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# Toby's California Vacation

*by Christian Downey*

Genre	Comprehension Skills and Strategy
Realistic fiction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Setting and Theme</li><li>• Generalize</li><li>• Inferring</li></ul>

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## Vocabulary

gnawed

headland

kelp

lair

ravine

shellfish

sinew

Word count: 1,596

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Note: The total word count includes words in the running text and headings only. Numerals and words in chapter titles, captions, labels, diagrams, charts, graphs, sidebars, and extra features are not included.

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Toby and his parents decided to fly to California for their vacation. Toby's aunt lived in San Diego, in the southern part of California. Toby couldn't wait to visit. He had never been out West. His mom told him to pack his shorts, T-shirts, and sneakers. He also took his bathing suit, because they would visit the Pacific Ocean. Toby couldn't wait to tell his friends that he went swimming in the Pacific!

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**A beach in San Diego**

As soon as they landed, Toby was amazed by what he saw. His mom's sister, Aunt Lee, drove Toby and his parents to her house. Out the car window, Toby saw tall buildings and palm trees. The roads were wide, and he could see mountains far off in the distance.

"Toby, look!" said his mother, pointing out of her window.

Toby looked to where she had pointed and saw the ocean. People were playing and swimming at the beach. Toby couldn't wait to run in the sand and jump in the bright, blue water.

"Toby, do you want to check out some of the islands along the coast?" asked his aunt.

"Of course!" answered Toby.

The next day, they set out on their island journey. Aunt Lee told them about the islands as she drove.

"I'm taking you to see the Channel Islands," she said. "The Channel Islands are made up of eight islands off the California coast, four northern islands and four southern ones."

"What's on the islands?" asked Toby.

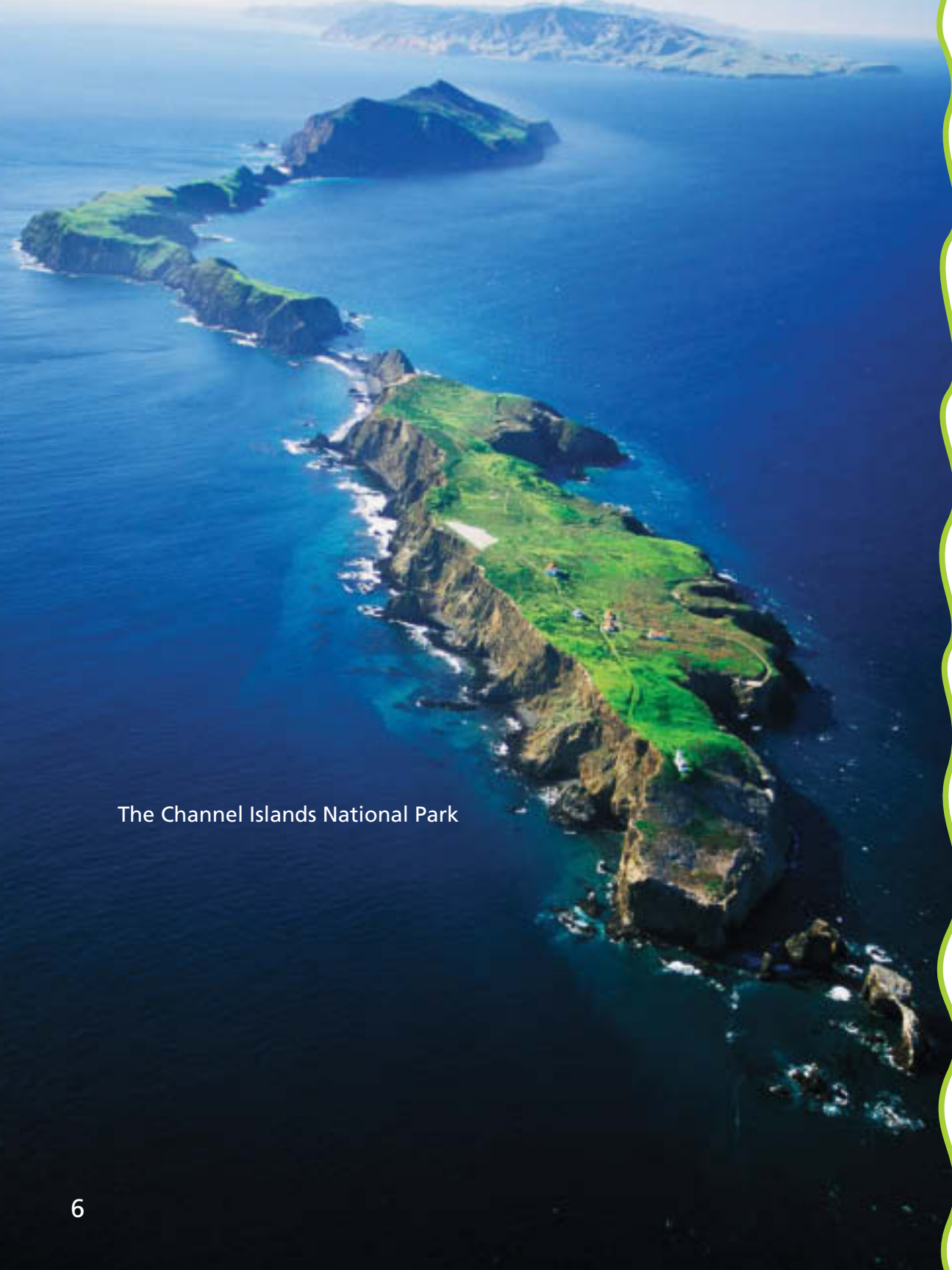
"All sorts of things," answered Aunt Lee. "There are plants and animals. There are many different kinds of birds and fish. The islands are home to all sorts of natural life. You can see for yourself, since we're almost there!"

