

Optional Enrichment Activity for Correctional Psychology
Dr. Tess Neal, Fall 2016

Students taking this course for honors enrichment and any other students who wish will participate in a “*Correctional Psychology in Literature*” reading group that will meet for one hour every other week outside of class over the course of the semester. The group will choose which book to read from the list below. Each member of the reading group will be expected to develop questions prior to each meeting based on the reading for that segment (such as 1-2 chapter of the book) and then pose questions to the group and participate in discussion when other group members pose their questions. Dr. Neal will participate in some of the reading group meetings. At the end of the book / reading group, each honors student will write a 4-page paper about correctional psychology in the readings.

Readings:

- 1) “The Ballad of Reading Gaol” poem by Oscar Wilde

And choice of (the group will vote and pick one):

- 2) *In the Belly of the Beast* by Jack Abbott
- 3) *The Lucifer Effect* by Philip Zimbardo
- 4) *House of the Dead* by Fyodor Dostoyevsky
- 5) *The Enormous Room* by e.e. cummings

I suggest we start with Wilde’s poem, a revealing and compelling depiction of his experience in jail (“gaol”) in the late 1800s in England. He was imprisoned for homosexual offences and sentenced to two years’ of hard labor in prison. A hanging took place during his imprisonment – which this poem revolves around. The hanged man had cut the throat of his wife – he had “killed the thing he loves.” Wilde compares himself in some ways to the man sentenced to death (Wilde was also separated from his wife and sons) and focuses on the brutalization of prison punishment.

After reading and thinking about and discussing this poem, we will turn to a book. Two choices are fiction-nonfiction blended semi-autobiographical novels (Dostoyevsky, cummings) and two are nonfiction (Abbott, Zimbardo). *In the Belly of the Beast* consists of letters from Abbott, an American prisoner, to Normal Mailer (a famous American writer) about his experiences in prison. Mailer thought Abbott’s writings were well-done and when the book was published it became a bestseller. Mailer supported Abbott’s successful parole bid in 1981; however, he was almost immediately returned to jail for a murder upon his release. *The Lucifer Effect* chronicles in detail the Stanford Prison Experiment and more – a psychological account based on 30+ years of research on factors that lead good people to engage in evil behavior.

House of the Dead chronicles Dostoyevsky’s four years of hard imprisonment in a Siberian prison camp in the mid-1800s. It came before and informed his masterpiece *Crime and Punishment*. He was imprisoned based on his political involvement (a literary “rebel”). This book is more of an authentic and philosophical discussion of the conditions of prison life and the characters of convicts than it is a novel. Similarly, cummings’ *The Enormous Room* compiles his accounts of interesting characters in prison. The title refers to the large room where he slept with about 30 other prisoners, and also serves as an allegory for his mind and memories of his time in the prison. This book includes elements of his well-known unconventional grammar and diction.