

Cop & Robber

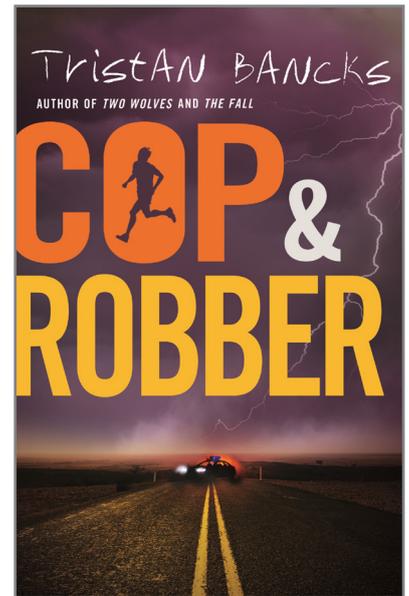
AUTHOR

TRISTAN BANCKS

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary
(Violence)



SYNOPSIS

If your mum was a cop and your dad was a crim who needed your help to commit a crime, would you do it to save him? At what cost?

Nash Hall's dad is a criminal who just can't seem to go straight. He wants Nash to help him commit a robbery. A big one. The trouble is, Nash's mum is a cop. And the robbery is at Nash's school. But Dad owes a lot of money to some very dangerous people and if Nash doesn't help him do the job, it could cost both their lives.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tristan Bancks tells stories for the page and screen. His books for kids and teens include *Two Wolves*, *The Fall*, *Detention*, the Tom Weekly series, *Nit Boy* and *Ginger Meggs*, a 100th anniversary book of short stories based on characters created by his great-great uncle, Jimmy Bancks, in 1921. Tristan's 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, ABIA, YABBA, KOALA, NSW Premier's Literary Awards and Queensland Literary Awards. His latest book is *Cop & Robber*, a tense, fast-paced crime novel with lots of laughs. Tristan is a writer-ambassador 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.

WRITING STYLE

LANGUAGE

The author says: I use words to paint pictures in the reader's mind of what is happening in the story and what the character is thinking, feeling, seeing, smelling, touching and tasting. I try to find unique and authentic detail, to not use cliches when I am describing things. Here's an example of the way the dust storm in the story is described in one scene: 'The wind yowls through gaps in buildings' (p 183). I could have said it howls or blows or I could have just said, 'It is very windy'. But the word 'yowl' came to me and I looked it up – 'a loud, wailing cry'—and that seemed perfect and unexpected. It's not a big word or a particularly impressive word. But it tells us what Nash can hear, not just what he sees.

- How many other examples can you find to describe the dust storm? (Hint: Try looking on pp 157, 182, 189 and 190.)

- Write a short story about someone else experiencing the dust storm in this small town, and what they see, hear, taste, smell and touch.

PACING

- Can you identify certain threads of the story that we learn more about as the story progresses? Make a list of what we learn and when about these story threads:
 - Dad's criminal history
 - What Mum knows about what Dad is doing
 - Nash's development as a runner and his relationship with Mrs Diaz
 - Nash's feelings about what is right and wrong and what he is prepared to do to help Dad.
- Now examine each thread and speculate on why the author chose to withhold or reveal information at a particular point. What story purpose does the revelation of that information have?

ETHICAL DILEMMAS

- Does Nash do the right thing? Is he correct in his judgement to go along with Dad? Should he have told Mum earlier? Would that have made any difference? If you were in the same position, what would you do?
- Identify places in the story, particularly in the first few chapters, where Nash's dad makes bad decisions. What is his motivation?
- Why does Nash want to believe and trust his dad, and what changes his mind?
- Write three different story synopses exploring what might have happened if Nash had made different decisions along the way. How would the story have been different if:
 - Nash told Mum about the two men and what they'd threatened, when he saw her the next day?
 - Nash didn't go back to Dad's house at all after Dad was caught following the service station robbery?
 - Nash didn't help his dad with the school robbery by finding out more about the office safe?
- What do you think about the decision Nash's mum makes, and what Mrs Diaz says about 'A mother bear will do whatever is necessary to protect her cub' on p 224? Does that protective nature of a mother justify Mum's actions?
- Consider also what Mum tells Nash about the larger covert police operation looking into the criminal activity of the two men and the people they work for in Chapter 35. Does that justify her actions? What would a court of law or a jury have to say about her actions?

