



TEACHERS' RESOURCES

RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary
(ages 15+; years 9 to 12)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Politics
- **General capabilities:** Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking; Literacy; Personal and Social Capability; Visual Literacy; Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A suspenseful and chilling read that will stay with you long after you turn the final page.
- Prepare yourself for curses, vivid nightmarish imagery, creepy grandparents and an inscrutable email chain steeped in mystery.
- *Archives of Despair* shares ten seemingly unlinked short stories with something dreadful in common – all the children are met with a tragic fate.
- Not for the faint-hearted!

THEMES

- Trauma
- Morals and ethics
- Death, mortality and existentialism
- Body horror
- Liminal spaces
- Storytelling, truth and uncertainty

PREPARED BY

Penguin Random House Australia

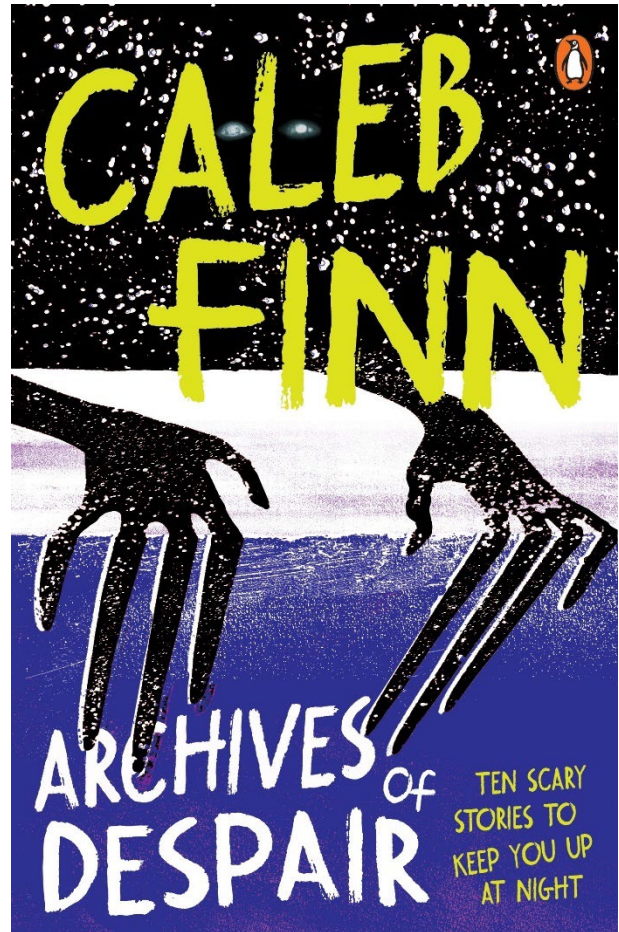
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Archives of Despair

Caleb Finn

SUMMARY

From the chilling mind of Caleb Finn comes his debut Young Adult book: a collection of ten stories to haunt your thoughts and fuel your darkest fears.

The blurb

You have been given access to secret files buried deep within the archives. Disturbing stories never meant for the light of day.

Stories of evil grandparents and unsettling homework. A string of deaths, seemingly unrelated. Walls squirm, as if alive. A cursed wish comes true. Ordinary people behave oddly, even family and your closest friends . . .

These stories share a common fate. All the children are met with tragedy.

Coincidence?

Or could these nightmares be connected by something more sinister than you dare to imagine?

A dark and chilling mystery awaits.

Find the answers, before he finds you.

About the author

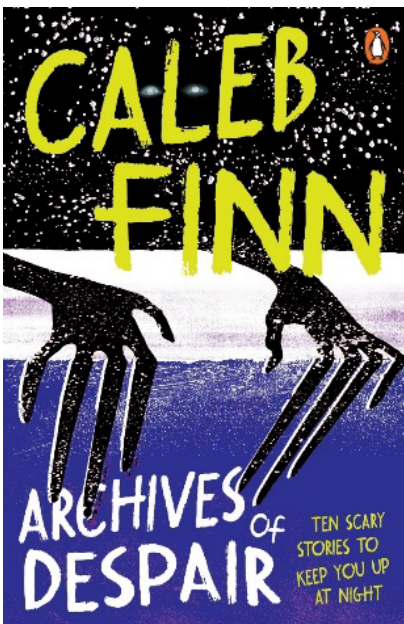
Caleb Finn is Australia's most-followed male content creator, with over 17 million fans worldwide. Known for his cinematic short horror films, Caleb is inspired by film, digital culture, body horror and liminal spaces. His fascination with creepypastas, urban legends found in the corners of the online world, motivated him to write his own collection of scary short stories. He documents his parenthood journey on his TikTok channel to millions of followers.

