

LETTERS TO A YOUNG INMATE LONGER WORKSHOP | EMILY DICKINSON

Read Tina's letter in the booklet and discuss:

A CLEANSING PROCESS

Today is the anniversary of what happened, what put me behind bars 24 years ago. I've walked where you've walked. I've laid there on my bunk, staring at the ceiling, wishing I'd made better choices. I've been angry. I've felt hopeless and ashamed. I could have stayed there, but I didn't.

In the beginning, I suffered. All alone behind bars, the sadness unbearable. Eventually, I realized I had a choice. I had a decision to make. Did I want to sit there dwelling on my mistakes? Or should I choose happiness and leave those walls a better person than when I arrived?

It was then I made a conscious choice. I chose to smile at those around me. I chose to see the positive and not let the destructive thoughts take hold. I woke up each morning and made the choice, until it became a habit. My outlook on life began to change. The difference was profound.

Writing was another powerful tool for me. I wrote letters, sharing things I should have said before. I wrote to my son, sent him stories that his dad could read to him at bedtime. I allowed my thoughts to escape on paper—a cleansing process.

Sometimes it's hard to begin. Start small with a thought or a feeling and before you know it you've immersed yourself in the freedom of writing. How are you feeling today? What are your dreams? Write them down. But most of all, remember that you have a choice. It's up to you. I hope you choose happiness.

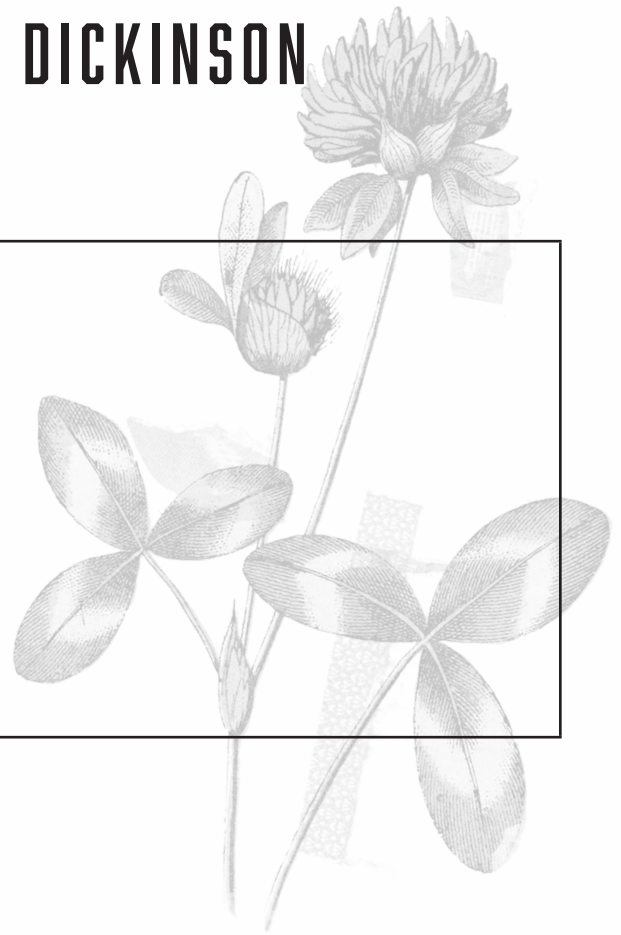
Tina

Time served: 75 months

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Read Emily Dickinson's poem:

This is my letter to the World
That never wrote to Me—
The simple News that Nature told—
With tender Majesty
Her Message is committed
To Hands I cannot see—
For love of Her—Sweet—countrymen—
Judge tenderly—of Me



Discuss as a group.

WRITING PROMPT #1

Do these two writings share anything in common? If so, how do you feel they're connected? What do you relate to in both / either of them?

Share writings // Discuss as a group

WRITING PROMPT #2

Write your own letter to the world. What would you want people to know about how you feel right now? What do you want to say, but are having a hard time saying? Share writings // Discuss as a group