The Channel Islands



Santa Catalina Island, CA





The Channel Islands National Park



Toby and his family took a ferry to the islands. A tour guide described the Channel Islands National Park.

"The park is made up of five of the Channel Islands," said the tour guide. "They hold over 2,000 kinds of plants and animals. Many of those can't be found anywhere else in the world."

"That's amazing," said Toby's dad. "What are some of the animals we might see?"

The tour guide replied, "On the islands there are seals, sea lions, foxes, owls, and many other kinds of animal life. Even though they're located close to some large California cities, the islands aren't very developed."

"So nobody bothers the animals, right?" asked Toby.

"Right," said the guide. "It's very important that the animals and plants are allowed to grow and live undisturbed."

Their first stop was Anacapa, the smallest of the northern Channel Islands. Anacapa was made up of three very small islands, called islets. Toby stood on the edge of one and looked out at the water.

"What's that brown stuff over there?" he asked his mother, pointing at the water.

"It looks like kelp. Seaweed."

"Is it bad for the animals?" asked Toby.

"Not at all, it's just a part of the environment," said his mom. "And kelp provides shelter for many sea creatures."

After they left Anacapa, Toby and his family went to San Miguel Island and then stopped for lunch. They still had a full day of sightseeing ahead of them.

Kelp

After lunch, Aunt Lee wanted to visit Santa Rosa Island. Santa Rosa was the second largest of the Channel Islands. Aunt Lee was excited to see the trees. The island was known for its many kinds of trees, including a native oak.

"Toby, they found human bones on this island that were 13,000 years old. Can you believe people were here that long ago?" Aunt Lee asked.

"And now we're here too!" replied Toby.

"Think about how long these trees have been growing," said Aunt Lee.

"They look like the oak trees in your yard," said Toby. "Only much older!"

Santa Rosa Island



Western gull among coreopsis plants



Next they traveled to Santa Cruz Island, the largest of the Channel Islands. The tour guide told them all about their surroundings while they stood on the headland by the ferry.

“This island has mountain ranges, ravines, tide pools, and sea caves. On this island alone, there are seventy-seven miles of coastline cliffs!”

“What kinds of animals are here?” asked Toby.

“So many kinds,” answered their guide. “There are mammals, like deer and mice. We have over one-hundred types of birds. There are also many reptiles, like snakes and lizards.”

“Snakes?” asked Toby’s father, looking nervous. Toby chuckled.

The guide continued, “Santa Cruz Island is also home to many marine animals. There are dolphins, seals, and sea lions. If you’re lucky, you may even spot a whale near the shore.”



