

Freedom Reads



Freedom begins with a book.

Amidst the chaos and control that characterizes prison, it is difficult to bring into focus the intellectual, cultural, and emotional loss that incarcerated people experience. While there are many organizations dedicated to decreasing the number of people in prison, few focus on the burdens of prison for those imprisoned.

Founded by poet and lawyer Reginald Dwayne Betts, who served eight and a half years in prison, Freedom Reads is the only organization in the country bringing beautifully handcrafted libraries full of great literature into cellblocks, within arm's reach of where people in prison dream.

“I survived solitary, and rediscovered a sense of freedom, because someone slid *The Black Poets* edited by Dudley Randall into my cell one day. I realized that a poem can give somebody a whole world of hope. And after reading that book, I dedicated myself to helping other prisoners, and people outside of prison, discover the freedom blueprint that poetry, literature, and other arts can provide.”

Reginald Dwayne Betts,
Founder & CEO of Freedom Reads



Reginald Dwayne Betts presenting his solo performance, *FELON: An American Washi Tale*, for Freedom Library patrons inside Logan Correctional Center, a women's prison in Lincoln, IL. (Photo: Illinois Department of Corrections)

Vision

A Freedom Library in every cellblock in every prison in America. Freedom Reads envisions a society that acknowledges and nurtures the basic dignity and humanity of people in prison.

Mission

Freedom Reads' mission is to bring joy, inspire hope, and help those Inside confront what prison does to the spirit.

We bring beautiful, handcrafted bookcases into prisons, transforming cellblocks into Freedom Libraries. The Freedom Library is a physical intervention into the landscape of plastic and steel and loneliness that characterizes prison. In an environment where the freedom to think, to contribute to a community, and even to dream about what is possible is too often curtailed, Freedom Reads reminds those Inside that they have not been forgotten.

Freedom Library at Woodbourne Correctional Facility in Woodbourne, NY. (Photo: Karen Pearson)



A public library like no other.

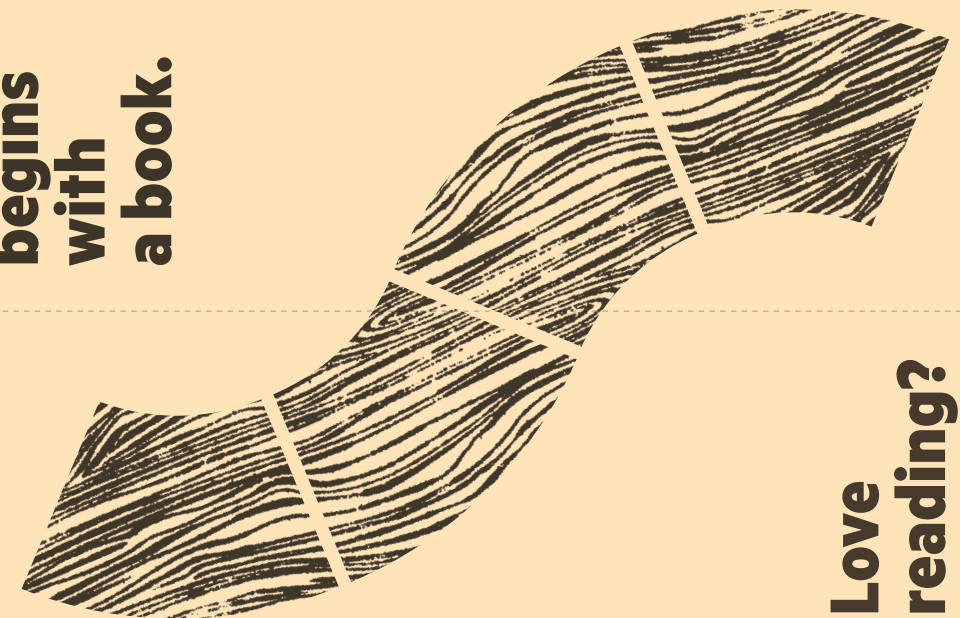
The Freedom Library is both an idea that unites people through conversation, literature, and art, and a physical intervention into the austerity of prison. Our handcrafted bookcases, constructed by teams that include people who've served time, are carved from maple, cherry, walnut, and oak, bringing nature into the lives of people who may not have touched a tree in years or decades.

Instead of leaning against a wall, the Freedom Library curves and is positioned in the middle of an open space because, as Alberto Manguel argues in *The Library at Night*, “a circular library more generously allows the reader to imagine that every last page is also the first.”

We host events with acclaimed and award-winning writers and artists in prisons to broaden the national conversation around art and literature. Through readings, talks, and performances, Freedom Reads is building communities committed to experiencing and discussing art together.

Anyone who receives a book from Freedom Reads—whether at an event or by borrowing one from a Freedom Library—is part of our community. The Freedom Library is designed to comfort and challenge, to meet readers where they are and where they're going.

Freedom
begins
with
a book.



Love
reading?
Write
to us!

Stay connected.

Be a part of Freedom Reads. There are many ways to get involved.

Write to us. We'll write back.

Share your thoughts on the books you're reading. We are committed to responding to every letter we receive.

Cover: Freedom Library at Dorsey
Run Correctional Facility in Jessup, MD.
(Photo: Gioncarlo Valentine)

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Learn and discover.

We encourage families and friends to visit our website (freedomreads.org). Learn about our mission, sign up for our monthly newsletter, and discover how we collaborate with organizations for positive change.

Share with your family and friends.

At Freedom Reads, we encourage connections with your loved ones. We have included two bookmarks designed for you to keep and share. One bookmark represents your literary journey with Freedom Reads. One bookmark is to share with a friend or loved one.

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