Orange is the New Black
Common Read Programming Resources

Links

Use these materials to supplement or provoke discussions or other educational programming in your cluster.

**Piper Kerman's website:** [http://piperkerman.com/](http://piperkerman.com/)

Piper’s webpage has a number of links relating to both the book and her story, as well as resources for prison and criminal justice reform.

**Videos:**

Piper Kerman TedX Talk, “We Gotta Get Out of This Place”:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CU7a8qp7h7Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CU7a8qp7h7Y)

Piper Kerman and Jenji Kohan Commenting on the Orange is the New Black TV Show:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbf_QGCykEM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbf_QGCykEM)

Piper Kerman *Orange is the New Black* Book Trailer:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEm960naQCQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEm960naQCQ)

Piper Kerman on Health Issues Behind Bars:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbf_QGCykEM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sbf_QGCykEM)

Laverne Cox on Wendy Williams:
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuZlp26WUKg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FuZlp26WUKg)

**Sound Clips:**

Behind ‘The New Black’: The Real Piper’s Prison Story (Piper Kerman on NPR):

Interview with Piper Kerman about Race in Orange is the New Black:
[https://soundcloud.com/kqed/piper-kerman-on-race-in-orange](https://soundcloud.com/kqed/piper-kerman-on-race-in-orange)
Book Content

Discussion Questions
Adapted from piperkerman.com

1. Piper, a graduate of Smith College and, arguably, an unlikely candidate for incarceration, gets involved in a drug ring shortly after graduation. This dangerous activity stands in sharp contrast to her previously safe, law-abiding life. What do you think precipitated Piper’s foray into crime? What might have made the drug world so enticing?

2. Once Piper meets other prisoners, she expresses concern that many of their sentences often seem disproportionate to the crimes committed, including prisoners receive fifty-four months for Internet fraud and two years for a marijuana charge, while a guard convicted of sexually abusing
prisoners receives one month. Women from poor communities often seem to be serving much longer sentences than middle-class prisoners. What are the biggest crimes in this story, who commits them, and what is their punishment?

3. The women in the prison have a very definite social system of their own. What purposes do those social systems serve for the prisoners? How do things like food and humor play a role in prisoners’ survival? What special strengths and vulnerabilities do women have when they are in tight-knit single-sex communities such as Danbury? How do you think the needs (emotional and otherwise) of incarcerated men and women differ, and how do their needs differ once they return home?

4. Piper has to learn the ins and outs of prison quickly. While the coping skills they teach Piper come in very handy behind bars, they don’t translate well into the free world. What kind of education were these women missing in prison? What skills could they have been given that would have helped them establish themselves as productive members of society? How can people convicted of felonies be successfully reintegrated into society?

5. Clearly the author’s race, education, and socioeconomic status have an impact on her experience. Should that matter when we consider her story? Do those factors make her story more or less credible? What’s the difference between Danbury FCI, where the author spends most of her time, and the correctional facilities she is transferred to toward the end of the story? Does Piper change in these harsher environments?

6. After reading Orange Is the New Black, do you think our prison system is successful? Do you think its dramatic growth over the last thirty years—nearly 400 percent more Americans in prison—is a good thing for the country? Why or why not? What do you think the author is trying to accomplish by telling her story?

7. Piper’s true story has been adapted to serve as the basis for the Netflix series by the same name. What are some of the differences between the two portrayals? What is the significance of some of these major changes?

8. Do you have sympathy for Piper’s story? Are you mad at her? What weaknesses caused her downfall and what strengths helped her persist? Is there a turning point in her story? How does she change?
9. What are the ways in which prison changes Piper? What does she come to learn about who she is?

10. Discuss some of the connections that Piper made with the other inmates at Danbury. What does she learn from them? Which of the other stories that were shared over the course of the memoir did you find particularly intriguing?

**Trivia Questions**

Use as an opportunity to give out prizes to residents or as a part of a community building event.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who was the author of Orange is the New Black?</td>
<td>Piper Kerman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In Orange is the New Black, Piper discusses two of her partners. What are their names?</td>
<td>Nora and Larry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What color are the uniforms in prison?</td>
<td>Khaki</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What crimes did Piper commit that sent her to jail?</td>
<td>Money laundering and drug trafficking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the name of the federal prison where Piper is originally housed?</td>
<td>Danbury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where did Piper attend college?</td>
<td>Smith College</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What was the length of Piper’s sentence?</td>
<td>15 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is the prison chef?</td>
<td>Pop</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How long does Piper wait between being indicted and being sentenced?</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who is Piper’s bunkmate for the majority of her time at Danbury?</td>
<td>Miss Natalie</td>
</tr>
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