Unit 10-

Unit 11-

Unit 12-

Unit 13-

Unit 14-

Unit 15-

Unit 16-

Unit 17-

Unit 18-
Accepting responsibility for your reactions to the circumstances in your life and finding forgiveness for yourself and others in order to find peace.
Previous Reviews/ Past Productions

The play version of *Dead Man Walking* is part of an overall project called The Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project. The intention of the project is to create a deep reflection in high schools and colleges about the death penalty. The project also requires each educational institution who takes on the project to also include at least two other departments within the school in a cross curricular fashion. Therefore there have been no professional productions of this play. The only reviews available are testimonials from others who have been involved in producing this event.

Dorothy J. McCrea, Ed.D, Principal, Mercy High School, San Francisco felt it was a worthwhile endeavor: "The combination of reading the book, experiencing the play and engaging in interdisciplinary discussions was a very powerful experience for our students, faculty and staff - and for the larger community" (http://dmwplay.org/make_theatre/testimonials.html).

Kevin G. Yell, Holy Names University was equally impressed by the experience:

One of the beauties of a well written contemporary script is that even students with no acting background can "relate" to the story and the emotions. This play is so very accessible, while still being a great vehicle to create teaching moments about so many things: the place of drama in education; the death penalty; acting and theatre skills; to name but a few (http://dmwplay.org/make_theatre/testimonials.html).

He continues:

It is wonderful to have a cast rejoice in creating silence, both within the play and even at the end of it for an audience. It is also wonderful to have such a powerful
vehicle for showing "others" (both inside and outside the establishment) that surprising people can achieve greatness when trusted with an issue with which they can engage. This play is a gift on so many levels (http://dmwplay.org/make_theatre/testimonials.html).
Playwright Tim Robbins

Tim Robbins is primarily an actor and director of films. From his first notable role in *Bull Durham* to his more contemporary roles, Robbins is known for his character driven acting as well as his social activism.

 Shortly after graduating from film school in 1981 he formed The Actor’s Gang and began co-writing short original pieces for the troupe. He starred in a series of flops and finally achieved recognition for his breakout role of ‘Nuke’ LoLoosh in *Bull Durham* in 1988. This is where he also met his longtime partner Susan Sarandon.

Over the next twenty years Robbins set out to prove to the world he wasn’t what he considered just another male bimbo actor by co-writing and starring in multiple smart satirical comedies Off- Broadway. His film career also skyrocketed in a string of critically acclaimed films throughout the 1990’s. In 1994 his role in *The Shawshank Redemption* stirred his interest in the plight of the prisoner.

In 1995 Robbins’ production company produced its own prison film. Based on Sister Prejean’s book of the same title, Robbins wrote and directed the film, *Dead Man Walking*. For his efforts he received a Best Director Nomination, while Susan Sarandon took home the Best Actress Oscar as well as a Best Actor nomination for Sean Penn.

Robbins was then asked by Sister Prejean to adapt the film for stage offering exclusive rights to educational institutions committed to exploring the death penalty in their curriculum.
Student Goals and Outcomes

- Characterization- *Dead Man Walking* will require the students to research characters that are far different from their real lives. Not only in location and time period but in age, economic status and religious beliefs. I want the students to get into the skin of these characters in a way that they become empathetic to the plight of their situations. Each student is required to write a character analysis that brings the character to life for them.

- Timing- This play is written in a different style than the typical play the students have encountered. There is not a distinct plot structure with the usual rising action. I want the students to feel the difference in the timing and pace of the dialogue so they can deliver the text effectively without losing the audience interest. I will know that this has been accomplished if the transitions become smooth and seemless.

- Script Analysis- This play is based on real people in situations that actually happened. It is important for the students to do research on this topic and make decisions based on reality. I am going to have them speak with prison officials as well as victim advocates to help them with the process.

- Time Management- It is very important for students to understand the balance of the real world. Along with their obligation to the cast and the show, they also have to balance their school work and for some of them their job. I require the students to maintain their GPA while participating in this extra-curricular activity. I will keep an eye on their grades, to support them in accomplishing this.
Production Journal

January 3, 2012- The cast met today for the first time. There are 33 students in the cast. The largest cast I have ever had for a straight play. The number of lines per actor ranges from pages and pages to zero lines at all. We read through the play as a group. At the end of the reading we discussed the death penalty and how every person in contact with the convict getting executed is affected by the act.

January 4, 2012- We started blocking today. We are scheduled to block unit 1. First we read through the unit and discussed the characters objectives. Then we went through the blocking and ran through it 3 or 4 times. It was amazing how efficient this approach was for me and the students.

January 5, 2012- Unit 2 and 3 are on the schedule for today. Like yesterday we started by reading through and discussing the text within a unit. When we were blocking this unit I discovered that I want to use the guards that are in this scene in every prison scene. I also discovered that the original set design I had in mind no longer works with the flow of the show, so I am going to have to rethink it.

January 6, 2012- Unit 4 blocking- This unit involved Sister Prejean meeting Matt Poncelet for the first time. When discussing the text Alex who is playing Prejean, mentioned that she would be really nervous walking into a prison and meeting an inmate.

January 9, 2012- Unit 5 blocking- We are introduced to Sister Colleen in this unit and the actors playing the two sisters work very well together. They are both smart performers and make strong choices. I find that they don’t need much direction at all.

January 10, 2012- Unit 6 blocking- Today I worked with a student, Anthony, who is playing Montoya. I don’t know this student well; I have never had him in a class. He is a little stiff but
we are working on his delivery. My biggest concern is being able to understand what he is saying.

January 11, 2012- Unit 7 blocking- Blocking the reporters scene today. I have changed my mind several times about how I want to portray these characters. They are all girls and I want there to be a variety in their characters, definitely a work in progress. I am not sure if I want them to be realistic in their delivery or more abstract. Something for me to think about.

January 12, 2012- Unit 8 blocking- We realized that Matt and Sister Prejean’s relationship takes a small shift in this scene. When Matt realizes that he needs Sister Prejean’s help his attitude changes completely. Getting a teenager to understand the subtleties of this character is a challenge, fortunately I have really dedicated students playing these roles and they have worked a lot on their own.

January 13, 2012- Unit 9 blocking- This unit was really difficult. It deals with Sister Prejean meeting Matt Poncelet’s mother. The student playing Lucille (Matt’s mother) realized that she is crying in every scene she is in. The same holds true for a couple of the other characters. I will need to find a way to help these students deal with all of the emotions involved in this show without needing therapy in the end.

January 17, 2012- Unit 10 blocking- One of the things that I realize is when I scheduled the rehearsals I put one rehearsal to block unit for the most part, and in retrospect I wish I would have put two or three units at a time. Oh well. In this unit Sister Prejean calls Matt on his crap for the first time. Watching the growth of the student playing Sister Prejean has been interesting. I also met with the students designing the set today. I expressed my concern with my original concept and we discussed the obstacles involved with our space.
January 19, 2012 - Unit 11 blocking - This was by far one of my favorite days at rehearsal thus far. The scene involves the prosecuting attorney and defense attorney addressing the parole board. The script is written in such a way that each character takes their turn arguing their case and then their speeches overlap in perfect timing until the audience is left with a cacophony of words and mental images. The students grasped the concept right away and it sounds really great.

January 23, 2012 - Unit 12 blocking - When the families of the victims approach Sister Prejean for the first time we see the pain that Matt’s actions have caused for the first time. Sister Prejean is taken aback by their words. This play is written in small vignettes and the most challenging part will be transitioning from one to the other. I feel like I have very few choices in where I stage things without being too repetitive.

January 24, 2012 - Unit 13 & 14 blocking - Finally a day where we are blocking two units. The first involves Sister Prejean being advised by her mother and her friend, the second, a trip to the victim’s family homes. We explored the stages of grief and how different people react to tragedy differently. I wanted to be sure that we didn’t overuse tears every time we encountered one of these characters. We played with different reactions to the dialogue until each actor felt comfortable with their choices.

January 30, 2012 - Unit 15 blocking - Over the weekend we went to the Utah Theatre Association Conference. While we were there we had the opportunity to take a Rasa Boxes workshop given by Elise Forier. I personally made a lot of connections between emotions and breath and I feel it will be very beneficial for the actors in this production. This unit deals with the obstacles that Sister Prejean encounters from her own church in trying to be Matt’s spiritual advisor. We talked a lot about bias, prejudice etc. and how it colors our daily interactions.
February 1, 2012-Unit 17 blocking- One of the students had a conflict come up for yesterday’s rehearsal so we pushed that Unit till Friday. Today’s unit involved Matt being interviewed by a reporter and he says some pretty nasty things. We discussed how the reporter may feel about Matt personally and how that cannot color how they report the news.

February 2, 2012- Unit 18 blocking- This unit was really fun to block because it included one of the few light moments in the play. Sister Prejean and Colleen are discussing finding a burial plot for Matt, and realize that the plot donated by the Sisters is next to a Sister who despised men, and how ironic it was that they would be burying a man next to her.

February 3, 2012- Unit 16 & 19 blocking- Due to a conflict with an actor we pushed the unit 16 blocking till today. This was the second time that I blocked two units in the same rehearsal. Looking back I wish that I had scheduled it this way all through, we would have moved through the entirety of the script much faster. I blocked Unit 19 which is a group therapy meeting as an abstract scene with each person being isolated and talking out toward the audience instead of to each other. As the rehearsal process continues I find myself moving away from a realistic depiction to a more abstract look at this material.

February 4, 2012- Unit 20-23 blocking- When I looked at the rehearsal schedule closer, I realized that none of us wanted to give up our Saturdays this early so I cancelled the Sat rehearsal and added the extra units to today. It worked out great. Today we began Act 2 which took us to the Death House. As the play continues Matt and Sister Prejean grow closer to one another and I have physically brought them closer to each other. First Matt was removed completely in a cell, then in the visiting area with a screen between them. Now in the Death House they are in the same room with no divider.
February 7, 2012- Unit 24 blocking- The emotions of this play have been hard for the students to access. I have noticed that the actress playing Sister Prejean has resisted connecting with her character. We will use some rasa exercises to help her access the emotions. This scene is a chance to get a little humor into the show. Sister Prejean and Sister Colleen are discussing where Matt is going to be buried, and it turns out it will be next to the nun who hated men, ironic.

February 8, 2012- Unit 25 blocking- Sister Prejean is meeting with the warden to ask permission to play a recording of a hymn for Matt before he dies. This conversation leads to a discussion about whether she is up for the challenge of being a spiritual advisor. They also discuss the warden’s role in the execution. We, as a cast, discussed personal responsibility in regards to the execution; the line between your own feelings on capital punishment and doing your job. I leave tomorrow for Georgia to attend DJ Queenan’s thesis show. I am looking forward to the opportunity to pick each other’s brain about our shows and the process.

February 13, 2012- Unit 26 blocking- Today my Stage Tech class has begun to build the set. One of my tech students designed it based on my vision and concept of the show. I am anxious to see how it plays out. We blocked the scene in the death house between Matt and Sister Prejean. It was fairly simple blocking wise. The complexity of the scene comes in the layers of emotions that these two characters are experiencing. We utilized rasa to investigate what that looks like. I also made the discovery that I am going to use the stage to physically separate and then join these two characters throughout the show. They begin completely separate with Sister Prejean on the stage and Matt up on a platform which represents his cell. He next moves down on the stage in the visiting room, but they are separated by a chain link wall. Eventually they move to the death house where there is no separation except the ever watchful eyes of the guards. Finally on
the way to the execution chamber, Sister Prejean is allowed to touch him for the first time. I am very excited about the possibilities using this.

February 14, 2012- Unit 27 & 28 blocking- As a last ditch effort to save Matt’s life Hilton and Prejean meet with the Governor. Unfortunately this meeting is more of a media opportunity for the Governor than an actual meeting intended to help anyone. I talked to the cast about the political nature of decisions in these situations. Today in my Theatre 3 class, which is made up of juniors and seniors, we started an exercise that Patrick Williams and I had created in our Curriculum Development class. The exercise involves the students being put into one of four groups.

Group 1- Anti death penalty activists
Group 2- Pro death penalty activists
Group 3- Families of the victims of violent crimes
Group 4- Families of the death row inmates.

Regardless of their personal opinions the students were assigned to do research about the group they were assigned and next class period we would hold a town meeting and discuss the issue.

In rehearsal, we used choral speaking to depict Sister Prejean’s nightmare. The actors spoke their lines and then we played with them repeating one of them simultaneously. It was quite effective.

February 15, 2012- Unit 29&30 blocking- This was probably the hardest day I have had at a rehearsal. The scene involves Matt’s family coming to the death house to see him for the last time. It was very emotional the first time we ran through it. It is the moment that we see Matt as more than just a monster. He is a human with a family. The actress playing Sister Prejean brought her younger brother in to play Matt’s youngest brother. I was concerned about the
content of the show being too much for a 12 year old, but after discussing it with him, and his parents, I feel confident that he can handle it.

February 16, 2012- Unit 31 blocking- In Theatre 3 today we held our town meeting with our four groups. It was inspiring. The first two groups on stage were the pro and anti-death penalty factions. They were asked questions by the audience. It was obvious that they had done their research and used statistics to make their points. The next two groups were the families from each side of the issue. We formatted their presentation in more of group therapy style. The students who participated had created characters that were engaging and profound. At the end of their presentations I gave them the assignment that were to choose a spokesperson who would have 5 minutes next class period to present their case at a press conference.

In rehearsal today we blocked the scene that first involves the last hours of Matt’s life. Sister Prejean is desperate to get him to take some sort of responsibility for his role in the crime. With pressure increasing from the prison chaplain, and Matt blaming everyone else, Sister Prejean finally breaks down. This is the first time we see her allow her own emotions to surface. The actress playing Sister Prejean also broke down for the first time today. This is really a tough show.

February 17, 2012- Unit 32 blocking- Along with blocking this short unit the main focus of today’s rehearsal was the journey that Sister Prejean takes throughout the play and how we are going to support that technically. We have purchased intelligent lights this year so we are planning on bringing them into this smaller theatre and using them to follow Sister Prejean around the stage as she travels from place to place. Also, I have designated different spots on the stage for different groups of people so the levels will help the audience identify what is going on, given that the stage is so abstract.
February 21, 2012- Unit 33 & 34 blocking- The press conference happened in Theatre 3 today and it was wonderful. The students found out how difficult it is to plead your case in 5 minutes. I have recorded it and plan on editing it down to a 2 minute news story.

Unit 33 is the beginning of the climax; it is the moment when Matt admits to Sister Prejean that he is in fact responsible for killing Walter and raping Hope. His confession is telling, he still blames his partner in the crime for leading him to that point, and that he is a victim. Unit 34 is the journey into the execution itself. The challenge was when to bring the witnesses in. Given that we have an open set, the trick for me is getting the witnesses on while the previous scene is going on. I believe today we solved the problem. We ran the transition a few times, and I believe it is going to work, I will know more when we are running the whole thing. My stage tech kids are building me a gurney for the execution; it has been challenging to design it so it can move up and down, in order to have the look I would like. Fingers crossed. I am excited to finish blocking all of these units so we can start connecting them together.

February 23, 2012- Unit 35 & 36 blocking- Today is the final blocking rehearsals. Although this has been a tedious process, for this type of show it has been beneficial to break it down into units, I believe it is going to be fairly easy to put the units together in the upcoming days.

Today’s units were Matt’s death as well as the meeting between Delacroix and Prejean afterwards. Resolution and reconciliation are the themes of these scenes. I have contemplated how each person connected to this execution would react to it; therefore I have placed the entire cast on the stage for it. My intention is for the audience to simultaneously witness the families of the victims and the killer as well as the reporters, governor and guards experience the event.

February 24, 2012- Run Act One- Today is the day we connected all of those units included in act one. It was fairly smooth. The main obstacles I have to overcome are the transitions. The
show is written in an episodic style and getting the actors and the audience from one place to another is driving me a little crazy. The set is complete and after we are able to run the whole show I may have a better idea of how to handle the transitions.

February 25, 2012- Run Act Two- Act Two went a quicker than Act One, but there are a lot more problems to solve. The through line is definitely the journey of Sister Prejean, so finding ways to follow that is the challenge. I have some ideas about using music to help some of the transitions, but which music and which transitions remains the question.

February 27, 2012- Clean Act One- Most of today’s rehearsal involved getting actors on and off stage throughout all of the transitions. Some of them I have solved with lighting, some with music and I tried repeating a line here and there to echo the thought as Sister Prejean moved to the next scene. My concern today was costumes. I have gone round and round in my head about the overall look I would like on the stage. I believe the best route to go will be to have all of the ensemble wear black. I want the victims to be in white. Sister Prejean and Matt will be the only characters in clothing with color. Matt will be in prison denim, and Sister Prejean in neutral colored skirt, shirt and sweater. I see this representing the memory play feeling that the script evokes. The only exception will be the execution scene, when everyone except the victims and Matt and Prejean will add something with color, like a coat or scarf. This will bring everyone into reality for this scene. I will have an opportunity to see this in the next few days. I hope it looks as good in reality as it does in my head.

February 28, 2012- Clean Act Two-This act went much smoother than Act One. I am still a little frustrated with the transitions, still researching music that fits. The biggest decision made today was to cut most of the accents in the show. The actors portraying Matt, Lucille and the attorney
are really the only ones who can keep it consistent, I believe the audience will still take the ride
with us even if every character doesn’t have an accent, as long as those that do are spot on.

March 1, 2012- Paper Tech, Run Show-Today’s rehearsal was the first time we got through the show in its entirety. It looked a lot better than I thought it would. I am so impressed with the work that these students have done. I went through the show with the tech crew during stage tech class today and we will hang and focus tomorrow. We have a multimedia effect in the show and Tianna gave that to me today. It needs some tweaking but we should be able to add it into the run tomorrow.

March 2, 2012-Hang and Focus, Run Show- Stage class got all of the lights hung today, it didn’t take long given that we had all of the basic lighting already in place. In the fall, our principal purchased three intelligent lights for our production of Beauty and the Beast; we have moved these in to the small theatre for this production. This has enhanced the production significantly. Sister Prejean goes on a journey throughout the play and with the minimalistic set we have designed we can depict this journey with the use of a light that follows her as she walks to the next location. I am very excited about having this available; we are taking it up a notch in our technical abilities. When we did the run today we added the multimedia show. Up above the stage there is an opening in the wall that was originally a projection booth. We have taken advantage of this by building a screen over the opening; I believe we will utilize this screen permanently.

March 3, 2012-Full Dress Run-Rehearsal today we added costumes. Lizzie Wade, who helped create the look I wanted, pulled all of the black items out of our costume closet as well as having actors bring in items from home. The ensemble was dressed in a variety of black clothing that fit the 1980 time period. Adding things like a badge and hat to the guards, or a white shirt to the
fathers and attorneys. This juxtaposed to the realistic clothing of Matt and Sister Prejean looks stunning on stage. I am very happy with the overall look; it sends a message without slapping the audience in the face with the symbolism. The run went really well. The transitions are still a little rough. The actress playing Lucille Poncelet made a suggestion about the placement of her home, and when we tried it out the flow was so much better. I left today feeling better about the show.

March 5, 2012-Tech run- It’s crunch time! We have three rehearsals until we have an audience. I have a wonderful cast who has worked extremely hard to bring this story to the stage. I was thinking about how much easier the rehearsal process has been because of the amount of “table work” we did in preparation. The blocking was so much more innate because the actors were so much more comfortable in the character’s skin. Today’s rehearsal focused mostly on programming lighting cues, and running a cue to cue through the transitions. We had a dinner break and were able to run through the show with cues after dinner. It was rough but the overall look is almost there.

March 6, 2012- Tech Run- The actress playing Sister Prejean had a complete breakdown today. She has been the strongest and most consistent member of the cast, but it was her turn to fall apart. I think the long hours compounded with the stress brought on by the complexity of the text have finally worn on her. This was perfect opportunity to speak with the entire cast about the separation between themselves and their characters. We had a wonderful discussion about how they were all feeling about the process and how they individually were dealing with the serious nature of the play. I reminded them that RASA was a great alternative to accessing emotions through breath rather than internalization of the emotions. The run through was fairly successful, everyone is really tired so after the dinner break we ran through the execution scene into the final scene to tweak a couple of things and the we went home early.
March 7, 2012- Tech Run- Lights are set, sound is set; everything is in place for a non-stop run through. I brought in a couple of former students to watch rehearsal as a fresh pair of eyes. We ran through the show once and then they gave us some feedback. There was some confusion about the purpose of the daughter watching television while her parents were talking to Sister Prejean. I realized that the imagery of her turning up the sound on the television to block out the sound of her father yelling wasn’t reading. Given that we are using an acting block to depict the television and she is pantomiming the knobs etc., I knew I needed to go further with it to justify it being in the scene. I started thinking about what television programs 10 year olds would watch in 1980. I had a conversation with the actress playing the daughter. I listed a few TV shows that I remembered from that time period and wondered if she knew the theme songs to any of them. The one she recognized was Scooby Doo. After this was settled I instructed her to use this song as a blockade to the yelling. When the father character starts to raise his voice she should reach for the television volume, then cover her ears, and start rocking back and forth while singing the theme song as loud as she could. When we ran it, it justified her being in the scene. It took a couple of times running through it, to get her to the volume we needed, but when she achieved it the result was fantastic. After the dinner break we went from the top and had a fairly good run. We have two previews tomorrow so we ended at 8:30 so we could all rest.

March 8, 2012-Double Preview- Today we had a huge opportunity as well as an enormous challenge. As a part of the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project I was required to involve at least two other departments in a cross-curricular fashion regarding capital punishment. Last year the English department had Sister Prejean’s book, *Dead Man Walking* approved for the advanced English classes to read. The History department created a unit on capital punishment for their civics as well as their US History classes. We invited the English classes to a special
preview during the school day. It was thrilling to watch the students step up to the plate when there was an audience. I observed the audience made up of teenagers as well. We have only a small population of African Americans at our school and I was concerned about the reaction to the use of the word “nigger” in the play. After the performance we held a talk back with the audience and discussed the differences between the book and the play, as well as their reaction to watching it live rather than reading it. The majority of them spoke to how it gave a face to the characters and created empathy for the killer that they had not expected.

In the evening we performed a second preview for the theatre students. This was our final official dress rehearsal. Like the earlier preview we held a talk back with the audience after the performance. Contrary to the English students, the Theatre students spoke more to the performances of the actors and the technical aspects of the show rather than the content. All in all the actors provided two very consistent performances and were excited to hear the reactions of the audiences. Everyone is exhausted and looking forward to the official opening tomorrow.

March 9, 2012- Opening Night- We had a nice size audience for opening night. The theatre seats 150 and we sold 120 tickets for tonight. The students did a wonderful job and the response from the audience was very positive after the show.

March 10, 2012- Performance- Marc Haniuk, my thesis chair attended tonight’s performance. We also had respectable size audience selling 130 tickets. The show went very well. After the show Marc had a talk back with the cast. The discussion was very interesting and the actors as well as the designers were very proud of their efforts at the end of the evening.

March 12, 2012- Performance –Tonight’s performance was plagued with technical issues. First of all I left my iPod with the soundtrack on it at home. I made a mad dash back home and retrieved it, returning 10 minutes before curtain. Then the light board froze during the opening
scene which forced the actors to improvise some of their cues, which they did seamlessly. Lastly there were a few dropped lines, all in all the performance was successful and a teaching moment for the actors. Of course we had the largest audience so far, selling 140 tickets.

March 13, 2012- Closing Night-This show was packed with a couple more than the 150 tickets in the box office. The performance was great. I am so proud of these kids, they really had to pull it out to deliver this script, and they did it very respectably.

The community I teach in is ultra conservative and I was concerned that I would offend people with the content of this play. I was thrilled to hear the responses from the parents, grandparents etc. after the show. The community who attended as a whole thought that the play was one that needed to be seen, they told me their families had talked about it in the car on the way home, or around the dinner table the next day. There was one phone call to the administration about the language, but it was anonymous so it was dismissed by the principal.

March 19, 2012- I was informed by the administration that the parents who had complained to the principal had escalated the attempt to be heard by contacting the District. They revealed their identity to the District but requested they remain anonymous to the school for fear of retribution. Their complaints were the following: 1. obscene language 2. religious undertones 3. one sided view of a controversial subject. The District listened to their concerns and offered to arrange a meeting with me to answer their concerns, they refused. When asked what it is they wanted, they stated an apology to the students and the community. I feel very strongly that we did nothing wrong and that no apology is necessary. I wish I knew who these parents were and whether their child was a member of the cast. I went out of my way to make sure the students were taken care of during the process. Each student was required to have a conversation with their parents to ensure their support. I really had no way of following up to be sure that this happened. In
retrospect I should have them sign a contract. I usually do, and I neglected to do that this time around.

May 30, 2012- Today I was required, along with all of the other theatre teachers in the district, to attend a meeting at the district office. The purpose of the meeting was to address how to have our play selections approved by the district before we produce them. It was obvious that the turmoil caused by *Dead Man Walking* had initiated this concern. I'm beginning to feel overwhelmed by the backlash that this play had caused. That was only the beginning, after over two months of no further contact from the concerned parents I received a phone call while in this meeting from the district area supervisor asking me to come into his office. Apparently these same parents had contacted a conservative political action group with their concerns who had, in turn, sent out a press release regarding their concerns about my production. I was brought in to help the public relations staff at the district respond to this press release intelligently. Fortunately I feel supported by the district office which helps a lot.

May 31, 2012- Two of the local newspapers along with two local TV stations carried the story today; it is unbelievable how much misinformation this PAC group has regarding the show. The reaction from the community has been overwhelmingly in my favor. I have included the news articles in the Appendices.

June 7, 2012- I was sent an email that was being forwarded throughout the community telling of a meeting that was going to be held at the home of the parents of one of my cast members. At last I know who these people are. The purpose of the meeting was to show the DVD of the play and show people why the show was so objectionable. I am in Phoenix so I cannot surprise them by showing up at the meeting, but I do see a phone number on the email. I called the woman whose name was listed. I identified myself and expressed my concerns with their crusade,
including the misinformation, but most importantly the fact that no one has ever spoken to me.

After much discussion she asked me to write an email that stated my views and she would read it at the meeting. I agreed. A couple hours later she called me back and abruptly stated the meeting had been cancelled. Maybe this will go away.

June 12, 2012- Today I received an email from a friend saying she had received a flyer on her doorstep asking people to join this group and sign a petition telling the school board that I had violated the public’s trust by producing this show and demanding an apology as well as some sort of disciplinary action against me and my principal for allowing this to happen. Oh My God! I have included all of the documents in the Appendices.
Production: *Dead Man Walking*
Venue: Bingham High School
Director: Michelle Willden
Date: March 21, 2012
Viewer: Marc Haniuk

On March 10, 2012 I attended the second performance of *Dead Man Walking* at Bingham High School presented by Bingham High School Theatre Department in South Jordan Utah. This production was presented as partial fulfillment of Michelle Willden’s Masters in Theatre Production. The second part of Ms. Willden’s thesis assignment is the written documentation relating to this production and the third element will be the oral defense, scheduled for July 8, 2012.

The Theatre was an intimate black box in a “horseshoe thrust” configuration. There are architectural parameters to the space; two voms, up- left and up-right and a permanent rise upstage. The seating risers appear to be permanent. Seating has a steep rake to the playing space and the grid is about 20’ from stage floor. The venue seats, to this viewers approximation around 200.