Spiny Lizard

Island Fox





As they walked around the island, Toby and his family saw many different structures. There were adobe houses and barns, where people and animals used to live.

"People lived here many, many years ago," his aunt said. "Now the island is home to so many kinds of plants and animals. I don't want to leave!"

They had to leave, though. They boarded the ferry again to go on to San Nicolas Island.

"This island was home to an entire group of people in the 1800s," said the guide as they passed.

"What happened to them?" asked Toby.

"They died off," said the guide.

Toby was amazed that people had once lived on the islands. They didn't even have electricity! Years ago, people had lived without so many things. Toby wondered what it would be like to live on such a small island.



Next they traveled to San Clemente Island, located fifty-five miles out at sea. Toby's mother was feeling seasick from the long ferry ride by the time they made it to the island. Toby's father took him to the water's edge to explore.

"Look, Toby," he said, holding up a shell. "This was once part of a shellfish."

"What's a shellfish?" asked Toby.

"You remember the oyster we served you once?"

"Eww! You mean that slimy thing in a shell? It had a vein in it. Gross!" said Toby.

"That vein was its sinew," laughed his father.

"You are better off eating fish sticks."



Various kinds  
of shellfish



A loggerhead shrike

Toby's aunt told him that San Clemente was once used by fishermen and ranchers.

"What's that funny-looking bird?" Toby asked his aunt, pointing up at a tall tree.

"That's called a loggerhead shrike," she told him. "It's an endangered species, which means there aren't many of them left in the world."

Toby took pictures of the bird. He couldn't wait to show everyone at home.

They boarded the ferry and went past Santa Barbara Island, the smallest of the Channel Islands. It was beginning to grow dark, so they went on to Santa Catalina Island, the only island with permanent residents.

"A Native American tribe used to travel here for trade many years ago," the tour guide told them. "Now conservationists work to save the plants that grow here from extinction."

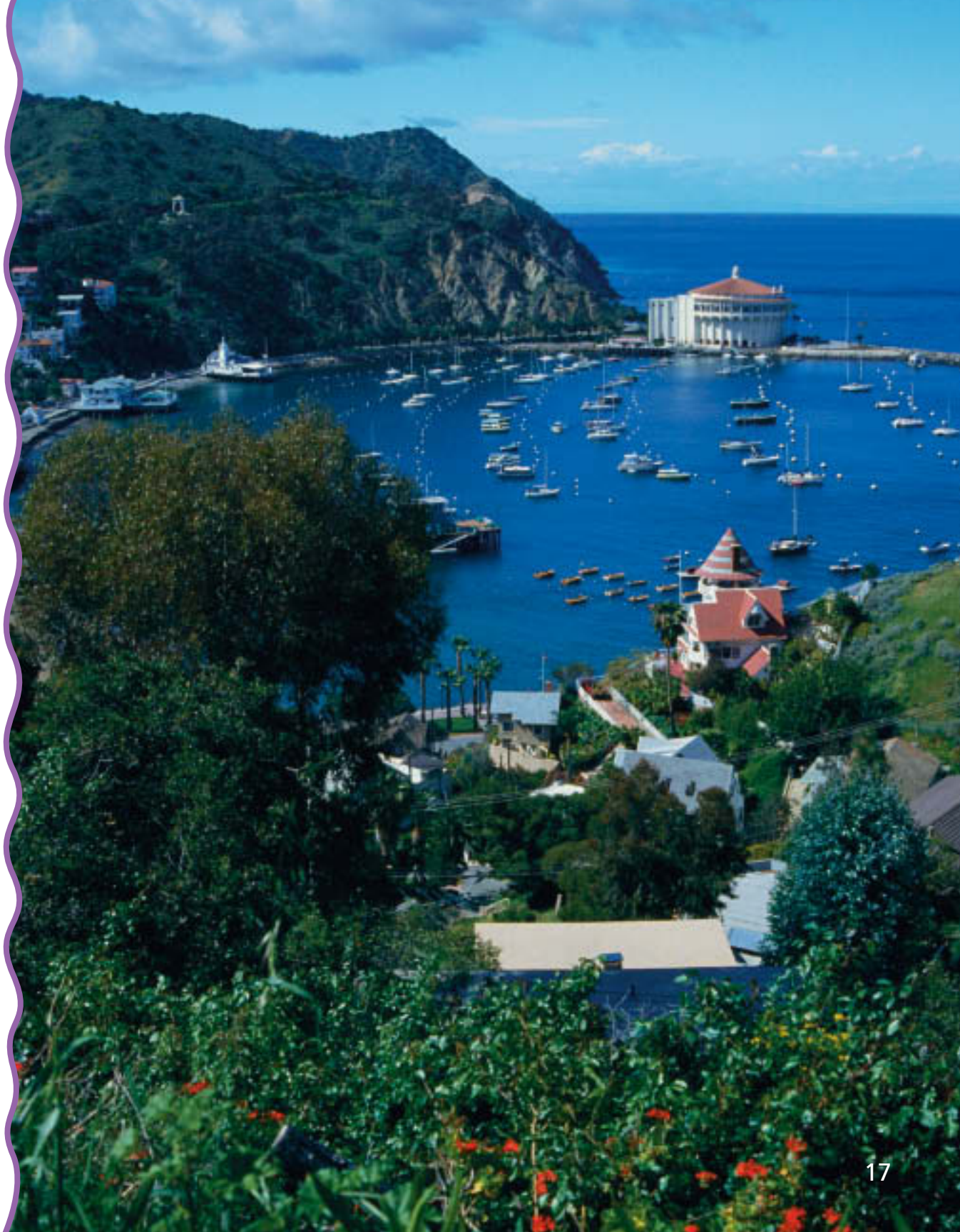
"How can they be saved?" asked Toby.

