

BCSCR



Building Communities that  
Support Children's Reading

Texas

# The Twenty-One Balloons

By William Pène du Bois

RL 6.8



6<sup>th</sup> Grade - H

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# Synopsis

## The Twenty-One Balloons



William Pene du Bois was born in New Jersey in 1916. He was an author and illustrator of books for children and young adults. He wrote his best-seller, *The Twenty-One Balloons*, in 1947, and in 1948 he won the Newbery Medal. In this book, Du Bois brilliantly mixes historical facts with fantasy and science fiction. The setting of the story takes place on the Pacific Island, Krakatau. Historically, as well as in the novel, the volcanic island of Krakatau blew up in the biggest explosion ever to take place. While the setting of the story is realistic, the plot is fictional.

The story begins *in media res* with Professor William Waterman Sherman floating in the Atlantic Ocean, desperately holding onto twenty balloons for support. Luckily, he is found by a passing steamship. Sherman had been seen last month beforehand leaving San Francisco as a retired math teacher in search of a new adventure. His departure from San Francisco differed from most because he took off in a giant balloon. Now, four weeks later, he is found with twenty balloons in the Atlantic Ocean. This story gained popularity in the media, and the whole world waited to hear the story behind the twenty balloons. After several days' rest and an extravagant welcome, the professor retells his journey in front of a curious audience.

Professor Sherman's flight started out uneventful. His giant balloon worked better than he imagined and he was flying carefree for several days until a seagull attacked his balloon, forcing him to land on the stranded island of Krakatau. Once he lands, he discovers that this island is far from ordinary. The twenty families that inhabit the island have a secret they are hiding from the rest of the world. The secret is that the island is filled with diamond mines. The mines contain more diamonds than anywhere else in the world, making Krakatau the wealthiest place on earth. Each year, the inhabitants sail to the outside world and sell the diamonds to receive supplies for their hidden civilization. These supplies aid in building the whimsical and elaborate houses that each of the families live in. All the houses are unique because each one contains an invention. Each family designs and constructs his own invention. Even the children design and construct their own version of a merry-go-round. Everyone living on the island is innovative, creative, and talented. These qualities set the people apart. They are wealthy, smart, clever, and resourceful, but secluded and hidden from the rest of the world. While the families live in complete luxurious isolation, the volcano rumbles every hour of the day. This rumble gives Professor Sherman the inkling that someday it will explode. But when he shares his thoughts about the volcanic explosion with the families, they are insistent

that something like that could never happen to them. Even so, they have an escape route in plan.

The volcano does erupt, and blows up the entire island of Krakatau. The families escape on a platform held aloft by twenty balloons. As the platform drifts west, the families parachute off to countries of their choice to begin their new lives. Sherman, the only one without a parachute, remains on the platform, and eventually descends into the Atlantic Ocean, where he is rescued. When the professor concludes his story, the crowd goes wild with pride and excitement. The book ends, and seemingly gives way to a sequel, as Professor Sherman tells the people that he intends to build another balloon that will last a year in the air.

# Vocabulary

## The Twenty-One Balloons



**balustrade** - a rail supported by posts that is placed along the outside of a porch or platform

**capable** - having the ability to do something

**carcass** - the body of a dead animal

**closely** – in a near manner; intimately; near or close in place, time, or relationship

**continuous** - never-ending, without interruptions, breaks, or pauses; uninterrupted; unbroken; unceasing; constant; perpetual

**desolate** - deserted or uninhabited; gloomy; barren; bleak or stark; bare

**detached** - parted, separated, or disengaged from something; removed, unfastened, or disconnected; took off; became distant or uninvolved

**flotsam** - floating debris and wreckage

**fraternity** - a group of people associated with a common interest or purpose

**intermission** - a break or a period of time between activities; a break or a rest during an event; a temporary pause; the act of suspending activity temporarily

**intrepid** - courageous; brave

**magnificent** - arousing or inspiring awe or wonder; grand; wonderful; splendid; great; outstanding; dazzling

**perpetual** - never-ending; everlasting or eternal; continuing forever or for an unlimited time; endless; uninterrupted or unbroken; never ceasing nor stopping; constant; continuous

**sinister** - evil or appearing to be evil; menacing or threatening; disastrous or harmful

**unprecedented** - having no previous example from which to draw

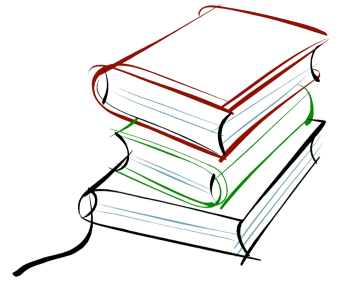
# High Level Questions

## The Twenty-One Balloons



These questions can be used to differentiate and scaffold instruction as a basis for class discussions, small group work, and/or extended individual writing assignments.

