

Katipo Joe

By Brian Falkner

- Reading • Writing • Social Studies •
- Thinking Skills •



Synopsis

Twelve-year-old Joe is living in pre-World War II Berlin, with his British father and New Zealand mother, attending school and witnessing the excitement of his friends who are enthusiastically joining the Hitler Youth Movement. Joe feels uncomfortable with the growing mistreatment of local Jews. After the arrest of his father as a spy, he is forced to escape from Berlin with his mother. A few days after arriving in London, Joe is shipped off to stay with relatives in New Zealand.

But two years later, with war looming in Europe, he is frustrated by his distance from the action, and his inability to do anything about finding his father. After a harrowing journey back to Europe, and surviving when his ship is torpedoed, Joe attempts to locate his mother, but is shocked to find the address she'd been writing letters from doesn't exist. After finding and following his mother for a few days, he realises she might be a spy. Joe and his 'Blitz-kid' friends take photographs of an assassin and then become his next target. They escape but Joe is soon kidnapped by the enemy. Luckily, he is rescued by MI5 – British secret service – who lead him to believe that his mother is dead, and they want to train Joe to work for them.

Joe undergoes rigorous spy training before being dropped into occupied France, disguised as a Hitler Youth member. His mission goes horribly wrong and the Nazis catch him. Fortunately, he is sprung out of prison and tries to escape the city. En route their truck is attacked. Joe evades capture and gets safely back to London where he learns that his mother is not dead. He also learns who betrayed him and is given another mission.

About the Author

Brian Falkner gained a diploma of journalism, worked as a reporter and an advertising copywriter. Other jobs helped pay the bills and expand the first-hand experiences that would enrich his fiction, among them stints as a motorcycle courier, radio announcer, graphic designer and an Internet developer. Brian's previous books with Scholastic NZ have been the widely acclaimed *Shooting Stars*, and his World War One novel, *1917 Machines of War*, part of the Kiwis at War series. He has been published in 14 countries, including the USA, Canada, England, Australia, Germany, France, Japan and the Netherlands. Brian currently lives on the Gold Coast of Australia with his wife and two daughters.

Writing Style

An intriguing, thought-provoking, coming-of-age novel from award-winning author Brian Falkner. *Katipo Joe* touches on themes of survival, personal responsibility and war, in a unique and gripping adventure story. The book is divided into three parts and settings: Book One, in Berlin living with his diplomatic parents until the Gestapo capture his father and then come for Joe's mother. Book Two, in London where Joe finds his mother but suspects she is a Nazi spy and decides to follow her to see what she is up to until he is drawn into the spy ring. And Book Three, in Paris, where he is involved in a mission that is sabotaged. There's also the historical setting of WWII from the perspective of the Germans in the Berlin section and the Allies from the London section onwards.

The story is told from the main character Joe's point of view, first in Germany aged 12, then in London and Paris aged 14. At the beginning of each chapter, Joe's diary entries foreshadow events that will follow. Flashbacks are also used to give backstory to events that are about to happen. Written in the third person point of view in past tense for Book One, then in present tense for Books Two and Three, the author uses several suspense techniques to keep the reader hooked throughout the book such as raising questions, hooks, and cliff hangers. He also foreshadows clues and skills early so that it is believable when revealed later in the story.

The main character's feelings of shame and guilt are revealed in the diary entries in a way that raises questions for the reader. Through the course of the story, Joe goes from being an innocent 12-year-old who thinks 'concentration camps' sound like fun places, to learning they're death camps where millions of people have been killed. He must grow up quickly, learning skills that will help him evade the enemy, including how to kill someone. The characters in the novel are fictional but the historical backdrop of WWII is very real. *Katipo Joe* has been written for ages 12+.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

The novel has been divided up into three parts as follows: Book One pp.12–115; Book Two pp.116–220; Book Three pp.222–401.

During the shared sessions, encourage students to ask questions to clarify their understanding of characters and events. Have them make predictions and inferences and relate events to their own experiences. Also encourage students to identify themes and explain how they are developed in the novel. Read the passages aloud with students reading along in their own copy, or reading by themselves.

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

Look at the cover and read the blurb.

- When and where is this story set? How can you tell?
- Who is the main character in the story?
- What do you think this story might be about? Why do you think that?
- What underlying themes do you think might feature in this story?
- What do you already know about World War II?
- What did the German people think of Hitler prior to WWII? In what way does that differ to how we see him now?

