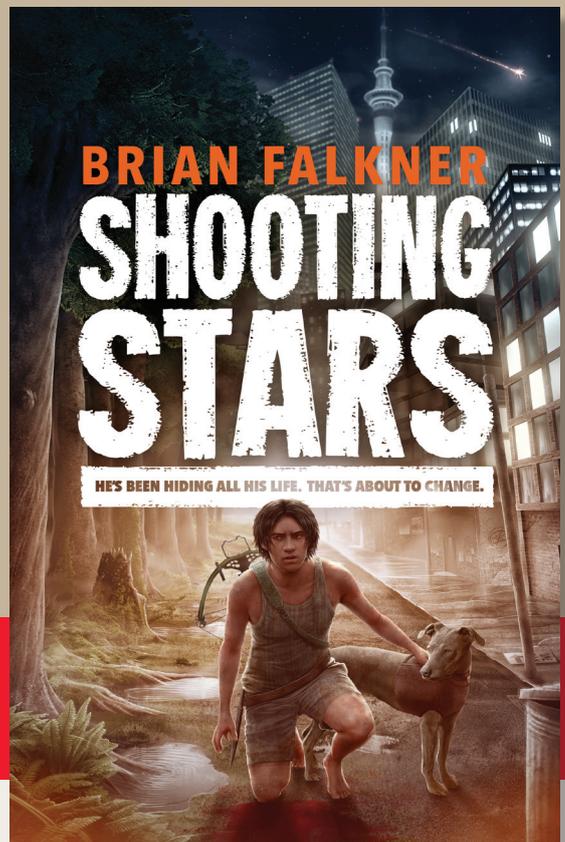


Shooting Stars

By Brian Falkner

- Reading • Writing • Listening • Presenting
- Debating • Social Studies • Evaluating
- Researching



Synopsis

Egan Tucker has grown up in the middle of the New Zealand bush. When he was a baby, his mother lost a bitter custody battle, and rather than hand him over to his abusive father, disappeared with Egan to live in a remote cottage deep in a North Island, New Zealand forest.

Now fifteen years old, Egan has never known electricity, television or the internet. He has never seen hot and cold running water, or a flush toilet. He lives in a world of Tilley lamps and long drop toilets, where food comes from the bush, or the nearby river – not from a supermarket. His knowledge of the rest of the world comes from the collection of books his mother has accumulated for him, and the occasional magazine that she brings back on her infrequent trips out for supplies. He amuses himself by writing stories in the style of his favourite authors. He draws and paints pictures in the style of his favourite artists. Egan's friends are the animals, birds and insects of the forest. The boundaries of his world are the hills that surround their tiny valley.

This is the only life he knows. But he knows also that one day he will return to the world. When he's an adult, and safe from his father. On his eighteenth birthday, he and his mother will leave the valley, and he will venture, for the first time, into modern New Zealand. In preparation for this, his mother has given him a 'code', a set of rules for living his life, to help him cope with the world and the people he will find in it.

But Egan's world is about to change. A few days before Christmas, his mother makes the long trip to the nearest store, to fetch much-needed supplies, and a surprise for his Christmas present. She doesn't return. Now Egan must venture out, by himself, into a world that is unlike anything he has ever known. Egan's strange story, and his code, rapidly turn him into an international celebrity. He is interviewed on all the major news channels. It turns out that the world has a lot to learn from a boy who has never seen it before.

But his father now has custody, and after an initial happy period, he turns out to be worse than Egan could have imagined. His father is violent, drunken and abusive. Egan runs away, intending to escape back into the one place he knows best, the New Zealand bush.

About the Author

Brian Falkner began college intending to study computers, but along the way he decided to shift his focus to something more creative. After gaining a diploma of journalism, he worked as a reporter and advertising copywriter. Other jobs helped pay the bills and also expanded the first-hand experiences that would enrich his fiction, among them stints as a motorcycle courier, radio announcer, graphic designer, and an internet developer.

His debut novel *Henry and the Flea* was published in New Zealand in 2003, and *Shooting Stars* is number 15. Brian's work has been published in 14 countries, including the USA, Canada, England, Australia, Germany, France, Japan and the Netherlands. Most recently his novel *Battlesaurus: Rampage at Waterloo* won the 2016 award for Young Adult Fiction at the New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults.

