

Teacher's Guide for *On the Run*

This Teacher's Guide was created by Random House Australia for the Australian edition of this title, *Two Wolves*, and has been Americanized. Please be aware of possible differences.

RECOMMENDED FOR

Ages 10-12

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning Areas:** English
- **General Capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and Creative Thinking; Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Examining the conventions of mystery fiction
- Analyzing how language and writing evoke mood, tone and tension
- Discussing moral and ethical dilemmas
- Encouraging critical thinking
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing

KEY THEMES (MORE INSIDE)

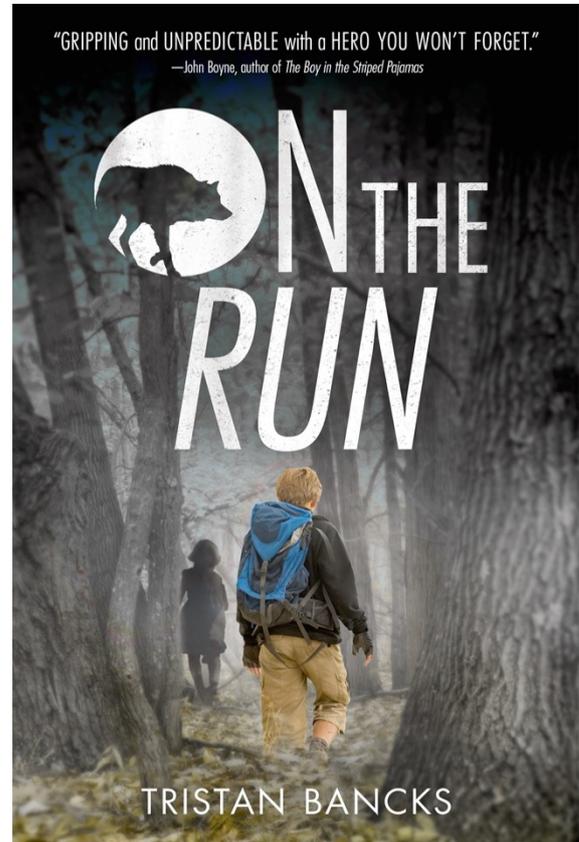
- Nature, survival and fear
- Self-perception: who is 'me'?
- Family: 'flesh and blood'
- Ethical dilemmas
- Truth and justice
- Wolves and rabbits
- Self-esteem and weight
- Innocence vs experience

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On the Run

ISBN: 9780374301538

Tristan Bancks

KEYNOTE

Simple on the surface but with deep undercurrents, *On the Run* is a powerful story, powerfully told: the language is as taut as a bowstring; the plot will have you afraid to keep reading and afraid to stop at the same time; the characters are the most honest and real you'll find in a work of fiction.

Thirteen-year-old Ben Silver must grapple with some of the most important questions we can face in our lives: Are we destined to become like our parents? What should you do if you uncover a crime? Should you lie to protect your family? Can money buy happiness?

What does it mean to survive against the odds – and how does the experience change you?

On the Run is an action-adventure novel with humor and strong conflict as Ben wrestles with the physical world, the not-knowingness of childhood and the slipperiness of truth.

'Gripping and unpredictable, with a hero you won't forget.' – **John Boyne**, author of *The Boy in The Striped Pajamas*

'A high stakes adventure that will keep you guessing and breathless until the very end. A moving family drama about the wild places of nature and the human heart.' – **Michael Gerard Bauer**, author of *Don't Call Me Ishmael*

PLOT SUMMARY

Ben Silver is at home after school, shooting a stop-animation movie in his bedroom, when police arrive at the front door. 'Where are your parents?' they ask. As far as Ben knows, his parents are at work at their car wrecking business.

They're not. They turn up moments later, telling Ben and his little sister Olive to pack a bag, because the family is going on a vacation. Their first ever.

But it doesn't seem like a vacation. Why have they changed cars? What was in the grey sports bag that Uncle Chris gave Dad? And how can Mum and Dad think that staying in the falling-down cabin in the bush miles from anywhere is like a vacation?

It doesn't take long for Ben to realize 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, writing down the clues in the brown leather notebook that belonged to his grandfather.

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

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Tristan Banks is a writer with a background in acting, filmmaking and TV presenting in Australia and the UK. His short films have won a number of awards and have screened widely in festivals and on TV. Tristan has written a number of books for kids and teens, including the Mac Slater, Coolhunter series, *It's Yr Life* with Tempany Deckert, and *My Life and Other Stuff I Made Up*. Tristan's drive is to tell inspiring, fast-moving stories for young people. Visit his website for lots of information and resources, including book trailers and writing tips: <http://www.tristanbancks.com/>

BOOK TRAILER

Watch

The book trailer for *On the Run* is very different from the usual, and features a news report set in a real-life television news studio. Watch the trailer at:

<https://youtu.be/tjOcD6avsoo>

Questions and activities

1. Discuss how the book trailer differs from the book's point of view. How might the book have been different if the author took more of an objective point of view and included the police perspective, the public, the media, or even taken us closer to the points of view of other family members?
2. Write your own newspaper or television news report based on one of the events in *On the Run* – for example, imagine you are a reporter who interviews Ben about his amazing survival story, or you are reporting on the escape of Ben's dad, or the result of Ben's mum's court case. What are the facts? What is the angle of your story?

Make your own

Make your own book trailer for *On the Run*.

1. Read the book and consider what the story is about. Who are the most important characters and what are the key story elements?
2. Write a 30-second to 1-minute trailer script. Remember: Short is good. Long is bad.
3. Pre-visualize your trailer, gathering images, music and other videos for ideas. Try using Story Scrapbook, Tristan Banks' free transmedia story brainstorming app: <http://www.tristanbancks.com/p/story-scrapbook.html>
4. Shoot and edit. Or, if you're using still pictures, gather your images and music and edit.

5. Share it with the class. Or, Tristan says, 'Share it on YouTube or Vimeo and submit to some book trailer-making competitions, win the big bucks and retire to the Caribbean!'

Here is a blog post with a few book trailers for you to watch: <http://www.tristanbancks.com/2012/05/book-trailers.html>

LANGUAGE AND WRITING STYLE

Tristan Banks has carefully crafted the language of *On the Run*, honing each word and sentence until it is taut with tension and drama, and perfectly conveys emotion, action and movement.

Some of the writing techniques Tristan uses in the novel are detailed below.

