

The History of Alcatraz

What is Alcatraz?

- Alcatraz is a prison situated on Alcatraz Island located 1.5 miles offshore in the San Francisco Bay, California.
- It is most famous for being a prison; otherwise known as the 'The Rock.'
- It was a high security prison for 29 years for many gangsters, robbers and murderers.
- It has also been a bird sanctuary, a fortress and housed the first lighthouse on the West Coast of America.



What was life like inside 'the Rock'?

- Each prison cell had a small sink with cold running water, a small bunk, a shelf, folding steel table, chair and a toilet.
- Prisoners were only allowed 2 showers per week and a change of clothes.
- Approved visitors were allowed for only one and half hours per month.
- Daily life centred around the kitchen or laundry and lights went out at 9.30pm.
- No newspapers, radio or television was allowed.
- Prisoners spent up to 14 hours a day in their cells.



As you can imagine, many people tried to escape this oppressive fortress...

These included;

- 14 different escape attempts made by a total of 36 inmates
- But only 5 inmates managing to escape from the island
- Theodore Cole and Ralph Roe disappeared in 1937
- Frank Morris, Clarence and John Anglin disappeared in 1962.

Read on to find out more about the 1962 escape...



(It has even been made into a film)

Frank Lee Morris had spent a lifetime navigating the prison system before his arrival on Alcatraz. Frank's accomplices in the "Great Escape" were equally well acquainted with the dark world of organised crime. Brothers **John and Clarence Anglin** were also serving sentences at Alcatraz for bank robbery.

The escape plan took several months to design, and it would require the fabrication of clever decoys and water survival gear.

Alcatraz inmate Allen West, who occupied an adjacent cell, was also brought in on the scheme. The escape plan started to take shape in **December of 1961**, beginning with a collection of several old saw blades that West allegedly found in one of the prison corridors while cleaning.

The plan was extremely complex and involved the design and creation of ingenious **lifelike dummies, water rafts**, and life jackets, fashioned from over **fifty rain coats** that had been acquired from other inmates - some donated and some stolen.

They would also require a variety of crudely made tools to dig with, and to construct the accessories necessary for the escape. By **May of 1962**, Morris and the Anglins had already dug through the **cell's six-by-nine-inch vent holes**, and had started work on the air vent on top of the cellblock.

The Anglins inhabited cells across from each other, as did West and Morris, who also resided nearby. The inmates took shifts, with **one working** and **one on lookout**. They

would start work at **5:30 p.m** and continue till about **9:00 p.m**, just prior to the lights-out count.

Meanwhile John and Clarence started fabricating the dummy heads, and even gave them the pet names of "Oink" and "Oscar." The heads were basic but lifelike, and were constructed from a **homemade cement-powder mixture** that included such harmless materials as **soap** and **toilet paper**. They were decorated with **flesh-tone paint** from prison art kits, and **human hair** from the barbershop.

Using **glue stolen** from the glove shop, the inmates also started working to **cut and bond the raincoats**, they had stolen, into a **makeshift raft** and **life jackets**. Each evening they would hide the materials on top of the cellblock to minimize any chance of being caught with the banned materials.

After months of long preparation the inmates had completed fashioning all of the gear they needed for their escape, and they then continued working to loosen the ventilator grill on top of the cell house. John Anglin carefully completed the large six-by-fourteen-foot raft, while Morris modified an accordion-like musical instrument, which would be used to inflate the raft.

But while the others had progressed well in their preparations, West had fallen behind in removing his grill at the rear of his cell. On the night of **June 11, 1962**, Morris decided that they were ready to attempt the escape.

At **9:30 p.m.**, immediately after lights-out, Morris brought down the dummies from the top of the cellblock and announced that the escape would be staged that very night. Clarence Anglin attempted to help West in removing his grill by kicking at it from outside of the cell in the utility corridor, but his efforts were unsuccessful. Morris and the Anglins would have no choice but to leave him behind.

The inmates made their final thirty-foot climb up the plumbing to the cell house roof, traversed 100 feet across the rooftop, and then carefully climbing down fifty feet of piping to the ground near the entrance to the shower area. This would be the last anyone ever saw of Morris and the Anglin Brothers.



YOUR TASK

LO: To write a series of diary entries based on a true event



You are going to **write a series of journal entries** from the point of view of Frank Lee Morris or Clarence/John Anglin. However, if you can think of your own interesting perspective that could detail the escape, please explore that in your writing.

You are writing **in past tense and first person**, however your introduction will be slightly different (**explained in the structure**).

