DISCUSSION GUIDE

AL CAPONE SHINES MY SHOES

GENNIFER CHOLDENKO

Author of Newbery Honor Book AL CAPONE DOES MY SHIRTS

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.

The sequel you didn't know was inevitable, *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.

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.

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.alcaponeshinesmyshoes.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?
- 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?

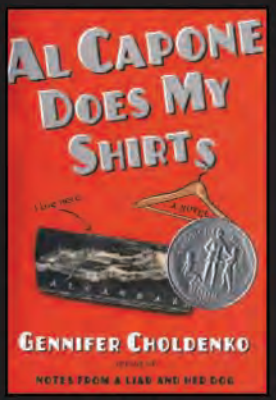
Not Your Typical Neighborhood. Not Your Typical Neighbors.

Al Capone Shines My Shoes

by Gennifer Chodenko

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

When Moose Flanagan and his family get settled on Alcatraz, e v e rything should be easy, but somehow friendships, family, and criminals all get tangled up and Moose is in more trouble than ever.



Al Capone Does My Shirts

by Gennifer Chodenko

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

Moose Flanagan's family moves to Alcatraz so his father can work as a guard and his sister can attend a special school in San Francisco. But can Moose have a normal life on Alcatraz? Can he stay out of trouble? And what will happen if his sister can't get in to the special school?

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HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again! All you need are some friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are and a little bit of organization.

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

The best way to find people to be in your book club is to ask your friends. Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your club, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

Figure out when and where you want to meet.
Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the "wheres" and "whens" right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run. Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a book club. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit
www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians

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 occurance, 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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"The convicts on Alcatraz are rotten to the core,
crazy in the head, and as slippery as eels in axle grease.
And then there's me. Moose Flanagan."—from *Al Capone Shines My Shoes*

AL CAPONE SHINES MY SHOES by Gennifer Choldenko

★ "Choldenko's pacing is exquisite. . . [A] great read."—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review
★ "Fast-paced and memorable."—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review
★ " The story, told with humor and skill, will fascinate readers."—*School Library Journal*, starred review

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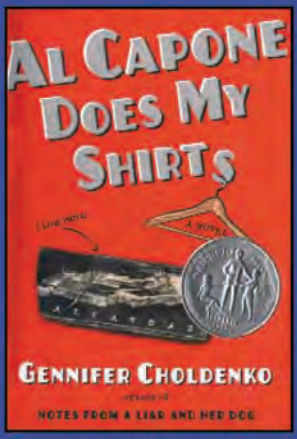

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