



Tre Maison Dasan

**VIEWING GUIDE:
INCARCERATED &
RE-ENTRY GROUPS**



**A STORY OF BOYHOOD
MARKED BY THE CRIMINAL
JUSTICE SYSTEM**

TABLE OF CONTENTS

USING THIS GUIDE	3
SYNOPSIS	4
BACKGROUND	5
The Kids	6
The Issue	7
SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION	
Audience Members	8
Facilitators	9
BILL OF RIGHTS	10
PREVIEWING	11
POST VIEWING	12
POST VIEWING WORKSHOPS	13
Tell Your Story	14
Letter Writing	15
Self Portrait	16
Collateral Effects	17

We encourage participants in prisons, jails and re-entry programs to write to us about their experiences viewing the film. All reflections will be archived as part of a national discussion about the film and the criminal justice system.

Artists Literacies Institute
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USING THIS GUIDE

This guide has been designed to use with audiences of incarcerated and formerly incarcerated people, and people in re-entry.

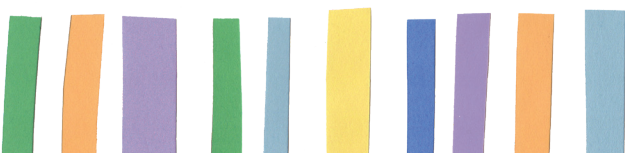
The guide has been organized to supply facilitators both with suggested guidelines for leading discussions around the film and issues presented, and also critical information on how to best acknowledge, work with, and support incarcerated parents and their children.

The Pre-Viewing provides suggested questions for audience members to reflect on what they know or how they feel before watching the film. This pre-viewing reflection is useful to effectively track learning throughout viewing and discussion.

The Post-Viewing section of the guide provides activities to promote reflection, connection, and accountability through guided workshops and storytelling exercises.

It is our belief that viewers will benefit from being in conversation with others about the film. Depending on the size of the viewing group, a facilitator may choose to begin with written reflection on the questions before engaging in small, or large, group discussions.

***NOTE:** For incarcerated populations, we are aware that there are often people who have trouble reading and/or writing. We have included activities that can accommodate those who may more accessible ways of expressing their reflections.



SYNOPSIS

Tre Maison Dasan is an intimate portrait of three boys growing up, each with a parent in prison. Told directly through the child's perspective, the film is an exploration of relationships and separation, masculinity, and coming of age in America when a parent is behind bars.

Tre, Maison and Dasan are three very different boys. Tre is a tough 13 year old who hides his emotions behind a mask of tough talk and hard edges. Maison is a bright eyed 11 year old with an encyclopedic mind and deep love for those around him. Dasan is a sensitive 6 year old with an incredible capacity for empathy and curiosity. Their parents are not incarcerated for the low-level offenses that have become infamous in conversations around mass-incarceration, but their histories and relationships beg many questions about Justice and the lasting and rippling effects of a system at large.

CONTENT WARNING:

Some strong language. This film may be emotionally triggering for people who have experienced incarceration, parental incarceration/separation or the death of a loved one, or have been the victim of a crime.



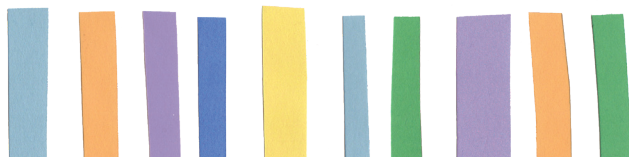
BACKGROUND

The title, *Tre Maison Dasan*, comes from the names of the three boys at the center of the film:
Tre (Τρεῖ) Maison (Μεῖ·σλη) Dasan (Δα·σση).

This is a documentary film, presenting real events and real people. The boys, their families and the prison are all located in Rhode Island. The filmmaker followed Tre, Maison and Dasan for three years of their lives, capturing over 350 hours of footage which was then distilled into the movie you are about to see.

