



# TEACHERS' NOTES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary  
(ages 11 to 14; years 6 to 9)

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Legal Studies
- **General capabilities:** Critical and Creative Thinking; Literacy; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Award-winning author Tristan Bancks brings readers another story with challenging moral and ethical dilemmas to explore.
- A fast-paced and action-packed story with broad appeal for young readers.
- Find out more from Tristan Bancks about the creative writing process and strategies and tips you can use to improve your own writing.

## THEMES

- Friendship
- Family
- Loss
- Ethical and moral dilemmas
- Coping with death and uncertainty
- Masculinity in remote regional towns
- Childhood and what happens when it ends prematurely
- Place, displacement and belonging
- Dealing with loss and letting go
- Guilt and shame
- Secrets, mysteries

## PREPARED BY

Tristan Bancks and Penguin Random House Australia

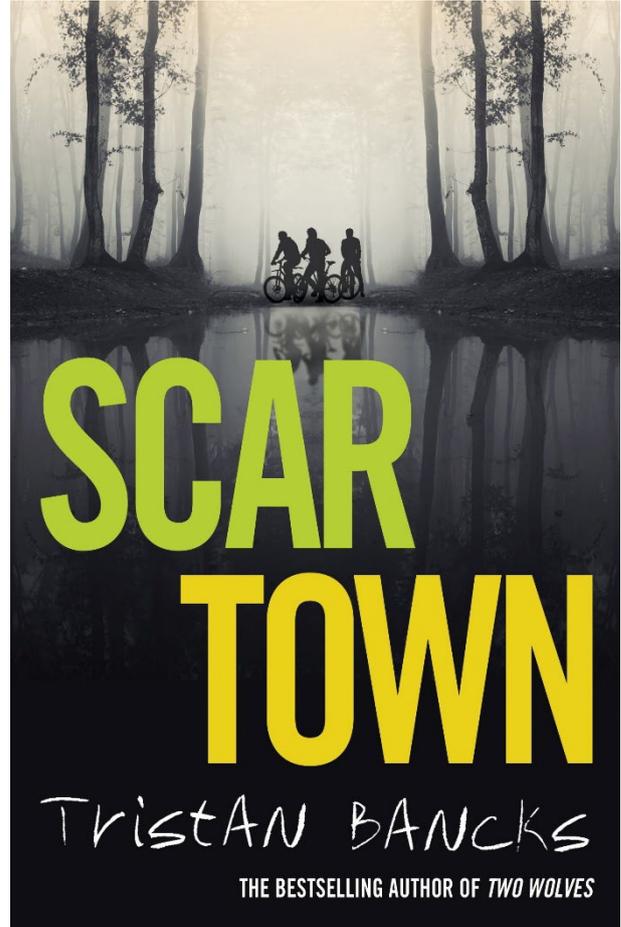
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## *Scar Town* Tristan Bancks

## PLOT SUMMARY

A missing father. A drowned town. A buried secret. Three friends on a dangerous mission to uncover the truth.

Seven years after Old Scarborough was drowned, a house is emerging from the water. Will and his friends Dar and Juno dare each other to explore it.

But when they find bones – and a stash of cash – they realise they're not the only ones interested in its secrets.

Now they're fighting for their lives against the men who want what they found. Will can't leave the mystery alone, though. What if the bones belong to his missing dad?

**A DANGEROUS JOURNEY TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH IN A TOWN THAT WANTS THE PAST TO STAY BURIED.**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tristan Bancks tells stories for the page and screen. His new book is suspense-thriller, *Scar Town*, for age 11+. His other books for kids and teens include *Two Wolves*, *The Fall*, *Detention*, *Cop & Robber*, *Ginger Meggs* and the *Tom Weekly* series. His books have won and been shortlisted for many awards, including a Children’s Book Council of Australia Honour Book, the Prime Minister’s Literary Awards, and the YABBA children’s choice book awards.

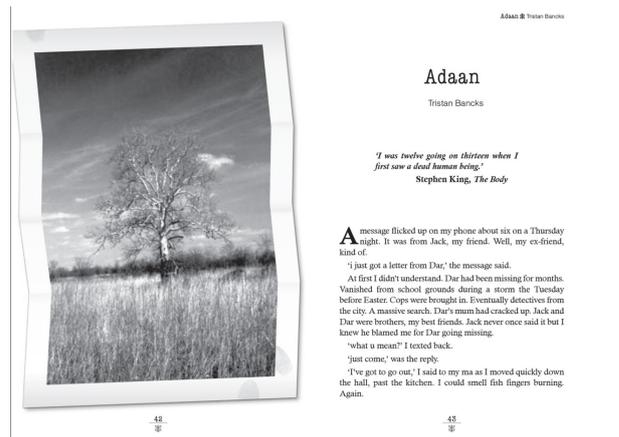
Tristan is an author-advocate for literacy non-profit [Room to Read](#). He is currently working with producers to develop a number of his books for the screen. He’s excited by the future of storytelling and inspiring others to create. You can find out more about Tristan’s books, play games, watch videos, join his [Young Writer’s StorySchool](#) and help him try to change the world at [tristanbancks.com](#).

