



Common Threads II: Restoring What's Broken

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Identify personal qualities the interviewees exhibited (e.g., resilience or patience) that fueled their efforts for change
- Compare and contrast the interviewee's different approaches to advocacy work
- Evaluate how the interviewees' identity and experiences motivated their commitment to work for change
- Connect these interviews to broader concepts of environmental stewardship, justice, and social responsibility
- Reflect on your challenges and what you can do to help fix what's broken
- Write a personal narrative reflecting on an issue or moment where their personal identity influenced their actions

Materials

- Equipment to screen interviews and clips
- Transcripts of interviews
- Journals or shared online space for notetaking
- Rubric for assessment

Time

Adaptable for a 90 minute block period or for two 50 minute periods

Overview of Theme

This lesson explores the resilience of people like Naturalist Murray Fisher, Legal Scholar Laurence Tribe, and Lawrence and Ronnine Bartley, who exemplify how patience, tenacity, and commitment can lead to restoration and renewal in the face of deep challenges.

Students will examine their work in mending our environment, justice system, and communities, then identify an issue needing repair and explore ways to contribute meaningfully to its restoration.



Interview Episodes



Murray Fisher, Naturalist

- **Title:** The Heart of Rewilding
- **Interview Log:** May 15, 2024 by Teddy Kunhardt
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- **Episode Overview:** Conservationist Murray Fisher shares his life and career of protecting New York waterways and ecosystems. He discusses where his deep love for nature originated from, the importance of youth engagement, and the ongoing success of his ecological restoration and conservation projects, which include the Billion Oyster Project and Plan it Wild.



Laurence Tribe, Legal Scholar

- **Title:** Law, Liberty, and the Limits of Power
- **Interview Log:** January 14, 2025 by David Bender
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- **Episode Overview:** Legal scholar Laurence Tribe reflects on his career as a Harvard Law professor teaching U.S. Constitutional Law. Tribe discusses varying interpretations of the Constitution and they have informed several of the landmark cases of the Supreme Court. Tribe also shares stories of political figures today who were once his students, including Ted Cruz and Barack Obama.



Lawrence Bartley, Publisher, The Marshall Project Ronnine Bartley, Educator

- **Title:** Beyond Incarceration
- **Interview Log:** Interviewed on June 26, 2023 by Teddy Kunhardt
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- **Episode Overview:** Lawrence and Ronnine Bartley share their unconventional story of love and family in the shadow of America's incarceration system. What started as a childhood romance was shattered by a sudden tragedy that led to Lawrence's arrest and incarceration. Despite spending 27 years in prison, he and Ronnine's love endured. The Bartleys reflect on the challenges of building a family while one parent is incarcerated, as well as the unlikely moments of joy, from getting married in a visiting room, to taking their children trick-or-treating in prison cells.



Lesson: Restoring What's Broken

Central Question:

How do we heal a fractured world?

First Take: Identify What's Broken

In small groups (3-4 students), discuss:

- ❑ What things in the world feel broken, not only physically, but in terms of systems, relationships, or the environment?
- ❑ Choose one “broken thing” to share with the class.

1. Setting the Stage: Biographies and Initial Thoughts

Introduce the lesson's central theme: “Restoring What's Broken” and the central question: “How do we heal a fractured world?” Explain that students will explore how real people dedicate their lives to repairing complex challenges.

Students read the interviewee biographies (located at the end of the lesson plan).

