



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Year 6 and Lower secondary
(ages 12+)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- *The Tell* presents a complex, coming-of-age dilemma with a moral crossroads

THEMES

- Family
- Corruption
- Legacy
- Loyalty
- Ethical and moral decisions

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia and Martin Chatterton

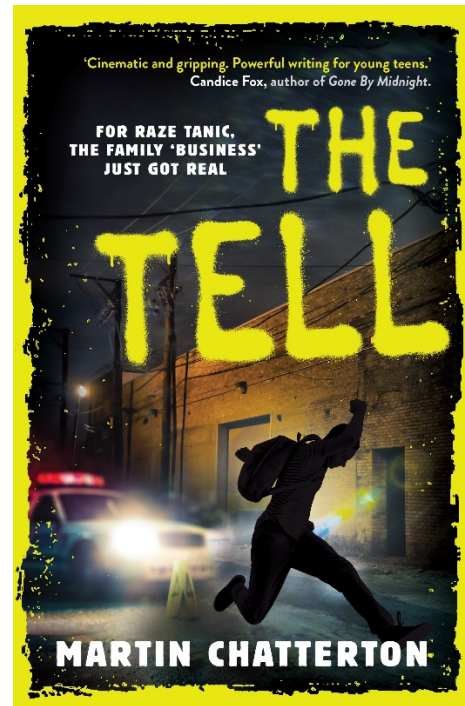
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The Tell Martin Chatterton

PLOT SUMMARY

Thirteen year-old Rey ('Raze') Tanic is the youngest son of Dejan Tanic, the self-styled 'King of Sydney', a feared crime boss, currently locked up in the Deep Cut Correctional Centre. It is expected of Raze that he will soon join his elder brother Solo in the family business.

However, Raze has other plans and, during a visit to his father in prison, tells him exactly that. To Raze's surprise, his father doesn't react. That's because Dejan has more pressing worries: namely that he is about to escape from Australia's most secure prison. When he does, Raze is thrust into a media feeding frenzy and a rapidly escalating turf war. His only respite in an increasingly tense and scary situation are his friends Candy Cooper and Ids McLafferty, the two other members of MCT, Raze's graffiti 'crew'.

With his father nowhere to be seen, Raze is seen as an easy target by rival crime gangs. He takes refuge in the attic space at Candy's house: a situation complicated by the fact that Candy's hard-nosed cop father, Don Cooper, is the lead investigator into Dejan's escape.

After Solo becomes a victim of the gang war, Raze is more determined than ever not to become 'a Tanic'. That resolve is hardened after he, Candy and Ids manage to prevent a bomb going off at a crowded Randwick Racecourse. A bomb, Raze is shocked to

discover, planted by his father in a tit-for-tat attack on a crime rival, Jonjo Sullivan.

As events in Sydney threaten to spiral into more bloodshed, Raze finds out that his father is in partnership with Candy's corrupt father. Raze, Candy and Ids tape the two men discussing their illegal multi-million dollar casino/real estate development scheme and, with nothing to lose, blow the whole thing sky high by projecting the evidence onto the side of the Sydney Opera House along with pin-sharp audio.

The story ends with the three friends heading north with no real aim except to put their previous lives behind them. They don't know what's in store and that's exactly how they like it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Martin Chatterton was born in Liverpool, England, and has been successfully writing and illustrating for over thirty years. He has written dozens of books for children and illustrated many more, collaborating with a number of illustrious authors along the way, including several British Children's Laureates. His work has been published in fourteen languages and has won or been shortlisted for numerous awards in Australia, the US and the UK. As Ed Chatterton, Martin writes crime fiction, screenplays and historical fiction and several of his books are in development with various TV and film producers. Martin is also well known as a children's performer and tours globally. In 2017 Martin gained his PhD and is currently working on an animated feature related to his doctorate. After a period spent living in the US, he now divides his time between Australia and the UK, where he is a partner in a media production company.

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Martin says:

I'd been writing books for children across a variety of genres and age ranges before I 'migrated' into becoming an adult crime fiction writer. After I'd written three or four crime novels I started to think that writing a middle grade thriller in the style of the 'grown up' books might be a good idea. During that same time period, I was also visiting and performing/speaking at a large number of schools and literature festivals and, as someone who regularly switched genres and target age range of readers, I'd noticed that writers often altered their writing 'voice' when it came to stories for children. Often – in my humble opinion – that voice could quite often be tinged with a patronising tone. I didn't mean that my high school thriller should be age inappropriate, just that it should be as visceral, paced and hard-edged as my crime novels. So that was the thought behind the project.

