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The members of the Committee approve the dissertation of Kathleen E. Brock presented on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2018.

Jeasik Cho, Chairperson

Pete W. Moran, Co-Chair

Susan Dewey, Outside Member

APPROVED:

Dr. L. Rush, Associate Dean, College of Education

Dr. R. Reutzel, Dean, College of Education

Brock, Kathleen E., *Fostering Empowerment for Incarcerated Women: Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail; A Book Study Curriculum*. Ed.D. Department of Curriculum & Instruction, May, 2018.

Incarcerated women historically have prior membership in marginalized communities, resulting in high rates of under-education, unemployment, single parenthood, poverty, intimate partner abuse, and low self-esteem. This 6 week-long book study curriculum, grounded in transformative learning theory, is designed to wholeheartedly foster the educational growth of female inmates through development of self-competence and specific life skills in areas of literacy, oral communication, and critical thinking. Through engaging, collaborative, and critical exploration of a woman's memoir entitled *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, incarcerated women will reflect on their lived experiences and their place in family and society. Regarding these female inmates as life-long learners, this book study curriculum consists of five thematic parts: *The Ten Thousand Things*, *Tracks*, *Range of Light*, *Wild*, and *Box of Rain*. This self-inquiry learning, coupled with empathic group discussions, will bring awareness to shared experiences, social struggles, personal conflicts, and reflective thinking. The ultimate outcome of this book study curriculum that the author hopes for is empowerment for incarcerated women to develop new habits of heart and mind on life, family, and the world in which we live.

*Keywords:* book study, education, incarcerated women, transformative learning

FOSTERING EMPOWERMENT FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN: *WILD FROM LOST TO  
FOUND ON THE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL*; A BOOK STUDY CURRICULUM

by  
Kathleen E. Brock, M.A.

A dissertation submitted to the University of Wyoming  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTORATE OF EDUCATION  
in  
CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION

Laramie, Wyoming  
May 2018

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## Acknowledgements

To Dr. Jeasik Cho: Thank you for your dedication and your support of my desire to support educational opportunities for incarcerated women. Many people found the work interesting, but few found it a topic they could support academically. You found it interesting and supported it. Thank you for supporting education on the other side of the bars.

To Dr. Pete Moran: Words cannot express my gratitude for your advice and support during my project. The implementation and completion of my work is stronger due to your content knowledge, expertise, guidance and kindness. With your guidance, I was able to better understand the “culture of the silenced.” Your support allowed me to continue a path of which I am very proud. I hope I have made you proud.

To Dr. Susan Dewey: You inspired, advocated, and worked beside me inside and outside prisons for two years. As a team, as collaborators, as feminists, we have taught over 100 men and women incarcerated in Wyoming, offered over 200 college credit hours, and inspired those who once felt hopeless and helpless. You are a mentor, a colleague, and a friend, and I am eternally grateful to you.

To Dr. John Kambutu: Seven years ago, when my mother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, my own mortality became evident. With a fear of dying like my mother, with unfinished dreams, I created a bucket list of ten mileposts I wanted to reach before I leave this world. One of those mileposts was to teach in a college or university. Two years ago you allowed me to mark that milepost off my bucket list. Not only did you allow me to mark it off my list, through conversation, kindness, patience, and example, you taught me how to be a better instructor and a better person. I have the deepest gratitude to you, and I cannot emphasize that enough. I thank

you for all you have done to support my success as doctoral student, an instructor, and as a socially conscious person. You are not only a great mentor, but a very great man.

To Dr. Dana Robertson: Your support of my work and your willingness to fund educational opportunities for incarcerated women never wavered. Through your support, 38 incarcerated women not only became trained inmate peer tutors, they also learned that reading is fun and reflective. They now know what it is like to be needed. They found meaning and purpose to their existence, and most important, they transformed their thinking to find confidence in themselves. If not for your support, my work would be largely unfinished. You helped make life better for 38 women in Wyoming and for the children they long to return to.

Thank you, thank you, thank you to Marian Stordahl, Karen Ventura-Kalen, Anna Shur, Lori Howe and Ann Van Wig, my cohort, my friends, the forces who kept me on track. It has been an incredible four years and your friendship made it worthwhile. Your friendship endures over time, your dedication transcends expectations, your kindness surpasses anticipations, and you will always be remembered for the wonderful women you are. I love you each!

Finally, to Devin: You let me alone so I could read and write in silence. You fixed my headers and page numbers to prevent me from throwing my computer out the window. You saddled the horses when I needed equine therapy. You supported my weeks and weeks away in Wyoming prisons. Simply put, I need you and love you!

## Dedication

This project, my work, is dedicated to the great women on both sides of the bars, who inspired me and gave me confidence that I could not only begin this work, but also finish it; my mother Nesie Brock, my daughter Riley Eaton, Darla Rouse, Sarah Lujan, Dee Jurisch and the many women housed at the Wyoming Women's Center.

To my mother: For seeing in me what I often did not see in myself, for instilling in me the desire to dream, and for holding me close while letting me go. For being the most loving and kindest person I have ever known. For teaching me to forgive myself. Your consistent love, guidance, wisdom, and encouragement always made anything seem possible. God knows I miss you more today than I did yesterday. No matter how old I am, I will always want to make you proud of me. I hope I have done so.

To my daughter: I love you more than words can express. You are my heart, my soul, my inspiration, my compass, my saving grace, and my reason for being. You made this day possible when four years ago, you agreed to pick up roots and leave all you knew behind in Florida, so I could move to Wyoming to find myself. I finally found myself . . . For 19 years you have been the best part of every day; you always will be. Without you, life for me would not be as meaningful.

To Darla: Two years ago we met at the WWC where we wrote our narratives, interweaving the happiest and saddest days of our lives, forever memorialized in a published article. You inspired me then, just as you inspire me now. You are not just a student of mine, but you are also a friend. Decades from now, I will think of you and know our lives are forever interwoven. Your honesty, authenticity, and courage inspired me to continue this work. You will always have me in your cheering section.

To Sarah: Your desire to motivate women to achieve higher, work harder, be smarter, and learn from their mistakes is commendable. I am grateful for your willingness and eagerness to come running when I call you to help teach my UW classes. Think about that, Sarah; *you* have taught college students at the University of Wyoming. You are stronger than you realize, and your potential is more than you recognize. I am better for knowing you, and I am proud of you!

To Dee: Your willingness to step out of your comfort zone and mentor other women is admirable. You have become someone women are able to look up to for guidance and support. In the short time you have been a tutor, you have transformed lives for the better. Be proud and confident in all you do!

To all the women at WWC: You have changed my life forever. Your stories, your tears, and your journeys have become mine. In the words of Cheryl Strayed (2012), “I had diverged, digressed, wandered, and become wild . . . I had strayed and that I was a stray and that from the wild places my straying had brought me, I knew things I couldn’t have known before” (p. 97). We are all *wild* and we have all *strayed*. We, women, are more alike than we are different.

### **Author's Position**

Katy Brock is a coordinator for Wyoming Pathways from Prison and an instructor in the College of Education and Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wyoming. She has developed and taught seven classes for incarcerated people in Wyoming, leading to over 107 men and women earning over 219 college credit hours. Katy is personally invested in the work because she believes strongly in education as a tool to transform lives, both inside and outside prisons, by creating opportunities for skill-building, personal growth, and self-reflection. This feminist work was developed through two years of collaborative work with women incarcerated at the Wyoming Women's Center. The women's experiences, perceptions, and voices formulated the desired outcome, that is, work created by women for women's educational development, intellectual growth, and personal empowerment.

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Fostering Self-Empowerment for Incarcerated Women: *Wild from Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*; A Book Study Curriculum

*Give a girl an education, and introduce her properly into the world, and ten to one but she has the means of settling well, without further expense to anybody.*

— Jane Austen

### **Introduction**

It is likely that negative school experiences lead to high dropout rates. Although the educational backgrounds of women in prison differ from study to study, proportionate to the rest of the country, incarcerated women possess low levels of educational attainment when they enter prison. Bloom, Owen, and Covington (2003) report that 44% of women incarcerated in state prison enter the facility without a high school diploma. In this work, I review relevant literature and explain variables related to low levels of educational attainment. The book study curriculum is designed to empower incarcerated women through the use of reflection and by development of literacy, oral communication, and critical thinking skills. Transformative learning theory frames this work.

### **Literature Review**

Victimization impacts school performance. Female inmates report poor academic performance as a byproduct of their parents' lack of interest in their school achievement (Carrigan & Maunsell, 2014; Mageehon, 2003). According to Mageehan (2003) incarcerated women's educational success is furthered by interaction in social groups that promote awareness of educational experiences. Furthermore, neglect and severe abuse (physical, emotional, and sexual) undermine motivation and ability to concentrate, as DeHart (2008) illustrates through Laura's story.

Laura started getting in trouble a lot after her mother's boyfriend had touched her. She began throwing stuff at cars, starting fires, tearing stuff up, and raising hell. Now that she thinks back on it, she thinks she was trying to make someone ask what was wrong. (p. 1370)

Laura, who failed English as a high school freshman, cited coursework overload; she had too much to concentrate on at home because she worried about personal and family problems, such as being impregnated by her stepfather. Rather than having a support system at school, young girls like Laura often find they are stigmatized and further victimized, often bullied, and considered outcasts. Rather than a place of respite, school becomes another place of abuse and intimidation.

Low levels of educational attainment result in lower levels of employment and income for incarcerated women. Prior to incarceration, women do what they can to feed their families and to survive. Often, survival depends on public assistance (Leigey & Reed, 2010). Most women who enter prison are not employed full-time when they are arrested. One third of female inmates have a monthly income of less than \$1000.00 a month prior to arrest (Kruttschnitt, 2010). Many women survive on public assistance; nearly 30% receive welfare benefits prior to arrest (Sokoloff, 2005). Much like their male counterparts, a lack of cultural and political capital resulting in poor educational opportunities play a significant role in their incarceration. Accordingly, women inmates demonstrate prior membership in underserved populations before entering prison.

### **Literacy Skills Training**

Correctional facilities often provide reading labs so inmates can work on literacy skills in a dyad or a one-on-one setting. The dyad is often facilitated by instructors, peer tutors, and community volunteers. The inmates with the least amount of education are most likely to be enrolled in such courses. The courses are designed to increase literacy and math levels of inmates

(Coley & Barton, 2006; Tolbot, 2002) so women can continue to further their education through additional learning opportunities.

As noted earlier, many inmates lack less than favorable childhood educational experiences (Annamma, 2016; Carrigan & Maunsell, 2014; Mageehon, 2003). Teachers who fail to offer academic or emotional support and home-lives of abuse make learning and the learning environment problematic, resulting in high rates of women who choose to drop out of high school (Cole & Cohen, 2008; DeHart, 2008). Disengagement from school occurs because of domestic problems at home, alienation from family members, disconnection from teachers, and a perception that no one cares about them or their academic success. Accordingly, literacy classes, adult basic education (ABE) course work, and general education diploma (GED) testing are important in a correctional setting because many inmates have little educational experience. Lack of educational experience and learning outcomes increase the likelihood of recidivism, post release. As a result, educational programs in prisons are designed to meet the needs of incarcerated women with the lowest levels of education, as these women have the highest rate of recidivism (Coley & Barton, 2006; Tolbot, 2002).

The most common educational programs in prisons are Literacy and ABE classes, designed to support inmates as they learn to read, write, and perform basic math skills to help pass the official GED. After inmates pass the GED exam, they are allowed to further their education with more advanced studies if such studies are available. The goal of these educational programs is to make incarcerated people more employable when released from prison. Inmates who are able to acquire and retain employment are less likely to recidivate (Coley & Barton, 2006; Tolbot, 2002).

**Educational Programming in Women's Corrections**

To my knowledge, there is a lack of literature devoted to education programs in women's prisons. What literature does exist fails to differentiate the needs of incarcerated woman from men's needs, despite gender-specific needs (Van Hooris, 2012). The scarcity of research on women's education in prison is not surprising, since men make up 93% of the nation's incarcerated population (Leigey & Reed, 2018). Research related to prison education is focused mostly on men. The overall lack of research on incarcerated women suggests that educational programs for women are seemingly the same programs in place in men's prisons, despite myriad differences and needs arising between the two populations.

A number of studies (Annamma, 2014; Brown & Bloom, 2009; Cobbina, 2010; Gray, Mays & Stohr, 1995; Erickson & Young, 2010; Mageehon, 2003) provide insight as to educational resources and opportunities potentially beneficial to women within prison systems. Mageehon (2003) found that many young incarcerated women learn best in "an environment in which they were allowed to work at their own pace with intensive one-on-one instruction" (p. 195). The prison classroom lends itself to positive learning experiences due to prison educators who are trained to support learners of varied levels and are familiar with traumatic life experiences.

Another proven resource for incarcerated women is art therapy. Erickson and Young (2010) demonstrate that art therapy is both an effective and beneficial tool for helping women learn to cope with difficult or traumatic emotions. The researchers suggest the effectiveness of art therapy for incarcerated women in "stimulating introspection, building self-esteem and self-awareness, and allowing insights to come to the surface" (p. 38). Implementing art therapy can be cost-efficient and can help break the victimization to criminalization cycle.

When such programs are provided to women, the benefits are apparent, yet most prisons still fail to provide educational opportunities for women other than GED classes required by law. Gray, Mays, and Stohr (1995) found that “inmates rated increased educational and vocational programming as their top priority” (p. 199), evincing that these programs would not go underutilized if implemented. In a similar vein, Erickson and Young (2010) found that some educational programs fail women when they “ignored their intersectional identities, reinforced their identities as criminals and did not address their academic needs” (p. 321). Prison systems and attitudes should shift from solely punishment to rehabilitation that includes providing many and adequate educational resources and opportunities for incarcerated women to facilitate positive change (Erickson & Young, 2010).

### **Background on Wyoming Women’s Center**

The population of Wyoming Women’s Center (WWC) fluctuates daily, as does the prison classification of the inmate population. Prison classification is a method of assessing the inmate’s security risks, program needs, and program requirements. Currently there are one hundred sixty-two (162) women classified as minimum custody, thirty-three (33) women classified as minimum restricted custody, and forty-four (44) women classified as medium custody at WWC. Eighteen (18) new female inmates are yet to be classified. These newly received inmates will be housed in the reception/assessment unit until they are given a security classification.

All women who enter WWC are screened at intake for educational backgrounds. The educational levels and needs are ascertained during screening. Results of the women’s educational screening are used for placement in educational programs. Women who are not able to verify that they are recipients of a high school diploma or GED are referred to the education department at WWC. Also, inmates who indicate they would like to receive additional assistance

to improve their academic skills are encouraged and allowed to attend ABE and GED preparation courses.

The goal of the education program at WWC is designed to support academic growth and personal development which will help females inmates become skilled workers, independent thinkers and competitive job seekers. Women who become skilled workers, independent thinkers, and competitive job seekers are more likely to reintegrate successfully into communities and are less likely to recidivate.

The average grade equivalent in reading, among the women at WWC, is 8.7 (eighth grade and seven months) and the average grade equivalent in math is 7.7 (e.g., seventh grade and seven months; Wyoming Department of Corrections, 2014). There are two routes for women to improve and complete basic education while incarcerated at the WWC: Adult Basic Education and General Education Diploma Preparation Program. The ABE program provides instruction for those inmates who do not have a verified high school diploma or GED to enable them to successfully prepare for and pass the GED test.

### **Transformative Learning Theory**

Transformative Learning Theory orients the way learners interpret and reinterpret their experience. The theory is central to making meaning, resulting in student learning (Mezirow, 1978/1991). Taylor and Cranton (2012) define transformative learning as a process by which previously assimilated assumptions, beliefs, values, and perspectives are questioned and validated. Transformative learning theory is based on human communication that adults use to interpret information for constructing new meaning to guide future actions. Cranton (2016) asserts that during transformative learning, learners share experiences and resources to create new knowledge.

Transformative learning requires an awareness of one's current life conditions (Taylor & Cranton, 2012). The theory relies on one's ability to make meaning out of experience and to question experience (Mezirow, 1978/1991). Transformative learning is voluntary and is often prompted by an unexpected outside event. Even though the prompt might be outside one's control, the reaction is to be self-reflective. An element of transformative learning is a voluntary response from the learner (Cranton, 2016). Voluntary self-reflection is required for a person critically to question his/her beliefs and assumptions. Learning how we are caught in our own history and continue to relive it, is cardinal for adult learning.

Brookfield (2012) emphasizes how adults learn to challenge dominant ideology, uncover power, and contest hegemony. Power is present in all human interactions (Cranton, 2016). People who feel powerless are less likely to engage in critical self-reflection. A person who is insecure or who lacks confidence may not be able to overcome the emotional barriers necessary to question values, experiences, and perceptions without first learning to exercise her power in relationship with others (Cranton, 2006, 2016). Thus, critical self-reflection is important to one's transformative learning experience. Feminist theorists suggest that women have been ignored in the literature on transformative learning (Belenky & Stanton, 2000).

The presumption of equitable power is detrimental to women because women historically have been on the losing end of the gender power dynamic. Belenky and Stanton (2000) further transformative learning theory by proposing that women learn differently than men. Women learn in relationships that are caring and nurturing, and by connecting with others. Collaborative, balanced relationships are central to transformation. Empowerment through discourse requires thoughtful attention to avoid viewing discourse as an elitist enterprise, gifted to the articulate and formally educated (Cranton, 2006). Individual values, learning styles, lived experiences, and

personal preferences contribute to empowerment and transformative experience. Mezirow (1991) presumes equitable relationships in discourse, even though most human relationships have a power dynamic.

Freire (1970) emphasizes how reflection, critical reflection, and thoughts are difficult to grapple with for people who live under oppression. For example, people preoccupied with challenges such as survival, trauma, and hunger, internalize experiences differently. Critical examination of experience is unlikely to occur under such conditions. Incarcerated women typically have a long and rich history of oppression due to abuse, unemployment, and homelessness (Daly, 1992). Experience of oppression results in inequitable roles in incarcerated women's relationships.

Mezirow (2003) identifies six habits of mind that shape how the world is viewed and experienced. Two habits of mind, sociolinguistic and psychological habits of mind, are important for understanding the transformative learning experience for women, incarcerated women in particular. Sociolinguistic habits of mind are developed from social norms, cultural expectations, and use of language. A society that values patriarchy, and where women's roles are defined as meek and modest, gives rise to habits of mind about women's social identity. Psychological habits of mind explain how people see and understand their own self-concept, needs, anxieties, and fears. The cradles of psychological habits of mind tend to begin in childhood experiences, including abuse and neglect, and are often inaccessible to the conscious self.

In summary, transformative learning theory emphasizes the importance of including habits of mind in adult educational programs. Mezirow (1978/2003) suggests that transformation does not take place until an individual has acted on concepts learned. For adult learners, habits of

mind and critical self-reflection followed by interpretation of their ideas, experiences, and perspectives are important for learning to occur.

### **Rationale for Book Study**

Collaborative learning equips women with skills that translate to the world beyond the prison, such as developing critical thinking, oral communication, and higher order literacy abilities. Within the prison facility, learning helps develop basic skills needed for academic and learning achievement as well as building higher-order literacy competence for inmate peer tutors and leaders. Furthermore, education in prisons enables women to think creatively and critically in multiple situations. Stronger social connections among learners increase interaction in and outside the classroom, stimulate different personal perspectives, and foster acceptance of other points of view in the transformative learning experience (Cranton, 2016). Ultimately, education in prison empowers women to take command of their own lives. Taking command of their lives will benefit not only women, but their children and extended family.

I have selected #1 New York Times bestselling book *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* by Cheryl Strayed (2012) that demonstrates a long life journey to the discovery of self, as a model that could provide incarcerated women with a meaningful opportunity to develop academic and social skills.

- A female narrative that entails many life disruptions
- A courageous adventure to seek her own identity and life goals
- A unique process of the decisions the author, mistakenly but thoughtfully, makes to resolve change.

Studies show that academic opportunities for incarcerated individuals not only increase knowledge about the world, but also encourage introspection that often leads to life-long learning

(Erickson & Young, 2010; Gray, Mays & Stohr, 1995; Mageehon, 2003). Equally important, educational opportunities for prison inmates demonstrate respect for the individual, something that is often missing in prison life. This is particularly important for female inmates because of traumatic life experiences and poor social relationships the women suffered prior to incarceration (Daly, 1992; Leverentz, 2006). Skills learned and developed through reading the book will enable women to reflect on and to interrogate their own lived experiences and in turn, learn to help other women reflect and question their own experiences. The skills and tools needed for self-reflection and self-interrogation will help women as individuals, mothers, and as peer tutors.

The literature on incarcerated women's lived experiences and limited educational opportunities indicates a need for gender-specific learning opportunities that incorporate best practices. The book study is designed to help incarcerated women develop self-awareness of effects of past experience on their lives through learner-centered, participatory, contextualized, and sensitive learning groups. Self-awareness will be developed through literacy practice, oral communication activities, and critical thinking. Developing these skills will support the women's intellectual development, self-confidence, and parental role, and will also help the women become aware of adversity they must overcome to take command of their own lives.

Women in prison should be seen not only as individuals, but also as vital members of society. Communities rely on members to strengthen the general welfare and bonds of community. However, literature reveals that lack of family and institutional support was missing from the women's adolescence (Annamma, 2016; DeHart, 2008; Mageehon, 2003). Such lack of support results in reduced opportunities for success. Now adults, the women are wives, mothers, and sisters responsible for the well-being of children and families, and the women carry an integral role in communities. Just societies should be accountable for providing equitable

opportunities for incarcerated women. Equitable opportunity would allow the women to seek success as individuals in communities and lead them to their own pursuit of happiness. The book study curriculum described in the present work is designed aid the women in their unique positions in their quest for empowerment.

### **Relevance of Book Study**

*Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* recounts memories which entail the issues of women's place in society, poverty, single parenthood, drug addiction, infidelity, and divorce through the first person narrative of Cheryl Strayed (2012). The experiences retold by Strayed are similar in context to those of incarcerated women. *Wild* is a woman's experience of adversity and reconstruction while she overcame seemingly unsurmountable odds. The narrative prompts the reader to look within herself to interrogate her own estimation and perception on her own life.

### **Themes of Book Study**

After the untimely death of her young mother, Strayed's depression and resentment resulted in her increased disregard for personal and relational boundaries. Drug abuse, marital infidelity, and dissolution of social and emotional bonds with friends and family resulted in disintegrated values and fragmented self-worth. Determined to reconstruct the person her "mother raised her to be," Strayed set out to hike the Pacific Crest Trail where she faced hunger, thirst, injury, fatigue, boredom, loss, bad weather, and wild animals in search of the person she once was. The author ultimately reached new levels of joy, accomplishment, courage, and peace, and experienced unanticipated companionship.

## Objectives

Author Cheryl Strayed presents her memoir in five parts: Part I, *The Ten Thousand Things*; Part II, *Tracks*; Part III, *Range of Lights*; Part IV, *Wild*; and Part V, *Box of Rain*. Each part is manageable for the targeted population in terms of length, lexis, and complexity. The shortest section, Part I, is 38 pages in length; the longest, Part V, holds 76 pages. Lexis, or vocabulary, is accessible to the target audience while allowing opportunities for instruction. Flesch-Kincaid readability established the grade-level of the text to be at 7<sup>th</sup> grade, indicating the complexity of the written discourse is inclusive of a middle school level audience. For these reasons, text difficulty is appropriate for the targeted audience. Participants will engage in six weekly sessions: five reading sessions and one writing session. Variability of activities allows for inclusion of rich literacy, oral communication, and critical thinking exercises, without redundancy in learning tasks.

**Literacy.** Literacy exercises engage the women as readers and writers in a social setting and practice. Most women who enter Wyoming Women's Center, and prison more generally, test at the eighth-grade reading level and lack a high school equivalency diploma. Typically, these women struggle with basic reading and writing due to poor adolescent schooling experiences (Mageehon, 2003). The literacy exercises incorporated in each weekly session focus on diverse literacy skills such as increasing vocabulary; reading comprehension skills; understanding and writing poetry; and writing and reading dialogue. Reading and writing increase interest and confidence in literacy activities.

Literacy helps empower the incarcerated in many ways. Increasing vocabulary enhances a speaker's ability to communicate with creditability, clarity, and optimize meaning-making. Reading comprehension skills raise reader awareness of clues in writing and alert the reader to

the writer's purpose and to the presence of literary elements that help the reader make meaning intended by the writer. Understanding and writing poetry allows for creative interpretation of written expression. Writing and reading dialogue supports the development of understanding written communication and expressed perceptions of others. Increasing literacy skills may increase the women's self-confidence in learning.

***Oral communication.*** Strengthening oral communication supports incarcerated women's prosocial skills (Cobbina, 2010) and leads to more supportive relationships and post-release opportunities. Varied factors determine whether or not a women's re-entry into the free world after existing within the penal system is successful. Human communication skills include not only writing but also oracy. A familial social support system, employment opportunities, and a good relationship with her parole officer are reliant on an inmate's communication and prosocial skills. Cobbina (2010) found that "successful reintegration was the result of family support, supportive parole officers, and access to post-release services" (p. 218). Interpersonal communication involves factors such as organized speech, word choice, vocal inflection, and body language.

Lawrence and Snow (2011) define oral discourse as "oral production . . . centered on a topic, activity, or goal" (p. 323). Elements of oral discourse targeted in the book study fall into the category of organized speech, word choice, vocal inflection, and body language. Organized speech enhances coherence and comprehensibility. Word choice enhances precision in meaning making. Vocal inflection heightens word emphasis oral discourse. Body language is nonverbal behavior such as body movement, posture, gestures, and eye gaze that carry communicative meaning (Adler & Proctor, 2011). Such oral communication skills, part of oral discourse, support relationships needed for formerly incarcerated women's successful reintegration.

***Critical thinking.*** Exercises in critical thinking have proven to be effective and beneficial for incarcerated women. For example, art therapy used as a tool to learn how to deal with difficult or traumatic emotions allows women to express themselves in nonverbal ways. Implementing critical thinking exercises can be cost-efficient and beneficial to the women and can help to break the victimization to criminalization cycle. The book study focuses on critical thinking skills such as problem solving, reasoning, evaluating situations, and synthesizing ideas. Critical thinking can stimulate creative art for incarcerated women working on “introspection, building self-esteem and self-awareness, and allowing insights to come to the surface (Erickson & Young, 2010, p. 38).

The aforementioned objectives are met during five weekly reading-group sessions that parallel the five parts of the memoir written by author Cheryl Strayed. The variability of activities is attractive for facilitators and participants alike. Five weekly reading group sessions establish a short but concentrated book study, allowing participants to complete the activity without becoming, overtime, an intrusion that could impose on the prison-related demands or personal undertakings. The sixth, and concluding session, illustrates concept maps the women can use to write their own memoir, which can be completed at the individual’s chosen pace.

### **Summary**

Transformative learning theory emphasizes the importance of critical reflection and real life application in adult educational programs. Transformation does not occur until an individual has acted on the learning. For incarcerated women, critical self-reflection or examination of habits of mind, followed by the interpretation of ideas, experiences and perspectives is important for learning to occur.

The book study, *Fostering Self-Empowerment for Incarcerated Women: Wild From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*; A Book Study Curriculum incorporates transformative learning theory into the learning activities, encouraging the women to critically reflect and interpret their past experiences and perspectives. This critical reflection and interpretation supports the women's understanding of their habits of mind and learning in a socially supportive learning environment, allowing them to take command of their lives.

### **Reading Strategies**

Have a pencil in your hand when you read.

- Write questions or comments in the margins.
- Underline sections that evoke emotions, appeal to your senses, describe events you can relate to, add to the characterization, etc.
- Create a time line of events. Note events that are cause and effect related.
- Make notes of characters and events you think are meaningful.
- Focus on character development. Interpret and predict the character's development. Make notes of changes in the character. Make notes of reasons why the character is changing.
- Draw on your own past experience to help interpret or understand the characters and events. Make notes of when you can or cannot relate your experience to a character or event. Explain why you can or can't relate your experience to the character.
- Make the reading your own. Reading is a personal experience between you and a book, let yourself explore the character's life.

**Part One: The Ten Thousand Things**  
**Chapters 1–3**

Experiencing sadness and anger can make you feel more creative, and by being creative, you can get beyond your pain or negativity.

-Yoko Ono

**Warm Up Activities**

**Vocabulary**

Strayed stated, “I wasn’t crazy about the green pantsuit, but I wore it anyway, as a penance, as an offering, as a talisman” (2012, p. 10). In this sentence, Strayed used two words, “penance” and “talisman,” which are similar in meaning to “offering.” What synonyms could be used in place of “penance” and “talisman,” that would not change the meaning of the sentence?

**Figurative Language**

On page 28, Strayed began Chapter Two by saying,

If I had to draw a map of those four-plus years to illustrate the time between the day of my mother’s death and the day I began my hike on the Pacific Crest Trail, the map would be a confusion of lines in all directions, like a crackling Fourth of July sparkler with Minnesota at its inevitable center.

The underlined section of the quote is a simile, a type of figurative language that uses “like” or “as” to create a mental image and emphasize something by comparing two different things. In this quote, Strayed compared the lines on a map to a crackling Fourth of July sparkler.

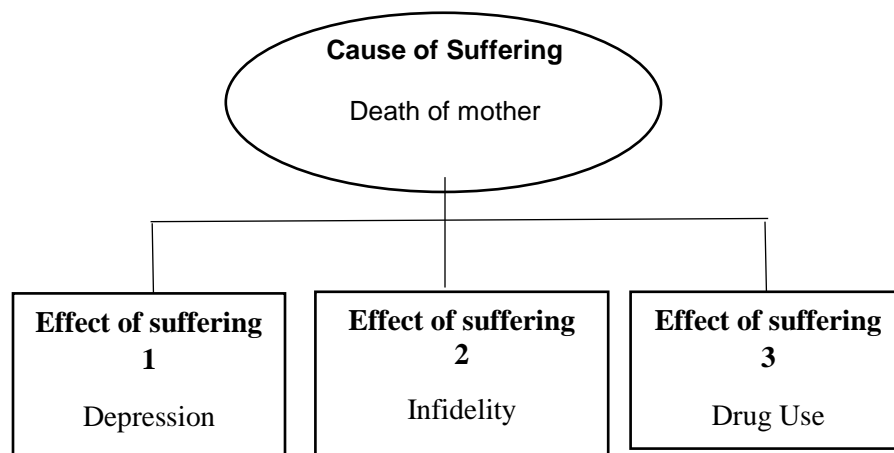
Questions: What was Strayed trying to emphasize to the reader in this simile? How did the use of figurative language emphasize this point?

### Literacy: Cause and Effect Relationship

The death of Strayed's mother catapulted Strayed into a life she was not familiar with; infidelity, drug use, and living as a vagabond. In Chapter One, *The Ten Thousand Things*, Strayed explained after her mother's death,

It took me years to take my place among the ten thousand things again. To be the woman my mother raised. To remember the way she said honey and picture her particular gaze. I would suffer. I would suffer. I would want things to be different from the way they were. (p. 27)

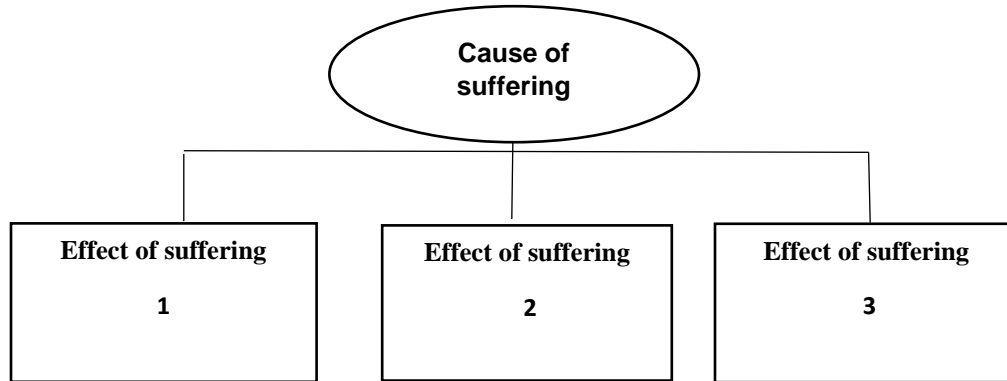
If Strayed had created a concept map of the cause and effects of her suffering it might look like the graphic organizer below (see Figure 1).



<Figure 1> Concept map of Strayed's suffering.

Reflect on a time or event in your life when you suffered and were no longer “among the ten thousand things,” you used to be, such as; the woman you were raised to be, the significant other you wanted to be, the mother you hoped to be, the employee you dreamed to be, the friend you aspired to be, or the person you intended to be.

Create a concept map (see Figure 2) of the time or event that caused you to suffer and the effects of that suffering.



<Figure 2> Concept map of your suffering.

Use the concept map to write a one page detailed letter to yourself, identifying the cause and effect relationship of the event that caused you to suffer. Clearly identify the cause of your suffering and the effects of your suffering. Explain the cause and effect relationship of your suffering. Conclude your letter by offering yourself compassion and understanding perhaps that had not been offered by others during your suffering.

**Literacy Group Discussion:** Read your letter to the group. After everyone has read their letter out loud, identify women in the group who had similar experiences. Discuss how the experiences were similar. How could others have eased the suffering experienced?

**Oral Communication: Verbal and Nonverbal Cues**

On page 30, Strayed described an exchange with a hotel clerk in Mojave, CA;

**Clerk:** It's eighteen dollars, said the old woman who stood behind the counter. With rude emphasis, she looked past me, out the glass door through which I had entered moments before. Unless you've got a companion. It's more for two.

**Strayed:** I don't have a companion, I said, and blushed-it was only when I was telling the truth that I felt as if I were lying. That guy was just dropping me off.

**Clerk:** It's eighteen dollars for now, then, she replied, but if a companion joins you, you'll have to pay more.

**Strayed:** A companion won't be joining me, I said evenly.

Strayed was honest when she said she didn't have a companion, and the clerk was doing her job when she asked and stated there would be an additional charge if an additional guest stayed in the room. However, tone of voice, eye contact, body language and intentions could have improved the dialogue, and Strayed's impression of the hotel clerk.

Choose a partner from the book study. One person will role-play Strayed and the other will role-play the hotel clerk. The person who is role-playing the hotel clerk will begin the oral communication activity by saying;

**Clerk:** It's eighteen dollars. Unless you've got a companion. It's more for two.

(The person role-playing Strayed will then respond with;)

**Strayed:** I don't have a companion.

**Clerk:**

**Strayed:**

**Clerk:**

**Strayed:**

**Clerk:**

**Strayed:**

**Clerk:**

**Strayed:**

**Clerk:**

**Strayed:**

Continue the conversation creating dialogue which is mindful of each person's concerns (not having a companion and hotel fees). Also, be conscious of your tone of voice, eye contact, body language and intent. Make sure the concerns of both, Strayed and the hotel clerk, are satisfied before ending the conversation.