## AUTHOR’S INSPIRATION

### Where did the story come from?

*Scar Town* is inspired by a short story I wrote in 2009, *Adaan*. The story was a collision of my love of the movie *Stand by Me* (adapted from a Stephen King novella), my childhood in the Blue Mountains and a song called ‘Appalachian Springs’ that I listened to over and over while I wrote the short story (and the book). Soon after I published the story, I had the idea to turn it into a novel. I was writing a Tom Weekly book every

year plus a draft of *Two Wolves* and touring for three months a year but, in the cracks, I was thinking a lot about this drowned-town idea. It was a story that wouldn’t let me go. Here’s a note from 2013: ‘On the edge of a town that lays buried, childhood memories twist into monsters and fear turns friend against friend. Shadows and camping and missing people and lost souls and secrets, so many secrets down there. The stories and myths behind this lake. My darkest, creepiest, most page-turning story ever.’



### Where is *Scar Town* set and why?

It’s set in a town called Scarborough, inspired by my childhood Easter holidays in Jindabyne, NSW, where they sunk the old town beneath a lake for a hydroelectric scheme. We would go out fishing and I would look out of the boat and down into the water, imagining the roads and buildings beneath the surface. It scared and intrigued me. Years later, I heard about how, during drought, water levels drop and these drowned towns start to reappear – slowly, the old buildings become visible above the surface. So I wondered, what would it be like if three kids swam out to a house poking from the lake and they found something inside, something scary and mysterious that changed the way they saw their small town of Scarborough as well as their families and themselves.

### Is *Scar Town* personal to you in any way?

All of my books are about me in one way or another. My books *Two Wolves*, *The Fall*, *Detention* and *Cop & Robber* are fast-paced, exciting reads full of crime and great escapes and near-death experiences, but they are also personal in ways that are sometimes difficult to articulate.

Here are some personal aspects of my life that I used in *Scar Town* to make the characters and the world of the



story feel real and authentic and, also, to make it easier for me to write the story:

- I had two friends who were twins when I was twelve/thirteen years old.
- One of them was obsessed with horror movies.
- The other one liked motorbikes.
- We used to ride around on pushbikes.
- The similarities to my friends end there. *Scar Town* then becomes the kind of story that we always dreamed of getting ourselves involved in – finding a whole bunch of money or some bones in an old, abandoned house.
- I went on holidays to the lakeshore of a sunken town.
- My cousins, who I went with, were also my good friends.
- My uncle was a manager for a big trucking company.
- When I was a kid I always dreamed of being a police officer. This is something you see in *Two Wolves* (Ben dreams of being a police officer), *The Fall* (Sam's father is a crime reporter and police play a key role), *Detention* (Dan's teacher Ms Aston is an ex-police officer like my year 9 English teacher) and *Cop & Robber* (Nash's mum is a cop).

### How long did it take to write?

Um ... well ... in the case of *Scar Town*, a very long time. Thirteen years, in fact. The short story was 2009 (the same time that I started *Two Wolves*) and, in 2010, I decided to try to spin the short story into a novel. I loved the feeling and tone and characters and setting of the story but I didn't know the ending yet, so I kept coming back to it again and again between drafts of other books. But I had never really written this kind of book before. It was only by writing *Two Wolves*, *The Fall*, *Detention* and *Cop & Robber* that I learnt the craft skills necessary to do this story justice. In November 2021, during the pandemic, I did NanoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month, where the challenge is to write a 50,000-word novel in thirty days). I took on the challenge with some writer friends – Dani Vee, Cristy Burne and Adrian Beck – and we detailed our efforts on Dani's Words & Nerds podcast. I pushed through major obstacles and, in 2022, really brought the story home.

### Why did it take so long?

I think it was not having the ending in mind before I began. I realise that I, usually, have a climactic scene in mind that I am writing towards when I'm creating a novel. But, this time, I had a feeling and a setting and some characters and I was writing the story to see where it led me. Also, the end of the short story was

very dark and it felt like too much of a bummer to finish a novel that way. And I needed to turn the story from 2500 words into 50,000 words. It wasn't quite as easy as I had imagined! I'm always very optimistic at the beginning of the writing process. I figure I've written over twenty books now. I should know how to do it. And I'm always so excited about the story that I figure the first draft will be amazing. Not always the case! In fact, I think I have written more drafts of *Scar Town* than any other book. Maybe ten or twelve?! But I still kept believing that tingling feeling in my gut when I thought about the story. I had to finish it.

### What research did you do for the book?

I read and watched videos and gathered lots of images of drowned towns. I visited Jindabyne and Lake Joondalup in WA and lakes in the Blue Mountains and Yamba and Queenstown NZ, all of which gave me details for the setting and sparked scenes in the book. I also spoke with my friend Fleur Ferris (author of *Found* and *Seven Days*) who is an ex-police officer. She advises me on police matters on all of my books. And, as Will's missing dad is an ex-cop, it was particularly important on this book.

