

# Growing Up on Alcatraz

What was it like to grow up on the notorious prison island?

## About the Story

Lexile® Measure 950L

For qualitative complexity factors,  
go to Scope Online.

**Learning Objective:** to  
synthesize key ideas from a  
nonfiction article, a sidebar, and  
two poems

**Featured Skill:** synthesis

**Additional skills covered in  
this lesson plan:** key ideas  
and details, figurative language,  
compare and contrast, text  
structure, perspective, tone,  
author's purpose

### Essential Questions:

- What makes a place a home?
- What forms our perceptions  
of how others live?
- Is there a “correct” way to  
view a place?

### Standards:

The article and its suite of  
support materials support these  
Common Core anchor standards:  
R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.6, R.7,  
R.9, W.2, SL.1

For more standards  
information—including  
TEKS—go to Scope Online.



## Your Teaching Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Article and poetry  
read-alouds
- Text-to-speech
- Vocabulary

### Video:

- Beyond the Story: Escape  
From Alcatraz

### Differentiated Article:

- Lower-Lexile version

### Connected readings from the Scope archives:

- “Escape From Alcatraz”

### Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Vocabulary: Definitions and  
Practice
- Close-Reading and  
Critical-Thinking Questions
- Featured Skill: Synthesis
- Choice Board
- Lesson Plan Slide Deck
- Quiz\*

\*Available on two levels

# Step-by-Step Lesson Plan

## 1. Prepare to Read (20 minutes)

### Preview Text Features (10 minutes)

- Give students a few minutes to preview the headlines, subheads, photographs, captions, and map that accompany the article and poems. Project the following questions on your whiteboard and ask students to work in small groups or independently to respond to them.
  - What place will be discussed in the article and poems? Have you heard of this place before? If so, what do you know about it?
  - Why do you think young people are pictured in some of the photos?
  - What do you think will be the difference between the two poems?
  - Based on what you saw in the text features, what do you hope you'll learn in these texts?
- Invite volunteers to share their responses.

### Preview Vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Project the Google Slides version of **Vocabulary: Definitions and Practice** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *administrator, conclusive, incarcerated, infamous, interactions, notorious, reassure, uninhabited*. Audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides. Optionally, print the PDF version or share the slideshow link to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently before class.

## 2. Read and Discuss (45 minutes)

### “Growing Up on Alcatraz”

- Invite a volunteer to read the As You Read box on page 22 or at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article once as a class. (*Differentiation: Share the lower-Lexile version of the article.*) Optionally, have students listen to author Talia Cowen read her article aloud

while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.

- Divide students into groups to read the article again and respond to the following **Close-Reading Questions**, also located in the Resources tab.

### Close-Reading Questions

(25 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. **Why was Alcatraz turned into a maximum-security prison in 1934? What details show that it was “built to be escape-proof”?** (key ideas and details) *In the 1930s, crime was rising in the United States. The government wanted to reassure people that they were safe, so they created Alcatraz prison as a place for dangerous convicted criminals. There, inmates had to follow strict rules, and they were watched by armed guards 24/7. They had multiple head counts every day. These details show that Alcatraz was “built to be escape-proof.”*
2. **What do you think Jolene Babyak means when she says moving to Alcatraz was like “going from black-and-white to full color”?** (figurative language) *Babyak probably means that compared with Alcatraz, the place she lived before wasn't very interesting or exciting. She had moved from a small, quiet town in Indiana that was far away from the ocean. After she moved to Alcatraz, she found beauty and excitement. She lived close to the sparkling ocean and the exciting city of San Francisco, and there were other kids her age to spend time with.*
3. **How was growing up on Alcatraz similar to growing up in other places in America? How was it different?** (compare and contrast) *Families living on Alcatraz could enjoy ordinary things like ice cream on hot summer days, trick-or-treating on Halloween, and Christmas caroling. But because the kids shared the island with prisoners locked up for committing violent crimes, there were many rules in place to keep everyone safe. Playdates with friends who lived outside of Alcatraz needed to be approved by prison officials. When kids got back to the island from school, they had to go through a metal detector to ensure that they didn't bring with them objects that could be used as weapons. And kids couldn't play with toys that could be mistaken for weapons, so they used bananas and sticks instead.*
4. **How does the section “After the Escape” relate to the opening of the article? How do the newspaper headline and the image of the cells inside Alcatraz add to your understanding of the escape?** (text structure) *The article opens with a description of Babyak waking up to the sound of sirens, indicating that an inmate had escaped. “After the Escape” returns to that moment and explains more about what happened: Frank Morris and brothers John and Clarence Anglin broke out and were never found. The photo showing rows of guarded cells helps you understand how difficult it was to break out of Alcatraz prison. The large headline from the Chicago Daily Tribune suggests that people all over the country followed the news of the prison break.*

