
The Center for Justice
Education at Eastern State
Presents:

EDUCATOR GUIDE:
**UNLOCKING HISTORY:
THE ENGINEERING
ACHIEVEMENTS OF
STEPHEN DE AYALA**

**EASTERN STATE
PENITENTIARY**

UNLOCKING HISTORY EDUCATOR GUIDE: ENGINEERING ACHIEVEMENTS

This guide supports a classroom viewing of [“Unlocking History: The Engineering Achievements of Stephen De Ayala”](#) [runtime 6 minutes].

This episode explores the fascinating story of Stephen De Ayala, a person incarcerated at Eastern State Penitentiary in the late 19th century who became known for his remarkable design and engineering skills. Through the lens of De Ayala’s contributions, this video sheds light on how creativity and resourcefulness can emerge even in the harshest environments. The video also features an interview with De Ayala’s great-great-granddaughter, Alexa Peregrin, who offers personal insights into her ancestor's life and legacy.

This guide encourages critical thinking about how personal history and legacy are intertwined with the spaces and systems we create, and how all individuals – no matter their circumstances – can leave a lasting impact on society.

Grade Levels:

9th through 12th

Number of Class Periods:

One period

Author:

Designed by the Eastern State Education Team.

Learning Objectives:

- Understand the impact of Stephen De Ayala's design and engineering contributions during his incarceration at Eastern State Penitentiary.
- Analyze the role of creativity and resourcefulness in the lives of incarcerated individuals and its potential benefits for rehabilitation and personal identity.
- Explore the concept of family legacy through the interview with De Ayala's great-great-granddaughter, Alexa Peregrim, and discuss how personal histories are passed down through generations.
- Evaluate the broader historical context of Eastern State Penitentiary and its design as part of 19th-century prison reform efforts.

Discussion Questions:

The Role of Creativity in Prison: Discuss the role that creativity and engineering skills might play in a prison setting. What does Stephen De Ayala's story tell us about the untapped potential of incarcerated individuals?

- Guiding question: "How can creativity be an important tool in rehabilitation?"

The Significance of Family Legacy: Discuss Alexa Peregrim's perspective on her ancestor's story. How does hearing about De Ayala from his great-great-granddaughter deepen our understanding of his life and legacy? What does it mean to have family stories passed down through generations?

- Guiding question: "What role does family history and memory play in shaping the identity of individuals, both inside and outside of prison?"

Prison Reform and Innovation: Explore how prison reformers like those at Eastern State Penitentiary thought about architecture and design. What was the purpose behind the prison's structure? How might De Ayala's contributions have helped improve or modify these ideas?

- Guiding question: "How did the architectural design of Eastern State Penitentiary reflect the broader goals of prison reform during the 19th century?"

Activities and Extensions:

Research Project:

- Have students research other justice-impacted people throughout history who contributed creatively to society. This could include incarcerated people who invented new tools, wrote works of literature, or made other contributions that helped improve the prison environment and/or their communities.

Interview with Family History Focus:

- Ask students to write a brief essay or conduct an interview about their own family history, similar to Alexa Peregrim’s reflections on Stephen De Ayala. How do family stories shape their understanding of history and identity? What role does storytelling play in preserving legacies?
- For students with access to their own family members, encourage them to learn about the experiences and contributions of their ancestors.

Group Presentation:

- Have students work in groups to present on a particular aspect of prison reform, including the role of design and architecture in shaping the prison experience. They could focus on Eastern State Penitentiary, comparing it to other prisons from the same era, or discuss the ethics of prison design.

Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1 / RH.11-12.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2 / RH.11-12.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.3 / RH.11-12.3: Analyze in detail a series of events described in a text; determine whether earlier events caused later ones or whether the events were coincidental.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1 / SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10/11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS?

Contact education@easternstate.org.

Learn more about the Center for Justice Education at Eastern State Penitentiary Historic Site, and about the Teacher Institute, at

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