### **Oral Communication Group Discussion**

What nonverbal communication were you most conscious of using? What nonverbal communication were you most conscious of observing? How can nonverbal communication impact verbal communication? Explain your answers.

**Critical Thinking: Before and After**

Eddie, Strayed's stepfather, a carpenter, fell off a roof and broke his back. Eddie received a \$12,000 settlement for his injury which was used to buy forty acres of land *up north*. "There was no house. No one had ever had a house on that land. Our forty acres were a perfect square of trees and bushes and weedy grasses, swampy ponds, and bogs clotted with cattails" (p. 15).

The family moved "up north" with two horses, cats, dogs and a box of ten chicks. On the forty acres they built a garden that provided for them through the winter and "a one-room tarpaper" shack for the family of five.

Strayed stated of her new life,

In our new life as pioneers, even meeting the simplest needs often involved a grueling litany of tasks, rigorous and full of boondoggle. Our kitchen was a Coleman camp stove, a fire ring, an old-fashioned icebox Eddie built that depended on actual ice to keep things even mildly cool, a detached sink propped against an outside wall of the shack, and bucket of water with a lid on it. (p. 16)

Karen and I shared a bed on a lofted platform built so close to the ceiling we could just barely sit up. Leif slept a few feet away from his own smaller platform, and our mother was in a bed on the floor below, joined by Eddie on the weekends. (pp. 16-17)

Use Strayed's visual representation of the forty acres of land when it was initially purchased and the forty acres of land after the family modified the property with a house (pp. 15-17) to create a before and after artistic representation of the property.

**Critical Thinking Group Discussion**

What do you think would be the most challenging part of living in the tarpaper shack?

What would be the best part? Explain your answers.

**Group Activity: Analytical Thinking**

Strayed described the contents of the backpack (pp. 39-40), which she planned to carry one thousand miles. When she purchased the supplies she stated, “I felt like I had become a backpacking expert” (p. 41). However, Strayed never packed the backpack with her supplies until the morning she began the hike. She was surprised when she was barely able to lift the backpack and disappointed at the slow hiking pace she was restricted to because of the weight.

Use the chart (see Figure 3) to analyze the contents of Strayed’s backpack. As a group, select the items you would keep and select the items you would discard before a 1,000 mile hike. Give a reason for each item you keep and each item you discard. (Keep this list for an activity later in the book.)

<b>Item in Backpack</b>	<b>Keep</b>	<b>Discard</b>	<b>Reason for your decision</b>
Blue compression sack for clothes			
Sleeping bag			
Camp chair			
Head lamp			
5 bungee cords			
Water purifier			
Collapsible stove			
Aluminum canister of gas			
Little pink lighter			
Small cooking pot			
Large cooking pot			
Utensils			
Sports sandals			

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Quick dry pack towel			
Thermometer key chain			
Tarp			
Insulated plastic mug with handle			
Snakebite kit			
Swiss Army knife			
Miniature binoculars			
Fake leather zip up case			
Fluorescent colored rope			
compass			
Book that teaches how to use a compass			
First aid kit			
Toilet paper			
Stainless Steel Trowel			
Bag of toiletries			
flashlight			
Metal candle lantern			
candles			
Foldable saw			
Green Nylon bag w/ tent			
32 oz. water bottles			
Dromedary bag			
Rain cover for backpack			
Raincoat			
Extra batteries			

Waterproof matches			
Mylar blanket			
Bottle of iodine pills			
Two pens			
Staying Found Pacific Crest Trail (Book)			
As I Lay Dying (Book)			
The Dream of a Common Language (Book)			
200 page sketchbook			
Postage stamps			
Spiral notebook			
Camera w/ accessories			

<Figure 3> The contents of Strayed's backpack.

### Group Discussion

If you were going on a 1,000 mile hike for the first time, would you rather have too many supplies or not enough supplies? If you were going on a 1,000 mile hike, what one personal item would you bring along to help you find your place “among the ten thousand things”, again?

Explain your answers.

**Culminating Activity: Simile**

A couple of days before Strayed’s mother died, twenty-two year old Strayed asked her mother, “Have I been the best daughter in the world?” Her mother said she had been the best daughter in the world. Still, Strayed thought, “This was not enough. I wanted those words to knit together in my mother’s mind and them to be delivered, fresh, to me.”

Why did Strayed ask her mother if she had been the best daughter? What was she hoping to get from her mother? What emotional character traits can you attribute to Strayed? Create a simile to emphasize Strayed’s emotional vulnerability.

Example: While Strayed’s mother was dying, Cheryl Strayed was **like** a

---

Example: While Strayed’s mother was dying, Cheryl Strayed was vulnerable **as** a

---

**Part Two: Tracks**  
**Chapters 4–7**

*I love poetry. I love rhyming. Do you know, there are poets who don't rhyme? Shakespeare did not rhyme most of the time, and that is why I do not like him.*

-Chuck Berry

**Warm Up Activities**

**Vocabulary**

Strayed stated, “*The Pacific Crest Trail, Volume 1: California* had explained the process with its usual equanimity” (p. 47). Synonyms for equanimity are; poise, composure and self-control. Use the synonyms to determine what Strayed was implying about the trail guide. Re-read page 47 for more contextual information.

**Text to Self**

Strayed wrote,

Inhaling it now, I didn't so much smell the sharp earthy scent of the desert sage as I did the potent memory of my mother. I looked up at the blue sky, feeling, in fact, a burst of energy, but mostly feeling my mother's presence, remembering why it was that I'd thought I could hike this trail. (p. 59)

Simply smelling the desert sage evoked the memory and spiritual presence of Strayed's mother and reminded her of her own purpose and safety on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT).

Strayed quickly reminded herself that she is safe on the trail; she had already endured the worse experience, the death of her mother.

Who drives you forward, emotionally, mentally and physically, to be the best version of yourself? What is it about that person who drives you to be the best version of yourself? What sights, sounds, smells, feelings or emotions remind you of that person?

**Literacy: Poetry**

On the first night on the Pacific Crest Trail, Strayed read and reread one poem from the book, *Dreams of a Common Language* (p. 61). The poem, *Power*, is about the potential and complexities of women's power. Specifically, the poem is written about Marie Curie, a chemist who, at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, pioneered the study of radioactivity. As a female chemist, Curie was rare and also powerful. Yet, what made her powerful in the world of science, experimentation of radiation, is also what killed her. In 1934, Curie died from radiation poisoning.

Read and reread *Power* by Adrienne Rich, just as Strayed did. Read it out loud, allowing your voice to rise, just as Strayed did on her first night on the PCT.

As you read, notice the poem does not have a rhyme scheme. Not all poems rhyme, but all poems do have rhythm. As you read, determine the rhythm of the poem.

After you read the poem,

**Underline** the words you emphasized as you read. (Where did your voice rise the most?)

**Circle** the lines that indicated Curie denied her illness was associated to radiation.

**Highlight** the lines that describe the effects of radiation on Currie's body.

**Discuss** the reason's Currie denied radiation as the cause of her illness.

**Consider** the reasons Strayed seems to have a particular interest in this poem.

**Evaluate** if Strayed's mother could be her radiation or causing the death of her?

***Power, by Adrienne Rich***

*Living in the earth-deposits of our history*

*Today a backhoe divulged out of a crumbling flank of earth  
one bottle amber perfect a hundred-year-old  
cure for fever or melancholy a tonic  
for living on this earth in the winters of this climate*

*Today I was reading about Marie Curie:  
she must have known she suffered from radiation sickness  
her body bombarded for years by the element  
she had purified  
It seems she denied to the end  
the source of the cataracts on her eyes  
the cracked and suppurating skin of her finger-ends  
till she could no longer hold a test-tube or a pencil*

*She died a famous woman denying  
her wounds  
denying  
her wounds came from the same source as her power*

**Write a Poem:** Currie became powerful in society and the scientific world because of the contributions she made to the field of science. However, radiation, which made her powerful, also killed her. Think of something that makes you feel powerful, but really makes you weak. This could be a friend, a bad habit, an addiction, a job, etc. Create a concept map to organize

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your thoughts and information, then write a three stanza, fifteen line poem about something that makes you feel powerful but really makes you weak. Write your three stanza poem in the format provided. Title your poem with a single, powerful word, which emphasizes the topic of your poem.

**Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_

5 \_\_\_\_\_

6 \_\_\_\_\_

7 \_\_\_\_\_

8 \_\_\_\_\_

9 \_\_\_\_\_

10 \_\_\_\_\_

11 \_\_\_\_\_

12 \_\_\_\_\_

13 \_\_\_\_\_

14 \_\_\_\_\_

15 \_\_\_\_\_

**Literacy Group Discussion:** Take turns reading your poems to the group, then choose two poems from the group to analyze. Use the following prompts to analyze the poems.

**Underline** the source of the false strength.

**Circle** the lines that indicate \_\_\_\_\_ is a false source of strength.

**Highlight** the lines that describe the adverse effects of \_\_\_\_\_.

**Discuss** the reasons the writer felt strengthened by \_\_\_\_\_.

**Consider** the reasons the writer did not discard \_\_\_\_\_ sooner.

**Evaluate** positive options the writer could rely on for a sense of strength.

**Oral Communication: Supportive Statements**

Strayed was looking for a reason to end her hike on the PCT when Greg, a forty year old accountant from Tacoma, Washington, caught up to her on the trail. Greg told her he had been averaging twenty-two miles a day, which further depleted her enthusiasm to continue hiking.

**Waning Confidence:** “It’s all I can do to cover eleven or twelve [miles],” (p. 87) which she knew was a gross exaggeration of the daily distance she averaged.

However, her spirits were lifted when Greg replied.

**Supportive Statements:** “Oh, sure. That’s how it was for me at the beginning too, Cheryl. Don’t worry about it. I’d go fourteen or fifteen miles if I was lucky and then I’d be beat. And that was with me training ahead of time, taking weekend trips with my pack fully loaded and so on” (p. 87).

Think of a time you lost your confidence in your ability to complete something; a job, sobriety, hobby and considered quitting. What could someone have said to you to change your perspective? What did you need to hear from someone to increase your confidence? Write these answers down in the form of a one paragraph letter to yourself.

On a sheet of paper, write a one or two sentence statement of your lack of confidence in your ability to complete something. Exchange papers with someone in your group. Have them read the statement to you. Offer supportive statements, just as Greg did, with a confidence boosting counter argument. Include explanations that would have made a difference to you at the time. Talk yourself out of quitting. Say what you wanted to hear at the very moment you decided you wanted to quit. Convince yourself you can complete the task.

Think about your nonverbal communication such as posture, eye contact, hand gestures, etc. Also consider verbal communication other than words, such as tone of voice, emphasis on certain words, powerful words.

Take turns observing each person offer supportive statements to counter their own lack of confidence. Note sincere and insincere verbal and nonverbal communication.

**Oral Communication Group Discussion:** When offering support, what nonverbal communication and verbal communication seems most sincere? What nonverbal and verbal communication seems insincere? Why is sincerity important in this type of exchange?

**Critical Thinking: Song Writing**

During the fourth day on the PCT, Strayed experienced an extended period of anxiety due to her fear of mountain lions in the area. To help calm herself and to scare mountain lions away, Strayed sang “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” and “Take Me Home, Country Roads” aloud (p. 68).

Read/sing both songs, “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” and “Take Me Home, Country Roads.” Determine the rhythm of each song. Also, notice the rhyme scheme of each song, which is identified with lower case letters.

