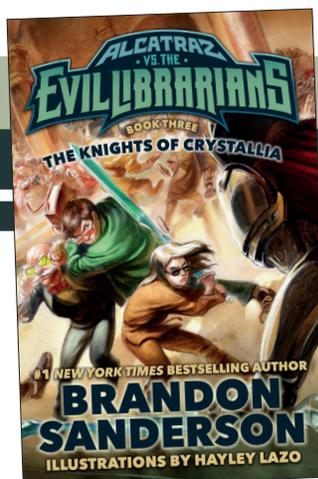


Starscape Teacher's Guide



Coming soon:

*The Shattered Lens:
Alcatraz vs. the Evil
Librarians*

*The Dark Talent:
Alcatraz vs. the Evil
Librarians*

series

Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians Brandon Sanderson

About this guide

The questions and activities that follow are intended to enhance your reading of Brandon Sanderson's Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians novels. The guide has been developed in alignment with the Common Core State Standards, however please feel free to adapt this content to suit the needs and interests of your students or reading group participants.



Photo credit: Nazrifof

Brandon Sanderson is the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Rithmatist* and *Steelheart*, both of which were selected for the American Library Association's Teens' Top Ten list. He's also written many popular and award-winning books for

adults. His middle grade series, Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians, is now available in deluxe hardcover editions from Starscape.

Hayley Lazo grew up just outside Washington, D.C. Her art can be found at art-zealot.deviantart.com.

About the

Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians series

Brandon Sanderson turns readers' understanding of literary genres upside down and backwards in this lively adventure series. In the world of thirteen-year-old Alcatraz Smedry, "Librarians," with their compulsions to organize and control information, are a source of evil, and "Talents" can include breaking things, arriving late, and getting lost. Add an unlikely teenage knight named Bastille, flying glass dragons, wild battles, references to philosophers and authors from Heraclitus to Terry Pratchett, and plenty of hilarious wordplay, and you have a series to please book lovers of all ages. And one that will have readers reflecting deeply about the nature of knowledge, truth, family, and trust, all while laughing out loud.

"Like Lemony Snicket and superhero comics rolled into one."

—Publishers Weekly

Ages 8-12 ★ Grades 3-7



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READING LITERATURE

Genre Study: FANTASY

In the introduction to the first book in the series, *Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians*, the narrator, Alcatraz Smedry, claims that his story is true, even though it will be shelved as “fantasy” in the world to which his readers (you) belong.

Fantasy is a literary genre that often includes:

- Characters who are magical, inspired by mythology, or who have special powers
- Settings that include unexplored parts of the known world, or new and different worlds
- Plot elements (actions) that cannot be explained in terms of historical or scientific information from our known world

While reading the books in this series, note when the author uses some of these elements of fantasy to tell his story. Students can track their observations in reading journals if desired, noting which elements of the fantasy genre are most often used by the author.

Older readers (grades 6 and 7) may also consider the way the author incorporates elements of the following genres into his novels, as well as how these genres relate to the fantasy components of the series:

Science fiction, which deals with imaginative concepts such as futuristic settings and technologies, space and time travel, and parallel universes. Science fiction stories frequently explore the effects of specific scientific or technological discoveries on governments and societies.

Steampunk, a subgenre of science fiction, which is often set in an alternative history or fantasy and features the use of steam as a primary power source. Steampunk features technologies which seem simultaneously futuristic and old-fashioned, or beings which are combinations of mechanical and biological elements.

After reading one or more of the Alcatraz books, invite students to reread the “Author’s Foreword” to *Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians* and discuss why they think the author chose to begin the series by explaining where the books will be shelved in a library.

Technical Study: STRUCTURE & LITERARY DEVICES

The Alcatraz series can be viewed as the author’s exploration of the idea, concept and value of books themselves as both a way information is shared, and

the way it is contained. One way Brandon Sanderson accomplishes this is to question the very structure of the novel. Invite students to look for the following elements in the stories and share their reactions to these literary devices and structures.

