Discussion Guide:
*The Sun Does Shine: How I Found Life and Freedom on Death Row*

Use this guide to frame your reflections and to learn more about the key themes of the book.

**About the book**
Just twenty-nine years old when he was sentenced to die by electrocution, Anthony Ray Hinton spent his first three years on death row in stunned silence and despair. At first, he expressed anger at those who would sentence an innocent man to die. However, he came to accept his fate and resolved not just to survive, but to serve as a beacon of hope for the others around him. For the next twenty-seven years, he served as a model and a mentor for those on death row, all the while never losing the determination to prove his innocence. In 2015, with the help of attorney Bryan Stevenson and the Equal Justice Initiative, Hinton won his release from prison. Hinton’s story is one in which prejudice and loss are overcome by hope, inspiration, and justice.

**More about the book:**

1. **The Sun Does Shine | Macmillan Publishers**  
   [https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250124715](https://us.macmillan.com/books/9781250124715)  
   The publisher site includes reviews of the book, an excerpt, and links to other media.

2. **Anthony Ray Hinton | Equal Justice Initiative**  
   [https://eji.org/cases/anthony-ray-hinton/](https://eji.org/cases/anthony-ray-hinton/)  
   EJI profiles Hinton’s story and the legal battle for his exoneration.

3. **The Sun Does Shine | Goodreads**  
   The Goodreads site offers user reviews and questions on the book, as well as opportunities for discussion and suggestions for further reading.

4. **Anthony Ray Hinton: ”The Sun Does Shine” | Talks at Google**  
   The author recounts his story and his message of hope in this recorded presentation.
Questions / topics for discussion:

1. Ray attributes his conviction not just to his racial identity but also to the difficulty of maintaining a proper defense without the money to hire his own attorney or bring in proper experts. At one point he jokes, “What does capital punishment mean? It means a guy without capital gets punished.” In what ways was his legal defense disadvantaged by his family’s poverty? Was poverty or race more of a factor in his conviction? In what ways were the two intertwined?

2. After spending three years in silence and anger, Ray determined to choose a new approach to coping with his circumstances. He wrote: “Despair was a choice. Hatred was a choice. Anger was a choice. I still had my choices … I could choose to give up or to hang on. Hope was a choice. Faith was a choice. And more than anything else, love was a choice. Compassion was a choice.” What do you think drove him to choose compassion and hope over hatred and despair? How did Ray demonstrate love and empathy in his interactions with others on death row?

3. When Ray is permitted to start a book club for death row, the first book the group reads is James Baldwin’s Go Tell It on the Mountain. What prompted Ray to select this book? If you were in Ray’s circumstances, what titles would you have recommended for the book club?

4. Chapter 21 begins with a quote from Fyodor Dostoyevsky - “The degree of civilization in a society can be judged by entering its prisons.” In what ways is the prison system in the South a reflection of our region’s past and present? If you had the opportunity to redesign a prison so that it could reflect the values that we aspire to, what would it look like?

5. When Ray finally gets to meet with Bryan Stevenson, he is relieved to have an attorney who seems to care about his story, saying “He didn’t seem in a rush to finish. He didn’t interrupt me. He just listened. It was a powerful thing to be listened to like that.” What lesson can philanthropy take away from his experience, particularly when working with underserved communities?

6. After reading Ray’s story, what possible roles do you see for philanthropy in criminal justice reform? How can foundations use different forms of capital (social, moral, intellectual, reputation, financial) to effect change in criminal justice policy?
Additional reading suggestions:

**Just Mercy: A Story of Justice and Redemption**  
by Bryan Stevenson  
The best-selling book, now also a feature film, tells the story of the formation of the Equal Justice Initiative and features one of EJI's first clients, Walter McMillian, a young black man who was sentenced to die for the murder of a young white woman that he didn't commit.

**The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness**  
by Michelle Alexander  
Alexander argues that while laws encoding racial segregation have been repealed, the targeting of communities of color in the War on Drugs and other criminal enforcement has resulted in a new form of racial control constructed through the criminal justice system.

**Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America**  
by James Forman Jr.  
Forman is a former public defender and a current critic of mass incarceration. In this book, he seeks to understand the war on crime that began in the 1970s and why it was supported by many African American politicians and leaders in the nation's urban centers.

**From the War on Poverty to the War on Crime: The Making of Mass Incarceration in America**  
by Elizabeth Hinton  
Challenging the belief that America's prison problem originated with the 1980s War on Drugs, the author traces the rise of mass incarceration instead to the social welfare programs of Lyndon Johnson's Great Society at the height of the Civil Rights era.

**Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans from the Civil War to World War II**  
by Douglas A. Blackmon  
In this Pulitzer Prize winning account, Blackmon brings to light one of the most shameful chapters in American history—an "Age of Neoslavery" that thrived from the aftermath of the Civil War through the dawn of World War II during which tens of thousands of African Americans were arrested, indebted, and sold as forced laborers.

**When They Call You a Terrorist: A Black Lives Matter Memoir**  
by Patrice Khan-Cullors and Asha Bandele  
A poetic and powerful memoir about what it means to be a Black woman in America, brought forth through the story of the co-founding of the Black Lives Matter movement that demands justice for all in the land of the free.

**Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools**  
by Monique W. Morris  
Morris chronicles the experiences of Black girls across the country whose intricate lives are misunderstood, highly judged—by teachers, administrators, and the justice system—and degraded by the very institutions charged with helping them flourish.
What to watch:

- **Just Mercy** - World-renowned civil rights defense attorney Bryan Stevenson works to free a wrongly condemned death row prisoner.
- **Slavery by Another Name** - The film tells how even as chattel slavery came to an end in the South in 1865, thousands of African Americans were pulled back into forced labor with shocking force and brutality.
- **Selma** - A chronicle of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s campaign to secure equal voting rights via an epic march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama, in 1965.
- **13th** - An in-depth look at the prison system in the United States and how it reveals the nation's history of racial inequality.
- **When They See Us** - Five teens from Harlem become trapped in a nightmare when they're falsely accused of a brutal attack in Central Park. Based on the true story.
- **Gideons Army** - Follows three young, committed Public Defenders who are dedicated to working for the people society would rather forget.
- **Tutwiler** – This documentary short from FRONTLINE and The Marshall Project, offers a powerful and unforgettable window into the lives of incarcerated pregnant women -- and what happens to their newborns.
- **The House I Live In** - Investigates the tragic errors and shortcomings that have resulted from framing drug abuse as an issue for law enforcement rather than a matter of public health, and traces the consequences of America’s war on drugs.
- **The Farm: Angola, USA** - Documentary depicting day to day life in Angola Prison mostly from an inmate's perspective.
- **Serving Life** - The story of a group of inmate volunteers who staff their own hospice inside a maximum-security prison in Louisiana where the average sentence is more than 90 years.

Suggested listening:

- Billie Holiday, "Strange Fruit." (1939)
- Sam Cooke, "A Change is Gonna Come." (1963)
- Bob Dylan, "Oxford Town" (1963)
- Nina Simone, "Mississippi God dam." (1964)
- Neil Young, "Southern Man" (1970)
- Marvin Gaye, "What’s Going On?" (1971)
- Gill Scott Heron, "The Revolution Will Not be Televised." (1971)
- Nina Simone, To Be Young, Gifted and Black (1958)
- Tupac Shakur, "Keep Ya Head Up." (1993)
- Nas, "One Love" (1994)

Artwork to explore:

- The Justice Arts Coalition
- Redaction: A Project by Titus Kaphar and Reginald Dwayne Betts
- The O.G. Experience
Learn more about criminal justice policy and reform:

   Founded in 1989 by Bryan Stevenson, EJI is a nonprofit organization that provides legal representation to people who have been illegally convicted, unfairly sentenced, or abused in state jails and prisons. EJI works to challenge the death penalty and excessive punishment and provides re-entry assistance to formerly incarcerated people.

   The Marshall Project is a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization that seeks to create and sustain a sense of national urgency about the U.S. criminal justice system. The project site includes first-hand accounts from incarcerated individuals and informational coverage on topics such as the death penalty and juvenile justice.

9. **The Sentencing Project** [https://www.sentencingproject.org/](https://www.sentencingproject.org/)
   Founded in 1986, The Sentencing Project works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system by promoting reforms in sentencing policy, addressing unjust racial disparities and practices, and advocating for alternatives to incarceration.

10. **Southern Center for Human Rights** [https://www.schr.org/](https://www.schr.org/)
    The Southern Center for Human Rights is working for equality, dignity, and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal system in the Deep South. SCHR fights for a world free from mass incarceration, the death penalty, the criminalization of poverty, and racial injustice.

11. **Prison Policy Initiative** [https://www.prisonpolicy.org/](https://www.prisonpolicy.org/)
    The nonprofit, non-partisan Prison Policy Initiative provides leading research on the effects of mass criminalization in American society and uses publications and data to spark advocacy campaigns to create a more just society.

12. **Charles Koch Institute** [https://www.charleskochinstitute.org/](https://www.charleskochinstitute.org/)
    The Institute supports reforms that improve communication between police and citizens and that reduce recidivism by removing barriers to opportunity.

13. **The Bail Project** [https://bailproject.org/](https://bailproject.org/)
    The Bail Project is a collaborative effort to combat mass incarceration at the front end of the system by paying bail for people in need, reuniting families and restoring the presumption of innocence for accused individuals.

14. **The Promise of Justice Initiative** [https://promiseofjustice.org/](https://promiseofjustice.org/)
    The Promise of Justice Initiative (PJI) is a New Orleans based nonprofit that works to create positive change for people in the criminal justice at the intersection of direct services, impact litigation, and community engagement.

15. **National Bail Out** [https://www.nationalbailout.org/](https://www.nationalbailout.org/)
    The National Bail Out collective is a Black-led and Black-centered collective of abolitionist organizers, lawyers and activists building a community-based movement to support our folks and end systems of pretrial detention and ultimately mass incarceration.

    Advancing Real Change promotes justice by ensuring that the life histories of people charged with crimes are at the forefront of their cases.
Selected readings on philanthropy and criminal justice reform:

- *Nonprofit Quarterly* - Philanthropy at Its Finest: Converting Assets to Action on Mass Incarceration
  https://nonprofitquarterly.org/philanthropy-finest-converting-assets-action-mass-incarceration/

- *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* - Victories in Curbing Mass Incarceration Show How Philanthropy Can Make a Difference (subscription required)

- *Philanthropy News Digest* - Funder Collaborative for Criminal Justice Reform Launched

- *Inside Philanthropy* - A New Normal? Amid COVID-19, Criminal Justice Reform Funders Dare to Hope: