

Prison Stories: Voices of Resistance from the Front Lines

This lesson uses digital and print media to explore some of the struggles Palestinians have faced in Israeli prisons and how people have organized to survive and resist.

Goals:

- 1) To examine some of the effects mass incarceration has on Palestinian society.
- 2) To think critically about how imprisonment is used to oppress people.
- 3) To engage with how people organize resistance to such oppression.
- 4) *Extension Activity:* To encourage making connections between people imprisoned in the US and Palestine.

Time: 75 + minutes (not including extension activities)

Materials needed:

(PDF and other media is hyperlinked below.)

[Aida Camp Prison Stories Video](#)

[Excerpt from Joe Sacco's Comic Book "Palestine"](#)

Markers

Paper

[Article](#) and [Comic](#) "No Army, No Prison And No Wall Can Stop Us"*

[Article about Georgia prison strike](#)*

(*optional, for extension activities)

Recommended Age Range: high school and up (including adults)

Preparation:

- Queue Aida Camp Prison Stories Video
- Photocopy comic book excerpts

Sequence of Activities

Introduction: Thinking about Prison (15-20 min)

1. Ask participants to share the first thing that comes to mind when they think of prison. After some initial responses, if needed, encourage a focus on the negative social impacts

of prison on community and family.*

2. After sharing and discussing some responses, suggest that we can think of prison as a complex machine that has many parts working together that allow it to function. Ask participants to brainstorm parts of our society's prison "machine" (i.e. police, private corporations, government officials, prisoners, prison guards, etc).

Note: Much of our work has been with communities that are directly impacted by heavy police presence and practices of incarceration. If you are working in a community for whom these issues are close at hand, the awareness of the negative impacts of prison may be readily understood and the facilitator should be sensitive to personal experience that may exist in the room. Facilitate the conversation in a way that doesn't require people to share personally while inviting those who can to do so (i.e., "What are some things that happen within a family with someone in prison?" This is a question that can be answered from personal experience or more generally).

If you are working in a community for whom these issues are seen from a distance, you may want to ask participants to take a moment to reflect on what a strong, healthy community looks like and then to think about the negative impacts a heavy police presence and high incarceration rates would have on a neighborhood, community, or family.

Building the Machine (15 minutes)

1. Once you have several parts identified, ask for volunteers to play each part. Tell them to think of a specific sound and body motion that can represent their role in the machine. Depending on how large the group is, several people may have the same part, but each can create their own sound and motion. Have participants stand and form a circle. Give the directions:

We are now going to build a prison machine. Someone will enter the center of the circle first and begin doing their sound and motion repeatedly. One by one, others will step into the circle and find a place to join the machine with their own sound and motion. Once everyone has joined, I will instruct you to speed up or slow down the machine. Let's begin--who will start off the machine?

2. Allow participants to create the machine and try operating it fast and slow. As founder of Theater of the Oppressed Augusto Boal writes, "The aim of the exercise is to reveal inner rhythms, rather than external cliché behaviours." Once you stop the machine, pose the following debrief questions for discussion:

What did you see or notice about the machine?

How did it feel to be part of the prison system?

Note: this can also be done as a simple written/spoken brainstorm if need be.

Aida Camp Prison Stories (15 minutes)

1. The following is a video made by youth in Aida Refugee Camp* in the West Bank about the friends and family they have who are currently in Israeli prisons. [Link to Video \(Click here for information on Aida Refugee Camp\)](#)
2. Watch the video, and discuss, using the following questions to frame your discussion:

What ways do you see that prisons have affected these young men's lives?
What is something you've learned about what it is like to be a young person in Palestine?
Are there any connections you make to police or prison here in the US?

Organizing and Resistance (15-20 minutes)

1. In small groups, read and discuss the [Ansar III section of Joe Sacco's comic book "Palestine"](#) about a notorious Israeli prison which was used to detain many activists during the 1st Intifada, a Palestinian uprising that took place in the late 1980s.

Questions for small group discussion:

What are some of the ways that they organized themselves in prison?
Why and how did they first start organizing?
What do you think we can learn from the story of these prisoners?

Make your own comic (20 minutes)

1. Have participants fold a piece of paper in quarters or eighths. Ask them to draw a simple comic incorporating ideas explored in this lesson. Some suggested prompts include:

Why do you think prisons exist? Who benefits? Who suffers?
Use your comic to give voice to the prisoners we don't hear from.
How does prison affect your life?
Imagine a world without prison. How can we achieve that world?

For an example, see [Hannah's comic](#), a powerful reflection on how prisons in the US have continued to enslave people of color.

OPTION FOR DIFFERENTIATING: If less time is available and/or participants would benefit from a more scaffolded writing activity, students can fill in blank dialog bubbles on a page of Sacco's story instead of creating their own. Print out [copies of the fill-in page here](#) to distribute to participants. Look at the pictures on the page together and ask participants:

What do you notice in these pictures?

What might the people be talking about?

After a brief discussion, direct participants to write dialog into the drawings to complete the story.

Closing (10 minutes)

Have participants share their comics and discuss what they drew/wrote. Ask each participant to name one question or observation that stands out from the lesson.

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Extension Activities (Strongly Recommended!)

Furthering connections to prisons in the US (15 minutes)

Read this [article about the 2010 Georgia Prison strikes](#) and discuss.

Discussion Questions:

What are some of the ways that they organized themselves in prison?

Why did they first start organizing?

What were their demands?

Can you make any links to the story told in Joe Sacco's comic?

Additional Resource: [Comic Books from the Real Cost of Prisons Project](#)

No Army, No Prison And No Wall Can Stop Us: Supporting the Palestinian Popular Struggle (15 minutes)

Abdallah Abu Rahmah is a Palestinian organizer and teacher who was imprisoned by the Israeli government for organizing resistance to the Apartheid Wall that is being built on his village lands. Read [Abdallah's letter](#) or [Ethan Heitner's comic](#) based on the letter and discuss.

Possible Discussion Questions:

Why was Abdallah detained? Why did Israel see him as a threat?

What is the vision Abdallah expresses?

What are people doing to support this vision? (You may want to incorporate information about the [International call for Boycott Divestment Sanctions on Israel.](#))