*The Foster Care to Prison Pipeline*

MSU Human Rights Education Internship

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**Lesson Title:** *The Foster Care to Prison Pipeline*

**Grade/Course:** Human Rights Day **Lesson duration:** 45 minutes

**Topic of Lesson:** An explanation of the foster care system and the inherent trauma associated that creates a predisposition to future struggles.

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| **Central Focus:** By the end of the lesson, students should gain a strong understanding of the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline, be able identify its causes, its long-term effects, and ways it may be prevented. |

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| **Essential Question(s):**   * How is the daily life a child in foster care different from those living with their birth parent or legal guardian? * Why are children in foster care disproportionally more likely to become involved with the criminal justice system? * What steps may be taken to ensure children in foster care are able to thrive and succeed after their services are terminated? |

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| **State/Disciplinary Standards:**  6.1.4.A.16: Explore how national and international leaders, businesses, and global organizations promote human rights and provide aid to individuals and nations in need.  6.1.4.D.19: Explain how experiences and events may be interpreted differently by people with different cultural or individual perspectives.  6.2.12.C.6.a: Evaluate efforts of governmental, nongovernmental, and international organizations to address economic imbalances and social inequalities |

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| **Daily Performance Objectives:**   * Identify the purpose of foster care * Understand the meaning of the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline * Name one way to reroute the pipeline |

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| **Prior Knowledge Resources:** Students may have never heard of the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline, but may have heard of the School to Prison Pipeline. The information provided distinguishes the two and ensures students will gain a comprehensive understanding. |

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| **Academic Language:** Foster Care System, Foster Care to Prison Pipeline, Trauma, Trauma Informed Care, Mental Health |

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| **Materials and Preparation:**   * Computer * Speakers * Hand outs |

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| **Assessment/Evaluation—** The final question demonstrates how the student’s understanding has changed and progressed based upon the information provided by the presentation. |

**Lesson Progression**

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| **Duration:** | **The teacher will…** | **The student(s) will…** |
| Beginning of slide show: 2 minutes | Play the first two slides to introduce the lesson, pausing after the second to ask if the students have any questions | Listen to the first two slides, raising any potential questions, and |
| Critical reading of a blog entry written by a child in foster care: 20 minutes | Introduce the activity while passing out the handouts. Let students know they have five minutes to independently read an entry and complete the activity. Unless more time is needed, the teacher should ensure all students are in pairs and actively discussing. Students will have five minutes before the class discussion, which should last about ten minutes. The teacher should emphasize similarities the students found in their answers and the way the lives of children in foster care paralleled their own. | Skim multiple entries before choosing one and filling out the handout accordingly. They will then engage in a discussion with a peer, initially summarizing the blog entry they read to give their partner a better understanding, and then transitioning to a class wide discussion. |
| Continuation of slide show: 3 minutes | Play the next two slides, pausing after each slide to ask if the students have any questions. | Listen carefully, raising any potential questions. |
| Video of Michelle Voorhees: 5 minutes | Play the fifth slide and then the video. | Listen and silently engage as they think about the questions Michelle asks. |
| Engagement with the video: 5 minutes | Play the sixth slide and then encourage students to share their answers, centering the discussion on the way the students’ answers overlap and their suggestions to facilitate the transition and stay in foster care. | Listen, independently engaging with the questions, before sharing their answers in a class discussion. |
| End of slide show: 6 minutes | Play the rest of the slideshow, pausing after each slide to answer any questions. | Listen and raise any potential question. |
| Rerouting the Foster Care to Prison Pipeline: 4 minutes | Pass out the handout while asking students if they had any final questions or thoughts. Return to question posed on slide 6, following the video, that asked what might help a child in foster care transition or adjust to foster care. See if their answer is reflected by Pamela’s story or the handout. | Read the handout. |

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| **Homework:**   * Complete one of the activities listed on the handout. |

Annotated Bibliography

Anspach, Rachel. “The Foster Care to Prison Pipeline Impacts America's Most Vulnerable

Youth.” *Teen Vogue*, Condé Nast, 25 May 2018,

[www.teenvogue.com/story/the-foster-care-to-prison-pipeline-what-it-is-and-how-it-](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-foster-care-to-prison-pipeline-what-it-is-and-how-it-works)

[works](http://www.teenvogue.com/story/the-foster-care-to-prison-pipeline-what-it-is-and-how-it-works).

Anspach centers her article upon a child who first entered foster care at the age of ten and was arrested twice before the age of eighteen. His story highlights the endemic issues of the foster care system as their often minor infractions translate to harsh sentences and indelible marks on their records, complicating their ability to gain housing and markedly increasing their likelihood of being homeless. Anspach accordingly advocates for trauma informed care, contending, “all young people should be granted the same levels of compassion” (Anspach, “The Foster Care to Prison Pipeline”). She emphasizes the need for therapy following trauma and condemns the casual prescription of antipsychotic drugs.