The set Design by Devin Malovich consisted of minimal scenery with many levels evoking multiple locations. The platform was faced with chain link fencing. Other elements were a grey and white scumbled (skipped rolled) floor and back wall. A projection screen hung up center. The main location was on prison grounds in Louisiana, circa 1980. One platform stage right was isolated from the rest. Distance and Isolation were a main theme in Ms. Willden’s production. The selective scenery was both visually stimulating and emotionally provocative.

There were very few props in the show, many were mimed. For the most part “rehearsal blocks” and benches were used as furniture.

The Costumes design by Lizzie Wade fit the play well. Most costumes were in crisp black and white, while the two main characters had texture and midtones. Either character wore “uniforms”. Matt Poncelet was in denim street cloths and Sister Prejean, wore white with a soft pastel sweater.

The Lighting design by Tom Thorne and McKenzie Powell was cold and stark, also fitting well with the theme. However at times I wanted to see more Isolation. Also, I wanted the lighting to help the audience with time and place.
Images on the projection screen were part of the script and provided factual information about the history of the death penalty in our socio-economic climate, created by Tianna Haldorsen. At times the slides pulled focus from the actors; a common consideration with mixed media.

Sound design by Brandon Childs, although minimal was well thought through. However there were no pre or post show framing effects that would have helped evoke the mood as well as time and place.

The design as a whole was very effective however at times I didn’t know what location they were in. Because the design consisted of selected elements; each element becomes that much more important. The Creative Team could have better helped each other communicate mood, time and place.

Another Image Ms. Willden sights in her concept statement is that of a “caged animal”. This was effectively communicated by the design as well as direction. By the end of the play the character Poncelet appeared dehumanized. I also applaud the tight color pallet. It was intellectually stimulating. Was a message being communicated here that not all situations are black and white? That there are many grey areas where human frailty is involved?

Redemption was another main theme in Dead Man Walking and Ms. Willden used this effectively in her approach. For instance as Poncelet was about to be executed; a gurney pivoted up exposing the character in a crucified pose.

Ms. Willden made good use of her space. She pinned the corners when needed and created interesting, largely asymmetrical stage pictures with her large ensemble. Tempo was well considered in Ms. Willden’s direction. Transitions moved seamlessly from one scene to the next. On another note, this play is intense! Ms. Willden and her ensemble strategically created moments of relief for the audience.

The cast was strong. Even the smallest role drew emotion from the audience. The actors appeared nervous at first. Some of the exposition was lost. But they settled in nicely as the play progressed. The Students had a good sense of the environment which helped us imagine where we were. It was easy to see Ms. Willden’s expertise, as she led her students through this complex story.

This was tough material for high school students; perhaps complicated by an audience with presumably opposing political views on “the death penalty”. We had a discussion at the end of the play. I asked them. “What is your responsibility to the audience”? After much deliberation they concluded; “To make them think”. This was the correct answer.

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Final Self-Evaluation

As I considered the overall production of *Dead Man Walking*, the play was the journey of Sister Prejean and I chose that journey as the driving force in creating the final production values used in the performances. I envisioned an open set that had limited set pieces and a minimalistic feel. Nothing should seem realistic thus communicating the memory of Sister Prejean. In retrospect, although the overall look of the show was exactly what I had intended, I could have been more specific with some of the locations, helping the audience to understand where the scenes were taking place. The journey that Sister Prejean takes from pen pal to spiritual advisor of death row inmate, Matt Poncelet, was supported in numerous areas. The set was stark and comprised of black platforms of differing levels as well as chain link fencing that created barriers that gave the audience a feeling of imprisonment. A great deal of effort was put into creating an environment that supported the concept of isolation. From the levels on the set to the pools of light separating locations, each character was ultimately alone.

The costumes contributed to the look of the play, using a neutral color palette, each character being dressed in 1980’s style clothing, black in color. The only exceptions to this were the victims who were dressed in white, as well as Sister Prejean, who we put in white, beige and pale blue. Lastly, Matt Poncelet wore blue prison denim. In the final scene we added splashes of color to the ensemble characters bringing the audience out of the memory state and into the here and now. Had I played with the costumes a bit longer, I would have made this transition a little more understandable to the audience.

I acquired three intelligent lights last fall and they were a godsend, they helped depict the journey by following Sister Prejean in her journey around the stage. Unfortunately, we were unaware of the complications that could arise from adding these instruments to our antiquated
dimmer racks. They worked fairly well for what we needed them for, but on more than one occasion we encountered the instruments freezing up during the show. This was unfortunate, but we worked through it, learning a valuable lesson. We are in the process of updating the system to better accommodate these instruments in the future.

The monumental task of tackling this mature subject matter with a group of high school students was made infinitely easier by the hours of table work completed during the rehearsal period. The cast of 33 actors was the largest ensemble I have directed in this small theatre space. The serious nature of the text, complied with my concept of isolation, made blocking a challenge. I was very pleased with the final outcome. The use of levels, lighting pools and the thrust stage presented many blocking opportunities. If I were to do it again I may have added yet another level down on the front of the stage to create one more obstacle for the actors. In spite of this, I feel as if the blocking was successful overall.

The greatest feat of this production was engaging the audience in a story that was full of narrative exposition as well as abstract settings. I knew it would be vital to guide the actors through the process by connecting them to the layers of emotions that each character felt, as well as the relationship they each had with God as well as their fellow human beings. We spent several rehearsals using rasaboxes, which is a performance tool to help the actor to access the emotional breath that their characters were experiencing in any given scene. Even after the performances began many of the actors would connect with breath before they came on stage. Objective and intention were also a main focus of the rehearsal process. Students created a character analysis, in which they stated their character’s super objective; I define this as the overriding thing that the character wants during the course of the play. The actors were diligent in exploring the levels of intention and how they shifted throughout the course of the play.
Overall I believe that this production met and exceeded my expectations. The students rose to the occasion and delivered a story that moved the audience emotionally as well as intellectually. I was very proud of the diligence and commitment, each and every one of the 33 students involved in the production, brought to the table.
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Appendix A

Design Renderings
Design Statement

The judicial system sentences criminals to be caged up like wild animals to wait out their fate. Those on death row are poked with the sticks of appeals, possible pardons and inevitably the walk to the execution chamber. Their crimes have caused them to be isolated from polite society. Their crimes have also isolated their victims as well as the victims' families.

Sister Prejean believes that these animals can be saved on some level by kindness and love. At the least the admission of their personal responsibility in the crime will recognize their humanity.
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<td>2</td>
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<td>Prejean, Herbie, Montoya, Matt</td>
<td>Prejean tutors Herbie, Montoya asks favor</td>
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Concept Statement for Dead Man Walking
by Tim Robbins

Vengeance, while perhaps a mortal emotion, is better placed in the care of divine intervention.

The Concept that I imagine for this show is a look of drab monochromatic colors that feel cold and isolated.

In Costuming this would be represented with colors such as faded blues, browns & grays. As the play progresses the colors in the costuming would become a little more vibrant, until we get to the execution where the convict goes from the blue denim shirt to a clean white t-shirt, and the colors become stark and institutional.

In Set Design I see blacks, whites and grays with the transition into the institutional colors at the end. I want to depict isolation, and grief.

Lighting is the crux of this show because it divides the action of the show. Each location is depicted in a different pool of light. Gobos will also help depict the location, i.e. window bars. I see a different feel to each pool of light helping the audience to travel through each situation and emotion. #60 No Color Blue, #351 Lavender Mist, #4 Medium Bastard Amber, #26 Light Red, being some of the color choices. There would be definite difference between the prison, and the home of the victim's families.
Scenic needs for *Dead Man Walking* by Tim Robbins

1. Platform at the rear of the stage
2. Projection Screen
3. Blocks of different sizes
4. Inmate visiting booth
5. Bed
6. Table and 2 chairs
7. Table and chair
8. Couch
9. T.V.
10. Death House
11. Desk
12. Prison Bed
13. Digital Clock
14. Polygraph Machine
15. Folded Metal Chairs
16. White Metal Door
17. Typewriter
18. White Tablecloth
19. Metal Screen Door
20. Gurney w/ straps
21. Injection machine
Matt Poncelet
*Dead Man Walking*
by
Tim Robbins
"Prison Blues"
I Oppose the Death Penalty!

Sister Helen Prejean
Dead Man

Walking
Appendix B

Ground Plan
Appendix C

Production Photos
Sister Prejean

Matt Poncelet

The Meeting
THE PAROLE BOARD

THE VIGIL
THE
FAMILIES
THE
DEATH
HOUSE
CONFESSION
Appendix D
Performance Program
BINGHAM HIGH THEATRE DEPARTMENT PRESENTS

DEAD MAN WALKING

by TIM ROBBINS

MARCH 9, 10, 12, 13, 2012
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Presented by Bingham High School Theatre Department
March 9-13, 2012

GHS ADMINISTRATION
Principal...........................................................................................................Tom Hicks
Assistant Principals.................................................................Barbara Gentry, Chris Titus
Dennis Edmonds
Richard Price

PRODUCTION STAFF
Director......................................................................................................Michelle Wilden
Stage Manager.........................................................................................Jacey Gardner
Set Design ............................................................................................Devin Malovich
Set Construction...................................................................................Stage Tech Classes
Sound Design......................................................................................Brandon Childs
Lighting Design........................................................................................Tom Thorne, McKenzie Powell
Costume Design...................................................................................Lizle Wade
Poster Design, Program Layout............................................................Marchant Design
Program Printing....................................................................................Associated Foods
Photographer..........................................................................................Jessica Brinton
Slide show Creator.................................................................................Tianna Haldorsen

SETTING
Louisiana- 1980
There will be a 15 minute intermission between acts
Alex Winch (Sr. Helen Prejean) Alex is so excited to be involved with this production. She is honored to be able to play Sister Prejean, she admires her courage very much. Working with this cast and show has been life-changing for her and she enjoyed every moment of it. Alex would like to thank the cast and crew of the show, as well as her family for their support, Ms. Willden for being the most amazing director and seeing something in her that she didn’t see, and finally, Sister Helen Prejean for starting a conversation about Capital Punishment. SCENE!

Jamie Ryser (Sr. Marie Augusta Neal/ Secretary) Jamie is super stoked to have a role in Dead Man Walking! She has been involved in theater since Sophomore year and has loved every minute. She wants to thank Mama Wild for teaching her that everyone is important and special! Alex Waller (Herbie/Jim Poncelet) Alex is thrilled to be in his second Bingham High production. He’s a Junior and would like to thank his family and friends for supporting him through the show.

Anthony Rodriguez (Luis Montoya) Anthony is excited to perform in his first production at Bingham High. He has previously taken theatre classes and has loved this experience.

Ben Wilkins (Matt Poncelet) Ben has been dying to get back to the stage since Beauty and the Beast closed in November. He got his first taste of theatre in 1998 as a member of Hale Centre Theatre’s A Christmas Carol. He then didn’t get back to the stage until the end of his ninth grade year. Since then, he has been a part of Fiddler on the Roof, Brigadoon, Beauty and the Beast as well as being involved in the 2011 Shakespeare team, and other performances. He is a part of the Madrigal Choir and loves music and acting. He wants to thank his family and friends for supporting him, and especially Willden for all her patience and for the wonderful opportunity.

Garrett Newton (Guard) Garrett is very excited to be in Dead Man Walking. He has been in other theater productions, but none that have been more than one show. All Garrett has to say is, “Remove any metal, coins, and keys.”

Amy Heimbigner (Female Guard/Lie Detector Administrator) Amy is enthralled to be in BHS’s production of Dead Man Walking and is thankful for the opportunity to improve her acting. She was previously in BHS’s Beauty and the Beast and is involved with the regional one act, Alky.

Grant Anderson (Chaplain Farley) Grant is so excited for this opportunity to portray the character of Chaplain Farley, this is Grant’s first straight play, but he has appeared in Fiddler on the Roof and the Mayor in Seussical the Musical at his previous school.

Aubrey Orullian (Sr. Colleen) Aubrey is very happy to be given the part of St. Colleen. She is very grateful for this chance to improve her skills and get to know this wonderful cast. Aubrey is also excited to continue being involved in theatre in high school and hopefully college.

Sarah Powell (Reporter #1) Sarah is so happy to be playing Reporter #1! She has learned a lot during this play, and has had so much fun! She wants to say thank you to all the awesome people who have directed and supported her, and she can’t wait to continue her high school involvement in theater!

Allison Borzoni (Reporter #2) All is ecstatic to be in the show and is thankful for the opportunity!

Lauren Kara Knowles (Lou) (Reporter #3) Lauren loves people and being on stage. It was her participation in “Up With Kids” where she discovered her passion for performing. Just last year, she played the part of Milie in Thoroughly Modern Mlle at Elk Ridge Middle School. She feels privileged to take part in such an important and pertinent play that helps the world understand the death penalty.

Connor Wade (Hilton Barber) Connor’s ecstatic to be involved in Dead Man Walking. He has been acting ever since he was very young. He was part of the group of senior boys that magically appeared to fill the theatre department. The typically shy Connor has had a wonderful reception and was even the department’s nominee for Sterling Scholar. He never dreamed of any of this auditioning as an outcast for Theatre Ill with and ill-prepared Doctor Who monologue. “I couldn’t be more grateful this year.” He would like to dedicate his performance to his snookems, Amy the female guard, who looks amazing in that gun belt.

Adelle Harris (Lucille Poncelet) Adelle is extremely thrilled to be in this production as the character Lucille. She has appeared in previous Bingham productions such as Beauty and the Beast and Fiddler in the Roof. She is so grateful for this opportunity and thanks her mom for all of her love and support.
CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE, COSTS)

Scott Moore (Guy Gilardi) Scott is so freakin’ excited to be in this play it’s driving him absolutely bonkers. He hopes you read this biography and later tell him you read his biography. Then, if you really feel like it you can tell Scott he did an amazing job with his mind-blowing performance. Scott would like to thank everyone for coming to see this play and hopes you enjoy the show.

Justin Olsen (Clyde Percy) Justin is excited about his first supporting role with the Bingham High School Theatre Department! He also participated in the school musical, Beauty and the Beast earlier in the school year as a villager. Apart from acting, Justin enjoys track and field, reading, playing basketball, and doing anything with friends. From this experience, he is learning how to work well with others, and how NOT to treat social workers. Justin is currently in his Junior year and is excited to take whatever steps lie ahead of him.

Thabata de Siqueria (Marybeth Percy) Thabata is so grateful for this opportunity to participate in Bingham’s rendition of Dead Man Walking this year! She really enjoyed becoming such a complicated character and getting in touch with her motherly side made her appreciate her own mommy so much more! She loved working with the rest of the cast, and she looks forward to the possibilities her future has to offer her.

Bryan Smart (Earl Delacroix) Bryan is so grateful to be part of this production. He would like to thank Willden for giving him this opportunity and chance to portray this character. He would also like to thank his family for supporting him in pursuing this production.

Alyssa Fowlks (Mrs. Delacroix) Alyssa is so grateful for the opportunity to be in this production. She has loved being involved in the performing arts and hopes to continue for the rest of her life. Alyssa would like to thank her family and friends for always supporting her and giving her the confidence to reach for the stars.

Geoff Kroll (Walter Delacroix) Geoff is so pumped to be able to play the part of Walter Delacroix in Dead Man Walking, even though he does get shot in the head... twice. Geoff loves acting and being involved in theater. Having Willden as a director has been an amazing experience for him. Geoff thanks his mother, family, and his friends in supporting him in this production.

CAST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE, COSTS)

Jessie Stevenenl (Hope Percy) Jessie is thrilled to be in her third production here at Bingham! Her favorite role was being a fling wolf in Beauty and the Beast, but she’s super excited to be to “Dead girl!” Jessie wants to thank Willden, Jacey, her family & friends, “I love you all!”

Abbey Wilson (Mother of St. Helen) Abbey is so excited to be in the cast of Dead Man Walking. She has enjoyed being in three Bingham productions and has loved working with Willden, Jacey, and the rest of the cast.

Collette Condie (Emily Percy) Collette loves to perform, and all the aspects of theater. She is very excited to be apart of the production, and is having a blast being with everyone.

Tanya Bartlett (Reporter #4/ Woman #2) Tanya is so excited to be a part of this production. Through it, she’s been able to develop her own opinion about the death penalty. She would like to say thanks to all who come to see it, especially her family and sister visiting from Australia.

Amy Boud (Mirabeau/ Woman #1) Amy is epically ecstatic to be involved in Dead Man Walking. The closest she has previously gotten to killing a man on stage is yelling “Kill the Beast!” in this year’s production of Beauty and the Beast. Now she gets to give the death sentence. How exciting! All she can say is, “Mazeltov!”

Micah Havens (Man #3/ Governor Fredericks) Micah is excited to be in Dead Man Walking. Micah would like to thank Willden for the chance to be in this play. He would also like to thank his mom for her support. Micah enjoys acting and is happy to perform for this play.

Jake Rosquist (Man #1/ Purvis Slade) Jake is excited to portray the radio announcer. This is his first time acting in a play in high school and he hopes it will be a lot of fun.

Angela Wilson (Woman #3) Angela is so excited to be involved in Dead Man Walking. She’s been involved in BHS theatre and is grateful to have grown as an actor in this experience.

David Vance (Guard/ Trapp/ Man #2) David is excited to be in this production and is so grateful for the opportunity. He is very involved in the BHS Theatre Department, and has recently been in Beauty and the Beast, is in the one act competition piece, Alky and is a thespian officer.
CAST

(Austin Thorne (Sgt. Beliveau) Austin is super excited to be in Dead Man Walking.
He would like to thank Ms. Willden for giving him this chance to play the role of Sgt.
Beliveau and his family for supporting him.

Tricia Williams (Nurse) Tricia is very excited to be a part of Dead Man Walking.
This experience has been both helpful with improving her skills, and has shown her
a new light on the death penalty.

Michael Woodruff (Warden Hartman) Michael is very excited to be performing
with his friends. He has learned a lot about the death penalty through this play
and through Sister Prejean's book. He also thanks Willden for all of her help and
support.

Mitchell Peart (Mitch Poncelet) Mitch is greatly excited to portray a character a
lot like himself, 'Mitch Poncelet', upstanding and handsome, though it's hard to
forget his character. He would also like to say he loves his family and is grateful for
all the support!

Tanner Wintch (Troy Poncelet) Tanner is excited to be a part of this production at
BHS. He has never done any stage acting before, but he was frequently thw star
of home movies and talk shows. Tanner has been watching his two older sisters
perform ever since he was born and is happy to now be working with one of
them. A special thanks to his mother for giving him courage and to Ms. Willden
for giving him this opportunity.

DIRECTOR’S NOTES

"Is God vengeful, demanding a death for a death? Or is God compassionate, luring souls
into love so great that no one can be considered 'enemy'?" Sister Helen Prejean

Two years ago Doug Livingston, a teacher at Bingham, mentioned that his friend
in San Jose Ca. had just finished directing a production of Dead Man Walking and
what a great experience it was. The project was looking for a school to produce
the show in Utah. After months of research and soul searching I
realized that
Bingham was in fact the school in Utah that would take on the challenge.
The last two years have been a
roller coaster of emotions. Every news report, every
obituary has spoken to me on some
level. The students involved in the production
are amazing dedicated students who have given their
all to this endeavor.
Thank you to everyone in my life that has supported me through this project. I am
truly blessed.
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Appendix E

Publicity Poster
BINGHAM HIGH THEATRE DEPARTMENT PRESENTS

DEAD MAN WALKING

by TIM ROBBINS

MARCH 9, 10, 12, 13
7:00 PM
COPPER PIT

TICKETS $7.00 STUDENTS • $8.00 ADULTS

PRODUCED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT WITH TIM ROBBINS AND THE DEAD MAN WALKING SCHOOL THEATRE PROJECT
Appendix F

Inspirations
AND I WILL EXECUTE GREAT VENGEANCE UPON THEM WITH FURIOUS REBUKES; AND THEY SHALL KNOW THAT I AM THE LORD, WHEN I SHALL LAY MY VENGEANCE UPON THEM.

GEZER 2:5-7
FORGIVENESS is not something we do for OTHER PEOPLE. We do it for OURSELVES - to GET WELL and MOVE ON.
Appendix G

Production Music
Appendix H

Visual Projections
TWO THIRDS OF THE WORLD’S POPULATION LIVES AT OR BELOW POVERTY LEVEL
U.S. is 6% of the world's populations, yet consumes 48% of the world's goods.
Since 1973, 158 BLACK DEFENDANTS HAVE BEEN EXECUTED FOR THE MURDER OF A WHITE VICTIM. IN THAT SAME TIME, 11 WHITE DEFENDANTS HAVE BEEN EXECUTED FOR THE MURDER OF A BLACK VICTIM.
IN 1980, 500,000 AMERICANS BEHIND BARS;
IN 1990, 1.1 MILLION;
IN 2000, 2 MILLION
Date of Death 06/14/78
LEADS ARE FEW IN TEENAGE MURDER HERE
Between 1980 and 1990, the federal government cut its contribution to education by 25% while increasing its allocation for criminal justice by 29%.
SINCE 1973, TWO THIRDS OF ALL DEATHS PENALTY TRIALS WHICH COMPLETED THE APPEAL PROCESS, WERE FOUND TO CONTAIN SERIOUS ERRORS REQUIRING THEIR REVERSAL.
RELEASED TWO WEEKS BEFORE EXECUTION
1,226 PEOPLE EXECUTED ON DEATH ROW
138 PEOPLE EXONERATED
Appendix I

Newspaper Articles
Eagle Forum decries play performed at high school

Source http://www.cachevalleydaily.com/story/eagle-forum-decries-play-performed-at-high-school-20120531

By Craig Hislop June 1, 2012

The Utah Eagle Forum, which supports conservative principles, is calling on Bingham High School to apologize to its students and explain the biased message sent by the play “Dead Man Walking” which was performed at Bingham in March.

The play is based on a book written by Sister Helen Prejean, a true story describing her experience working with a murderer on death row. That man, Matt Poncelet, was convicted with an accomplice of killing a young girl and boy by making them kneel down and then shooting them in the back of the head after raping the girl and stabbing her 17 times.

Utah Eagle Forum President Gayle Ruzicka Thursday told Cache Valley Daily that parents of Bingham High students requesting the Eagle Forum become involved contacted her organization.

“Hopefully, as this is made public, the school board will talk to those in charge at Bingham High School and the decision will be to make a public apology to the students and to their parents for the kind of exposure the children have had to this.

“It’s an interesting situation when we have a Utah Attorney General who has asked the movie industry to please take smoking out of movies that are targeting the
youth and yet right here in Utah on the stage at Bingham High School they were using fake cigarettes that looked real to the audience.

“That, to me, is appalling. They took the Lord’s name in vain; they used some vulgar four-letter words and other inappropriate language throughout the play. They had some graphic sexual talk going on. They also described the condition of the girl who was raped and murdered by this convicted death row inmate.”

Ruzicka said it was troubling at the end of the play at the execution of the murderer when he was strapped onto to a gurney which is raised and his arms are stretched out as if he were on the cross, making a comparison to the crucifixion of Christ.

“It is such an inappropriate play for these young people. It was also a project for the school. Bingham’s English Department made ‘Dead Man Walking’ required reading of the students and the History Department did a unit on capital punishment. This was all required by the ‘Dead Man Walking’ national high school project before the play could be staged there.”

Ruzicka said she talked to students who told her they were upset to see their friends on stage using language they would never use otherwise.

“School is ending for the year and these parents continue to request the apology. There has been no action, at least that students and parents know about. Otherwise, it is seen that the school is condoning these actions and the parents don’t want that.”
Rolly: Eagle Forum trying hard to be disgusted

By Paul Rolly
Tribune Columnist
Published: June 4, 2012 10:40AM
Updated: June 3, 2012 11:17PM

You almost have to feel sorry for the Utah Eagle Forum folks, those self-appointed moral watchdogs who have the ability to strike fear into the hearts of Republican legislators.

They failed this year to eradicate meaningful sex education from public schools; they have failed to get the State School Board to abandon multistate curriculum standards that aren’t Eagle Forum-driven; they are losing the battle for homophobia; and many of their loyal minions in the Legislature have left or are leaving.

So they are getting desperate to remain relevant.

Their latest salvo: They are shocked and disgusted at Bingham High School’s student production of the play “Dead Man Walking,” which, according to the Eagle Forum’s press release, is full of profanity, sexual language, violence, racial slurs, bigotry, political bias and “inappropriate use of biblical teachings.”

The first sign of the Eagle Forum’s desperation is the fact that the press release was blasted to media outlets just this past week. The play was performed more than two months ago, in March.

The second sign is that, in my telephone interview with Eagle Forum President Gayle Ruzicka on Friday, it was clear that her impression of the contents of the play and what was actually performed are not even close.

The third sign is that hardly any attempt was made to discuss the issue with Bingham High or Jordan School District officials before the release was sent out in an attempt to create controversy.
The fourth sign is that Ruzicka claims to be representing Bingham High parents concerned about the play and has included with the press release five letters she says are from Bingham parents expressing their concern. But none of those parents are identified. In fact, there is not one identifiable complainant other than the Eagle Forum.

According to Sandy Riesgraf, Jordan School District Communication director, only one person complained to the district about the play. Conversely, the more than 700 parents and patrons who saw the play expressed overwhelming support.

Riesgraf said a meeting was requested with district officials, but the request was not from parents. It was from the Eagle Forum’s Dalane England, who said she was going to bring a group of concerned parents with her. But the night before the meeting, England called up and canceled. She was given the opportunity to reschedule but never did.

The play is based on the book by Sister Helen Prejean, a nun who counseled a condemned killer before he was executed. It was made into an R-rated movie.

Director Tim Robbins wrote the stage play.

Ruzicka, in the interview, displayed she has several misunderstandings. Numerous cuss words in the original play were taken out for the school production, with permission from the author.

The Eagle Forum’s press release talks about racial slurs, but the main character, the condemned killer, was a white supremacist and the student actor who portrayed him spent weeks working with teachers and his parents to reduce the offensive language as much as possible while preserving the reality of the character.

Ruzicka also said students are depicted smoking on the stage, which isn’t true. The main character had a fake cigarette tucked behind his ear, but it never touched his lips. Bingham Principal Tom Hicks said no one has complained to him or to the drama teacher who directed the play. The only criticism is from anonymous folks in the Eagle Forum press release.

“I find that cowardly,” Hicks said, noting that not only was the controversy raised more than two months after the performance, but it came during the week of graduation when “we should be focused on celebrating a great year at Bingham.”

prolly@sltrib.com

© 2012 The Salt Lake Tribune
SOUTH JORDAN — A Bingham High School production of "Dead Man Walking" is under fire from a conservative lobbying group over claims the play contained inappropriate content.

The play was performed in March. But the Utah Eagle Forum issued a statement Wednesday condemning the production and demanding an apology to the community from the Jordan School District.

"There's a lot of parents who are upset and they feel alone," said Dalane England, Eagle Forum vice president over issues. "They're very concerned for their children."

But those parents are anonymous. Included with the Eagle Forum statement were the objections of five parents — two of whom did not attend the performance — and one student, all of whom cited language, subject matter and topics discussed in the play as inappropriate for students.

District officials said that out of approximately 700 individuals who saw the production during its four-day run in March, only one person anonymously contacted Jordan District to express concerns. District spokesman Steve Dunham said the remainder of complaints have come from individuals outside of the Bingham community.

In the statement, the Eagle Forum objects to the use of mature language and racial slurs in the play, as well as its discussion of rape, religion and capital punishment.

England said the group came forward at the request of parents whose concerns she said were ignored by school and district officials.

Dunham said the play was approved by Bingham's administration as well as a committee of parents and community members. The play is based on a book of the same name, which received district approval for classroom use prior to Bingham's production.