1. Consider the various balloon inventions cited in the book. Which ones are scientifically plausible, and which ones are absurd? Are any of them worth attempting?
2. The children on Krakatoa have duties to perform as well as responsibilities to assume. Discuss the life style of the children on the island. Does it have advantages over that of the typical American child?
3. A substantial portion of the book is presented as the Professor's lecture to the club. How does the author make this lecture convincing and effective?
4. What do the Krakatoans lack? Is their life as complete as they seem to think it is? Are they better off than most people?
5. What questions would you have for Professor Sherman, now that his story is finished?
6. Choose one of the inventions from the chapter and discuss what you liked and disliked about it. What changes would you make to the invention? Would it be a useful invention today?
7. Do you agree or disagree? The people who lived on Krakatoa wanted to keep the diamond mines a secret. Defend your answer.
8. Which events The Twenty-One Balloons could not have happened.
9. Defend Mr. M's criteria for choosing the 20 families that came to the island.
10. What is your opinion of Mr. F's explanation of why people live on top of a volcano when they could take some diamonds and live in luxury anywhere else. Support your opinion with evidence from the text.



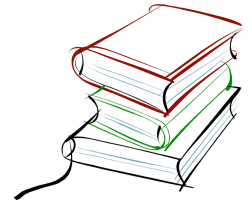
# Using Choice Boards

Choice boards give students the opportunity to participate in multiple tasks that allow them to practice skills they've learned in class or to demonstrate and extend their understanding of concepts. From the board, students either choose or are assigned tasks to complete. Individual tasks address learning style modalities.

To scaffold the activities for struggling readers, teachers can modify the tasks using the blank template provided or give more details for performance criteria. Some teachers like to assign point values for the different tasks.

# Choice Board

## The Twenty-One Balloons

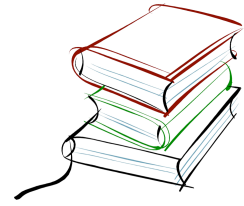


<p>Create a charades game with key events from the story. Play the game in groups.</p>	<p>Use an encyclopedia to research the actual volcanic destruction of Krakatoa and compare your findings with the Professor's account of the disaster.</p>	<p>Create a chart evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of the inventions found on the island.</p>
<p>Draw a map of the island. Label where at least 6 key events took place.</p>	<p>Write 5 analogies about Gourmet Government.</p>	<p>Create several short video clips to present ideas from the book.</p>
<p>Create a Rap summarizing the story.</p>	<p>Create a table categorizing the natural elements in the story.</p>	<p>Make a PowerPoint about hot air balloons or volcanoes.</p>



# Choice Board

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# Using a RAFT Matrix

A RAFT matrix enhances students' comprehension of novels they're reading and information they're learning. It also provides a fun way to encourage student writing. RAFT is an acronym for *role*, *audience*, *format*, and *topic*:

- **Role.** The role is the person or people the student becomes for this project. Sometimes students take on the role of a book character, historical figure, or contemporary personality, such as Peyton Manning, and at other times, they are themselves.
- **Audience.** The audience is the person or people who will read or view this project. They may include students, teachers, parents, or community members, as well as simulated audiences, such as book characters and historical personalities.
- **Format.** The format is the genre or activity that students create. It might be a letter, brochure, cartoon, journal, poster, essay, newspaper article, speech, or digital scrapbook.
- **Topic.** The topic pertains to the book. It may be an issue related to the book, an essential question, or something of personal interest.

RAFT is an effective way to differentiate instruction by providing tiered activities. The BCSR RAFT matrices are scaffold and can be adjusted according to students' achievement levels, English proficiency, and interests.

# RAFT Matrix



## The Twenty-One Balloons

Role	Audience	Format	Topic
The Kids on Krakatoa	Readers of the San Francisco Times	Full page newspaper ad	Krakatoan inventions
Mr. M	Prospective families	Travel Brochure	Come to Krakatoa
Professor Sherman	Former Class	Advice column	How to travel comfortably in a hot air balloon
Explorers Club	Mayor	6-8 panel storyboard	Professor Sherman's adventure

# RAFT Matrix Rubric



**STUDENT NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_ **NOVEL:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Accuracy** 5 4 3 2 1  
Information is accurate and supported with specific details from the novel.

Comments:

**Role** 5 4 3 2 1  
The writing is credible in the role assigned.

Comments:

**Format** 5 4 3 2 1  
The proper format was used.

Comments:

**Conventions** 5 4 3 2 1  
The writing had no errors in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, or spelling.

