



Cinema/Chicago and the Chicago International Film Festival  
Education Outreach Program Screening: *Evolution of a Criminal*  
Director: Darius Clark Monroe  
83 minutes

Please use this guide to lead your students in preparation and post-screening discussion. Following the film, students are required to respond to the screening with a one-page essay. Essays must be sent to Cinema/Chicago in order to be invited to subsequent film screenings.

### **Synopsis**

After serving a five year sentence in prison, Darius Clark Monroe embarks on a cinematic journey to retell the tale of how he and two friends robbed a bank, and to try to understand what led him down the path of crime in the first place.

The documentary begins by describing the healthy relationships Darius had with his family, and the positive environment he grew up in. He describes being a carefree child, but suddenly going from being young and free to understanding the burdens of adulthood. As he grew older he began to understand that his family had money problems, and their problems suddenly worsened when their home was robbed. Through the documentary Darius emphasizes how hard it was for him to see his family struggle financially.

At just 16 years old, Darius Clark Monroe and two friends rob a Bank of America. Initially, they are not caught by police. Darius brings home the money, giving it to his mother in a shoe box. Just a few weeks after the crime, one of Darius's friends starts bragging, eventually leading to the arrest of Darius. Throughout the film, teachers, friends, and family, all assert that they never would have thought Darius would do something illegal, and that they were all shocked when they found out he had robbed a bank. The documentary follows Darius as he revisits victims of his crime, talks to his family about how they were affected, and discusses his own feelings on looking back.

### **"Evolution of a Criminal"**

Statistics show that the 15-24 age demographic accounts for 40% of all crimes committed in the US, even though this age group only makes up about 14% of the population. People in this age range are statistically much more likely to commit a crime. Many believe that this age group is much more likely to commit a crime because they have not yet developed the same ties to society as those of older age groups. It is also suggested that they do not have the same grasp on what it would mean to serve a years-long prison sentence.

Other social factors play a major role in predicting not only whether or not someone will commit a crime, but also what type of crime they are most likely to commit: gender, class, race, ethnicity, and urban or rural residency are all significant indicators of crime and types of crime committed. For example, men are much more likely to commit crime than women, and those of a higher socioeconomic status are more likely to commit non-violent, financially motivated crimes (such as fraud), while those of a lower socioeconomic status are more likely to commit street crimes (violent or non-violent crimes that take place in a public space, such as mugging). While all of these factors are considered to be very useful in predicting who commits what kinds of crime, there are many factors that often cannot be accounted. Darius's documentary allows us to follow his progression towards robbing the bank, and shines some light on the other factors that lead him down the path of crime, such as his own family being the victims of a robbery.

Because of the severity of Darius's crime, he was tried as an adult. In the US, many states allow children to be tried as adults depending on the severity of their crime, how old they are, and their past criminal record. Darius was likely tried as an adult because he was sixteen at the time of his crime, and because the robbery was an armed robbery.

### **Life after Prison**

Although a prison sentence can often be a difficult time in a person's life, life after prison often presents much bigger challenges and obstacles to overcome. For convicts recently released, reintegrating themselves to the world outside of prison can be very difficult. The most effective element of punishment for those serving a prison sentence is the loss of all freedoms; for convicts, life is confined to a prison cell, with no freedom to make choices, or go anywhere or do anything. Upon leaving prison and reentering society, convicts are suddenly faced with a multitude of decisions they must relearn how to make. The sudden change from being imprisoned to being free can be shocking for convicts. Even worse, recently released prisoners face immense challenges in reentering the workforce. Being confined in prison for extended periods of time can seriously affect their social skills and ability to successfully interview with employers. Additionally, employers in all industries are skeptical of hiring employees who have been convicted of a crime. This can make the job search nearly impossible.

Ultimately, reintegrating into society after life in prison can be difficult. Statistics show that 30% of all convicts released from prison are rearrested within six months. 67% are rearrested within three years. The first sentence in prison increases one's chances of ending up back in prison by at least 50%.

### **Study Ideas/Questions**

1. Before seeing this film, did you think there were certain factors that determine whether or not someone will commit a criminal act? What were they?
2. Darius's friend Trey describes not being able to decipher between right and wrong when he helped rob the bank. Why do you think he had this challenge?
3. Darius's parents use the money Darius stole from the bank to pay their bills. What do you think this communicated to Darius about the crime he committed?
4. In the documentary, Darius's grandmother names off members of their family who spent time in prison. Do you think this family history was a factor that influenced Darius to rob the bank? What were the other factors that influenced him committing the crime?

5. What do you make of Darius apologizing to those who were present at the bank robbery? Why do you think he wants to visit them? What is he getting out of this experience?
6. In the documentary, some of Darius's teachers say they would have seen him differently had they known he was convicted of a crime. Why would they have seen him differently? How will his criminal conviction affect the rest of his life?
7. Darius's friend who carried the gun in the robbery was never tried for the crime, but he eventually went to prison for something else. If Darius hadn't been caught, do you think he would have committed another crime? Do you think it would be easier to commit a crime after you have already committed one and not been caught? What about committing a crime after you've served a prison sentence?
8. Darius's mother says in the film that even though Darius committed a criminal act, he is not a criminal. Do you think there is a difference between being a criminal and committing a criminal act? What is the difference?

### **Useful Links and Resources**

[Statistics of Juvenile Crime](#)

[Predicting factors of Crime and Criminals](#)

[Ex-convicts After Prison](#)

### **Interested in Film?**

**The Chicago International Film Festival's Student Film Council** is looking for members for the 2015-2016 school year! Visit [chicagofilmfestival.com](http://chicagofilmfestival.com) for more details!

Adobe Youth **Voices** helps students/teachers get a film club started at their school to encourage students to foster their creativity, practice their storytelling techniques, and even influence change through experimenting with society's most powerful medium. Find out more: [youthvoices.adobe.com](http://youthvoices.adobe.com)