

## Perspectives on the Death Penalty-Case Study

**Target Audience: Grades 10-12**

**Time Need: Five class sessions + homework**

**Curriculum Links:**

- CST: The Right to Life
- Seamless Garment
- Consistent Ethic of Life

**Lesson Contents:**

- Overview of Lesson Details for Teachers
- Engaging Questions & Vocabulary Sheet (Ready to Photocopy)
- Case Preparation Sheet for Students (Ready to Photocopy)
- Student Web Quest Work Sheet (Ready to Photocopy)
- Creative Writing Assignment Sheet (Ready to Photocopy) (Homework assignment)
- Engaging the Death Penalty in Popular Culture: Music – (Homework assignment)
- Concluding Prayer Activity
- Lesson Extensions
- Links to Additional Background & Resources for teachers

### Overview of Lesson Details for Teachers

**Objective:** To engage students in a dynamic process of exploration and faith reflection surrounding the issue of the use of capital punishment in the United States.

**Process:**

1. Students will begin with analysis questions about their own beliefs and views towards capital punishment.
2. Students will read three different news items each presenting information and perspectives about the case of Anthony Graves.
3. Students will create a case summary organizing the facts of the case and demonstrating reading comprehension and written summarization skills.
4. Students will embark on a web quest in order to:
  - to gain more background about the prevalence of capital punishment in the U.S. through a mapping exercise and compare the U.S. realities with capital punishment in other countries
  - to explore Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *"The Gospel of Life," (Evangelium vitae)* and select excerpts that inspire them to think more deeply about the value of human life and the church's view towards the death penalty
  - to explore the U.S. Bishop's statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*
  - to look closely at The Articles of the U.S. Constitution and decide if the death penalty should or should not be considered "cruel and unusual punishment"
5. Students will take on a role from the case study and complete a creative writing assignment presenting a specific perspective based on their role. Students will use and apply their case summaries and web quest learnings to complete this exercise. (Note: Teachers may wish to assign roles or let students select one.)  
**Suggested length for assignment:** 1 page, single spaced, typed, 12 pt. Times New Roman.
6. Students will engage auditory forms of learning by selecting and listening to various songs which contain a perspective or social critique about the death penalty. Students will summarize what they think are the songwriter's views and message regarding the death penalty.
7. Students will conclude the lesson by creating a prayer or a prayer service that encompasses the scope of their work and insights.



## Engaging Questions

*Directions: Take a few minutes to think about the questions below and then respond to the questions in the space provided. Be prepared to discuss your responses with the class.*

1. Describe your own personal views about the death penalty:

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2. In your opinion, do you think the death penalty is an act of retribution or justice? Explain.

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3. Should the Government have the right to kill its citizens? When? Who should decide?

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4. Can the right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' be considered an absolute right if a government can kill its own people?

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5. In stating that 'killing is against the law' is the Government breaking its own law in executing citizens?

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## Vocabulary Hunt

**Directions:** Define the following words in the space provided using the web resources listed on the next page and/or Merriam-Webster's online dictionary (<http://www.m-w.com/>):

encyclical: \_\_\_\_\_

exonerated: \_\_\_\_\_

retribution: \_\_\_\_\_

recant: \_\_\_\_\_

snitch testimony: \_\_\_\_\_

capital punishment: \_\_\_\_\_

lethal injection: \_\_\_\_\_

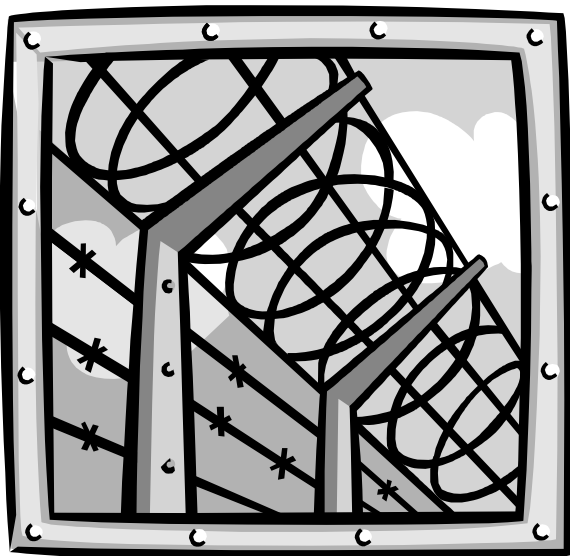
conviction: \_\_\_\_\_

death penalty: \_\_\_\_\_

consistent ethic of life: \_\_\_\_\_

seamless garment: \_\_\_\_\_

jail vs. prison: \_\_\_\_\_



*“Today, when the inviolable rights of the human person are proclaimed and the value of life publicly affirmed, the most basic human right, “the right to life, is being denied or trampled upon, especially at the more significant moments of existence: the moment of birth and the moment of death.”*

