

# UNLOCKING MINDS



## UNLOCKING POSSIBILITIES

## READING BETWEEN THE LINES

5<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY REPORT | 2017-2022

*“What makes Reading Between the Lines such a remarkable and essential program is how it gives men and women leaving prison the tools to engage with the world.”*

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**ALEX KOTLOWITZ**

Reading Between the Lines Senior Advisor;  
Journalist, Author, Filmmaker

Reading Between the Lines™

The Road Not Taken

Robert Frost

I

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

II

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

III

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

IV

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence,  
Two roads ~~diverged~~ <sup>have</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>been</sup> ~~a~~ <sup>born</sup> ~~wood,~~ <sup>and</sup> ~~I~~ <sup>—</sup>  
I took the one ~~less~~ <sup>3014</sup> traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference

## OUR MISSION

Reading Between the Lines creates a unique space for the discussion of great literature with people who are incarcerated or transitioning back to their communities. By reading together and sharing insights, participants' voices are heard and valued as they build on their communication and leadership skills.

# A MESSAGE FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR



Dear Friends,

I wish to thank the hundreds of people who have brought Reading Between the Lines to this point of celebrating our 5th Anniversary. Board members, volunteers, financial supporters, staff, and the program's participants have built this unique organization. Through discussion of great literature, those marginalized by the criminal justice system have the rare space to be heard, accepted, and valued.

Many years ago, before Reading Between the Lines was even a thought, I was asked to help the indomitable Joan Shapiro, a retired banking executive, as she looked to make a difference in meeting the needs of women in prison. We met over breakfast many times to share experiences and ideas. Although we were not sure how those conversations would pan out, they were inspiring and motivating and led us directly to this 5th Anniversary. From my childhood to this day, I have had a passion for helping others. My work with Joan and so many others to establish and evolve Reading Between the Lines has been one of the best and proudest achievements of my career.

My more than 8 years of incarceration was one of the hardest times in my life. What is even harder for me, however, is seeing other men and women warehoused for decades, leaving our penal institutions, and returning to prison in short order. I have seen siblings in prison together, fathers and sons as cellmates, and entire families decimated because of the failures of our overcrowded, inhumane system. These incarcerations have been ineffective and a colossal waste of time and resources. Nevertheless, I am hopeful.

I am hopeful because I have seen the potential within the eyes of Reading Between the Lines' participants. I have seen individuals rediscover their voice and reclaim their sense of dignity through this impactful program. Many things which we would consider normal are not normal to many of our participants. Prisons create an abnormal society, where one cannot show fear, weakness, compassion or concern for others. Reading Between the Lines provides a purposeful alternative, one where participants help others with varying reading ability, respect those with a different opinion, and engage in literature in ways they never imagined. **You can see the light turn on during a session when a participant has the joy of connecting great words with lived experience and expressing it. You can see participants thirst for more, and you see a change in spirit when they begin to hope for a better future.**

The Reading Between the Lines experience is not the "be-all and end-all." It is, however, a critical resource for individual growth and self-affirmation. It is a metamorphosis our participants use to change their lives and the lives of those they love. I am proud to say, Reading Between the Lines unlocks minds and unlocks possibilities!

With deep appreciation,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Wilder Kendrick Berry". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Wilder Kendrick "Ken" Berry**  
Chair

# LEADING BETWEEN THE LINES



Dear Friends,

Incarceration stigmatizes. It scars. It represses dignity and confidence. There is no sure way home or safe guarantee of a successful future for people just out of prison or transitioning back, let alone for those who remain detained in jail. Reading Between the Lines supports the rights of people in the carceral system to be valued as individuals in the same way that we all are.

We incorporated in 2017, after a three-year pilot at two halfway houses on Chicago's Westside. The idea for this novel program germinated after visiting prisons and imagining that powerful words of literary giants could offer respite and joy to an invisible, vulnerable population. In our first discussion, a dozen of us sat around a table to explore how a Lebanese poet imagined parents easing their children into the world. Participants read the poem for the first time. The conversation was lively and enlightening. Most said it was the first time they had analyzed a literary text together, exchanging opinions and being heard as intellectual peers.

During the early years with my colleague Don Whitfield, we engaged 450 people to build communication and leadership strengths through discussion of great writing. Readings spanned generations and genres. Our muses were Maya Angelou, Martin Espada, Maimonides, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nikki Giovanni. Today, Sonia Sanchez, Nate Marshall, Thucydides, Yusef Komunyakaa, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Claudia Rankine and 50 other great writers comprise a growing repertoire, chosen to resonate with participants' interests and to ignite exchanges with multiple interpretations. One participant said, **"I now use Reading Between the Lines all the time."**

Innovation in the carceral system is a long-term effort. Nevertheless, Reading Between the Lines looks to the future with energy and optimism. Accompanying participants is vital as we work together to strengthen foundational life tools, using literature to ignite hearts and minds, self-worth and trust. As one participant said, **"Reading Between the Lines is medicine for the brain."**

The board of directors, staff, and mostly participants, thank you for being at our side these first five years. We do not fit neatly into traditional, nonprofit funding silos so are especially grateful for your investments and trust in this unique approach to offering those marginalized by the criminal justice system the space to hone communication skills and to be validated.

