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Review of *The Gardener of Alcatraz: A True Story* by Emma Bland Smith

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The Gardener of Alcatraz: A True Story

Smith, Emma Bland

Illustrated by Jenn Ely

Watertown: Charlesbridge, 2022

9781623541606

Emma Bland Smith creates an intriguing biography of Elliott Michener, the prisoner turned gardener. The story follows Elliott's imprisonment and his attempt to escape. Sent to Alcatraz for counterfeiting, Elliott is determined to put on a performance of good behavior to make an escape. One decision to turn in a key as an act of honor turned him into the gardener of Alcatraz. Elliott grew to love the work and his plan to escape faded into the background. He learned more about plants and was entrusted with becoming the gardener of a warden and his wife. Due to his trustworthiness, Elliott was sent to a lower-security prison where he then applied and was granted to get out early and then spent his life gardening. The illustrator used color to emphasize the changing of the character and how he influenced the world around him, from the gray landscapes of coming to Alcatraz to the colorful gardens and growing trustworthiness of Elliott. The story portrays an excellent story of physical and metaphorical growth, encouraging an attitude of trustworthiness, patience, and passion. The author emphasizes the harshness of the prison without over-stepping the boundaries of the intended reader.

Recommended *Janelle Burd, Centennial Library Intern, Cedarville University*