The film portrays an in-person, full contact visiting program, unique to the Rhode Island Department of Corrections. Every Saturday, children can come to the prison in Cranston, RI to visit their parent for up to 4 hours (depending on the security level of the facility), in a designated child-friendly space, without another adult caregiver present. This allows kids and their parent one-on-one time where they can talk, play games, eat lunch, and do activities. This parenting visiting program is separate from regular public visiting hours, which happen during the week at each facility.

Often the first question that arises when talking about an incarcerated individual is, “what did they do?”. In this film, the only way you hear what led Tre, Maison or Dasan’s parent to be incarcerated is if the child asks their parent directly. This is very intentional, as the film is carefully created around the child’s perspective. The specific crime in these cases, and many cases, is not imperative to understanding each child’s relationship with their parent and the effects of their separation.



THE KIDS



TRE - 13 YEARS OLD

Tre lives with his mother in an apartment on the west side of Providence, RI. His father, Tyree, is incarcerated at the Men's Medium Security Prison 10 miles from Tre's home. Tre is able to visit every Saturday, though depending on how he is feeling about his relationship with his dad at any given time, he will go less often, sometimes months passing between visits.



MAISON - 11 YEARS OLD

Maison's family immigrated to the US from England when his dad was a teenager. When Maison was a year old, his father was sentenced to 20 years in prison. Shortly after his father's sentencing, his mother moved to California, leaving Maison in Rhode Island with his paternal grandmother who he calls "Nana". Maison visits his dad every Saturday, as well as a few additional times during the week during public visiting hours with Nana. Maison is on the Autism Spectrum, and his mind is constantly racing with ideas, images and music. He attends 5th grade at a public school in Pawtucket, RI.



DASAN - 6 YEARS OLD

Dasan lives with his maternal grandparents in East Providence, RI. His mom is in prison on a 2 year sentence. Dasan spends a lot of time with his cousin, Alivia, who also attends the Saturday visits at the Women's Minimum Security Prison. When Dasan's mom went to prison, she was not prepared to tell her then 4-year-old son where she was going, so she told Dasan and Alivia that she was at a "special school for grown-ups". After Stephanie is released, she will spend 6 months on parole and then 17 years on probation.



THE ISSUE

1 in 14 children in the U.S. have experienced parental incarceration at one point in their lives. These numbers largely and disproportionately affect poor, African American and Latino families: 1 in 9 Black children, 1 in 28 Latino children and 1 in 57 White children have a parent currently behind bars.

Parental incarceration is recognized as an Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE), and yet it is still a largely misunderstood or unknown when it comes to supporting children at home and in the classroom, and comes with a unique combination of trauma, shame and stigma compared with other adverse childhood experiences.

A misperception exists that children of incarcerated parents are more likely to be incarcerated than their peers, and are predisposed to criminal activity. **There is no basis for this in existing research.** Risk factors for children of incarcerated parents may be related to parental substance abuse, mental health, inadequate education opportunities or other challenges. Parental incarceration also increases the risk of children living in poverty or experiencing household instability, and for children whose mothers are incarcerated, there is an increased likelihood that the children will enter foster care.

For more information on statistics and research regarding children of incarcerated parents and the criminal justice system, see the following resources:

[A Shared Sentence - Annie E. Casey Foundation](#)

[National Resource Center on Children & Families of the Incarcerated](#)

[Youth.Gov - Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)

[Promoting Social and Emotional Well-Being for Children of Incarcerated Parents](#)

[Stronger Together Handbooks](#)



SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION: AUDIENCE MEMBERS

We acknowledge that the film may bring about powerful emotions and personal responses, especially for those who are living or have recently lived a similar experience. During the screening people may need to take breaks, leave the room and come back, and should be informed before the film about the potential emotional triggers.