### How did you come up with the title?

Naming a story is difficult – anyone who has ever tried to come up with a title for a story or a song or a business or a band will know this. At first *Scar Town* was titled *Adaan*, the name of the short story back in 2009. Then it was titled *Back Harlow Road* (a reference to *Stand by Me*). At one stage it was called *Three Dark, Twisted Tales*, then *The Boy From the Bottom of the Lake*, before becoming *Scarborough* (I often stay with friends in a place called Scarborough in Queensland) and, eventually, it turned into *Scar Town*. Chicagoans call their city Chi-Town and I have a friend from Edmonton, Canada who calls her city E-Town. So, Scarborough became *Scar Town*. And the focus on the word 'scar' became a key theme in the book. For Will, it's all about healing the scars of his town, his family, his friends and himself.

### Questions and activities

- How do Tristan's personal experiences and influences shape the story in *Scar Town*?
- How does the setting of Scarborough contribute to the atmosphere and themes of the novel? How might Tristan's research on drowned towns and visits to various locations enhance the authenticity of the setting?



- What are some of the challenges Tristan faced in writing *Scar Town*, and how did he overcome them?

## WRITING STYLE

### Language

Read the opening passage of the book:

*My eyes flick open to a blood-red sky, water lapping at my face, head split-aching, my mouth a cave of pain. I hear footsteps move away, sloshing through the shallows. I don't know if I've been out for a second or a year. I cough up a throatful of water and try to move but my neck screams in protest.*

*Broken? I wonder, too dazed to feel real panic. My head throbs and I push up but the explosion in my neck is nuclear. My brain feels squishy, like a sponge full of water. I feel a hard, heavy throb at the front of my mouth. I touch my teeth. Fresh, warm blood. I rub it between my fingers, sniff it to check, as though I know what blood smells like. And, somehow, I do. Animal and mineral at the same time. Like meat and metal.*

*There's a scream nearby, sending a thrill of fear through me. Without thinking, I turn fast, pain slicing me in half, and I see the house.*

*The house is where all this began.*

### Questions

- How does the author use language to evoke a strong setting to draw you in to the story right from the opening scene?
- Can you give some examples of words and phrases that bring this scene to life through the different senses?
- What style of writing does the author use in this opening scene to heighten the sense of drama?
- Does this style allow you to form a connection to the characters and the setting?
- Does seeing this opening scene through Will's eyes influence how engaged you become with him as a character?
- How does the first-person point-of-view allow you to step into this scene more closely than if it were told through a third-person voice?

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### Ethical dilemmas

Will faces several dilemmas through the story.

- He knows, from the very beginning, that he shouldn't go inside the house in the lake, but he does.

- He knows they shouldn't take the money, but they do.
- He knows they should tell parents or police, but he agrees not to.
- He knows he should confide in his mum, but he doesn't.
- He knows not to open up Dad's locker but he does.
- He shouldn't go into the archive room at Scarborough Haulage, but he does.
- He definitely knows not to go out to the house a second time, but he agrees to. That's when he knows he has gone too far.
- He discovers that his uncle and grandfather are tied up with the house, money, bones and Dar's abduction and he still questions whether to call police.

### Questions

- Does Will do the right thing in not reporting what he and his friends found to police or his mum immediately?
- What would you do in the same situation if your friend who needed money for their own safety was pressuring you to go back out there to look for more?
- Does it change things when it's your own family who have committed a crime? Or would you be just as likely to do in your uncle and grandfather as you would be to do in a non-family member? Why?

### Missing persons

Will's missing father looms over the entire story. Almost everything Will does is influenced by his missing dad. He holds out hope that his dad might still be alive, but this is a double-edged sword: if his dad is alive and left his family by choice, Will is left to wonder *why*. Will's memories of his dad are sketchy and unreliable, and his mum's refusal to discuss it only heightens Will's fears that he did something wrong to drive his dad away. His mum thinks she is protecting Will, and Will in turns tries to protect her, but they learn that being more open with each other leads to uncovering the truth.

### Friendship

Friendship is one of the key themes explored in *Scar Town*. Will has a unique relationship with each of the twins and their dialogue and interactions and Will's private observations of them are very different. But he tends to stick with the twins rather than with a larger group of friends, despite their parents' history of antagonism. Part of this came about because Tristan



had two close friends who were twins when he was twelve/thirteen years old but, also, having fewer characters in a story allows the writer to go deeper on those few characters. The friendship is tested in various ways:

- Dares and questioning of each other's bravery
- Patience with each other
- Alliances formed
- Trust in one another
- Agreements made
- Agreements broken
- Secrets kept
- Lives risked to save one another

#### Questions and activities

- Can you list examples from the book where any of the above tested their friendship?
- Will is loyal to both Dar and J but the dynamics are different when he interacts with J to when he interacts with Dar. Can you list any differences in the relationships? And how do those differences help drive the story forward?

### Family history

On the first visit to the house, Will makes the observation: 'Mum will already be freaking out. I'll have to tell her I've been hanging out with the Carpenter twins and breaking into a house. It's hard to know which will upset her more.' This seems like just an off-hand comment that Mum doesn't like the twins but, by the end, we gain a much richer insight into all the reasons why Mum has this view of the Carpenters.

#### Question

- Can you list some of the things we discover by the end of the story that contribute to Mum banning Will from hanging out with the Carpenters?