Filmic imagery

Tristan is a filmmaker as well as an author, and he thinks very visually. For instance, look at the detail in this description: 'The floor around him was littered with clothes, shoes, a game console, two controllers, a bike wheel with no tire, a skateboard deck, school books, a jumbo-size packet of chips and plates from long-forgotten afternoon snacks. Ben's favorite place. It was dark with the curtains closed, the only light coming from two lamps trained on the stop-motion set on his desk.' (p. 3-4) Can you picture the scene in your head?

Questions and activities

1. Read pages 3 and 4 of the book. What do these descriptions tell you about Ben as a character? Is he rich or poor? What does he like or not like? Write down as many facts and assumptions as you can based on what you learn on these pages – then revisit them after finishing the book. Were you right in your assumptions?
2. Write a description of your own bedroom, using as much detail as possible. Pretend that a film camera is zooming around the room and describe what it would see. What items are worthy of more attention and description because they say the most about who you are?

Fractured sentences

Short, sharp sentence fragments at climactic moments increase the readers' sense of urgency and excitement, as well as conveying Ben's swirling emotions. For example: 'Rush of water, dark of night, wink of lightning, ominous roar, tremble of body, whirling wind. And fear. Terrible fear.' (p. 177)

As well as conveying tension, the fractured sentences also contribute to the novel's stream-of-consciousness

mode: we are hearing Ben's thoughts as he has them. Consider, for example, the flow of Ben's thoughts we are privy to on pp. 145 to 147, as Ben questions what he should do and weighs his options.

Questions and activities

1. Read 'The Tempest' on pp. 177-180. Even though Tristan has used short sentences to convey Ben's exhaustion and fear, it's possible to make the words even simpler. Rewrite this scene as a free verse poem of no more than twelve lines. Free verse poems have no set meter or structure. Example: <http://www.youngwriters.co.uk/free-verse.php>
2. Not short enough for you? Now try writing this scene, or an aspect of it, as a haiku. This type of poem has only three lines. The first line should have five syllables; the second line has seven syllables; the third line has five syllables. What are the key words or images of 'The Tempest' scene that you would convey in such a small number of words? Often the last line of a haiku makes an observation about the subject, or makes a poignant statement. So, for instance, in this scene how would Ben summarize the effect of the storm on his situation? Here are some haiku examples: <http://www.poetry4kids.com/blog/lessons/how-to-write-a-haiku/>

Linear chronology

On the Run makes very little use of literary techniques such as backstory or flashbacks. We don't know much about Ben's life before the story began except for a few hints that are given, which tell us what kind of family the Silvers are: we learn that they eat dinner in front of the television; that Ben hates spending time at the wreckers; that his dad always has some new scheme for making money; and about Ben's nan.

But other than a few snippets from their past, the story has an immediacy to it, arising from the stream-of-consciousness mode and straightforward linear chronology: we are thrown into this adventure at this point of time, just as Ben is. The past is almost irrelevant and the present is reduced to a series of life-changing questions, the answers to which will shape Ben's future: Who am I? Who are my parents? What should I do in this moment?

Powerful, active vocabulary

In crafting the language of the novel, Tristan has made sure to imbue each word with as much power and meaning as possible, allowing the reader to see, hear, touch, taste and smell what Ben does.

Rather than relying on adjectives, Tristan uses verbs and nouns to simply and powerfully tell us what is happening for Ben externally and internally. The words used are forceful: Ben doesn't just put on his shoes, he 'jammed his feet into a pair of sneakers' (p. 8), clearly conveying his sense of urgency; and when he is trying to find his way out of the bush he 'stepped carefully from boulder to boulder, slogged into river' (p. 186-187).

On the Run also employs powerful metaphors and similes, again to convey the greatest meaning and emotion with the fewest possible words. Here are a few examples:

- 'Ben took a bite from a microwaved jam doughnut. The jam was lava on his tongue' (p. 3)
- 'Ben watched, eyes alert, pupils black and big as marbles' (p. 89)
- 'It shook low and heavy through his bones like a train through a mountain tunnel.' (p. 178)

Questions and activities

1. Find ten examples of forceful verbs in the novel – verbs that are packed with meaning.
2. Good writers evoke all five senses: sight, smell, touch, taste and hearing. Find examples of descriptions of what Ben senses.
3. Tristan's aim in this novel was to pare back the writing to essentials, which is why he often chooses to use powerful verbs and simple sentences. But he does sometimes use adjectives and adverbs too. Find some examples of adjectives and adverbs and discuss why they are necessary to that sentence or scene.

Third-person, past-tense narration

On the Run is written in what might be considered the most common narrative form for fiction: using a third-person narrator and writing in past tense. Despite being written in the third person, Tristan is able to make the voice sound distinctively Ben's using a limited perspective – keeping the narrative focused in on what's happening in Ben's head and only showing us what Ben sees, hears and knows.

The sentence structure and often vocabulary are also always kept as simple as possible, which makes us aware that it is written through Ben's point of view, evocative of Ben's position of innocence evolving into experience – his simple life becomes more complex as not-knowing evolves into knowing. For instance, note the basic sentence structure used in this sentence: 'He made it into the clearing and he looked around and he almost cried.' (p. 187)

Questions and activities

1. Discuss how the author told the story in third person but still gave us intimate insight into Ben's feelings and interior world. Why didn't he just tell the story in the first person?
2. Would the story be different if it had been written in first person or present tense? Try rewriting a scene to see what changes. Is the scene more or less tense or dramatic?
3. Write a new scene or chapter for the book from another character's perspective – a family member, a police officer or perhaps a private detective tracking down the money.

Clues and mystery

Lists in Ben's notebook summarize the clues that Ben is writing down. Readers can read between the lines to see what Ben is not yet willing to admit – that his parents have committed a crime.

On the Run plays on the conventions of the mystery novel: Ben suspects his parents of committing a crime or doing something wrong, and he must find the clues and solve the puzzle. Unlike the usual mystery or detective story, however, Ben is then faced with the moral dilemma of what to do with the information he has gathered.

Questions and activities

1. Make a list of the clues as you learn them in the story. At what point do they add up to the truth?
2. What other mystery or crime novels have you read? Explore and research the conventions of a mystery novel, such as red herrings, suspects and motives, puzzle solving, building suspense and foreshadowing.