When it came to the 'what' of the story, I looked to doing the same things I was doing in crime fiction: namely, being interested in criminality as a subject in which those engaged in crime were not one-dimensional ciphers. After a chance conversation with someone who'd been raised in families where crime was normalised – was in fact, the family 'business' – I started to wonder about what that would be like, and soon realised that was going to be the primary subject of *The Tell*. There have been many (too many) novels, movies and TV shows set in the world of the gangster. Few, if any, have told that story from the perspective of a child born into a crime family. I set out to do just that: effectively to re-write a *Godfather* novel, only with the centre of the narrative lying not with Don Corleone but with his 14-year-old son (Rey 'Raze' Tanic).

This would be a coming-of-age story with a difference. It would invoke (I hoped) other stories in which young people run headlong into reality, accelerating their transition to adulthood (for better or worse). I was thinking specifically of Stephen King's novella, *The Body*, in which four twelve-year-olds set out to find the body of a missing young man. *The Body* (which was made into the movie, *Stand By Me*) skilfully sketches the emerging adults in the four protagonists. *The Tell*, like *The Body*, is anchored in reality: in *The Body* there is a dead body ('The kid was dead. The kid wasn't sick, the kid wasn't sleeping. The kid wasn't going to get up in the morning anymore . . . or catch poison ivy or wear out the eraser on the end of his Ticonderoga No 2 during a hard math test. The kid was dead.') while in *The Tell*, the gangsters who rule Sydney are just that: gangsters. For Raze Tanic, negotiating his path through puberty is complicated beyond measure when he is thrust into the centre of a red-hot news story with his own family as 'stars'.

I set the story in a third generation Croatian family. There are a number of reasons for this. I'm not Croatian, but I am a European immigrant to Australia and I wanted to write the story from the perspective of an 'incoming' culture. Making the family Croatian is not a comment on Croatians: I just happen to know a lot of Australians with Mediterranean/Balkan/Greek/Macedonian heritage and I enjoy the ebb and flow of their speech patterns. From the point of view of a writer, there's something rich about those rhythms that I enjoy working with: it's a selfish reason! The third reason is to position Raze and his family as lying further 'outside' what we can lazily term 'normal' Australian society. The media find it easy/easier to classify entire ethnic groups as criminals and, for part of *The Tell*, I look at those ideas. And, as readers will discover, the Tanic family are by no means the worst crooks at work in *The Tell*.



WRITING STYLE

Martin says:

While many of my children's books are comedies, the style of writing I've used for my adult crime fiction is not. With thrillers, I try to write in a spare, fast-paced 'filmic' style with a strong sense of place and character conveyed primarily through dialogue. It's a style in which, for me, many of the best exponents are American writers: Elmore Leonard, Richard Price, Don Winslow and, before them, Raymond Chandler, Patricia Highsmith, Walter Mosley and Dashiell Hammet. It's no coincidence that so many of those writers have had their work turned into movies: what they write is already halfway to being onscreen. You could call the style 'noir', although in the UK my crime books are often placed in the genre marked 'Brit Grit'. The key to this sort of writing is in keeping the sentences mostly short, reducing the amount of description, and letting the characters and dialogue move the story along. I write a lot of screen material and find it a natural fit for me. Perhaps that's because I come at writing from a visual arts background. I find it easier to think visually and the punchy style of 'noir' writing is close to writing for the screen. It's also something that you find in graphic novels and comics: both things I'm interested in and have worked on.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. What is a 'coming-of-age' novel?
2. What is meant by 'organised crime'?
3. What is meant by 'ethical choices'?
4. What is meant by 'nature versus nurture'?
5. Do you think graffiti is Street Art or vandalism?
6. 'Noir', which is one of the writing styles used in *The Tell*, is a French word. What does 'noir' mean literally? And why would that word be used to describe books or films?
7. *The Tell* is (mostly) written in 'first person'. What does that mean? Why do you think choosing this style works for this particular story?