RELATIONSHIPS AND CONFLICT

- Have a think, or a conversation in class, about Nash's key relationships in the book and how they progress from the first chapter with that character through the middle to the end.
 - Nash and Dad
 - Nash and Mum
 - Nash and Griff
 - Nash and Mrs Diaz.
- You might want to ask questions like:
 - What do we know about their relationship from their first scene together?
 - What is the main problem in their relationship?
 - How does Nash deal with the problem in the relationship?
 - Does he always make the right choice? Does he always make the wrong choice? Or is it a mix? How does this compare with real life?
 - How does each relationship change throughout the story?
 - By the end, are all the relationships resolved? Do we get to a point where we feel as though the problem has been solved and everyone lives happily ever after? Or are some things left open? Why did the author make those choices?
- Nash often feels two things at once and this causes inner conflict for him. Do you ever feel this way? You love

someone, but they also make you really angry?

- Can you find other examples in the book of Nash's emotions conflicting?
- Does it help the story to have these inner conflicts or does it just make it muddy and confusing? And if it's muddy and confusing, does that help us to understand the way the character feels or does it make the story unclear?
- What other stories have you read or films have you watched that feature characters with complex, conflicting emotions?

FORGIVENESS

- Should Nash forgive his father? Why/why not?
- Should Nash forgive his mother? Why/why not?
- Should Mrs Diaz allow Nash to stay at the school? Examine her motivations and why she makes the decisions she does, and how the events of her own childhood have affected her career choices.

CLASS, OPPORTUNITY AND PRIVILEGE

- How does his class identification and moving in between the three different 'worlds' of Mum's home, Dad's home and school affect Nash?
- Is running a sport that crosses all classes? Why/why not?

THEMES AND SYMBOLS

THE DUST STORM

- What role do you think the dust storm plays in the story? Imagine the story without the storm. What if there was the race and the robberies, but no dust storm? What does the dust storm add?
- What do you think the dust storm says about Nash's situation or his state of mind? Does it reflect or contrast anything that Nash is feeling?

RUNNING, SPORT, COMPETITION AND MOTIVATION

- Often, we play sport purely to win. Write down or have a class discussion about other reasons to play sport. Why do you play sport? What happens when people are too obsessed with winning? Is it possible to be obsessed with winning but to do it in a healthy way?
- Find and discuss the motivations different characters in the story have for choosing running as their form of exercise—for instance, Nash, Mrs Diaz and Griff. What is different for each person, and what is similar?
- Is there anything that you do purely for the positive feeling it gives you? Not to win or to be appreciated by others, but because it feels like part of you and you can't help but do that thing, and the act of doing the thing is its own reward. What is it? Write a short piece describing how that activity makes you feel.

BUSHRANGERS

- Why do you think the author chose to have the thread of bushrangers running through the book?
- How do bushrangers resonate with some of the key themes the author explores in the novel?
- Who was Ben Hall? Was he a 'goodie' or a 'baddie'? Or do people disagree on whether he was a criminal or a hero?
- Is Nash a criminal or a hero in the story?
- How does Nash's journey of doing the wrong thing in order to try to do the right thing resonate with this aspect of Australian history?
- The way Nash's dad sees it, the service station and the school and the bank can afford to lose a little money, whereas he has none. Is this right? What do you feel about people with few or no resources taking a little from businesses that have a lot?

CREATIVE WRITING

- Have a go at copying, word-for-word, the first few paragraphs of *Cop & Robber*. Just read them and either write them into a notebook or into a document.

- Write down what you noticed about the writing. Here are some of the things you might want to consider.
 - Sentence length. Were the sentences short or long? Were they the same length, sentence after sentence, or did they vary in length?
 - Word choice. Is the vocabulary complex or are the words fairly simple?
 - Character. What do we learn about the main characters in those few paragraphs?
 - Meaning and ideas. What are some of the ideas the writer is starting to explore?
 - What is the tone? Is it dramatic and serious or light and funny?
 - Pacing. Is it fast-paced or slow and steady? How does the writer set the pace of the story? What tools do they use?
 - Dialogue. Is there any dialogue? If not, how does the writer keep the story moving forward?