*-Pope John Paul II, *The Gospel of Life*  
[*Evangelium Vitae*], 18.*

## The Case of Anthony Graves – A True Story

Read the various news sources provided which present perspectives and information about the case of Anthony Graves. Using the material provided (as well as other news resources you may wish to add) organize the facts, and summarize the details of the case using the worksheet on the next page.

### Case overview:

**Anthony Graves**, who was sentenced to death in **Texas** in 1994, may soon be released on bail. Graves' conviction was overturned in March 2006 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 5th Circuit because **prosecutors had withheld two pieces of important evidence** from Graves' attorneys prior to his trial. One of the main witnesses against Graves, a co-defendant who participated in the crime, recanted his earlier testimony. The federal court has given Texas the mandate to either retry Graves or to dismiss charges. Texas requested more time because it has appealed the 5th Circuit ruling to the U.S. Supreme Court, but the request was denied.<sup>1</sup>

(Houston Chronicle, Sept. 1, 2006). Note: Eight former Texas death row inmates have been exonerated and freed since 1973. There is also substantial evidence that three people who were executed in Texas were innocent.

<sup>1</sup> Source: Death Penalty Information Center, *Texas May Release Former Death Row Inmate*.

## Case Resources

*Uses the resources and articles below to gather the facts surrounding the Anthony Graves case. Summarize the facts on the Case Sheet provided.*

### Articles to Build Case:

“One capital case tests the threshold of proof” (Feb 6, 2001, *Houston Chronicle*)  
<http://www.chron.com/cs/CDA/printstory.mpl/special/penalty/815415>

National Public Radio transcript of Anthony Graves Story  
<http://www.ccadp.org/anthonygravesnpr.htm>

Students Say Prosecutor Made Graves Mistake (Jan 10 2005, *Houston Chronicle*)  
<http://www.truthinjustice.org/graves.htm>

CBS Evening News Story, “Innocent Man on Death Row?” (May 30, 2005)  
<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2000/05/30/eveningnews/main200710.shtml>

PBS Now - Death Penalty Debate & Graves Case (Jan 6, 2006)  
[http://www.pbs.org/now/printable/transcriptNOW201\\_full\\_print.html](http://www.pbs.org/now/printable/transcriptNOW201_full_print.html)  
<http://www.pbs.org/now/society/deathpdebate.html>



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Due Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Case Preparation Sheet:

### Anthony Graves & The Death Penalty



Media Credit: Nicole Cásarez  
[www.uscauldron.org](http://www.uscauldron.org)

Facts:

*Who:*

*What:*

*Where:*

*When:*

*Who is involved?:*

*What's the controversy?*

Key Issue in this case:

Case Summary:

*Additional facts to the case:*

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- 
- 



# DEATH PENALTY

**Discussion Questions:**

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

**Case Notes:**

<b>Church teaching:</b>	<b>My views on this case:</b>
<b>Points in the handling of this case that promote justice:</b>	<b>Points in the handling of this case that point to injustice:</b>

*My suggested resolution for this case:*

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## Student Web Quest Worksheet

**Directions:** *On this web quest, you will be exploring different sites in order to gather information and obtain a broader picture about the death penalty. You will explore web sites to map the issue, to learn about church teaching and to consider what the U.S. Constitution has to say. Follow the directions for each step of the journey.*

### Mapping the Issue

**Part One:** Go to the following web site and print out the map of the U.S. you find there.

**Site:** <http://www.eduplace.com/ss/maps/pdf/uspostal.pdf>

1. Print the map
2. Outline your state using a blue magic marker
3. Take out a yellow highlighter and a red pencil or magic marker

**Part Two:** Go to the Death Penalty Information Center Web site found at the following address:

**Site:** <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/state/>

Scroll down to the bottom of the page where you will find a table listing the states that have the death penalty and the states that do not have the death penalty.

