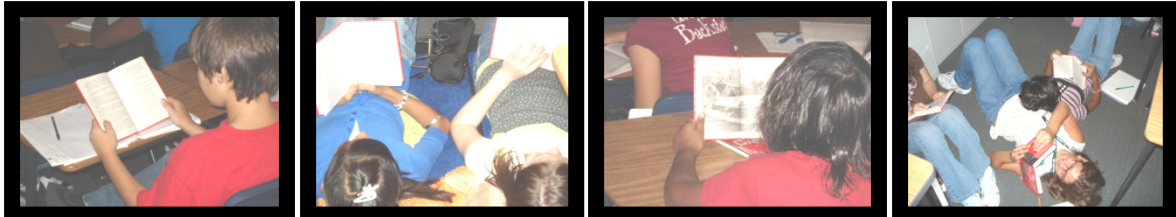


Discover Alcatraz!

An Authentic Learning Opportunity

Prepared by Christina Bentheim, 6th Grade Reading Teacher



Purpose

We started reading this book one month ago and have become incredibly fascinated with Alcatraz Island—the prisoners, the way of life for children who lived on the island, the type of work environment for guards, and so on. In my attempts to encourage students to become lifelong learners, I provided background information about Alcatraz. Students joined me in their desks for a “virtual” field trip filled with my photos from previous visits. However, that didn't capture the essence of the Island. Research tells us that students learn most when they are engaged and provided with opportunities to experience moments of authentic learning. Therefore, the idea to visit Alcatraz Island was born!

Essential Skills, Concepts, Content Objectives, and Experiences

Through participation in this field learning experience, my students will be able to directly relate reading and writing to the rest of the curriculum. We're going to learn about different aspects of our novel's setting through hands-on exploration (outside of our classroom)! Prior to the trip, we'll embark on a journey that takes us into the subjects of science (winds and tides and endangered animals), history (Great Depression), math (lengths of prison terms and number patterns of animals now endangered), technology (mini webisodes produced by students and shown on school news channel), English Language Arts (descriptive and expository writing), among other things. In addition, my students will be able to experience the joys (and maybe even frustrations) of travel first-hand. Traveling out of one's safety zone is a learning experience in and of itself.

Student learning and success will be assessed regularly through discussions, observations, student writing and art, as well as through a culminating experience back home at the conclusion of our field trip. In this culminating experience, students will be able to come back to school and teach their non-participating classmates, parents, and other teachers about Alcatraz and how its presence has influenced our culture, criminal system, and history.

Learning Experiences Prior to Trip (not inclusive)

- Virtual Field Trip of Alcatraz using photographs from teacher's collection
- Brief read alouds of personal prisoner accounts about life on the island
- Extension projects involving each subject's curriculum

- Student maintenance of web page featuring collected Alcatraz research on class wiki
- Reading of literature related to themes present in novel (text sets)
- Author study of novel's author, Gennifer Choldenko

Learning Experiences During Trip (not inclusive)

- Maintenance of journal/travel diary to record observations from environment; reflections from various parts of the experience; as well as impressions, connections, and wonderings generated from actually being at the place where our novel is set
- Students will report their learning using handheld video cameras so that the mini episodes can be shared with the student body via school-wide news
- Exploration of endangered animals within the animal sanctuary
- Calculation of distance and time traveled on journey

Learning Experiences After Trip (not inclusive)

- Thank you letters will be written and delivered to generous individuals and entities
- Students will share their learning experiences to family, friends, and the rest of the student body at our We Discovered Alcatraz Night in April
- Students will analyze how the setting of Alcatraz either was or was not realistically portrayed
- Students will document how the hands-on exploration of Alcatraz contributed to his or her interest in—and understanding of—the novel
- Students will write their own stories using the setting of Alcatraz
- A timeline will be designed and displayed to include photographs and explanations of our trip activities—door to door

Itinerary

We will be leaving for San Francisco on a coach-type bus early on the morning of March 31, 2009. The trip takes about 10 hours with stops, so we'll arrive in San Francisco mid-to-late-afternoon. We're staying overnight at a hotel at Fisherman's Wharf—four same-sex students to a room with one same-sex adult chaperone. Dinner will be included. The next morning, we'll have included breakfast at the hotel and walk to the boat dock where we will board the boat for Alcatraz. Our day-long stay on Alcatraz will include a guided tour by a park ranger, as well as a special visit by our book's author, Gennifer Choldenko (provided we can raise enough funds). After spending the day on Alcatraz, we'll get on the coach and return to Las Vegas late night on April 1, 2009.