Caleb lives in Melbourne with his partner and young child. Archives of Despair is his debut novel.

BOOK DESIGN

The cover

Designer Christa Moffit was briefed to create something eerie, thrilling and shocking.

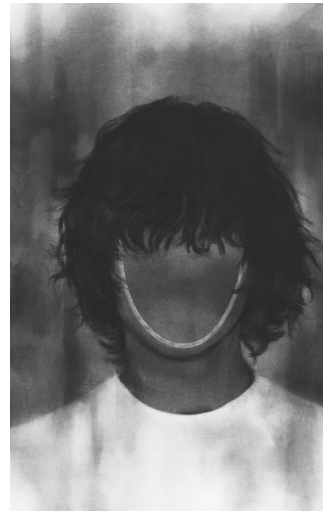


Questions and activities

1. Look at the book's cover. Identify visual techniques used in the design that help you form ideas or assumptions about what the story will be about.
2. What genre do you think the story is? Which elements of the cover gave you hints about the genre (for instance, colours, fonts chosen, imagery)?

3. What do the title and image tell you about 'despair'?
4. Predict what you think may happen in the story.
5. The blurb on the back cover is brief and mysterious, and written in the second person. Why do you think the publishers and author chose to give minimal information about the characters and story in the blurb?

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION



Interview with the author:

Congratulations on writing your first novel. How did you first come up with the idea for Archives of Despair?

Thank you! It's been a lifelong dream of mine to write horror short stories. *Archives of Despair* was first born from the idea of what *Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark* would look like in 2023. Kids are a lot harder to scare these days, and a lot has changed over the years since frightening scarecrows and witches in the woods were the pinnacle of terror. The internet and its creepypastas and urban legends were a huge inspiration for me.

What was your writing process like for Archives of Despair? Did you have a writing routine, or any regular rituals?

It was a fantastic experience. Recalling all of my childhood fears and nightmares was thrilling as well as very confronting. I believe that true horror happens close to home, which is why most of the stories in *Archives of Despair* happen in very normal, everyday environments. It was a little tricky to balance writing an entire book while caring for my one-year-old son and making daily content for the internet! Once I got into the groove, it became hard to stop. I loved every second of it.



I had a very strict ritual for the process. I listened to two very specific YouTube playlists every single time I sat down to write: *The Caretaker – Everywhere At The End of Time* and *Silent Chill* (a relaxing playlist from the soundtrack of *Silent Hill*). Definitely recommend listening while reading!

How long have you been working on it?

I think just about a year, if you include all the pre-planning as well as the countless rewrites and proofreads (haha).

Do you have a favourite book? Have you always been inspired by horror?

My favourite book would have to be *Uzumaki* by Junji Ito. He's an incredible horror manga artist. I would have to say *The Enigma of Amigara Fault* by the same author is my all-time favourite short story. Truly terrifying. Horror has always been a huge inspiration for me since I was little. I was a spooky kid. Horror just has this mysterious and cosmic draw that pulls me in. I really do find comfort in the dark.

What inspired you to become a writer?

I've been making horror content in short video formats for six years; it's my bread and butter. Though I really wanted to challenge myself and bring my point of view into an entirely new space.

I had to completely rethink my entire approach since I couldn't visually scare the viewer anymore – I had to describe it. I'd have to say now I prefer the latter.

Do you think there is a place for comedy in horror writing? R.L. Stine once said, 'laughing and being scared, I think is the same visceral reaction.' Do you agree?

Absolutely. Horror takes form in all shapes and sizes. Being happy and terrified are on the opposite ends of the spectrum, and it takes a very skilled storyteller to make the two ends meet. Jordan Peele's films are a fantastic example of how to combine the two to tell incredible stories.

What surprised you most about the publishing process?

TIME. IT TAKES SO MUCH TIME. I really thought I could smash out a quick twenty pages a day. Oh, ho ho! How innocent I was.

What did you want to be when you grew up?

I wanted to be a video game tester (haha). I really thought it was just being paid to play games all the time. Instead, it's searching for bugs and glitches for eight hours a day and not actually playing.

