



Cassie Clark: Outlaw

by Brian Falkner

About the author:

Brian was born in New Zealand. Even at school he knew that he wanted to be a writer. It took him thirty years to realise that dream when his first junior novel, *Henry and the Flea*, was published in 2003.

He had studied computers at university but dropped out to pursue his love of writing. He trained as a journalist, and then worked as a reporter and an advertising copywriter, a radio announcer and an Internet developer before finally becoming an author.

In 2005 *Super Freak* was nominated in the Junior Fiction category of the 2006 New Zealand Post Book Awards. *The Tomorrow Code* (2008) was nominated in the Young Adult Fiction category of the 2009 New Zealand Post Book Awards, and the 2009 LIANZA Children's Book Awards. Most recently, Falkner's *Battlesaurus: Rampage at Waterloo* (2015) was shortlisted for the 2016 NSW Premier's Awards, and won the Young Adult Fiction category of the 2016 New Zealand Book Awards for Children and Young Adults

Falkner now lives in Queensland, Australia.

Synopsis of novel:

Cassie Clark – Outlaw follows a very traumatic month in the life of 18 year old American girl Cassie Clark. Cassie is a first year college (University) student, who is trying to solve the mystery of her high-ranking politician father's mysterious disappearance. She already leads a very complex life – mentally ill and demanding mother, resentful and difficult younger sister, inappropriate yearnings for Cam, her assigned bodyguard - and she has adopted a calm exterior coping mechanism, but her sharp and dogged determination to solve her father's disappearance plunge her head first into multi-layered treachery and violence that will leave readers panting for breath at times.

A shadowy and very powerful group of financial 'puppet masters' have plans to put their own man into the White House' but the mounting body count and physical and mental injuries Cassie endures only make her more determined to bring the group to justice.

The novel ends with the group's plan stymied but the leader of the group still at large, apparently too powerful and well-connected to be held in any prison. Cassie declines the new President's offer of an amnesty, for all her supposed crimes while on the run, and adopts the life of an incognito outlaw. She will not rest until she has her man – and we feel she will. A sequel must surely be in the wings.



Themes / issues

This is a book packed with issues worth exploring, including; girl power, self-belief, emotional and physical resilience, family loyalty (despite injustices), the justification of violence, the nature of conspiracy theories, the masks we all wear, the links between political and financial power, corruption.

Writing style

The first person present tense works well for a story of this nature as it gives an urgent, breathless feel to the fast moving narrative. The dialogue is sharp most of the time and Falkner deals well with Cassie's interior monologues, using them to expose both plot and her own growing awareness of the evils she is battling. A strength of the plotting is that Falkner makes the reader work hard at trying to figure out just who 'the baddies' are, and how and why they are able to operate as they do. At the conclusion of the novel we are still puzzled to an extent, and this is how it should be.

Year level suitability and application

Despite the main character's age (18) the novel is probably best aimed at year 10 and 11 students and it should appeal to both boys and girls. Some will read it only for the filmic quality of the rapid action (and the mounting body count) but others will wish to delve into the issues the work raises.

Curriculum links

The book will obviously work well for a Level 1 English Written Text character study. It also has links to the Social Sciences and some economics teachers could well use it to highlight the massive financial and political power wielded by private companies, particularly in the banking and oil industries. The various American settings, most of which are well described, could be of interest to social studies and geography teachers.

Before reading: Setting the scene

Reading the cover for visual/verbal clues:

- Students work in pairs to study the verbal and visual clues given by front and back cover of the book. They make a set of predictions on plot, character and setting based on those clues alone.

- While doing this, students can also make a list of statement that identify how they are being 'positioned' by use of of colour, contrast, images, layout, font style.

Prior knowledge discussion:

- What do the students know of the American high-school and college scene?
- What do the students know of the American political system?
- What do the students know of conspiracy theories to do with President J.F. Kennedy's death?
- What other novels or films have emotionally and physically powerful main characters?

During reading: Understanding the content – Answers to these chapter heading questions may be written and/or oral

The Accident: What do we learn about who Cassie might be?

Bad Karma: Describe her relationship with Jackson. Explain her father's political importance.

College: Why doesn't Cassie have any close college friends? What is her reaction to the newspaper article?

Going Home: What is your reaction to her comment 'No way in hell am I flying cattle class.'