1. On your map of the U.S., color in red the states that have the death penalty.
2. Color in yellow highlighter the states that do not have the death penalty.
3. What do you notice about the states that have the death penalty and the states that do not? What connections and observations can you draw? Jot them down below:
  
4. Calculate: What percentages of states use the death penalty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? \_\_\_\_\_
5. What methods of execution are still used in the United States today?  
**Site:** <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/article.php?did=245>
  
6. If your state uses the death penalty, what methods are used in your state for the execution of criminals?
  
7. Return to the Home page for the Death Penalty Information Center and click on "Facts." Select the first option which lists the "Crimes Punishable by Death." In the space below, list the crimes punishable by death for *your state*.



8. Skim the information in the following report: **The Death Penalty in 2005: Year End Report.**

**Site:** <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/YearEnd05.pdf>

- Locate the information in the report that summarizes the numbers of prisoners who were executed in 2005 in each state.
- Using black pen write the numbers of those executed in 2005 in the appropriate state. Place a cross after this number.
- Next, find the box summarizing those prisoners who are currently on death row in each state. Write the number on your map in each state. Put this number in parenthesis.
- The total number of prisoners on Death Row in the United States as of October 1, 2005 is: \_\_\_\_\_ . Write this caption at the top of your map.
- Create a key at the bottom of your map:  
Cross †= executions in 2005.  
( ) = those currently on death row.
- List at least three interesting, enlightening facts or items from this report in the space below. What struck you? What did you find surprising?

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_

- Summarize the conclusions in your own words:

## Perspectives

### *Church Perspectives:*

Explore more closely what Pope John Paul II has written in his document, “*Evangelium vitae*” –a Latin title meaning, “The Gospel of Life.”

1. Go to the Vatican web site: [http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0141/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0141/_INDEX.HTM)
2. Take a few moments to study the organization and outline of the text. Notice the structure of the document and how its development progresses. List five observations about the organization of this document:

- 1) \_\_\_\_\_
- 2) \_\_\_\_\_
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_
- 5) \_\_\_\_\_



3. Click on the text and skim the document.
4. Read and select 5 passages of Pope John Paul II's *Gospel of Life* encyclical that you think best summarize a clear position of the church, and that you find to be positive statements about the sanctity of life. Create a heading for this document using the title of the encyclical. Copy and paste those selections into a Word document, being sure to site the paragraph reference where the quote appears. **Save your selections.**
5. Read the U.S. Bishop's statement, *Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice*  
**Site:** <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/criminal.htm>

Using the same file you created in #4 above, create a heading underneath the last selection from #4 with the title of the Bishop's document. Select 3 passages that you find clearly present a Catholic view of the issue and attitudes about the treatment of prisoners and the use of death penalty. Copy and paste your selections into the Word document created above. **Save and print your work.**

### ***"State" or Government Perspective:***

In addition to the church's perspective, the U.S. Government also has a perspective when it comes to the death penalty.

- Look up the Amendments to the U.S. Constitution and write down the exact wording of the 5<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 14<sup>th</sup> amendments.

**Site:** <http://www.law.cornell.edu/constitution/constitution.table.html>

(Note: you will need to scroll down to see the amendments.)

Amendment 5:

Amendment 8:

Amendment 14 (section 1):

In your estimation, do these statements permit or prohibit the use of the death penalty in the United States? Support your thinking and explain:





## Creative Writing Exercise

### Directions:

*This is a creative writing exercise where you are asked to assume a specific role in this case and tell the story from that person's point of view. Use and engage the facts you have gathered in the case summary and in the web quest. Put yourself in someone else's shoes and describe what they must be thinking and feeling. Select or identify your role from the options below. On a separate sheet of paper write a first hand account of your perspective on this case. Use the work you have done on gathering the facts and other informational pieces surrounding the death penalty. Speak in first person. Use the questions below to guide you.*

### Role Perspectives:

- You are the mother/father of the victim
- You are a juror (who is Catholic)
- You are the “convicted criminal” and you know you are guilty
- You are the “convicted criminal” and you know you are not guilty
- You are the mother/father of the “convicted criminal”
- You are the judge (who is Catholic)
- You are the son/daughter of the convicted criminal
- You are the brother/sister of the victim
- You are a strong pro-death penalty advocate
- You are Sr. Helen Prejean (find out who she is and present from her perspective)
- You are a member of Amnesty International trying to end the use of the death penalty globally.