Scriptwriting

Scenes from a script (e.g. on pp. 99) show how Ben thinks in terms of filmmaking techniques. He visualizes scenes from his stop-motion movie 'playing on the movie screen at the back of his eyelids' (p. 12) and, as the story progresses, he uses the movie he is creating to help him to process events in his own life, work out how to question his parents to get answers (e.g. see p. 93), and decide whether his movie offers any advice for his own situation (e.g. see p. 212-213).

The intertextuality of Ben referencing his film-in-progress as he thinks about his own problems adds extra depth, and encourages readers to consider storytelling techniques. 'How is it going to end?' Ben wonders about his film scene on p. 212 – just as readers are heading towards the novel's resolution and are wondering how Ben's own story will end.

Questions and activities

1. Choose a scene from the book with dialogue. Rewrite the scene as if it was in a film script.
2. What do you think should happen in Ben's film? Does the detective catch the zombie thief? Write another scene from Ben's film, or a synopsis of what will happen in the film, thinking about the three-act structure of films so you can make your film satisfying:
 - o First act: Inciting incident or catalyst (set up the characters and their world)
 - o Second act: Rising conflict or confrontation (what is the action in the movie?)
 - o Third act: Climax and resolution (what dramatic questions are answered and how are they resolved?)
3. Write and make your own stop-animation short film. You can find an example of a stop-animation film that Tristan made with his 8-year-old son, and tips on making your own, at: <http://www.tristanbancks.com/2012/01/harry-potter-lego-animation.html>

Allegory and allusion

An old man tells his grandson one evening that there is a raging inside him, inside all of us. A terrible battle between two wolves. One wolf is bad – pride, envy, jealousy, greed, guilt, self-pity. The other wolf is good – kindness, hope, love, service, truth, humility. The child asks, 'Who will win?' The grandfather answers simply, 'The one you feed.'

The tale above, quoted as the epigraph, infuses the whole novel with an additional layer of meaning. Ben reads the story and so does the reader. How will the story of two wolves become relevant to Ben? You can find a cartoon depiction of the 'two wolves' tale at <http://zenpencils.com/comic/94-the-two-wolves/> (note that the story is often attributed as being of Cherokee origin, but this is disputed).

Similarly, Ben reads the novel *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean George – it is a survival story, and Ben soon finds himself in a survival story of his own. What has he learnt from his reading that will help him survive?

His reading of *My Side of the Mountain* also highlights the benefits and value of reading, and how books can help you to escape reality for a while: '*My Side of the Mountain* had given them comfort and light and warmth, but when it was done all they had was heavy rain, leaks spattering the floor around them, and small, unseen animals making nests in the darkest corners.' (p. 11)

)

Questions and activities

1. Why do you think the author included the 'two wolves' proverb? Read the tale before you start the book. What does it tell you about the questions or dilemmas that might arise? Does the book live up to your expectations?
2. Which characters are feeding their good wolf, and which are feeding their bad wolf? Are any or all of the characters feeding *both* wolves?
3. What other proverbs have you heard that tell you more about what it means to be human?
4. How does Ben use stories and fiction and imagination as a way of dealing with his situation? Consider the various ways Ben blurs fact and fiction in the story: his filmmaking; his notebook; the cinema screen on the back of his eyelids; *My Side of the Mountain* and Sam Gribbley; his imagination; the half-truths he tells himself in order to avoid facing the truth; the stories he tells Olive in order to avoid telling her the truth. Consider also this key quote: 'He closed his eyes and wished that everything was going to be okay. He wished that he could rewind time. He wished that they had never come to the cabin. He wished that he was still at home, before the police had knocked on his door and set this in motion. He wished that he was making his movie, and only pretending about zombies and thieves and forests and being on the run.' (p. 140)
5. At the end of the novel, what does the following quote mean and how does it relate to the 'two wolves' epigraph? What has occurred to make Ben feel that he has 'released his wolves from captivity'? 'Ben stared out the window, letting the world go by in a blur of trees and sky. He felt empty now, totally empty. In a good way. As though he had released his wolves from captivity. There was no "good" or "bad" wolf anymore, nothing to run from. For the moment, the terrible battle was done.' (p. 227)

Gaps and omissions

Not only are the sentences kept sharp and to the point, but Tristan also uses omission of action and dialogue to great effect in keeping the reader on their toes. Sometimes the reader knows or suspects more than Ben does, but at other times Tristan deliberately cuts off the reader from a scene, particularly at the end of chapters, and these cliffhangers create suspense.

For example, on p. 103 we know that Ben's father has found and is reading Ben's notebook. Ben is anxiously awaiting his father's reaction: 'Ben had no idea what his father would do once he had read the notebook, and he did not want to find out.' But the chapter ends

there, and the next chapter begins with Ben asleep and dreaming – the reader is forced to keep reading to find out what has happened in between, and what his father said and did.

Questions and activities

1. At what other points in the story do you as the reader not know what is happening, or what happened in between scenes? Did you want to know, or is it OK that you don't?
2. Which chapter do you think ended with the biggest cliffhanger? Why do authors write cliffhanger endings to chapters?

KEY THEMES, MOTIFS AND STUDY TOPICS

Nature, survival and fear

Ben's story is one of survival – at first on the run from police with his parents, but later his story becomes one of actual life-or-death survival in the wilderness.

Having grown up in the suburbs, being confronted with the wilderness and Nature is one of Ben's greatest fears. Yet in forcing him to face his fears Nature also becomes his savior, helping him to see beyond his emotions and panicked state to the truth, to accept his situation and to embrace quiet and stillness. In the survival chapters in particular (pp. 148-191) we see Ben confront his fears and his attitudes changing from worry to "flatlined" (p. 184) to an acceptance that: 'Things could not rattle him so easily. Maybe not even death.' (p. 193).