The guide answered, "People work to keep the island clean and get rid of weeds. They also remove any animals that may hurt the land."

"Is it okay to have so many tourists coming to the islands?" asked Toby's mom.

"As long as people treat the island with respect, visitors are welcome," said the tour guide. "Just leave it like you found it, please!"

Avalon Bay is part of Santa Catalina Island.



They ate dinner at one of the local cafes and walked around the island. It was much different from the others they had visited. This island had streets and shops. Toby thought it looked more like a town than an island.

Night had fallen. On the way back to the ferry, Toby saw a small cavelike hole by a big tree.

"What's that?" he asked Aunt Lee.

"It looks like a fox's lair. That's where the fox lives and hides from us!" she joked.

"Look," said Toby's father, pointing at the hole. "You can even see little teeth marks, where an animal gnawed at the ground."

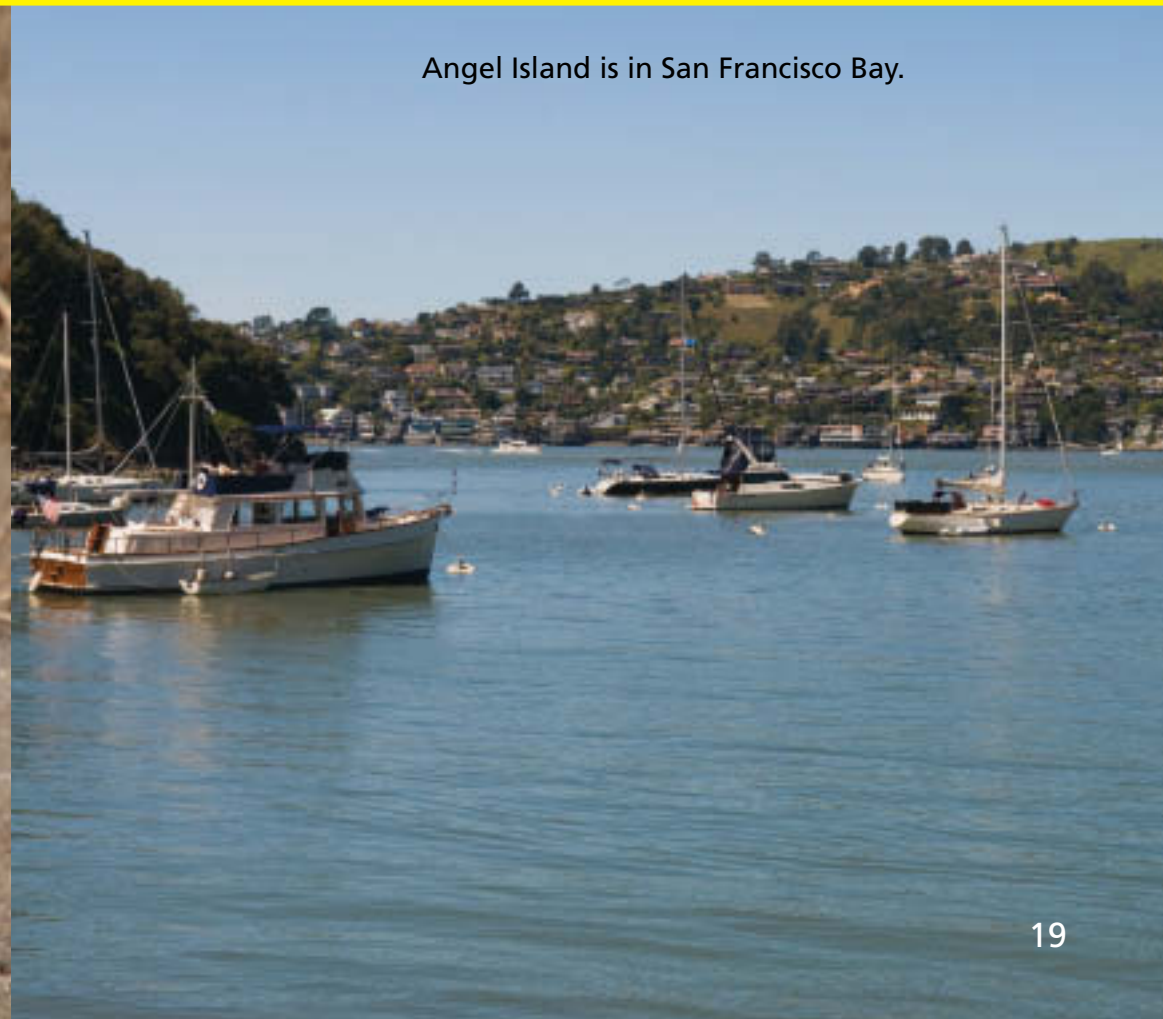
They were all exhausted from their long day of visiting the islands. When they got off the ferry, Aunt Lee drove them to her house for the night. Aunt Lee told Toby more about California.

"You know, Toby, there are islands in the northern part of California too," she said. "San Francisco has Angel Island, Alcatraz island, and others. Angel Island used to be a fishing and hunting site. Now it is used by the Coast Guard. And Alcatraz is pretty famous!"

Foxes in their lair



Angel Island is in San Francisco Bay.