Comprehension questions for pages 12–115

- Read the definition of Katipo. How do you think this might relate to the main character? P.12
- What does he mean by 'there is a wolf among the sheep'? p.17
- What is the importance of what he has seen in the ocean? Pp.16–17 Predict what will happen next.
- What is a 'safe house' in this story? P.29
- Who do you think is coming to their town and what does Joe think about it? Pp.31–32
- Why do you think Joe goes along with the name-calling and plans to smash the baker's window? And why does he have a change of heart later? Pp.44–58
- At the beginning of chapter four there is a passage about castor oil given as a punishment to children. What do you think this is foreshadowing? Pp. 59, 66
- Why do you think Joe's father has been arrested and how does this affect his family?
- What clues does the author give that imply Joe's mother is a spy? Pp.69–72
- Why do the boys think concentration camps aren't too bad? What were they really like? P.79
- How do Joe and his mother escape the house undetected? pp.84–85
- What tips does Joe's mother give Joe to avoid detection and defend himself? Pp.95–96
- How is the author foreshadowing and raising questions in each chapter?



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Comprehension questions for pages 116–220

- Why do you think the author changes from telling the story in past tense in Book One to present tense in Book Two?
- How does Joe get to London in 1941 and how old is he?
- How has the author hooked us in on page 123?
- Predict what happens in Chapter 10 after reading the U.K. Ministry of Home Security instructions.
- Who does Joe see (p.137) that makes his hands shake and heart race? Why do you think he has reacted like this?
- Why do you think Joe follows his mother and does not reveal himself? P.145
- What is Operation Onion and what is their mission? Who is involved? Pp. 170–171
- Why do you think Joe always leaves Grable behind each day? P.171
- What spy techniques does Joe suggest to his team to avoid detection by his mother? Pp.177–178
- How does the author tease out the tension on pages 191–192?
- Predict who the man with the gun works for and what his intentions are. P.194
- Who saves the children and how does he do it? Pp.198–200
- What does the author mean when he comments ‘normal social barriers are breaking down’? p.204
- What does Joe experience after the mission? What are his symptoms? P.206
- How has Joe’s attitude to war changed? Give an example from the text. P.218

Comprehension pp.222– 401

- What does Tar tell Joe that confirms his worst fears? Do you think he is telling the truth? P.235
- What skills does Joe learn at the camp? Pp.253–254
- What has Joe deduced he’ll be doing as a spy and undercover as what? P.254
- What, Where and When is Joe’s mission? P.276
- Why does Joe say his Aunt dances better with prosthetics when he doesn’t even have an aunt? P.287
- What do you think has happened to Rosie? Why has she locked them out? Pp.293–294
- What does Joe realise about the mission when his target doesn’t turn up? Pp.336–337
- Why does Joe kill his old friend Klaus, and how does it make him feel about himself? Can you imagine any circumstance where you would kill your best friend? What could cause you to do such a thing? P.342
- How does Joe know that Albert has not been tortured? P.351
- What device has the author used at the end of Chapter 27 to keep you reading?
- What clue does the author give as to who has come to Joe’s rescue? P.364
- What helps Joe find the rendezvous? P.386
- What does Flannery mean when he says, “The enemy of mine enemy and all that”? P.394
- If you had been in Joe’s position would you want to go on another mission? P.399
- How has Joe’s character changed from when he was a 12-year-old in Berlin to the boy he is at the end of the book?

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: CHARACTER POV

Discuss as a class the devices the author has used when presenting characters in the story. Choose a character from the story and tell a scene they feature in from their point of view. Afterwards analyse changes in style with a partner.

ACTIVITY 2: JUDGE AND JURY

Imagine one of the characters is prosecuted. Working in groups – the judge, the jury, the prosecution and the defence – analyse the characters in certain circumstances. Then discuss issues related to how society was in WWII versus how it is in the present day.

ACTIVITY 3: REPORTERS ON THE JOB

In pairs, students take on the roles of Reporter and Character (they can pick any character in the story). The Reporter prepares 5–10 questions about an incident in the story (making sure they use open-ended questions). The Character rereads the incident and answers the questions, remembering their character’s background but also being imaginative and open-minded.

Afterwards the reporters write an article about the incident (with the help of the characters). They need first to write a headline, a by-line and a leading sentence. Then they write the body of the article, using a quote from the interview, and writing a summary at the end.



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ACTIVITY 4: DIARY OF A CHARACTER

Throughout the book the author starts most chapters with an excerpt from Joe's diary. Write some diary entries for another character. Like Joe's diary, make it so it raises questions and hooks the readers in.

ACTIVITY 5: THE BOOK JACKET

Students discuss aspects of the book's jacket design – what it represents, its relevance and its appeal. How would you design a jacket for this book? Draw up a template that includes back cover, spine and front cover.

NB: Students interested in finding out more about the people, organisations, weapons, planes and vehicles of the era will find this of interest: <https://brianfalkner.com/glossary.asp>

Written by Maria Gill



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