Key quotes

- 'He had never spent time in the bush, had never left the suburbs. He did not want to go to the river. The wilderness was his enemy.' (p. 57)
- 'Nature was real and true and terrible.' (p. 60)
- 'He knew that he would have no chance out here alone. Ben's survival skills included hunting for leftovers in the fridge, lowering bread into the toaster, and switching on the heater when it was cold. None of these talents would be useful here.' (p. 61)
- 'Ben felt the force of the wild all around them. In the cawing of crows high in a dead tree and the relentless chirping of insects and the silence of the big blue sky. He was not sure if the force was for or against them. But it was there.' (p. 164)
- 'He had nothing. Just him, wilderness, Olive, fear. Fear was his fire, keeping him alert and

alive. Growing up in a house in the suburbs, right next to a highway, had not prepared him for this. Playing thousands of hours of video games, watching hundreds of movies, playing soccer, helping out in the wrecking yard, watching game shows with Nan – none of it was useful to him now. Someone had pressed "reset" on his life. He had no pantry, no fridge, no shops, no cars, no lights, no bed, no blankets, no roof.' (p. 169)

- 'Ben looked around and breathed it all in. He had missed this place . . . He cupped his hands, dipped them in the water, splashed his face. It felt crisp and good, waking something inside him . . . [H]e should have felt bad about the place, but he didn't. He knew now that everything bad would pass, and everything good would pass too. A never-ending stream. The river flowed on. He splashed his face again and sat back on a rock, closing his eyes. He sat there for a long time, becoming so still he felt as though he had disappeared or had turned into one of the boulders he was surrounded by. Rocks that had been here forever.' (pp. 219-220)

Questions and activities

1. Have you ever had an experience that threatened your life? How did you feel? Did your feelings change over time or as the situation changed?
2. Write a story or poem drawing on your own experience of fear or of being in the wilderness.
3. Research ways to survive if you were lost in the bush and present your findings to the class. What could you eat? Where could you find water? How would you find your way home? How would you alert searchers to your location?
4. What is it about horror stories that draws people to watch them? What is the scariest thing you have read or seen? What made it so scary? How much of the fear was in your imagination and how much was real?
5. What other survival stories have you read? What do survival stories tell us about ourselves – our strengths and weaknesses, and what it means to be human?
6. Tristan Banks says: 'Nature is a power that transcends Society, Time, Family and Self.' Discuss this statement in relation to *On the Run* and how this idea is explored in the novel.
7. Consider the ways Ben is helped or hindered by Nature. How does Ben's changing attitude towards Nature reflect his internal changes, the different way he begins to look at the world?

Self-perception: Who is 'me'?

Ben likes to think about the concept of self, contemplating who he is and what 'me' means. The question, of course, becomes even more important as he learns more about what his parents have done, and he wonders whether he will become like them.

Key quotes

- 'I'm me, he thought. *Not this again*, said another voice inside him. *But if I'm me then who is everybody else?* Ben often had these 'I'm me' sessions. It was usually when he was walking home from school or before he went to sleep . . . *I am me. But, if I'm me, then who are Mum and Dad? Who are James and Gus? Are they 'me', too? They think they're 'me'. They call themselves 'I' just like I do. So how am I different? I'm in a different body but are we the same thing somehow?* Ben's 'I'm me' sessions always brought up more questions than answers. Each time he tried to capture 'me', it would disappear into the dark corners of his mind, like a dream he was desperately trying to remember. Where did his thoughts and ideas come from? Even the thought 'I'm me' – what was that? It felt like there was someone back there saying things that Ben couldn't control.' (pp. 33)
- 'He had never really thought that much about where meat came from before, about the process of an animal becoming food. Did it become meat as soon as it died or only once it was ready to be cooked? Or was it always meat? *Am I meat?* he wondered. Ben squeezed his bicep. *Maybe I am*, he thought. *I hope they don't eat me.*' (p. 97-98)
- 'Ben no longer knew if he was a detective or a thief. His dream was to be an officer of the law, but his reality was very, very different. *I'm me*, said a voice in his head. *Not now*, Ben thought. *I'm me*, said the voice again, *but they are me too. My own blood.*' (pp. 145-146)

Questions and activities

1. Why does Ben have these 'I'm me' sessions? Why does he find it so difficult to work out what 'me' really means?
2. Have you ever thought about the concept of 'me' and if there is any way of capturing yourself, finding out who you really are? Or do you find it as confusing as Ben does?
3. Why, towards the end of the novel, does Ben's concept of 'me' seem to disappear when he is by the creek and surrounded by Nature? Is there

somewhere you like to go where you have space and quiet to think?

4. What fields of study have attempted to answer the question 'who is "me"'? Split into groups to research the fields of philosophy and psychology. What do these fields study? Who are their most famous practitioners? What have they learned about the human brain, perception and consciousness?
5. Conduct an experiment that involves the brain and perception. For example, try <http://www.education.com/science-fair/psychology-and-sociology/> or watch this famous selective attention test <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJG6g8UzMvo> or look up optical illusions or brain teasers. Through these experiments, what can you learn about whether our sense of 'me' is true or whether it is a construction?

Family: 'flesh and blood'

Much of Ben's dilemma revolves around the concept of family. What is family? Does family matter? If so, why? Should you lie or conceal the truth to help your family, even if they've done something wrong? How much of your character is in your genes?

Key quotes

- 'For that moment, everybody was happy. The way things were meant to be, the way they were in movies. The way Ben always imagined other families being. Maybe better.' (p. 77)
- 'Ben worried sometimes that his parents would not be together forever. But he also worried that they *would* be together forever.' (pp. 80)
- 'They always ate dinner in front of the TV . . . [But] to Ben's family, TV was like bad glue. They needed regular doses to keep all the cracks hidden.' (pp. 108)
- "'Better the devil you know.'" That's what people said. If there were two choices and they were both bad, you should go with the one you knew. *Your own family. Flesh and blood*, said the voice in his mind, the voice he could not control.' (p. 140)
- '*Run*, said another voice. But they were his family, the only family he had. *I'm me, but they are me too.*' (p. 146)
- 'His parents were criminals, so he must be more likely to become one. Like father, like son. Did he have a choice or was it written in his DNA?' (p. 190)

- 'Like grandfather, like father, like son. Was it really possible to escape what was written in his genes?' (p. 219)
- 'Dad and Pop, no matter where I go, are inside me, in my blood. Is it possible to outrun the blood you have inherited, to become somebody else?' (p. 213)

Questions and activities

1. Did Ben make the right decisions? What would you have done if you were in the same situation?
2. Why is Ben so obsessed with who he is and whether he can 'outrun' the blood he has inherited?
3. Discuss Nature vs. Nurture. Do you believe that you are limited by the genes you have inherited? Or do you believe that you are capable of doing anything if you set your mind to it?
4. How about Ben? Do you believe that he will go on to repeat the mistakes of his father and grandfather or has he successfully overcome any genetic pre-disposition towards crime?
5. 'Ben worried sometimes that his parents would not be together forever. But he also worried that they would be together forever.' What does Ben mean by this? How does it relate to Ben's feelings of belonging or abandonment?
6. If Ben's parents were closer or more stable, how might it change his own outlook on the world?

