

Conspiracy Theories – Escape from Alcatraz



<https://www.loc.gov/item/2004670167/>

Overview/Prior Knowledge

This lesson plan is part of larger unit titled Conspiracy Theories. This particular lesson plan focuses on life in Alcatraz and the three men who successfully escaped. Ultimately, students must be able to answer the following question: "Did the Three Men Survive Their Escape?"

Objectives

- Analyze a primary source connected to Alcatraz.
- Participate in collaborative group discussions of a secondary source connected to Alcatraz.
- Synthesize information taken from a primary and secondary sources about Alcatraz.
- Evaluate author's claims and argument connected to Alcatraz.
- Create authentic writing assignments pertaining to Alcatraz.

Time Required

3 days - 50 minute class periods

Recommended Grade Range

8th - 12th grade

Subject/Sub-Subject

English Language Arts

Social Studies

Standards

Social Studies

Reading History

RH.6-8.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.2: 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.

RH.6-8.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary specific to domains related to history/social studies.

RH.6-8.8: Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

RH.6-8.9: Analyze the relationship between a primary and secondary source on the same topic.

RH.6-8.10: By the end of grade 8, read and comprehend history/social studies texts in the grades 6–8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

English Language Arts

Reading Information

RI.8.1: Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.8.8: Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; recognize when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Writing

W.8.2b: Develop the topic with relevant, well-chosen facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.

W.8.2f: Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented.

Speaking and Listening - 8.1 a-d, 8.3, 8.4

SL.8.1c: Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.

SL.8.1d: Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.

SL.8.3: Delineate a speaker's argument and specific claims, evaluating the soundness of the reasoning and relevance and sufficiency of the evidence and identifying when irrelevant evidence is introduced.

Library of Congress - Teaching with Primary Sources Skills:

- Picture of man in cell at Alcatraz - <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004670168/>
- Photo of 3 escapees - <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004670167/>

Highlighted Strategies:

- Visual Discovery in *Bring Learning Alive!* (pp. 28-37).
- Writing for Understanding in *Bring Learning Alive!* (pp. 56-65).
- Headline in *Making Thinking Visible* (pp. 111-118).

Credits

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Materials

- Primary Sources – See Resource Guide at the end of this document.
- Pretest
 - See attached
- History Channel Documentary
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DO153ueJX1A>
- SCOPE article
<https://www.sps186.org/downloads/basic/235139/SCOPE-022012-Alcatraz.pdf>
- Cell Block Picture from the Library of Congress
<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&source=images&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiA0Jn3yevgAhWCnoMKHS4dBNgQjRx6BAgBEAU&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.alcatrazhistory.com%2Falcasc2.htm&psig=AOvVaw3tvx5CmsT5xe14h5F69nxb&ust=1551895013032630>
- Article about Alcatraz with the Cell Block Picture from the LOC Enlarged
<https://news.sky.com/story/escape-from-alcatraz-does-letter-finally-solve-mystery-of-prisons-most-infamous-escapees-11220573>
- Alcatraz Website
<https://www.alcatrazhistory.com/maincell1.htm>
- “Guntown Gazette” Newspaper Assignment
---see attached
- "Inmate Letter" Assignment
---see attached
- "Pretest" --see attached

Procedures

DAY 1

Introduction:

(Optional: You may also choose to give the "pretest" the day prior to this lesson in order to find out the background knowledge of your students before the following day.)

1. Display the photo of the man in his cell in Cell Block D the Library of Congress.
2. Ask the students to name/write down one thing they see in the photo - only one.
3. Ask the following spiraling questions:

Level 1 - *What details do you see in the picture?*

How would you describe the scene and the person in it?

What do you hear or smell in this scene?

Level 2 - *What do you think is the date of this scene? What evidence in the picture supports your answer?*

Where might this scene have taken place? Give two pieces of evidence to support your answer.

What do you think is happening in this scene? Give two pieces of evidence to support your answer.

Level 3 - *How do you think the man was feeling at this time and place?*

Why do you think he is in the situation he is in?

During:

4. Read the SCOPE article from Scholastic titled "A Daring Plan to Escape from Alcatraz."
 - A. Make a classroom set of the article or allow students to digitally look up the article.
 - B. Discuss article vocabulary as you read or have students look up synonyms to the article's vocabulary words prior to reading the article. The following questions will guide the discussion:
 - *What do you think might have been the hardest part about being an inmate at Alcatraz?*
 - *Why is the island nicknamed "The Rock?"*
 - *What kind of "tiny tools" could they have been using to make holes in the walls of their cells?*

- *Why was it important for the men to make "dummy heads"?*
- *Why do you think Allen West could not get out of his cell?*

What could the men having been accused of doing that would cause "ordinary prisons" not be able to handle them?