### 'Brave and Gentle'

This is an idea that crops up again and again in *Scar Town*. 'A Brave and Gentle Man' is actually a line on the gravestone of the author's grandfather. Tristan has often thought about the meaning of it, especially when he was a kid. Tristan says: 'I grew up in a world where bravery was often associated with masculinity and being "tough", while gentleness was widely considered a more feminine trait. Yet I saw that my mother was both brave and gentle. My grandfather died when I was only four or five years old, but I have always aspired to be both brave and gentle. To be strong and resilient in

the face of challenges, but to also be caring, to think about other people, and to let myself be vulnerable sometimes. I haven't always succeeded!'

#### Questions

- Can you identify the times in the novel that the idea of 'brave and gentle' crops up?
- What is it that makes Will curious about the line?
- What do these seemingly opposite traits come to represent for Will and how does his understanding of them change through the novel?
- Can you think of people in your life who show both of those qualities?
- Are there times in your life when you've had to be both brave and gentle?

### Fathers and sons

Tristan says: 'Most of my books seem to be about fathers and sons in some way. In *Two Wolves* Ben and his dad have a very difficult relationship, particularly after his father commits a crime and takes the family on the run. His journey is to be able to face his father, not to fear him. In *The Fall* Sam's dad left before he was born and Sam has never met him until just before his thirteenth birthday when the story takes place. In *Detention* Dan's father is up north working in the mines and in *Cop & Robber* Nash watches his father commit a crime in the opening scene of the book. Now, in *Scar Town*, Will's father is missing, presumed dead by many, and Will's journey is about proving that his father is alive, or finding out that he's dead and, along the way, discovering whether Dad going missing was Will's fault or not.

'My parents broke up when I was two years old and I didn't spend a lot of time with my dad when I was a kid, particularly in my teen years, but I think I always wanted to. He was beyond my reach. He was a mystery to me. He wasn't "missing" but he was missing, if that makes sense. I grew up with a stepdad until about the age of twelve and then it was just me and my mum at home. So, when I go to write a book about a twelve year old, I think I'm basing it on my life at that time and, on a subconscious level, working through some of my feelings about that and what it's like to try to get a sense of yourself without a father's input.'

#### Questions and activities

- What do we come to know about Will's dad in the book? You could discuss as a class, in a small group or individually write a character breakdown of Will's dad with some quotes from the book.



- Father-and-daughter relationships are also touched on in *Scar Town*. What do we know about J's relationship with her dad? Why do you think Mr C behaves the way he does towards her and Dar?
- What about Mum and Pops? What is their relationship like? Why do you think it is the way it is?
- Why do you think there are so many challenges in the relationships between parents and their 'children' in the book? Is this true to life or is it just in the novel?

### Mortality

*'I picture a wide, open field under a big blue sky, like they told us to when we did meditation in PE. It works for a moment, but then I see my dad looking down from the sky. I try to cover his face with clouds, but he keeps emerging. And I can't help thinking that even though Mum and I keep getting older, he'll stay the same forever. One day, I'll be older than my dad, which isn't right.'* - p. 53

Will is dealing with the idea of his dad being missing or dead from the very beginning of the book. We get a sense that he might be telling himself that his father is missing but that he suspects the bones are Dad's. When he looks into the eyes of the skull, he feels as though he's looking into himself. And when Dar pushes Kyle Butcher down the stairs and J hits him with a piece of timber to protect themselves and each other, Will must deal with the possibility that Butcher is no longer alive. At the end of the book, Will speaks at his own father's funeral. So, mortality, or death, is a theme running through the book. Tristan says that this probably stems from his favourite quote from *Stand by Me / The Body*: 'I was twelve going on thirteen when I first saw a dead human being.' He says: 'I often place this quote at the top of my manuscript when I'm writing a novel for readers of this age. Twelve/thirteen is an age when I think you really start to form your own thoughts on big ideas like mortality and religion and morality. You start to shift from being a child and accepting what the adults around you think towards having your own views. I try to write the stories that I wanted to read at that age, stories that spark interesting conversations.'

### Questions and activities

- Can you find other quotes from the book where Will is thinking about mortality?
- Did you think that Will's dad would be missing or dead at the end? Did you think he might come back? What were some of the clues that made you think this?

## SYMBOLS

### The lake



The lake is a strong symbol throughout the story. The water level lowering and the town slowly emerging from the lake comes to symbolise the truth emerging and Will's growing understanding of where his father might be and who the bones and money might belong to. The lake is very still at the opening of the story but by the climax, when they're on the dam wall, it 'rushes, roils and froths' as it pours out through the hole. Then, by the end, the town is empty. Just a puddle here and there. Very still and static.

### Questions and activities

- How do these three different descriptions or states of the lake represent or mirror Will's journey through the story?
- Can you find examples of lines where we see the lake representing more than just a lake, for instance where Will notices that the lake level is lower just before or after he makes a major revelation about the unfolding mystery?