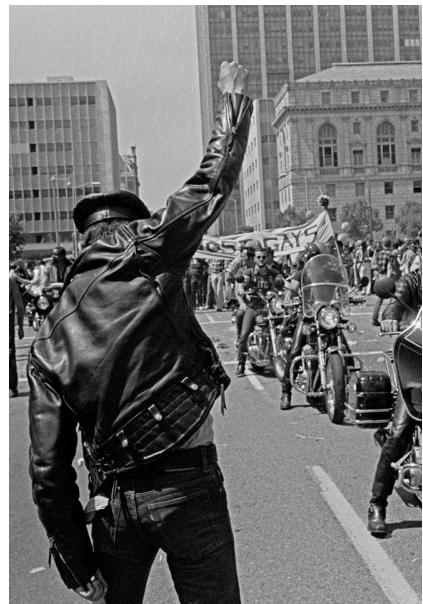
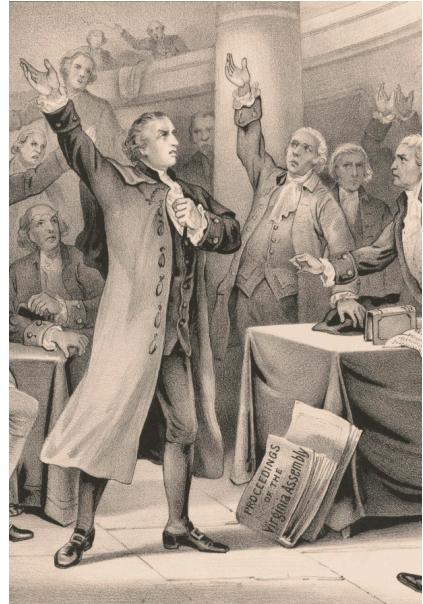
Class Discussion (Based on Biographies):

- ❑ How has each individual worked to repair something broken (an issue, a law, a relationship)?
- ❑ What similarities or differences do you notice between their approaches or experiences?
- ❑ Are there common themes connecting their stories, despite varied backgrounds and professions?

2. Watch and Reflect: Restoring What's Broken Clips

Show suggested clips from each episode.

- ❑ Murray Fisher: Clip 1: 17:22 - 20:50
- ❑ Laurence Tribe: Clip 1: 00:54 - 3:10; Clip 2: 7:54 - 9:40
- ❑ Lawrence and Ronnine Bartley: Clip 1: 1:43 - 4:10



3. Common Threads: Small Groups

Return to the same small groups for groups to discuss reflections of the interviews. For each interviewee (Murray Fisher, Laurence Tribe, Lawrence and Ronnine Bartley), consider these themes:

Motivation

- ❑ What early experiences or personal identity cultivated their passion and commitment to their work?
- ❑ Were their mentors or pivotal moments that helped motivate their later work?

Approach

- ❑ How do they aim to “restore” or “repair” their chosen issues? (e.g. Fisher’s Billion Oyster Project, Tribe’s interpretation and teaching law, the Bartley’s Marshall Project.)
- ❑ How did their background inform these choices?

Challenges and Resilience

- ❑ What challenges did each interviewee face, and what does their story teach us about resilience and tenacity?

Youth Engagement

- ❑ How do they, or could they, engage others, including the next generation, in their restoration efforts?
- ❑ Why is this important?

Synthesizing Key Takeaways (Whole Class Discussion)

Bring small groups back together to synthesize their discussions.

- ❑ What common threads connect these individuals in their commitment to restoring what’s broken?
- ❑ How did personal identity (as a naturalist, a refugee’s son, an incarcerated individual, or a family member of an incarcerated person) motivate and sustain their work?
- ❑ What insights about resilience and tenacity did these interviews demonstrate?
- ❑ How might their experiences inspire or empower you to approach challenges or moments of hesitation?



Activity: A Path Forward

Choose one activity below to demonstrate your learning.

Essay Prompt: Write a personal essay (500 words maximum) about a time when your identity influenced how you acted or hesitated to act on a “broken” situation, issue, or moment.