Brian currently lives on the Gold Coast of Australia with his wife and two daughters.

Writing Style

This is a gripping adventure story that will quickly draw the reader into Egan and Moma's world. *Shooting Stars* uses the constructs of diary entries, court transcripts, television transcripts, a Will and newspaper articles to support the narrative. The themes explored include domestic violence, survival, personal responsibility, homelessness and children sleeping rough, all issues that may be challenging for some readers. However, the topics are introduced sensitively and are an important part of gaining understanding of the characters' motives.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the front cover. What clues does the cover give about what location and era the story is set in?
- What is the purpose of a prologue?
- Which three characters are we first introduced to in the Court Transcript?
- What is a Captain Cooker? What changes between Dec 1 and Dec 3? (p. 13)
- Why does Moma tell Egan to start the diary again? What are the reasons Moma thinks he should write the diary? Who is Egan writing the diary for? What does Egan have in common with the pig? (pp. 14–17)
- What had they done to keep the pig out? Why wasn't it working? (pp. 18–19)
- Why does Egan stay off the trails during hunting season? Can you predict the reason(s) why Moma and Egan are living in the bush? Why might they not want people to know they're living there? (pp. 20–21)
- How does Egan describe the rain? Why did they rename the landmarks around where they live? (pp. 22–23)
- What signs did Egan use to track the pig? What would happen if he missed the pig's heart with the crossbow? (pp. 24–25)
- While Egan was waiting for the pig to line up, what did he hear? What told him there was a hunter nearby? (pp. 26–27)
- What is the other animal in the forest that the hunter might be hunting? How does Egan describe the movement of the hunter? (pp. 28–29)
- How is Egan rescued from the pig? (pp. 30–31)
- How is J.T.'s appearance described? Why was Egan surprised that J.T. liked the bush because it was so quiet? Why couldn't Egan tell J.T. where he lived? (pp. 32–33)
- Why did Egan thank and apologise to the pig? How far was Egan's hut from J.T.'s camp? What is a cache? Do you think Moma will be worried when Egan doesn't come home for tea? (pp. 34–35)
- What does 'shootin the shit' mean? What is 'DOC'? What does a 'deer culler' do? (pp. 36–37)
- What does 'load the magazine' mean? What happens when Egan fires into the sky? What does Egan tell J.T. about his father? (pp. 38–39)
- How did Egan know Moma was angry? What does Egan mean by 'But I wonder if somehow I was getting punished in a way that I don't understand.'? (pp. 40–41)
- Why is Egan unsure about going back to see J.T.? Why might Egan's book about the moon not mention the moon landing? (pp. 42–43)
- What is Egan writing a story about? What do you think it should be called? (pp. 44–45)
- What does 'disturb his quarry' mean? Would you rather lose your sight or your hearing? Why? (pp. 46–47)
- Why did Egan and Moma come up with 'The Code'? (pp. 48–49)
- What is a 'block and tackle'? What is a 'skiff'? What do you think would be a good title for Egan's story? Are you surprised by what the story is about? How would you describe Moana? (pp. 50–61)
- What is the CSC? Who is in it? Do you agree with Moma's Code #6? (pp. 62–63)
- Who is the newest member of CSC? What do you think the swearing in ceremony might have involved? Why can't you look directly into the sun, even in an eclipse? What was J.T.'s solution for that? (pp. 64–65)
- What does 'thwarted' mean? Do you think it's realistic for Egan to hope Moma and J.T. might like each other? Why can't he introduce them? Do you think Egan has made a mistake by staying by the fire? (pp. 66–67)
- Why did J.T. say Egan was his son? Do you think Egan liked to be called J.T.'s son? Why did the visitors change their manner towards J.T. and Egan? (pp. 70–71)
- What is Egan's dilemma in telling Moma about the cyclone? What do they do to prepare for the cyclone? (pp. 72–73)
- Why would historians be excited to find the cave? What is 'the eye of the storm'? (pp. 74–75)