Moral and ethical dilemmas: what would you do with a bag of money?

One of the most important questions Ben must ask himself in the book is about how money could change his life. Can his family's problems be solved with money – even if it isn't theirs? What difference can millions of dollars make in their lives? Will they be better off with the money, even if it means moving to a different country or remaining on the run? The moral and ethical dilemmas surrounding these questions form the heart of *On the Run*.

Key quotes

- '...If life was full of good things and presents and they were all happy, did it matter where the money had come from? Did it matter why his father had driven off from the police? Did it matter that his mum had lied to him? Maybe he was overreacting. Maybe they really did sell the wreckers . . . And that's how they got the presents. What if it could always be like this? A million dollars could buy a lot of happy.' (p. 77-78)

- 'If the bank put it into their account by accident, even though Mum and Dad transferred it out, wasn't it theirs? Didn't it belong to them now? Wasn't that just bad luck for the bank? Finders keepers. Maybe Ben's parents could keep it. Was Ben a millionaire? Technically, he was. Could life on the run with millions of dollars be good?' (p. 134-135)
- 'He had taken the money and run with it. What did that say about him?' (p. 176)

Questions and activities

1. Choose one of these topics to debate: 'Money can buy happiness'; 'Finders keepers'; 'Greed leads to destruction'.
2. If money was mistakenly deposited in your bank account, would you spend it or report it to the bank? If you found a million dollars in a bag, would you spend it or hand it in to the police? What if you just found \$50?
3. Is streaming movies online or downloading them from the internet okay, even though you might know it is, technically, illegal? How about downloading an album for free? Or a book? Where do you draw the line on what is stealing and what is sharing? Does sharing things for free online differ from keeping money that was wrongly deposited into your account?

Wreckers

The family business is a car wrecker, and Ben sees Dad as 'the wrecker' – the double meaning of which becomes more apparent as the story progresses.

Key quotes

- 'I hate Mum and Dad . . . They wrecked everything.' (p. 174)
- 'Other people's bad luck: [Dad] fed off it. He would race out there in the tow truck, pick up the car, come back, hack it up, sell it off, or crush it. He was a wrecker. That's what he did. He wrecked stuff. Mum helped. Cars, trucks, motorbikes, Ben's life, their family. Themselves. They wrecked themselves and they left Ben and Olive to deal with the mess.' (p. 188-189)
- 'Ben needed to be careful. Needed to make a good choice. Would he become a wrecker, too?' (p. 190)

Truth and justice

Ben wants to be a detective when he grows up, and he's particularly interested in police work and procedures.

His stop-animation film is about a detective called Ben Silver – Ben is using his film to live out his dream. And when the family is pulled over by police, Ben is given a business card with the police motto.

What Ben learns about his family – in particular that his dad and grandfather had criminal tendencies – shakes Ben to his core.

He must ask himself: if being a police officer is about upholding the law and being truthful, can you become a police officer if you have made bad decisions or told lies?

When the police arrive at the cabin, Ben must make the ultimate decision: whether to run towards them or away. His decision will affect his family and even his and his sister's lives, and he may come to regret it – but he must also learn to live with his decisions, and, in the end, make amends and set things right.

Key quotes

- '*Culpam Poena Premit Comes* – the police motto. Ben figured it must be something about honesty, truth, abiding by the law.' (p. 144)
- 'Ben had found the translation of it in a book – "Punishment follows closely on the heels of crime". It had proven true but it was almost too simple and neat for Ben now, too black and white.' (p. 226)

Questions and activities

1. Investigate the Latin roots of the police motto *Culpam Poena Premit Comes*. What other words come from the same Latin roots? For instance: culpable; penal system; penalty.
2. Why does Ben think so much about this quote?
3. How do Ben's ideas of 'good' and 'bad' change throughout the story? Why does Ben decide that the idea of 'punishment following closely on the heels of crime' is 'almost too simple and neat for [him] now'? What is it about his experience that changes his views?
4. Find other mottos or famous sayings about truth, justice, crime and punishment. Use them as debate topics or for class discussion.
5. What do police officers and detectives do? Invite someone who works in this field to talk to the class. How is police work different to what you see in the movies and TV shows?
6. Should Ben's father be punished for what he did? Should his mother be punished? Why/why not?

Wolves – and hunters

The title of *On the Run* in Australia is *Two Wolves*, and wolves are of course a key motif. Not only is there the obvious parallel to be drawn between the 'two wolves' epigraph and Ben's own dilemmas, but there are also more subtle uses of wolf, dog and animal symbolism.

Key quotes

- Ben thinks Dad looks 'rat-like' (p. 12)
- Olive calls Dad Maugrim, the evil wolf henchman from C.S. Lewis (p. 14)
- Ben thinks Dad 'looked more like a dog than a rat today' (p. 91)
- Ben's dream: 'The wolf had his father's eyes' (p. 104)
- Olive calls their parents 'dirty dogs' for leaving them alone at the cabin, and it becomes Ben's chant while he sows (p. 114)
- 'Dad released his grip and walked out of the cabin, shouting into the night like a beast.' (p. 132)
- 'He had leg-length. He could take Ben down like a wolf chasing a rabbit. Eat him alive. Black and crispy on the outside, raw in the middle.' (p. 135)
- 'Now they were wolves behind the hen house.' (p. 209)
- Dad says 'I've been living like an animal.' (p. 221)
- Dad is both a lame dog and a vicious dog in the climactic scene, right down to biting Ben's arm and drawing blood (p. 224-225)

Questions and activities

1. What does it say about Olive and Ben that Olive has pegged Dad as a wolf from the start (see p. 14 above), whereas Ben has to revise his opinion of Dad from rat, to dog, to wolf (and back to dog again). Is Olive right about Dad, or is her seven-year-old viewpoint too simplistic?
2. Are there other wolf analogies that could be drawn, or that the author could have included in the book? Think about what else you know about wolves – for instance, they hunt in packs, how they raise their young, etc.

Rabbits – and prey

Contrasting with the metaphor of wolf as hunter and destroyer, there is the symbolism of the rabbit, its potential prey.