POINT OF VIEW

In this series, the point of view through which the reader sees the story is in the first-person voice of Alcatraz Smedry. He also claims that he is using the name Brandon Sanderson as a pseudonym, thus this is an autobiography or memoir. Is Alcatraz Smedry a reliable narrator, giving readers an unbiased report of the events of the story, or is Al an unreliable narrator, making false claims or telling the story in such a way as to leave doubts in the reader’s mind? In what ways is Alcatraz reliable and/or unreliable? How might the series be different if Bastille or another character were telling the story? (Hint: For further examples of unreliable narrators in children’s and teen fiction, read Jon Scieszka’s *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs*, E. Nesbit’s *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*, Justine Larbalestier’s *Liar* or Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*.)



ASIDES

At times, the narrator directly addresses the reader, suggesting how s/he should interpret a comment or how to best enjoy the novel (e.g. reading aloud or acting out scenes). Does this change the reader’s sense of his or her relationship with the book? If so, how does this relationship feel different?

CHAPTER BREAKS

Discuss the unusual ways the author begins, ends, numbers and sequences chapters. Is this pleasant or unpleasant? Have readers read any other works of fiction (or nonfiction) that explore chapters in this way?

WORDPLAY IN WORLD BUILDING

To explain Free Kingdoms ideas, technologies and objects in terms of the Hushlander (readers’) world, the author uses similes, metaphors, and analogies. To reflect protagonist Alcatraz’s own confusion and frustration, Brandon Sanderson employs invented words, puns, and even text written backwards or in other unusual ways. Find examples of these uses of wordplay in the text. How does the use of these literary devices enrich the text?



Character Study: FAMILIES AND FRIENDS

Having been raised in foster homes convinced that both of his parents were horrible people, Alcatraz Smedry is often uncertain as to what it means to like, love, and trust other people. Since he is the narrator of the series, Alcatraz's uncertainty affects readers' perceptions of the characters he describes. In a reading journal or in class discussion, have students analyze the physical traits, lineage (parents, relationships), motivations, and concerns of major characters in the novel. How is each character related to Alcatraz? What is especially important about the idea of family relationships in this series? Does Alcatraz's view of certain characters change in the course of single books? Do recurring characters develop or change over the course of more than one book in the series? If so, how and why do the characters evolve?

English Language Arts Common Core Reading Literature Standards
RL.3.3-6, 4.3-6, 5.3-6, 6.3-6, 7.3-6

Themes & Motifs: DISCUSSION TOPICS for the ALCATRAZ SERIES

Sanderson's Alcatraz novels can be read on many levels, including as adventure stories, as musings on the nature of knowledge, and as fantasies incorporating elements of science fiction and steampunk. Here are some themes you may want to watch for and explore with your classmates or students.



TALENT

How does Sanderson use the word talent in traditional and nontraditional ways? Is talent important, valuable, even essential? What does Sanderson really mean by talent? How might students incorporate Sanderson's unique interpretation of the word talent into their own sense of self?

HEROISM

Throughout the novel, Alcatraz claims to be "bad," "a liar," "a coward," and "not a hero." What makes a "hero" in a novel, a movie, and in real life? Does it matter if a person acts heroically on purpose or by accident? What do you think is the most important reason Alcatraz denies his heroism?

KNOWLEDGE, LEARNING, THINKING

Find instances in the stories when Alcatraz admits to acting before thinking ahead to consider all possible outcomes of his plans. In these instances, is he simply being careless or does he lack some important information since he was raised in the Hushlands? Compare and contrast the way people acquire knowledge in the Hushlands versus the Free Kingdoms.

OPPOSITES

Throughout the novels, the narrator refers to the ideas of the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus, whose doctrines included (1) universal flux (the idea that things are constantly changing) and (2) unity of opposites (the idea that opposites [objects, ideas] are necessary and balance each other). The philosopher also believed that "Much learning does not teach understanding." (*The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, ed. Charles H. Kahn. Cambridge University Press, 1981). How might the series be read as an exploration of Heraclitus' doctrines?