- Based on the sidebar “Life on Alcatraz,” how did the public view the prison island? Why do you think people might have felt this way? (perspective) *The caption “In the News” states, “Americans were fascinated by Alcatraz and loved to read about the prison in newspapers and magazines.” The nation’s most notorious criminals were imprisoned in Alcatraz; people probably wondered what it was like to live near them and whether it was scary. Additionally, people tend to be interested in unusual lifestyles, and living on a prison island is unusual.*

### “The Isle of Alcatraz (As Seen From the Outside)” and “The Isle of Alcatraz (As Seen by Those Who Live There)”

- Call on two volunteers to read the poems aloud, one for each poem. Optionally, have students listen to the read-aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- As a class, discuss the following **Close-Reading and Critical-Thinking Questions**, some of which apply to both the article and the poems.

#### Close-Reading Questions

(5 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

- What is the tone of “The Isle of Alcatraz (As Seen From the Outside)”? What words and phrases help create this tone? What is the tone of “The Isle of Alcatraz (As Seen by Those Who Live There)”? Find words and phrases that contribute to the tone. (tone) *The tone of the first poem is severe or forbidding. Words and phrases including “a fortress grim,” “forbidden spot,” “scorn,” “fear,” and “fury” help create this tone. The second poem’s tone is warm and inviting. Words and phrases contributing to this tone include “beauty,” “happy voices, children’s laughter,” “cozy,” and “welcomes.”*
- Read the last line of each stanza in both poems. How are they similar and different? (compare and contrast) *In both poems, the last line of each stanza ends with the phrase “Isle of Alcatraz.” But the words that come before this phrase to describe the island differ greatly between the two poems. In the first poem, the words are mainly negative: “lonely,” “unwelcome,” “grim,” “defiant,” and “unfamed.” In the second poem, they are mainly positive: “welcome,” “beautiful,” “peaceful,” and “dear.” By repeating a similar line with varying descriptive words, the poet makes a direct comparison of the two views of Alcatraz, one from the outside and the other from within.*
- Read the description of poet Esther Faulk that appears below the poems. What do you think motivated her to write these poems? (author’s purpose) *Faulk lived on Alcatraz for almost 20 years and raised three children there. She likely had fond memories and warm feelings about the island and wanted to let people know that living there was not how many might imagine it. Perhaps she wanted to share an insider’s view, one unknown to most people.*

## Critical-Thinking Questions

(5 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. If you could trade places with Jolene Babyak and spend part of your childhood on Alcatraz, would you? Why or why not? *Answers will vary.*
2. Why do you think the way Jolene and Esther Faulk viewed Alcatraz was different from the way the general public viewed it? *Answers will vary, but students may say that for the general public, the first thing—and maybe the only thing—people thought of when they thought about Alcatraz was a harsh penitentiary and its infamous inmates. For those who lived there, Alcatraz was first and foremost a home—and it was a lovely one, with “sweeping views of the bustling San Francisco Bay,” where “the sun danced and sparkled on the ocean waves.”*

## 3. Beyond the Story (10 minutes)

- Let students know you are about to show them a short video that has more information about the escape from Alcatraz that is mentioned in the article they just read. Then show the video “Beyond the Story: Escape From Alcatraz.”
- After watching the video, discuss: What do you think happened to the escapees? What stuck with you about Alcatraz after reading the article and poems and watching the video? What questions do you still have about Alcatraz?

## 4. Write About It: Synthesis (45 minutes)

- Have students complete the **Featured Skill Activity: Synthesis**. This activity prepares them to respond to the writing prompt on page 26 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page:

***Compare Esther Faulk’s two poems. How is Alcatraz presented in each? Based on Cowen’s article, which view of Alcatraz did Jolene have? Answer both questions in an essay. Use text evidence to support your ideas.***

- Alternatively, have students choose a task from the **Choice Board**, a menu of culminating tasks. (Our Choice Board options include the writing prompt from the magazine,

differentiated versions of the writing prompt, and additional creative ways for students to demonstrate their understanding of a story or article.)

**Another story about Alcatraz from the Scope archives:**

- Nonfiction: [“Escape From Alcatraz”](#)