Things you may want to consider:

- **A range of complex, compound and simple sentences** – this will allow you to experiment with the voice of your chosen character, build tension and suspense and develop the explanation of the preparations that led to your escape.
- **A range of punctuation** – in this piece of writing you could focus on the use of **dashes and hyphens**. But, of course, use the range of punctuation that you know how to use successfully.

Dash

Show a break in a sentence/REFLECTION
Separate two clauses.

I knew our escape would need to be meticulously planned – I was scared.

Remember:

- It is stronger than a comma
- It is longer than a hyphen

- -

Dash

As soon as the words left Clarence's mouth we all went silent - could it be possible?

Not wanting to sound negative but I wasn't sure if they would be strong enough to keep all four of us alive – maybe just three.

Luckily John, Clarence's brother, worked in the prison barbershop and had access to a lot of human hair - perfect for a dummies barnet.

Hyphen - To join or separate words.

Compound words – there is a relationship between the words.

An eye-opener
Bad-tempered
Run-down
Good-looking
Good-hearted
Well-known
Blue-eyed
Heavy-footed

Avoid confusion –
A walking-stick

NOT a walking stick



Writing numbers from twenty-one to ninety-nine.

Twenty-one Twenty-two Twenty-three

- Remember as well to **experiment with a range of sentence starters**, this will develop the fluidity of your writing and they can be used effectively to aid in description and progress your narrative.

Adverbial

Before the sun came up...
 Before we went out...
 All night long...
 As fast as he could...
 Under the bed...
 At nine o'clock...

This morning, we decided to begin to manufacture the human dummies and water rafts but what would we use?

Under the bed, we hid the prison raincoats and hair in order to avoid discovery.

- And **finally** as with your rainforest piece of writing, please consider the **internal** (emotional/thoughts and feelings) and **external experience** (physical struggle) of your chosen character.

Success Criteria:

Sentence Structure and Punctuation	Text and Organisation	Composition and effect	Spelling
Complex sentence: • Connectives - however, due to, despite, subsequently, consequently. • Subordinate clause Capital letters for names and places? () brackets () ??? Question marks ??? !!! Exclamation marks !!! Colon :::: Semi colon :::: Hyphen ---- Ellipsis Apostrophes - can't, didn't, haven't	Link paragraphs Ordered text with introduction AND conclusion. ✓ A dash ✓ A hyphen ✓ A sentence with an adverbial (e.g. Before dinner, I...)	Address the audience Adjectives Adverbs Alliteration Similes Metaphors Rhetorical questions.	

Suggested Structure and Planning Sheet

This is an idea to help guide you, if you have other ideas please pursue them.

Paragraph 1

Set the scene in present tense

Joanna Morris, great granddaughter of famous bank robber Frank Lee Morris, is rifling through her grandfather's attic when she stumbles across a dust filled journal dated 1962. These extracts are evidence of what she discovered.

Paragraph 2

How did the idea come about? Who was involved?

12th December 1961

Dodging the watchful eyes of the prison wardens out in the yard, myself and the Anglin brothers (my new found friends) were discussing life on the Rock. Within moments Clarence suggested we should escape. As soon as the words left Clarence's mouth we all went silent – would it be possible? ...

Paragraph 3

Making the dummies and water rafts. What materials did you use? Whose idea was it? How did you manage to ensure the wardens did not see you?

13th February 1962

Well our plan has most certainly come together over the past two months! Today, we decided to begin to manufacture the human dummies and water rafts. Clarence came up with the ingenious idea of stealing the prison raincoats in order to sew them together and make a raft...

Paragraph 4

You have managed to dig through the air vent and your escape is now imminent. How do you feel? What are you looking to most? Do you think your accomplices are trustworthy? Could anything go wrong?

10th June 1962

The day has finally come! This morning I spent my time in the work yard staring out towards the Golden Gate Bridge imagining my life outside the Rock's bars. Unbelievably we have all managed, apart from West, to break through our air vents without being noticed- the final step in our master plan. How the wardens haven't noticed the sheer amount of tools that have gone missing is beyond me...

Paragraph 5

Where are you? How does it feel to be free? Did your escape go to plan? Was anyone left behind?

12th June 1962

Well who'd have thought a bunch of misfits like ourselves could be so successful?! Well, myself and my friend John I mean. Unfortunately we had to leave West behind as he wasn't ready and it was too much of a risk to push the escape back by a day. And as for Clarence, well his genius life raft let him down right at the final hurdle. We all had to swim frantically to the shore but within moments something was dragging him beneath the surface...