

The Untold Story of the Real Me: Young Voices From Prison

Curriculum Design: Free Minds Book Club & Writing Workshop

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Sample Readings and Lessons:

CHAPTER 1

GROWING UP

Charlie

When I was little I wanted to grow up and be a firefighter. My favorite possession was my toy fire truck. I lived with both of my parents. I knew that was unusual and I was grateful. I was kinda quiet, but I had my older brothers. We used to do everything together. Play football and basketball on our block all day long.

We were living in poverty though. We didn't have any money. I used to have hand-me-down clothes with holes in them, my brother's shoes, and old coats. So I used to get picked on in school. They'd be like, "You're dirty," and "You don't got the new Jordans." And then on top of that, I couldn't read or write that well. Every year, I just got left further and further behind. By the time I got to 7th grade I only had a 2nd grade reading level. It's kind of embarrassing to be in junior high school and you got to stand up in front of the class. I could barely read! That made me feel like, *I don't need to be here*. That's when I ventured off onto the streets.

All that playin' tag and swingin' on the swing set? All that just faded away. They call it "jumping off the porch." In the streets, they didn't care about my clothes. They was more into me. That's where I got my love from—the streets. I started to pick up the street ways. That led me into trouble. I started carrying a gun, robbing people. The path I was on led me to stop caring about everything and everyone. Then my brother got locked up. He was sentenced to 40 years. He was my best friend. I didn't care about anything any more. I was 16 and I thought I was being a man. Looking back, I wasn't a man. I wasn't doing anything but buying tennis shoes and new clothes. To be honest, I didn't really think I'd be alive to see the age of 21.

I know now what growing up and becoming a man really is. It's taking responsibility and being a family man. I go to school now and I'm not afraid to ask for help. I have a tutor. I also do outreach work with at-risk teens, so I can help them grow up the right way. My little girl is about to be a big sister. I want their childhood to be better than mine because I missed out on the entire experience of being a teenager. Going to regular high school, football games and graduation? I missed all of it. I can picture how it will be for my daughters. Me and their mom will be with them all the time, going to movies and having fun. When they are 16, they will get to see what being a teenager is supposed to be like.

I still sit on my stoop sometimes. I see a good future. I'm proud of what I'm doing.

Discussion Questions:

- Why did Charlie get picked on in school?
- What were the two reasons Charlie dropped out of school in the 7th grade?
- How did Charlie react to his brother getting a 40-year sentence?
- Name 3 things that Charlie does now that he is proud of.
- What do you think Charlie means when he says, “That’s where I got my love from—the streets”?
- Have you ever felt like you wouldn’t live to the age of 21 like Charlie did?
- Can you relate to any part of Charlie’s story? Which part?

Chapter 15

You Would Know Me If

By Daquan

You see that I’m locked up
And you think I can’t make a change in my life
You see that I’m cut-throat and strong
But you don’t know me
You would know me if
You knew how hard it was to grow up in my struggle
You would know me if
You knew how I feel when I think people can’t help me
You would know me if
You know how much I want my freedom
You see that I talk different and walk different
But you don’t know me
You would know me if
You knew that I want something different
You would know me if
You knew how much I have to change in my life
To let my mother see the son she dreamed I would be
Then you would know me

Fill-in-the-blank Writing Prompt

IF YOU KNEW ME

a poem by _____ (your name here)

You see that I _____ (fight,???)

You see that I _____ (do what people want, ???)

But you don't know me

You would know me if ...

You knew how hard it was to _____ (hold in my anger, ???)

You knew how I feel sometimes that _____ (no one cares, ???)

You knew how _____ (my dad walked on me, ???)

You see that I _____ (swear,???)

You see that I _____ (smoke,???)

But you don't know me

You would know me if ...

You knew how I _____ (express myself through art, ???)

You knew how I _____ (like to cook, ???)

You knew how I _____ (take care of my younger sisters, ???)