LESSON PLAN
What Do I Believe? Considering Controversial Issues Like the Death Penalty

OVERVIEW

“You can’t kill someone and then go home and wash dishes. It changes you from the inside out.”
- Lindy Lou Wells Isonhood, Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2

Upholding the rule of law is a fundamental principle of a democracy. Doing so protects the rights of citizens, maintains order and limits the power of the government over its citizens.

Twenty years ago, Lindy Lou Wells Isonhood believed she was upholding the rule of law by serving on a jury. At the conclusion of the trial, a capital murder case, the jury handed down a death sentence to Bobby Wilcher, a Mississippi man convicted of a double homicide. Since then, Lindy has lived with an unbearable feeling of guilt over her decision. Determined to understand her remorse, Lindy embarks on a road trip across Mississippi to find her fellow jurors. A conservative former federal police officer and religious woman from the South, Lindy manages to tackle this oft-politicized topic with humor, an open mind and sincere curiosity.

In this lesson, students will have the opportunity to analyze, consider and respectfully discuss different perspectives on the death penalty by listening to Lindy’s conversations with her fellow jurors, conducting independent research and reflecting on their own beliefs. Students will consider the moral, ethical and constitutional arguments used by others to support or oppose the death penalty. Then, they will articulate their own view by writing a “This I Believe” essay.

OBJECTIVES
By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
● Research, critically evaluate and summarize visual and written source material on the death penalty
● Discuss the emotional, moral and ethical impact of serving on a capital trial by listening to the viewpoints of jury members
● Cite a range of primary texts they used to inform their viewpoints on the death penalty
● Develop and write essays on their views of the death penalty using the guidelines from the “This I Believe” format

GRADE LEVELS: 9-12

SUBJECT AREAS
Civics, Current Events, Language Arts, Law, Philosophy, U.S. History
MATERIALS
Internet access and equipment to show the class online video clips from *Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2* and for students to conduct research.

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED
Approximately one 90-minute class plus homework.

A NOTE TO TEACHERS
This film contains mature content and conversations about the death penalty. If you suspect that parents/guardians might be concerned about the subject matter, you may want to send home a note prior to the lesson explaining that students will view clips from a film that examines a legal case involving the execution of a man in 2006. It may also be important to share that students will be writing about their own points of view on the death penalty, which may involve individual moral, ethical and religious connections.

FILM CLIPS
Film clips provided in this lesson are from *Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2*. Access the streaming clips for free on POV’s website by visiting [www.pbs.org/pov/educators](http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators). Borrow the full film from our DVD Lending Library by joining the POV Community Network: [communitynetwork.amdoc.org](http://communitynetwork.amdoc.org).

Clip 1: There Are No Answers (3:16 min)
This clip begins at 4:25 with Lindy visiting Linda (juror number 13) and ends at 7:41 with Lindy sharing with Linda that “the more I learned the more questions I had.” This is the first conversation that Lindy has with a fellow jury member about her feelings of guilt and remorse after the conclusion of the trial. The jury member empathizes with Lindy but believes she made the right decision.

Clip 2: It’s Been So Long (4:00 min)
This clip begins at 27:00 with Lindy visiting Pete (juror number 10) and ends at 31:00 with Lindy driving away from the meeting and reflecting on Pete’s lack of memory of his decision. This clip offers a different viewpoint from a jury member who appears to have very little emotion about or memory of sitting on the jury.

Clip 3: You Have to Live With It Every Day (3:18 min)
This clip begins at 37:33 with Lindy visiting Allen (juror number 7), and ends at 40:51 at the conclusion of their conversation. In this exchange between Lindy, Allen and Allen’s wife we hear about their shared emotional and spiritual challenges after the verdict was given and after the execution was carried out.

Clip 4: Jury Foreman (4:28 min)
This clip begins at 45:15 with Lindy locating the jury foreman for Bobby Wilcher’s trial, Kenneth, and concludes at 49:43 with Kenneth’s daughter saying she could never sentence someone to death. The conversation with the jury foreman offers further ethical and moral perspectives on the death penalty. We also hear the letter the jury wrote that was read at Bobby Wilcher’s trial.
Clip 5: Pebbles and Ripples (1:57 min)
The final clip begins at 49:43 with Lindy in the car reflecting on the entire experience and concludes at 51:40. In this clip we hear Lindy reflecting on the larger lessons she has gained from conversations with fellow jury members 20 years after the trial.