The Dam: Imagine you were a survivor of this incident – describe your experience.

Harrisburg: Describe the complex relationships Cassie has with her mother and her sister.

Reinhardt: What explanation does Cassie give for her lack of visible emotions?

A Mistake: What is this mistake?

The Diary: What is Cassie's reaction to reading the diary?

Mr Arbuckle: Take a guess at what he might know and be warning Cassie about.

Nutter: How would you describe Ethan Arbuckle's state of mind?

Puppet-Masters: Explain the link in this chapter with the Kennedys.

Three Bad Men: How real did this chapter seem to you?

Aftermath: Why was Cam not more hurt in the fight and what fate may he have saved her from?

Take a Bullet: What are your thoughts about Cam at this stage of the story?

D'Tox: What are two unusual things about this guy?

The Man who Wasn't There: How does her father's official missing status impact on Cassie's life?

Drugs: Why is the drugs story so ridiculous?

Interrogation: Describe Cassie's experience at the hands of the police.

The Warrant: What is your guess about what happened in the drugs test?

Prepared: What do you think of Cassie's 'people judging radar'?

House Arrest: What do you think of Jackson's summary of her personality?

FBI: Do you think Cassie should feel any safer with the FBI?

Joshua Tree: Describe and do an accompanying drawing of a Joshua tree.

Crockpot Cookin': Explain this gruesome method of death.

Hospital: What is Cassie's dilemma about staying at the hospital?

The Mansion: What reasons did Abel, Mullins and Robins give for the series of disasters listed on page 111?

Release: Would you trust these people at this stage? Why or why not?

Charlotte Hunter: What is driving Cassie's anger?

Waste Transfer Station: What similarities to the dam disaster can you see?

Brooklyn: List four stages of the bridge's destruction.

Devastation: Why do 'the puppet-masters' want Kurtz to be President?

Figuring it out: What is Camp David?

Fire: How does Cassie react to being shot at?

Boak Rings: Explain how he traced her?

Camp David: How has Stamp been used?

An Unnatural Disaster: Make a list of Cassie's current injuries.

Show Me a Hero: What difficult decision does Cassie have to make?

A Tragedy: How does Katz survive the shooting?

Deluge: What causes the 'downpour'?

Madam President: What possible similarities may there be to Johan Stamp and Lee Harvey Oswald?

Jarhawk: Why doesn't Cassie accept the new President's amnesty invitation? Do you think she will 'get her man'?

Post reading: Taking it further

Theme analysis:

Activity one: Group work activity

Select two of the themes / issues listed earlier in these notes and get students to write what the author may be commenting on and how he may be positioning them think about these issues. When considering the 'how' aspect students will need to closely consider character presentation. A group spokesperson reports findings to the class.

Activity two: Individual work – NCEA level 1 Written text essay questions.

Attempt one of these questions from the 2017 level 1 Written Text external exam

- Describe at least one challenge faced by a character in the written text. Explain how this challenge helped you understand the character.
- Describe at least one idea that changed your perspective or point of view in the written text. Explain how this idea changed your perspective.
- Describe a key moment in the written text that surprised or shocked you. Explain how this moment was important to the text as a whole.
- Describe a character that you disliked or admired in the written text. Explain how your feeling towards this character helped you understand the text as a whole.

Role play activities:

(These need to be handled with sensitivity and closely monitored by the teacher)

- In groups select a short scene or episode from the novel. Present it to the class using a combination of existing dialogue and your own added dialogue.

- Monologue – adopt the role of one of the characters and speaking in character explain your relationship with another character. Suggestions: Jackson reflecting on Cassie or Katz reflecting on Kassie.
- Monologue - Speaking as a main character in the novel one year in the future, reflect on events of a year ago.
- Monologue – speaking as James Boak try to justify your actions. Also speak of your thoughts on Cassie Clark.

Beyond the text activities:

Research 1: Explore the assassination of President J. F. Kennedy. Write a factual account of the assassination and then give a summary of at least two conspiracy theories about his death.

Research 2: Research the role that large international banks and/or oil companies play in influencing politics internationally. In what way might some of this activity be compared to the work of the 'puppet-masters' mentioned in the book?

Design a poster or make a short film promoting or debunking a well-known conspiracy theory.

by Denis Wright