"Bingham High went to great lengths to ensure all of the participants were comfortable with their parts and lines in the play; in fact, the student who played the lead role was given the opportunity to edit any of the lines he was not comfortable with," the district said in a statement prepared by Dunham. "No other participants in this optional activity had offensive language."

England said she has talked with several parents and students she said were shocked and appalled by the play's content. She specifically mentioned teenage actors smoking fake cigarettes on stage, using strong language and citing biblical passages to debate the morality of the death penalty.

"We don't appreciate the Bible being used in that way," she said.

Dunham said one student appeared on stage with a fake cigarette tucked behind his ear, but never removed it from his ear or put it to his lips. He speculated that much of the objections to the play...
stem from individuals who did not attend Bingham's production.

"They are basing this off of a national production of the play," he said.

In their statement, district officials also emphasized that "Dead Man Walking" was an optional extracurricular activity.

The Eagle Forum statement repeatedly objects to a perceived one-sided political bias regarding capital punishment in the play's storyline. The group also takes particular offense to an execution scene in the play where a man is strapped to a cross-shaped table in an apparent allusion to a crucifixion.

The Eagle Forum is requesting an apology from the district as well as an explanation to students for what it called the biased message delivered to them by the play.

E-mail: benwood@desnews.com
High school play about the death penalty causes controversy

SALT LAKE CITY (ABC 4 News) - The school year is coming to a close, but controversy surrounding a school play is just starting. Bingham High School put on the play "Dead Man Walking" this spring. While hundreds attended the performances, the Utah Eagle Forum says several parents and students thought it was too graphic and they want to prevent another play like it from being performed at the school.

The high school adaptation of Dead Man Walking has been performed for several years and by several schools across the country. And during its four night run at Bingham High School in March it was well attended and the students we spoke to liked it. Emily Simek, a Bingham student says "I thought the play was really well done." And fellow student Wyatt Merrill says "It was a very real story - like it brought it to life." Its real, because like the movie by the same name - its all about the death penalty. In fact, Merrill says of the play "I kind of found myself for capitol punishment then against capitol punishment."

However, some parents and students thought the play was inappropriate and too graphic for a high school performance. They wanted to remain anonymous so they contacted the Utah Eagle Forum with their complaints. And told the conservative organization things like; "I was both surprised and appalled...

"...there were explicit descriptions of rape and murder, and foul language used.

"They made him (the killer) out to be a martyr and someone who didn't deserve to die."

And during the Bingham performance parents said the execution scene was too symbolic of the crucifixion of Christ. Gayle Ruzicka with the Utah Eagle Forum says they "Laid him on this gurney and had his arms stretched out as if on a cross." Even some students, like Merrill, had a problem with that. "I actually personally didn't like that part - I thought it was a little distasteful."

However, the Jordan School District says the play was "an optional extracurricular activity." And a spokesperson went on to say it "was approved by Bingham High School and a committee of parents." And that the school "went to great lengths to ensure all of the participants were comfortable with their parts and lines." The Jordan School District says during the performance only one parent complained to the school. And the a district spokeswoman says about one hundred parents contacted the school with positive comments.

Another complaint from the anonymous parents. They say the play one one sided and that it tries to say God is against capitol punishment. While that is up for debate, they point out the website for the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project (http://www.dmwplay.org) has a "take action" page for students. And on that page it tells students to "call for a moratorium" on capitol punishment, "contact their elected official" and it even provides "how to connect with a death row inmate" information and links.

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High school play about the death penalty causes controversy

We Recommend

Moms protest Seven Peaks "no breastfeeding" policy (ABC4.com)

Gender Benders: 8 Actors Who Play Gay But Really Are Straight or Vice Versa (Are Their Roles Believable?) (Styleblazer)
We, many concerned parents and community members, present our petition to the Jordan School District Board of Education. We wish to express our deepest objection to Bingham High School's recent production of the play "Dead Man Walking." This production contained offensive materials not suited for a high school play and in violation of district policy which requires drama productions to stay within "acceptable community standards." This content included students smoking on stage, drug abuse reference, profanity throughout the script (including the name of deity and the "N" word multiple times), racially demeaning language, sexual language, explicit descriptions of rape and murder (including descriptions of female genitals being mutilated), and mockery of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We have also been informed that the faculty and administration of Bingham High School violated school district policy in the selection of this play. Certain district procedures were not followed and appropriate district approvals were not obtained to present this play.

The play uses the Bible and religious ideas to support an anti-capital punishment political agenda. The theater students along with the students in the audience were exposed to an unbalanced and biased view of capital punishment. Our tax dollars and our students, most of whom are minors, were used to support a political agenda of the high school faculty, who are in a position of great influence and trust. This play is part of a national campaign called the "Dead Man Walking School Theater Project." Its purpose is to influence the views of our students and communities against capital punishment. We have also been informed that all proceeds from the play attendance were donated to this national project thus funding their continued political agenda.

We demand redress for this violation of our parental and public trust. We demand an apology addressed to all Bingham High School students and the community. This apology should include an admittance of violation of school district policy, an apology for exposing students and all others to inappropriate content, a statement that the presentation of the capital punishment issue did not represent the position of the school or the school district, and an assurance that this offense will not happen again. Reprimands commensurate with the severity of the violations of policy and public trust should be administered to the high school faculty and principal.

Sign petition
1
Name: Richard Dunn on Jun 8, 2012
Comments: We need to identify the teachers and administrators involved and fire them.
Flag

2
Name: Ron Harmer on Jun 8, 2012
Comments:
Flag

3
Name: Dorothy Callister on Jun 8, 2012
Comments: I am thoroughly disgusted by the content of the play, the involvement of students; and
the lack of involvement by school & district heads.
Flag

4
Name: Joanne Mower on Jun 8, 2012
Comments:
Flag

5
Name: Jeff McKay on Jun 8, 2012
Comments: I see nothing noble, enlightening or enriching in this theatrical production and believe
those who authorized and supported this made a serious error in judgement. I won't even allow
myself as a mature adult to be exposed to this kind of material much less a developing teenager. I
have traveled over many countries in this world and having compassion does not equal lack of
justice in any responsible community that I have visited. This play fails to show that "Capital
Punishment" is NOT about revenge but protection of the citizens of a country. If it were about
revenge, we'd let those victimized execute the criminals rather than insisting that an impartial group
of one's peers make the decision on innocence or guilt. I know it is difficult to be a teacher and try to
Teach high standards in a world where it is popular to allow anything to be said in and done in the
name of "Freedom of Expression. I think it is difficult for a teacher to remain politically neutral but I
think that is what those in education agree to do or at a minimum avoid anything beneath the
standards of the community they serve.
Flag

6
Name: Colleen McKay on Jun 8, 2012
Comments: I was shocked that this was permitted at Bingham High (where our kids attended).
This is NOT inline with any standards we follow as a family and not in line with what we have been
used to from the South Jordan School District.
Flag

7
Name: David Mower on Jun 8, 2012
Comments:
Flag
Comments: I fully agree with the arguments made in this petition. I don't understand how a play of this nature could ever be approved by the administration and they, both the administration and the involved faculty ought to be disciplined severely for such a neglect of duty.

Flag

8 Name: Kimberly Sanders on Jun 8, 2012
Comments:
Flag

9 Name: Thayne Sanders on Jun 8, 2012
Comments:
Flag

10 Name: Neva Jones on Jun 8, 2012
Comments: This play does not reflect the standards of this community and is entirely inappropriate for a high school play.
Flag

11 Name: Colette Harmer on Jun 8, 2012
Comments:
Flag

12 Name: Kimberly Stanley on Jun 9, 2012
Comments:
Flag

13 Name: Mike Bennett on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: I believe the play is merely a byproduct of a bigger issue. A few things that really bother me. The school is justifying the play by saying it was an extracurricular activity, yet it is my understanding, as part of this national campaign against the death penalty, the school made the decision to make the book, "Dead Man Walking", required reading for all Juniors in their English classes. Doesn't sound like the students had a choice. By the way, the book is a lot more graphic in content than the play. Also, I am not sure I want my tax dollars spent pitching any politically driven agenda in our public schools. Is it fair for a public school to teach our kids about Pro-Choice without giving Pro-Life an equal voice? It is my opinion, these types of politically charged issues have a place for discussion and disagreement, just not in our public schools and without parental consent. I believe it is important for our children to learn about these things, but parents should be involved and our schools have the responsibility to choose play content that meets "acceptable community standards". Lastly, I wonder how many parents knew that the money they were spending on tickets to the play was being donated by the school to the "Dead Man Walking Theater Project", to help further the anti-capital punishment cause.
Flag

14 Name: Shaun Kirkham on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: Had no idea that any public school in UTAH would ever even consider endorsing and promoting a school play with this sort of content. This is alarming and does make me VERY CONCERNED and worried for my children's future and what we might expect more of if GOOD PEOPLE DO NOTHING!! - Shaun Kirkham.
Flag

15 Name: Anonymous on Jun 9, 2012
Comments:
Flag

16 Name: Megan on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: I'm not a religious person... and I'm very much a person who says live and let live. However, I'm opposed to our youth being subjected and compromised without the full facts and understanding of what they are doing. At that age, it's just cool to go against the norm and most don't understand the true meaning behind what they say and do. This play isn't for young adults in any region. Even if it weren't to make a marked statement of faculty (which to an outsider is unknown to be fact or not), the content alone isn't for youth. Yes, they have mostly been likely subjected to these terms and graphics in their life anyway (and more so these younger generations), but they need to set examples for their younger siblings and younger students. It's a compromise of their youth, and for that alone I am signing this petition.

Flag

Name: Melissa Kirkham on Jun 9, 2012
Comments:
Flag

Name: John Pratt on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: This play is not appropriate for a high school audience.
Flag

Name: Heather Dubach on Jun 9, 2012
Comments:
Flag

Name: Paula Bennett on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: I am disappointed that this play was presented at Bingham High without the approval of the majority of parents. I believe if parents knew ahead of time the content of this play or the book the Juniors were required to read, it wouldn't have happened. These students are still considered minors in our society. Parents are required to sign permission slips on behalf of their children to participate in many things. Why didn't this not happen on something this controversial?
Flag

Name: Jack Pferdner on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: The subject matter seems to be inappropriate for public schools and can only compromise the integrity of those required to act in it.
Flag

Name: Gene & Trudy Angus on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: Not cool
Flag

Name: Jodi Parker on Jun 9, 2012
Comments:
Flag

Name: Marty Stout on Jun 9, 2012
Comments: I'm disappointed in the drama department and the administration of Bingham High School in their selection and approval of DMW. I don't think that this play reflected the values of the community. My son has participated in church and community theater and had a desire to participate at Bingham - until we actually so some of the productions - including one showing high school girls in lingerie. There are many productions that are in line with community values that would be enjoyable for the students to participate in, and that are appropriate for family viewing. I would like to see the faculty be more sensitive in their selection, rather than trying to push the limits of acceptability and stir up controversy.
Flag
**Name:** Peter Cannon on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:** This kind of overt political indoctrination and crudeness should have no place in our public schools. This is one reason many citizens have lost confidence in our public school system. Flag

**26**  
**Name:** Genevieve Murphy on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:**
Flag

**27**  
**Name:** Steve Shepherd on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:**
Flag

**28**  
**Name:** Anonymous on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:**
Flag

**29**  
**Name:** Julie Orullian on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:** The school faculty have let down this community in allowing this play to be performed by and to our students. We give our schools our trust to protect our kids from this kind of biased and inappropriate content. That trust has been broken. This isn't education, this is exploitation. Flag

**30**  
**Name:** Anonymous on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:**
Flag

**31**  
**Name:** Jean B. Bateman on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:** Please give our students and citizens of South Jordan and surrounding communities uplifting plays to attend. Flag

**32**  
**Name:** David Lund on Jun 10, 2012  
**Comments:**
Flag

**33**  
**Name:** Genal Reese on Jun 11, 2012  
**Comments:** Tax payer money should not be spent to further someone's political or social views in the education system of our children. Flag

**34**  
**Name:** Kristin Matthews on Jun 11, 2012  
**Comments:** This type of material is inappropriate for high school students. Flag

**35**  
**Name:** Brian Matthews on Jun 11, 2012  
**Comments:** I wouldn't want my child to participate in or watch this type of material as a high school student. Flag

**36**  
**Name:** Todd Orullian on Jun 11, 2012  
**Comments:** There is simply no place for such a one-sided political message and agenda in our public schools. This is clearly an attempt by critics of capital punishment to push their views into
our public schools. With something so biased and controversial surely parents should have been consulted. Why weren't they? This is to say nothing of the offensive language that our students were asked to participate in and listen to. Our public schools are not allowed to teach religion, yet this play was allowed to use religion to support a political agenda.

37
Name: Dionne Tarpenning on Jun 11, 2012
Comments: My daughter attended this play and was disturbed by its contents. Such things are inappropriate for minors. I had hoped that Bingham High School was worthy of our trust.
Flag

38
Name: Carina Tarpenning on Jun 11, 2012
Comments:
Flag

39
Name: Michelle Estrada on Jun 11, 2012
Comments:
Flag

40
Name: Robin Dansie on Jun 11, 2012
Comments:
Flag

41
Name: Mark Riding on Jun 11, 2012
Comments: The anonymous individual(s) responsible for this ridiculous petition need to grow up. Reactionary censorship of controversial ideas is sure fire way to ensure young adults won't have the knowledge necessary to make informed, mature decisions. The orange flyer left on my front porch is filled with unsubstantiated rhetoric and it's own "political agenda", which I find offensive. I need to start a petition to end this petition.
Flag

42
Name: Craig Smith on Jun 11, 2012
Comments:
Flag

43
Name: Patsy Matthews on Jun 11, 2012
Comments:
Flag

44
Name: Rebecca Rodrigues on Jun 11, 2012
Comments: This is not appropriate for students of high school age. In order for this play to have taken place, the writer, Tim Robbins, said that at least two academic departments in the school were required to incorporate the issue of the death penalty into their curriculum for at least a semester within that year. These are social debates best left to students of a college level who are not required by law to be in school. Political and social issues such as these are not appropriate learning material for students required to be in school. Students between the ages of K-12 grade should study basics in Math, Science, English and History to educate them and enable them to progress in life. Forcing our students to listen to lectures on social justice and one-way political opinions have no place in the elementary and secondary school systems. These sorts of topics are appropriate for college level adults. This is not art. This is a play with a social agenda. The writers and producers have said as much. There are other plays that could have been used in its place. "To Kill a Mockingbird," comes to mind or even "Of Mice and Men." But I'm sure that a rate R movie turned play was probably a better draw money-wise, huh? That's a shame.
Flag

www.ipetitions.com/petition/dmw-bingham-high-play-petition/signatures
Name: Kristina Spackman on Jun 11, 2012  
Comments:  
Flag

46  
Name: Andrea Almond on Jun 11, 2012  
Comments:  
Flag

47  
Name: Anonymous on Jun 11, 2012  
Comments:  
Flag

48  
Name: Angela Ware on Jun 12, 2012  
Comments:  
Flag

49  
Name: Cindi Smith on Jun 12, 2012  
Comments:  
Flag

50  
Name: Nyal Angus on Jun 12, 2012  
Comments: What a terrible thing to do to our great young people. Leaders of this should be ashamed!  
Flag
"Dead Man Walking" - Bingham High School play

Please sign the petition at: http://www.ipetitions.com/widget/view/438824
For more information and to sign the petition, please visit the website at: www.dmwpetition.us

Please take a stand with many concerned parents and community members in letting the Jordan School District Board of Education know that we will not tolerate the abuse of the public trust we place in our schools to educate our children ethically and responsibly.

We, many concerned parents and community members, wish to express our deepest objection to Bingham High School’s recent production of the play “Dead Man Walking.” This production contained offensive materials not suited for a high school play and in violation of district policy which requires drama productions to stay within “acceptable community standards.” This content included students smoking on stage, drug abuse reference, profanity through-out the script (including the name of deity and the “N” word multiple times), racially demeaning language, sexual language, explicit descriptions of rape and murder (including descriptions of female genitals being mutilated), and mockery of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. We have also been informed that the faculty and administration of Bingham High School violated school district policy in the selection of this play. Certain district procedures were not followed and appropriate district approvals were not obtained to present this play.

The play uses the Bible and religious ideas to support an anti-capital punishment political agenda. The theater students along with the students in the audience were exposed to an unbalanced and biased view of capital punishment. Our tax dollars and our students, most of whom are minors, were used to support a political agenda of the high school faculty, who are in a position of great influence and trust. This play is part of a national campaign called the “Dead Man Walking School Theater Project.” Its purpose is to influence the views of our students and community against capital punishment. We have also been informed that all proceeds from the play attendance were donated to this national project thus funding their continued political agenda.

Please join us in demanding an apology for this violation of our public trust and that appropriate remedial actions are taken to assure that this offense will not happen again. For more information and to sign the petition, please visit the website at: www.dmwpetition.us

Jordan School District
Bingham High
Appendix J

Correspondence
Dear Friend,

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project. Since the fall of 2004, more than 170 schools have performed the play across the United States and around the world. We hope you will join the growing list of students and teachers eager to incorporate the power of theatre arts and academic study into a nationwide discourse among young people on the death penalty.

The idea for the project began in 1998, when Sister Helen Prejean called Tim Robbins to craft a stage version of the book. Sister Helen and Tim realized that if Dead Man Walking could be performed on stage, its impact would be felt by thousands of young Americans, as it invites every one involved into a deeper reflection on the death penalty. Every time we attend a performance, discover the creative ways students and teachers involve other departments, and listen to the feedback of students, we come to understand just how much the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project is inspiring discernment, discourse, and reflection.

In entrusting the play to you, our only requirements are that schools who participate:

1. Involve at least 2 other academic departments (law, sociology, humanities, campus ministry, art, etc.) to provide courses related to the death penalty, which include in the curriculum either Sister Helen's first book, Dead Man Walking, or her most recent book, The Death of Innocents (order forms for both books are included in this packet).
2. Sponsor creative art and music projects on the issue (the Dead Man Walking CD, a compilation of music written and recorded for the movie, may spark the imagination of musicians and future composers).
3. Provide feedback on your production of the play, creative initiatives on campus or with other schools or community organizations, suggestions on how to expand the discourse, and what worked or did not work.
4. Do not produce the play for commercial gain.

As we move into the sixth year of this outstanding national project, we are fueled and inspired by the creativity and talent that we have seen in schools and communities throughout the country. We are experiencing first-hand the power of theatre arts and academic study to stir hearts and minds to new levels of understanding and compassion—not only on school campuses but in their local communities as well.

We hope that you will join Helen, Tim and me in this unprecedented theatre enterprise. If you care to learn more about this project, or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 617-263-7550, email me at playcoordinator@dpdiscourse.org, or return the reply card of the brochure to receive more information on the play project, including our promotional DVD.

Sincerely,

Steven Crimaldi
National Coordinator

P.S. Please visit our new website at www.dmwplay.org to learn more about the play project!

3009 Grand Route St John, Apartment 6, New Orleans, LA 70119
Phone: 504-940-6583 Fax: 504-948-6558
Email: playproject@dpdiscourse.org
Web: www.dmwplay.org

Please note: This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
Re: DMW

Robert hicks <tom.hicks@jordandistrict.org>  
To: Michael Cavanaugh <michaelcavanaugh@skaggscatholiccenter.org>  
Cc: Barbara Gentry <barbara.gentry@jordandistrict.org>, Christopher Titus <christopher.titus@jordandistrict.org>, Dennis Edmonds <dennis.edmonds@jordandistrict.org>, Richard Price <richard.price@jordandistrict.org>, Michelle Willden <michelle.willden@jordandistrict.org>, elizabeth.smith@jordandistrict.org, Anthony Godfrey <anthony.godfrey@jordandistrict.org>

Wed, Jun 13, 2012 at 7:02 AM

Thank you for your email and the kind comments. The administration, faculty, and staff at Bingham High School never intended to create this kind of "controversial atmosphere" when the decision was made to produce this play. We are very proud of the efforts of the teachers and students in the Drama Department to provide such a wonderful experience for our students.

Tom Hicks
Bingham High School

On Tue, Jun 12, 2012 at 11:52 AM, Michael Cavanaugh <michaelcavanaugh@skaggscatholiccenter.org> wrote:

Dear Principal Hicks & VP Edmonds:

I recently found on my front porch a yellow notice concerning the Bingham High School theater performance of "Dead Man Waking" (DMW). Let me start by applauding your courage and wisdom for allowing students to study and then perform the play. As a former member of the Theology Departments of both Judge Memorial Catholic and Juan Diego Catholic School, I am well versed with DMW, as this was required reading in our Senior Theology course. In addition some years ago Judge Memorial performed this amid the same objections, however in the end with Sr. Prejean who wrote the book, visiting in person Judge Memorial and actively engaging the student body in discussion, as well as the student body researching the facts behind capital punishment, as a faculty member I can testify to the growth students experiences. As those who are in education can appreciate, student growth and maturity as well as improved student outcomes is always the mission. Maybe Sr. Prejean would visit if invited!

What I find most difficult with the "notice" I received from www.dmwpetition.us is the total hypocrisy of their statement. Lets be real the issue is that the State of Utah supports capital punishment, and frankly with the majority of population being LDS, I ask a simple question: How can people of faith be for capital punishment, and against abortion? The Roman Catholics have it right when we teach that both are morally wrong, one cannot support one and be against the other. The facts prove that capital punishment is far more expensive that life in prison, along with other very telling facts that note capital punishment is never a deterrent in stoping capital crimes.

I can only hope that as with our experience at Judge Memorial Catholic HS, your Bingham HS students have grown. One last comment, I am always stunned by young families bring toddlers to the movie theater to view PG rated movies. As a child my parents never allowed this, and wish that young families would recognize that a 5 year old is not of age to view "Snow White and the Huntsman." Let us truly start adjusting the audience age with the appropriate theme and content of the performance.

Again I appreciate your courage, Judge if I remember performed a segment of DMW at the Utah State High School one act play competition, they won! But the most telling comment were by other public school theater directors to our Judge director, "we only wish we could engage our students as this performance does." Peace.

Respectfully
Michael Cavanaugh

https://mail.google.com/mail/u/1/?ui=2&ik=308939c5d9&view=pt&search=inbox&th=137e5f07b7dded46
March 9, 2012

Dear Bingham High School Cast and Crew,

Congratulations on the opening of your production of Dead Man Walking! How I wish that I could be in the audience to experience your telling of this very moving and heartbreaking story. I have no doubt that, just as your minds and hearts were opened as you studied your role in the play, so too will the audience be carried into this tragic human drama and thus moved and changed by its power.

Surely your souls will broaden and deepen as you engage in the telling of this story. But also keep in mind that to present this drama to the school and the local community you are providing a crucial service. You, the cast, are bringing an issue that we, individually or collectively, rarely think about. By provoking a discussion on the death penalty, a key moral issue of our day, you are awakening the community. You are opening their minds and hearts to understand forgiveness and reconciliation in a new light. Susan Sarandon once told me that “The vocation of acting is enforced compassion.” That is what each of you are doing as you bring this story to your community.

I send you my heartfelt gratitude for immersing yourselves so fully and enthusiastically into this national play project. You are setting an example to many other schools who will also be performing this play across our country in the coming months. Tim Robbins has given us the gift of his play but you are bringing it to life. My only wish is that I could see each school’s production of the play. Even though that is not possible I do know that as I cross this country engaging our people in a honest discourse about the death penalty I will also be feeling the vibrant energy that you are sending out across our nation and world.

Thank you so much for your partnership in this good work.

Helen Prejer

Please note:
This signature has been redacted due to security reasons.
Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project

Who: Theatre Dept, English Dept, History Dept, Art Dept, Community

What: Performance of “Dead Man Walking” coupled with curriculum in other departments exploring the death penalty as well as a community forum.

When: Performances would be February 2012

Why: This would be my “Thesis Production” for my Masters in Theatre Production.

The idea for this project began in 1998, when Sister Helen Prejean partnered with Tim Robbins to craft a stage version of the book in order to involve young people in a deeper reflection on the death penalty.

The time is ripe for a conversation in our schools and community.

What I am asking of you is inclusion in your curriculum next year without any cost to you. I will provide you with the books and study packets.
Swearing or profanity:
- Racial slurs (i.e. “nigger”) throughout, but heavy on p. 150
- Swearing, pp. 177, 183, 190, 218

Offensive sex:
- Graphic description of sexual abuse/rape: p. 48

Offensive violence:
- Graphic description of rape, p.48
- Graphic description of the electric chair, p. 18

Controversial content:
- Prejean’s story is heavily and obviously against the death penalty. It is a one-sided view of the story, but she readily admits that throughout. Although it is very one-sided, I think it would give students a chance to really explore their view on capital punishment and see not only what they believe but why they believe it.
- The book also has very religious undertones as Prejean is a nun and cites many scriptures and references to God. There is a very strong opinion that the death penalty is the exact opposite of Christianity.
- Prejean is also very critical of the justice system.

Plot summary:
Helen Prejean, a nun who volunteers in the inner city of New Orleans, is asked to be a pen-pal to a Death Row inmate. She is hesitant at first, but she is quickly pulled in once she meets this inmate, Patrick Sonnier. Although he is guilty of being an accomplice of a crime, it becomes painfully obvious that he never received a fair trial. She then helps him fight the court systems in order to get an appeal. Through this she learns about the one-sidedness of the justice system and how badly many are treated who do not have the means or “right” skin color to get a fair trial. Pat Sonnier is eventually executed, and the remainder of the book deals with Prejean’s continued fight for other Death Row inmates.

Curriculum:
MichelleWillden, our Drama teacher, came to our English department and told us that she is going to put on the play, “Dead Man Walking,” next year. She asked if we would be willing to teach the book in our classrooms a part of a cross-curriculum assignment she is required to do in her graduate program. Susan McCandless and I volunteered to read the book and report to our department. I was drawn into this book by the first page and read it in a matter of days. I was amazed by how much I didn’t know about what I thought I understood. This book made me think, heavily, about my beliefs and why I think the way I think. I know it would be beneficial to teach this book to my senior class, as many of them would have much to say concerning Helen Prejean’s point of view. I realize that this could easily lead to some very heated discussions, but I hope to also teach my students to have respect for the opposing side and to see what they can learn by listening to each other. I would be able to teach persuasive writing, rhetoric, research skills, and critical thinking skills. I am good friends with the former warden of the prison at Point of the Mountain, and he was heavily involved in last year’s execution. He is retired now, so he is free to share his views on the death penalty. I would love to have him come and speak to my classes about his perspective and also to answer their many questions concerning the process.

I don’t remember the last time I was more excited at the prospect of teaching a book to my students. I truly think this would be a remarkable experience for them.

Thank you for your consideration.

Katie Jones
English Department
Bingham High School
Dead Man Walking is a provocative, non-fiction account of a nun’s fight against the death penalty. This fight was not a mission, Helen Prejean, the nun, sought out; rather, it developed out of a friendship and the insight she gains when she is asked to be a pen-pal for a man on death row.

This is not a neutral piece, morally or politically. Neither is it pretty. Prejean describes—in systematic detail—the effects of being executed by electric chair, as well as the grisly nature of the murders committed by the inmates for whom she serves as “spiritual advisor.” However, while dramatic, it is never gratuitous. Her descriptions are appropriate to her discussion and revulsion of the death penalty. Her descriptions of the murders are also needed to provide some balance and framing for why these men received the death penalty. The language is never profane. It is certainly appropriate for high school audiences.