Comments:

**Creativity** 5 4 3 2 1  
Writing shows imagination and originality.

Comments:

Assessment Guide  
5 = Above and Beyond  
4 = Meeting Standard  
3 = Working to Standard  
2 = Developing  
1 = Incomplete

# RAFT Matrix

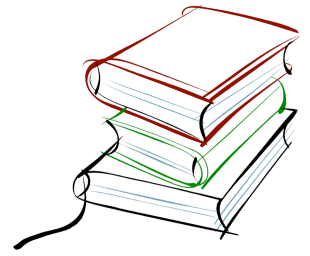
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Role	Audience	Format	Topic

# Extended Resources

## The Twenty-One Balloons



**Kid friendly writing rubrics and checklists address all 10 standards Grades 3-6**  
<http://allwritewithme.com/for-teachers/kid-friendly-writing-rubrics-checklists/>

### **Background on Krakatoa**

<http://www.kids-fun-science.com/krakatoa-eruption.html>

### **Background on volcanoes**

<http://www.sciencekids.co.nz/sciencefacts/earth/volcano.html>

### **Background on hot air balloons**

<http://pbskids.org/dragonflytv/show/balloon.html>

<http://nvaloft.com/2013/02/14/fun-facts-about-hot-air-balloons/>

<http://www.balloonfiesta.com/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,print,0&cntnt01articleid=6&cntnt01showtemplate=false&cntnt01returnid=57>

# 1883 Krakatoa Eruption

## Introduction

The Krakatoa eruption of 1883 created pyroclastic flows that traveled across the surface of the ocean to nearby islands. The hurricane force winds with super-heated gases and rocks burned many people living on nearby islands. The pyroclastic flows also created tsunamis that sank ships and destroyed villages on the shores of nearby islands.



**Anak Krakatoa , NOAA**

## Krakatoa Island prior 1883

Prior to 1883 the three volcanoes that made up Krakatoa island had not erupted for over 200 years. Then steam and gas eruptions began in the spring of 1883 delighting passing ships and villagers living in the region.

## Climatic eruption

The climatic eruption started at noon on August 26 with an explosion that shot a cloud of black ash and pumice about 25 kilometers into the air. The climatic eruption continued all afternoon and into the night.

## Most island blown away

Early the next morning four great eruptions began about 5:30 am culminating in a blast that blew two-thirds of the island away creating a six kilometer wide caldera. These eruptions were heard through out the Indian Ocean and as far away as Australia.

## Pyroclastic flows

Nearby islands were battered by pyroclastic flows that generated tsunamis. Ash and pumice continued to be blown into the air covering nearby islands with layers of ash and pumice.

## Tsunamis

Pyroclastic flows generated tsunamis that swept over nearby islands sweeping over 3000 people into the ocean from just one island. The Dutch estimated approximated 36,000 people died during these two days.

## Java and Sumatra

Ninety percent of the people were killed by tsunamis. Ten percent were killed by pyroclastic flows that flowed across the ocean to nearby Java and Sumatra which were still hot enough to burn people to death with the hot gases and rocks in the flows when they came ashore.

## Krakatoa today

Today Anak Krakatoa in the image above has grown into a small island in the caldera formed by the 1883 eruption. The volcano is still active and is closely monitored by geologists.





