

Al Capone Shines My Shoes Discussion Guide

ABOUT THE BOOKS

AL CAPONE SHINES MY SHOES

It's 1935 and Moose Flanagan lives on Alcatraz with a few hundred no-name hit men, con men, mad dog murderers, and a handful of bank robbers too. And one of those cons has just done him a big favor. *Al Capone Shines My Shoes* dives straight back into the world of Alcatraz. From prisoner passmen working in the warden's house to girl troubles and baseball, life never stands still on Alcatraz. Moose does his best to be a good friend, a good brother, and a good son, but somehow nothing ever seems to go quite the way he hopes.

HC: 978-0-8037-3460-9 • \$17.99
Ages 10 up • Grades 5 up

AL CAPONE DOES MY SHIRTS

Moose Flanagan moves with his family to Alcatraz so his dad can work as a prison guard and his sister, Natalie, can attend a special school. But after Natalie is denied admittance, things start to get difficult both in Moose's family and in the community on Alcatraz. Moose tries to protect his sister and stay out of trouble, but on Alcatraz, trouble is never far away.

HC: 978-0-3992-3861-1 • \$16.99
PB: 978-0-14-240370-9 • \$6.99
Ages 10 up • Grades 5 up

A Newbery Honor Award Book
An ALA Notable Book
An ALA Best Book for Young Adults
A *School Library Journal* Best Book of the Year
A *Publishers Weekly* Best Book of the Year
A New York Public Library Best Book for the Teen Age

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gennifer Choldenko is the author of several children's books, including *Notes from a Liar and Her Dog*, *If a Tree Falls at Lunch Period*, and *Al Capone Does My Shirts*. *Al Capone Does My Shirts* was a Newbery Honor Award Book, an ALA Notable Book, an ALA Best Book for Young Adults, and a Best Book of the Year for *School Library Journal*, *Publishers Weekly*, and *The San Francisco Chronicle*, as well as a *People Magazine* "Best Kids' Book."

Visit her website at www.alcaponeshinesmysshoes.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to be in debt to someone? Why is Moose in debt to Al Capone? How does Moose's father describe being in debt? Explain how that description applies to Moose's situation. Do you think that he could have done anything differently or did he handle everything well? What would you do in his situation?
- Moose loves playing baseball—why does he love it so much? How is his love of baseball a good thing and what problems come with it? What are some of the skills or talents that other kids on the island have? How do these skills and talents help with the problems that come up over the course of the story?

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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (continued...)

- How does Moose feel about Piper? How does he feel about Annie? How do each of them feel about him and how does that complicate what happens in the story?
- Moose seems to always be in trouble with someone, especially with Piper and Jimmy. Why do people get mad at him? Could he have done things differently? What happens as a result of people getting mad at him and how does he handle those situations? Think about a time that someone was mad at you and how you made up afterwards.
- What do you think causes Moose's hives? Why do they get worse? What makes them get better?
- How does Natalie feel about being away from her family and at the new school? How does she express what she's feeling? How does Moose feel about having her away? What is different when Natalie returns home— have some things changed for the better? For the worse?
- How does Piper feel about getting a new sibling? What worries does she have and how does she express those worries? Why would someone be more worried in 1935 than today? How were girls treated differently in 1935 than they are today? How is Moose able to help Piper? When the baby actually comes, how do Piper's feelings change?
- What special talents do the criminals have and how does this help them to pull off their escape attempt?
- When Officer Trixle comes to talk to Moose about his brother, what is he trying to tell Moose? How are Moose and Officer Trixle's viewpoints different? Does their conversation affect the way Moose acts towards his sister?

RESEARCH & ACTIVITIES

- With a few friends, write a scene from the book as a short play and act it out.
- It is likely that Natalie would be diagnosed with autism if she were living now. What kind of treatment is there for people with this disorder today? How does the treatment given to Natalie at the Esther P. Marinoff School compare to the treatment that is currently available? Create a presentation focusing on one or more aspects of this disorder: possible causes, symptoms, treatment, and research that's being done.
- Find a first person account of people who lived on Alcatraz. What would it be like to live there as a kid? Find something about life on Alcatraz that interests you, either something about everyday life or a special occurrence, and write about it from the perspective of someone living on Alcatraz.
- Look up information on a famous criminal during the Great Depression, either someone who was in Alcatraz or somewhere else, such as Al Capone, Machine Gun Kelly, or Lucky Luciano. Why were certain criminals sent to Alcatraz? What kinds of interaction could people inside jail have with people on the outside?

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