

THE PRISON LIBRARY AS VIEWED BY FOUR INMATES

THE IMPORTANCE OF PRISON LIBRARIES

by
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The Jackson Correctional Institution has had a great influence over my life. It has provided an easy way to find information on legal material and other interesting subjects that have improved my language skills. Also, it has given me a great opportunity to find an academic position in my life. The library means more to me now than it ever did before. I have come to feel that the art of learning, growing, and becoming deals with self-education.

There are no words to describe the importance of prison libraries and the impact they have on us inmates. The important question is, are we, as inmates, willing to use our library to discover for ourselves the excitement and joy of learning?

Many interesting books help to ease the mind in this enclosed environment. At this library it is not difficult to access information. Educational movies and computers make it easy to find books, and our librarian is more than happy to help us to find materials. Appointed inmates in the law library assist us in finding answers to our questions and in finding legal material we wish to examine. This is very important to me as well as to other inmates who are trying to find information concerning their court cases. The J.C.I. library also distributes books into classrooms and housing units, thus providing easier access.

As a bilingual person, it is very important for me to refresh my memory in the Spanish language. I have taken advantage of books in the library not only to improve my Spanish, but also to keep my English fluent. The library here provides a selection of Spanish materials for inmates who are still learning English. Bilingual library assistants direct these inmates to interesting books that will help feed their minds and that will give advice on legal matters. It would be beneficial if more books could be provided to inmates unable to speak the English language as well as books for other minority inmates such as Native Americans and Asian Americans who wish to learn more about their heritage. There can never be too many books in our libraries that can help us to change the way we carry ourselves.

The mind must be fed and books are an important part of the diet. I enjoy reading both fiction and non-fiction that will increase the range of my intellectual interests. Mostly I check out books that help me learn something new, but also those that will give me

a little mental adventure, for example books about history, science, romance, etc. In this process, I have come to see reading as the bread of the intellect. Moreover, the quality and type of books my mind feeds upon makes a critical difference. The intelligent and habitual use of reading provides me with an access to facts, ideas, and experiences unavailable to me in no other way and helps to develop my mind to the highest level. Books remain the basic tools of my education and are my special concern for life of the mind.

Learning is opportunity. Here I have unlimited access to library materials that constantly remind me that it is never too late to learn. Attending the library regularly gives me a sense of what knowledge is, its relationships, and its connections. It gives me an opportunity for growth in emotional maturity, health, integrity, knowledge, and wisdom.

On the streets today, the sensible thing to do is make use of libraries and utilize the knowledge provided there. The adventure and the responsibility to make good use of the library belong to us. Inmates often lack interest, motivation, intellectual hunger, drives, and desires to learn. Decreasing participation in this library is becoming common. Encouragement is needed to give inmates the power to develop passion for the great opportunities provided by JCI's library.

The goal of every person is to be successful in life. If we inmates wish to strive, we must make it a mission to educate ourselves by means of materials found in our library. We are all capable of astonishing growth in learning and developing skills.

Libraries can have a great influence and importance to incarcerated inmates. They provide ways by which we can engage our curiosity on interesting subjects. Man is what he reads. So, let us read to become man. I believe that learning in our library should be active, not passive. The experience is ours. Learning is our adventure.

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