English Language Arts Common Core Speaking and Listening Standards
SL.3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1
SL.3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3, 7.3

RESEARCH & WRITING PROJECTS

Keep a reading journal. Use the journal to record:

- Favorite quotations, funny lines, exciting scenes (note page numbers)
- Situations in which the main character is in crisis or danger, and notes on what advice readers might offer
- New vocabulary words and/or a list of invented words
- Sketches inspired by the novels
- Questions readers would like to ask the author or characters from the novels

EXPLORE GLASS

From Oculators Lenses to unbreakable glass buildings, glass is a core substance throughout the series. Go to the library or online to learn more about glass. Create a PowerPoint or other multi-media presentation discussing the physical properties, history, practical and creative uses of glass. Or create a presentation explaining how glass works in the Free Kingdoms. Include visual elements, such as photographs or drawings, in your presentation.



SILIMATIC TECHNOLOGY

This part scientific, part magical technology powers much of the Free Kingdoms. Using details from the novels, create an outline or short pamphlet explaining the rules and functions of silimatic technology as you understand it. If desired, dress as you imagine a Free Kingdoms scientist might choose to dress and present your findings to classmates.

CHOOSE A TALENT

Many of the characters in the Alcatraz series have talents that seem more like problems. Think of personality quality you consider a fault in your own life, such as messy penmanship, bad spelling, or the inability to catch a baseball. Imagine how that talent might prove useful in the world of Alcatraz. Write a 3-5 page scene in which you encounter Alcatraz and help him using your “talent.”

English Language Arts Common Core Writing Standards
W.3.1-3, 4.1-3, 5.1-3, 6.1-3, 7.1-3
W3.7-8, 4.7-9, 5.7-9, 6.7-9, 7.7-9

DISCUSSION STARTERS AND WRITING PROMPTS FOR INDIVIDUAL TITLES

ALCATRAZ vs. THE EVIL LIBRARIANS

Who is Alcatraz Smedry? Is his tendency to break things a curse...or a talent? Though his past has been marked by a series of disastrous foster home placements, his breaking ability is about to lead him to a future battling Evil Librarians and discovering the truth about his long-missing parents.

QUOTES

Discuss your interpretation of the following quotations in terms their meaning within the novel; in terms of your thoughts about books and libraries; and in terms of their relevance to the real lives of readers.

“Now, you Hushlanders may think that I took all of these strange experiences quite well...maybe if you’d grown up with the magical ability to break almost anything you touched, then you would have been just as quick to accept unusual circumstances.” (Chapter 3)

“Public libraries exist to entice. Librarians want everyone to read their books—whether those books are deep

and poignant works about dead puppies or nonfiction books about made-up topics, like the Pilgrims, penicillin, and France. In fact the only book they don’t want you to read is the one you’re holding right now.” (Chapter 7)

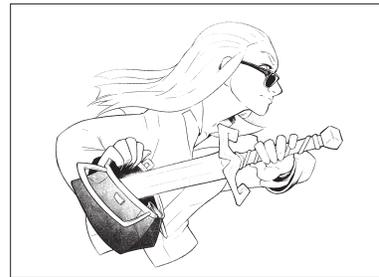
“It has been my experience that most problems in life are caused by a lack of information. Many people just don’t know the things they need to know.”

“Some ignore the truth; others never understand it (Chapter 15)

WRITING PROMPTS

Reading Journal Entry: A BAG OF SAND

What would you make of the sort of birthday present Alcatraz received? Write a journal entry describing how you might have reacted and the emotions you felt (anger, curiosity, disappointment, confusion) upon receiving such a gift. Sketch your vision of this odd gift.



Reading Journal Entry: LYING

Throughout the novel, Alcatraz insists that he is a liar. Write an entry into your reading journal in which you explain what you think Alcatraz means by being a LIAR.

Follow with your thoughts on one or more of the following questions: Have you ever acted or felt like a liar in ways similar to those of Alcatraz? Have you ever felt like people were not seeing you as your true self—or were making assumptions about you based on information from other people? How did you react? Did you try to make people see the truth or allow them to believe the falsehood? Is lying always bad? Is something that feels like a lie always a lie?