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- What did they find when they got back to the hut? Why did Egan wish J.T. was there? Do you think he might have wanted him there for another reason too? (pp. 76–77)
- Do you think J.T. is getting suspicious about where and how Egan lives when he sees him again after the cyclone? What does ‘shoot the breeze’ mean? (pp. 78–79)
- What does J.T. think about ‘the code’? What was it like for J.T. when he first left the army? (pp. 80–81)
- What happens that makes Egan tell J.T. everything about his life? Do you think Egan can trust him? (pp. 82–83)
- Why might J.T. be looking differently at Egan now that he knows his secret? What do you think J.T. might be hiding in the bush from? (pp. 84–85)
- What is a ‘tableau’? What does ‘gunning the engine’ mean? What does ‘agitated’ mean? What might leaves look like if they were agitated? What does Egan mean by ‘Constable-esque’? Why do you think Egan called the story ‘Of Mince and Men’? Do you think it is an accurate title? Were you surprised by the way Egan’s arm was broken? (pp. 86–93)
- What sign did Moma see in the sky? What did she think it meant? What was Egan worried about missing? Where do you think J.T. will think he is? (pp. 96–97)
- What does Egan know about what happens at a tangi? Have you been to a funeral or a tangi? Was it similar to what Egan is expecting at the tangi? Do you think it’s too risky for Moma and Egan to go to the tangi? (pp. 98–99)
- Who was the old lady? Why do you think Moma hadn’t told Egan who she was before she died? (pp. 100–102)
- Do you think J.T. will keep Egan’s secret now that he has gone? Where do you think he might have gone? Why would Egan find Lotto tickets in his Christmas gift? (pp. 105–106)
- Do you think Egan is being honest with himself about being glad that J.T. has gone? (p. 108)
- What do you think has happened that has kept Moma from returning to the hut? (p. 111)
- Do you think Egan has enough things on his list? Do you remember him mentioning anything else he owned that he should put on the list? (p. 116)
- Who do you think ‘Acacia Kavanagh’ might be? Where do you think the money in the lock box might have come from? (pp. 117–119)
- Who will Egan go to now that he knows Acacia is dead? Would you leave the forest or stay at the hut? Why? (pp. 120–121)
- Where does Egan decide to go? How is he going to get there? (pp. 125–126)
- How does he feel when he first gets off the boat in Auckland? (p. 127)
- Why are there a lot of free pencils in the shop called TAB? How did the group try and trick Egan? Why did they try and trick him? Why did Egan think one of the boys was an Apache? Were you surprised Egan pulled a knife on the boy? (pp. 128–133)
- What does the phrase ‘it’s always darkest before the dawn’ mean? What does Egan say that makes June change her mind about helping him? How does that change her feelings towards him? What does June tell Egan just before he leaves? (pp. 134–138)
- Why does Egan think the city is like a beast? (p. 139)
- Even though Egan has had no contact with people outside the forest, he is still able to read the situation he is in and react to protect himself. How was he able to do that? Do you think living by Moma’s code is helping him in the city, or making life harder for him? (pp. 140–150)
- How does Egan get his bag and other possessions back? (pp. 151–154)
- How did Simon know Egan and Moma were at the tangi? Why was Simon so suspicious of Egan’s motives to see him? What did the other people visiting him want? What did Egan ask Simon when he left? How do you think Simon felt about the question? (pp. 158–162)
- Do you think the kids that live under the bridge can empathise with Egan’s story? What do you think it must have felt like for Egan when he first walked into the huge public library? What did Reggie do to try and help Egan find his mother? (pp. 163–165)
- What do you think it’s like for Egan to have a friend his own age for the first time? Do you think he is confusing friendship with love? (pp. 167–169)
- Do you think the police were looking for Egan, or was it just a coincidence when they started chasing him? Do you think the other kids believed him when he went back under the bridge? (pp. 176–180)
- Why is it so hard for the other kids to understand why Egan lives by a code? Is it hard for you to understand too, or do you agree it’s a good way to live? (pp. 181–182)
- Why did Reggie and Egan take paper towels from ‘Maccas’ before going to have a shower? What do you think the consequence for Egan and Reggie would be if they were caught showering in the apartment? (pp. 183–185)
- Can you identify facts, as they are reported in the article, that don’t match with the story Egan believes? (p. 189)
- What does Egan predict would happen to the kids in his crew if they had to survive a week in the forest? In what ways are they looking out for him? (pp. 190–192)
- What else could Egan have done when he came back to the cave to find the older boys there? Knowing what you know about Egan, and the code he lives by, do you think it was possible for him to do anything other than stand up for his friends? What happened that changed the older boys’ minds about hurting Egan? (pp. 193–199)
- Why do you think Egan doesn’t do anything to stop his friends sniffing glue or drinking alcohol? (p. 202)
- Egan is devastated to be hurt and caught by the police. Do you think that it might be a good thing that he will have adults to help him now? Do you think Jack got away? (pp. 206–208)