Think about the setup of the room. It is often helpful to move chairs into a circle. This way, everyone can see each other and speak to the whole group. Decide how you would like participants to join in the discussion, i.e. raising hands, going around the circle (allowing people to pass), or using a talking stick.

If necessary, you might create a group “contract” to underscore the importance of respectful conversations. You might want to adapt the following suggestions for your particular setting:

Listen with respect. Try to understand what someone is saying before rushing to judgement.

Make comments using “I” statements

Respect privacy - do not share stories that are not your own outside of the screening room.

If you don't feel safe making a comment or asking a question, write the thought down.

If someone states an idea or question that helps your own learning, say “Thank You”.

If someone says something that hurts or offends you, don't attack the person. Acknowledge that the comment hurt your feelings and explain why

If you don't understand something, ask a question

Share talking time – provide room for others to speak.

Do not interrupt others while they are speaking.

Write down your thoughts if you don't have time to say them during our time together.

Consider the following facilitation strategies for structured conversations about the film:

(Teaching strategies from [Facing History and Ourselves](#))

[Fishbowl](#)

[Iceberg Diagrams](#)

[Learn to Listen / Listen to Learn](#)



SUPPORTING AN EFFECTIVE DISCUSSION: FACILITATORS

Because of the guilt and shame involved in being separated from your child by incarceration, it is critical that facilitators create an environment that is safe and supportive for participants. Many of the audience members in groups of incarcerated or formerly incarcerated parents may also have been children of incarcerated parents themselves. It is important to acknowledge that people who have committed crimes are often also survivors of trauma.

NOTIFY PARTICIPANTS AHEAD OF TIME:

If you are screening the film as part of a parenting or re-entry course, you may consider notifying participants before the film is shown. This notice will give people who may be significantly triggered by the film and the conversations it promotes to either prepare for, or opt out of, discussions.

USE HUMANIZING LANGUAGE:

When speaking about incarcerated people, avoid terms like “convict”, “felon”, “prisoner”, and “inmate”. Instead use, incarcerated mom/dad/parent, incarcerated person, or simply, “moms”, “dads” and “people”.

RESPECT PARTICIPANT’S PRIVACY:

Participants may not wish to discuss what led them to be incarcerated, experiences they have had with their children or parents, or other personal details of trauma they have received or caused. It is important not to pressure participants to share details of their lives or their children that may be emotionally triggering without mental health support staff on hand.

MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT AND FOLLOW UP:

During these discussions, it may be helpful to have another facilitator or mental health worker in the room, who is not a correctional officer. Screenings can also present important opportunities to introduce the prison or program mental health counselor or support staff, so participants know where they may seek support, if they need it.

PROVIDE RESOURCES:

A screening for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated audiences presents an opportunity to provide resources on hand for people to learn about how they can request access to or information about visiting rights with their children, mental health counseling and parenting courses that are available through the facility or program. Have a list of your institution’s resources available to pass out, or be prepared to answer these questions should they come up.



CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS BILL OF RIGHTS

In 2003, the San Francisco Children of Incarcerated Parents Partnership (SFCIPP) developed a “Bill of Rights” for Children of Incarcerated Parents to address concerns, challenges and trauma that children face from the point of the arrest, to the sentencing, to the incarceration of a parent. The full Bill of Rights can be viewed in more detail here: [Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Bill of Rights](#).

*A printable version of the Bill of Rights for the classroom can be found on the next page.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

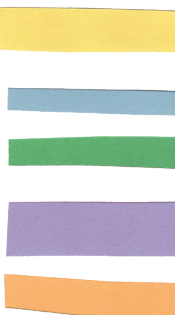
1. To be kept safe and informed at the time of my parent’s arrest.
2. To be heard when decisions are made about me.
3. To be considered when decisions are made about my parent.
4. To be well cared for in my parent’s absence.
5. To speak with, see, and touch my parent.
6. To support as I face my parent’s incarceration.
7. To not to be judged, blamed, or labeled because my parent is incarcerated.