The cooking of the rabbit Dad has shot could also be seen as symbolic of Dad's failure to take control of the situation the family are in, and his botched attempts to run away with the money, as well as his inability to see when a plan is failing – which becomes his downfall. The family's reactions to the raw inside, burnt outside 'rabbit-fail' (p. 116) help to convey their individual feelings about Dad to the reader, and how they cope with him – Ben 'trying to sound tough and manly while still refusing to eat the meat' (p. 116); Olive ignoring Dad altogether; Mum trying to distract everyone with the other food on offer.

Key quotes

- Olive has a 'dirty, grey stuffed rabbit' toy called Bonzo (p. 9) – Bonzo symbolizes Olive's innocence as a young child of seven, as well as her determination, since she won't leave Bonzo behind
- Ben sees a rabbit in the bush (p. 62) – wild and shy, it skitters off when Ben moves
- On p. 135 Ben sees himself as a rabbit, being chased by his father, the wolf
- On pp. 90-95 Dad is hunting rabbits with Pop's old rifle: 'Ben hoped that the rabbit was way underground, settling in for a bunch of carrots and a long nap.' (p. 91) Dad is about to shoot the rabbit at the end of the chapter: "'Bang,'" Dad whispered.' (p. 95)
- The scene of Dad skinning the rabbit is described in vivid detail on p. 96 and following pages: 'The rings of the tree, stained with blood, seemed to radiate out from the rabbit. The one brown eye that Ben could see looked alive, but the rest of the animal was floppy and lifeless.' (p. 96)
- On pp. 182 Ben likens Olive to a rabbit: 'She ate the crisp, juicy tips of fern fronds instead, nibbling at them like a pink-eyed rabbit'
- Ben also sees Olive as a helpless koala when she is ill: 'Just two little koala claws clutching his shoulders.' (p. 184)

Questions and activities

1. Does Ben see himself as more rabbit or wolf? Does it change at different points of the story? What do you see him as?
2. Why is a rabbit's foot supposedly a good luck charm?

The symbolism of colors

Green: Green can often signify envy and greed, as well as money – but on the other hand it can signify nature

and wilderness. Does the author make use of the symbolism of green in *On the Run*? Consider that: Dad's car is the Green Machine; there's a rusted green trunk in the cabin; the cash is all in green \$100 notes; Dad carves the rabbit on a green metal plate; there are green vines and green rocks.

Yellow and brightness: Bright colors such as yellow are associated with Nan in the story. Nan's house is bright and her yellow biscuit barrel is mentioned a couple of times. Nan doesn't like anyone turning the lights off in her home – perhaps implying that she has her own fears or recalls the dinginess of her husband's cabin, but also symbolizing warmth, comfort, security and openness to Ben and Olive. She keeps Caramello Koalas stashed in the desk. She wears lots of bright, patterned clothes and has orange carpet in the house. What does yellow symbolize to you?

Red: Red comes up in innocuous ways in *On the Run*, but it also plays a role in creating the forceful, graphic imagery that sets the tone of this tense and powerful story. For instance: the red-raw 'cooked' rabbit on p. 116; Dad ploughing through the Big Red soup on p. 145; Ben sees blood-red water on p. 183 and p. 191; Dad draws blood when he bites Ben's arm on p. 268.

Self-esteem and weight

Ben's weight is an issue for him – he knows he is 'slightly overweight' and he has been teased about it at school. His nan thinks it's caused by 'the rotten dinners his parents fed him from the burger chain on the corner' (p. 4) and his mum tries to help by offering advice but she sometimes makes Ben feel worse about himself.

As part of his character arc and because of the circumstances he finds himself in – having to survive with no food in the bush – Ben gradually overcomes his weight issues. At the end of the book we learn that he has been lifting weights, and has grown taller in the year following his ordeal. His new level of fitness plays a role in helping him to stand up to his dad's bullying.

Key quotes

- 'He looked at it, wondering if he should eat it. How much fatter would it make him? How delicious would it be? He could hear his mother's voice: "It's your choice. Don't blame me," and he could hear the things kids sometimes said at school when they were picking teams for soccer. Ben was always goalie. "You just have to stand there and block the goal with your body," they would say, laughing. Ben would laugh along too, but it wasn't that funny. And he remembered when the school had sent home BMI report cards – Body Mass Index. It

was the only report where he had scored really high marks.’ (p. 107)

- ‘Ben was bone-hungry. Blood-and-bone-hungry. Mum always told him to eat less, exercise more. “You don’t want kids teasing you for being fat,” she would say when he asked for a sundae at the drive-thru. Mum thought that standing out or being teased were the worst things in the world. Now he was eating less. Eating nothing. He wondered if she would be proud.’ (p. 175-176)
- ‘He tried to keep eating to make Nan happy but the hole inside him was not as big as it used to be.’ (p. 202)
- ‘He felt like he was a little kid again, like nothing he said or thought or felt was worth anything. The difference was that Ben was almost as tall as Dad now and, after a year of lifting weights, better built.’ (p. 222)

Questions and activities

1. How does Ben’s weight make him feel? Is he concerned about his weight or is he more concerned about other people’s opinions?
2. How do Ben’s concerns about his weight mirror his feelings of comfort or belonging?
3. Would Ben have lost weight and chosen to start lifting weights if he hadn’t had the ordeal in the cabin and the bush?

Innocence vs. experience

Tristan says: ‘As *On the Run* unfolded I realized that, to me, the story was about the “not-knowingness” of childhood. As a kid, you want to know everything but you are often protected from the truth by your parents. In order to find anything out, you become a kind of detective inside your own family, trying to put the fragments of information together to discover the truth.’

It is clear to the reader at the beginning of the book that Ben is immature, both through the way he thinks, and particularly via the way his dad treats him – Dad is ruthless about signs of what he sees as weakness in Ben:

- “‘man up”, like Dad always said’ (p. 40)
- “‘Big baby!” Dad called’ (p. 41)
- ‘You want me to put a nappy on you?’ (p. 45)
- ‘Useless.’ (p. 132)
- ‘Don’t apologize all the time . . . It’s weak.’ (p. 10)

- ‘Dad had assured him that real men don’t cry’ (p. 175)

Ben’s journey in *On the Run* is one of coming of age, of growing up and reaching maturity – his struggles, mental and physical, help him to learn resilience and strength, and to trust in his own judgment. His progression is clearly from innocence to experience, from ‘not-knowing’ to knowing. The question is, what kind of person will he become as he learns more about the world?

Part of Ben’s journey is also to learn that adults are fallible, and that parents don’t always make the best decisions for themselves or their children.