**Twinkle Twinkle Little Star**

*Twinkle twinkle little **star**. (a)*

*How I wonder what you **are**. (a)*

*Up above the world so **high**. (b)*

*Like a diamond in the **sky**. (b)*

*Twinkle twinkle little **star**. (a)*

*How I wonder what you **are**. (a)*

*Twinkle twinkle little **star**. (a)*

*How I wonder what you **are**. (a)*

*Up above the world so **high**. (b)*

*Like a diamond in the **sky**. (b)*

*Twinkle twinkle little **star**. (a)*

*How I wonder what you **are**. (a)*

**Take Me Home, Country Roads**

Almost heaven, West **Virginia** (a)

Blue Ridge Mountain, **Shenandoah River** (b)

Life is old there, older than the **trees** (c)

Younger than the mountains, blowing like a **breeze** (c)

Country roads, take me **home** (d)

To the place I **belong** (d)

West Virginia, mountain **mamma** (e)

Take me home, country **roads** (f)

Choose the tune to either “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” or “Take Me Home, Country Roads” to write two verses to a song that you could sing to yourself when you are feeling emotional or on edge. You decide the emotion you want to control through the use of a song; anger, sadness, bitterness, fear, anxiety, boredom, etc. If your song has a rhyme scheme, use lower case letters to identify the rhyme scheme.

Read/sing your songs to the group.

**Critical Thinking Group Discussion:** Songs, singing, and song writing are reflective of the arts and are artistic outlets. Often, in books, movies and real life, people recite familiar songs when they are nervous, anxious, lonely, bored, etc. Why are the arts, such as songs and music, used for emotional distractions? How do you use the arts, songs, music as an emotional outlet?

**Group Activity: Claim and Evidence****Claim**

By day ten on the PCT, Strayed realized hiking the PCT was more grueling than she had expected, her body ached more than she could bear, the weather was more severe than she had planned, her insignificance in the environment was evident, and she was ready to quit.

Read the very powerful, direct quotes, evidence that support the claim that Strayed was ready to quit the PCT.

**Supporting Evidence:**

“A I hiked, I tried to force myself not to think about the things that hurt-my shoulders and upper back, my feet and hips-but I succeeded for only short bursts of time” (p. 82).

“By noon the heat was so merciless and the trail so exposed to the sun I wondered honestly if I would survive” (p. 83).

“The sun stared ruthlessly down on me, not caring one iota whether I lived or died” (p. 83).

“Despite the things I’d endured so far on the trail, I’d never once considered quitting. But now, only ten days out, I was done. I wanted out” (p. 84).

By day ten, Strayed felt defeated by the PCT and seemed to have forgotten the reasons she decided to hike the grueling 1,000 mile trail. In chapters one through seven, Strayed stated many reasons why she *needed* to begin and finish the PCT. Hiking the trail wasn’t recreation for Strayed, it was therapy. Find four powerful, direct quotes which are evidence that supports the claim that Strayed was hiking the PCT for therapeutic reasons.

**Claim:** Hiking the trail wasn’t recreation for Strayed, it was therapy.

**Evidence:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

**Session Two: Group Discussion:** Choose the quote that is most powerful to you. Explain to the group why that quote is powerful. As a group, organize the quotes into a three stanza poem.

Choose the order of the quotes by meaning, length, chronological order, etc. Provide a rationale for the origination.

The poem will probably not have a rhyme scheme since it is created from a collection of quotes, but it will have rhythm, which will be determined by the group. As a group, create a rhythm for the poem. Finally, title the poem.

**Poem Title:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.

11.

12.

### **Culminating Activity: Evidence**

After Strayed and her husband divorced, she changed her last name. However, she did not return to her maiden name. Instead, she chose a new last name, Strayed. The name she chose, Strayed, is symbolic and reflective of the years between her mother's death and her divorce.

I had diverged, digressed, wandered, and become wild. I didn't embrace the words as my new name because it defined negative aspects of my circumstances or life, but because even in my darkest days - those very days in which I was naming myself - I saw the power of the darkness. Saw that, in fact, I had strayed and that I was a stray and that from the wild places my straying had brought me, I knew things I couldn't have known before. (p. 97)

Use the **evidence** in Session Two: Concluding Group Activity to choose an alternative last name for Strayed. The alternative name should be symbolic and reflective of the years between her mother's death and her divorce. Explain to the group why you choose that name.

**Comparison:** When Strayed reaches Kennedy Meadows, Albert, an experienced hiker, helps Strayed sort through her backpack, keeping only the items she needs (pp. 106-107). The items she does not need are discarded to the "PCT hiker free box" for other hikers to use.

Compile a list of the items Albert discarded to the "PCT hiker free box" and compare them to the list of items you would have discarded. Based on the similarities and differences, would you have packed more like Strayed or more like Albert?

**Part Three: Range of Light**  
**Chapters 8–10**

*You can't be brave if you've only had wonderful things happen to you.*

- Mary Tyler Moore

**Warm Up Activities**

**Vocabulary:** Strayed wrote, “I felt dislocated and melancholy when I hung up the phone, less excited about being in town than I thought I’d be” (p. 124). Use the context clues, other words in the sentence, such as “dislocated” and “less excited” to determine the meaning of melancholy.

**Text to Self:** On page 119, Strayed explained how walking the PCT for miles brought about a new appreciation and awareness to the immensity of the world. She wrote, “Until now, I hadn’t truly understood the world’s vastness - hadn’t really even understood how vast a mile could be - until each mile was beheld at walking speed.”

Can you make a similar comparison, comparing the length of the day during your freedom to the length of the day during your incarceration?

**Literacy: Text to Self and Text to World**

Strayed and Christine, a guest staying in the Packer Lake Lodge, discussed books and the quality of certain books and authors. The conversation made Strayed reflect on a conversation she had with her mother. In that conversation Strayed advised her mother that a book she received for Christmas was not “real literature,” so not worth her time. Strayed’s mother replied, “Well, my time has never been worth all that much, you might know, since I’ve never made more than minimum wage, and more often than not, I’ve slaved away for free” (p. 150).

The quote is reflective of feminized labor, the work many women rely on for income. Feminized labor is work dominated by women, associated with particular tasks of the female gender and is typically low paying. This type of labor is often used with regard to the responsibilities a mother or wife. Feminized labor is also often referred to as “women’s work” and associated with child rearing, teaching, baby-sitting, housekeeping, cooking, dressmaking, and waitressing, and is low paying. However, in the last few decades women have made advances in the formerly male-dominated work force and are becoming employed as doctors, lawyers, and politicians, and are earning higher wages.

Look through newspapers and magazines, search for articles, advertisements and pictures that either promote or reject feminized labor. For example, is the article about a stay-at-home mom, or a female politician? Do pictures of women depict them as housekeepers or as professionals in the work force? Explain how feminized labor was promoted or rejected in the article and/or picture.

**Literacy Group Discussion:** Discuss the common factors associated with women’s work. What skills do jobs categorized as women’s work require? What skills do those job *not* require? Discuss the employment you held prior to incarceration. Would you categorize your former

employment as feminized labor or male-dominated work? Were your wages reflective of feminized labor or of male-dominated work?

**Oral Communication: Situational Dilemmas**

Strayed found herself in a situational dilemma when she pitched her tent at the Whitehorse Campground, two miles from the PCT. When Strayed arrived at the campground it was late, she was tired, and she didn't think anyone would notice her, so she set up her tent despite not having any money to pay the fee at the campground. Not long after she set up her tent, the owners of the campground told her she needed to pay the \$12 camping fee or move off the campsite. Reluctantly, Strayed packed her belongings and moved toward the PCT.

Re-read pages 154-155. Underline the arguments Strayed used in her position for staying at the campground without paying. Circle the arguments the owners used in their position for requiring a \$12 fee. How would you categorize the dialogue? Was Strayed argumentative, combative, polite, understanding, or something else? How were Strayed's interactions with the campground owners appropriate or inappropriate? Would you have sided with Strayed or the owners of the campground? Why would you have chosen that side?

**Situational Dilemmas:** In situational dilemmas, ethical, moral, or legal factors may be operating. Count off from 1 to 10 (each woman should be assigned a number from 1-10). Assign each member of the group the situational dilemma that corresponds with the number they were assigned. Analyze the ethical considerations. Report to the group what you believe to be important in terms of ethics in your situation, and explain how you think the situation should be handled. Then, state your argument as if you were in that situation. During your argument, consider your tone of voice, eye contact, body language, and consideration of others. Others in the group may counter your argument, allowing you to either restate your argument or submit to them gracefully.

1. You are housed with someone you did not choose. You go through the appropriate channels to request a new roommate, but your request is denied. What do you do?
2. You miscalculate your commissary order by \$.22 and you are brought before a hearing officer. Do you accept responsibility? Explain your response.
3. You are hired at a bar/restaurant in your hometown. Your probation officer thinks the employment will lead to temptation (addiction) and doesn't think it is a suitable job. Do you keep the job or quit? Explain your decision.
4. Five previous job interviewers declined to hire you because you are a felon. You are now on your sixth job interview. You are tempted to lie about being a felon but know they will find out you are felon if they hire you. How can you handle the topic of being a felon to a potential employer?
5. At the grocery store you run into an old friend who you use to "use with." The friend asks you to come to her/his car. You know that is their way of trying to get you to use drugs. What is your response to your friend? What is your response when he/she insists no one will know if you "use" just one time?
6. While in prison you have not been able to have physical contact or intimacy with others. When you are released your mother wants to hug. Physical contact now causes you to have a panic attack. How do you explain that to her?
7. You are walking to the bus stop and wondering how you will pay your electric bill. You look on the ground and notice a \$20 bill on the sidewalk. You stop to pick up the money and continue walking to the bus stop. At the bus stop a woman taps you on the shoulder and says, "I dropped a \$20 bill and saw you pick it up. Can I have it back?" You don't know if the money really belongs to her and she has no way of proving it was her money. What do you do?

8. You are a cashier at a grocery store. A friend who has two pre-school-age kids, enter your lane at the grocery store. Your friend's spouse doesn't work because he/she has to take care of the children. You also know your friend is strapped for cash because he/she was recently fired. You see that your friend has groceries hidden inside his/her coat, in an attempt to steal them. What will you say?

9. Your friend's parents are selling their big house and moving into a smaller one. They are having a huge garage sale because they have thirty-nine years' worth of furniture and other household effects they no longer need. Among the sale items you see a crummy-looking brass-colored pendant on a greasy chain, and because you like junk jewelry, you buy it for two dollars from your friend's parents. When you take the necklace to the jeweler for cleaning and repair, he tells you it is really fourteen-karat gold and in just its weight alone, the necklace is worth three hundred dollars. What will you say to your friend's parents the next time you see them?

10. You want to live with your mom and dad while you work to save up money. You explain to your parents that when you have \$2000 saved you will move into your own place. They tell you they will think it over and let you know their decision. The next day they tell you that they are not comfortable with you living with them because you have previously stolen from them and used drugs in their house. How do you respond to them?

**Oral Communication Group Discussion:** Often, we are aware that there is potential for situational dilemmas before the dilemma even arises, such as family gatherings, job interviews, running into former friends involved in criminal activity, etc. How does practicing oral communication skills required in situational dilemmas help you respond favorably? Why is it important to respond favorably in situational dilemmas, and not become argumentative?

**Critical Thinking: Scene Sketching**

Strayed's rich description of the Sierra, Muir's Range of Lights, appeals to the senses (p. 120). Read Strayed's description the Range of Lights. Underline the descriptive words or phrases that appeal to your sense of touch, sight, sound, smell and taste. After you have read and underlined words or phrases that appeal to your senses, ask two different women to volunteer to read the passage to the group. As each woman reads the passage, close your eyes and concentrate on the experience that is described to you, the Range of Lights. After the passage is read, make notes regarding your experience of listening to the passage, instead of reading the passage. Was the experience different from when you read it?

Use the words and phrases you underlined in the book and your notes to create a sketch of the Range of Lights. In your sketch include the objects that appealed to your senses.

