Young Adult Fiction

Prisoner in Alcatraz
Theresa Breslin
Stoke Books
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Marty King has made mistakes in his life, but agreeing to help a friend with a bank robbery ranks right near the top. Marty's panic when things don't go as planned leads to the deaths of two people—and a life sentence for murder. Now Marty is a young man in Alcatraz, one of the world's most notorious prisons, and some truly scary criminals have plans of their own for him.

Breslin, author of twenty-nine books and winner of the Carnegie Medal for British children's books, was inspired to write this story after she visited Alcatraz and learned about the inmates, both famous and not, and some of their daring, yet unsuccessful, escape plans. She excels at creating a strong sense of place and an honest, fresh voice for her main character. The story is told from Marty's point of view, and his naïve, yet resilient, personality draws the reader into his world. As he is coerced into playing a part in the escape plan of a group of murderers, the reader is introduced to prison life and the complex relationships between those doing time together.

Stoke Books specializes in short fiction for reluctant readers and those who have difficulty reading due to dyslexia and other learning disabilities. This book, like their others, is short in length, uses a special font that is easier for dyslexics to read, and is written at a fourth-grade reading level (though the content is definitely for an older audience). It contains some violence (two people are shot and a guard has his throat cut) and a warning to Marty from another inmate not to take too long in the showers: "Pretty young boy like you. Some of these men haven't been near a woman for years, and they're not too choosy, if you get my drift."

Overall, this book has an interesting plot with an engaging narrator that will appeal to older readers who have a reluctance or weakness in reading. The action in the story propels the reader through each chapter and holds their focus throughout. An attention-grabbing story like *Prisoner in Alcatraz* is key to enticing struggling readers to get into a book, and encouraging them to pick up another when they reach the end.

Christine Canfield