POST-READING QUESTIONS

1. What do you think you would do if your parent was a gangster and wanted you to join the 'family business'?
2. Do you think it's fair that people are judged by the actions of their family members?
3. In *The Tell*, Raze, Candy and Ids break the law many times in order to help stop Raze's father. How can you judge if that is the right thing to do?

4. Raze and Candy in particular make a definite choice to cut themselves off from their families (or, at least, their fathers) in order to be better people. In their situation, what do you think you might do?
5. What is meant by the phrase 'the greater good'? And who gets to decide what 'the greater good' is?
6. At one point in *The Tell*, Raze finds himself with nowhere to stay. If that happened to you – if, quite suddenly, you couldn't go home – what do you think you would do?
7. What historical events in Croatia in the last fifty years might have affected Raze's family and, perhaps, encouraged them to become criminals?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

- Family relationships and friendships
- Family pressures
- Loyalty/divided loyalties
- Crime and punishment
- Personal responsibility; ethical and moral choices
- Incarceration
- Grief/loss
- Media
- Policing
- Corruption
- Street art
- Social media
- Shakespeare
- Greek myths
- Film noir

KEY QUOTES

1. *'[The prison] was built for one reason and only one reason: to keep the wolves away from the sheep.'*
Who are the wolves and who are the sheep?
2. *'And, right now, Fiji's neck is talking. I've sat behind Fiji on the way to the Coffin about a million times before and I've never thought about the back of his neck once until I saw that tick. That tick is Fiji's tell, and it's trying to tell me something. The big question is what?'*
What is a 'tell' and why is it so important in the story?



3. *'Jail's what the Tanics do. Not me, though. I'm going to be different. Watch me.'*

Is Raze right in what he says? Is he so different to his father? Or do you think the way he turns the tables on his father and Don Cooper shows that really he is every bit as tough and ruthless as his dad?

4. *'As far as everyone is concerned we're all tucked up safe and sound in our beds.'*

We've got all night.'

This quote comes at the end of a chapter which sees Raze, Candy and Ids preparing to paint one of their designs on a wall. I've picked it because of the last phrase: 'we've got all night.' That's because (for me) Raze here isn't just talking about the actual night they are in – I think what he's really saying 'we have the rest of our lives ahead of us'. And, more than that, having 'all night' is their choice, not the choice of their parents (who don't know they're out at all). Can you find any other examples in *The Tell* where a simple sentence might contain deeper meanings?

5. *'Keep paddling. Just go. The sly thought tugs at me, whispers the dizzying possibility of nothingness in my ear.'*

Here, Raze is waiting in the surf to meet Solo, his brother. He's on the run, homeless and desperate and he's thinking about the awful (but tempting) idea of just paddling out forever until he just disappears. This part of the scene deliberately 'echoes' a famous moment in a famous Shakespeare play spoken by the Prince of Denmark. Can you spot which speech I'm talking about?

6. *'The world turns on moments like these. Crossroad moments; a toss of the coin. Write your name in blood and flames, or accept this is how the world works – that there are wolves and there are sheep.'*

In this scene in Chapter 44, Raze is waiting for Candy to tell him what she wants him to do. What is the choice he'll face?

7. *'I can see the beast inside my father and I know I have one just like it. But what I also know for sure is that I want to keep mine under control. The beast inside my father has already eaten him.'*

What does Raze mean when he says the beast inside his father has 'already eaten him'?

8. *'I pull the bat back, stop for a micro-second and then – whomp! – smash the front headlamp of the Lamborghini into a shower of glittering glass.'*

Why does Raze smash up his brother's car?

THEMES

Martin says:

The main theme in *The Tell* is 'family expectations'. It's a book about how someone deals with family pressures. Admittedly, Raze Tanic has a lot more family pressure than many people his age do, but most of us have some kind of family pressure put on us at some point in their lives.

Like a lot of writers I often 'go back' to myths, legends and William Shakespeare for inspiration and thematic ideas. Particularly Shakespeare, who is forever putting sons and daughters into conflict with their fathers. I visited Shakespeare's family home recently (in Stratford-upon-Avon in England) and it was obvious that Shakespeare's dad was a powerful figure in the town. He owned the biggest house and was well respected. It's not hard to imagine Will rebelling in some way against that kind of authority. He certainly wrote about it in plays like *Hamlet*, *Henry IV* and *King Lear*. I actually 'stole' the idea of Dejan Tanic seeing himself as the 'King' of Sydney from *King Lear*: a play in which the King deliberately tries to make his children as ruthless as he is. And, in *Hamlet*, Shakespeare has Hamlet say this line about his (step)father, Claudius: 'A little more than kin, and less than kind.'