Key quotes

- ‘Adults never told kids anything. Nothing worth hearing anyway. Ben felt as though he spent his entire life trying to work out things that adults knew but wouldn’t tell him.’ (p. 63)
- ‘Ben made a promise to himself that he would work out where the money had come from and why they were lying to him. He was sick of being treated like a child. He was going undercover. He would find the truth.’ (p. 72)
- ‘Ben tried to sit there and be okay with the not-knowing. After all, he was just a kid and they were adults and this was best for him. They knew. They would take care of him. They were his parents.’ (pp. 125)
- ‘It’s a weird day when you realize that your parents aren’t who you think they are. Ben wondered if there would come a time when he realized that he, himself, was not who he thought he was, that he was someone totally different. Someone capable of doing what his parents had done.’ (p. 130)
- ‘He looked upstream, toward the not-knowing place, where he had been at the mercy of his parents. A place he and Olive could not go back to now.’ (p. 161)

Questions and activities

1. What does the author mean by the ‘not-knowingness of childhood’?
2. What do you think the adults in *On the Run* could learn from Ben and Olive?
3. Do you think adults could learn more from young people? What could they learn?
4. Write about a time when you felt that adults were keeping a secret from you and you tried to work out what that secret was.

5. The Roman poet Horace said: 'Adversity has the effect of eliciting talents, which in prosperous circumstances would have lain dormant.' Tristan found this quote while writing and he kept it in his character files as a way to help capture Ben's journey. How does the adversity that Ben faces push him to evolve as a human being?
6. Is Ben better off at the end of the novel having endured these difficulties and gained these experiences? Or has the adversity only had negative effects?

Belonging / Exploring transitions

Ben is constantly on the move throughout the book – from home to the car journey to the cabin to the wilderness, back to the cabin, to Kings Bay to Nan's house, to the cabin again and finishing in the car.

Questions and activities

1. How does this constant movement relate to Ben's sense of belonging?
2. What are some of the ways that Ben comforts himself and gives some sense of continuity and stability to his life?
3. How do the physical transitions that Ben makes inform and cause his emotional and mental transitions? Note in particular his relationship with Nature and how it shapes his thoughts.



WRITING EXERCISES: FROM THE NOTEBOOK OF TRISTAN BANCKS

Tristan Banks spends much of the year visiting schools to talk to students about the craft of writing, and inspire students to be creative. Here are some of Tristan's best exercises on creativity, finding inspiration and improving your writing.

The writer's notebook

Tristan says: 'The writer's notebook is the place where ideas are born. This is where writers learn to lay words onto the page in their own unique way. Every morning I sit down and write three pages flat out. I don't mind what it is. My rules are simple:

1. Don't think. Just write.
2. Write three pages, flat out.
3. Once I begin, my pen is not allowed to stop moving across the page until the time is up.'

Here is a blog post on the importance of the writer's notebook: <http://www.tristanbancks.com/2012/11/the-writers-notebook-1.html>

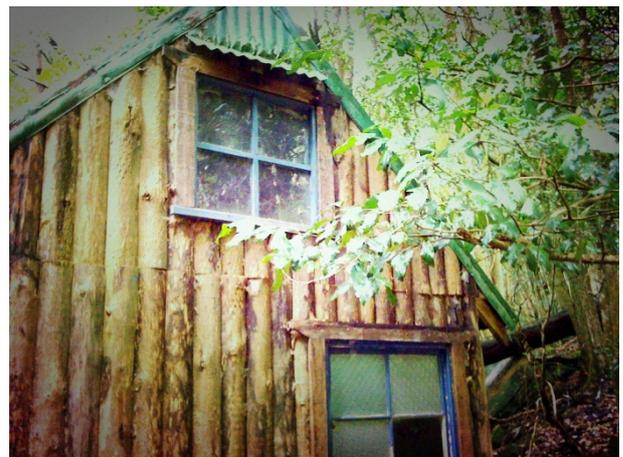
All of the writing exercises you'll find in these Teachers' Resources use this approach to writing the first draft – quickly and without too much second-guessing, by-passing the conscious mind to get to the unconscious ideas beneath.

You can always rewrite and edit later but Tristan says, 'I believe that this is the best way to write a first draft and to develop a daily writing practice.'

On location

Tristan says: 'I like to visit the places that my stories are set. Sometimes, if it's in another country, I might need to "visit" it using Google Maps Street View. Other times, I stumble across locations, photograph them on my phone, and they end up in the book. This happened with the cabin in *On the Run* and also the creek location.'

The cabin Tristan found:



The creek Tristan found:



Questions and activities

1. Go on a location scout around your school using a camera, iPod or similar to photograph places that you think are interesting. Then sit under a tree or return to the classroom, set yourself a timer for ten minutes and write a story set in one of those locations. (Remember, ten minutes flat-out, non-stop writing.)
2. Choose a location somewhere in the school. Go and sit there, set yourself a timer and write a story inspired by that location. Being there, in the place your story is set while you are writing, allows you to more honestly commit the details of the location to the page. This detail draws your reader into the story and helps them to believe.

Vision boarding

Tristan says: 'When I'm writing I gather lots of pictures that feel like my story, that help me to capture the tone and mood of the story. These pictures make the world of the story feel real to me and then I can write it honestly.'

Questions and activities

1. Use the internet or magazines to gather pictures that feel like a certain scene or chapter from *On the Run*. OR
2. Use the internet or magazines to gather pictures for a story that you are writing or would like to write yourself. Whether you love unicorns or motorbikes or dropbears, spend fifteen or twenty minutes gathering pictures and then set yourself a timer for five, ten, fifteen minutes or more and write a story inspired by the images you have found.

You might want to use Tristan's digital story brainstorming tool, Story Scrapbook, to collect your images. You can also gather video, Google Maps and text on your Story Scrapbook page:
<http://www.tristanbanks.com/p/story-scrapbook.html>

Storyboarding

Tristan Banks started out telling stories for TV and film.

Tristan says: 'I "see" my stories as they unfold. I write down what I see in my mind's eye.'

For examples, try doing a Google image search for 'Sample Storyboards'.

Questions and activities

1. Read chapter four, 'Chase', when Ray Silver is pulled over by the police, and see if you can storyboard it. Imagine it was a scene from a movie or even a cartoon strip and draw a still image for each 'shot' in the scene. Each time you would change camera angle as the director of this scene, draw a new storyboard image. Try to storyboard the entire scene according to the descriptions on the page. Use the blank storyboard template worksheet included in these Teachers' Resources.
2. Now storyboard a story of your own.

