



# Shakespeare Behind Bars: The Power of Drama In A Women's Prison

*Jean Trounstone*

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A deeply stirring account of one woman's experience teaching drama to women in prison.

*I began to understand that female prisoners are not "damaged goods" and to recognize that most of these women had toughed it out in a society that favors others-- by gender, class, or race. They are Desdemonas suffering because of jealous men, Lady Macbeths craving the power of their spouses, Portias disguised as men in order to get ahead, and Shylocks who, being betrayed, take the law into their own hands.*

So writes Jean Trounstone in *Shakespeare Behind Bars*. In this gripping account, Trounstone, who spent ten years teaching at Framingham Women's Prison in Massachusetts, focuses on six inmates who, each in her own way, discover in the power of great drama a way to transcend the painful constraints of incarceration. We meet:

- \* Dolly, a fiftyish grandmother who brings her knitting to classes and starts a battered-women's group in prison
- \* Bertie, a Jamaican beauty estranged from her homeland, torn with guilt, and shunned for her crime
- \* Kit, a tough, wisecracking con who stirs up trouble whenever she can-- until she's threatened with losing her kids
- \* Rose, an outsider in the prison community who lives with HIV and eventually gains acceptance through drama
- \* Rhonda, a college-educated leader whose life falls apart when her father dies and who struggles in prison to reestablish her roots
- \* Mamie, a nurse in the free world, now the prison gardener who makes cards with poetry and dried flowers and battles her own illness behind bars

*Shakespeare Behind Bars* is a uniquely powerful work that gives voice to forgotten women, sheds a compassionate light on a dark world, and proves the redemptive power of art and education.

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