**Critical Thinking Group Discussion**

Show your sketches to the group. How are the individual sketches different? How are the sketches similar? How does individual interpretation of hiking, the outdoors, and appreciation of nature impact what is represented in the sketch? How do individual experiences of hiking, the outdoors, and appreciation of nature impact what is represented in the sketch?

**Group Activity: Cultural Awareness**

On pages 161 and 162, Strayed described the day Leif shot and killed their mother's very sick horse, Lady, so the horse would not have to endure another cold winter. The scene described by Strayed was graphic and heart-wrenching. When Lady finally died, Leif said to Strayed,

Mom can go to the other side now. That's what the Indians believe – that when a great warrior dies you've got to kill their horse so he can cross over to the other side of the river. It's a way of showing respect. Maybe mom can ride away now. (p. 162)

Leif relayed his knowledge of Native American Indian's and their beliefs about "crossing over." Different cultures have different traditions that are performed when a group member dies. Cultural groups are represented by race, ethnicity, religion, and geographic location. What death/funeral traditions are typical of your cultural group? What other cultural death/funeral traditions are you aware of?

**Group Discussion**

How are cultural traditions influenced? Who is responsible for passing them on to younger generations? What happens to the culture if the traditions are not passed on to younger generations? Explain one cultural tradition that is important to you.

**Culminating Activity: Rationalizing**

**Vocabulary:** Strayed stated, “I have problems a therapist couldn’t solve; grief that no other man in a room could ameliorate” (p. 134). Use the context clues, such as “couldn’t solve,” to determine the meaning of ameliorate.

**Rationalize:** After Strayed’s mother died, Eddie’s relationship with Strayed, Karen and Leif changed. On page 153 Strayed wrote,

Eddie pulled away from my siblings and me. He acted like he was our friend instead of our father. Quickly, he fell in love with another women, and soon she moved into our house with her children. By the time the first anniversary of my mother’s death rolled around, Karen, Leif, and I were essentially on our own; most of my mother’s things were in boxes I’d packed up and stored. He loved us, Eddie said, but life moved on.

Use the quote from page 153, and other evidence from the text, to understand Eddie’s actions after his wife died and Strayed’s hurt toward Eddie. Why did Eddie’s ability to “move on” hurt Strayed? Was Eddie wrong to move on so quickly? Pick a side, and rationalize either Strayed’s argument or Eddie’s actions. In your discussion, consider *loneliness* as the root of Eddie’s actions and Strayed’s hurt.

**Part Four: Wild  
Chapters 11–14**

*There are things known and there are things unknown, and in between are the doors of perception.*

-Aldous Huxley

**Warm-Up Activities**

**Vocabulary:** “That’s quite a pack you got there, kiddo, she said, and laughed raucously” (p. 183). The underlined word, *raucously*, is an adverb and is used to describe how *she* laughed.

Reread the passage, use the context clues, other words and sentences, to determine how *she* laughed. Was her laughter soft and gentle or loud and wild? What clues did you use to determine the meaning?

**Text to Self:** On pages 190-191, Strayed described a situation which depended on mind control, or mind over matter.

My two big toes had never recovered from the beating they took on the merciless descent from Three Lakes to Beldon Town. Their nails looked near dead. My pinky toes had been rubbed so raw I wondered if they’d eventually just wear away from my feet. What seemed like permanent blisters covered the backs of my heels all the way up to my ankles. But I refused to think of my feet that morning in Old Station. So much of being able to hike the PCT depended upon mind control: the stout decision to move forward, regardless.

Often, the ability to move forward is dependent on mind control, or mind over matter.

When was the last time you activated your mind control to move forward? What were the circumstances that could have prevented you from moving forward? How did you convince yourself to move forward?

**Literacy: Writing a Thank You Letter**

Strayed's feet are bruised, blistered, calloused and sore from her hiking boots. Rex, a hiker on the PCT, advised Strayed that her boots were too small and she needed a new pair. Strayed agreed with Rex, but knew she did not have enough money to buy new boots. However, Rex informed her that REI, the company who sold her the boots, had a satisfaction guarantee and would replace the boots for free.

When Strayed reached Falls Memorial State Park she called REI and was told a new pair of boots would be mailed to her on the PCT. The new boots were mailed to Castle Crags, a campground on the PCT, and were waiting for Strayed when she arrived.

Write a two paragraph thank you letter to the REI Corporation. In the thank you letter, thank them for; 1) offering the satisfaction guarantee and explain why it was beneficial to long distance hikers and 2) sending new boots to a campground on the PCT and explain why the new boots were needed. Conclude your thank you letter with a paragraph that summarizes your gratitude.

**Literacy Group Discussion:** Gratitude is typically expressed in verbal exchanges or in writing. Verbal gratitude tends to be a quick exchange, while written gratitude tends to require more time of the person who is expressing gratitude. How can a verbal expression of gratitude versus a written expression of gratitude influence the perception of those who are being thanked? Could one expression of gratitude be perceived as more heartfelt or meaningful? What could be perceived about a person who expresses gratitude? Explain your answers.

**Oral Communication: Understanding Perceptions of Others**

Jimmy Carter, a reporter for the *Hobo Times*, believed Strayed was a “hobo” and despite Strayed’s best attempts, he could not be convinced otherwise (p. 178). Strayed’s hair was matted, her clothes were dirty, everything she owned was in her backpack, and she was hitchhiking. By all appearances, Strayed looked like a homeless person and her appearance fueled Jimmy Carter’s belief that she was homeless. Strayed tried to explain to Jimmy Carter that she was on a long hike, “not on the road” but she was unable to change his perceptions of her.

Jimmy Carter developed a perception of Strayed, based on her appearance. Strayed explained why she looked the way she did and why she was hitchhiking. However, Jimmy Carter had already developed a perception of Strayed and his perception was not changed by her repeated explanation.

Incarcerated women are also subject to other people’s preconceived notions or perceptions. Incarcerated women are judged by their appearance and their uniform. Incarcerated women are also judged by their address, a prison facility. What assumptions or perceptions do you think people have about incarcerated women? Are their assumptions correct or incorrect? Explain your answers.

Imagine the day when you are released in the free world. You move into an apartment and your neighbor, who found out you were formerly incarcerated, has a perception of you as a threat to the community. One day, while arriving home, your neighbor approaches you and tells you that he/she doesn’t like having a dangerous person living in the complex. You are face to face with the neighbor and must respond to his concerns.

Talk to the women in the book study, just as you would the neighbor in the hypothetical situation. Respond to your neighbor’s concerns with honesty not hostility; sincerity not sarcasm;

consideration not dismissiveness. Use body language that shows you are confident not timid.

The women in the group may be active participants in the activity by asking questions or making suggestions, just as Jimmy Carter did. Remember, Jimmy Carter was not combative, insulting, belittling or snide toward Strayed. He was polite in his false belief that Strayed was homeless. Strayed was not combative, insulting, belittling or snide in her response toward Jimmy Carter. She was straightforward and even-tempered as she defended her stance. Use the same behaviors and tone in this activity.

**Oral Communication Group Discussion:** Why do people develop negative perceptions of others? Why is it difficult to change people's negative perceptions? Since it can be difficult, or impossible, to change someone's negative perception of you, what can you do to keep from fueling their negative perception of you? What perception are you most fearful of having to defend yourself from?

**Critical Thinking: RAFT**

In pairs, select a character or event from Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail to present in a creative socio-drama (e.g., panel, interview, family lunch, game show, etc.). Use the **RAFT** (Role of the Writer, Audience, Format, Topic) strategy, to evaluate, extend, and transfer knowledge of that character or event. Act out the socio-drama you chose. Through your socio-drama, others should develop a deeper understanding of the character or event.

Examples of socio-dramas you could choose.

1. Write the dialogue and act out a counseling session between Strayed and her counselor.
2. Create a game of Jeopardy in which you are the host and ask others questions about Strayed and/or her journey.
3. Write and perform a dialogue between Strayed and Paul, which underscores of the complexities of their marriage, divorce and relationship.
4. Write a letter from Strayed's mother to Strayed and read it aloud.

After you have chosen the socio-drama you want to create, use the RAFT strategy to brainstorm and begin writing your socio-drama.

**RAFT STRATEGY**

**Title of Socio-Drama:**

**Role of the Writer-** Who or what are you, as the writer? Are you Cheryl, Paul, Leif, Karen, Joe, Eddie, Mother or a traveler in the PCT?

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**Audience-** Who are you writing for? A game show audience, a newspaper, a counselor, a family member, hikers on the PCT, Strayed's absent father?

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**Format-** What format are you writing? A letter, poem, interview, Q and A, a play?

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**Topic-** Who or what are you writing about? Why did you choose that person or event? What do you want others to learn or understand?

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**Critical Thinking Group Discussion:** How does creating and performing a socio-drama help you understand the characters, events, and decisions better? The use of socio-dramas allows for others to share their perceptions of characters, events, decisions, etc. What perceptions surprised you?

**Group Activity: Perception of Others and Self**

Upon leaving the California portion of the PCT trail behind, Strayed wrote,

I cried and I cried and I cried. I wasn't crying because I was happy. I wasn't crying because I was sad. I wasn't crying because of my mother or my father or Paul. I was crying because I was full. Of those fifty-some hard days on the trail and the 9,760 days that come before them too.

I was entering. I was leaving. California streamed behind me like a long silk veil. I didn't feel like a big fat idiot anymore. And I didn't feel like a hard-ass motherfucking Amazonian queen. I felt fierce and humble and gathered inside, like I was safe in this world to. (p. 234)

At different times, hiking the PCT made Strayed feel like “a big fat idiot” a “hard-ass motherfucking Amazonian queen” and “fierce and humble and gathered.”

Identify the experiences on the PCT that made Strayed feel like:

**A big fat idiot-**

**A hard-ass motherfucking Amazonian queen-**

**Fierce and humble and gathered-**

The three perceptions Strayed held of herself were developed through her experiences on the PCT. Identify three perceptions you hold of yourself that were developed through your own experiences.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Group Activity Discussion**

Were the self-perceptions of each woman negative or positive? How can she overcome her negative self-perception? What helped establish her positive self-perception? What goal(s) can she set to help her develop a more positive self-perception?

**Culminating Activity: Text to Self**

**Vocabulary:** “Though a small group of hikers immediately embraces Montgomery’s idea, it wasn’t until Clinton Churchill Clark took up the cause six years later that a clear vision of the PCT began to coalesce” (p. 206). The underlined word, *coalesce*, indicates the ideas that two men, Montgomery and Clark, had for the PCT merged into one final outcome. When is another time, in American government or society, which two people’s ideas coalesced or merged together for a united outcome?

**Text to Text:** On page 231, Strayed describes a conversation with Vera and a young boy, Kyle, on the PCT. While Kyle was tossing blades of grass into the water, Vera explained to Strayed that Kyle’s mom asked her to take Kyle on the hike while she (Kyle’s mom) got her life straightened out. Kyle was upset when he overheard Vera talking about his “problems.” Strayed interjected and told Kyle she had big problems also. When pressed about her problems, Strayed told Kyle she “didn’t really have a dad.” Although, Strayed’s response was accurate, it was not the root of her problems. What were the roots of Strayed’s “problems”?

**Part Five: Box of Rain**  
**Chapters 15–19**

*The past, the present and the future are really one: they are today.*

- Harriet Beecher Stowe

**Warm-Up Activity**

Strayed described a situation with Jonathon, in which she was both nervous and self-conscious.

Jonathon, who was always looking at me every time I looked at him, which made me worry that he thought I was always looking at him because what if it was only a coincidence that every time I looked at him he was looking at me and he wasn't actually looking at me always. (pp. 248–249)

What reasons did Strayed have for being nervous around Jonathon? What reasons did Strayed have for being self-conscious around Jonathon?