### The half-submerged house

'A cold breeze blows up the hillside and through the house and I remember how I felt when we first saw it up close. And when J told us she was going inside and started swimming out. We were hot, our skin burning, and I was terrified of what might be in there. It ended up being much worse than I'd imagined. But, now, looking at the house, it looks naked, stripped of its secrets. And right up on top, above the attic, at the peak of the roof, I see the crow. It starts to caw and,



this time, I smile. I was scared of it and the house and everything before. It was all unknown. But none of it scares me anymore.' - *Scar Town* p. 240

The house is drowning when we first see it. A crow up top, a mud-stained sneer and hanging with waterweed. It creaks and groans and looks back at Will through broken-window eyes, almost like the house is alive, like it's a monster. Will is terrified of it at first and for good reason. By the mid-point of the novel he and his friends are attacked at the house and must face whether J has accidentally killed Kyle Butcher. But, from that point on, Will's courage grows and he tries to be brave in tracking down clues, finding his friend and lifting the veil of lies that hangs over his family and his town.

### Questions

- Can you name some of the key plot points or turning points when Will makes a decision that moves him towards no longer being afraid of the house?
- Can you think of any ways in which the half-submerged house might represent Will's growing sense of courage? Think about where Will is in his life at the beginning of the novel and where he is at the end. How does the house reflect him?

### The money

The money is an important element driving the story forward. J's motivation to keep the money is what causes the friends to keep the secret, which allows events to unfold to a point of no return. Filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock, known as 'the master of suspense', called this kind of object in a story a MacGuffin - an object or device that serves as a trigger for the plot and a motivator for the characters. The MacGuffin provided Tristan with a structure for the story with mystery and suspense that allowed him to then explore the characters and history of the town and the various ideas and themes in the story.

### Questions and activities

- Is there another MacGuffin in *Scar Town*?
- Can you think of other books or movies that have a MacGuffin?
- Try researching 'MacGuffins'. See what you discover and share your findings with your class.
- Could you write a story, individually, in a small group or as a class that involves a character or group of characters in pursuit of a MacGuffin?

### The scars

The title *Scar Town* stuck for a reason. Often writers give their characters scars. Not so much external ones, but internal scars, personal scars from their past that they have to deal with and heal throughout the course of the story. A character scar is often something that drives the character in their decision-making. It can raise the tension and the stakes. It might make the reader care more about the character. It's something that the character might avoid talking about because it's too painful (like J and her Mum leaving, perhaps?). In this story, I knew that it was about characters trying, or being forced, to deal with the scars of their past. By the end, not everyone lives happily ever after. Some are more successful than others at healing and moving on. Some just create new scars.

### Activity

- See if you can think of any particular character scars for the following characters in *Scar Town*:
  1. Will
  2. Dar
  3. J
  4. Mum
  5. Pops
  6. Uncle Monty
  7. Mr C
  8. Scarborough itself

### The bones

The bones symbolise one of the key themes in *Scar Town*. Will is dealing with the fact that his father is missing and in two weeks will be considered dead in the eyes of the law. And now he has found these bones. Imagine the story without the bones. J would still want to keep the money secret and they would probably go out to the house a second time.

### The crow

We see the crow three times in the book, each time Will and his friends visit the house. From the beginning Will thinks the crow is warning him to stay away. When they make it into the attic the first time, the crow glares at them and when they find the bones and the door slams shut it's the crow's flapping feathers and call that adds to the intensity of the moment and sends Will, Dar and J running. Crows represent transformation and rebirth. They often symbolise death, too, which is a type of transformation.

### Questions and activities



- What did the crow symbolise or mean to you as you read the story?
- Is symbolism useful in books? Why do authors use recurring motifs or symbols?
- Is the crow actually warning Will in some way? Or is it just Will's mind creating meaning for the crow, playing tricks on him? Is it just a bird sitting on a house watching some humans?

### Will's house and Pops' cabin

*'I try to calm myself, concentrating on all the houses with weather-beaten For Sale signs out front, their corners curled like the owners have abandoned the idea of ever selling. I know Mum's pretty much given up. There must be a hundred houses for sale in a town with about three-fifty total. Some people, after having their house on the market for years, just lock up and drive away. My friend Jonah left with his family last year, and I was jealous. Mum's wanted to leave since she was a kid, but there was always something keeping her here. Family. Money. My dad. Her dad. Having a kid. The business. Our place is a hundred-year-old house moved up from the old town.'*

Will's house was moved up from the old town. It's not a new build. Tristan says: 'I did this partly because my house is a light-blue, hundred-year-old weatherboard home and I know that kind of house. But also because the problems that Will and his mum are dealing with began in the old town and have continued in the new. They've brought their problems with them, so I liked the idea that they were still living in the same place. Mum and Will have been trying to get out of Scarborough for a long time and they just haven't been able to. The journey of the story is from being stuck, trapped by the past and, by uncovering the truth, being freed.'

Pops' cabin, however, is a new build. He's been downsized from a huge house to this little granny flat behind Will's house. Perhaps this mirrors his demise from being an important figure in the town to losing his money, status, health and, by the end, his freedom.