ACTIVITY
The first section of the lesson is dedicated to establishing critical background information on the death penalty. Students will then listen to conversations between Lindy and her fellow jurors through film clips in order to develop their own POV essays.

Gaining Background Knowledge
To begin the lesson, students will gain fluency with the central aspects of the death penalty. Using the jigsaw format, divide students into five groups to research their individual content. Give them time in their expert groups to share learnings, then have them return to their jigsaw groups to share out what they individually learned.

Group 1: Terminology
In conversations students may hear the terms capital punishment and death penalty used interchangeably. To begin the lesson, have students research and discuss the definitions and come to a general understanding as a class of how to use each term accurately. See https://definitions.uslegal.com/c/capital-punishment/

Group 2: State By State
Have students review several visual resources on the use (or non-use) of the death penalty in different states and be prepared to summarize their conclusions based on analyzing the visual materials.

- Pew Research Center’s interactive gif (Remind students to complete the map beyond 2015.): http://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/11/2015/04/FT_15.04.17_deathPenalty.gif
- ProCon.org on the Death Penalty (Students can click on any state to learn more).

Group 3: Eighth Amendment
Have students review the history of the Eighth Amendment, paying particular attention to the clause on cruel and unusual punishments. Students may choose to research different views on cruel and unusual punishments as well. https://constitutioncenter.org/interactive-constitution/amendments/amendment-viii

Group 4: Current Statistics About the Death Penalty
Have students review information and current statistics on the death penalty. Example sources:

Group 5: Methods Used in the Death Penalty
Have students read the website from the National Conference of State Legislatures and scroll down and read through the methods of execution.

Introduce the Film and POV Exercise
Explain to students that they are going to watch a series of film clips of conversations between Lindy and fellow jury members who served on the jury in the 1994 capital murder resentencing trial of Bobby Wilcher. Instruct students to view and analyze the conversations in order to identify the point of view expressed by each jury member.

To keep track of the details in the interviews, students will create a table titled “POVs from Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2” and then use it to document the viewpoints, emotions and questions expressed in the interviews. The columns will have the following titles:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name and/or Number of Juror or Family Member</th>
<th>POV For Death Penalty</th>
<th>POV Against Death Penalty</th>
<th>My Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

View Film Clips
Before viewing Clip 1, remind students to take notes in the appropriate column on significant statements made by either Lindy or the other people featured.

Clip 1: “There Are No Answers” (3:16 min)
Featured: Lindy and Linda (juror number 13)
After watching the discussion of the first clip, share with students your notes on Lindy’s POV and Linda’s POV as a model. Invite students to add more reflections that they heard as a group in order to model how to analyze a clip for POV.

Clip 2: “It’s Been So Long Ago” (4:00 min)
Featured: Lindy and Pete (juror number 10)
After viewing and after students have completed their tables for Clip 2, discuss whether students noticed differences between Lindy’s conversation with Linda and her conversation with Pete? What did they observe?

Clip 3: “You Have to Live With It Every Day” (3:18 min)
Featured: Lindy, Allen (juror number 7) and Allen’s wife
Repeat viewing and analysis process, making sure to add Allen’s wife into their notes. Discuss with students whether they saw any differences in the conversation when a spouse was involved.
Clip 4: “Jury Foreman” (4:28 min)
Featured: Lindy, Kenneth (juror number one and foreman), Kenneth’s wife and Kenneth’s daughter
Repeat viewing analysis from Clip 3.

Clip 5: “Pebbles and Ripples” (1:57 min)
Featured: Lindy
After the final clip, invite students to look over their tables and gather their general observations about the interviews that Lindy conducted. Have students share in small groups, or as a large class, the POVs they heard from Lindy and from the other jury members. Was anything new or surprising? If they had the opportunity to sit down with Lindy, what would they want to ask her?

Homework and Assessment: Introduce students to the “This I Believe” [website](#) and [guidelines](#). Discuss strategies to complete 500- to 600-word essays for homework. Each is to articulate their viewpoint on the death penalty.

Each essay must cite at least two sources that support the student’s POV. One must be from an interview heard in *Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2* and one must be from a credible primary source.

EXTENSIONS/ADAPTATIONS
Have students read several editorials expressing a range of viewpoints in favor of or opposed to the death penalty. Ask each student to pick an editorial and write a letter counter to their own personal POV to the editor of the publication that published the chosen editorial, expressing support for or against the POV of the author. Here are a few samples:

*The Washington Post*, “*The Supreme Court Should Strike Down the Death Penalty,*” November 2, 2017


*CNN.com*, “*Time to Question Sanity of Death Penalty,*” July 26, 2015

Have students watch the TED Talk “Lessons from Death Row Inmates” given by Texas attorney David R. Dow and then have them write letters to him sharing their personal viewpoints on his talk.