**Vocabulary:** “Jonathon materialized by my side, squeezing my hand solicitously, saying he was glad I'd come, asking if I wanted another glass of wine” (p. 249).

Use the context clues, or other words in the sentence, to determine the meaning of the underlined word *solicitously*. How did Jonathon squeeze Strayed's hand? Why did he squeeze Strand's hand in that manner?

**Literacy: Character Analysis**

Use the activities provided to conduct a character analysis of Strayed. Use the analysis to write a brief character description of Strayed.

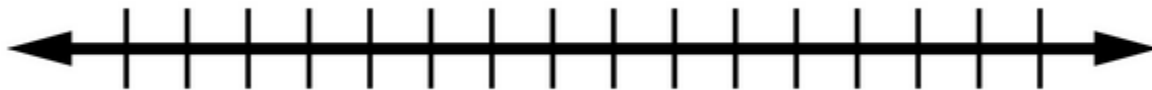
**1) Personality.** Use the timeline (see Figure 4) to describe Strayed’s personality before she began her hike on the PCT and use the next timeline (see Figure 5) to describe her personality during her hike of the PCT. Describe her personality through her thoughts, actions, feelings, reactions, perceptions, mannerism, communication skills and habits.

Use the timeline to plot the development of Strayed’s character traits in chronological order, or the order in which they developed.

**Strayed before the PCT**

Strayed as a little girl

Strayed in Mojave CA

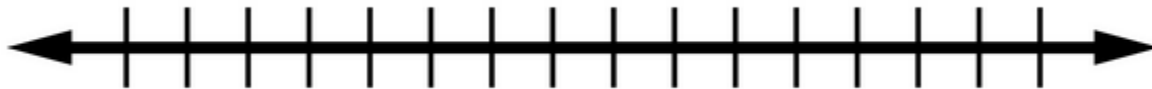


<Figure 4> Timeline of Strayed's character before she hiked the PCT.

**Strayed during the PCT**

Strayed in Mojave CA.

Strayed at the Bridge of the Gods



<Figure 5> Timeline of Strayed's character during her hike on the PCT.

**2) Character Type.** Is Strayed a flat character or a round character?

Flat Character: A character who has one or two personality traits that don't change.

Round Character: A character who has many complex traits that change and develop over time.

Explain your answer by using 3 sources of evidence in the text.

Strayed is a/n \_\_\_\_\_ character. My evidence from the text is;

1. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**3) Role of Characters.** Identify the protagonist, antagonist and foil of *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*. Use evidence from the text to support your answers.

Protagonist: The main character whom the plot revolves around.

Antagonist: The character who presents a challenge to the protagonist. Occasionally, the antagonist is not a person.

Foil: A foil is a character who contrasts the main character to emphasize their traits.

Protagonist:

Antagonist:

Foil:

**4) Character Description of Strayed:**

Use your notes from the character analysis activity to write a brief character description of Strayed.



**Oral Communication: Speech**

Throughout Strayed's telling of her hike on the PCT, she often reflects on her life and the people who had entered her life. One of those people is Eddie, her stepfather. After the death of Strayed's mother, Eddie remarried and moved on with his life. Because Eddie moved on so easily, seemingly, Strayed became estranged from him. However, a few nights before Strayed completes her hike on the PCT she realizes Eddie made her PCT hike successful.

While burning the book *The Ten Thousand Things* in a campfire, Strayed reflects on her relationship with Eddie. Re-Read the last paragraph on page 303 and the first paragraph on page 304 to better understand Strayed's reflection on Eddie.

Strayed completes her hike when she crosses the Columbia River on the Bridge of God's. When she completes the hike she had many people to thank for their support. One of those people is Eddie.

Pretend you are Strayed and you are completing your hike of the PCT. When you cross the Bridge of Gods you see Eddie. Write a speech that you could deliver to Eddie, in person. Tell him the reasons you were angry at him and then tell him the reasons you are grateful for him, because without him you would not have found yourself on the PCT.

Use the verbal and nonverbal communication skills in your hypothetical speech to Eddie.

- 1) Stand up straight
- 2) Uncross your arms
- 3) Make eye contact
- 4) Smile often
- 5) Facial expressions
- 6) Hand gestures

7) Voice audibility

8) Tone of voice

9) Sincerity

**Oral Communication Group Discussion**

Based on what you know about Eddie, how do you think Eddie would have responded to Strayed? Explain your answers.

**Creative/Critical Thinking: Paradox Statement**

Part Five. *Box of Rain* concluded *Wild: From Lost and Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, by Cheryl Strayed. When Strayed ended her hike on the PCT, she was no longer the drug addicted, sexually dependent, depressed person she was when she began the hike, that person was dead. Born on the PCT was the “person her mother raised her to be,” which was Strayed’s goal.

A paradox is a contradictory statement, situation or idea. Re-read the underlined passage. Identify the contradictory statement, situation or idea, or the paradox. Write a short explanation of why it is a paradox.

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Write either a eulogy for the person that died on the trail or a welcome home speech for the person who was born on the trail. Use the RAFT strategy from Part 4 to help guide your thinking and writing.

**Role of the Writer-** Who or what are you, as the writer? Are you at a funeral offering a eulogy or are you at a house party offering welcome home speech?

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**Audience-** Who are you writing for? Are you writing for mourners at a funeral or ecstatic friends and family member at a home?

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**Format-** What format are you writing? Is your speech an open letter, a poem, a song?

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**Topic-** Who or what are you writing about? Why did you choose the eulogy at the funeral or the speech at the welcome home part? What do you want others to learn or understand about Strayed?

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In your eulogy or speech, include as many of the literacy skills taught in the book study as possible.

- 1) A simile; a type of figurative language that uses “like” or “as” to create a mental image and emphasize something by comparing two different things. Refer to the warm up activity from Part One for figurative language.
- 2) A cause and effect relationship; when two or more events occur and one events results in another. Refer to the literacy activity from Part One for cause and effect relationships.
- 3) At lease 4 lines of Poetry (either original poetry or published poetry); lines that include rhythm and rhyme. Refer to the literacy activity from Part Two for poetry.

4) A situational dilemma; a difficult choice that must be made between two or more alternatives.

Refer to the oral communication activity from Part Three for situational dilemmas.

5) A statement of gratitude for those in attendance; a thank you. Refer to the literacy activity from Part Four.

6) A description of Strayed's character; qualities or traits unique to the character. Refer to the literacy activity from Part Five.

7) A paradox statement; contradictory statement, situation or idea. Refer to the group activity from Part Five for a paradox.

Read your eulogy or speech to the group. Be conscious of your verbal and nonverbal communication.

1) Stand up straight

2) Uncross your arms

3) Make eye contact

4) Smile often

5) Facial expressions

6) Hand gestures

7) Voice audibility

8) Tone of voice

9) Sincerity

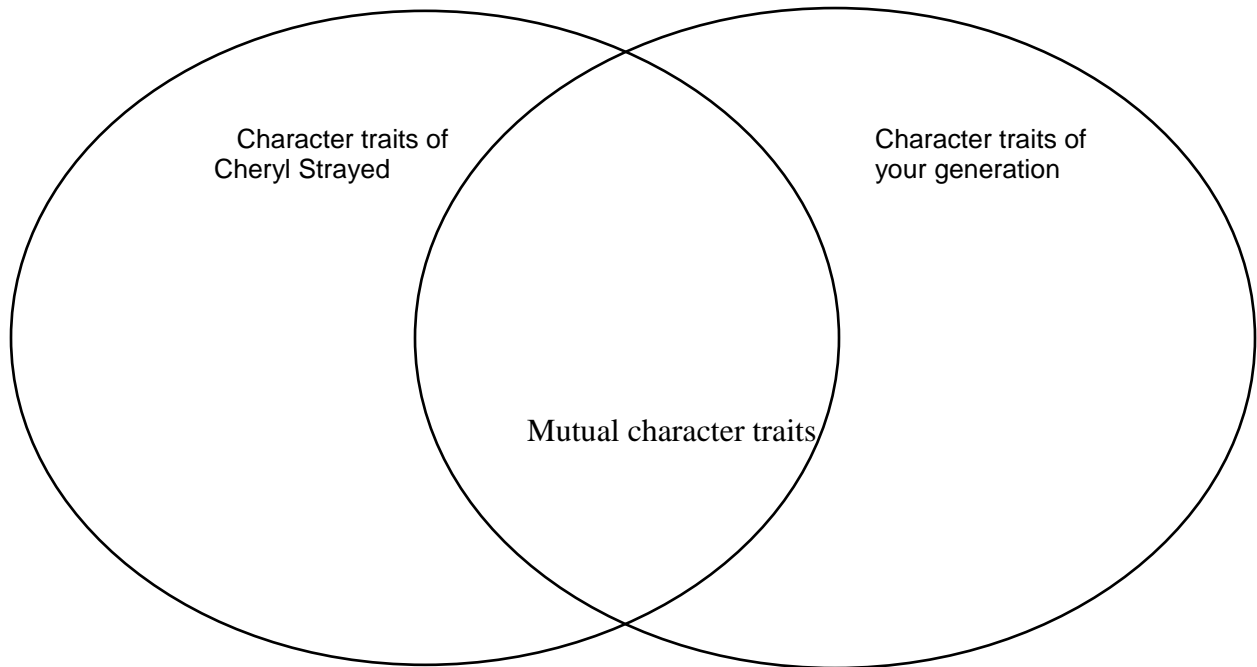
### **Creating/Critical Thinking Group Discussion**

Which of the practices Literacy, Oral Communication or Creative/Critical Thinking skills do you think will be most beneficial to you? Explain your responses. Which of the practiced skills do you need additional practice? Explain your responses.

**Group Activity: Text to Self and Text to World**

On page 240 Strayed wrote,

I'd liked several of the Grateful Dead songs, but I'd never collected tapes of their live shows or followed them around the country, like some of my Deadhead friends had. Kurt Cobain's death the year before had felt closer to me – his sad and violent end a cautionary tale not only of my generation's excesses, but of my own as well.



<Figure 6> Graphic organizer for compare and contrast

Use the outer sections of the graphic organizer (see Figure 6) to compare and contrast character traits of Strayed, and character traits that are associated with your generation. Use the inner sections of the circles to identify mutual character traits

What character traits and excesses were common among Strayed, Cobain and their generation?

**Group Discussion**

Identify other celebrities, whose deaths were influential for cultural or generational reasons?

How had the celebrities been influential? Why were they influential?

**Culminating Activity: Text to Self**

What similarities do you have with Strayed? What do you admire about her? What about her causes you disdain for her? Explain your answers.

Would you recommend *Wild: Lost and Found on the Pacific Crest Trail* by Cheryl Strayed to other women? Explain your answers.

### **Part Six: Memoir Writing**

A memoir is an author's account of times he/she witnessed (Barnet, Berman & Burto, 1960) and may be written any time during the author's life. A memoir details a specific memory; it may be written about an event that was funny, sad, happy, devastating, or life-changing. Writers use authenticity, honesty, and emotion to evoke description that allows readers to submerge themselves in the writer's experience.

For a writer, memoir writing is an opportunity to look inside oneself and to reflect on events, circumstances, and choices. Writing gives the author an opportunity to examine events in her life and to consider how the event changed her/him. Upon reflection, the author might ask if the event changed her, or whether a personal change came about. The author might identify pivotal turning points in her/his life, marking events that caused her/him to adopt a new outlook on her experience.

A memoir can be any length, from a single page to hundreds of pages. An author might choose to write his/her memoir in a variety of styles: A memoir can be written in poetry, song, a letter, dialogue, or an essay. The memoir belongs to the writer, and she chooses the format for telling her memory.

**Analyzing a Memoir**

Reread Chapter 1: The Ten Thousand Things from Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail, by Cheryl Strayed. This chapter is full of descriptive events, which are the basis of Strayed's memoir.