### Questions and activities

- What are your impressions of the town of Scarborough from the description above. Could you try drawing the town? Or imagine what kind of music might play in the movie of *Scar Town* as Will is riding through town at night making these observations?
- How does the positioning of Pops' cabin behind Will's house foreshadow the ultimate outcome of the story?
- Early in the story, why did you think Mum didn't want to go out to Pops' cabin or invite him into her house?
- Do you believe that Mum just thought Pops was a bit crooked but that she didn't think he was capable of what he's, ultimately, guilty of?
- What do we learn about the nature of Mum's relationship with Pops during the story? The author obviously kept this a mystery for a reason, but what are the clues we get along the way?

### Five books that influenced the writing of *Scar Town*

All stories are partly inspired by other stories. All authors have influences on their work. Tristan was inspired by books, movies, songs, pictures and other works in the writing of *Scar Town*. Tristan sees them not so much as straight crime stories but, rather, stories that have heart, with a crime at their centre. They're stories about place and character and emotion and mystery. Here are five particular books that had an impact on the writing process, and his thoughts on each.

*[NB: Some of these are adult novels and may not be suitable for younger readers.]*

- **Skellig – David Almond**  
A story about a kid who finds a crusty old man, an angel, living in an old garage behind a house his parents have bought. This secret weighs heavily on the protagonist and he has to live a dual life – his time with Skellig and coping with difficulties that his family is facing. It taught me a lot about secrets and about a character having an internal and external life and challenges in each.
- **Jasper Jones – Craig Silvey**  
A young adult novel set in a small Australian town in which teenagers must search for truth in order to solve a mystery. Friendship, secrets, dilemmas and lies.
- **The Body – Stephen King**  
An adult novella turned into a young adult movie, *Stand by Me*, which was my favourite as a teenager and is still one of my favourites now. It's about four kids who head out on a railway line searching for a dead body. *Scar Town* turns that story upside down in that the kids find the bones up-front and the journey is to find out who they belong to. But both stories are about coming-of-age.



- **The Dry – Jane Harper**  
An adult novel about a man returning to a small town after his friend has died and working through the evidence. I learnt a lot about clues and detective work by reading (and watching the movie of) *The Dry*.
- **Bag of Bones – Stephen King**  
An adult novel about a town with secrets. The unravelling of the story, the main character's growing knowledge of the history of a cabin on a lake, leads to understandings about himself, the town and the passing of his wife.

### A movie and a TV show that influenced the writing of *Scar Town*

#### **Stand by Me**

Tristan says: 'The movie based on *The Body* was my favourite when I was twelve or thirteen years old. It had a profound effect on me – one of those stories that feels like it is my story, like it's about me, even though it's not and it's set in the 1950s in another country. I wanted *Scar Town* to feel universal, too. I felt that same inexplicable connection to *Scar Town* as I was writing it as I feel to *Stand by Me*.'

#### **Stranger Things**

Tristan says: 'This show reminded me of all the movies I loved when I was twelve or thirteen. And, because it's set in the '80s, it feels a bit like my childhood. Kids getting around on bikes the way I used to with my friends. Kids with big secrets and facing major problems, both in their family lives and in terms of the secrets they are discovering about the Upside Down and the government and the questionable choices that adults have made. I like the flawed, imperfect characters and I wanted my characters to feel flawed, too. And for friendship to feel as important as it does in *Stranger Things* and *Stand by Me*. As important as it was to me when I was twelve.'

### Naming characters

Character names, like story titles, are hard to come by. Tristan says: 'In the short story, the main character's name was Chris, then he became Nate, Max and Tristan on the way to becoming Will. Dar and Juno were Dar and Jack in the short story. Will's last name was always Haddon.'

'To name a character, if a book is to be released in 2023 and the character is twelve, I look up "Most popular baby names 2011" and I either choose one of the top ten if I imagine that their parents would have named them a top ten baby name, or I might reach down to number 52 or 79. Sometimes I'll base

the name on a kid I met at a school talk or someone I know but, usually, it either pops into my head or I hit the baby names lists.

'One thing I never do is wait to find out what the character's name is before I begin. I dive in and try them out as I go, leaving a trail of discarded names in my wake.'

#### **Questions and activities**

- Can you think of any other good ways to name a character?
- Do names matter? Can you try writing the opening paragraph of a short story in third-person, naming the character as you write. Then read it back and replace the name with one or two others. How does the name of the character change the feeling of the character for you?
- Think of some of your favourite book characters and try replacing their names and see how it makes you feel. Can you come up with a better name for a famous character? Barry Potter, maybe?

### Naming chapters

Tristan says: 'I had an idea that I wanted every chapter to have a title that was earthy and primal. I tried to use as many titles from my list of chapter ideas as I could but, sadly, not all of them made it in. These words, though, were something I returned to again and again as I wrote the book and they helped set the tone of the story. I wanted *Scar Town* to be authentic and true, like it had bubbled up out of the earth.'

Here is Tristan's list of possible chapter titles.