Explanatory Text: SANDS OF RASHID

Imagine you are Bastille, Sing, or Grandpa Smedry, separated from Alcatraz but anxious for him to understand the truth about the Sands of Rashid. In the voice of one of these characters, write a letter of explanation to send to Al.

Literary Analysis: CLIFFHANGERS

“Hooks and cliffhangers belong only at the ends of chapters.”

Go to the library or online to find definitions of the novel-writing terms “hook” and “cliffhanger.” Find examples of these devices as Brandon Sanderson uses them in his novel. Then, write a one-page essay in which you agree or disagree with the above quotation from the book. Use examples from *Alcatraz vs. the Evil Librarians* and other novels to support your position.



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English Language Arts Common Core Standards
RL.3.1-4, 4.1-4, 5.1-4, 6.1-4, 7.1-4
SL.3.3-4, 4.3-4, 5.3-4, 6.3-4, 7.3-4
W.3.1-3, 4.1-3, 5.1-3, 6.1-3, 7.1-3; W3.7-8, 4.7-9, 5.7-9, 6.7-9, 7.7-9
Lexile level: 730L, ATOS Book Level: 4.9, AR Points: 9.0, AR Quiz No. 118054 EN

THE SCRIVENER'S BONES: ALCATRAZ vs. THE EVIL LIBRARIANS

Has Alcatraz's estranged father gotten lost in the secret underground Library of Alexandria? And is he willing to pay the ultimate price for limitless knowledge...the sacrifice of his soul?

QUOTES

Discuss the following quotations in terms of what they mean in terms of the novel; in terms of your thoughts about books and libraries; and in terms of their relevance to the real lives of readers.

"The things I am telling you here are factual. In this case, I can only prove that I'm a liar by telling the truth, though I will also include some lies—which I will point out—to act as object lessons proving the truth that I'm a liar." (Chapter 4)

"The quickest way I've found to feel bad about yourself is to read a self-help book, and the second quickest way is to read a depressing literary work intended to make you feel terrible about humanity in general." (Chapter 9)

"Many people would rather give up what remains of their lives than live in ignorance...This is only one of the many ways that we gain souls" (Chapter 9)

"Writers—particularly storytellers like myself—write about people. That is ironic, since we actually know nothing about them." (Chapter 16)

"Think about it. Why does someone become a writer? Is it because they like people? Of course not. Why else would we seek out a job where we get to spend all day, every day, cooped up in our basement with no company besides paper, a pencil, and our imaginary friends?" (Chapter 16)

WRITING EXERCISES

Reading Journal Entry: KNOWLEDGE

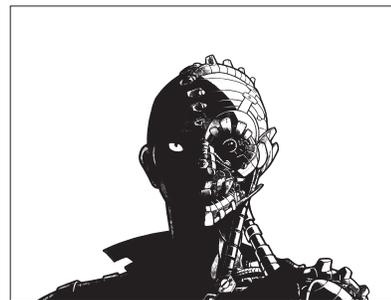
The Curators attempt to trick Alcatraz and his comrades into reading. In a short essay or reading journal entry, describe what type of knowledge is most tempting to you. What is the most important kind of knowledge? Do you think you would be able to avoid the Curators' traps? Why or why not?

Explanatory Text: ANCIENT LIBRARIES

With friends or classmates, go to the library or online to learn more about the Ancient Library of Alexandria and other ancient libraries or archives. Create informative posters about these places, their locations, history, contents and legacy, and assemble them into a classroom display.

Literary Analysis: NAMES

Many Free Kingdoms characters have names associated with prisons. Make an annotated list of characters with prison names accompanied by facts about their namesake prisons. What reason(s) are given for the prison names by various characters in the story? Can you think of other novels, book series, television shows, or movies in which characters' names are related to such things as historical figures or geographical landmarks? What impact does Brandon Sanderson's naming choice have on your reading of the story?