Finding a character's 'knot' or internal dilemma

First, read this blog post on finding your character's 'knot' – their internal struggle:

<http://www.katemessner.com/teachers-write-whats-your-characters-knot/>

Questions and activities

1. What do you think Ben's key 'knot' is in the book?
2. Discuss the character of Ben's grandfather. How does the character of 'Pop' deepen Ben's internal conflict?
3. Look at a story that you are writing or have written. Does the character have an internal struggle or is all the conflict external or outside the character? How could you develop a 'knot' for your character?

Music

Tristan Banks puts together a soundtrack for each book that he writes. During the writing of *On the Run* he listened to songs from bands Phoenix, Keane, Foals, Band of Horses and also Gotye's album *Making Mirrors*.

Questions and activities

1. Listen to the opening bars of Gotye's song 'Somebody That I Used to Know', before the lyrics begin, and discuss whether you feel it captures any of the mood of *On the Run*. What is it about the music that does or doesn't feel like the mood of the story?

2. What songs or music inspire *your* writing or reading? Make a playlist to suit a story you're writing.
 3. Imagine you're creating the soundtrack to a film version of *On the Run*. What kind of music would you set to be heard during each of the scenes below? What emotions should the music be conveying in these scenes? What kind of musical instruments or sounds could you use to convey those emotions?
 - Chapter 3: Vacation haircuts (in the hotel room, having haircuts)
 - Chapter 6: The dead of night (they reach the cabin and explore it in the dark)
 - Chapter 12: Knife (Dad brings home presents for everyone)
 - Chapter 16: Notebook (Dad finds Ben's notebook)
 - Chapter 24: The Fugitive (Ben and Olive are running from the police)
 - Chapter 26: Stuck (Ben and Olive argue and look for food)
 - Chapter 29: Tempest (the storm)
- What are the Stakes? What does the main character stand to lose if they don't get what they Want?
 - What incident near the beginning of the book sets the story in motion?
 - Is there a 'Mid-Point', a major story event near the middle of the book that raises the stakes?
 - What happens at the Climax of the story?
 - What happens in the story's Resolution? How does it end?
2. *On the Run* refers to several other books within the story. Choose one to read and think about how and why that story inspired Tristan or is relevant to Ben's story:
 - My Side of the Mountain*
 - The Lion, The Witch & the Wardrobe*
 - Huckleberry Finn*
 - Hatchet*
 - The Magic Faraway Tree*
 - The Mouse and His Child*

You are your favorite stories

Tristan says: 'Just as the stories you write become part of you, the stories you read and love are also part of you. While writing *On the Run* I pulled apart some of my favorite books and considered, in some depth, how the stories were structured, what made them tick. These books included *Hatchet*, *My Side of the Mountain* and *White Fang*. Of course there is a more spiritual and magical dimension to great storytelling that cannot be easily broken down but story structure can be understood using some key tools.'

Questions and activities

1. Choose one of your favorite books – or *On the Run* – and break it down using some of the tools that Tristan uses to analyze story structure:
 - Write a one-paragraph synopsis of the story. Tell us what happens.
 - Who is the Protagonist, the main character?
 - Who is the Antagonist, the character who most gets in the way of the main character getting what they want?
 - What does the Protagonist Want?
 - What is the Conflict? In other words, what stops the main character from getting what they Want?



Story safari

Tristan says: 'Nature is a direct route to accessing your most powerful stories. When I wrote *On the Run* I would often go down to the beach and walk for hours, writing in Notes on my iPhone. Something about having my shoes off, connected to the earth, allowed me to write more honestly. In the space of four hours I would write 2500 words. I would then go home, plug my phone into my laptop and copy-and-paste those words into the manuscript of the novel.'

Here is a blog post that illustrates Tristan's Story Safari approach to writing:

<http://www.tristanbancks.com/2012/06/get-fit-write-book.html>

Questions and activities

1. See if you can gather an iPod, iPad, iPhone or similar device for each member of your class. (Otherwise you could use a small, hand-held notebook and pencil.) Head out in the playground or in a local park or beach and set yourselves a timer for ten minutes, half an hour, whatever you can spare. Open up Notes app or similar and walk and write until the timer goes off. Come back, share your writing and discuss how the process of walking while you wrote helped or hindered your process.

Are you a 'plotter' or a 'pantser'?

Writers are often asked if they are 'plotters' or 'pantsers'? A 'plotter' plans everything they are going to write very carefully. A 'pantser' writes by the seat of their pants and lets the story unfold as they write it. Which are you?

Tristan says: 'When I began writing books I would always create an outline before I began writing the first draft. I learnt this from writing screenplays. This helped to reassure me that I would make it through the book and that the story was worth telling. *On the Run*, however, was different. I wrote the early drafts of the book without a plan or outline. I wanted to let the characters speak, let them bump into one another and see what would happen. From about the fourth draft I started to think more about the overarching story and to tighten the plot and structure but, by then, the characters had emerged and started speaking for themselves.'

Questions and activities

1. As a writer, how do you strike the balance between plotting your stories and simply writing, letting the story unfold?
2. How might the story and characters in *On the Run* have been different if the author had outlined more fully from the beginning? How might it have changed the 'feeling' of the book and the reader's connection with the characters?
3. Might plotting from the beginning have made the book more exciting? But at what cost to the mood of the story?
4. Discuss some books that you feel might have been heavily plotted from the beginning and others that feel as though the writer let the story unfold. Do some online research and see if you can find out if your theory on the storytelling method is true.

WORKSHEET: Story structure

Stories need a narrative drive, something pushing the story forward. Try filling out the following 'story template' for *On the Run* and see if you can work out what it is that drives the story.

On the Run is the story of _____

(protagonist / main character), a _____

(description of protagonist/main character) who, after _____

(first major story turning point), decides to _____

(character objective that drives the action).

The character is prevented from achieving their goal by _____

(main obstacle or antagonist). We know that _____

(the protagonist/main character) has succeeded or failed when

(achievement that represents success or failure.)

You can see that, after the first turning point, there is something driving the action
– the narrative, in other words.

WORKSHEET: Storyboard

Filmmakers use storyboards to plot out scenes. Create a storyboard or comic strip for a scene in *On the Run* or one of your own stories.

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