Tomahawk  
Catapult  
Ash  
Bones  
Blood  
Dust  
Earth  
Water  
Within  
Air  
Truth  
Flesh and Blood  
Skin  
Hope  
Money  
Wonder  
Fire  
Wind  
Marrow  
Mother



Father  
 Shallow  
 Deep  
 Crow  
 Death  
 Life  
 Scars  
 Escape  
 Funeral  
 Wolf  
 Eyes  
 Fight  
 Battle

**Questions and activities**

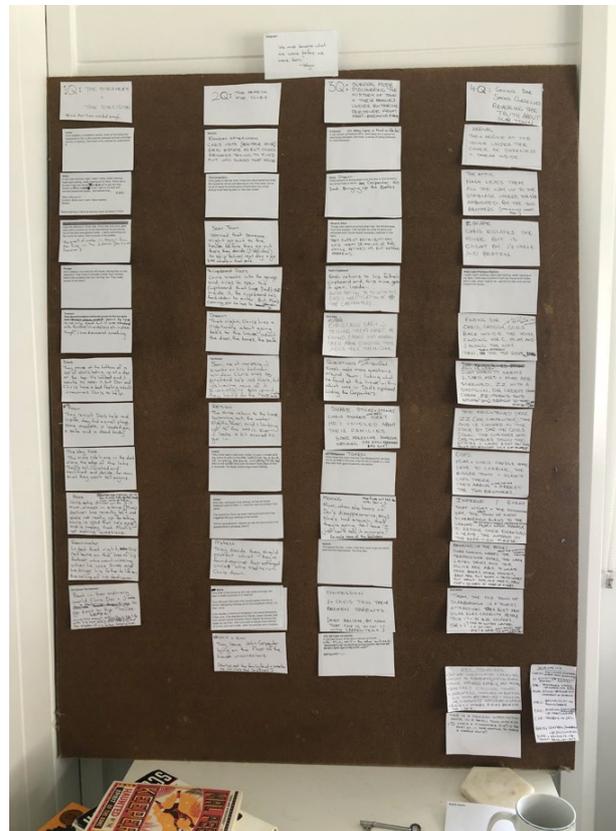
- How many of these chapter titles made it into the book?
- Can you see how a list of words like this could influence the writing of a story? Could you try brainstorming a list like this next time you write a story?
- Can you name three chapter titles you feel should have made it in, but didn't? Which part of the story might you give that title to?



**Vision board**

Tristan is a very visual person. He likes to gather images, videos, music and maps as he develops his stories to spark and feed ideas. He says: 'You don't have to invent everything yourself. Fiction is often better when it's riddled with facts and truths from the real world.'

Below is an image that helped inspire the writing of the book, and some photos of the actual story creation.



### Soundtrack

Two songs – ‘Appalachian Springs’ by The Verve and ‘The Braying Mule’ by Ennio Morricone – captured the mood of this story for Tristan. In fact, he listened to The Verve song over and over as he wrote the short story. And the mystery and darkness of it influenced the entire feeling of the story. It’s the first song in Tristan’s ‘book soundtrack’ – a unique collection of songs that he gathers for each book and listens to as he writes.

Here is the link to the *Scar Town* soundtrack on Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3lOem14peQdhTvUP8atu0C?si=4c208b4968874075&pt=4ec427895d21babe-f3d986f09464d887>

You can find Tristan’s other book soundtracks by Googling them.

### Activity

- Try listening to ‘Appalachian Springs’ and looking at the cover of the book. Can you see any connections between the two? How does the feeling of the song match the mood of the cover?

## FURTHER DISCUSSION POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

### Discussion questions

- What do you think the title *Scar Town* represents? How does it relate to the story?
- Discuss the theme of secrets in the novel. How do secrets drive the plot and affect the characters’ relationships?
- How does the setting of *Scar Town* contribute to the overall atmosphere and suspense of the story?

### Character analysis

- Choose one of the main characters from *Scar Town* (e.g., Will, Dar, Juno) and create a character profile. Include their physical appearance, personality traits, motivations and conflicts. Discuss how the character evolves throughout the story and the choices they make. Use evidence from the text to support your analysis.
- Create a character relationship diagram, illustrating the connections and dynamics among the main characters. Discuss how

these relationships influence the story’s progression.

### Plot development

- Create a visual representation of the plotline in *Scar Town*. Identify the key events, turning points and the climax of the story. Discuss the pacing and how suspense is built throughout the narrative. Encourage students to consider the author’s use of foreshadowing and plot twists.

### Imaginative writing

- Imagine you are one of the characters in *Scar Town*. Write a diary entry or a letter from their perspective, describing their experiences, thoughts and emotions. Encourage students to reflect on the challenges, dilemmas and moral decisions their chosen character faces. Emphasise the importance of using descriptive language and capturing the character’s voice.

### Research and presentation

- Investigate the concept of coastal erosion and its impact on communities. Explore how rising sea levels and climate change can affect coastal towns. Have students present their findings in a creative format such as a poster, slideshow or short video. Discuss possible solutions and strategies for adapting to or mitigating the effects of coastal erosion.

### Book review

- After reading *Scar Town*, have students write a book review sharing their thoughts and opinions on the novel. Encourage them to consider the strengths of the story, the writing style and the overall impact of the book. Promote critical thinking by asking them to support their opinions with specific examples from the text.

### Pre-reading activities

- Icebreaker: Have students share a personal story of overcoming a challenge. Discuss the emotions, strategies and lessons learned during those experiences.



- Prediction exercise: Show the cover of the book and ask students to predict the significance of the title and the imagery. Encourage them to make hypotheses about the characters and plot.