Literary Analysis: FORGOTTEN LANGUAGE

Write a short essay explaining how the idea of a "Forgotten Language" is introduced in the story and how it becomes an increasingly important concept throughout the course of the novel. Why might the idea of language be something Brandon Sanderson seeks to put at the core of this series?

English Language Arts Common Core Standards
RL.3.1-4, 4.1-4, 5.1-4, 6.1-4, 7.1-4
SL.3.3-4, 4.3-4, 5.3-4, 6.3-4, 7.3-4
W.3.1-3, 4.1-3, 5.1-3, 6.1-3, 7.1-3; W3.7-8, 4.7-9, 5.7-9, 6.7-9, 7.7-9

Lexile level: 660L, ATOS Book Level: 4.7, AR Points: 9.0, AR Quiz No. 126447 EN

THE KNIGHTS OF CRYSTALLIA: ALCATRAZ vs. THE EVIL LIBRARIANS

Can Alcatraz handle the realization that, in the Free Kingdom city of Crystallia, he is incredibly famous? How will that change his friendship with Bastille, who has been stripped of her knighthood for failing to protect the "great" AI? And can either of them save the historic city from the Evil Librarians?

QUOTES

Discuss the following quotations in terms of what they mean in terms of the novel; in terms of your thoughts about books and libraries; and in terms of their relevance to the



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real lives of readers.

“Summarizing is when you take a story that is complicated and interesting, then stick it in a microwave until it shrivels up into a tiny piece of black crunchy tarlike stuff. A wise man once said, ‘Any story, no matter how good, will sound really, really dumb when you shorten it to a few sentences.’” (Chapter 8)

“People tend to believe what other people tell them...And if we didn’t know who was an expert, we wouldn’t know whose opinion was the most important to listen to.

Or, at least that’s what the experts want us to believe. Those who have listened to Socrates know that they’re supposed to ask questions. Questions like, ‘If all people are equal, then why is my opinion worth less than that of the expert?’ or ‘If I like reading this book, then why should I let someone else tell me that I shouldn’t like reading it?’” (Chapter 13)

“I mean, why is it that you readers always assume you’re never to blame for anything? You just sit there, comfortable on your couch while we suffer. You can enjoy our pain and misery because you’re safe.” (Chapter 19)

WRITING EXERCISES

Reading Journal Entry: FAME

Upon arriving in the Free Kingdom city of Crystallia, Alcatraz discovers that he is famous. In the character of Al, write a journal entry describing how you came to this discovery, your emotions, and any planned actions



you might take since discovering this new fame and its power.

Explanatory Text: KNIGHTHOOD

Write a short essay explaining the roles, responsibilities, and sacrifices made by members of the Knights of Crystallia. Is Bastille an ordinary or unusual knight? Why or why not?

Explanatory Text: SOCRATES

With friends or classmates, go to the library or online to learn more about the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates and the “Socratic method” of teaching and learning. Compile your information into a short report. Conclude with 1-3 paragraphs explaining why Brandon Sanderson references Socrates in the novel.

Literary Analysis: SPACE, TIME, KNOWLEDGE, AND THE PHYSICAL WORLD

Alcatraz is told that talents can have impact on space, time, knowledge and the physical world, and that his talent (breaking things) is the one ability that can impact all four areas. Make a four columned list to analyze these areas, noting the names and talents of various story characters whose abilities fall under each category, brainstorming other possible talents that could be included in each column and, finally, writing a short paragraph explaining the breaking talent and its breadth of impact.

English Language Arts Common Core Standards

RL.3.1-4, 4.1-4, 5.1-4, 6.1-4, 7.1-4

SL.3.3-4, 4.3-4, 5.3-4, 6.3-4, 7.3-4

W.3.1-3, 4.1-3, 5.1-3, 6.1-3, 7.1-3; W.3.7-8, 4.7-9, 5.7-9, 6.7-9, 7.7-9

Lexile level: 670L, ATOS Book Level: 4.9, AR Points: 9.0, AR Quiz No. 133649 EN

THE SHATTERED LENS: ALCATRAZ vs. THE EVIL LIBRARIANS

The island of Mokia is under siege by the Librarians, and its fate may tip the scales for the Librarians’ conquest of all the Free Kingdoms...unless Alcatraz can sort out family, enemies, friends, talents, and the power of exploding teddy bears.