However, Prejean’s case against the death penalty is extremely one-sided. She effectively creates sympathy for the death-row inmate, revealing tragic and troubled childhoods as well as exposing injustices in the prosecution and sentencing of the poor and minority defendants brought before the courts. She paints vivid, emotional pictures of those who enforce the law, despite conflicted emotions, (which eventually lead some to resign their jobs). She is hostile and highly critical of the system and those who have power to change it, but don’t. Even though, she does make attempts, mostly belatedly, to reach out as well to the families of victims, her description of those attempts are flavored with self-serving compassion and feel contrived. Even the reconstructed dialogue of Prejean’s many visits with her death row inmates often feels self-serving, as if she includes it just to show that she is not letting them “off the hook” for the grievous crimes they committed. But it falls flat and is even hyperbolic in its understatement, as if she was a parent scolding a child for leaving his room a mess. But instead of the minor infraction (“How could you leave your room such a mess?”), it’s “How could you have held her arms back while Vacarro stabbed her 17 times?”

Prejean quotes Ghandi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Bible, always reminding us that Christ asked us to forgive. She gives us a play by play of each tortuous moment in the day(s) before an execution: the exhausting all legal recourse, the rejection of a stay of execution, the last time he will see his mother, the last time he will walk this floor. She includes many prayers and Biblical allusions, “I remember Jesus’ words that we do not know the day nor the hour [when we will die], but Pat knows. And in knowing he dies and then dies again.” for dramatic effect. However, what is absent is a similar play-by-play account of the kidnapping of a young couple, the terror they faced, the rape, the execution. Yes it occurred, and it was horrific, but it never receives the same equal treatment—or outrage—as the executions of the horrifically guilty. And Prejean always remains incredulous that there is or could be another opinion.

That said, Dead Man Walking will always make the reader think. It will make you question; it is an opportunity for endless classroom discussion.
JORDAN SCHOOL DISTRICT
Secondary Literature Recommendation Form
(School Review)

School requesting Selection Approval: Bingham High School

Title of Selection: Dead Man Walking

Author: Prejean, Helen Copyright: 1993 Page: 208

Approximate Reading Level: 10th grade Grade Level Use: 12th Date: 3-14-2011

Class/Course for which the work will be used: English 12 and 12CP

The Jordan School District Board of Education has established the following criteria for all literary materials, which are assigned as required reading or read aloud to students.

1. The subject matter, interest/reading level, and maturity level of the selection are appropriate for the proposed student population.
2. The selection is appropriate for the age, emotional development, ability level, and social development of the proposed student population.
3. The selection meets an appropriate instructional purpose.
4. The selection will help students to better understand themselves and others.
5. The selection has identifiable literacy or curricular merit.
6. The selection appropriately models a literary element (character, setting, plot, conflict, etc.), style, or genre that the student is expected to learn.

The use of swearing, profanity, or frankness in dealing with sex or violence may be controversial, but when a book opens a clearer vision of life, develops an understanding of other people, or breaks down intolerance, these virtues must be weighed against the possible harm from a shocking word or passage, particularly where taste rather than morals is offended.

If you answered YES to any of the questions above, please attach an explanation of how you would handle these issues with students should the book be approved.

---

PEACE ATTACH

- a detailed description of any swearing, profanity, objectionable sexual content, objectionable violence, or culturally controversial themes or passages (note page numbers);
- a detailed synopsis (plot summary) of the book; AND
☐ a detailed rationale explaining the curricular/instructional purpose of the book for the class/course indicated above. (Tell what contribution the book makes to the school curriculum, what students will learn from reading the book, and what school or course objectives the book meets.)

******************************************************************************

We recommend this book be submitted for approval to the District Literature Selection Committee:

Recommending Teacher’s Signature: ________________________________
Signature is illegible.

Department Chair’s Signature: ________________________________
Margaret Pratt

Principal’s Signature: ________________________________
Signature is illegible.

Please note:
The signatures have been redacted due to security reasons.
Unit 1: Overview

In brief

Recently, capital punishment has been under increased scrutiny. Efforts to abolish or impose a moratorium on the death penalty are multiplying. Many people, including bar associations, members of Congress, and leaders of religious organizations are raising concerns about the application of the death penalty, and new ballot initiatives are making an appearance. Several states have called for studies of the fairness and justice of the death penalty.

Centered on a controversial issue of great public concern, this unit is designed to facilitate critical thinking, citizen responsibility and voice, and writing and cooperative group work.

In this unit, students will be introduced to issues and opinions concerning capital punishment in a Web/classroom/group-work environment. Their research reports will be publicly debated in a legislative/town meeting, where a decision on the issue will be made.

Students will begin this unit by reviewing and rendering a decision on four actual death penalty cases. They will then research the Web site in groups to examine critically the concept and practice of capital punishment, engage in a role play simulation, present their findings to a group representing a legislative body that will consider their presentations, and determine whether their state should support, abolish, or impose a moratorium on the death penalty.

Rationale

The purpose of this unit is to prepare students to take on the roles of responsible and informed citizens, and to work cooperatively in a safe classroom environment where differences of opinion can be productively expressed in the process of coming to a decision on a serious matter. As citizens in a democracy, students will struggle with their own opinions in creating a public position regarding fairness and justice as it relates to capital punishment. The group work will give students first-hand experience in dealing with the dynamics of democratic decision-making based on the assumption that public opinion trickles up via grass roots efforts, opinion polls, and citizen voice. As students examine
who is eligible to serve on a capital case, review and discuss four actual cases including the stories of the victims involved, explore arguments for and against the death penalty including expert testimony, review the current methods of execution, and interpret demographic information provided on the site, the issues of fairness and justice will be at the forefront.

Outcomes

Students will thoughtfully consider the central issues concerning the death penalty, utilizing information provided on the Web site. They will also engage in critical self-reflection on the issue and learn to negotiate their personal positions as they work in groups for the purpose of creating public policy. Students will do their own research, produce a report, and debate group research findings via a role-play scenario with appropriate support for their positions, culminating in a class decision to support, abolish, or impose a moratorium on the death penalty. In addition to their group’s report, the suggestions they offer and the class’s final decision, students will also reflect on their own position at the beginning and at the end of the unit through personal essays.

Themes

Citizen agency and voice; issues of fairness and justice with regard to capital punishment; examination and negotiation of individual and collective opinions; the democratic decision-making process; personal/persuasive essay writing.

NCSS Standards addressed

(See National Council for the Social Studies Standards Appendix, and Michigan Standards Appendix.)

Time:

2 weeks +

Materials needed:

1.) Computer lab with Internet capabilities
2.) PowerPoint software or poster board and related display materials (for group presentations)
3.) Death Penalty Main Site:

- Based on your beliefs, would you be chosen to serve as a juror on a capital case? (to help examine their initial perspectives and prepare them for the cases they will be given)
- Four Death Penalty Case Studies (to serve as real life examples for their deliberation, reports and discussion)
• Arguments and expert testimony for and against the death penalty (to explore the various positions and use of evidence)

• Methods of Execution (to use as evidence of cruel and unusual punishment or as humane methods of terminating a life)

• State-by-State Data (to use in investigating issues of fairness and justice - especially regarding differences between states and ethnicity)

Secondarily:

• History of the death penalty (to provide historical context, thematic illustration of past and present public opinion, and to serve as evidence for reports)

• Stages in a capital case (to show the process, from commission of the crime through trial, sentencing, and appeals)

• Current events (to make connections between the simulations and issues influencing current public opinion)

Assessment:

Initial and final position paper; know/want to know notes; reflection papers on group work dynamics; group research projects and role-play presentations.
High School Curriculum

We invite you to visit our balanced, dynamic Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty designed by the award-winning team at the Michigan State Communications Technology Laboratory in conjunction with the Death Penalty Information Center. For teachers, there is exclusive content available by signing up here. This includes flexible lesson plans, teacher overviews, and objectives meeting national educational standards.

TEACHER TRAINING WORKSHOPS

DPIC provides free training for educators on how to teach the subject of the death penalty. Training have been hosted in Alabama, Connecticut, the District of Columbia, Georgia, Indiana, Ohio, Oklahoma, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Texas and Washington.

If your social studies council or professional association is interested in scheduling a

TEACHER RESOURCES

DPIC provides a printable teacher's guide, flexible lesson plans, teacher overviews, and objectives meeting national educational standards. To access these exclusive materials, register for free here. Teachers may opt to receive timely updates on significant death penalty news and events for classroom discussion, and your email will never be shared or sold. For more information about the TEACHER listserv or the curriculum, contact us.

CURRICULUM BROCHURES

DPIC has prepared a full-color brochure for teachers and schools considering the use of the curriculum. If you would like multiple copies of this free brochure for distribution to educators in your area, contact DPIC.

TEEN SUMMITS

A Teen Summit is a student participation event such as a mock legislative hearing, student debate, or town hall forum giving students the opportunity to interact with death penalty experts representing a broad spectrum of experiences and opinions on the issue.

If you would like more information or assistance in developing a similar program in your area, please contact DPIC.

PROFESSIONAL DAYS FOR TEACHERS

In 2008, DPIC held its first Professional Day for New York City high school teachers. The purpose of the workshop was to assist teachers in using Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty in their classrooms. Sponsored by the Justice Resource Center and the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, this all-day seminar showed teachers the features of the curriculum and how to integrate outside resources, such as guest speakers and film into their lessons. For more information on the NYC Professional Day, visit here. To learn about having a professional day for your school district, please contact DPIC.
Unit 2: Overview

In brief

Students will be introduced to the issues concerning capital punishment in a web/classroom/group-work environment. They will learn the arguments from both sides of the issue in order to reflect on their own position on the matter and make informed arguments for their positions. In addition, using the informed arguments and resources drawn from the Web site, the students will read and deliberate on the issues of ethics and justice using an actual case study in order to humanize the debate.

As early as the founding of the United States, the validity of capital punishment has been a contentious public issue. Recognizing the controversial nature of this subject, it is necessary for informed citizens/students to examine the issue from different perspectives. As a result, citizens and students alike will be able to investigate this topic and make informed, persuasive arguments concerning their position.

Rationale

The purpose of this unit is to engage students in an examination of the arguments concerning capital punishment, culminating in debates using an actual case study. In doing so they will learn about the history of the death penalty, the stages in a capital case, arguments for and against capital punishment, and insights drawn from expert testimony. In addition to learning about the complex issues associated with capital punishment, students will become more familiar with identifying and making sound arguments, engaging in critical evaluation of both sides of the issue, and marshaling evidence to support positions for both sides. Finally they will debate about capital punishment using an actual case study and reflect on their own opinion of the death penalty.

Outcomes

Students will be able to identify the central issues concerning the death penalty from the past to the present (early uses of the death penalty, deterrence, public sentiment and the death penalty, stages in a capital case, and—most importantly—the issues of fairness, equality, and justice). They will be able to
Would You Be Chosen to Serve on a Jury?

Four Courtroom Cases

Additional Resources

Links & Resources

identify the states that have and don't have the death penalty, in order to investigate issues of fairness and justice. Students will be able to explain the different positions on the capital punishment issue, using evidence from the site. The simulation will provide an opportunity for students to engage in substantive conversations regarding the issue. Students will also participate in a persuasive debate on the subject, using information provided by the web site as well as core democratic values for support.

Themes

Fairness and equality under law; justice; purposes of punishment; identifying and constructing sound arguments.

NCSS Standards addressed

(See Appendix D for National Council on Social Studies Standards, and Appendix E for Michigan Standards.)

Time:

2 weeks +

Materials needed:

1.) Computer lab with Internet capabilities

2.) PowerPoint software or poster board and related display materials (for group presentations)

3.) Death Penalty Main Site:

Primarily:

- History of the death penalty (to provide historical context, thematic illustration of past and present public opinion, and to serve as evidence for reports)
- Arguments and expert testimony for and against the death penalty (to explore the various positions and use of evidence)
- Stages in a capital case (to show the process, from commission of the crime through trial, sentencing, and appeals)
- Four Death Penalty Case Studies (to serve as real life examples for students' deliberation, reports and discussion)

Secondarily:

- State-by-State Data (to use in investigating issues of fairness and justice - especially regarding differences between states and ethnicity)

Assessment:

Quick writes; learning journal entries (See Appendix for descriptions); one quiz; group work consisting of site research and argument/rebuttal posters and presentations; one final essay; performance-based
assessment of group work (in other words, how students work together, how effectively they share responsibility for the work, and how they engage the content covered).
High School Curriculum

We invite you to visit our balanced, dynamic Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty (http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org/suite/2) designed by the award-winning team at the Michigan State Communications Technology Laboratory in conjunction with the Death Penalty Information Center. For teachers, there is exclusive content available by signing up here (http://www.deathpenaltycurriculum.org/urban). This includes flexible lesson plans, teacher overviews, and objectives meeting national educational standards.

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http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/high-school-curriculum

4/20/2011
Unit 1: Overview | High School Curriculum on the Death Penalty

Would You Be Chosen to Serve on a Jury?  
Four Courtroom Cases

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Links & Resources

who is eligible to serve on a capital case, review and discuss four actual cases including the stories of the victims involved, explore arguments for and against the death penalty including expert testimony, review the current methods of execution, and interpret demographic information provided on the site, the issues of fairness and justice will be at the forefront.

Outcomes

Students will thoughtfully consider the central issues concerning the death penalty, utilizing information provided on the Web site. They will also engage in critical self-reflection on the issue and learn to negotiate their personal positions as they work in groups for the purpose of creating public policy. Students will do their own research, produce a report, and debate group research findings via a role-play scenario with appropriate support for their positions, culminating in a class decision to support, abolish, or impose a moratorium on the death penalty. In addition to their group's report, the suggestions they offer and the class's final decision, students will also reflect on their own position at the beginning and at the end of the unit through personal essays.

Themes

Citizen agency and voice; issues of fairness and justice with regard to capital punishment; examination and negotiation of individual and collective opinions; the democratic decision-making process; personal/persuasive essay writing.

NCSS Standards addressed

(See National Council for the Social Studies Standards Appendix, and Michigan Standards Appendix.)

Time:

2 weeks +

Materials needed:

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2.) PowerPoint software or poster board and related display materials (for group presentations)
3.) Death Penalty Main Site:

Primarily:

- Based on your beliefs, would you be chosen to serve as a juror on a capital case? (to help examine their initial perspectives and prepare them for the cases they will be given)
- Four Death Penalty Case Studies (to serve as real life examples for their deliberation, reports and discussion)

http://www.deathpenaltycurriculum.org/node/93

4/20/2011
Unit 2: Overview

In brief

Students will be introduced to the issues concerning capital punishment in a web/classroom/group-work environment. They will learn the arguments from both sides of the issue in order to reflect on their own position on the matter and make informed arguments for their positions. In addition, using the informed arguments and resources drawn from the Web site, the students will read and deliberate on the issues of ethics and justice using an actual case study in order to humanize the debate.

As early as the founding of the United States, the validity of capital punishment has been a contentious public issue. Recognizing the controversial nature of this subject, it is necessary for informed citizens/students to examine the issue from different perspectives. As a result, citizens and students alike will be able to investigate this topic and make informed, persuasive arguments concerning their position.

Rationale

The purpose of this unit is to engage students in an examination of the arguments concerning capital punishment, culminating in debates using an actual case study. In doing so they will learn about the history of the death penalty, the stages in a capital case, arguments for and against capital punishment, and insights drawn from expert testimony. In addition to learning about the complex issues associated with capital punishment, students will become more familiar with identifying and making sound arguments, engaging in critical evaluation of both sides of the issue, and marshaling evidence to support positions for both sides. Finally they will debate about capital punishment using an actual case study and reflect on their own opinion of the death penalty.

Outcomes

Students will be able to identify the central issues concerning the death penalty from the past to the present (early uses of the death penalty, deterrence, public sentiment and the death penalty, stages in a capital case, and—most importantly—the issues of fairness, equality, and justice). They will be able to
assessment of group work (in other words, how students work together, how effectively they share responsibility for the work, and how they engage the content covered).

Theme developed by Atlassian Pty Ltd
Facilitation Guide

Dead Man Walking

ABOUT THIS BOOK

The book is Dead Man Walking: An Eyewitness Account of the Death Penalty in the United States by Helen Prejean, C.S.J. In it Sister Helen described her experiences and insights as she ministered with men facing execution, and then to the families of murder victims. The book allows readers to see the reality of murder and of punishment from the viewpoints of the accused, their family, and the families of the victims.

In 1982, Sister Helen Prejean became the spiritual advisor to Patrick Sonnier, the convicted killer of two teenagers who was sentenced to die in the electric chair of Louisiana's Angola State Prison. In the months before Sonnier's death, the Roman Catholic nun came to know a man who was as terrified as he had once been terrifying. At the same time, she came to know the families of the victims and the men whose job it was to execute him—men who often harbored doubts about the rightness of what they were doing.

Out of that dreadful intimacy comes a profoundly moving spiritual journey through our system of capital punishment. Confronting both the plight of the condemned and the rage of the bereaved, the needs of a crime-ridden society and the Christian imperative of love, Dead Man Walking is an unprecedented look at the human consequences of the death penalty, a book that is both enlightening and devastating.

To Order the Book

The book Dead Man Walking, by Sister Helen Prejean is available in Alamosa at the Narrow Gauge Newstand (587-6712). The book can also be ordered through the Dead Man Walking project in Louisiana at a special price reserved for official study groups. Use the form at the end of this guide to make book purchases through the Project.

Guidelines for Discussion

A discussion of Dead Man Walking can be a rich learning experience and it can also be an intense experience. The issues of violent crime and the death penalty often stir strong feelings and deeply held opinions. In addition, the book presents these issues in an emotionally powerful way through the personal stories of its characters. Because the book allows us to hear a variety of viewpoints, it affords an excellent opportunity for discussion. As the facilitator, your role will be to help highlight the many perspectives present in the book and in your participants, rather than advocating a particular point of view. It is important to consider the emotional dynamics of the session(s), as well. You will want to draw on your own skills of active and empathetic listening—as well as coach participants in these disciplines - to help manage the strong feelings that may arise. These skills will include reflecting, clarifying, summarizing, attending body language, and even a respectful silence at times. If one or more persons begin to dominate the speaking space or wander off-track, a good facilitator will respectfully shift the focus to other participants,
viewpoints, or topics. More techniques for “sharing the space” are noted below, at the beginning of the Discussion Questions section.

As you begin the session, be sure that the group has a clear understanding of the time frame and purpose of the discussion. Be particularly clear about whether you will be discussing the book, or the issues it raises, or both. This is something that may be a good lead-in topic, so that the group can reach consensus on the purpose of your time together and primary focus for discussion — unless this has been decided and spelled out in advance of your first session. If this is not clarified, and if participants come with conflicting expectations, the resulting discussion may be frustrating for some of the group, as well as for you as discussion leader.

Begin the first session by allowing participants to introduce themselves, if they are not an already-existing group. Even for groups who know one another, a quick introductory question may help connect everyone (e.g., “why did you decide to join this discussion?” or “what is one goal or expectation you have for your participation in this activity?”) Then take a few minutes to introduce some ground rules for the discussion. This is especially important if you expect significant differences of belief and opinion, but also helpful for any group. Be aware that your tone and approach as discussion leader will go a long way toward setting the atmosphere of the session. Guidelines such as these, which you invite all participants to adopt, may be useful:

- **Dialogue vs. debate.** The focus of discussion is on dialogue: an exchange of ideas with the possibility of new insights. Debate or argumentation is to be avoided.

- **Speak the truth in love.** Be as open as you can about your own thoughts and beliefs, but be respectful toward others who may hold differing beliefs.

- **Listen actively,** in an effort to understand, and remain open to new ideas.
  Refrain from interrupting other participants

- **Speak from your own understandings,** rather than speaking for or criticizing others.

- **Speak freely,** but share the speaking space with others.

- **Ask questions for clarification and to increase your understanding,** not for judgment.

The questions for discussion are listed in categories to make it easy for you to find those that suit your group and your purposes. You may want to organize the flow of the discussion by choosing questions from several categories.

If the discussion follows directly after reading the book, it will be especially important to begin the session with some time for the expression and release of emotional energy built up during the experience of reading *Dead Man Walking.* Questions 1-3 will assist in this initial debriefing. Unless the group is small, it would be a good idea to do this debriefing in groups of 2 to 4 persons, to allow everyone the opportunity to speak and be heard.

**Consider ways to encourage participation by all members of the discussion group, and to avoid**
domination by a few vocal members. Here are some ways this can be done:

- With a small group, for questions on which you would like to hear from everyone, go around the circle to give each person an opportunity to speak.

- With a larger group, it is often a good idea to break into pairs or small groups of 3 to 5 persons. If it seems useful and time permits, you can ask each group to report briefly to the larger group some insights or important points from their discussion.

- The facilitator can simply say, "I'd like to hear from some of the persons who have not said very much so far."

Discussion Questions

The discussion questions in this guide cover both the content of the book and issues raised by the book. The section below of content questions follows the book by chapter, and divides the book roughly in half, with the presumption that a satisfying discussion of the book will probably need at least four hours of meeting time. Other sections of the guide include biblical references and questions relating to religious issues raised by the book, a section on social justice issues relevant to the reading, and factual information related to capital punishment in the United States. Clearly, groups have many options about how to structure and focus discussion time.

Content Questions

Part I, Chapters 1-5 (2 hours)

Chapter 1 Sister Helen Prejean’s life leading up to New Orleans, St. Thomas, Hope House, and her decision to correspond with a death row inmate

1. Contrast Sister Helen’s own childhood and youth, pp.6-7, to that of the people to whom she teaches and ministers in Hope House, 7-9.

2. In 1980, what personal beliefs/self understanding, guided her to make the commitment to “stand on the side of the poor?” Who were some of people/writers who impacted this decision? 5, 11

3. What did she learn about the systems (economics, education, jobs/working poor, and criminal justice) to which people in St. Thomas are subjected? 8-9 How do the “gifts of her own upbringing” give her a personal advantage in dealing with these systems? 10

4. In her study of the files on Patrick, what did she learn about his crime (15), the victims and their parents? (11,17) How does she sort out her feelings about the crime, the perpetrator, the victims and “life for life” retribution? (20-22) Why do you think she includes her (quite graphic) research on execution? (18-20)

5. What does Patrick reveal about himself, in his letters to her, that moves Helen to arrange a visit? (13, 18, 22)
Chapter 2 Sister Helen visits Patrick and, eventually, his brother, Eddie. She will go through the preparation for Patrick’s first Warrant of Execution date.

1. Of what significance is Patrick’s visitor category designation, “spiritual adviser,” for himself and for Helen? Describe Helen’s preliminary visit with the prison Catholic priest: his scrutiny of her gender, dress, and attitude. 25-26

2. As she walks through “death row” for her first visit with Patrick, months later, she is struck with the meaning of its reality. Discuss her visceral feeling at each sight and sound. 27-28

3. What are some things she learns about Pat; his appearance, relationships, out-law beginnings? 28-30

4. As she drives away from the prison she recalls her own “unnegotiable moral bedrock on which society must be built…” What is that nonnegotiable and how does that create conflict for her as she goes about her ministry? 31

5. In March ’83 she visits Pat’s brother Eddie for the first time. What does she learn from this visit? What does she observe concerning a prisoner’s treatment? 32-33

6. In July, Pat receives his Warrant for Execution dated for August 19th. Helen thinks about how “surreal all of it is.” Discuss the procedure for preparation. 34-36

7. Patrick last hours are spent talking with Helen. What does she learn from him and how does she process all this? 36-40

8. Helen continues to visit Eddie, then Patrick who received a stay of execution. What does Eddie disclose about the crime, his remorse, and the trial? What did Helen, looking back, regret not saying to Eddie? 41-42

Chapter 3 Millard Farmer enlightens Sister Helen about the criminal justice system.

1. After the 5th Circuit denied appeal, Millard Farmer came on board to help Pat with another set of appeals. Helen learns about the legal system of “one-way turn-style gates.”

2. Millard discovers numerous discrepancies (violations) in Pat’s defense and trial. Discuss some: e.g. lawyer visit just one day before the trial, jury selection, unsupported claim of prosecutor about Patrick’s behavior is not questioned by defense, and ineffective defense during first sentencing trial, etc. 45-47

3. How does racism impact Patrick’s death sentence? 48-49

4. Millard points out that the public defenders appointments in Louisiana are flawed for a truly fair defense. Explain why. 49

5. What does Millard mean when he says “that is why you’ll never find a rich man on death row?” 49
6. Why is, as Millard explains, “the application of the death penalty like a lottery?” 50

7. What was the issue in the Clark case, for which the 5th circuit granted a new trial, that might help with Patrick’s appeal? 52

8. When Millard visits Patrick he finds that there are no “rocks in his wagon,” so what does he decide should be the next step? 51-3

9. How did the Governor’s new political career impact his decision about granting clemency for Patrick? 56-57

10. What discrepancies did Helen find in reading over the transcripts of Patrick’s trial? 58-59

12. Last chance of clemency is the Pardon Board hearing. Who are the people present to speak for Patrick’s life and what is said? 63-6

Chapter 4 There are four days until Patrick’s execution, April 5, 1984
1. What impact does Pat’s pending execution have on his mother and Helen’s mother? 68-71

2. What did Pat negotiate with Warden Maggio concerning Eddie? 70

3. During Helen’s visit with Eddie, what does he give her? Then when she visits Pat, he dictates a letter to the Governor concerning his not being asked to attend his Pardon Board Hearing. How is Helen affected by the letter? 73-74

4. Captain Rabelais (in charge of the death house and procedures) and Helen have a discussion about the justification of Patrick’s punishment as found in the Bible. Discuss Helen’s response. 76-77

5. In the final hours before his execution, Pat shares his feelings which he had not expressed until then. What, about Pat’s disclosure, is humbling for Helen.? 82

6. As Helen stays by Patrick for his last meal and last hours of his life, she recalls how the legal system, refusal by refusal, closed the gates to a stay, confirming for Pat and Helen his certain death. While the final steps are being taken to kill Pat, what is Helen feeling and how is she managing to help him die? 88-92

7. Moments before suffering his death, Patrick looks at the witnesses and delivers his last words. What effect did Sister Helen’s guidance have on his choice of words? 93

Chapter 5 Beyond the Execution: Putting the Pieces Together
1. What was accomplished with Pat’s execution? See Paul Phelps: 100-102
2. How is modern “designed” execution different from, say, that of Joan’s described in George Bernard’s *Saint Joan*? 101

3. What was Thurgood Marshall’s argument about the death penalty? 117

4. What evidence did Helen cite about execution not being a deterrent of the crime of murder? 110

*Part II Chapters 6-end (2 hours)*

**Chapter 6 Robert Lee Willie/Vernon and Elizabeth Harvey/October 84**

1. Women’s ministry to death row inmates is being questioned. Discuss Helen’s interview with the new warden, Frank Blackburn, in light of the controversy over her experience with Patrick Sonnier. 121-25

2. What does Helen commit to doing differently this time? 118

3. What are Helen’s impressions of Robert from their first meeting? 126-128

4. In her commitment to abolish the death penalty, Helen joins the march from New Orleans to Baton Rouge. How does she hope to educate the public with this activity? 128-31

5. Discuss Helen’s first meeting with the Harveys and how she relates to their tragedy and grief over the killing of their daughter: include their feelings about the perpetrator. 132-40

**Chapter 7 Reflecting on her visit with the Harveys/Her second visit with Robert**

1. Helen understands the Harvey’s desire for retribution. What are her thoughts about “measured” retribution to replace the death penalty? 142-44

2. What does Helen think her position and role might be as Robert tells her about his crimes? 145-46

3. What is Robert’s response when Helen speaks to him of reconciliation, taking responsibility, and asking forgiveness? 147

4. How does H’s story about W.C. Fields “finding the loopholes” seem amusing, yet significant to understanding Robert? 149-150

5. What does Helen discover when reading Robert’s files? (his juvenile records, his value among inmates, his public behavior, etc.) 151-54

6. Helen said to Robert, after listening to him tell more about himself, that she is “going to do her level best to invite him past some lines he’s drawn.” What does she mean? 149

7. In an appeal petition to the 5th Circuit Court to change the sentence, what are some of the findings Ronald Tabek will use? 154-55

8. Where did the title for Helen’s book come from? 156
Chapter 8 Helen's third visit with Robert/Pardon Board (Howard Marsellus)

1. What are Robert's arguments, concerning his being a political prisoner, which he wants to make a part of his presentation to the pardon board? 160-61

2. What "serious issues remain unsolved" in Robert's case, will John Craft present to the Board? 165

3. What is in Helen's presentation as she pleads for his life? What does she reply when Board Chair, Howard Marsellus, explains that none of the five members are responsible for anyone's execution? 166-67

4. The prosecutor's presentation is effective and, in part, very true. What is Helen referring to? 167

5. Discuss the conversation that Helen has with Howard Marsellus, years later, in terms of his now-made-public political corruption; how his loyalty to the governor let him compromise his moral values; his feelings about denying clemency in face of personal doubt, and his witnessing Baldwin's execution. 169-74

Chapter 9 Robert's Last Visits/Execution Date, December, 28

1. In the time left for her visits with Robert, what does Helen do to help him and his family prepare for his death? 175-79

2. Major Kendall Coody, supervisor on death row, visits with Helen: what are his feelings about his job? 180-81

3. What do we learn about Robert from his interviews with the media? 182-83 Later, how does he explain to Helen his feelings about Hitler, etc.? 187

4. What special request does Robert ask of Helen during her first visit with him in the Death House and why? 186

5. With a little over an hour before his execution, what brings Helen to say to him "You're a real man now, Robert?" 208

6. Do you believe there was reconciliation with Robert's last words to the Harvey's?

Chapter 10 Beyond the Execution

1. In her appearance with Peter Jennings on ABC, what does Jennings ask and how does she answer? 214

2. What are Helen's thoughts about the argument that dignity and nobility exist in our modern-day executions, done in secrecy, as compared to those in times past? 215-218

3. What if the innocent are executed? Discuss the Bedau/Rodelet study. 218-220

4. Who attends Robert's funeral and how does his differ from Patrick's? 221-2
Chapter 11 Helen’s ministry, for both the perpetrator and the victims’ families
1. What did Helen learn about the Harvey’s work with other victims’ families when she next visits them? 224-25

2. What does Helen believe will bring the Harvey’s the “peace” that Robert’s last words and execution did not provide? 226

3. Under what circumstances does Helen continue to meet the Harveys? 227-237

4. When she attends the Parents of Murdered Children’s meeting what does Helen learn? 232-34

5. What does Helen learn when she attends the victim’s group she helped organize in New Orleans, named Survive? 239


7. Sister Helen ends her book with a recounting of her reunion with Lloyd LeBlanc. Discuss how he has been able to reconcile, forgive, and reconsider the death penalty. 242-245

Initial Reaction and Feelings
1. *Dead Man Walking* is a very powerful book. What were some of the feelings and strong reactions you had while reading it?

2. Patrick Sonnier and Sister Prejean seem very different. What binds them together?

3. What scenes and images stand out for you as you think back over the book? What meanings do these have for you?

4. How did the story affect you?

To the Facilitator(s):

5. A suggested question prior to a 10-minute break: Have you known anyone who was in prison? On death row? Have you ever visited someone in prison?

Discussion questions:

6. Sister Helen said that she accepted Patrick Sonnier’s request to be his spiritual adviser because she wanted him to acknowledge his crime and she wanted to help him die with dignity. What did you feel when he confessed—better, worse, indifferent? Why?

7. Sister Helen found herself in an awkward position with the families of the victims. What was her responsibility to them?
8. Sonnier said that he had never known love prior to meeting Sister Helen and that he never expected that he would have to die to find love. Have you ever experienced or witnessed the redemptive power of a love that transcends all? How do you understand this phenomenon?

9. If you were a religious professional, could you serve as chaplain to a prisoner, especially one on death row? Why or why not?

10. Who should have the moral authority to decide who lives and who dies? Discuss.

11. When asked why she is counseling death row inmates Sister Prejean says "Every person is worth more than their worst act." Do you agree with her? Why or why not? How is this statement central to Sister Prejean's Character?

12. What do you think about Helen's attempt to minister with "both sides"—with the murderer and the families of the murder victims?

13. What Changes do you see taking place in Patrick or Robert? What brought about these changes?

14. What new information about the death penalty did you learn?

15. What new understandings about the experiences of murder victims and their families did you gain?

16. What new understandings about the experiences and needs of the families of persons on death row did you gain?

17. Are there portions of the book with which you disagree? What do you disagree with or have trouble understanding? Why?

18. If you were serving as spiritual advisor to a person on death row, what would you consider to be your primary responsibility?

19. Sister Helen believes that a nun, as a servant of God, should serve the poor, and she sees her political activism as a way of serving the poor. Does Sister Helen fit your own conception of a nun? While reading the book, did you find yourself looking upon Sister Helen as a heroine?

The Book In Depth, Quoting the Text

20. Sister Helen Prejean looks back on the life and career of her father— a good man who helped the black people in his segregated community— and reflects that "systems inflict pain and hardship in people's lives and...being kind in an unjust system is not enough" [p. 7]. Do you find her judgment to be true?

21. Lloyd Leblanc asks Sister Helen, "How can you present Elmo Patrick Sonnier's side like this without ever having come to visit with me and my wife or the Bourques to hear our side?" [p. 64] Why do you think it never occurred to Sister Helen to do this? When she eventually becomes friendly with the victims' families, how, if at all, does it affect her ideas about the killers?

22. Sister Helen accuses Edwin Edwards of condoning the death penalty so as not to risk his political career. Do you believe that Edwards is doing his job as governor by carrying out the will of the people, or should he act upon his own convictions? Robert says, "This whole death penalty ain't nothing but politics" [p. 162]. What does he mean by this, and do you think he has a point?

23. "Look how shamefully secret this whole thing is," says the lawyer Millard Farmer. "If most people in Louisiana would see what the state did tonight, they would throw up" [p. 94]. Both Farmer and Sister Helen believe that performing executions in public would turn opinion
against capital punishment. Do you agree with them? Or do you think, like many, that witnessing executions would simply desensitize citizens about death?

24. Sister Helen quotes Albert Camus on the death penalty: "To assert...that a man must be absolutely cut off from society because he is absolutely evil amounts to saying that society is absolutely good, and no one in his right mind will believe this today" [p. 22]. Do you find this a persuasive argument? What about Camus's next assertion, that the death penalty is as evil as first degree murder because it is premeditated? Does that seem a reasonable comparison to you?

25. Sister Helen believes that "to claim to be apolitical or neutral in the face of...injustices would be, in actuality, to uphold the status quo-- a very political position to take, and on the side of the oppressors" [p. 5-6]. Do you agree with this assessment? Do you believe that there is in fact any such thing in today's world as being truly apolitical or above politics?

26. Sister Helen often speaks of "government" as though it were entirely separate and dissociated from the people themselves. Do you feel this is an accurate view of government, or do you feel that the government we have does reflect, at least in large part, the opinions of its citizens? If so, do you think that it is the government's job to educate and lead public opinion or to follow it?

27. Sister Helen asks Phelps his opinions on some questions that have been bothering her. "Aren't there, I argue, some rights fundamental to human beings— such as the right not to be tortured or killed— that everyone, including governments, must respect? Doesn't the moral foundation of a society erode if its government is allowed to treat these fundamental, nonnegotiable rights as some sort of privilege, which they take on themselves to dispense for good behavior or withdraw for bad behavior?" [p. 103] What are your opinions on these issues?

28. Do you agree with Sister Helen that, according to Amnesty International's definition of torture, Pat Sonnier was tortured?

29. Sister Helen describes the legal system as "a system of gates that shut like one-way turnstiles, and you can't go back once you've come out" [p. 45]. The long appeals process would seem to ensure a fair trial for all, but in actuality the prisoner's success within it depends upon how good a lawyer he can afford to hire. Has the experience of reading Dead Man Walking changed your views of the American legal system, and, if so, in what way?

CLOSURE

Closing thoughts: Although set in a religious context, Dead Man Walking is not as much about religion as it is about ministry—being there for those in need, even in the face of evil, even when the shadow side of the human personality seems to prevail. It is the story of one woman's journey into the soul of another person and the redemptive power of love between two extraordinary people—one who had lost touch with what it means to be fully human, and the other, who helps him to remember. Is this not what ministry is—soul meeting soul and moving together toward something greater?

In closing the session(s), you may want to help the group summarize or reflect upon the themes or important points that emerged during your discussion. It will also be helpful to ask whether any individuals, or if the group as a whole, is moved to take further steps in regard to the issues raised by the book.
30. The concept of equal retribution "Life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot" (Deuteronomy 19:21) was actually given in order to control the all-out vengeance that had taken place up to that time. Rather than prescribing that retribution ought to take place, it limits the response to no more than the original offense. Does this awareness make a difference in the way you would apply this Scripture to modern-day capital punishment?

31. Although the early biblical writings call for death as punishment for a wide variety of offenses, the Rabbis made such punishment nearly impossible through biblical interpretation and Talmudic law. Laws regarding evidence and eyewitness testimony were so strict as to impose a standard of proof almost impossible to meet. Do you wish that our society would enact such strict standards to guide the application of the death penalty? Why or why not?

32. The Union of American Hebrew Congregations has stated: "We believe that there is no crime for which the taking of human life by society is justified, and that it is the obligation of society to evolve other methods in dealing with crime." Suppose your discussion group were a decision-making body with the responsibility to adopt, reject, or amend this statement. Take some time for discussion and try to reach an agreement on the decision your group would make.

33. How does Ezekiel 33:11 apply to the question of capital punishment? "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live."

34. In your faith tradition, how important is the question of guilt and innocence in determining the rightness of capital punishment?

35. In the Scriptures, we find that some of the heroes among God's people were guilty of murder at some point in their lives. What examples can you think of, and how did God deal with their offenses?

36. Mr. Percy, Hope's Father says "(Sonnier or Willie?) is God's Mistake!" Would you agree? What causes human beings, created by God, to commit such inhuman acts as rape and murder?

37. If a murderer asks forgiveness, does God forgive? Should we? If we do forgive, what impact does our forgiveness have on the kind of sentence we feel is appropriate for that person?

38. How does the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was executed as a criminal affect our understanding of capital punishment from a Christian perspective?

39. What is the difference between forgiving and forgetting?
Additional Questions for Issue-Focused Discussion

40. Were your beliefs regarding capital punishment changed by reading this book? If so, how?
41. Did you find yourself supporting Patrick Sonnier's execution, or hoping that his life would be spared? If he had been an African American whose trial was tainted by racism, how would that have affected your beliefs about the rightness of his sentence?
42. Early in Patrick's relationship with Helen, he tells her that he didn't kill anybody, but ultimately he confesses his real involvement in the crime. If Patrick's original story to Helen had been true that he had been present and had participated in the crime by threatening the two young people but had not killed anyone how would that affect your view of whether he should live or die?
43. We are not told what the alternative to the death penalty was in Louisiana, but if you knew that the alternative punishment was life imprisonment with no possibility of parole, would you support the death penalty for Patrick or Robert, or the alternative? What if the alternative were life with parole possible only after a minimum of twenty-five years in prison?
44. Can a killer be rehabilitated or redeemed? Why or why not? Discuss the reason for your preferred language (rehabilitation vs. redemption); how do you distinguish the two?
45. Many people say that criminals cannot be rehabilitated or redeemed. Do you believe this? Why or why not? How do your conscience, values, theology, and belief inform your views about the death penalty?
46. The people responsible for carrying out executions rationalize their actions by saying that they are just doing their jobs. Are men like Phelps, Rabelais, and Blackburn justified in believing that they are doing the correct thing? What does the fact of the executioner's legal anonymity indicate to you? Is Sister Helen correct to compare this complicity in the execution of criminals with the obedience shown by the servants of the Nazi regime in carrying out their terrible murders?
47. A greatly disproportionate number of the prisoners executed are black. Do you think the South's history contributed to this inequity, and, if so, how? How does that history continue to mold the lives of black and white citizens? How has it led to hellish environments like St. Thomas?
48. Do you believe victims' families should have a role or a voice in the determination of sentence in a capital case, or in the clemency process? Why or why not?
49. How does healing come to families grieving the loss of a murdered child? How can we be helpful in bringing healing?
50. How does healing occur for the family members of someone convicted of a capital crime, or executed by the state? What is our role in assisting with their healing?
51. Which arguments did you find more persuasive: Sister Helen's against the death penalty, or the Harveys' in favor of it? It is true that the Harveys' loss has hardened them against the idea of mercy; it is also true that Sister Helen has never lost a family member to a violent crime. If you were in the Harveys' position, do you think that you, too, would support the death penalty?
52. How do the lives, expectations, and attitudes of the members of Survive differ from those of the members of the group founded by the Harveys? What do these differences tell us about the lives of black Louisianans as opposed to white ones?
Researchers revealed that the chances of a death sentence in cases with a black defendant and white victim increase when there are five or more white males on the jury, and the chances decrease when there is at least one black male on the jury. These jurors have very different perspectives regarding lingering doubt, defendant remorsefulness, and defendant future dangerousness.

**Exonerations**

Since 1973, over 150 persons have been released from death row because of evidence demonstrating their innocence

**Deterrence**

The South, with the highest execution rate also has the highest murder rate at 6.7 per 100,000

The Northeast, with the lowest execution rate (most states do not permit the death penalty) has the lowest murder rate at 4.2 per 100,000.

84% of all experts on the death penalty reject the notion that the death penalty serves as a deterrent to murder

After Canada eliminated the death penalty in 1976, there murder rate fell by 23% in the decades following. It is currently at 1.8 per 100,000.

Police officers rated the death penalty as the least effective arsenal for reducing violent crime. Furthermore, police officers are most likely to be killed on the job in states that employ the death penalty.

A study in New York analyzing data from 1907 to 1963 found that the murder rate increased in the months following an execution. This has been consistent with the "brutalizing" effect cited by social psychologists in which brutality is increasingly viewed as a legitimate means for solving disputes following executions. In other words, the state leads public behavior by example.

**Cost**

In California, the death penalty system costs taxpayers $114 million per year beyond the costs of keeping convicts locked up for life. California taxpayers have paid more than $250 million to execute 11 persons

In Kansas, the costs of the death penalty are 70% more than the cost of life in prison

In North Carolina, taxpayers pay more than $2.16 million dollars above and beyond the cost of life in prison

In Texas, a death penalty case costs an average of $2.3 million dollars, about 3 times the amount of life in prison
Investigation costs are 3 times greater, trial costs are 16 times greater, and appeal costs are 21 times greater, making it prohibitive for some counties to seek the death penalty.

**Arbitrariness of Defense and Jury Deliberation:**

From 1995-2000, 42% of the federal cases submitted to the Attorney General for review came from just 5 of the 94 federal districts.

In Washington state, one-fifth of the 84 people who have faced execution in the past 20 years were represented by lawyers who had been, or were later, disbarred, suspended or arrested. (Overall, the state’s disbarment rate for attorneys is less than 1%)

In North Carolina, at least 16 death row inmates, including 3 who were executed, were represented by lawyers who have been disbarred or disciplined for unethical or criminal conduct.

In Texas, about one in four death row inmates has been defended by lawyers who have been reprimanded, placed on probation, suspended or banned from practicing law by the State Bar.

In Alabama, about 40 of the approximately 185 death row inmates – some within five months of filing deadlines for state appeals – do not have counsel.

Interviews with jurors found that approximately 50% of those interviewed decided what the penalty should be before the sentencing phase of the trial. This is before they have heard penalty phase evidence or received the instructions on how to make the punishment decision.

Researchers found that jury selection methods resulted in disproportionately guilt-prone and death-prone juries. Those opposed to the death penalty will be eliminated for jury selection in death penalty cases.

The study found that 45% of jurors failed to understand that they were allowed to consider any mitigating evidence during the sentencing phase of the trial. In addition, two-thirds of jurors failed to realize that unanimity was not required for findings of mitigation.

**Victims and the appeals process:**

The average time spent between sentencing and execution is 11.2 years.

Each year, only 0.2% of those on death row are executed.

Only about 16% of those initially given the death penalty are ever actually executed.

Evidence suggests that victims in which the perpetrator is given the death sentence rather than life without parole suffer more long-term emotional trauma by reliving the events through the continual appeals process, which most often leads to a commutation of the death sentence.
Victims opposed to the death penalty report being systematically excluded from the appeals process, and have been designated as proponents for the perpetrator rather than the victim by the court.

In one case, the husband and daughter of the victim were not allowed to speak during the sentencing phase of the trial because they opposed the death penalty, whereas the sister who supported the death penalty, was allowed to read a statement to the jury.

**International and the World Community:**

China, Iran, the United States, Viet Nam, and Saudi Arabia were responsible for 95 percent of all known executions.

More than half of all countries around the world have abolished the death penalty.

United States is the only First World country to retain the death penalty.

**Selected Bible Passages for a Discussion of the Death Penalty**


If someone has a stubborn and rebellious son who will not obey his father and mother, who does not heed them when they discipline him, then his father and his mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of his town at the gate of that place. They shall say to the elders of his town, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a glutton and a drunkard." Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. So you shall purge the evil from your midst; and all Israel will hear, and be afraid. (Deut. 21:18-21, NRSV)

**Genesis 4:8, 13-15** -- Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.... Cain said to the Lord, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me." Then the Lord said to him, "Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a seven-fold vengeance." And the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.

**Genesis 9:6** -- [God said to Noah] Whoever sheds the blood of a human by a human shall that person's blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.

**Psalm 8:4-5** -- What are human beings that you art mindful of them, mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them a little lower than God, and crowned them with glory and honor.

**Exodus 20:13** -- You shall not murder.
Deuteronomy 5:17 -- You shall not murder.

Exodus 21:23-25 -- If any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

Leviticus 24:19-20 -- Anyone who maims another shall suffer the same injury in return: fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth; the injury inflicted is the injury to be suffered.

Deuteronomy 19:21 -- Show no pity: life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.

Matthew 5:21-22 -- You have heard that it was said to those of ancient times, "You shall not murder"; and "whoever murders shall be liable to judgment." But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment; and if you insult a brother or sister, you will be liable to the council; and if you say, "You fool," you will be liable to the hell of fire.

Matthew 5:38-41 -- You have heard it was said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth." But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile.

Luke 6:27, 37 -- Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.... Do not judge, and you will not be judged; do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

John 3:17 -- God did not send the Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.

Romans 5:8 -- God proves his love for us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us.

Romans 12:17-19, 21 -- Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." [Deut 32:35] ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Romans 13:1-5—Every subject must obey the government authorities, for no authority exists apart from God; the existing authorities have been constituted by God. Hence anyone who resists authority is opposing the divine order, and the opposition will bring judgment on themselves. Magistrates are no terror to an honest man, though they are to a bad man. If you would avoid being alarmed at the government authorities, lead an honest life and you will be commended for it; the magistrate is God’s servant for your benefit. But if you do wrong, you may well be alarmed; a magistrate does not wield the power of the sword for nothing, he is God’s servant for the infliction of divine vengeance upon evildoers. You must be obedient,
therefore, not only to avoid the divine vengeance but as a matter of conscience, for the same reason as you pay taxes....

2 Corinthians 5:19 -- In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to us.

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15 -- ...admonish the idlers, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with all of them. See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.

1 Peter 3:8-9 -- ...have unity of spirit, sympathy, love for one another, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called -- that you might inherit a blessing.

Leviticus 19:18 -- [And the Lord said to Moses] You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.

Romans 13:8-10 -- Owe no one anything except to love one another; for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law. The commandments ... are summed up in this word, "Love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law.

See also Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27

Psalm 25:7, 11 -- Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions; according to your steadfast love remember me, for your goodness' sake, O Lord! ... For your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my guilt, for it is great.

Psalm 130:3-4 -- If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, Lord, who could stand? But there is forgiveness with you, so that you may be revered.

Ezekiel 33:11 -- As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from their ways and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways.

Matthew 18:21-22 -- Then Peter came and said to him, "Lord, if another member of the church sins against me, how often should I forgive? As many as seven times?" Jesus said to him, "Not seven times, but, I tell you, seventy-seven times."

1 John 1:8-10 -- If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.
You’ve Read and Discussed the Book.

Now, Witness the Play and Meet Sister Helen Prejean.

The Adams State College Theatre program has been selected to participate in the national Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project. Partnering with Sister Helen Prejean and the Death Penalty Discourse Center, Adams State is among the first schools in the country selected to present the powerful new play Dead Man Walking. Adapted from the award-winning book and film, actor and director Tim Robbins has written an extraordinary drama that explores issues of justice, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The production will be in performance April 21, 22, 27-30 at 8 p.m., April 26 at 12:00 p.m., and April 30 at 2:00 p.m.

Dead Man Walking is an example of a form of theatre known as Docudrama. With the goal of examining issues that challenge society, recent docudramas have explored war, racism, and justice. Some of you may have seen ASC Theatre’s production of another docudrama titled The Laramie Project that dealt with homophobia and hate crimes. These plays differ from traditional dramas in the following ways:

1. Docudramas use actual words of real people to form the text of the script. Interviews, newspaper articles, television journalism, transcripts from Congress, trials, etc. are the primary documents with which a playwright works. In short, docudrama is the theatre version of the film documentary. In the case of Dead Man Walking, the play is based upon the real life experiences of Sister Helen Prejean as expressed in her book.

2. Docudramas are cinematic in style because they often incorporate multimedia staging techniques such as voiceovers, projections, and video. These plays are staged with minimal scenery so that the words and experiences of the actual individuals are highlighted.

3. Docudramas consist of a series of short scenes that form a mosaic in which the “big picture” of the play is seen. Because of the quick transitions between scenes, these plays use a small company of actors who play multiple roles. In Dead Man Walking, the 38 characters will be played by a company of 12 actors.

4. Docudramas present the words of multiple characters so that truth emerges not from a single viewpoint but from multiple points of view. As you have discovered in your own Book Club discussions, the death penalty is a complex issue and this play gives voice to the diversity of perspectives that exist in our society. Of course, the book and play are about much more than the death penalty. It is as much about the role of reconciliation and forgiveness in our daily lives as it is about our system of justice. It is an amazing story about the power of redemption. These viewpoints are also expressed in the play.
The docudrama offers an evening of theatre unlike any other. It can be intense, emotional, provocative, and thrilling.

As part of your *Dead Man Walking* Book Club experience, plan to attend the ASC Theatre production. If you come to the play on opening night, come for the pre-show reception for Sister Helen and stay for the post-show talk back with her. Bring your own perspectives and questions for Sister Helen, the play’s director, and cast. Attend the other events that are planned such as the *Dead Man Walking* Art Exhibition, Film Series, and the one-day symposium that examines how different religions approach the topic of forgiveness and reconciliation. Add your voice to this discussion about justice in our society, the need for forgiveness, and the possibility of redemption.

For more information, please contact Dr. John Taylor at 587-7382 or jhtaylor@adams.edu.

This guide was adapted by the SLV DMW Theater Project from various materials including:

Dead Man Walking Discussion Guide by Bob Gross
Published by Criminal Justice Program, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)
100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, KY 40202-1396, (502) 569-5803

Special thanks to Suzanne Shriber, Kacey Stamets, Alice Price, Jeron Parkins, Vivia Lawson, John Taylor and Stephanie Gonzalez for their role in adapting this guide.
Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project
Project Materials Order Form

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We will pay for UPS Ground shipping of scripts, books and packets. Contact Emile Netzhammer to make arrangements if you need faster shipping or if you have any other questions regarding your order, at (504) 467-3545 or emilen32@aol.com.

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We will do everything we can to help make your participation in the Dead Man Walking School Theatre Project a positive and valuable educational experience. Best of success
53. Texas, the state with the highest level of executions, recently rejected the passage of Life-Without-Parole sentences. Was this sentence option rejected as a means for maintaining the death sentence? Should it be a guaranteed option?

54. Because the race of the victim is the largest predictor of whether the perpetrator will receive the death sentence, does the death penalty represent the social value we place on different racial groups? Do we attribute greater social value to white victims with stronger sentences, while attributing less social value to black victims with weaker sentences? Is this a form of racism?

**Facts and Statistics regarding the death penalty**

**Statistics and Use**

Since the Death Penalty was reinstated in 1976, the U.S. has executed 1,001 persons as of the end of 2005.

808 of those executions were in the South; 445 of those were in Texas and Virginia alone.

The US has executed 22 persons who committed crimes as juveniles; in March of 2004, the Supreme Court struck down the death penalty for juveniles.

11 women have been executed since 1976.

Support for the death penalty has dropped from 80% in 1994 to 64% today.

Public support for the death penalty drops even further when life without the possibility of parole is an option.

Currently 12 states, plus the District of Columbia, have ruled the use of the death penalty unconstitutional. The death penalty statues of New York and Kansas were declared unconstitutional.

**Race and Victim**

58% of all those executed were white, and 34% were black.

80% of the victims of these crimes were white, and only 14% were black.

Only 12 white persons have been executed for killing a black person.

204 black persons have been executed for killing a white person.

The odds of receiving a death penalty are 350% higher if the victim is white. Race of the victim is the best predictor of whether the death penalty will be awarded.
Dead Man Walking

Dead Man Walking is about a man on death row, who is convicted of killing a boy and murdering and raping a girl in around the 70’s. A nun, who becomes his spiritual advisor in the prison, tries to help him come back to God. He struggles with admitting what he did, and taking full responsibility for his actions. Throughout the play, you get both the sides of the parents who lost their children, and the side of the murderer, Matt. This play raises the question of how you feel about capital punishment.

Matt is a man on death row, who is convicted of rape and murder. He is old enough to have had a child, who is at least a teenager. He has tattoos all over his arms, and cares deeply for his boots. He is always fidgeting, and wringing his hands. Matt wants to be freed from his death row sentence, and recruits the help of a nun who he befriends. The nun is a woman who is against capital punishment, and wants to help Matt. She wears a white button down shirt, cream colored jacket, and a white skirt. She’s very neat and orderly in her appearance, and is very caring towards others.

The conflicts of the play were two folds that ran neatly into each other. One was the question posed of whether you believe in capital punishment. The other was Matt trying to be freed of his death row conviction. Many people are affected, namely the parents of the murdered children. They don’t want him to go free; they want him to pay for his deeds. In the end, Matt does not get his wish, and is put to death by lethal injection. This ending was believable, as is really did happen, and happens still today.

The strongest aspect of the play was the emotions that it made you feel. The actors portrayed their characters, and gave their well written lines in such a way that you have to feel something for what they are going through. Also, the lighting, setting, clothing, and blocking also affected the mood of the play. The only weak aspect of the play that I can think of is that maybe people didn’t get the symbolism in the clothing and furniture-less setting. But, even if they didn’t consciously understand and pick up on it, it still played a role in the portraying of emotions.