- What motivated the street kids to help Egan? Who do you think organised them to work together? Are they starting to live by Egan's code? (pp. 209–213)
- Why do you think J.T. was prepared to fly back to New Zealand immediately to help Egan? What do you think J.T. is doing in Australia? (pp. 215–217)
- Do you think Reggie has done the right thing by finding Egan's father? Do you think Egan can trust his father? Is he telling the truth? Has Egan put Moma in danger by telling his father where she went missing? Do you think J.T. is angry that Egan didn't arrive at the DOC office? (pp. 218–225)
- What is a DNA test? How will the police use it to prove Egan is who he says he is? (p. 232)
- What did Lauren mean by 'a gang of rabid paparazzi'? (p. 236)
- What is a 'motivational trainer'? (p. 240)
- How well do you think Jack is adapting to life in the city? (p. 242–243)
- Why are all the overseas news agencies interviewing Egan? (p. 245)
- Are you suspicious of Egan's father's motives for putting the tracking app on Egan's phone? (p. 246)
- Do you think Egan should tell the police where the hut is? Do you think Moma has gone back there? (p. 262–263)
- Do you think Egan can trust J.T.? Why is J.T. so willing to help Egan? (pp. 265–266)
- What did Lauren mean by 'young love is a fickle thing'? (p. 279)
- How do you think Lauren really hurt her eye? (p. 280)
- Given that you now know Egan's father is violent towards Lauren and was threatening to Egan, who do you believe, Moma or Ray? What evidence do you have so far to back up your belief? (pp. 290–291)
- What did the boys do to hide their crime? (p. 292–294)
- Why did Lauren think they would need a big church for Moma's funeral? (pp. 295–296)
- In what ways was the funeral very different to how Egan may have expected it to be? (pp. 297–303)
- What do you think Moma would have thought of Egan's speech about her? (pp. 304–305)
- Why was Ray in such a foul mood after the funeral? (pp. 306–307)
- Why do you think people were leaving unkind comments on Egan's Facebook page? (pp. 308–309)
- What had happened at the mall that meant that Ray was already angry before Crackerjack scratched his car? What injuries did Crackerjack sustain? (pp. 310–315)
- What happened to finally make Lauren leave? What did she tell Egan to do? (pp. 316–319)
- How long does it take from when Egan rings J.T. until he arrives at his house? (pp. 322–325)

- How were the Police able to know what happened between Ray, J.T. and Egan? (pp. 325–329)
- What is an 'Appellant'? What is a 'Defendant'? In this case, who is the appellant and who is the defendant? (pp. 330–336)
- What does *The New Zealand Herald* article say is the reason Egan became famous? (p. 337)
- What does Helen DeGrassi say she was looking for in the sky? (pp. 338–339)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: LIVING BY A CODE

Moma and Egan lived by a code. Thinking about how you view the world, design a code that you believe you do, or should, live by. As a class, discuss your codes and develop a shared class code.

ACTIVITY 2: DEER CULLING

In pairs, use online resources such as the Department of Conservation website to research the reasons behind DOC employing deer cullers. Not everyone supports culling. Research the reasons people might be against culling. In your pair, decide which side of the argument you will take and present your arguments for and against to the class.

ACTIVITY 3: FINAL ARTICLE

At the end of the book there is a *New Zealand Herald* article about Egan being hurt by his father. Write a further article for the newspaper about Egan's life and death. Include information about resources at the end for young people who might need help with domestic violence.

ACTIVITY 4: HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE

Research the agencies where you live that support homeless people. Write interview questions and telephone or email the agency to find out what they do for young people that are homeless. Include a question about what kind of support the community could give to help them in their work. Using the information you gather, plan a fundraising activity to raise money, or goods, to donate to the homeless charity of your choice. As a class, evaluate the ideas and decide which idea would be best to use.

ACTIVITY 5: RE-WRITING THE ENDING

Pick up the story just before the television transcript in which we find out Egan has died. Write a new ending to Egan's story in which he recovers from his injuries. What happens next?

Written by Sarina Dickson



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