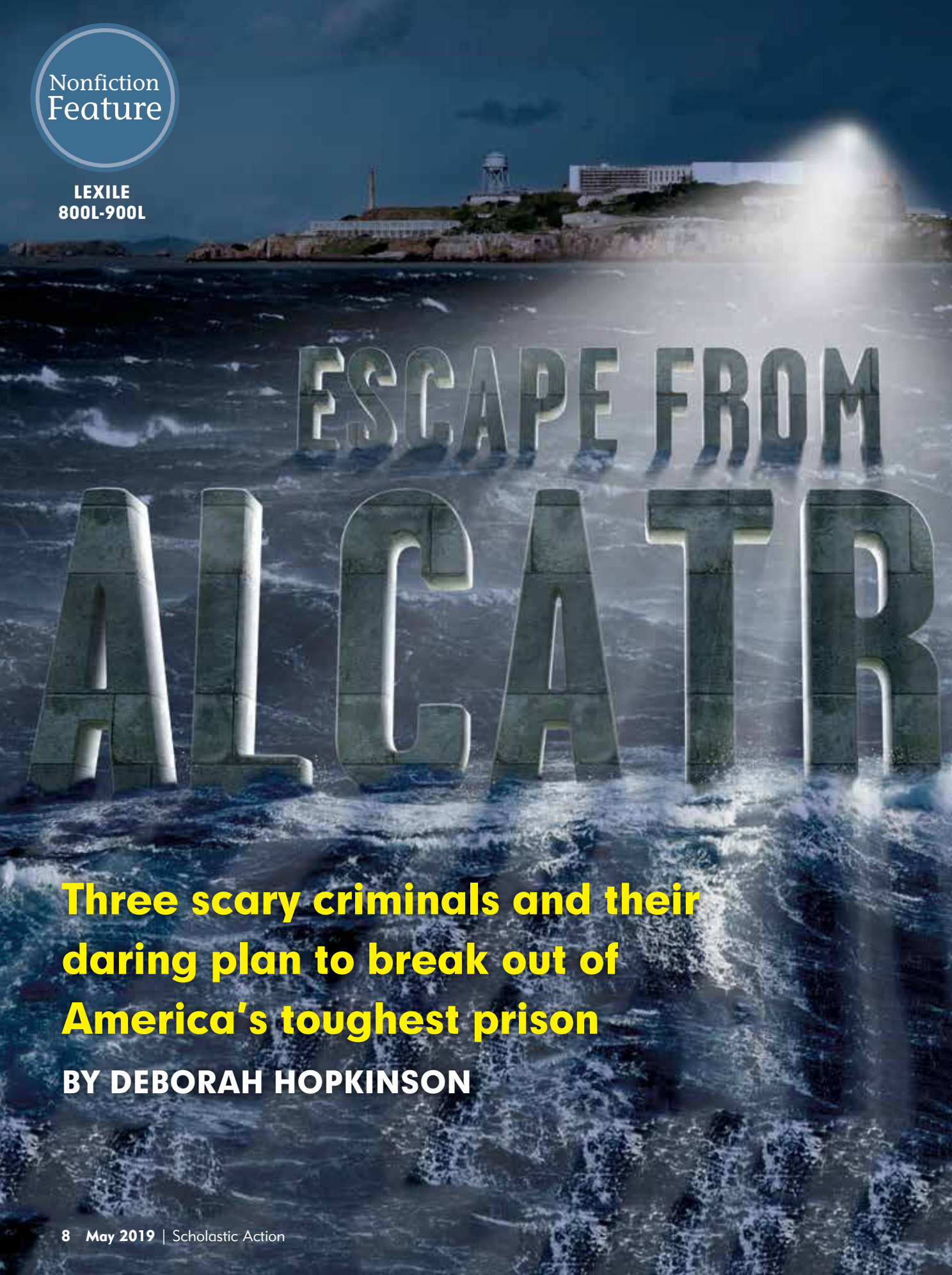


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ESCAPE FROM ALCATRAZ

**Three scary criminals and their
daring plan to break out of
America's toughest prison**

BY DEBORAH HOPKINSON



These men may be the only prisoners to have successfully escaped from Alcatraz—ever!

At precisely 9:30 on the night of June 11, 1962, the lights at Alcatraz prison went out. Most of the prisoners shivered on their thin beds, trying to fall asleep.

But not Frank Morris. Heart pounding, he waited for the prison to get quiet. If his plan succeeded, he would never sleep in this prison again.

