

Solitary Watch

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://solitarywatch.org/2021/09/13/back-to-school-resource-reading-teaching-guide-for-hell-is-a-very-small-place-voices-from-solitary-confinement/>

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by [Jean Casella](#) | September 13, 2021

First published in 2016 by The New Press, *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement* is the first book to feature firsthand accounts both writing and oral history about the experience of solitary confinement in U.S. prisons, jails, and detention centers. It includes pieces by 16 currently and formerly incarcerated men and women.

This new reading guide, written by Nicole Capozziello for Solitary Watch, is intended for use by educators and students at the high school, college, and continuing education levels; for community, faith-based, and prison reading groups; and for anyone who wishes to enter the hidden world of solitary confinement to listen to the voices of people who live there.

The guide provides discussion questions and activities for four of the pieces in the book:

The book's introduction, which provides a brief history of solitary confinement and a summary of its effects.

A Sentence Worse Than Death, written by a man held in solitary confinement for 25 years.

On the Verge of Hell, by a woman who experienced years of solitary confinement while also contending with other abuse.

Invisible, by a man recently released from prison who finds that the scars of solitary follow him into the outside world.

Other firsthand accounts in the book deal with solitary confinement from a variety of perspectives, including a young man placed in isolation while still a child, a transgender woman held in solitary in immigrant detention, and incarcerated people fighting back against their inhumane treatment. The book concludes with essays by experts that provide psychological, legal, and ethical perspectives on solitary.

Hell Is a Very Small Place is available at local bookstores and at [Bookshop.org](#), [IndieBound.org](#), or [Amazon.com](#).

The New Press offers discounts on orders of ten copies or more for nonprofits, activists, educational institutions, and other groups. For more information, visit thenewpress.com/bulk-orders. Instructions for educators who wish to request desk copies or discounted examination copies can be found at thenewpress.com/academic.

Click on the image below to download a PDF of the complete 10-page guide.

Jean Casella is the director of Solitary Watch. She has also published work in The Guardian, The Nation, and Mother Jones, and is co-editor of the book *Hell Is a Very Small Place: Voices from Solitary Confinement*. She has received a Soros Justice Media Fellowship and an Alicia Patterson Fellowship. She tweets @solitarywatch.

Accurate information and authentic storytelling can serve as powerful antidotes to ignorance and injustice. We have helped generate public awareness, mainstream media attention, and informed policymaking on what was once an invisible domestic human rights crisis.

Only with your support can we continue this groundbreaking work, shining light into the darkest corners of the U.S. criminal punishment system.

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 30, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 19, 2022

by [Voices from Solitary](#)

September 6, 2022

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P.O. Box 11374
Washington, DC 20008

info@solitarywatch.org

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