Here are some questions you can be asking yourself as you complete the essay:

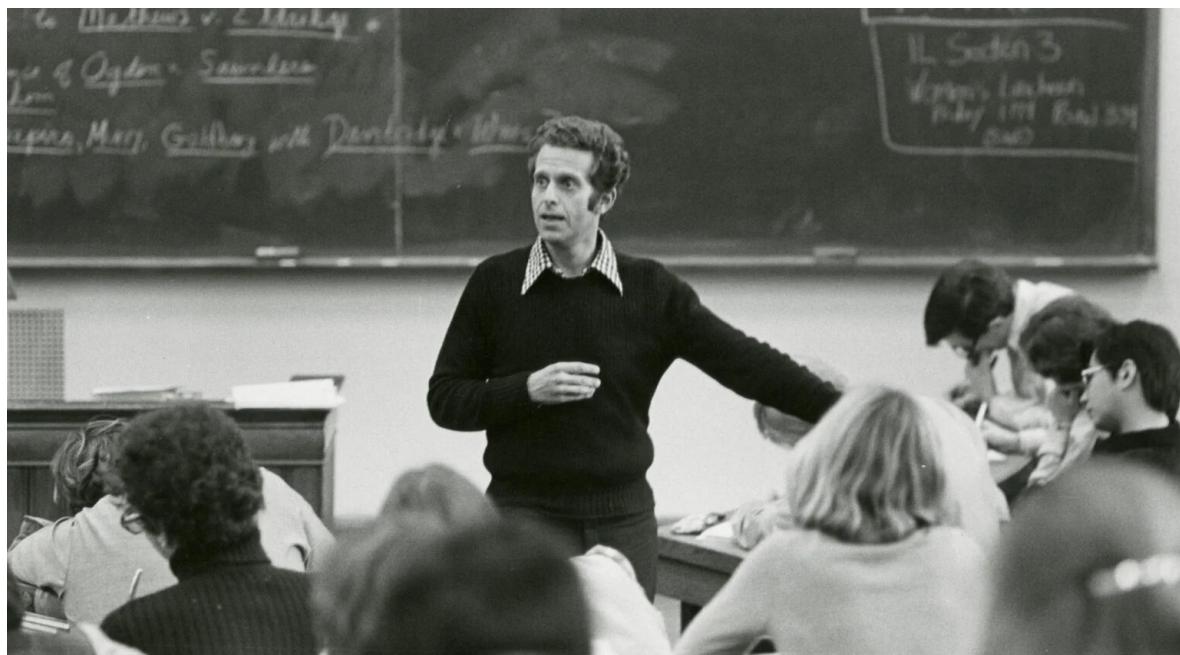
- ▢ Why did you perceive this as a broken situation/issue/moment?
- ▢ Think about what compelled you to act (or hesitate to act) because of who you are.
- ▢ Reflecting on that moment today, after listening to these interviews, do you have any new insights about yourself?

Extension Activity: Assign students to watch the full interviews of Murray Fisher, Laurence Tribe, and Lawrence and Ronnine Bartley. After absorbing their full stories, have fun with this project!

You are in charge of creating a short set of slides (no more than five) on an issue (local or national) that you see as presenting as “broken” and in need of fixing. Your slides will be presenting a preliminary plan for restoring or fixing the issue to a local or national government agency.

Your final deck needs to include these elements:

- ▢ **Slide 1:** Title slide that identifies an issue you believe is “broken.”
- ▢ **Slide 2:** Based on research (at least three citations), outline three actionable steps that could move the needle to restore or “fix” the issue.
- ▢ **Slide 3:** Identify potential allies, resources, or organizations that are either already working on the issue or ones that you believe could help.
- ▢ **Slide 4:** Choose a name for your restoration project





Additional Resources

For expanding student learning on the ideas, people, and events shared.

Murray Fisher

- ▣ [Billion Oyster Project](#): Founded by Murray Fisher and dedicated to restoring oyster reefs to New York Harbor in collaboration with public school students and volunteers.
- ▣ [New York Harbor School](#): The School where the Billion Oyster Project originated and where the program remains deeply integrated into its curriculum.
- ▣ [Plan it Wild](#): An organization founded by Murray Fisher that connects people directly to nature on a smaller, more personal scale.
- ▣ Riverkeeper: A leading clear water advocacy organization that patrols the Hudson River and its tributaries. Murray Fisher worked for this organization early in his career.