PRE-VIEWING

To most effectively track learning and processing throughout viewing and discussion, it is worthwhile to have participants reflect on what they know about the issues presented in the film before watching. Consider the following survey questions for participants to answer out loud, or journal about before watching the film:

- What do you think are the experiences of children who are affected by the incarceration of a parent?
- If you are a parent, have you had access to your children during the time of your incarceration? If not, what has prevented that access?
- If you were the child of an incarcerated parent, did you have access to your parent during their incarceration? If not, what prevented that access?
- What do you expect to see in the film we are about to watch?
- Did you have an incarcerated parent growing up?



POST-VIEWING REFLECTION

After the film, some audience members may be feeling strong emotions. It may be a good idea to take a short period of time to have people reflect and journal about what they experienced watching the film. If anybody needs to take some time to process their emotions, consider having a private space available for quiet personal reflection, or a mental health worker on hand to provide emotional support.

Consider the following post-screening questions to prompt preliminary personal reflections:

- List the emotions you felt while watching the film. Circle the ones you felt the strongest.
- What questions do you have after watching the film?
- Reflecting on the questions you answered before watching the film, what did the film show you that you didn't know before?
- Do you connect personally to one of the characters more than the others? Which one, and how?



POST-VIEWING DISCUSSION WORKSHOPS

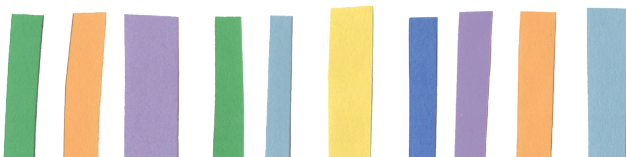
If you are viewing the film as part of a class or small group - use one or more of the following guided discussion workshops to have participants reflect on the film and themselves. To get the conversation started, you may have participants share some reflections from their post-screening journaling.

If you are viewing the film as part of a large group, without time or resources to conduct a workshop, consider handing out one or more of these workshop guidelines for participants to do on their own, after the screening.

**NOTE: Some activities may be more or less suitable for different individuals, depending on their personal response to the film and comfort with reading, writing, drawing or speaking. If an individual has trouble with reading or writing but would like to participate in one of the writing exercises (like writing a letter), have them find a partner to take dictation.*

Participants may send any work or writing to the filmmaking team, which will be archived as part of a national discussion around the film and the criminal justice system:

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WORKSHOP: TELL YOUR STORY

GOAL:

Often watching the film will prompt people to tell their own stories. Storytelling can be a powerful way to put ones own experiences in context, and to reflect on events of the past in new ways. Stories promote empathy and connection for both those speaking and those listening.

SUGGESTED FACILITATION STRATEGIES:

Consider the following facilitation strategies to make sure everyone has a chance to participate, and to promote listening. You may also consider having participants journal before they speak out loud, and using a timer or a talking stick to make sure one person is not dominating the discussion.

[Fishbowl](#)

[Learn to Listen / Listen to Learn](#)

WORKSHOP:

Tell your story - starting and ending wherever feels most relevant to who you are as a person, and where you are in your life right now. As one person tells their story, the group should listen for the following and take notes: You may consider sharing these comments out loud, or anonymously handing them to the storyteller to reflect on later.

When the storyteller expresses guilt or shame - what prompted these emotions?

When the storyteller blames someone else for something - who did they blame and why?

When the storyteller expresses forgiveness - how did they forgive?

When the storyteller expresses denial - what are they in denial about?

When the storyteller takes responsibility - what for and how?

When the storyteller expresses hope - what are they hopeful for?

Once you have finished telling your story, reflect on the following questions:

What is something you have lost?

What is something your incarceration has changed in you?

What is something people don't understand about being incarceration / being an incarcerated parent?

What is something in your story you regret, or would do differently?

What is something you have had to accept as a result of your incarceration?

What is something you are still working on taking responsibility for? How are you doing it?