The play was really good. It makes you think of what side you’re on when it comes to capital punishment. Dead Man Walking gave a human face and life to the verdict of death by lethal injection, which adds another dimension to it all. I wouldn’t recommend it to everyone, just because some people can’t take the sadness or death. The characters and situations were believable, and that was probably helped by the fact that it was based off real life.
Dead Man Walking

Dead Man Walking was an amazing play. Bingham did a wonderful job of putting it together and performing it. I thought that the lead, Matt, was a very interesting character. He never completely stopped moving. He had some sort of twitch that moved the whole upper part of his body. I feel like his body language said a lot about what he had been through in his life and what he had done. I think that he seemed so intimidating, not only because he was behind bars, but because he would get frustrated or angry pretty fast. Sister Prejean was a very brave woman to help him. I really loved her character. You could tell that she was trying so hard to do the right thing. She knew what he did was wrong and she felt so much empathy for the families of Hope and Walter, but she felt like he needed help. She looked past his faults and looked at him as a person in need. People all around her were discriminating her for her decision to help him, but she knew what was right and stuck to it. I loved the way she talked with others. She was so sweet and willing to help, yet she stood up for herself and her beliefs when she needed to. She could even be stern with Matt, which must have been really scary. You could tell by her body language and listening skills that she cared about the people she came in contact to. The parents of both Hope and Walter were very sad characters. You could see the sadness in their eyes and feel it in their presence. Everything they did screamed emotion. They could not escape what had happened and they were looking for anything to help them feel like some justice was being done for what had happened to their children. Overall this was a great play. It really makes you think about where you stand on the death penalty because it shows both sides of the situation, as well as someone in the middle. I would recommend this play to anyone.
Dead Man Walking

I was able to go to the play Dead Man Walking put on by Bingham’s Theatre Department on Saturday night. I went with my younger sister and it was interesting to see how her reaction was so different than mine because of some of the knowledge that I have that she doesn’t.

I have never been able to go to a winter play so I have never experienced a play that was being preformed that close to me. I thought that the performers and everyone else that was involved backstage did a really good job in putting on this play. I thought that the tech crew really did a good job at changing the scene without causing too much distraction.

This play was done really well and the actors and actresses portrayed their parts really well especially Ben Wilkins who played the role of the murder. This play was different than any other play that I have seen but I really enjoyed it. It had a lot of deep themes and I was really able to think hard about certain aspects of life. I thought a lot about how I would react if I was put in this situation and had to deal with this situation in real life. It was really interesting to observe the reactions of different people with different viewpoints. It seemed very realistic to see how different people responded and you could really see why people either wanted him to die or not. It was interesting to see how the Nun was treated by the different groups of people. I thought that one of the best parts of the play was when the cast portrayed the final day of life for this murder. It was interesting to see how even though he did not receive the sacraments of the church how he changed so much in such a short time. I loved the way that the Nun was able to love this murderer and give him hope when nobody else would. It was interesting to see how this murderer treated his family especially his mother. In my mind it did not seem like someone
that had murdered people would treat his mother with a lot of respect but this play really changed my mind on that aspect.

Overall I thought that this production was really done well. The main points and themes of this play were portrayed really clearly. I would definitely go to this play again if it were produced again some other time.
I was able to attend the last showing of Dead Man Walking last night, and I actually enjoyed it a lot more than I expected. The show was very glum and it played upon the audience’s emotions. At the end of the show, more than half of the audience was in tears based upon the actors and actresses moving performances. This play was very inspirational and I think it really moved people to make things right with others that they have wronged, and also to forgive and develop trust with others.

I believe that there are many different themes to this play, but I think the most important one that I took out of it was to live life how you want it to be and accept the trials that come into your life. Matt was very against anyone’s help and getting killed and he had a poor attitude towards anything that was going on around him. But you notice at the end of the play he felt bad for his wrong doings and was trying to make up for what he had done wrong. I think the character with the most growth was Sister Helen though. She was being criticized for her doings through this trial, but she kept on helping him. In the end she found herself loving him for who his, even though he was a convicted murderer. She found forgiveness in her heart and was able to influence Matt to be the best he could be. She was able to find courage in her life and understand the pain that people go through.
Dead Man Walking Analysis

*Dead Man Walking* is a very political play. It makes a bold stand on the Death Penalty; however, when I saw the play I was not moved by it because he was dying. I was moved because it showed how death separates families. The parents showed so much emotion about losing their children, it broke my heart. Hope Percy’s mother, when explaining to Helen Perjean what happened to her child, was so numb. She stared off and had no inflection in her voice. It was almost as if she was just reciting the coroner’s report that she had read several times in disbelief. The Delacroix’s relationship is ruined because of what Matthew Poncelet did to their son. They both handled the death so differently that they couldn’t even be together any more. It broke my heart to think about these parents and how they never really got to say good bye to their children. The last parent in the show was Lucille Poncelet. The most devastating scene for me in the play was when Matt’s family comes to see him for the last time. It is hard to lose someone you love. If they are old or critically ill, you know that death will come soon. But if they are young and are killed, you don’t know when it will happen. Lucille has the heart ache of having her child killed and knowing when that will happen. When she tries to give her son one last hug, the guards block her from him. This is so unfair. Any mother has the right to touch their child for the last time, whether they killed someone or not.

I loved in the end how Mr. Delacroix and Sister Perjean are together to pray. I feel a sense of finality. The pain that was there can now somewhat go away. Something that the
audience didn’t get to see was when the lights went out they grabbed hands and walked off the stage together. I found that very tender. They had something in common; Matthew Poncelet changed their lives forever.
Dead man Walking Play Critique

On Friday, March 9th, I went to see the Bingham High School production of the play, Dead Man Walking. I did not know any background on this play when I went in to see it, so I had no idea what to expect.

The Play follows a nun that begins to write a man who is in prison on the death row as a pen pal. The story is about how he is about to be given the death penalty and she is his spiritual adviser. The nun is also narrating the story to the audience as she does a flashback of the story. She tells you how she feels and what she learned.

At the beginning of this play, I was kind of bored, and to be honest I thought it was over at the intermission. Their acting was amazing, the play was just very long, and I felt it was a little repetitive. But I ended up staying the whole play and I think the play left a very good message. There is a time at the end where she says something like, "We kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong." This line really gets you to thinking.

This play is generally not the kind of play I would like to go see. I am more of a happy ending, happy story kind of girl, so this play may have had too dark of a plot for my liking. Overall, this play was very well acted to the point where it was a little tearjerking. The play really got you thinking.
Dead Man Walking Play Critique

Wow! That is the only word I have to describe my opinion of the play. It was amazing! The cast, the lighting, the costumes, the set, the script; it was all perfect! It was so intense that I was basically on the edge of my seat the entire time. I think the one factor that made the play amazing was how the cast got into their characters. In the middle of the play I caught myself forgetting who the actor really was and believing I was watching the actual thing happen.

Mrs. Willden mentioned at the end of the play that this showing was actually the hardest one she's ever done and especially with lighting. I think they did amazing with how they used the lights. They were able to spot light sister Prejean when she was narrating and then take the spot light away and add a darker vibe with red to make talking to the prisoner kinda frightening. The stage crew did a good job making the audience feel what the characters were feeling.

The other factor of the play that I liked was the costume. All the characters had clothing that fit their personality. What I didn't observe that the cast had mentioned at the end was that all the cast was in black except the two dead teenagers and sister Prejean and the man in prison. Everyone was in black until the execution where they were in color. It was a neat thing to realize after they had mentioned it. You can tell that a lot of thought went into the play!

This play is worth watching and I am so happy that I got the chance to watch it.
The play was a lot similar to the book. I enjoyed how they had projected the statistics on the screen that were actually in the book. Overall this play is the best play I have seen besides Beauty and the Beast. We have a great drama team at Bingham!
DEAD MAN WALKING REVIEW

The play was spectacular! I loved the fact that we got to go to the play during school. What I really loved was that each student was in character. That made the whole play. Each actor was really good at making their character come alive. It almost made me feel like I was a part of the play. The costumes were very well made. So was all of the scenery. The only part I didn’t like was the length of the play. I think they could have made it a lot shorter. Also there were way too many disrespectful kids that just wanted to be out of class. At the end of the play the actors got to answer some of the questions that we had. That was very interesting. What I remember from that was that the play was very draining. Not just physically but also emotionally. I can see why it was so draining; the story was very deep and emotional. I saw some people tearing up during the play. Honestly, I didn’t tear up but it was really hard to watch. It was even draining for me. Its really hard to watch someone get executed. But during the play I was thinking about the death penalty and where I stand on it. I still don’t think that it’s the right thing to do. The guy in the play obviously had reasons and was trying to repent for his mistakes. I think he deserved a second chance. But not everyone deserves a second chance. If you are proven to be guilty of murder and there is enough evidence then you should be put to death. But what I think would be a lot worse is to have them sit in the jail cell and think about what they did. That would be the worst punishment I think. I think that I couldn’t take the guild. That would be haunting. Overall the play was good. It made me think.
Dead Man Walking

By: Brian Wood

3/13/12

I went to Dead man walking on March 13, 2012. I went there with my brother and my sister. All ready have read the book I knew mostly what was going on, so with my siblings being young I had to explain to them what was going on and what it was about. By watching the play you can understand the meaning and sorrow behind the characters. You can watch in real life how their actions can show their emotions. You can actually feel what is going on in the story, and I think that by watching the play you had more emotions.

The actors did an amazing job. They knew their lines and they knew when it was their time to talk and not to talk. The only thing that really went wrong in the play was the lighting. At the beginning of the play the lights would not start so it was held up for a few minutes. But they eventually got it all situated and working out well. The actors I think were picked out very well because they all had a different personality and it fit the character of the story very well. When you looked at the person you could tell what character they were going to play and it made it feel that much more real. The play was I have to admit fairly boring, it had its moments where it went by very slowly. But in the end the story and meaning that you get out of it is very strong and very emotional, but in a good way.
Dead Man Walking Critique

While watching *Dead Man Walking* I had a lot of good things to say about it and a lot of things that I thought could use some improvement. What worked well? I really thought the second act was a lot more interesting and really drew in the audience to what was happening. Alex Wintch was a phenomenal actress and she had me believe everything that her character, Sister Prejean, believed because you could see the passion and devotion in how much she cared about the death penalty. Ben Wilkins really quite shocked me at how amazing he was at his acting capabilities. I had no idea that he could act that well, he took on a different physicality and his body language really expressed who his character was and it helped reveal how much his character, Matt, cared about certain conversations and ideas. What I liked was the intensity that characters ended up building to the end. I was in tears at the end because I could feel as an audience member, all the feelings that the actors were feeling during the last scene. All the love, hate, revenge, forgiveness was expressed with so much power through the actors. I also noticed that many of the actors really followed their intentions, they didn’t sit on any impulses, and they “obeyed” the impulses of their character. I loved the relationships that were developed between the characters.

What they could work on? Some of the little actors, like the parents of Hope, or some of the other sisters were kind of “faking” their acting. I felt like they didn’t really make that personal connection with their character yet, so most of their acting was “forced.” The first act
was a little slow; it didn’t have a very nice flow as I would’ve wanted. I was quite confused in the beginning, and some of the actors really needed to enunciate; like the lawyer, Hilton Barber.

Overall, the play was pretty impressive, and it left me thinking a lot about the death penalty and what I thought on the situation. So I know that this play definitely had an influence on me.
Dead Man Walking

Dead man walking is a classic book that is a must read. Bingham High school's drama department put this show on casting Alex wintch and Ben Wilkens as the leads. Amazing job by both of them. The play itself consisted of a good variety of cast members. Which did not even come close to being as good as Alex and Ben, but I was still impressed. Both Alex and Ben performed in the school play, Beauty and the Beast. Alex was a napkin, and Ben was the bookseller that befriended Belle. Most did amazing jobs. The acting still could have used a little work but the leads were amazing.

The whole outlook of the play was very interesting. They performed the play inside the copper pit, which is already a small stage, but they used the space well. They put chain fence all around the sides to make it seem more realistic. They also had to have a plethora of different set ups for all the different places the nun would visit. Such as both the victims parents house. The girl victim was played by Jesse. An experienced actress who was also in Beauty and the Beast. They also had set-ups for when the nun talked to the prisoner through the fence. The Prisoner's cell. The nun’s house. The prisoner's mother's house. The courtroom. And among other sets also. The costumes were pretty simple and I realized that everyone but the nun and Ben were dressed in black. Was this for a specific reason? Maybe to show how everyone was mourning. The nun, Alex, was wearing a white dress with a pink cardigan over. This really helped her stand out from the rest of the cast because I feel like it represented the purity of Alex's character. That even though there was so much hatred going on in the play there was still the nun who only cared about others and didn't give into her own desires even once.

I didn't actually cry while watching the play but it did bring the emotions. Especially at the beginning when Ben started to shake the first time he talked face to face with the nun. He started to tell her about his relationship with his daughter and it almost made me cry because Ben got so into character that I almost really though he has a daughter that he never got to see. Another scene that was a tearjerker was the scene right before the intermission. In this scene the nun and a group of people start to sing amazing grace right before the execution of one of the men. This part made me sad because of what it meant. You didn't get to see the actual killing but you could just imagine what was going on. Probably the only other part of the whole play that made me tear up was when Alex went to visit Ben's mother. His mother looked as if she was trying to be tuff but you could just see the sorrow in her eyes and with how she spoke.

This is definitely a play I would recommend to others because I think that this play has something to teach all of us. Whether your for the death penalty or against it, this is a must see! It really helped me realize that those who are on death penalty are still people. Although people tend to call them monsters they still have life’s.
Dead Man Walking

This play takes place somewhere in the South. It is about a man named Mathew who was accused of murdering a couple and raping the girl. He is convicted of the murders and sentenced to lethal injection. The play also has a nun that somewhat councils Mathew, till he is executed. The play takes place back in the 1960's sometime and there are only two main characters which are Sister Hellen (the nun) and Mathew (the convict).

Mathew is an uneducated man who grew up in a poor home with no dad and a single mom raising him. He is the oldest of all boys in his family. Ben plays this part and he depicted it very well. Ben when depicting this character has tremors and he seemed to be a little sketchy making the audience take notice that he is not contempt with his sentencing. He wants to be released of his sentence, but at the same time towards the end of the play you see him growing and he knows that he deserves his punishment. You also see Ben go through phases where when the nun first shows up he talks to her like a girl at the strip club. But later he starts talking about god and changes his views. Another character I would like to examine is the mom of Mathew (Lucille). Lucille is played by Adelle. I think that she played this part very well too. Adelle brings out how even a criminal has a mom and that she can bring out the good in her son. Even though she is the same age as Ben the makeup and hair paint make her look older than Ben and I really believe that they are family. Adelle seems like she really loves her son and convinces the audience of this.

The main conflict in the play is not about whether Mathew is innocent or guilty. It is about the death penalty and whether it should be used or not. The play does not directly ask this but it is implied through conversations that the characters have and on one side you see Mathew’s family where they bring out the happy memories to remind you that this is a human and that he knows he is going to die
soon, and he cannot have physical contact with anyone. On the other hand you have the family of the children who were killed that remind you of what an awful crime this man committed. He raped someone’s baby girl and then stabbed her to death.

The play had very strong aspects like the lighting. It influenced the whole play. It made Mathew have a yellow spot light while in prison and you could sense his condition a bit through the lighting. Another thing done well was the staging. One could see that at the first of the play Mathew and Sister Hellen were separated by a fence and she gets more and more comfortable with him until she is actually touching him. This made the audience closer to Mathew as well. One of the few weak points in the play was the beginning they did not show how tragic the crime was. But the screaming of hope in the back ground helped a lot.

The play was amazing! It was probably one of the best plays that I have seen at Bingham if not the best. The actors were so into their parts it seemed like the real people could almost be there before us. The play was amazing; however, I did not change my stance on the death penalty. I believe that if someone could have done something as horrible as rape a girl and stab her then they do deserve to die. But I really liked how this play portrayed two sides of the argument.
The play Dead Man Walking takes place in the 1980s, in Louisiana. A nun named Sister Prejean volunteers to council an inmate on death row named Matthew Poncelet. He was convicted of harassing and murdering two teenagers on lovers’ lane. Throughout the play, Prejean becomes Matthews’s spiritual adviser and helps him to acquire peace with the murders. She helps him be right with God. She visits with the families whose children were murdered and tries to get them to show compassion on Matt, because he is a regular person who just made some bad choices. Matt, in the end, is killed by lethal injection. Prejean continues on with her life by helping others who lost children, and helped them to be able to forgive those who did them wrong, and help them pray for their enemies.

Sister Prejean is a sweet-natured nun who narrates the story. She originally wrote the book that inspired the play. She worked with the poor and then became Matt’s spiritual advisor. She wants to see Matthew live a life free of guilt, so she reads the bible and sings hymns and helps him to become clean.

Matthew Poncelet is a man who murdered and raped many teenagers, and has been on death row for 6 years. He smokes and swears. The man that he teamed with for the murders was hung for his crimes. Matthew admits to killing the teenagers. Prejean becomes his friend, and he looks forward to her visits so that he’s not so lonely. He reads the bible and tries to become clean with the help of Prejean by the end of the play.

The main conflict of the play is whether Matthew should be killed, or stay in prison for the rest of his life. Many people are affected, and the parents of dead children do nothing to help Matthew live. They just want revenge, and they think that having Matthew killed will make them feel better. Killing begets killing. What good would it do to kill yet another person? To help Matt, Prejean finds an attorney to help him, but it falls through, so nothing happens. Prejean tries to help by talking to the families to see how they feel about it, but they end up sending her away and being angry in their grief.

One of the strongest aspects of the play to me was when Sister Prejean visited the families. I think that they could’ve been nicer to her. I know that if I were them, I would probably do the same thing. However, they need to respect that Matthew is a person too, and when he dies, his family will feel just as sad as them. Will they be happy then? The plot and the play were very strong and understandable. The only weak spot I found happened when Sister Prejean would do a monologue, not a flashback. That was somewhat confusing.
The play Dead Man Walking was very enjoyable, and I think that I really connected with it because I know of someone who was murdered. I can’t imagine how you would feel to be the parent of the murdered child. It made me think about corporal punishment, and how people make choices that affect the rest of their lives. I think of men and women who sit in prison their whole lives, would they rather be dead? Should they be punished more than jail? This play made me think about my own family, and the choices that we make every day. I wonder what choices now will make or break our lives? It was a wonderful play and everyone did great! You are awesome Willden!!! :):):)
Dead Man Walking

Dead Man Walking is about a man that is on death row. The play takes place in several areas including the jail, the Mom’s House, and the park. I guess you could say that it all takes place in the Sister Prejan’s memory. I’m not sure when the play takes place but it is in modern times probably a couple of decades ago. The main characters are Sister Prejan who is the main character; she remembers what happened during the trials of Mathew Poncet. Mathew is a guy that killed/aided and abetted the murder of two teenagers. The play is talking about Sister Prejan trying to help get Mathew off the death sentence. She goes to a lawyer, the Governor, and others to try to get help with Mathew case. At the end of the play Mathew admits he killed George and raped Hope.

The main characters are all pretty different. Sister Prejan wears white the entire time and is a nun. She is probably in her late forties and has a mother that is still alive and we know she used to have a father. Sister Prejan is trying to help get Mathew off death row. She is kind and doesn’t try to force her religion on Mathew, she just pushes him. Mathew is in trouble because he killed a teenage boy and raped his dead girlfriend. He is selfish and has a habit of smoking. He compares himself to Christ and is quickly brought down to reality by Sister Prejan. Sister Prejan, while trying to get Mathew off death row, goes to the Governor. The Governor is only really worried about how the public sees him. He is tall and probably in his fifties. The Governor has a habit of not really looking to help other people out unless it can help him but in no way will he help anybody out if it could hurt him publicly. The Lawyer that tries to help Mathew is average height with crazy blond hair and an air of cockiness. He wants people to see that Mathew is a human being and not a monster.

The problem in the play again is that Mathew is on death row. Sister Prejan and the Lawyer are trying to help Mathew. The parents of Hope and George are trying to get him killed sooner rather than later. Sister Prejan’s health is put in to question while trying to fast for Mathew. The lawyer is sorrowful but not affected to much. The parents feel better, especially Hopes, when Mathew is killed. Mathew is killed by injection.

I think the play was fantastic. To try to give it weak points is hard, but if I had to try I think the music was just a little loud in one part. The strongest part in the play for me was when Mathews family came in. During this part for me was the first time I felt a little sympathy for Mathew. During the rest of the play I hated the guy but seeing him there with his family showed me that this is not a monster but is a human being with brothers that you hope will not fall into his footsteps. I think it is the strongest part because it really pulls on your heart strings.

I really liked this play. I went home and probably talked to my dad for about an hour on capital punishment and religion about it. I think it was worthwhile and I recommended it to friends. The play was believable. At the first of the play I had a hard time because I knew Alex from her coming in to class but Alex and the other actors that I knew were very good.
about covering their own personality and though I don't know the other actors they did very well too. Seeing the set before hand during class I was wondering how it was going to show the places. It was pretty good though. This play really made me think and I liked the difference.
Matthew Poncelet is a man who is on death row for killing a couple and raping the girl. After being on death row for years he began to write a nun, Sister Prejean. Soon after they start writing Matt was finally appointed an execution date. Because this had finally become real for him he requested for Sister Prejean to become his spiritual advisor. As he goes through the many trials on death row Sister Prejean is not far from his side. Not even Sister Prejean knows why she is defending Matthew Poncelet, a convicted killer, not until the end. It is then when she realizes that she loves Matt.

Matthew Poncelet is a very rugged middle aged man with tattoos all over his arms and legs. He uses foul language and is very racist. After he meets Sister Prejean he is less rude, realizes that he is capable of loving someone and is very sorry for his crimes. Sister Prejean is a kind, caring middle aged woman. She becomes Matt’s spiritual advisor and guides him through the execution process. She is a very understanding, kind, and loving woman.

The main conflict of the story is whether or not Matt Poncelet deserves to die for his crimes. Many people were affected by his crimes and his death. Still today many people are affected by the story of Matthew Poncelet and Sister Prejean. During this story there were many moments were it went back and forth between Matthew’s death being good and it being very wrong.

I thought that the parts when the cast were just completely and utterly broken by the story really showed how much of an impact the story of Matthew Poncelet made. It really made it more realistic when instead of just acting the cast members actually cried. I thought that there should have been way more emotion
I had the wonderful opportunity to be cast in the production of *Dead Man Walking* here at Bingham. It tells the beautiful, but very real, story of a nun, Sister Prejean, who sets out on an unexpected journey to fight against capital punishment. She finds her way to death row, where she begins a friendship of sorts with a man by the name of Matt Poncelet. This man is not innocent, although he openly confesses he is, and throughout the play, Sister Prejean holds on to the solid belief that all human beings have a dignity. “You have a dignity now Matt, and no one can take that from you,” she says as Matt is walking to his death.

Although the play isn’t as close to the book as it is to the movie, there are some similarities. Some lines throughout the play were taken directly from the book. But there were some differences, mainly for staging sake. The character Matthew Poncelet was a combination of the two separate beings Sister Prejean becomes close with in the novel, *Dead Man Walking*. Matt has the spunk Robert Willie, the second person Prejean advises, but a lot of the crime and the journey Patrick has. But, Patrick is more likable than Matt. Matt definitely had a harshness to him.

Another difference between the book and the play was the format. The book was basically a giant research paper, using anything and everything to show you the evils of the death penalty; on the side, it had a bit of story thrown in to keep it going. The play, although it was biased and it did have an agenda backing it up, showed more sides to the story: the families, the facility workers, even the victims themselves. A theme Willden took and ran with was, everyone in this play, is imprisoned. Prejean is imprisoned with the responsibilities of a nun, the families of the victims are imprisoned in grief, Matt’s family is imprisoned with guilt and sorrow and blame being placed on them, and Matt was literally imprisoned.

My role was a very interesting one. I was “Female Guard”, but in the script for the purpose of the pat-down in the beginning of the play. That was the only place I was mentioned. My one line was given to me, practically as a gift. This was a very tough role to find motivation and a mindset for. It took me a while, but once I realized it, it made my job as an actor so much easier. Sister Prejean touched so many more lives than she
realized. One of those lives she touched, was my character. I was sceptical at first; females on death row are practically non-existent. Female advisors, aren't in existence at all. I started with almost a mocking feel. What on earth is this nun getting herself into? She hasn't got a clue. It continued on, and as she stays with Matt, and she breaks her emotions a few times, I realize: She isn't perfect. She isn't trying to make Matt a project, spreading the gospel in all corners of the earth, including the corners of a musty, grey cell. She is helping someone who needs help, and occasionally, he drives her absolutely crazy. But she stays. I was growing more and more attached to this woman, in both curiosity and sympathy. But the breaking point, when a change occurred, was when Matt freaks out at Prejean in those last hours before his death, when he almost attacks her. I am assigned to keep Matt contained, but in that moment, I went for Prejean, to protect her, instead of Matt. He had nearly assaulted her, and yet, she stays, and I will never be able to forget that.

Guards are imprisoned, too. In their jobs, in the horrifying place where they work. They are trapped in the corners of the insanity of the world, where they are forced to remain calm, business-like, and powerful. It is an exhausting task they place on us, and that we place on ourselves.

Overall, this entire unit and my experience with *Dead Man Walking* has been extremely life-changing. I started out with a brand-new book on my desk, and no clue of what was before me, that I within the course of just a few weeks, I was going to change to a mild supporter of the death penalty to a full-out envisionist on what it means to be human, and the rights and responsibilities, or lack thereof, given to people. In my opinion, We the people of the United States have the right to keep our country, and families, and futures safe. Yet, when it comes to the death of another human life, I do not believe there is anyone good enough or wise enough on this earth to make the decision of whether someone deserves to live, or die. It is not our right to dictate that ultimate decision of taking away life. I'm not going into this decision uneducated or relying solely on pathos; I chose to write my research paper against the death penalty, and the statistics proving the the death penalty did not lower murder or crimes in the area would shock you. So I stand next to Sister Prejean, and plead, please. Let the madness end.
Appendix L

Research
Facts about the Death Penalty
Updated June 30, 2011

STATES WITH THE DEATH PENALTY (34)
Alabama
Arizona
Arkansas
California
Colorado
Connecticut
Delaware
Florida
Georgia
Idaho
Indiana
Kansas
Kentucky
Louisiana
Maryland
Mississippi
Missouri
Montana
Nebraska
Nevada
New Hampshire
New Jersey
North Carolina
Ohio
Oklahoma
Oregon
Pennsylvania
South Carolina
South Dakota
Tennessee
Texas
Utah
Virginia
Washington
West Virginia
Wisconsin

STATES WITHOUT THE DEATH PENALTY (16)
Alaska
Hawaii
Illinois
Iowa
Maine
Massachusetts
Michigan
Minnesota
New Hampshire
New Mexico
New Jersey
New Mexico*
New York
North Dakota
Rhode Island
Vermont
Wisconsin

-plus
District of Columbia

Two inmates remain on death row in NM.

Number of Executions Total: 1259

Race of Defendants Executed

- Black - 438
- Hispanic - 91
- White - 706
- Other - 24

Race of Victim in Death Penalty Cases

- White 76%
- Black 15%
- Hispanic 6%
- Other 3%

Over 75% of the murder victims in cases resulting in an execution were white, even though nationally only 50% of murder victims generally are white.
In 96% of the states where there have been reviews of race and the death penalty, there was a pattern of either race-of-victim or race-of-defendant discrimination, or both. (Prof. David Baldus report to the ABA, 1998).

98% of the chief district attorneys in death penalty states are white; only 1% are black. (Prof. Jeffrey Pokorak, Cornell Law Review, 1998).

A comprehensive study of the death penalty in North Carolina found that the odds of receiving a death sentence rose by 3.5 times among those defendants whose victims were white. (Prof. Jack Boger and Dr. Isaac Unah, University of North Carolina, 2001).