QUOTES

Discuss the following quotations in terms of what they mean in terms of the novel; in terms of your thoughts about books and libraries; and in terms of their relevance to the real lives of readers.

“Most members of my family, it should be noted, are some kind of professor, teacher, or researcher. It may seem odd to you that a bunch of dedicated miscreants like us are also a bunch of scholars. If you think that it means you haven’t known enough professors in your time.” (Chapter 6)

“That’s how they win. By making us give up. I’ve lived in Librarian lands. They don’t win because they conquer, they win because they make people stop caring, stop wondering. They’ll tire you out, then feed you lies until you start repeating them, if only because it’s too hard to keep arguing.” (Chapter 070706)

“Something stirred inside of me, something that felt immense. Like an enormous serpent, shifting, moving, awakening.”

“I want everything to make sense again!” (Chapter ∞)



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“The Librarians...they try to keep us from changing. They want everything to remain the same inside the Hushlands...

In this case, it's not because they're oppressive. It's because they're afraid. Change frightens them. It's unknown, uncertain, like Smedrys and magic. They want everyone to assume that things can't change.” (Author's Afterword)

WRITING EXERCISES:

Reading Journal Entry: WHO IS RIGHT?

By the end of the fourth novel, Alcatraz believes that his mother, Shasta, is in the right while his father, Attica, is on a dangerous path. Write a journal entry describing how you think this new perspective will affect Al's relationships with his parents. Have you ever felt caught between two parents or other adults in your life? How might you use this experience to offer advice to Al about handling his situation?

Reading Journal Entry: MOKIA

Imagine that you have arrived in Mokia along with Al. Write a journal entry describing the sights, sounds, smells, and emotions you experience those first moments on the island nation.



Explanatory Text:

HUSHLANDS VERSUS FREE KINGDOMS

Imagine that you are a scholar from the Free Kingdoms assigned to instruct Alcatraz about the two worlds that coexist on Earth. Prepare a speech, including an

introduction of yourself, your name and your relationship to Al, then address the following questions: What are the key distinctions between these two worlds? How do characters move between the worlds? Can all characters do so? What do you think would happen to the Hushlands if they were made aware of the Free Kingdoms? Why are the Free Kingdoms so anxious to remain free from the Hushland society created by the Librarians?

Literary Analysis: CHARACTER COMPARISONS

Using information from the novel, create a chart comparing and contrasting the characters of Bastille and Draulin, Shasta and Attica Smedry, or another pair of characters of interest to you. Write a paragraph or essay describing the importance of including both of your chosen characters in the book. How does the contrast between the characters represent a larger conflict in the story.

Literary Analysis: AN ALCATRAZ HANDBOOK

From exploding teddy bears to myriad powerful lenses to terms like “stoopiderific,” the Alcatraz novels have a vocabulary of their own. Create an Excel spreadsheet, graphic index, or other type of chart or booklet in which you list and define the language of Alcatraz.

Genre Exploration: POEMS, SONG LYRICS AND BEYOND

In the course of the series, Alcatraz's talent is described as the most powerful, dangerous, and dark, yet he is a legend and a hero. With the complex descriptions in mind, write a poem, song lyrics, or a four-panel cartoon celebrating (or denouncing) Alcatraz Smedry.

English Language Arts Common Core Standards

RL.3.1-4, 4.1-4, 5.1-4, 6.1-4, 7.1-4

SL.3.3-4, 4.3-4, 5.3-4, 6.3-4, 7.3-4

W.3.1-3, 4.1-3, 5.1-3, 6.1-3, 7.1-3; W3.7-8, 4.7-9, 5.7-9, 6.7-9, 7.7-9

Lexile level: 680L, ATOS Book Level: 4.8, AR Points: 8.0, AR Quiz No. 140919 EN