For months, Morris and three other prisoners—Allen West and brothers Clarence and John Anglin—had been secretly planning to escape. Alcatraz sat at the top of an island surrounded by San Francisco Bay. People said it was impossible to break free from “the Rock,” as the prison was known.

Morris and his friends had come up with a clever plan. They had used tiny tools to chip away at the walls of their cells until they made holes large enough to crawl through. Then they climbed up the pipes behind their **cells** and set up a secret workshop.

In the workshop, they used stolen and handmade tools to fashion a raft out of raincoats. It was their only hope for surviving the rough, freezing waters of San Francisco Bay.



PAUSE AND THINK: What were Frank Morris and his three friends trying to do?

The Crazy Escape

Morris had already escaped from several prisons—but Alcatraz was different. Security was extremely tight, with guards counting the **inmates** many times each day and night. To deceive the guards, Morris and his friends made dummy heads.



VIDEO

GO TO
WEB VIEW

On the night of their escape, the men tucked the fake heads into their beds. In the low light, the heads looked real.

Now, as darkness descended over Alcatraz, everything was ready—well, almost.

At the last minute, West was unable to get out of his cell. Morris and the Anglin brothers left without him. They **wriggled** out of their cells, climbed up plumbing pipes, and stepped onto the roof. Then they crawled across quietly and scrambled down a drainpipe.

Finally, the men were out.

The salty breeze from San Francisco Bay blew against their faces. The men still had to climb a 15-foot fence and survive the shark-infested waters of the bay. Land was more than a mile away.

VOCABULARY

cells: small rooms that prisoners live in

inmates: people who are in jail or prison

wriggled: twisted and turned

federal: having to do with the U.S. government

landmark: building or place that is important in history

Inmates had made it this far before, only to drown—or go back because of the dangerous waves. Morris took a deep breath. Could he and his friends pull off the most daring escape in the history of Alcatraz?



PAUSE AND THINK: How did the men get out of their prison cells?

Ready for Troublemakers

Morris and the Anglins had a difficult journey ahead of them—Alcatraz was designed to be impossible to escape.

During the 1930s, an alarming number of robberies and murders were taking place in the United States. People became convinced that the country needed a “super-prison” to contain the most difficult and dangerous criminals. Alcatraz, which sat by itself on a tiny island one-and-a-half miles from shore, seemed like the perfect location.



DAVID WALL/LAMY STOCK PHOTO (ALCATRAZ); JIM McMAHON © MAPMAN (MAP)

THE PRISON

Alcatraz was built to be escape-proof. It is located on an island in the San Francisco Bay in California. The waters around it are rough, cold, and filled with sharks.

THE ESCAPE Frank Morris escaped through a hole he carved in his jail cell. He even created a dummy head to slip under the covers of his bed to fool the guards. It was made out of toilet paper and cardboard. And it was covered with hair stolen from the prison barbershop!

In August 1934, Alcatraz opened as a **federal** prison. Other prisons were told that Alcatraz would take their biggest troublemakers. By the end of the year, Alcatraz was home to more than 200 criminals.



PAUSE AND THINK: What made Alcatraz a good place for a prison?

Life in Prison

A prisoner at Alcatraz found himself in a harsh world. Prisoners banged on bars. No newspapers were allowed, and inmates could listen to only certain radio shows.

At 6:30 a.m., the men would wake up. After standing to be counted, they cleaned their cells and marched single-file to breakfast. After breakfast, guards counted the forks, knives, and spoons to make sure no one used them later as weapons.

During the day, guards marched the inmates to jobs in places like the laundry room and the garden. The prisoners were counted constantly. Bedtime was at 9:30 p.m. on the dot. Anyone who broke the rules faced cruel punishments.



PAUSE AND THINK: What was life like for prisoners in Alcatraz?

Daring Escapes

Alcatraz was a prison for 29 years—but in 1963, the government shut it down because it had become too expensive to operate. Today, Alcatraz is a **landmark** run by the National Park Service. More than a million tourists visit every year and learn about the 36 men who tried to escape.



Of those 36 men, 23 were caught, 6 were killed, and 2 drowned. Experts believe that two others who tried to escape were swept out to sea.

That leaves three men: Frank Morris and John and Clarence Anglin. After the night of June 11, 1962, they were never seen or heard from again.

A massive search for the men was conducted. Ultimately, officials concluded that the prisoners probably drowned—but not everyone believes that. There are still rumors that the men are alive, and some people even claim to have seen them. More than 50 years after the escape, a federal officer is still investigating the case.

What do you think? Did Morris and the Anglin brothers make it—or did they perish in the rough, icy waters of San Francisco Bay? •



PAUSE AND THINK: What do people think happened to the three prisoners?