A study in California found that those who killed whites were over 3 times more likely to be sentenced to death than those who killed blacks and over 4 times more likely than those who killed Latinos. (Pierce & Radelet, Santa Clara Law Review 2005).

Since 1973, over 130 people have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence. (Staff Report, House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil & Constitutional Rights, Oct. 1993, with updates from DPIC).

From 1973-1999, there was an average of 3.1 exonerations per year. From 2000-2007, there has been an average of 5 exonerations per year.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race of Death Row Inmates</th>
<th>States Where Inmates Have Been Released</th>
<th>DEATH ROW INMATES BY STATE: October 1, 2010</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black - 42%</td>
<td>California 714</td>
<td>S. Carolina 63</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic - 12%</td>
<td>Florida 394</td>
<td>U.S. Gov't 62</td>
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<tr>
<td>White - 44%</td>
<td>Texas 322</td>
<td>Mississippi 59</td>
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<td>Other - 2%</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Nevada 80</td>
<td>Virginia 11</td>
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Since 1973, over 130 people have been released from death row with evidence of their innocence. (Staff Report, House Judiciary Subcommittee on Civil & Constitutional Rights, Oct. 1993, with updates from DPIC).

From 1973-1999, there was an average of 3.1 exonerations per year. From 2000-2007, there has been an average of 5 exonerations per year.


When added, the total number of death row inmates by state is slightly higher than the given total because some prisoners are sentenced to death in more than one state.
NUMBER OF EXECUTIONS BY STATE SINCE 1976

<table>
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<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>2010</th>
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<td>17</td>
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<td>Virginia</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>California</td>
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DEATH SENTENCING

The number of death sentences per year has dropped dramatically since 1999.

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<td>123</td>
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Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics: “Capital Punishment 2009.” *Projected, based on DPIC’s research

JUVENILES

- In 2005, the Supreme Court in Roper v. Simmons struck down the death penalty for juveniles. 22 defendants had been executed for crimes committed as juveniles since 1976.

MENTAL DISABILITIES

- **Intellectual Disabilities:** In 2002, the Supreme Court held in Atkins v. Virginia that it is unconstitutional to execute defendants with ‘mental retardation.’
- **Mental Illness:** The American Psychiatric Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill, and the American Bar Association have endorsed resolutions calling for an exemption of the severely mentally ill.

WOMEN

- There were 62 women on death row as of April 1, 2010. This constitutes 1.9% of the total death row population. 12 women have been executed since 1976. (NAACP Legal Defense Fund, April 1, 2010)

DETERRENCE

- According to a survey of the former and present presidents of the country's top academic criminological societies, 88% of these experts rejected the notion that the death penalty acts as a deterrent to murder. (Radelet & Lacock, 2009)

Criminologists View of Deterrence

<table>
<thead>
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<th>88%</th>
<th>5%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes 5%</td>
<td>No 88%</td>
<td>No Opinion 7%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Consistent with previous years, the 2009 FBI Uniform Crime Report showed that the South had the highest murder rate. The South accounts for over 80% of executions. The Northeast, which has less than 1% of all executions, again had the lowest murder rate.
EXECUTIONS SINCE 1976 BY METHOD USED

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lethal Injection</td>
<td>1085</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electrocution</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gas Chamber</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanging</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Firing Squad</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1085 states plus the US government use lethal injection as their primary method. Some states utilizing lethal injection have other methods available as backups. Though New Mexico abolished the death penalty in 2009, the act was not retroactive, leaving two prisoners on death row and its lethal injection protocol intact.

FINANCIAL FACTS ABOUT THE DEATH PENALTY

- The California death penalty system costs taxpayers $114 million per year beyond the costs of keeping convicts locked up for life. Taxpayers have paid more than $250 million for each of the state's executions. (L.A. Times, March 6, 2005)
- In Kansas, the costs of capital cases are 70% more expensive than comparable non-capital cases, including the costs of incarceration. (Kansas Performance Audit Report, December 2003).
- In Maryland, an average death penalty case resulting in a death sentence costs approximately $3 million. The eventual costs to Maryland taxpayers for cases pursued 1978-1999 will be $186 million. Five executions have resulted. (Urban Institute 2008).
- The most comprehensive study in the country found that the death penalty costs North Carolina $2.16 million per execution over the costs of sentencing murderers to life imprisonment. The majority of those costs occur at the trial level. (Duke University, May 1993).
- Enforcing the death penalty costs Florida $51 million a year above what it would cost to punish all first-degree murderers with life in prison without parole. Based on the 44 executions Florida had carried out since 1976, that amounts to a cost of $24 million for each execution. (Palm Beach Post, January 4, 2000).
- In Texas, a death penalty case costs an average of $2.3 million, about three times the cost of imprisoning someone in a single cell at the highest security level for 40 years. (Dallas Morning News, March 8, 1992).

PUBLIC OPINION

- A 2010 poll by Lake Research Partners found that a clear majority of voters (61%) would choose a punishment other than the death penalty for murder, including life with no possibility of parole with restitution to the victim's family (39%), life with no possibility of parole (13%), or life with the possibility of parole (9%).
- A 2009 poll commissioned by DPIC found police chiefs ranked the death penalty last among ways to reduce violent crime. The police chiefs also considered the death penalty the least efficient use of taxpayers' money.

Percent Ranking Item as One of Top Two or Three

| Lack of law enforcement resource | 20% |
| Drug/alcohol abuse              | 20% |
| Family problems/child abuse     | 14% |
| Lack of programs for mentally ill | 12% |
| Crowded courts                  | 7%  |
| Ineffective prosecution         | 6%  |
| Too many guns                   | 5%  |
| Gangs                           | 3%  |
| Insufficient use of the death penalty | 2% |

The Death Penalty Information Center has available more extensive reports on a variety of issues, including:

- "Struck By Lightning: The Continuing Arbitrariness of the Death Penalty 35 Years After Its Reinstatement in 1976" (June 2011)
- "The Death Penalty in 2010: A Year End Report" (December 2010)
- "The Death Penalty in 2009: Year-End Report" (December 2009)
- "Smart on Crime: Reconsidering the Death Penalty in a Time of Economic Crisis" (October 2009)
- "A Crisis of Confidence: Americans' Doubts About the Death Penalty" (2007)
- "Blind Justice: Juries Deciding Life and Death with Only Half the Truth" (2005)
- "Innocence and the Crisis in the American Death Penalty" (2004)
- "Innocence and the Death Penalty: The Increasing Danger of Executing the Innocent" (1997)
- "Twenty Years of Capital Punishment: A Re-evaluation" (1996)
Suggestions for how to connect Dead Man Walking into the curriculum of various subjects


Government/History: Examine legislation about the death penalty and its history in our country and other countries. [http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org](http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org) has interactive maps of various states, and information about court cases.

English/Journalism: The book, Dead Man Walking, or selections from it can be read, discussed and analyzed. Study questions available (religion department has them, or contact Tri-School Theatre). Students working on the production can be interviewed for articles.

Foreign Language: Examine the policies of countries that speak Spanish, French, etc. Look at cultural influences of government policy on and as a result of capital punishment.

Music: Ask students to compose theme music for some of the lead characters in the play. Explore expression of character through music. Or, students choose a piece that best represents the mood of the production. Analyze—why? How is mood created with music?

Math: Examine statistics about the death penalty in this country, and in California. Compare and contrast with statistics for crime, executions, and policies across the country, and against that of other nations, with and without the death penalty.

Computer/Web Design: Have students go to [http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org](http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org) and explore the interactive website features.

Science: Have students research medical professionals' involvement with the death penalty—doctors used to prescribe dosages and confirm death. Why is lethal injection used as the primary method of execution in this state? Lethal injection is a series of injections—why? Why was the electric chair deemed cruel and unusual punishment?

Art/Photography: Ask students to create a work in response to the Death Penalty. Students can respond to the play, book, or extended research online. Discuss what the response is and how it finds artistic expression.

Additional Web site resources

- [http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org](http://deathpenaltycurriculum.org)
- [http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/capital.html](http://www.cdcr.ca.gov/Reports_Research/capital.html)
  (detailed information from the department of corrections about death row and executions in California, including photos of death row and listing of executions and other deaths on death row.)
- [http://deathpenaltyinfo.org](http://deathpenaltyinfo.org)
- [http://www.dmwplay.org](http://www.dmwplay.org)
Blood on Our Hands: An Interview with Sister Helen Prejean

by Shannon Presler
2009-01-18 21:05:32

Sister Helen Prejean is a vowed member of the Sisters of St. Joseph of Medaille. She has worked tirelessly for the abolition of the death penalty after befriending Patrick Sonnier on death row. Her book, Dead Man Walking, which became the subject of the Oscar winning film of the same name, recounts this time of her life. Since then she has written another book, Death of Innocents, which chronicles the many innocent people that have been convicted and executed by the state.

Sister Helen Prejean has won numerous awards and speaks over two hundred times a year. Her message has taken her into the private chambers of presidents, prime ministers, and the Pope, whom she personally met and influenced to change the Catholic Church's ambiguous stance on capital punishment. In this interview, Sister Prejean shares some of her journey, past and present. She also tells of Manuel Ortiz and Cathy Henderson, two innocent people that she is fighting for today.

The Other Journal (TOJ): What brought you to intersect with the lives of those men on death row?

Sister Helen Prejean (SHP): In 1982, I wrote about a person on death row in Louisiana by the name of Patrick Sonnier: his story is told in Dead Man Walking. I went to visit him, and it was the first time I was in the presence of another human being who had knowingly done evil and killed another human being. The transcendent part of that experience for me was when I looked in his eyes, because I was sort of afraid of him. I guess I thought that in some way, someone who had murdered someone else, their eyes must look different or their face in some way would mirror someone who was bent on evil or something. It was so amazing, Shannon, because instead when I looked into his eyes, I remember thinking very clearly, "Whatever he has done, as bad as it may be, he's worth more than the worst act of his life."

That began then a habit of presence, being in the presence of someone who had a tremendous amount of goodness in him that began to be revealed. I also had to stand present with the victims' families, because a teenage couple had been killed. So the "doing" part that we're talking about is getting ourselves to be physically present: it is going onto death row. Following the call to go visit or write, and all that action begins to take you down a road, and on this road, you have these encounters.
So first was the man on death row, who with another person had killed these teenage kids. Then there was the road of going and meeting the parents whose kids had been killed. The girl’s parents were very angry at me, and they didn’t want to have anything to do with me. It was an experience of making a mistake because I hadn’t reached out to them earlier, and they were angry at me.

I experienced rejection, which I felt I deserved, because in their anger and their grief they were all caught up in a societal symbol, a cultural symbol, that says the way you are going to relieve this sadness and the way that you are going to deal with your rage and your loss is that you will be allowed to witness the death, the killing, of the one who killed your child.

And so this was my first experience, and there was a kind of guilt, in being in the presence of the girl’s father and mother. Because I knew that I hadn’t reached out; I hadn’t written; I hadn’t known what to do because I was spiritual advisor to the people that had killed their kids. There was a powerlessness in that and a guilt, like “who am I to go and accompany people on death row? I haven’t had a murder in my family, I haven’t had my sister or my niece or my mother killed.”

Walking in the presence of such pain, it’s very hard to hold onto the principles of human rights, compassion, and life and not give in to the seeking of vengeance—even though it’s legalized, that’s basically what the death penalty is. So that was an experience of discovery for me, and I resolved out of that experience that I would reach out to murder victims’ families, and that I would never hesitate again.

By being in the presence of the other couple, the parents who had lost their son, I also experienced a whole other reality, a reality of people who had recognized that the chair was always going to be empty in which their young son David had sat. Their spiritual journey was not to let the hatred overtake them, not to lose the love they had inside, so they taught me that it’s possible for human beings to be thrown into this kind of fire of abrupt and violent loss of their only son and yet to not let the love be overcome.

I came to a new understanding of forgiveness as a positive way of being, a way of being present so that the person doesn’t succumb to what society is offering them as the antidote to their rage and their grief, which is, “In my name I want you to kill again; I want you to kill.”

It is hard for executions to take place without the victims wanting it. I use the image of a river of fire—in fact I am writing about this in my spiritual memoir—where the fire means to be illumined from within but to be adrift in the river, always moving. You move with a current; it’s not like you create a river, but you do put the steerage on your boat, and you do set the tiller to go in the current or to avoid it.

There were currents I got caught up in. One on the perpetrator’s side and being brought into all that suffering, a suffering that includes the parents and the family of the one being executed. Nobody ever, ever relives on them, the perpetrators. The first man I was with, Patrick Sonnier, his mother couldn’t even go into the town because she was so hated and reviled by the people who lived in the town. So I get to enter into their suffering, too.

And then over on the side of the victims’ families, what I discovered is that the gift that we give each other is not so much what we do for each other, it’s our ability to be present and to say to the other person by your presence and by your constant care that you care for them. This has to be concrete, not in words, nor even simply in prayer. It has to be embodied, and it has to be manifested. That is what shores up people’s dignity and helps them to feel worth it, that someone cares enough to be with them. So those are some of the first things I’ve learned and am still learning from this experience.

TOJ: That’s beautiful. At my graduate school we have a class, Interpersonal Foundations, where the core message is that of presence and being there. Actually your quote, “Let me be the face of Christ for you” is a mantra of the class, and so there is a bunch of us being trained up in the importance of Presence, capital ‘p’ presence.

SHP: That’s wonderful. That is the core thing, Shannon, that really is the core thing. What graduate school is this?

TOJ: It’s a place called Mars Hill Graduate School in Seattle. It’s a school that combines counseling with theology.

http://www.theotherjournal.com/article.php?id=571
SHP: That is wonderful. That is the category, or phenomena, that does hold all that you’re trying to bring together, so I’m glad that I fit in your groove.

TOJ: You are digging that groove in front of our feet. What advice would you give to people who, like me, experience discomfort trying to be present with those on the margins or those who are already labeled and faceless to society. You’ve been there so many times—are there any practical words of wisdom you can give to us to help us through those times? What’s helped you get through it and transform your perspective?

SHP: You know, it’s for us to reflect on our own discomfort, because I think as we develop a mature spirituality, we are able to be in the presence of anyone of so-called celebrity, like the President of the United States or the Pope or whatever, and not get an inflated high from it or begin name-dropping or bragging about how we met this movie star or that Pope or whatever. But then we must also realize that whatever category society has put on marginalized people, once we are with these people, if we are having a conversation in a soup kitchen with a homeless person, if we are talking to a woman on the street, these categories also disappear.

Edwina Gately started a house for recovering prostitutes called Genesis house in Chicago. One time the ex-prostitutes gave a retreat. They were the presenters! And they said, "You oughtta’ come.” I said, "You better believe I’m gonna come!” Because you need to hear people’s stories.

The things that make us uncomfortable are the distancing words we have that we put around them; they construct the basis of our discomfort. We say things like “Oh, this person’s a prostitute” or “Oh, this person is homeless” or “Oh, this person is an immigrant.” We categorize someone as “the poor,” or “a Muslim,” you know, possibly even “a terrorist.”

What feeds those things and that uncomfortableness is separation. In fact, uncomfortableness is the milder stage because it quickly turns to fear and then we’re easily, easily manipulated by politicians or anybody because of our fears.

As long as we are not meeting real people and having real conversations, we start saying “these people” or “those people,” and that is the source of our uncomfortableness; it’s the separation that we have built up inside ourselves. Then we begin to imagine them as threats to us. We think “They could do this to us” or “They could do that to us” or we do transference of something we see on the evening news or we heard about. We see one immigrant family ripping people off and conclude “That’s what those people do.”

What is really hard about the experience of being middle class or affluent is that we live in neighborhoods where we do not come into contact with people who are actually poor and struggling. We have to build up those experiences ourselves; we have to initiate them; we have to be the one to cross over into it, because you can’t just have a panel discussion and say, “Now we’ll have people share about being homeless.”

There’s a guilt in being middle class and having what we need. We have that guilt if we are not realizing the freedom that wealth gives us and the energy it gives us because we don’t have to spend half of our day, as so many women and children do, as so many villages of the world, getting water. We have energy because we don’t have to spend it on such things. Even if we are going to graduate school, look at what this is: We’ve not only gotten a degree, but we are getting another degree, we can be developing that. But if we do that for service and out of servanthood, in the biblical sense of Isaiah and Jesus, the Gandhi sense of that, then we can see it as releasing this energy and get something given to us in order for us to become the servant of all in the new way. And then the guilt drops away, because then we are using the energy we have been given for others.

TOJ: That’s great. I find myself, even here, being invited into your habit of presence and I am torn between wanting to ask questions for myself and wanting to ask questions for the magazine.

SHP: Don’t discount your questions, because maybe the questions you really want to ask are the questions that the magazine really needs asked.

TOJ: I worked with the elderly, and their families, who were suffering with Alzheimer’s disease. You often speak out about the death penalty and justified killing of death row inmates by the state. In Washington we recently passed the “Death with Dignity” initiative, and I was wondering if
you have any thoughts about assisted suicide in the elderly or other culture
-of-life issues.

SHP: Whenever life is at a vulnerable point, from the very beginning of life
to the very end of life, we have to really watch when the state code of law
allows the ending of human life, and we make it legal, because we need to
build moats around the castle of life, especially with older people. Now, so
many elderly people are put into homes and other places where very
quickly the right to die can become the duty to die. There is just not the
discrimination, care, and presence that goes into that decision. There should
be pain management but anyone in chronic pain, anyone who cries to die,
it's tempting to want to bring their death. The Roman soldiers used to
break the legs of the people being crucified to hasten their deaths, not
exactly a painless death.

Of course, with the management of pain you also have some qualifiers. You
can have people strapped into wheelchairs, their heads bent over because
they're so drugged, they're already in half-life, and then it becomes an
easy, easy step to just take it all away. Just give them enough so that it
finishes people off, simply because the person is old, or the person is sick—
those stages where other people are in charge of those decisions, or where
the dignity of the self has lost all agency.

Killing them destroys us. It deteriorates us as a society. We have to uphold
the dignity of the human person. Pain management, especially with the
drugs that are possible now, morphine and so forth, is possible in almost all
instances. Things are always complex, but the bedrock is the dignity of
human life. Once you put something into law that says "Well, you know,
this person is asking to die, so here are our steps," it can never codify all
the possibilities and situations of human life; it never can. So once we
codify certain conditions that allow for someone to take drugs that can kill
them, at the patient's request or at the family's request, I think we have to
be abhorrent of that.

In terms of the magazine's topic of death and dying, what I deal with is not
just death and dying, it's death at the hands of the state. It's being killed.
Being killed and dying are two things that are very different from each
other. It's one thing that one's own being through disease or whatever is
coming to the end of life, and the acquiescence to that, and being helped to
enter into that stage. But being killed is an entirely different reality where
people imagine and anticipate their own death a thousand times before
they actually die. It's just a whole other reality.

When I am being present to people, it combines walking with them,
accompanying them, and being present to them, but furiously resisting
their death every step of the way. Part of my standing with them is that
they know I am fiercely resisting their death in every way that I can. Even
my presence at an execution is not to be a witness for the state, but I am
there so that they can see my face. It is always with this very active
resistance to the death, with my will and everything within my power. As
soon as I visit a death row inmate, I go get with the lawyers, get with the
news, get with the legal team and whatever we need there to not go
quietly into this dark night and let the state kill somebody.

The irony and the surreal aspect of what's going on with the killing now is
that it's masked as dying and that there is a medical, humane procedure to
put someone to sleep. They even, Shannon, give a paralyzing drug to the
person being killed so that witnesses do not see them struggle at all.

TOJ: I remember reading that in your book, and that was horrifying.

SHP: When we're talking about death and dying, the reality is different
when the state is killing you.

TOJ: That is a really important distinction to make; I am glad you made
that. One noticeable thing about your books and speeches is that you
repeatedly mention the names of the people you have been with—Dobie
Williams, Joseph O’Dell, Patrick Sonnier—is there anyone right now that
you are working for and fighting for that you could mention?

SHP: Two people. One is Manuel Ortiz. He is on death row in Louisiana. He
is innocent, and he has been on death row for fourteen years, and
ironically, his hearing about his innocence is coming up in February. The
lawyers have been working, and they really have gotten a cumulative
amount of evidence to show that he is, in fact, an innocent person.

Also, a woman on death row in Texas. Her name is Cathy Henderson. She
is accused of murdering a baby while she was babysitting. The first thing I
did when I went to see her was to get her pro bono lawyers. They took the case, and they got forensic experts to show that what Cathy had said all along was true: that it was an accident. They said that she had murdered the baby, but in truth, it was an accident. Or at least, you could not definitively, positively say it had to be murder.

Those are the two people that I am visiting presently, and both of them are innocent. I have been visiting Manuel for over eight years and Cathy for four or five years.

TOJ: Is there anything we can do to help you in your work or to get the word out?

SHP: You want Washington to end the death penalty. You want to stop state killing. You want to be a part of ending this. You have got to shut down the machinery of death. You have got to shut it down. The people of Washington State, from what I know of them, from my many visits there, are not wedded to the death penalty by any means. Most people do not reflect on it deeply. We are part of systems.

One thing is to write to people on death row. How many people do you have on death row?

TOJ: I do not know.

SHP: That would be the first thing. How many people have you killed? I have to say "you" because we are a democracy. Anytime someone has been killed in our state, it's done in our name, and if we haven't resisted it, we are part of it.

So just get information. Who is on death row? Who has been executed? Just start digging into the issue. It is an important life and dignity issue. Then just get in there and take it from there. Maybe write to someone on death row in Washington State. Maybe begin to get in touch with the pro bono lawyers that are taking the cases and find out what happens in the courts and who goes to death row and who doesn't.

I found when I went to murder victim support groups that people stay away from victims' families as much as they do the death row inmates. They had different reasons, but when people are in great pain, our society does not know how to be them. They said, "People stay away from us. They don't know what to say to us." You have to reach out to both sides. You have to reach out to the prisoners. They are building more and more supermax prisons. Two-thirds, Shannon, of people in prison in the United States are there for nonviolent crimes—they're there for drugs or economic related crimes like forging checks.

We have 2.3 million people, and one in every one hundred adults is incarcerated. The death penalty is the tip of the iceberg, but there is a huge iceberg. We are the biggest incarcerator in the world; we are doing enforced exile on people, just like Stalin did in his gulags. It takes them away from family. It takes them away from everyone they know and love and puts them in an island of cement, steel, and bars. It is a terrible, terrible thing. All the deepest spiritual traditions, whether it's Islam, Judaism, hold that we are to love one another as our brother and sister. It is a deep thing to realize that all our separations and fears are artificial because we all are brothers and sisters to one another. So it is these needs, the suffering cries of our society, that call to us. Then we begin to respond through our acts or like Saint John says, "Do the truth with deeds of love." We have to embody love and there are great opportunities for us because the needs are so great. There is so much suffering, so much diminishment of people. To hear the cry is the first step.

All the wisdom traditions speak that blessed are the eyes that see what you see, and blessed are the ears that hear what you hear. In the Catholic Church during this Advent season, the Scripture reading the other morning was from Isaiah, and it said, "What has been hidden will be revealed." All spiritual traditions have that. It is developing the spiritual capacity to be able to hear and to be able to see.

TOJ: Finally, you mentioned that you were writing your spiritual memoir, *River of Fire*, when should we expect that?

SHP: Sometime around fall of 2010.

TOJ: Thank you so much for speaking with us. I often read of Dorothy Day and Thomas Merton, and it is thrilling to be able to speak to someone who is living the life and blazing a trail for the rest of us.

http://www.theotherjournal.com/article.php?id=571

7/1/2010
SHP: Glad to be of service.

Notes
2. 1-1000, for more information go to http://www.yeson1000.org.
5. For information go to http://www.savecathyhenderson.org.
6. There are 9 people on death row in Washington State. See www.deathpenaltyinfo.org for more information.
7. Since 1608, 109 people in Washington State have been executed. Between 1608 and 1976, 14,499 people were executed in the United States; between 1976 and 2008, 1,132 people were executed in the United States; thus, since 1608, 15,621 people have been executed in the United States. See www.deathpenalty.org for more information.

awecarison: You: A piercing view of democracy. This article is a gift, and I think Sister Helen expresses unique sentiments that the Christian has to offer by equating the President and the Pope with the Inmates on death-row. I'm struck at that by her words and the obvious life behind them when she says that a mature spirituality leads us to eliminate society's categories while sitting before another: I wonder about the interplay of that... Is it the mature spirituality that enables us to love on society's "worst" or is it loving on society's "worst" that enables a mature spirituality? I suspect it is both.

shannon: yeah awecarison, I love your comments. Speaking with Sister Helen was truly an encounter with the Spirit. I have never experienced such an otherly feeling of strength and tenderness emanating from an individual like I did her. I expect that great love leaves these things hanging on anyone that dares to do so.

shannon: "...makes you realize the Dead Man Walking truly belongs on the shelf in the library in the Fiction category." "Being devout Catholics, the norm would be to look to the church for support and healing. Again, this need for spiritual stability was stolen by Sister Prejean." Victim Survivors, Dead Family Walking From: I. Dead Family Walking: The Bourque Family Story of Dead Man Walking, by D. D. devincio, Goldcamp Publishing, 2006 "On November 5, 1977, the Bourque's teenage daughter, Loreta, was found murdered in a trash pile near the city of New Iberia, Louisiana lying side by side near her boyfriend with three well-placed bullet holes behind each head. " www.desdfamilywalking.com/ contact 7J. Eder, 337-567-5840, cajunmixes@bellsouth.net Sister Helen Prejean and the Death Penalty Dudley Sharp, Justice Metters, contact info below II. The Victims of Dead Man Walking by Michael L. Varnado, Daniel P. Smith comment -- A very different story than that written by Sister Helen Prejean. Detective Varnado was the investigating officer in the murder of Father Hathaway. 2003 III. Death 'Of Truth: Sister Prejean's new book The Death Of Innocents: An Eyewitness Account of Wrongful Executions. For some years, there has existed a consistent pattern, from death penalty opponents, to declare certain death row inmates to be actually innocent. Those claims have, consistently, been 70-83% in error. ("ALL INNOCENCE ISSUES -- THE DEATH PENALTY") Keep that in mind with "Death of Innocents". Readers should be very careful, as they have no way of knowing if any of the fact issues in either of the two cases, as presented by Sister Prejean, are true. Readers would have to conduct their own thorough, independent examination to make that determination. You can start here. Four articles (a) "FOR GOOD REASON, JOE O'DELL IS ON DEATH ROW" scholar(DOT)id.vt.edu/VA-news/VA- Rilo/Issues/1999/v9905726/07210224.htm quote: "The DNA report commissioned by O'Dell and his lawyers actually corroborates O'Dell's guilt. There is a three-probe DNA match indicating that the bloodstream on O'Dell's clothing is indeed consistent with the victim Helen Schartner's DNA as well as her blood type and enzyme factors." "There is certainly no truth to O'Dell's accustion that evidence was suppressed or witnesses intimidated by the prosecution." (b) "Selene district attorney disputes author's claims in book" www(DOT)shreveporttimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20050124/NEWS03/501240328/1060 quote: "I don't know whether she is deliberately trying to mislead the public or if she's being misled by others. But she's wrong." District Atty. Burkett, dburkett(AT)Aol.com. (c) Book Review: "Sister Prejean's Lack of Credibility: Review of "The Death of Innocents", by Thomas M. McKenna (New Oxford Review, 12/05). http://www.newoxfordreview.org/reviews.jsp?id=1205- manuscript. "The book is moreover riddled with factual errors and misrepresentations."