Baugh, Reighley. “The Foster Care-To-Prison Pipeline.” *Juvenile Law Center*, The Texas

Tribune, 14 Dec. 2018,

<https://www.tribtalk.org/2018/12/14/the-foster-care-to-prison-pipeline/>.

Baugh discusses the emotional and relational trauma that as many as 90% of children in foster care have endured and has been correlated with behavioral and mental health problems. She advocates for action to ease the transition as they age out, lessening group home placements, mandating regulations for interactions with police, and ensuring foster parents and workers are knowledgeable about trauma to improve their care. Critically, Baugh emphasizes the need for empathy and understanding as opposed to strict, zero-tolerance policies as well as addressing the mass incarceration of children in foster care to ensure the system may best care for those involved.

Prince, Dana M., et al. “Effects of Individual Risk and State Housing Factors on Adverse

Outcomes in a National Sample of Youth Transitioning out of Foster Care.” *Journal of*

*Adolescence*, vol. 74, July 2019, pp. 33–44. *EBSCOhost*,

doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2019.05.004.

The article presents the findings of a study conducted to delineate an individual’s level of risk as well as potential protections for foster children reaching the age of majority. The authors cite financial support and housing as state factors and race, placement instability, child behavioral problems, and residence in group home as individual. They further emphasize trauma as a contributor to the likelihood of homelessness, substance abuse, incarceration, and deficient engagement in education and careers. Multiple placements and a lack of support have been correlated with arrests, leading the authors to advocate for an extension of services and housing security as effective measures.

Garcia, Antonio R., et al. “From Placement to Prison Revisited: Do Mental Health Services

Disrupt the Delinquency Pipeline among Latino, African American and Caucasian Youth

in the Child Welfare System?” *Journal of Adolescence*, vol. 45, Dec. 2015, pp. 263–273.

*EBSCOhost*, doi:10.1016/j.adolescence.2015.10.008.

The study examines potential indicators of juvenile delinquency, including maltreatment, placement instability, trauma, and poverty, as well as the discrepancies according to race and ethnicity. The resulting data establishes a positive relationship between delinquency and social, economic, and behavioral problems but no significant effect according to one’s race or ethnicity. The racial disproportionality may alternatively be attributed to discrepancies in the mental health services provided as well as the lack of mental health training provided to child welfare caseworkers, which prevents accurate diagnoses and the provision of appropriate services.

Hasenecz, Nadine M. “Fixing Foster Care — 5 Strategies for Change.” *Social Work Today*,

March/April 2009 p. 30, [www.socialworktoday.com/archive/031109p30.shtml](http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/031109p30.shtml).

To effect positive changes within the foster care system, Hasenecz first proposes strengthening families of origin by encouraging preventative and reunification measures to preserve the voice of the parents should the child’s safety and well-being be ensured. She also advocates for the support of caseworkers through training, especially in mental health, as well as educating the public to end stigmas attached to the children in the foster care system. Hasenecz asserts the significance of knowledge to empower them with strategies to react to offensive confrontations. She additionally stresses the importance of teachers and foster parents helping children deal with unresolved grief and loss as support for their whole wellbeing may critically be fortified by guiding children in building relationships.

Miklowitz, David J. “Delinquency, Depression, and Psychosis Among Adolescents in Foster

Care: What Holds Three Heads Together?”Nov. 2014. *EBSCOhost*,

doi:10.1016/j.jaac.2014.09.006.

Miklowitz discusses the separate treatment of internalizing and externalizing disorders despite their overlapping nature and advocates for Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care. MFTC was intended to decrease delinquency for adolescent girls by providing individual therapy for six months in foster care and teaching their guardian proven parenting skills in a family-therapy format in the meantime. The effects were evident within two years as the severity and number of the psychotic systems the patients presented with steeply declined. The results may be traced to a reduction in stress and shift in their reactivity as MFTC and family-focused therapy emphasize consciousness of one’s moods and triggers and coping strategies.

Williamson, Lisa Ann. “Fostering Allies.” *Teaching Tolerance*, Issue 44, Summer 2013,

[www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2013/fostering-allies](http://www.tolerance.org/magazine/summer-2013/fostering-allies).

Williamson details the effects of foster care upon education through statistics revealing the propensity to repeat grades and the reduced likelihood of obtaining higher education. She further emphasizes the inherent trauma, foremost the fundamental lack of control through periods of great change and the resulting struggle to form strong bonds. Williamson additionally cites Jennifer Gomeztrejo, a consultant with the Los Angeles County Office of Education’s Division of Student Support Services, who speaks to the importance of building relationships with teachers and counselors and stresses the importance of inclusion in school events.