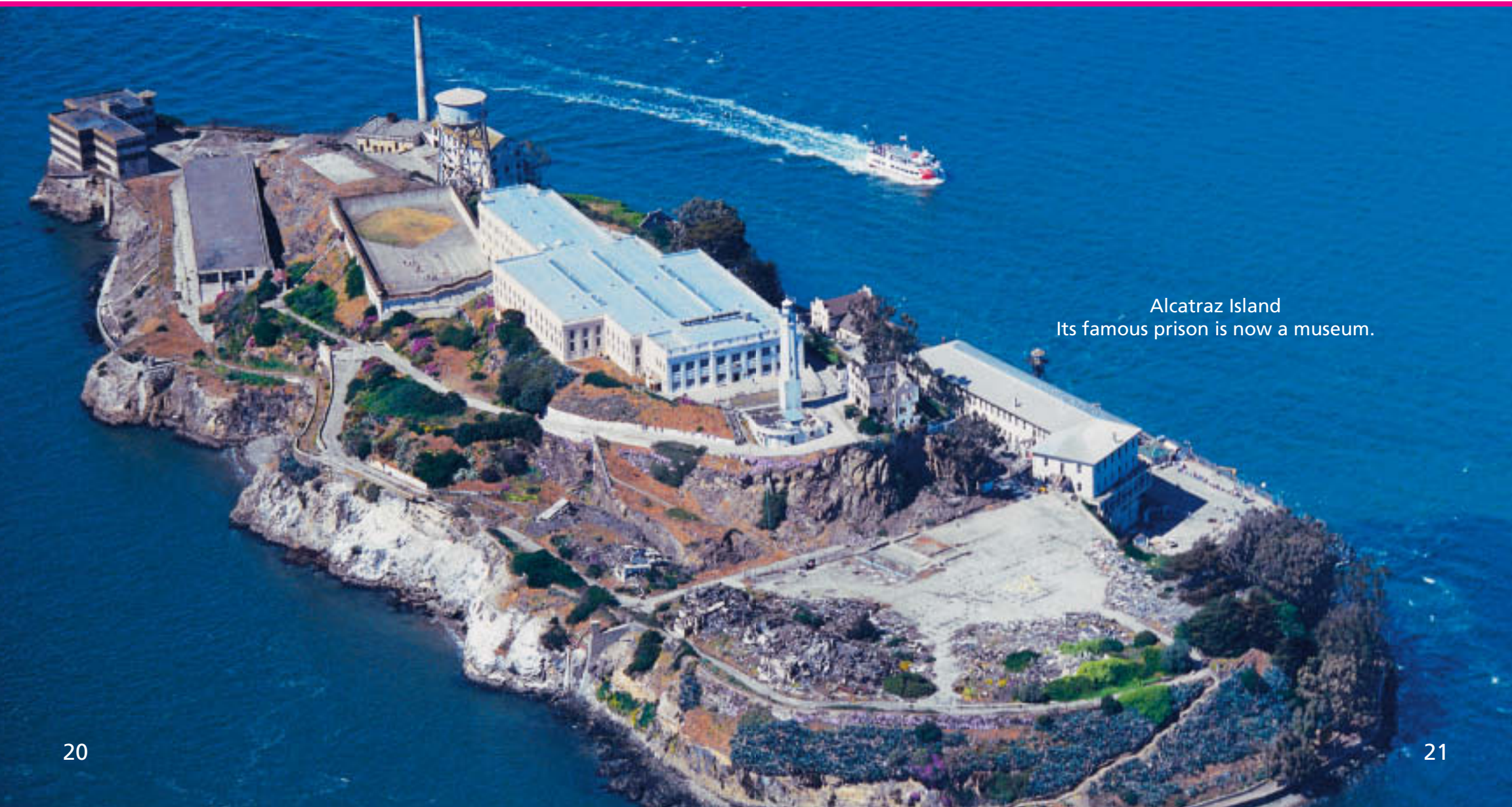
"Famous? How?" asked Toby.

"Alcatraz used to have a prison where dangerous criminals were held. There are many books and movies about it," said Aunt Lee.

"Are there still prisoners on the island?" asked Toby.

"No," said his aunt. "Now the island is a historic site. Visitors can go to see the empty prison."

When they arrived at Aunt Lee's house, Toby and his family were ready for bed. Even though Toby was tired, he had trouble falling asleep. He couldn't stop thinking about all that he had learned that day. He loved seeing the islands and learning about their past. He had never seen so many animals and fish outside of a zoo or aquarium.



Alcatraz Island  
Its famous prison is now a museum.



The next day they decided to go to the beach. On the way, Toby's mother reminded him of the lesson that the tour guide had taught them: visiting natural places is fine as long as you are respectful.

Toby was already looking forward to going home. He wanted to tell his friends about the California islands. He hoped his photos would turn out OK so that he could show everyone what he saw. But first, he was going to the beach to swim in the ocean!

# California Coastal National Monument

The California Coastal National Monument was established in 2000. It includes 840 miles of coastline between Oregon and Mexico. Many of the animals that live along the coast are very rare. People can be a danger to these animals. Humans who walk, swim, or ride boats too closely can cause problems. It is up to everyone to make sure that nature is protected there.



## Reader Response

1. What part of California did Toby and his family visit? What were some of the things he saw when he arrived?
2. What kind of personality do you think Toby has? Describe it in detail. How does this inference about Toby help you better understand the story?
3. On page 11 of the story, Toby and his family stand on the headland of the island near their ferry. If you don't know what a headland is, can you guess from the story? Write what you think the definition is. Then, to be sure of the meaning, look up *headland* in a dictionary.
4. The California islands are home to many plants and animals that may soon be extinct. Think of ways that humans can help preserve them and keep them in good condition. List your ideas in a table like the one below.