**Analyze Chapter 1: The Ten Thousand Things from Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail, by Cheryl Strayed by answering questions 1-6.**

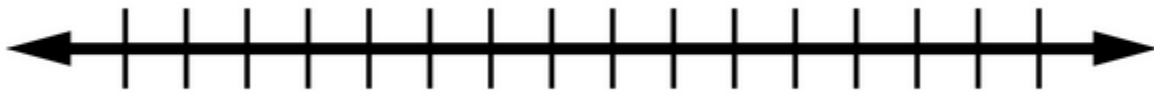
1. Create a timeline of events from Chapter 1. Begin the time line with the marriage between Cheryl's mom and dad and end the time line with the Cheryl's decision to backpack the Pacific Crest Trail.
2. Memoirs, written memories of one's life, often include people who influenced or affected the writer's life in either a positive or a negative way. Cheryl describes her mother as influential in her life, her desire to live and her desire to give up life. What qualities did Cheryl's mother have, which made losing her all the harder?
3. Through chapter 1, Strayed writes with honesty, authenticity and emotion. Identify three lines from Chapter 1 that portray the writer's honest, authenticity and emotion. Explain why you chose each of those lines. Explain why you think it portrays the writer's honesty, authenticity and emotion.
4. Strayed does an excellent job of creating visual imagery with only words. Choose one scene that you were able to visualize, through the author's words, and draw a sketch of that scene.
5. Strayed tells of many people and events in Chapter 1. These events were included to help the reader understand the significance of one single event that occurred in her life. What memory (event) is Strayed telling in Chapter 1. Why was that event significant?
6. What adversity did Strayed have to overcome? What was her plan for overcoming the adversity?

## Writing a Memoir

Brainstorming Activities.

1. Create a time line of your life (see Figure 7). On the time line, list the events that are most memorable, life changing, challenging and influential. When did you meet the person who most influenced your life? Why was a certain year such a difficult one? How did you overcome the problems you faced? How did it change you? When you make a timeline of your life, you will realize moments or events were transformative, or life changing. The time line will help you pick out the pivotal moments of your life.

Time Line



<Figure 7> Timeline of significant events in your life

2. Use your time line to choose a moment or event that was pivotal in your life. Chose a moment or event that is rich with details. The details should include people, places, and things. The details should appeal to the senses and emotions. That is where your memoir begins. Use the line below to write a sentence describing the pivotal moment.

Pivotal Moment = Basis of your memoir

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Complete each section of the graphic organizer (see Figure 8) with a complete sentence that answers the question.

What Pivotal Event/Memory is the basis of your memoir?		
1. What precipitated or caused the pivotal moment you chose?	2. What emotions did you experience during the pivotal moment?	3. How did the pivotal moment impact your life?

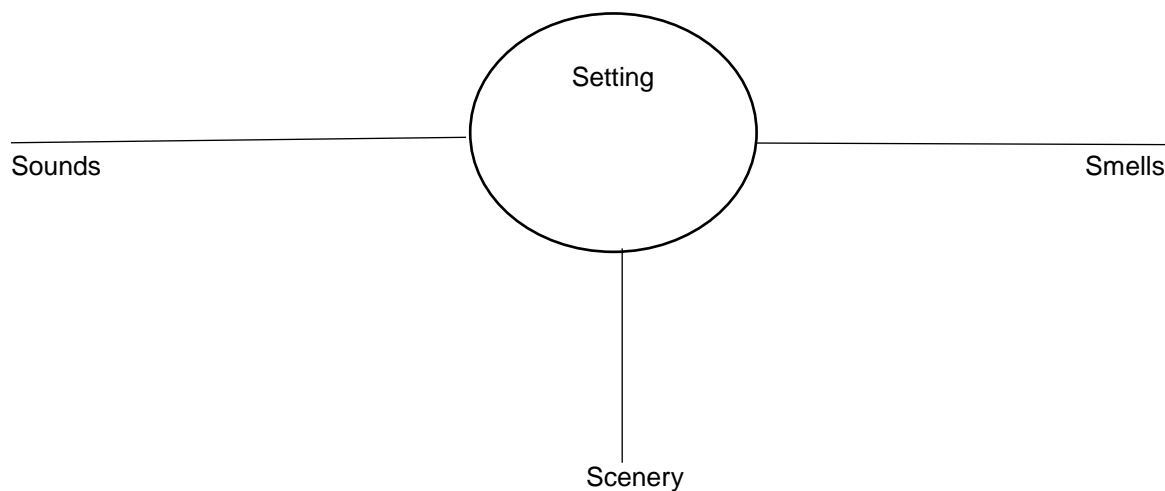
<Figure 8> Graphic organizer for pivotal event in memoir

4. Where is your memoir set?

Setting

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5. Use the graphic organizer (see Figure 9) to describe the setting of your memoir.



<Figure 9> Graphic organizer for the setting of your memoir

6. Who was involved in your memoir and what were his/her roles? Use the table (see Table 10) to note the people in your memoir and the significance of their role.

<Table Figure 10> *Chart of people and their roles in your memoir*

Person	Significance of role

7. How does your memory begin? How will you introduce your readers to your memoir?

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8. Start writing! Use brainstorming activities 1–7 to start writing a detailed description of your memory, or memoir. Use the writing guide as a checklist for your writing.

Use the checklist (see Table Figure 11) as you write your memoir.

<Table Figure 11> Checklist for writing a memoir

EMPOWERMENT FOR INCARCERATED WOMEN

Writing Guide	Yes	No
Did you begin by writing a timeline of memories?		
Did you select one pivotal from your time line?		
Did you complete the graphic organizer with sentences pertaining to the pivotal event?		
Did you incorporate imagery?		
Were the events in your memoir clearly explained?		
Was background information given on other people/characters so the reader understands their relevance?		
Did your memoir appeal to the sense?		
Did you read through your memoir for meaning, clarity and purpose?		
Did you ask someone to read your memoir for meaning, clarity and purpose?		

**Final Activity: Patchwork Quilt**

For two minutes, in silence, reflect on the last six weeks of the book study. What emotions or feelings do you have about the accomplishment of reading a book in its entirety? Write that emotion or feeling on a piece of scratch paper. Next, write a color that you correlate with the emotion or feeling you wrote down.

Open the package of construction paper that has been provided to you. Choose the color of paper that you correlated with the emotion or feeling you experienced. This paper will be your square for the quilt.

On the back of your quilt square write your emotion or feeling. Write 2–3 sentences stating why you chose that emotion or feeling.

Use the remaining construction paper to make cut outs, shapes, confetti, symbols etc. to represent your experience with Cheryl Strayed and *Wild*. Cut out shapes that represent people, places, experiences, emotions that you think are significant.

**Ideas for Cut Outs**

Hiking Boots

Love

Range of Lights

Stars

Moose

Snow

Forests

Bridges

Campgrounds

Books

Tents

Monster (the backpack)

Tears

Songs

Music Notes

Use the glue or paste, which is provided, to attach your cut outs to your piece of construction paper. Use the crayons, and colored pencils, which are provided, to add additional decorations to your quilt square, if you desire.

After everyone has completed their quilt square, lay the quilt squares on the floor. As a group, organize the quilt squares into patchwork quilt and tape them together.

Finally, sign the letter to the Warden, requesting permission to hang the patchwork quilt in a common room.



### Conclusion

The purpose of the book study curriculum is to empower incarcerated women through the use of reflection and development of literacy, oral communication, and critical thinking skills. Transformative learning theory frames the women's metamorphosis from custodial wards of the state to free-thinking agents of self-actualization. Low levels of educational attainment are supplanted by educational achievement.

Cheryl Strayed, author of *Wild: From Lost to Found on the Pacific Crest Trail*, recounts similar life events often experienced by incarcerated women, such as poverty, abandonment, homelessness, drug abuse, and domestic violence. On the basis of her experiences in youth and early adulthood, Strayed could have been an incarcerated woman. However, Strayed sought empowering opportunities that allowed her to overcome the effects of her early experiences and to attain self-actualization. Because of the similarities between Strayed and incarcerated women, Strayed's memoir, *Wild*, was chosen for the book study curriculum.

The curriculum for the book study is divided into five weekly reading sessions and one memoir writing session. The author divided her memoir into five parts: Part I, *The Ten Thousand Things*; Part II, *Tracks*; Part III, *Range of Lights*; Part IV, *Wild*; and Part V, *Box of Rain*. Each part is capable of standing alone in length and context. The curriculum is aligned with the five bounded sections in the memoir, allowing readers to engage with Strayed's experiences while also reflecting on their own. The sixth and final session supports the women's memoir writing as they recount their own experiences.

The literacy exercises in the six book study sessions are designed to engage the women as readers and writers in a social setting. Engagement is important to the women's social and

educational growth, as most who enter the Wyoming Women's Center had quit high school prior to graduation and entered the facility with an eighth-grade reading level and with intrapersonal deficits, such as lack of self-esteem and negative self-image. The book study curriculum addresses such deficits by building needed interpersonal relationships. Social and educational development is centered on development of literacy skills, oral communication skills, and critical thinking skills.

The literacy exercises incorporated in each of the six weekly sessions are designed to increase the women's interest and confidence in reading and writing activities. Oral communication skills are designed to support the women's social skills, leading to supportive relationships, increased post-release opportunities, and successful reintegration. Critical thinking exercises are designed to stimulate introspection, self-esteem, and self-awareness of all women, but particularly for women who have difficulty expressing themselves verbally. Implementing the diverse literacy exercises in a book study is not only cost-efficient for prison educational programs, but is also beneficial for the women who seek to break the victimization to criminalization cycle.

Critical self-reflection, introspection, and social engagement activities are designed to facilitate transformative learning. Through the transformative learning experience, participants will develop a better understanding of their past experiences and the impact of those experiences; by understanding past experiences, the women will gain a better understanding of the need to effect change in their lives. Such change could result in stronger family relationships, increased employment opportunities, improved confidence in educational programming, and strengthened understanding of parental responsibilities. Finally, the reading and writing activities included in

the book study will help foster the women's development of empowerment and aid them in their life-long journey in learning.

**Suggested Reading List-Women's Memoirs**

**Angelou, Maya (1986).** *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Angelou writes her story of overcoming racism and prejudice as a young girl to become an adult who is able to respond to racism and prejudice as a social structure.

**Custer, Elizabeth, B (1885).** *Boots and Saddles*. George Custer's wife, Elizabeth Custer, describes the trial and tribulations of Army life on the western frontier in the 1870's.

**Grealy, Lucy (2003).** *Autobiography of a Face*. Society's value of physical beauty is disclosed through personal experiences after a facial disfigurement from childhood cancer.

**Kaysen, Susanna (1993).** *Girl, Interrupted*. The author describes her 18 month commitment in a mental facility during the 1960's.

**Kerman, Piper (2010).** *Orange is the New Black*. Kerman details the events that led to her conviction and her fifteen month sentence in a federal prison.

**Lamb, Wally (2008).** *I'll Fly Away Home*. Women incarcerated in York State Prison, publish writing produced in a prison writing workshop.

**Pruitt-Stewart, Elinor (1961).** *Letters of a Woman Homesteader*. Stewart's letters home tell the story of her grit and determination to make a life in the prairie of Wyoming in 1909.

**Seabold, Alice (1999).** *Lucky*. The author details the day she was raped in Central Park, in New York, and describes how the attack changed and shaped her life.

**Stratton, Joanna, L (1981).** *Pioneer Women: Voices from the Kansas Frontier*. Women's memoirs offer detailed accounts of life for schoolmarm, Indian women, immigrants, homesteaders, mothers and wives on the frontier.

**Walls, Jeannette (2010).** *The Glass Castle: A Memoir*. Walls shares her childhood experiences of living in poverty with her alcoholic father, unstable mother and siblings.

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