



★ **The Prisoner and the Writer**

Heather Camlot

Sophie Casson, Illustrator

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Heather Camlot's *The Prisoner and the Writer* tells the story of the Dreyfus Affair for early readers.

In 1895, Alfred Dreyfus was convicted of treason against France. He was sentenced to prison on remote Devil's Island, where he languished alone in his cell with his prison guards as his only company. Meanwhile, France's most famous author, Emile Zola, realized that Dreyfus had been made into a scapegoat because he was Jewish, while the real culprit was still at large. Wracked by his conscience and risking everything he had worked hard to achieve, Zola decided to use his position to prove Dreyfus's innocence.

On January 13, 1898, Zola's text in defense of Dreyfus, titled "J'Accuse," was published as an open letter, adding further fuel to an already explosive affair. *The Prisoner and the Writer* is written in celebration of the 125th anniversary of Zola's text. It uses that historical event to show the importance of acting against injustice and antisemitism, as well as of speaking up for those who are without a voice.

Written in verse, *The Prisoner and the Writer* alternates between showing Dreyfus in prison on Devil's Island and focusing on Zola in France. It ably portrays the polarization that the Dreyfus Affair caused in French society. The verbs "can" and "cannot" recur in juxtapositioned pairs, highlighting the dilemma of taking sides. Further, the visual language of Sophie Casson's illustrations resembles photography. Using light and perspective, her electrifying drawings increase the dynamism of the narrative, bringing into focus the most important moments of the story.

The Prisoner and the Writer is an affecting account of the Dreyfus Affair that highlights the importance of acting against injustices.

ERIKA HARLITZ KERN (September / October 2022)

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