### Ethics and morality

- Ethical dilemmas: Present students with ethical dilemmas faced by the characters in the book. Divide the class into small groups and have them discuss and debate possible courses of action, considering the consequences and moral implications.
- Personal reflection: Encourage students to reflect on their own values and ethical choices. Have them write journal entries or engage in group discussions about how they would navigate similar dilemmas in real life.

### Writing and creative activities

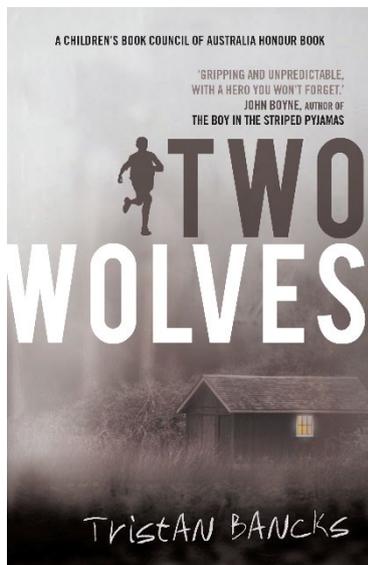
- Alternate endings: Ask students to rewrite the ending of the novel, exploring different possibilities and resolutions. Encourage them to justify their choices and consider the impact on the characters' lives.
- Character journals: Assign students to write journal entries from the perspective of a chosen character, providing insights into their thoughts, emotions and experiences. This activity encourages empathy and a deeper understanding of the characters' perspectives.

Conclusion: *Scar Town* offers a rich and thought-provoking reading experience for students. By engaging with the novel's themes, characters and ethical dilemmas, students can develop critical thinking skills, empathy and a greater appreciation for resilience in the face of adversity. These teaching materials provide a foundation for meaningful discussions and creative activities that enhance students' understanding of the book and its relevance to their own lives.

You can find more of Tristan's creative writing exercises in the [Teachers' Notes](#) for *Two Wolves*.



## FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



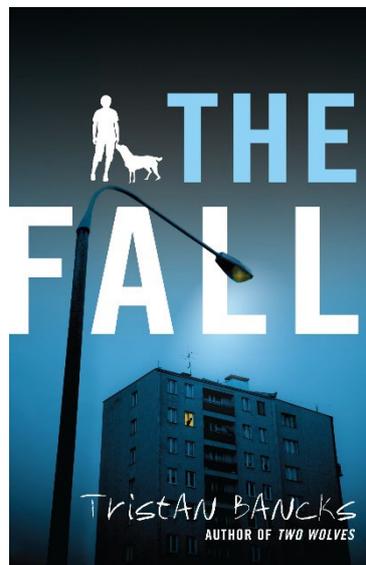
*Two Wolves*  
by Tristan Bancks

One afternoon, police officers show up at Ben Silver's front door. Minutes after they leave, his parents arrive home. Ben and his little sister Olive are bundled into the car and told they're going on a holiday. But are they?

It doesn't take long for Ben to realise that his parents are in trouble. Ben's always dreamt of becoming a detective – his dad even calls him 'Cop'. Now Ben gathers evidence and tries to uncover what his parents have done.

The problem is, if he figures it out, what does he do? Tell someone? Or keep the secret and live life on the run?

*Teachers' notes available.*



*The Fall*  
by Tristan Bancks

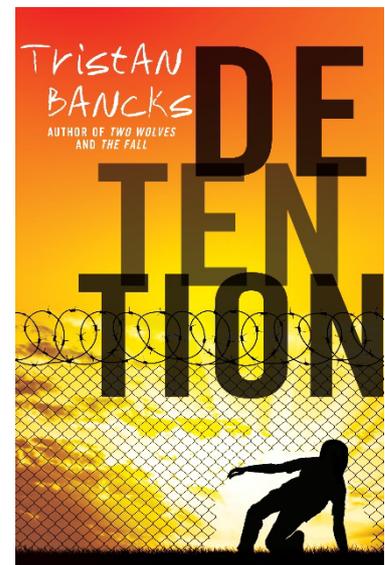
In the middle of the night, Sam is woken by angry voices from the apartment above.

He goes to the window to see what's happening – only to hear a struggle, and see a body fall from the sixth-floor balcony. Pushed, Sam thinks.

Sam goes to wake his father, Harry, a crime reporter, but Harry is gone. And when Sam goes downstairs, the body is gone, too. But someone has seen Sam, and knows what he's witnessed.

The next twenty-four hours could be his last.

*Teachers' notes available.*



*Detention*  
by Tristan Bancks

Sima and her family are pressed to the rough, cold ground among fifty others. They lie next to the tall fence designed to keep them in. The wires are cut one by one.

When they make their escape, a guard raises the alarm. Shouting, smoke bombs, people tackled to the ground. In the chaos Sima loses her parents.

Dad told her to run, so she does, hiding in a school and triggering a lockdown. A boy, Dan, finds her hiding in the toilet block.

What should he do? Help her? Dob her in? She's breaking the law, but is it right to lock kids up? And if he helps, should Sima trust him? Or run?

*Teachers' notes available.*