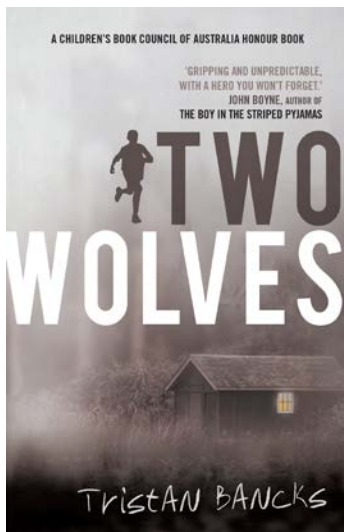
The second source I went to when looking at the theme of family pressures and relationships in *The Tell* was Greek mythology. It's hard to separate out individual Greek myth stories when looking at father/children relationships as pretty much *all* of Greek mythology is about that subject: the Greek gods are forever hating and killing or banishing their sons or daughters, or the other way round.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND GENERAL ACTIVITIES

- At the end of *The Tell* we see Raze, Candy and Ids heading north to Byron Bay. Will they make it? And, if they do, what happens next?
- Watch the movie *Stand By Me*.
- How many movies can you find that are inspired by, or based on, a play by Shakespeare? That doesn't include movies *of* the Shakespeare plays!



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



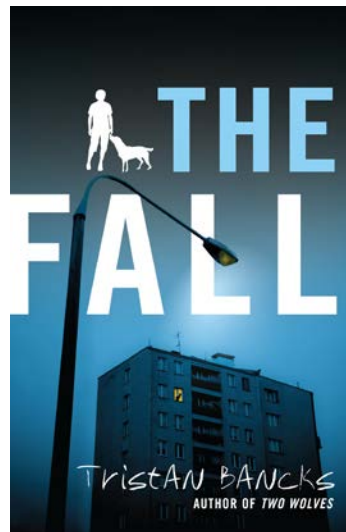
Two Wolves by Tristan Banks

One afternoon, police officers show up at Ben Silver's front door. Minutes after they leave, his parents arrive home. Ben and his little sister Olive are bundled into the car and told they're going on a holiday. But are they?

It doesn't take long for Ben to realise 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.

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

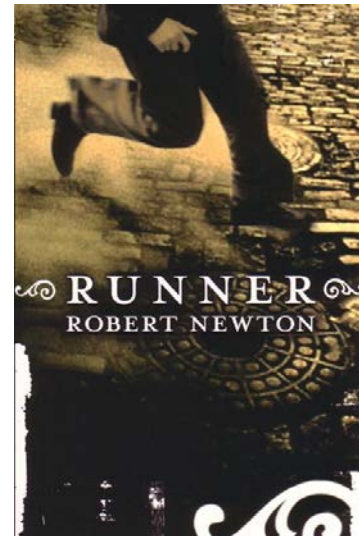
Teachers' resources available.



The Fall by Tristan Banks

It's 1919, Richmond football club is on top of the ladder, cream buns are threepence each and four boys are gunning for the best job in town. Charlie is lucky enough to win the prime job – running messages for Squizzy Taylor, the most dangerous gangster in Melbourne. But things start to get a little too hot for Charlie, so he decides to take the money and run . . .

Teachers' resources available.



Runner by Robert Newton

It's 1919, Richmond football club is on top of the ladder, cream buns are threepence each and four boys are gunning for the best job in town. Charlie is lucky enough to win the prime job – running messages for Squizzy Taylor, the most dangerous gangster in Melbourne. But things start to get a little too hot for Charlie, so he decides to take the money and run . . .

Teachers' resources available.

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
The Tell	Martin Chatterton	9781760895945	6-10	16.99		
Two Wolves	Tristan Bancks	9781760892661	5-9	16.99		
The Fall	Tristan Bancks	9781760892654	5-9	16.99		
Runner	Robert Newton	9780143302070	5-9	19.99		
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