- *Why do you think utensils had to be counted each morning after breakfast?*
- *What might be the reason Al Capone said, "Alcatraz has got me licked"?*
- *The 3 men took a huge risk not knowing whether they would succeed or not. What risks do people take today similar to these men?*

5. Pair students. Require them to choose two people from the SCOPE article and create a 10-line dialogue based on what they learned. *Optional:* Have students come up and act out the script in front of the image displayed.

Wrap-up/Closure:

6. Exit ticket: 3 - 2 - 1

3 things you learned today

2 things you found interesting

1 thing you still have a question about

DAY 2

Introduction:

1. Using the website www.polleverywhere.com, ask students to create an 8-word Headline for the "Guntown Gazette" newspaper about the 3 men who successfully escaped from Alcatraz. Remind the students the headline should be written as if it is the day after the men were found missing from the prison. They can do this independently, with a partner, or in groups.

During:

2. Watch the following documentary from the History Channel. Require students to take notes as they read. Stop the video at your discretion to discuss/see if students have any questions about what they have watched thus far.

DAY 3

Introduction:

1. Have the students write a brief summary of the History Channel documentary on Alcatraz from the previous day - no more than a paragraph.

During:

2. Review the “headlines” students created from the previous day. Tell them to then create a four-sentence article about the 3 men who escaped from Alcatraz. Remind the students the headline should be written as if it is the day after the men were found missing from the prison. They can do this independently, with a partner, or in groups.

3. Ask for volunteers to read their four-sentence articles aloud to the class.

4. Pass out the “Inmate Letter” assignment for students to complete independently.

Wrap-up/Closure:

5. Ask for volunteers to read their letters aloud to the class.

Assessment

Formative: Exit Ticket, Summary Paragraph, Newspaper article

Summative: Inmate letter to family member

Differentiation

Remediation:

1. Students will be allowed to use computers, phones, or iPads to view the SCOPE article.
2. Students will be allowed to work in groups to create an 8-word headline.
3. Students will be allowed to work in groups to create a 4-sentence article.

Enrichment:

1. Students will be required to take individual notes while watching the video.
2. Students will be required to complete the summary paragraph independently.
3. Students will be required to write the letter to their family member independently.

Supplementary Materials

- **Slide gallery of Alcatraz from the San Francisco gallery**
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/article/Renovation-opens-up-earlier-pre-prison-history-6361610.php#photo-4342787>
- **Library of Congress website link to Alcatraz**
<https://www.loc.gov/resource/hhh.ca1498.photos?st=gallery>
- <https://www.history.com/news/alcatraz-escape-new-evidence-anglin-brothers>
- <https://abcnews.go.com/US/video/escape-from-alcatraz-mystery-revisited-31833881>
- <https://nypost.com/2015/10/10/relatives-have-proof-alcatraz-escapees-are-still-alive/>
- <https://web.archive.org/web/20080709032857/http://www.fbi.gov/page2/june07/alcatraz060807.htm>
- <https://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=112746496&ps=cprs>

Teaching with Primary Sources Resource Guide

Title: Conspiracy Theories – Escape from Alcatraz

Historical Background:

Alcatraz opened as a federal men's prison in August of 1934 on an island in the San Francisco Bay. The baddest of the bad criminals were sent to Alcatraz because of its "escape-proof" location. Though there were 14 escape attempts by 36 different men, only 3 men successfully escaped from the prison but were never found.

Primary Source 1:



Title: Two views of cell in Cell Block B at Alcatraz, on left is a guard's view from the corridor with fake head on pillow, and on the right is view inside the cell showing the hole in the wall through which the prisoner escaped

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004670168/>

Purpose: This picture is to be shown at the beginning of the lesson on Day 1 to ignite student interest in the topic of Alcatraz. It would be a good idea to only show the right portion of the picture first, then show the entire picture at the end of the lesson on Day 1.

Primary Source 2:



Title: Official Alcatraz Federal Prison photos, show three men reported to have escaped from Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay, early 6/12

Link: <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004670167/>

Purpose: This picture is to be shown as the students read the SCOPE article about the 3 men who successfully escaped from Alcatraz but were never found.



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