I did end up becoming a preschool teacher for about six years. Kids are just endlessly fascinating to watch as they learn things and expand their understanding of the world.

Being a content creator and now a published author of children's horror books was definitely not on my bingo card, but I couldn't imagine my life any other way.

Do you have any tips for aspiring authors?

Any and every idea that floats through your head: WRITE. IT. DOWN.

Originally, I had about thirty stories planned out for *Archives of Despair* before I nailed it down to ten. I still have my notepad with the most ridiculous stories I made up from just observing our world and thinking how I could twist it into a nightmare. I remember I had a story about a kid who saw the neighbours' cat transform into an old man in a leotard! Pretty scary stuff.

What are you most afraid of?

Mannequins and aliens.

WRITING STYLE

Voice:

Archives of Despair is a collection of short stories written in first person and past tense. The stories are interspersed with emails written directly to the reader, using second person.

The writing often employs short sentences and details are dripped throughout the action. This creates suspense and a sense of immediacy, as though the reader is watching the scene unfold in real-time. The author also uses speech, either in dialogue or an internal monologue, to reveal what the protagonist is going through.

Example:

I turned around and looked down the hallway, catching a small glimpse of The Cleaner before he disappeared around the corner.

'Hey!' I cried out. 'Where's Dad?! What did you do to him?'

I launched into a sprint to catch up with The Cleaner. I was the fastest girl in my grade. If there's one thing I could count on, it was my speed.

I grabbed the corner and pushed my weight off the opposite wall, nearly losing my grip against the wet paint slipping through my fingers.

'Don't walk away from –'



Questions and activities

- In the above example, how effective is the speech in pacing the story? Describe a scene (it can be inspired by *Archives of Despair*, or one you've made up) and write one version with no speech and plenty of description of the action; and another version with less detail and some speech. Is the second version briefer, and more economic? Which do you enjoy reading the most?

Form:

The term **epistolary novel** refers to a book written as a series of letters; or one where the narrative is dispersed with additional content in the form of diary entries, newspaper articles, transcripts, emails. These can be fictionalised as part of the narrative or real-life resources. The word **epistolary** means of or relating to letters. (Macquarie Dictionary.)

Archives of Despair is a collection of ten short stories, and interspersed with these stories are emails addressed to the reader, so it could be described as an epistolary novel.

Here are some classic examples of epistolary novels through time – they are still iconic today:

- Bram Stoker: *Dracula*
- Margaret Atwood: *The Handmaid's Tale*
- Stephen King: *Carrie*

Questions and activities

- What do you think of the emails that are threaded throughout the book? Do you think it is effective in adding intrigue and propelling the narrative? Why?
- One of the stories also uses a diary format (*Happy Birthday*.) How does this format impact the unfolding action? How would your reading of, and enjoyment of, the story change if the story was written in standard first person past tense prose?
- Use the epistolary structure in your own creative writing. You can choose two fictional characters and write down their correspondence, or you could add extra content (like newspaper articles, radio transcripts, blog posts, diary entries) to your narrative.

ILLUSTRATIONS**About the illustrator**

New Zealand born, Melbourne based artist Adam Parata is known for his atmospheric and thought-provoking work. Drawing inspiration primarily from life and the complexity of the human experience, Adam's handling of visual storytelling can be described as a dance of both literal and abstract forms to communicate simple and complex messages. This sensitive approach to handling form, detail, light and texture is where the magic lives, and it's through these focused sensibilities that Adam is able to create drama, story and atmosphere in his masterful work.

Adam finds working with darker themes to be most thought-provoking, and what interests him the most about illustration is its ability to tell stories, share and communicate at scale.

'For me, the work should ideally transcend itself and become a portal to a story, an experience, another world, another time. This is the power of the arts; it's like magic.'

Growing up studying the masters, watching films, playing sport, obsessing over video games and building huts in the countryside of New Zealand has no doubt informed Adam's work. But it's this merging of a curious country boy feeding on the offerings of a modern city that continues to grow the fruits of Adam's labour.

Illustrations in novels

The book contains eleven original illustrations by Adam Parata. They feature at the beginning of each short story on the facing left-hand page.

Scary Stories to Tell in the Dark by Alvin Schwartz (1981) is a horror book for young readers, featuring illustrations by Stephen Gammell. His black-and-white artwork in charcoal and ink became iconic for their gruesomeness, dread and surrealism.