Laurence Tribe

- ▣ [Harvard Law School](#): Laurence Tribe's official profile page.
- ▣ [ACLU](#): While not an organization he works for, Laurence Tribe has been involved in many cases and issues that the ACLU champions.

Lawrence and Ronnine Bartley

- ▣ [The Marshall Project](#): Lawrence Bartley is the publisher of this non-profit journalism organization that reports on and investigates the U.S. criminal justice system.
- ▣ [News Inside](#) (The Marshall Project): An initiative within The Marshall Project curated by Lawrence Bartley that delivers criminal justice news and information directly to incarcerated individuals in print and video formats.
- ▣ Formerly Incarcerated & Convicted People and Families Movement ([FICPFM](#)): Led by formerly incarcerated individuals, this organization advocates for justice and supporting communities impacted by the criminal legal system.





Rubric: Common Threads II - Restoring What's Broken

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

Chosen Activity: [] Essay Prompt / [] Extension Activity

Criteria	4 - Exceeds Expectations	3 - Meets Expectations	2 - Developing	1 - Needs Improvement
1. Comprehension & Analysis of Interviewees (Objectives 1, 3)	<p>Sophisticated understanding of interviewees' personal qualities, motivations, and diverse approaches to advocacy.</p> <p>Clearly articulates connections between their identity and commitment to change.</p>	<p>Clear understanding of the interviewees' personal qualities, motivations, and approaches to advocacy.</p> <p>Explains how personal identity influenced their commitment to change.</p>	<p>Some understanding of the interviewees' personal qualities or approaches, but may lack depth in explaining motivations or the link between identity and commitment.</p>	<p>Provides limited or inaccurate understanding of the interviewees' stories, motivations, or methods.</p> <p>Does not clearly connect identity to their work.</p>
2. Connection to Broader Concepts (Objectives 4)	<p>Strongly connects interviewee stories to broad, complex concepts of the environment, justice, and social responsibility, offering insightful parallels and distinctions.</p>	<p>Clearly connects interviewee stories to broader concepts of environmental stewardship, justice, and social responsibility.</p>	<p>Makes surface-level connections between interviewee stories and broader concepts, or connects to only one or two concepts.</p>	<p>Fails to connect interviewee stories to broader concepts or makes inaccurate connections.</p>
3. Personal Reflection & Engagement (Objectives 5)	<p>Offers authentic self-reflection, thoroughly exploring personal obstacles and hesitation and proposing creative, actionable ways to contribute meaningfully to restoration.</p>	<p>Provides thoughtful self-reflection on personal experiences with obstacles and hesitation and identifies plausible ways to participate in repairing a "broken" issue.</p>	<p>Shows some self-reflection, but it may be superficial or lack depth. Identifies general, but not specific, ways to participate in restoration.</p>	<p>Lacks genuine self-reflection or fails to connect personal experiences to the concept of "brokenness" or pathways for participation.</p>