Have students create an annotated website bibliography on organizations working to abolish the death penalty, such as [Equal Justice Initiative](#), and those working to uphold the death penalty, such as [Nebraskans for the Death Penalty](#).

Engage your class in a discussion using this fact sheet from the Death Penalty Information Center that
details a range of sociopolitical issues surrounding this issue. Ask students to examine critically all the statistics, including determining whether the sources cited are credible news sources. 
https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/documents/FactSheet.pdf

Expand research to the use of the death penalty internationally. The Death Penalty Information Center consistently updates this page with the latest facts and figures: 
https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/death-penalty-international-perspective

RESOURCES

The Film

POV: Lindy Lou, Juror Number 2
http://pbs.org/pov/lindylou
The film’s official POV site includes a discussion guide with additional activity ideas and resources, steps to borrow the DVD from the POV Lending Library and other resources.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films
http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php
This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

Capital Punishment

8th Amendment Project
http://8thamendment.org/- This is the website of a group that works to end the use of the death penalty in the United States and change the national discourse on the issue.

Death Penalty Information Center
www.deathpenaltyinfo.org – This is a comprehensive site that offers statistics, research, issue backgrounders, legislation tracking, a state-by-state database and resources (including in Spanish).

Pew Research Center
www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/24/5-facts-about-the-death-penalty/- The Pew Research Center presents polling results on support for and opposition to the death penalty.

ProCon.org: “Should the Death Penalty Be Allowed?”
https://deathpenalty.procon.org/- This page and its links offer overviews of pro and con arguments on various aspects of the death penalty.

Equal Justice USA
https://ejusa.org/learn/- This group provides information on transformative justice alternatives that address trauma, health, racism and victim’s services.

Death Penalty Action
http://deathpenaltyaction.org/- This advocacy organization provides resources, as well as
educational and direct action activities, including the Annual Fast and Vigil to Abolish the Death Penalty.

Many states have organizations dealing with alternatives to the death penalty. These vary in services but often provide state-specific statistics, legislative updates, policy statements, services and advocacy. Do an Internet search for the name of your state and the phrase “alternatives to the death penalty” to find local resources.

STANDARDS
Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects (http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading: Key Ideas and Details: CCRA.R.1, CCRA.R.2, CCRA.R.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: CCRA.R.7, CCRA.R.8; Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: CCRA.R.10

English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing: Text Types and Purposes: CCRA.W.1, CCRA.W.2, CCRA.W.3; Production and Distribution of Writing: CCRA.W.4; Research to Build and Present Knowledge: CCRA.W.7, CCRA.W.8, CCRA.W.9; Range of Writing: CCRA.W.10

English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: CCRA.SL.1, CCRA.SL.2, CCRA.SL.3; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: CCRA.SL.4

English Language Arts: College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Language: Conventions of Standard English: CCRA.L.1, CCRA.L.2; Vocabulary Acquisition and Use: CCRA.L.6

English Language Arts: Reading: Literature: Key Ideas and Details: RL.11-12.1, RL.11-12.2; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RL.11-12.7

English Language Arts: Reading: Informational Text: Key Ideas and Details: RI.11-12.1, RI.11-12.2, RI.11-12.3; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RI.11-12.7, RI.11-12.8; Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: RI.11-12.10


English Language Arts: Speaking and Listening: Comprehension and Collaboration: SL.11-12.1, SL.11-12.2, SL.11-12.3; Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas: SL.11-12.4, SL.11-12.6

English Language Arts: Language: Conventions of Standard English: L.11-12.1, L.11-12.2, L.11-12.2a,
English Language Arts: History/Social Studies: Key Ideas and Details: RH.11-12.1, RH 11-12.2, RH.11-12.3; Craft and Structure: RH.11-12.6; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas: RH.11-12.9; Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity: RH.11-12.10

Content Knowledge: ([https://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp](https://www2.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp)) a compilation of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McREL (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Blueshift is a team of education specialists with background in environmental and social impact work. The team recognizes and builds on the power of documentary film in reaching broad audiences to spark energy for deep and lasting social change. The team works with filmmakers, photographers and writers to develop innovative educational strategies, experiences, tools and resources that bring stories off the screen and into viewers' lives.