### Creative Writing Questions:

- Putting yourself fully into the role assigned (or chosen), describe what it feels like to be in your position.
- Summarize the case from your perspective.
- What do you think about what happened and the current appeals process?
- How has this case affected your life and your thoughts about the death penalty? (Speak from the perspective of your role) Describe your “character’s” views about the death penalty.
- How will you feel if Graves is either found innocent or released from prison?
- Again, speaking from the perspective of your role describe what you think should happen as the outcomes of this case and state your reasons. Bring in church teaching to support or challenge your outcomes.



## Engaging the Death Penalty in Pop Culture

**Note:** This activity can be done as a class activity or as a homework assignment

### Critique of the Death Penalty in Music

Music often provides a strong social critique of institutions, societal failures and politics, among other things. Music can be a powerful vehicle for influencing the way people see an issue or view a particular topic. The death penalty is a controversial topic in the U.S. This controversy can be found and reflected in the songs listed below.

#### **Directions:**

1. Select one or more of the songs listed below to download or listen to. Most songs are available at iTunes.com or students may volunteer to find them and bring them in.
2. Locate the lyrics online and print out the lyrics.
3. Using a yellow highlighter, highlight the words or phrases that indicate the perspective found in the song.
4. In your own words, summarize the song's perspective towards the death penalty and what you think this song is trying to say about the death penalty.
5. Do you agree or disagree? Support your opinion.

#### **Song Options:**

- Song: Crime for Crime, Artist: Ani Defranco
- Song: Death Penalty, Artist: Tankard
- Song: 25 minutes to Go, Artist: Johnny Cash
- Song: The Great State of Texas, Artist: Chris Ligon, Album: The Executioner's Last Songs Volume 1
- Song: Death Row, Artist: Willie Guthrie
- Song: Ellis Unit One, Artist: Steve Earle, Album: Dead Man Walking Sound Track

## Concluding Activity/Wrap-up

Teachers may wish to inquire whether any students in the room have been affected by violent crime. Some students may have relatives in the prison system, so sensitivity is needed here. Have students work either individually, in small groups or as a class to compose a prayer (or prayer service) for all those who are victims of crime and their families. (Suggest students pray for healing, for those grieving, for forgiveness, for an end to violence and the causes of violence, for an end to capital punishment, for a reform of the justice system, for judges, for those on death row and their families, etc.) Encourage students to tie in ideas and quotations from Pope John Paul II's encyclical, *The Gospel of Life*. Suggested prayer forms for this exercise include litanies, a modern psalm to end the death penalty, prayers of petition, and original prayer compositions.

## Lesson Extensions

- Extend the lesson by also looking at the Patriot Act and discussing whether the US Government is justified in using torture as a weapon against terror. Pull in various recent speeches by George Bush as well as those of other political analysts.
- Assign students to view the PBS Frontline Video *The Case for Innocence (2000)* and log on to the website where they can read the true stories of four different people who were sentence to death but were innocent.  
Web site: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/case/>
- If your state currently still executes its prisoners, follow the news of those in your state who are currently on death row. Create an information center in the room and have students hold prayer vigils when execution dates are set. Pray for the victims and their families as well as for those condemned to die.

## Background Resources for Teachers & Students

### Encyclical: *The Gospel of Life*

[http://www.vatican.va/holy\\_father/john\\_paul\\_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_enc\\_25031995\\_evangelium-vitae\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25031995_evangelium-vitae_en.html)

### US Bishops Statement: *Catholic Campaign to End the Use of the Death Penalty*

<http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/national/deathpenalty/>

**Article: *The Gospel of Life and the Sentence of Death: Catholic Teaching on Capital Punishment*, By Rev. Augustine Judd, O.P.**

<http://www.usccb.org/prolife/programs/rlp/00rljud.htm>

### *Ethics Update*

<http://ethics.acusd.edu/Applied/deathpenalty/index.asp>

### *Death Penalty Information Center*

<http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org>

**See especially:** The Death Penalty in 2005: Year End Report at: <http://www.deathpenaltyinfo.org/YearEnd05.pdf>

### *Amnesty International*

<http://web.amnesty.org/pages/deathpenalty-index-eng>

### *The Innocence Project*

<http://www.innocenceproject.org/>

### *The Justice Project*

<http://www.thejusticeproject.org/>