## GRADES 6-11

### Research Simulation Tasks Rubric and Literary Analysis Tasks Rubric

Construct Measured	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1	Score Point 0
<b>Reading Comprehension of Key Ideas and Details</b>	The student response demonstrates <b>full comprehension</b> of ideas stated explicitly and inferentially by providing an <b>accurate</b> analysis and supporting the analysis with <b>effective and convincing</b> textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates <b>comprehension</b> of ideas stated explicitly and/or inferentially by providing a <b>mostly accurate</b> analysis, and supporting the analysis with <b>adequate</b> textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates <b>basic comprehension</b> of ideas stated explicitly and/or inferentially by providing a <b>generally accurate</b> analysis and supporting the analysis with <b>basic</b> textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates <b>limited comprehension</b> of ideas stated explicitly and/or inferentially by providing a <b>minimally accurate</b> analysis and supporting the analysis with <b>limited</b> textual evidence.	The student response demonstrates <b>no comprehension</b> of ideas by providing inaccurate or no analysis and <b>little to no</b> textual evidence.
<b>Writing Written Expression</b>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addresses the prompt and provides <b>effective and comprehensive</b> development of the claim or topic that is <b>consistently appropriate</b> to the task by using <b>clear and convincing</b> reasoning supported by <b>relevant textual</b> evidence;</li> <li>demonstrates <b>purposeful</b> coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it <b>easy to follow</b> the writer's progression of ideas;</li> <li>establishes and maintains an <b>effective</b> style, attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addresses the prompt and provides <b>mostly effective</b> development of the claim or topic that is <b>mostly appropriate</b> to the task, by using <b>clear</b> reasoning supported by <b>relevant textual</b> evidence;</li> <li>demonstrates coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it <b>fairly easy to follow</b> the writer's progression of ideas;</li> <li>establishes and maintains a <b>mostly effective</b> style, while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addresses the prompt and provides <b>some</b> development of the claim or topic that is <b>somewhat appropriate</b> to the task, by using <b>some</b> reasoning and <b>text-based</b> evidence;</li> <li>demonstrates <b>some</b> coherence, clarity, and/or cohesion, making the writer's progression of ideas <b>usually discernible but not obvious</b>;</li> <li>has a style that is <b>somewhat</b> effective, <b>generally</b> attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>addresses the prompt and develops the claim or topic and provides <b>minimal</b> development that is <b>limited in its appropriateness</b> to the task by using <b>limited</b> reasoning and <b>text-based</b> evidence; or</li> <li>is a developed, text-based response with <b>little or no awareness</b> of the prompt;</li> <li>demonstrates <b>limited</b> coherence, clarity, and/or cohesion, making the writer's progression of ideas <b>somewhat unclear</b>;</li> <li>has a style that has <b>limited</b> effectiveness, with <b>limited</b> awareness of the norms of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is <b>undeveloped</b> and/or <b>inappropriate</b> to the task;</li> <li><b>lacks</b> coherence, clarity, and cohesion.</li> <li>has an inappropriate style, with <b>little to no</b> awareness of the norms of the discipline.</li> </ul>
<b>Writing Knowledge of Language and Conventions</b>		The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>full command</b> of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be a <b>few minor errors</b> in mechanics, grammar, and usage, but <b>meaning is clear</b> .	The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>some command</b> of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There <b>may</b> be errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage that <b>occasionally impede understanding</b> , but the <b>meaning is generally clear</b> .	The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>limited command</b> of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There <b>may</b> be errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage that <b>often impede understanding</b> .	The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>no command</b> of the conventions of standard English. <b>Frequent and varied errors</b> in mechanics, grammar, and usage <b>impede understanding</b> .

## Narrative Tasks Rubric

Construct Measured	Score Point 4	Score Point 3	Score Point 2	Score Point 1	Score Point 0
<b>Writing Written Expression</b>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is <b>effectively</b> developed with narrative elements and is <b>consistently appropriate</b> to the task;</li> <li>demonstrates <b>purposeful</b> coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it <b>easy to follow</b> the writer's progression of ideas;</li> <li>establishes and maintains an <b>effective</b> style, attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is <b>mostly effectively</b> developed with narrative elements and is <b>mostly appropriate</b> to the task;</li> <li>demonstrates coherence, clarity, and cohesion, making it <b>fairly easy</b> to follow the writer's progression of ideas;</li> <li>establishes and maintains a <b>mostly effective</b> style, while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is developed with <b>some</b> narrative elements and is <b>somewhat appropriate</b> to the task;</li> <li>demonstrates <b>some</b> coherence, clarity, and/or cohesion, making the writer's progression of ideas <b>usually discernible but not obvious</b>;</li> <li>has a style that is <b>somewhat</b> effective, <b>generally</b> attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is <b>minimally</b> developed with <b>few</b> narrative elements and is <b>limited in its appropriateness</b> to the task;</li> <li>demonstrates <b>limited</b> coherence, clarity, and/or cohesion, making the writer's progression of ideas <b>somewhat unclear</b>;</li> <li>has a style that has <b>limited</b> effectiveness, with <b>limited</b> awareness of the norms of the discipline.</li> </ul>	<p>The student response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>is <b>undeveloped</b> and/or <b>inappropriate</b> to the task;</li> <li><b>lacks</b> coherence, clarity, and cohesion;</li> <li>has an <b>inappropriate</b> style, with <b>little to no</b> awareness of the norms of the discipline.</li> </ul>
<b>Writing Knowledge of Language and Conventions</b>		<p>The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>full command</b> of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There may be a <b>few minor errors</b> in mechanics, grammar, and usage, but <b>meaning is clear</b>.</p>	<p>The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>some command</b> of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There <b>may</b> be errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage that <b>occasionally impede understanding</b>, but the <b>meaning is generally clear</b>.</p>	<p>The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>limited command</b> of the conventions of standard English at an appropriate level of complexity. There <b>may</b> be errors in mechanics, grammar, and usage that <b>often impede understanding</b>.</p>	<p>The student response to the prompt demonstrates <b>no command</b> of the conventions of standard English. <b>Frequent and varied errors</b> in mechanics, grammar, and usage <b>impede understanding</b>.</p>