When you told your story, was there anything you blamed someone else for? Was there anything that showed you forgiving someone for something?

What is something you hope for in the future?

What is something you are working on to be a better man, woman, father, mother, person or parent?

Was there anything in your story about your own parents? How does reflecting on your family affect how you understand your relationship with your children?



WORKSHOP: LETTER WRITING

GOAL:

To have participants reflect on relationships between themselves and those around them, on ideas of responsibility, and on their place and position to support themselves and others in their community.

WORKSHOP:

When Tre is in the psychiatric hospital, he writes a letter to himself. In the letter, he talks about things that have caused him pain, but also about the responsibility that he has to take for his own actions. Write a letter to one of the following people:

TRE

Write a letter to Tre, in which you acknowledge the pain he has experienced in his life, and give him some advice on how to overcome that pain in order to meet his goals. What kind of support can you offer Tre? What kind of support should he look for in others? **(You may also chose to write a letter to MAISON or DASAN - if you choose, you may send it to them using the address below)**

SOMEONE CLOSE TO YOU

Write a letter to someone who has either helped you or hurt you. If that person has helped you, tell them the impact they had on your life through the help they provided. How did their actions make you feel in the moment? How have you paid that help forward to others? If the person has hurt you, without attacking them, explain the pain that you felt because of the hurt they caused. Tell the person how this pain has affected you. Why do you think this person acted the way they did? Do you forgive them? If not, what do you need from them in order to feel forgiveness? If so, how do you hope your relationship will move forward?

YOURSELF

Write a letter to yourself in which you identify a mistake you've made, and a goal you want to achieve. What caused you to make the mistake? What emotions were at play during your decision making process that led to this mistake? Do you forgive yourself for this mistake? If not, what do you need in order to feel forgiveness? How can you support yourself to meet the goal you have set for yourself? What kind of support do you need from others? How will you go about finding that support?

ALTERNATIVE PROJECTS FOR PARTICIPANTS WHO STRUGGLE WITH WRITING:

Make a drawing from the perspective of Tre. How might he express himself and his emotions creatively?

Make a drawing that represents your story. Try to draw both events and express the emotions you felt, using different colors.

If you choose, you may mail us your letter, or drawing, which will be archived as part of a national discussion about the film and the criminal justice system.

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WORKSHOP: SELF PORTRAIT OF A MEMORY

GOAL:

To have participants feel close to themselves in a moment from the past to better understand how past events affected their outcomes.

WORKSHOP:

Choose a memory of an event or time in your life that had a significant impact on you. This could be a happy memory, a frightening memory, or an emotional memory. Draw a picture of yourself (self portrait) in that moment. Consider the following questions as you draw:

Was this a specific event that happened quickly, or something that happened over a period of time?

How old were you?

Where were others present, or were you by yourself?

If there were others around, what were their reactions to the event, and towards you?

How are you feeling in this memory? How do you feel now, reflecting on this memory?

How did this event change you?

—

If you choose, you may mail us your drawing, which will be archived as part of a national discussion about the film and the criminal justice system.

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ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY: COLLATERAL EFFECTS

GOAL:

To have participants reflect on their larger community and how one person's decisions reverberate out to effect many others.

WORKSHOP:

Think of a time that you made a choice that affected other people in your life, either positively or negatively. Make a flow-chart with you at the center. Radiating out from you, list all the people who are affected by this choice you made. Under each person, write how you think the choice affected them (i.e. emotions, work, finances and relationships with others). Radiating out from each of the people directly affected, identify the people who may have been directly affected by those people's emotions and/or physical situation.

How many people did you end up with on your flow chart?

Look at the affects you listed under each person. What are some themes that arise when you look at your community as a whole?

You may get creative with your flow chart - use markers, colored pencils, or collage.

If you choose, you may mail us your flow chart, which will be archived as part of a national discussion about the film and the criminal justice system.

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