

Scar Town

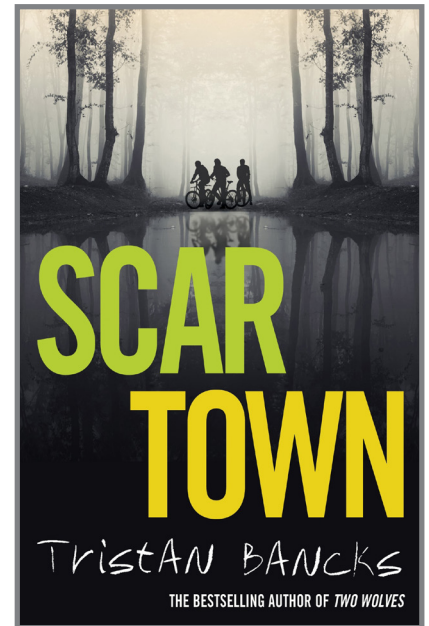
AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower to Mid Secondary



SYNOPSIS

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?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tristan Bancks tells stories for the page and screen. His new book is suspense/thriller, *Scar Town*. 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.

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 and mysteries

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading, 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. Revisit their responses once they have read the book and see if they were correct.

WRITING STYLE

Language

- Read the opening passage of the book that ends with 'The house is where all this began.' and then answer the following 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?
- Character names, like story titles, are hard to come by. Here is Tristan's process for naming characters '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.' 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?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Ethical Dilemmas

- 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?

Friendship

- Can you list examples from the book where any of the following instances tested their friendship?
 - 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.
- 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?
- 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. The author, Tristan Bancks, 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.' Think about 'brave and gentle' in *Scar Town* and then answer the following 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

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

Morality

- '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) 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?

SYMBOLISM

- Is symbolism useful in books? Why do authors use recurring motifs or symbols?

The Lake

- The lake is a strong symbol throughout the story it symbolises:
 - The truth as the water level lowers and the town slowly emerges from the lake.
 - 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.
 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

- 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, also known as a MacGuffin (an object or device that serves as a trigger for the plot and a motivator for the characters). 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.
 - Write a story that involves a character or group of characters in pursuit of a MacGuffin?

The Scars

- In this story, Tristan 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. See if you can think of any particular character scars for the following characters in *Scar Town*:
 - Will
 - Dar
 - J
 - Mum
 - Pops
 - Uncle Monty
 - Mr C
 - Scarborough itself.

The Crow

- Crows represent transformation and rebirth. They often symbolise death, too, which is a type of transformation. What did the crow symbolise or mean to you as you read the story?
- 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

- What are your impressions of the town of Scarborough? Could you try drawing the town?
 - 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?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- Here is the link to the *Scar Town* soundtrack on Spotify: <<https://open.spotify.com/playlist/3IOem14peQdhTvUP8atu0C?si=4c208b4968874075&pt=4ec427895d21babef3d986f09464d887>>
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?
- 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?
- Choose one of the main characters from *Scar Town* 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 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.