With deep thanks,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joan Shapiro". The ink is dark and the signature is fluid and personal.

**Joan Shapiro**

Founder & Executive Director



Numbers are important in telling the Reading Between the Lines story. But the story is not complete without highlighting the innovation and evolution of the program.

### OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WE:

- ▶ **Increased** the role of participants as we evolved methodology, research, and facilitation.
- ▶ **Invested** in technology to deliver the program remotely six weeks after the pandemic began; we could hold sessions online or in-person.
- ▶ **Moved** from required to voluntary participation at all sites—those in the room choose to be there.
- ▶ **Launched** the program virtually at Cook County Jail (CCDOC) in August 2021 and at Fox Valley Adult Transition Center for women in June 2022.
- ▶ **Initiated** facilitator training for participants at CCDOC and Fox Valley Transition Center for women as a rare professional development opportunity that also includes stipends.
- ▶ **Engaged** all Board members, staff and volunteers in ongoing DEI (Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion) work to realize our commitment to anti-racism.

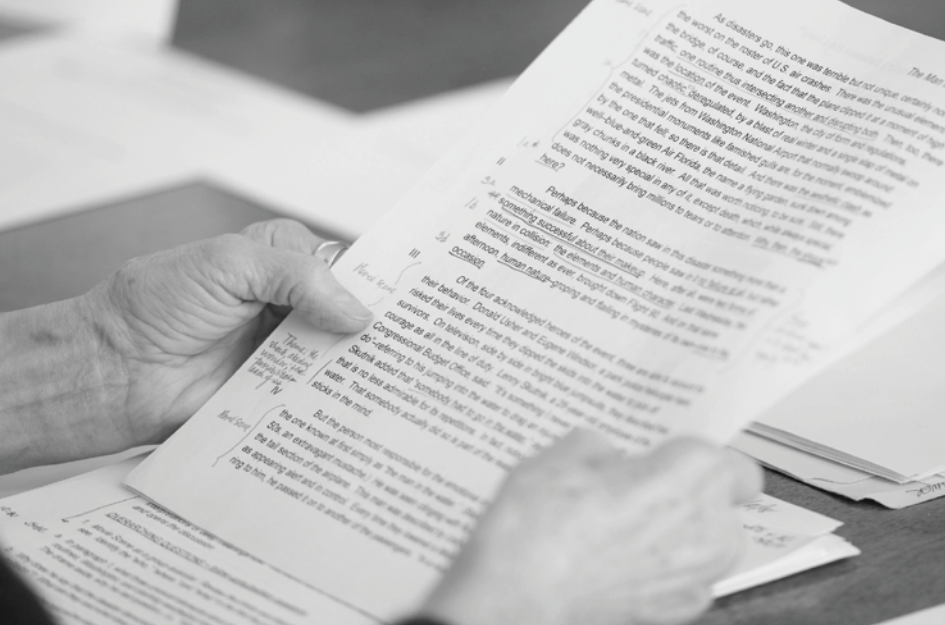
*“Reading Between the Lines is transformational for so many of its participants. It is easy to read the actual line, but reading what’s between the lines is where truth lives.”*

---

**NICOLE BOND**

Reading Between the Lines Facilitator;  
Museum Educator & Teaching Artist

# READING BETWEEN THE LINES BY THE NUMBERS | 2017–2022



Engaged over **2,500** different participants



Facilitated sessions **50** weeks a year pre-Covid, now **40**



Involved **58** facilitators, of whom **41** have volunteered



Partnered at **1** jail and **5** transitional residences



Developed a repertoire of over **60** short, powerful texts



*I appreciate being appreciated...  
No one has ever asked my opinion before.*

**PARTICIPANT** | Reading Between the Lines



*It teaches me to communicate, but most  
of all to use my mind...to think!*

**PARTICIPANT** | Reading Between the Lines



*It has reinvented my love for writing,  
literature, expression—the arts.*

**PARTICIPANT** | Reading Between the Lines

*“ Reading Between the Lines offers each participant  
an opportunity to practice the soft skills that so many  
employers are looking for in their hiring practices.  
We fully support the program. ”*

---

**BOBBY MOORE**

Safer Foundation North Lawndale;  
Center Supervisor

# READING BETWEEN THE LINES

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As of 9/6/22

Reading Between the Lines is grateful for the tremendous support that it has received from so many these past five years.

*“It’s humbling and exhilarating to spend time sharing ideas with people who have no reason to do so except that they are curious and passionate. Here’s to poetry and history and the human spirit!”*

### WOODWARD BENNETT

Volunteer Facilitator (2018-Present)  
and Science Educator

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