



GCSE – **NEW**

C700U20-1A



ENGLISH LANGUAGE – Component 2
19th and 21st Century Non-Fiction Reading
and Transactional/Persuasive Writing

MONDAY, 12 JUNE 2017 – MORNING

RESOURCE MATERIAL FOR USE WITH SECTION A

Inside America's Toughest Prison

Mark Binelli reports on the use of solitary confinement in Florence prison. Solitary confinement is a method of punishment where prisoners are kept in cells alone, deprived of all human contact.

Throughout history, there have been different ideas about what to do with the 'worst of the worst' of criminal offenders, ranging from the 19th-century chain gangs, who were forced to work in silence, to prisoners being sent to the isolation of the prison on Alcatraz Island. Solitary confinement was used in the United States as a substitute for corporal punishment that was popular at the end of the 18th century.

Florence prison was built in 1994 at a time of rising panic in the United States prison service after a number of breakouts and guard killings. It has 490 beds and was planned as a place from which no one would ever escape. It remains the most secure prison in the United States.

Florence was designed to house prisoners regarded as too dangerous or high-profile for regular prisons. It is home to some of America's most violent and evil criminals, and is the number one prison for convicted terrorists. At present, the prison houses 439 violent criminals, including those involved in the 2001 World Trade Center attacks.

It is known for its harsh conditions: prisoners are kept in solitary confinement for 23 hours a day. They spend their days in incredibly small 12-by-7-foot cells with thick concrete walls and double sets of sliding metal doors (with solid exteriors, so prisoners can't see one another). A tiny single window only four inches wide offers just a glimpse of sky and little else. Each cell has a sink, toilet and an automated shower, and prisoners sleep on concrete slabs topped with thin mattresses. The cell furniture is limited to a desk, stool and a bed, and each is constructed from concrete. The toilets are designed to shut off if misused and the showers are on timers. Rooms may have mirrors, radios, or in very rare cases televisions – but these are used as privileges based on good behaviour and are very rarely awarded.

The hour they are allowed out for exercise is into a bigger cell with a high ceiling called the 'empty swimming pool'. This room has a 4-inch by 4-foot skylight as the only window. It is designed to prevent the prisoners from knowing where they are, and they still spend this time alone.

There is no food hall: all meals come through a small slot in the interior door, as does any face-to-face human interaction. Many prisoners routinely go days with only a few words spoken to them.

For at least the first three years, prisoners are never allowed to come into contact with other prisoners at any time – anywhere in the prison. Over time, good behaviour can earn inmates more time outside their cells and, for the most fortunate, a transfer back to a less-secure prison might eventually be possible.

The prison has many motion detectors and cameras, 1,400 remote-controlled steel doors, and 12 foot high razor wire fences. As an added level of security, laser beams, pressure pads, and attack dogs guard the area surrounding the prison's outer fences.

In their cells, prisoners are left to their own thoughts, which often leads to hallucinations and memory loss. Prison reformers have long objected to the prolonged use of solitary confinement at Florence, which in some cases has lasted for more than a decade. The director of the American Civil Liberties Union described the conditions as “extraordinarily harsh”. He said, “Solitary confinement, even for a few months, let alone for more than a decade, can be shattering, and can often lead to more violent behaviour.”



Robert Hood, the warden of the prison from 2002 to 2005, said that when he first arrived at the prison, he was struck by “the very stark environment,” unlike any other prison in which he ever worked or visited — no noise, no mess, no prisoners walking the hallways. When prisoners complained to him, he would tell them, “This place is not designed for humanity.” Hood has memorably described Florence as “a clean version of hell.”

He also noted that earlier maximum security prisons, such as Alcatraz, had existed for roughly 30 years before being closed down. “Florence has been there for 20 years,” Hood said, “so it’s getting close to the last third of its life. I’d say those in charge of prisons are beginning to look in the mirror and say, ‘Guess what? The world has changed since 1994.’”

Mark Binelli