The trip will cost about \$325 per person. This includes some meals (one dinner and one breakfast), hotel accommodations, transportation to and from San Francisco, as well as the Alcatraz ticket. The author's visit is also included in this price.

To help keep parents as informed as possible, I've set up a field trip communication section of our class website, www.MrsBentheim.com. The site is often updated daily.

Student Selection Guidelines

While I would love to bring every student, it is not possible given the cost. Therefore, to ensure the most equitable selection of students, some parameters for participation have been set in place both by the school district, school administration, and me.

In order to be eligible to attend, a student must have:

- 3.5 overall GPA at Bailey Middle School
- Perfect Attendance (no unexcused absences)
- Favorable recommendations from ALL teachers
- Completed Application with Essay
- Outstanding rating in citizenship for ALL classes
- No overdue library fines within CCSD
- No Dean's Referrals OR In-House Suspensions
- No RPCs or Suspensions (protective RPCs exempt)
- Parent Permission

Students will be rated from the first day of school to the end of the first semester (includes quarter 1 and quarter 2 grades) using the above criteria by a team of teachers and administrators. Students with the highest ratings based on these qualifications will be invited to go. All students, however, will participate in the pre-trip learning activities that tie into our state-mandated learning objectives, as well as the post-trip learning activities. Additionally, students that participate in the actual field trip will be filming mini video documentaries that will be shared with the entire school upon return from our trip. Students who do not attend the actual field trip will have related assignments at school.

Potential Funding Sources

- CCEA Grant (applied October 2008)
- Target Field Trip Grant (applied October 2008)

Student Fundraising Efforts

We estimate that the trip is going to cost nearly \$13,000. It will be necessary, then, to hold various fundraisers and related activities. The more money we raise, the more students can go. The following fundraisers are tentatively scheduled as follows. (For more information about any of these fundraisers, please visit www.MrsBentheim.com and click on Fundraising Central.)

October

- After-school Candy Sales (10/20 - 10/24 AND 10/27 - 10/30)
- Money in a Minute (10/20 - 10/24 during 5th period)

November

- Gobble Grams (11/19 - 11/21 during lunch AND 11/24 - 11/25 during lunch; deliver during 5th period 11/26)
- Thanksgiving Dance (possibly on 11/26)

- Rummage Sale (11/15 from 8 a.m. to 12 p.m.)
- Scratch Cards (TBD)

December

- Bake Sale (12/8 - 12/12; Time is TBD)
- Scratch Cards (TBD)

January

- Coffeehouse Night (1/13 from 6 - 8:30)
- Bingo Night (TBD)

February

- Explore Alcatraz Night (2/24 from 6-8:30)
- Cherrydale Fundraiser (TBD)

March

- Rummage Sale (Date TBD)

Always Accepted: Cash Donations can be turned in to Mrs. Bentheim in a SEALED envelope with the student's/parent's signature across the flap to ensure the envelope remains unopened until receipt at school. Mrs. Bentheim will then keep a record of donations and submit any funds received DAILY to the front office for placement in our Alcatraz Field Trip account. PARENTS, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY MAY ALSO DONATE SAFELY ONLINE THROUGH FASTTRACK FUNDRAISING. PLEASE VISIT WWW.MRSBENTHEIM.COM FOR THE LINK.

Press Involvement

Press releases summarizing various activities prior to travel, as well as travel itself will be distributed to local news outlets and CCSD communications personnel as appropriate.