"Williams had confessed to repeatedly stabbing his victim, Sonya Knippers." "This DNA test was performed by an independent lab in Dallas, which concluded that there was a
one in nearly four billion chance that the blood could have been someone's other than Williams's - despite repeated claims that (Prejean) cares about crime victims, implying that the victim's husband was a more likely suspect but was overlooked because the authorities wanted to convict a black man." . . . a Federal District Court . . . stated that 'the evidence against Williams was overwhelming.' " The same court also did not find any evidence of racial bias specific to this case. (Prejean's) broad brush strokes paint individual jurors, prosecutors, and judges with the term "racist" with no facts, no evidence, and, in most cases, without so much as having spoken with the people she accuses. "(id) Prejean also claims that Dobia Williams was mentally retarded. But the same federal judge who thought she deserved a new sentencing hearing also upheld the finding of the state Sanity Commission report on Williams, which concluded that he had a "low intelligence," and did not suffer from schizophrenia or other major affective disorders. Indeed, Williams's own expert at trial concluded that Williams's intelligence fell within the "normal" range. Prejean mentions none of these facts. In addition to lying to the jury about how he came to have blood on his clothes, the best evidence of O'Dell's guilt was that Schartner's (the rape/murder victim's) blood was on his jacket. Testing showed that only three of every thousand people share the same blood characteristics as Schartner. Also, a cellmate of O'Dell's testified that O'Dell told him he killed Schartner because she would not have sex with him. "After the trial, LifeCodes, a DNA lab that O'Dell himself praised as having "an impeccable reputation," tested the blood on O'Dell's jacket -- and found that it was a genetic match to Schartner. When the results were not to his liking, O'Dell, and of course Sr. Prejean, attacked the reliability of the lab O'Dell had earlier praised. Again, as with Williams's conviction, the federal court reviewing the case characterized the evidence against O'Dell as "vast and overwhelming." " Sr. Prejean again sees nefarious forces at work. Not racism this time, for O'Dell was white. Rather, she charges that the prosecutors were motivated to convict by desire for advancement and judgeships. Yet she never contacted the prosecutors to interview them or anyone who might substantiate such a charge. (Prejean) omits the most damning portion of O'Dell's criminal record: an abduction charge in Florida where O'Dell struck the victim on the head with a gun and told her that he was going to rape her. This very similar crime helped the jury conclude that O'Dell would be a future threat to society, it supports the other evidence of his guilt and thus undermines Prejean's claim of innocence. There is thus a moral equivalence for Prejean between the family of an innocent victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim and the newfound victim 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shied away from any argument, fulfills or otherwise, which opposed the death penalty. She has abandoned biblical texts for only one reason: the text conflicted with her personal beliefs. Sister Prejean rightly cautions: "Many people sift through the Scriptures and select truth according to their own templates." (Progressive, 1/96). Sadly, Sister Prejean appears to do much worse. The sister now uses that very same biblical text: "Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone" as proof of Jesus') "unequivocal" rejection of capital punishment as "revenge and unholy retribution!" (see Sister Prejean's 12/12/95 fundraising letter on behalf of the Saga Of Shame book project for Quixote Center/Equal Justice Initiative/V. Redemption and the death penalty) The movie Dead Man Walking reveals a perfect example of how just punishment and redemption can work together. Had rapist/murderer Matthew Poncelet not been properly sentenced to death by the civil authority, he would not have met Sister Prejean, he would not have received spiritual instruction, he would not have taken responsibility for his crimes and he would not have reconciled with God. Had Poncelet never been caught or had he only been given a prison sentence, his character makes it VERY clear that those elements would not have come together. Indeed, for the entire film and up until those last moments, prior to his execution, Poncelet was not truthful with Sister Prejean. His lying and manipulative nature was fully exposed at that crucial time. It was not at all surprising, then, that it was just prior to his execution that all of the spiritual elements may have come together for his salvation. It was now, or never. Truly, just as St. Aquinas stated, it was Poncelet's pending execution which may have led to his repentance. For Christians, the most crucial concerns of Dead Man Walking must be and are reflection and eternal salvation. And, for that reason, it may well be, for Christians, the Most Important Pro-Death Penalty Movie Ever Made. A real life example of this may be the case of Dennis Gentry, executed April 16, 1997, for the premeditated murder of his friend Jimmy Don Ham. During his final statement, Gentry said, "I'd like to thank the Lord for the past 14 years (on death row) to grow as a man and mature enough to accept what's happening here tonight. To my family, I'm happy. I'm going home to Jesus." As the lethal drugs began to flow, Gentry cried out, "Sweet Jesus, here I come, take me home. I'm going that way to see the Lord." (Michael Graczyk, Associated Press, Houston Chronicle, 4/17/97). We cannot know if Gentry or the fictitious Poncelet, or the two real murderers from the DMW book really did repent and receive salvation. But, we do know that St. Aquinas advises us that murderers should not be given the benefit of the doubt. We should err on the side of caution and not give murderers the opportunity to harm again. "The fact that the evil as long as they live, can be corrected from their errors does not prohibit the fact that they may be justly executed, for the danger which threatens from their way of life is greater and more certain than the good which may be expected from their improvement. They also have at that critical point of death the opportunity to be converted to God through repentance. And if they are so stubborn that even at the point of death their heart does not draw back from evil, it is possible to make a highly probable judgment that they would never come away from evil to the right use of their powers." St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Contra Gentiles, Book III, 146. VI. On God and the death penalty (*Sister Prejean*) received nothing but a stony silence, however, when she questioned the basis of the biblical crucifixion story as a "projection of our violent society. "Is this a God?"

Prejean asked about the belief that God allowed his son, Jesus, to be sacrificed for the sins of humanity. "Or is this an ogre?" The audience -- to that point in strong agreement with the author of "Dead Man Walking" -- said and did nothing. ("God, ogre comparison doesn't fly with interfaith crowd", Paul A. Anthony, Rocky Mountain News, 03:35 p.m., August 24, 2008). It is understandable that the audience was stunned. Sister Prejean is questioning the bedrock of the Christian faith. Appropriately, Pope Benedict XIV appears to reply on a few days later: "If to save us the Son of God had to suffer and die crucified, it certainly was not because of a cruel design of the heavenly Father. The cause of it is the gravity of the sickness of which he must cure us: an evil so serious and deadly that it will require all of his blood. In fact, it is with his death and resurrection that Jesus defeated sin and death, reestablishing the lordship of God." ("It Is Not (Optional) for Christians to Take Up the Cross", 8/31/2008) http://www.zenit.org/article-235157

meaning: None should have been surprised. It is not uncommon for persons of faith to create a god in their own image, to give to that god their values, instead of accepting those values which are inherent to the deity. Sister Prejean states, in reference to the death penalty, that "I couldn't worship a god who is less compassionate than I am." (Progressive, 1/96). She has, thereby, established his standard of compassion as the basis for God's being deserving of her devotion. If God's level of compassion does not rise to the level of her own, God couldn't receive her worship. Director Tim Robbins (Dead Man Walking) follows that same path: (1) don't believe in that kind of (god) (that would support capital punishment and, therefore, would be the kind of god who tortures people into their redemption). ("Opposing The Death Penalty", AMERICA, 11/9/96, p 12). Robbins establishes his standard for God's deserving of his proceeding. God's standards do not seem to be relevant. Robbins' sophomoric comparison of capital punishment or torture are typical of the ignorance in this debate and such comments reflect no biblical relevance. Perhaps they should review Matthew 5:17-22 and 15:1-9.

Be cautious, for as the ancient rabbi warned, "Do not seek to be more righteous than your creator." (Ecclesiastes Rabbah 7.33).

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Detective Varnado writes: "For those who believe in the teachings of Sister Helen Prejean as her journey continues in her effort to abolish the death penalty, 'for such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And, no marvel: for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.' 2 Corinthians 11:13 & 14." From Detective Varnado's new book Soft Targets: A Women's Guide To Survival

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- Permission for distribution of this document, in whole or in part, is approved with proper attribution. Dudley Sharp, Justice Matters e-mail sharpsjd@aol.com, 713-622-5491, Houston, Texas. Mr. Sharp has appeared on ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, C-SPAN, FOX, NBC, PBS, VOX and many other TV and radio networks, on such programs as Nightline, The News Hour with Jim Lehrer, The O'Reilly Factor, etc., has been quoted in newspapers throughout the world and is a published author. A former opponent of capital punishment, he has written and granted interviews about, testified on and debated the subject of the death penalty, extensively and internationally.

http://www.theotherjournal.com/article.php?id=571

7/1/2010
Every point is easy to understand.

I thought it would automatically format, which it did not.

For example, the first paragraph:

"... makes you realize the Dead Man Walking truly belongs on the shelf in the library in the Fiction category. "Being devout Catholics, 'the norm' would be to look to the church for support and healing. Again, this need for spiritual stability was stolen by Sister Prejean."

Victim Survivors, Dead Family Walking

That should be easy to comprehend.

First of all, Shannon, I don't know about you, but I first encountered Dead Man Walking when taking Dr. DeRosset's Images of Christ in the Novel course (at Moody Bible Institute). I was struck again with how Sister Prejean really portrays the image of Christ, especially in the early portion of the article. The power of Christ and the cross, to my mind, is the willing embodiment of God the Son to walk with us and experience the pain (and the joys) of being human. By walking with people who are experiencing death row, Sister Prejean is showing them Christ. And I think that even thedude can recognize that: whether or not you think the death penalty is just/feible (and I don't, but obviously he does), the people who are to be executed are still made in the image of God and need to be visited by Christ. Thank you, Shannon and Sister Prejean, for reminding us to wear his image more boldly.

Second, I think that her comments also apply to other marginalized groups--as she mentions. This is where thedude's disproportionately long and biased comments become inappropriate. Again, regardless of the guilt or innocence of death row inmates, we are called as Christians to walk alongside people who have been marginalized by their level of education, income, skin color, English-speaking ability, etc. By diverting the issue from our calling to bring grace to others, thedude does a grave disservice to the true import of this interview.

Shannon, thank you for sharing this conversation with us. Glad to see that you are writing and pursuing beauty in its many forms.
Timely, relevant, challenging... here's an award-winning teaching tool that's ready for you to use now!

Awards & honors for teacher.deathpenaltyinfo.msu.edu

“One of the Best Educational Resources on the Web”
Lightspan’s StudyWeb

★★★★★ rating
Pacific Bell’s
Blue Web’n library of
Blue Ribbon learning sites

“Busy Educator’s Award”
Web “Editor’s Choice” award
The Awesome Library collection
of the top 5% of sites
in the field of K-12 education

Death Penalty Information Center
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www.deathpenaltyinfo.org
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Curriculum site for teachers:
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If you teach high school or middle school social studies, English, history, debate, ethics...

If you want to capture your students' interest...

If you want to engage them in a challenging, rewarding study of one of today's most debated topics...

And if you want to bring a timely subject from the headlines into your classroom...

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From the headlines to your classroom

Debated in state legislatures, debated by religious leaders, debated in homes around the dinner table, the death penalty is one of the most important topics of our day and a subject of great public concern.

Now, "Educational Curriculum on the Death Penalty" at teacher.deathpenaltyinfo.msu.edu offers you an exceptional opportunity to take the headlines from the evening news into your high school or middle school classroom and use the death penalty question to teach critical-thinking and persuasive-writing skills.

The authors of the curriculum have made every effort to ensure that the educational approach is balanced, and that it respects the views of all sides in this often spirited debate. Using role-playing, written reports, quick-writes, learning journals, and simulations, the curriculum engages your students' interest and allows them to thoughtfully consider the central issues concerning the death penalty.

Two interactive 10-day lesson plans
Just click on teacher.deathpenaltyinfo.msu.edu to find a rich resource for classroom learning that presents an outstanding free curriculum in two stand-alone 10-day lesson plans.

The curriculum encourages on-line student involvement in activities that closely resemble the experiences of ordinary citizens encountering this issue. Students can participate in a mock legislative hearing at which public testimony on the death penalty is presented, and may also serve on a mock jury to decide between a life sentence and the death penalty in scenarios based on the actual murder trials of four men—Leslie Gosch, Kenneth French, Dennis Stockton, and Walter McMillian.

Extensively illustrated and resembling an on-line magazine, the curriculum Web site contains a powerful search engine and user-friendly designs with attractive illustrations, interactive modules, and easy links. For schools with limited access to the Internet, the Web site pages are printable.

"...especially useful in helping young people examine their own beliefs and begin to form an opinion on this controversial subject."

Stephen R. Greenwald
President, Audrey Cohen College
A sample role-playing exercise from teacher.deathpenaltyinfo.msu.edu

Students, divided into four groups, present their group's case—for or against the death penalty—in an open hearing before a fifth group of students, who represent legislators in an open hearing.

Group 1 Role: The law enforcement community
Group 2 Role: Families of victims
Group 3 Role: Families of the accused
Group 4 Role: Multicultural task force
Group 5 Role: State legislators

What do you think?

At the heart of the curriculum are two flexible, imaginative 10-day lesson plans that provide for role-playing, discussion, reports, debates, deliberation, and simulations based on the pros and cons of these propositions:

Proposition 1: Deterrence
The death penalty prevents future murders.

Proposition 2: Retribution
A just society requires the death penalty for the taking of a life.

Proposition 3: Innocence
The risk of executing the innocent precludes the use of the death penalty.

Proposition 4: Arbitrariness and Discrimination
The death penalty is applied unfairly and should not be used.

For teachers...

The site provides a variety of teacher-friendly, time-saving aids.

- Lesson plans that meet National Council for the Social Studies standards, with an appendix to each lesson plan showing how it addresses those standards
- Detailed classroom ideas that help you present students with interesting interactive lessons that enhance debate, critical thinking, and analytical writing skills
- Opportunities to use all of this information to make and criticize arguments about the death penalty

Includes printable pages you can hand out in class if your school has limited Internet access.

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About the authors of the curriculum

The site and curriculum were principally designed by the award-winning Michigan State Communications Technology Laboratory, which also developed the Personal Communicator CD-ROM and Web site that won the 1995 Discover magazine award for Software Innovation of the year. Factual content was provided by the Death Penalty Information Center, a non-profit organization that conducts and disseminates research on issues related to capital punishment. The Center used a broad spectrum of case decisions, news accounts, books, and scholarly journals in assembling the content. The design of the curriculum has been greatly aided by review and suggestions from teachers in the fields of social studies, history, and religion.

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The site and curriculum were principally designed by the award-winning Michigan State Communications Technology Laboratory, which also developed the Personal Communicator CD-ROM and Web site that won the 1995 Discover magazine award for Software Innovation of the year. Factual content was provided by the Death Penalty Information Center, a non-profit organization that conducts and disseminates research on issues related to capital punishment. The Center used a broad spectrum of case decisions, news accounts, books, and scholarly journals in assembling the content. The design of the curriculum has been greatly aided by review and suggestions from teachers in the fields of social studies, history, and religion.

Includes printable pages you can hand out in class if your school has limited Internet access.

What do you think?

At the heart of the curriculum are two flexible, imaginative 10-day lesson plans that provide for role-playing, discussion, reports, debates, deliberation, and simulations based on the pros and cons of these propositions:

Proposition 1: Deterrence
The death penalty prevents future murders.

Proposition 2: Retribution
A just society requires the death penalty for the taking of a life.

Proposition 3: Innocence
The risk of executing the innocent precludes the use of the death penalty.

Proposition 4: Arbitrariness and Discrimination
The death penalty is applied unfairly and should not be used.

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The site offers a rich collection of resources to help develop academic and analytic skills.

- History of the death penalty
- Balanced summaries of the principal points both for and against the death penalty
- Interactive U.S. maps with quick links to state death penalty laws, data on current death row inmates, and past executions
- Summaries of the legal stages in a capital case
- Student participation in a mock legislative hearing involving pro and con testimony
- Sample question used to select jurors in capital cases, allowing students to determine whether they would be qualified to serve
- "You Be the Judge"—four actual courtroom cases
- Links to additional research resources
A free, online curriculum designed for college courses

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT in context
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT in context

Capital Punishment in Context is an innovative approach to teaching research skills and critical thinking, using real death penalty cases to stimulate broader exploration and discussion of topics in a variety of college courses. This dynamic new curriculum is designed to open a path to the criminal justice system and build upon students' intrinsic interest in the death penalty.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT uses interactive, real-life content from existing cases to encourage research on complex criminal justice issues. The unique components of the curriculum include:
- Video interviews with key individuals in the case, such as attorneys, jurors and witnesses
- Original police reports from investigations
- Transcripts of witness testimony
- Links to additional source materials

The case method approach and additional resources embedded in CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT provide students with a starting point for researching complex criminal justice issues. Given the diverse issues involved in death penalty cases, the curriculum is relevant to a variety of academic disciplines - political science, criminal justice, sociology, etc. Each case is accompanied by guidelines for analysis, discussion, and further research on issues raised by the cases.

Start using CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT in your courses today. Registration is easy and there is no charge. Log-on at: http://www.capitalpunishmentincontext.org/.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT is:
- Easy to Use: Online format allows professors to integrate resources into course materials with ease
- Reliable: Resources, case materials and content from real cases
- Free and Flexible: One-time registration provides access to all curriculum content and supplemental materials
- Embedded with added resources for instructors, including
  - Teaching notes
  - Sample syllabi
  - Issues Resource Guide
  - Information on how other instructors are using CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT

CURRICULUM AUTHORSHIP CAPITAL PUNISHMENT IN CONTEXT was developed by the Death Penalty Information Center in conjunction with the Education Development Center. Numerous experts in the fields of education and criminal justice assisted with its preparation. The Death Penalty Information Center is a non-profit organization that provides the media and the public with analysis and information on issues concerning capital punishment. The Education Development Center is an international, non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing learning and fostering a deeper understanding of the world. For more information, please contact curriculum@deathpenaltyinfo.org.

"These materials very nicely blend case-specific issues with broader policy questions about capital punishment. The links provided will allow for in-depth exploration of a host of important death-penalty related issues, while the case presentation is certain to inspire discussion and lively debate about capital punishment and its application. Both teachers and students will benefit by these impressive learning tools.

Professor James R. Acker
School of Criminal Justice, SUNY at Albany

'Capital Punishment in Context' is a remarkable resource. Compelling cases are presented in riveting narratives that are supplemented with a wealth of background materials. This site promotes careful, critical thinking about one of our nation's most pressing legal and moral issues.

Professor Robert Johnson
Justice, Law & Society, American University
CAPITAL PUNISHMENT in context

"The Capital Punishment in Context curriculum offers professors a way to engage their students in close study of death penalty cases. The original documents add depth to the case studies and provide students the chance to evaluate the evidence and reach their own conclusions. Detailed information on relevant issues and an abundance of links to reference material place the cases in broad context. The curriculum is an exceptionally detailed and useful pedagogical tool."

Professor Margaret Vandiver,
Criminology and Criminal Justice, University of Memphis
Appendix M

Audition Materials
Matt: I had a dream once that I was about to be fried in the chair and a guard came into my cell with a chef’s hat on and started to roll me around in breadcrumbs licking his chops and all. Maybe you think I’m a weirdo to have dreams like that but your mind does funny things when you’re locked up and surrounded by people that want to kill you. Anyway. Thanks for writing. I don’t get many letters. Visitors either. No one in my family seems able to make the trip out here. I understand. It’s a long drive from Slidell.

Prejean: We aren’t made to look at our retribution. We don’t see the dying man in the execution chamber. We don’t see the dying man on the battlefield. We are kept from the face of retribution. It is a concept, carried out at midnight, far away, unseen. Is death removed from our view because it’s unacceptable? Is there a compassion in our hearts that is uncomfortable with seeing death? Can we look at the death of a human being with cold detachment, with indifference? And yet his act, his violent act revisits the Percys and the Delacroixs nightly. And sometimes at night in a dream I come back to his face, wild torn, and without reason or compassion or any of the calming signs we seek day to day in our companions.

Delacroix: I’m Walter Delacroix’s father. Sister, I am a Catholic. How can you sit by Matt Poncelet’s side without ever having come to visit with me and my wife or the Percys to hear our side? How can you spend all your time worrying about Poncelet and not think that maybe we needed you too? Listen Sister I’m sure you’ve seen a side of Matt Poncelet that none of us has seen. I’m sure he must be pretty sympathetic to you. I’m sure he’s on his best behavior. But, Sister this is a man that hung out in bars with thieves. This is an evil man. That scum robbed me of my only son, my name. My family name dies with me. There will be no more Delacroixs, Sister.

Marybeth: On June 15th a recruiting agent was going to meet Hope at her apartment and drive her to Baton Rouge for induction. I had taken her shopping the day before to get some things she would be needing. You know, practical things, new bras with plenty of support, dental floss, medicine for menstrual cramps, stuff like that. As she was leaving I noticed a part of her hem was coming out of her skirt. She was in such a hurry I pinned it for her with one of those tiny safety pins and she was gone, out the door. You don’t know when you see your child leave through the door that you are never going to see her alive again. If I had known I would have told her how much I loved her. My last words to her - the last she ever heard from me was about the hem of a skirt.
Dead Man Walking

Cast List

Thank you to all who auditioned! The following people need to be in the Copper Pit Friday Dec 16th @ 2:45 pm

Sr. Helen Prejean ................................................... Alex Wintch
Sr. Marie Augusta Neal............................................. Jamie Ryser
Herbie/Jim Poncelet................................................. Alex Waller
Luis Montoya........................................................... Anthony Rodriquez
Matt Poncelet.......................................................... Ben Wilkins
Guard ................................................................. Garrett Newton
Female Guard.......................................................... Amy Heimbigner
Chaplain Farley....................................................... Grant Anderson
Sr. Colleen.......................................................... Aubrey Orullian
Reporter #1............................................................ Sarah Powell
Reporter #2........................................................... Ali Borzoni
Reporter #3........................................................... Lou Knowles
Hilton Barber(Death Penalty Lawyer)................... Connor Wade
Lucille Poncelet (Matt’s mother)......................... Adelle Harris
Guy Gilardi(asst DA).............................................. Scott Moore
Clyde Percy (Hope’s father)................................. Justin Olsen
Marybeth Percy (Hope’s mother)......................... Thabata de Siqueria
Earl Delacroix (Walter’s father).......................... Bryan Smart
Mrs. Delacroix (Walter’s mother)...................... Alyssa Fowlks
Walter Delacroix (son) ............................................. Geoff Kroll
Hope Percy (daughter) ........................................... Jessie Stevenett
Mother of Sr. Helen ........................................... Abbey Wilson
Emily Percy (Hope’s sister) ................................... Colette Condie
Reporter #4/ Woman #2 ........................................ Taniya Bartlett
Mirabeau/ Woman #1 .......................................... Amy Boud
Man #3/ Governor Fredericks ................................ Micah Havens
Man #1/ Purvis Slade (radio announcer) .................. Jake Rosquist
Woman #3 ................................................................ Angela Wilson
Guard/ Trapp/ Man #2 .......................................... David Vance
Sgt. Beliveau ...................................................... Austin Thorne
Nurse ................................................................. Tricia Williams
Warden Hartman ............................................... Michael Woodruff
Mitch Poncelet ................................................. Mitchell Peart
Troy Poncelet .................................................... TBA
**Dead Man Walking Callbacks**

Thank you for auditioning the following people needs to report to the Copper Pit right after school for Callbacks!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Connor Wade</th>
<th>Amy Heimbigner</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anthony Rodriquez</td>
<td>Tricia Williams</td>
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<tr>
<td>Michael Woodruff</td>
<td>Aubrey Orullian</td>
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<td>Bryan Smart</td>
<td>Jessie Stevenett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Garrett Newton</td>
<td>Mishea Kuchner</td>
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<td>Ben Wilkins</td>
<td>Emily Craghead</td>
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<td>Katelyn Christiansen</td>
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<td>Abbey Wilson</td>
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<td>Sarah Powell</td>
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<td>Jamie Ryser</td>
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Dead Man Walking Rehearsal Schedule

January 3, 2012- Read through/Production Meeting

January 4, 2012- Block Units 1- Prejean, Neal, Herbie, Montoya

January 5, 2012- Block Unit 2 & 3- Prejean, Matt, Guard, Female Guard, Farley

January 6, 2012- Block Unit 4-Guard, Female Guard, Prejean, Matt

January 9, 2012- Block Unit 5 & 6- Colleen, Prejean, Montoya

January 10, 2012- Production Meeting

January 11, 2012- Block Units 7-Slade, Reporters, Colleen, Prejean

January 12, 2012- Block Units 8- Hilton, Prejean, Matt

January 13, 2012- Block Unit 9-Prejean, Lucille

January 17, 2012- Block Unit 10- Prejean, Matt, Lucille, Reporters /Production Meeting

January 19, 2012- Block Unit 11- Matt, Hilton, Gilardi, Delacroixs, Percys, Prejean, Mirabeau, Lucille, Guards

January 23, 2012- Block Unit 12- Delacroixs, Prejean, Percys, Lucille

January 24, 2012- Block Unit 13- Prejean, Lucille, Hilton, Colleen, Hope, Walter, Mother

January 25, 2012- Block Units 14-Earl Delacroix, Prejean, Walter/ Production Meeting

January 30, 2012- Block Unit 15-Farley, Prejean, Matt

January 31, 2012- Block Unit 16- Marybeth, Clyde, Prejean, Emily, Matt

February 1, 2012- Block Unit 17- Prejean, Colleen, Reporters, Matt/Production Mtg

February 2, 2012- Block Unit 18-Prejean, Colleen, Herbie

February 3, 2012- Block Unit 19- Woman #1-#3, Man #1, #2, Earl Delacroix, Prejean

February 4, 2012- Block Units 20 &21-Prejean, Trapp, Matt, Start Building/ Production Meeting

February 6, 2012 - Block Units 22 & 23- Farley, Prejean, Nurse, Beliveau/ Build

February 7, 2012- Block Unit 24- Colleen, Prejean, Percys, Delacroixs, Hilton, Mother/ Build

February 8, 2012- Block Unit 25- Prejean, Warden Hartman/ Build

February 13, 2012- Block Unit 26- Matt, Prejean/ Build
February 14, 2012- Block Units 27&28- Prejean, Hilton, Fredericks, Walter, Hope, Matt, Farley, Mother/Build

February 15, 2012- Block Units 29 &30- Matt, Prejean, Colleen, Hilton, Beliveau, Mitch, Jim, Troy, Lucille, Guards, Warden / Production Meeting

February 16, 2012- Block Unit 31- Prejean, Hartman, Matt, Beliveau, Warden, Farley/Build

February 17, 2012- Block Unit 32-Matt, Prejean, Guards, Secretary (Jamie), Man #1, Man #2, Beliveau/Build

February 18, 2012- Block Unit 33- Matt, Prejean/Build

February 21, 2012- Block Unit 34-Guards, Prejean, Matt, Hartman, Percys, Delacroixs, Reporters, Attorneys, Beliveau, Farley/Build

February 23, 2012- Block Units 35 & 36- Guards, Hartman, Percys, Delacroixs, Reporters, Attorneys, Beliveau, Farley Hope, Walter, Lucille, Troy, Jim, Mitch, Matt, Prejean, Herbie/Build

February 24, 2012- Run Act 1

February 25, 2012- Run Act 2

February 27, 2012- Clean Act 1

February 28, 2012- Clean Act 2

March 1, 2012- Paper Tech

March 2, 2012- Hang and Focus

March 3, 2012- Tech Run

March 5, 2012- Tech

March 6, 2012- Dress/Tech

March 7, 2012- Final Dress

March 8, 2012- Preview

March 9, 2012- Opening Night

March 10, 2012- Performance

March 12, 2012-Performance

March 13, 2012- Performance
Dead Man Walking Moving Cam
Bingham High Theater Department