Common Threads II: Restoring What's Broken

Criteria	4 - Exceeds Expectations	3 - Meets Expectations	2 - Developing	1 - Needs Improvement
4. Chosen Activity: Content & Application (Objectives 6)	<p>Essay: Articulates a compelling “broken” situation, demonstrating how personal identity influenced actions or hesitations, and offering sophisticated new insights inspired by the interviews.</p> <p>Extension: Identifies a highly relevant and well-researched “broken” issue with actionable, evidence-based steps. Allies and resources are highly appropriate and strategically chosen.</p>	<p>Essay: Clearly articulates a “broken” situation, explains how personal identity influenced actions/hesitations, and offers clear new insights inspired by the interviews.</p> <p>Extension: Identifies a clear and researched “broken” issue. Outlines actionable, research-backed steps. Identifies appropriate and relevant allies and resources.</p>	<p>Essay: Describes a “broken” situation and touches upon personal identity’s influence, but may lack depth in reflection or new insights.</p> <p>Extension: Identifies an issue, but research may be limited or steps not fully actionable. Allies and resources may be general or less relevant.</p>	<p>Essay: Fails to clearly describe a “broken” situation or connect it meaningfully to personal identity. Lacks reflection or new insights.</p> <p>Extension: Identifies an unclear or unresearched issue. Actionable steps are vague or missing. Allies and resources are absent or inappropriate</p>
5. Chosen Activity: Structure, Organization & Presentation (Objectives 7)	<p>Essay: Exceptionally well-structured, coherent, and concise (within word count). Writing is polished, grammatically correct, and compelling.</p> <p>Extension: Slides are logically organized, visually engaging, and meet all specified requirements. The presentation is clear and professional</p>	<p>Essay: Well-structured and clear, generally within word count. Writing is mostly correct with minor grammatical errors.</p> <p>Extension: Slides are well-organized, visually clear, and meet most specified requirements. The presentation is understandable.</p>	<p>Essay: Organization is sometimes unclear, or it exceeds/falls short of the word count. Contains several grammatical errors that may impede clarity.</p> <p>Extension: Slides lack some organization or visual appeal, or miss some specified requirements. Presentation may be somewhat unclear.</p>	<p>Essay: Lacks clear structure or organization, significantly exceeds/falls short of the word count. Contains numerous grammatical errors, making it difficult to understand.</p> <p>Extension: Slides are disorganized, visually confusing, or miss several specified requirements.</p> <p>The presentation is unclear or incomplete.</p>

Biographies

(in alphabetical order)



MURRAY FISHER

Murray Fisher is a conservationist, educator and entrepreneur. He was born in Bogota, Columbia and raised in Virginia, establishing a love for nature at an early age. In the 2000s, he was involved in marine education and activism as a field coordinator for Waterkeeper Alliance, a global network of organizations dedicated to protecting bodies of water, and a co-founder of New York Harbor School, a public high school for maritime education. Expanding his protection of New York City waterways, in 2014 Fisher co-founded the Billion Oyster Project, an initiative to restore the oyster population and health in the New York Harbor, in turn supporting the harbor's water quality and shoreline protection. 19,000 volunteers, 100 NYC schools, and 83 restaurants have joined the Billion Oyster Project.



LAURENCE TRIBE

Laurence Tribe is an author, legal scholar, and law professor at Harvard University, specializing in U.S Constitutional Law. Among his students were former Chief Justice John Roberts, Associate Justice Elena Kagan, Senator Ted Cruz, and former President Barack Obama. In 1978, Tribe published *American Constitutional Law*, a core treatise on the U.S Constitution. Tribe has argued in several landmark Supreme Court cases, including *National Gay Task Force v. Board of Education*, *Bowes v. Hardwick*, and *Bush v. Palm Beach County Canvassing Board*. Tribe served as a judicial advisor for Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign and in 2010, Obama appointed Tribe as the first Senior Counselor for Justice in the Department of Justice. Tribe held this position for eight months, leaving due to health reasons. In 2021, former President Joe Biden appointed Tribe to serve on the Presidential Commission on the Supreme Court of the United States.



LAWRENCE BARTLEY RONNINE BARTLEY

Lawrence Bartley is a journalist, publisher, and former inmate in Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York. He was arrested on December 27, 1990 after being involved in a shootout on Christmas. After his release in 2018, he joined The Marshall Project as founder and leader of Inside News, a publication dedicated to bringing information to incarcerated people. News Inside is distributed to over 950 prisons and jails in 44 states across the United States, Canada, and Tijuana, Mexico. Bartley was also host of Inside Story, a video series by The Marshall Project that aired in over 750 prisons and jails across 40 states, examining the realities of the American criminal justice system.

His wife, **Ronnine Simmons Bartley** is a dean and educator for New York City Public Schools. The Bartleys married while Lawrence was in prison and now live in Queens, New York with their two sons.