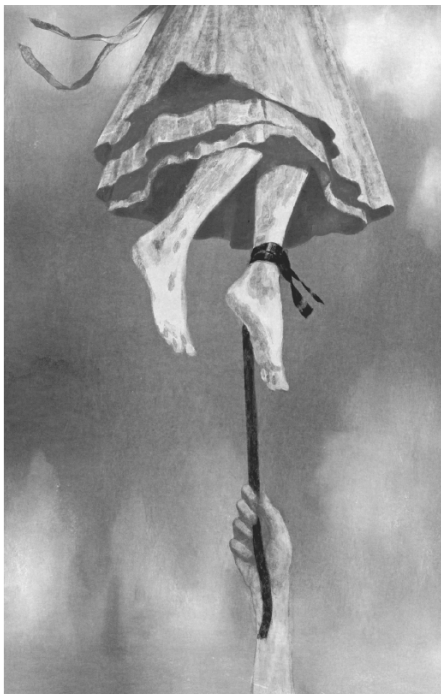
The history of illustrations in novels is varied. In the nineteenth century, many of Charles Dickens' major works were illustrated with black-and-white etchings, these may have contributed to his writing's popularity. However, by the twentieth century illustrations in literary fiction declined, and it is uncommon to find illustrations in novels today.

Questions and activities

- Do the illustrations add to your experience reading the stories? Why or why not?
- What do you think of Adam's scene choices to match the story? Do they add mystery, intrigue and horror to the experience of reading the story? Do they 'spoil' the narrative in any way?



- Would the images be more or less impactful if they were in colour? Why?
- Choose one of the short stories and create your own illustration. Have you chosen a similar scene to the illustrator, or something completely different? Why?



THEMES AND CHARACTERISATION

The Bowler Hat Man

The author created a sinister character that is omniscient in each of the short stories, who is later revealed to be intrinsic to the metanarrative explored in the emails. He is described like this:

He wore a tan-checked suit and a bowler hat. He didn't smell very pleasant but that's to be expected by now. I wondered how this man was wearing clothes that haven't existed for five centuries.

The presence of this quiet character adds to the mystery and dread of the stories. The reader quickly realises that any time he is mentioned, the outcome is not going to be good. This is a powerful plot device as the author is deliberately restrained in *The Bowler Hat Man's* involvement in the action – leaving the reader to fill in the blanks with a sense of dread and suspicion.

Questions and activities

1. What was your take on the Bowler Hat character? How does the description of his looks, his smell and his clothing impact this impression? Does his old-fashioned outfit, for example, make him more scary, or less?
2. Write your own scary short story with the Bowler Hat Man involved. He can be a background character or a more prominent one. Check through the stories (especially *Lovely Day* and *The Extra*) to fact-check you have his characteristics consistent.

Trauma

The author describes trauma as 'the driving force and main theme [he] focused on when making *The Bowler Hat Man*. All of the events occurred through his unhealthy channels of relieving the trauma from losing his family, as well as projecting his jealousy onto others.'

The word trauma (from the Greek word for *wound*) can be defined as a startling experience which has a lasting effect on mental life; a shock (Macquarie Dictionary.)

This theme is common to the horror genre, with many films, TV shows and books exploring a character's grief, past trauma and fears to varying degrees.

Questions and activities

1. After learning of *The Bowler Hat Man's* past in the short story *The Extra*, did you feel differently about his actions?



- There is a content warning at the beginning of *Archives of Despair* highlighting some of the themes of the book, as well as a page with helpline phone numbers listed. The author says his hope is 'for these stories is to encourage younger readers to face their fears and persevere through confronting situations.' Discuss.

Extension question and activity (on morality and ethics)

- How large an impact should someone's mental health history and personal circumstances have on our understanding of criminal behaviour? Research real-life examples of crimes perpetrated by people with traumatic backgrounds and discuss the judicial case, media coverage and long-term impacts for all people involved.

- shows them to be not true or not as the character or reader had believed them to be.
- Write a story that incorporates some or all these elements you have uncovered. It can be the beginning of a story describing the setting, an ending, an extract, or a full short story. Up to you!
 - Research 'gothic fiction' or 'gothic literature' and compare *Archives of Despair* to other works of gothic fiction you have read or seen. What do you think the differences are between 'horror' and 'gothic' stories?

Horror and gothic literature

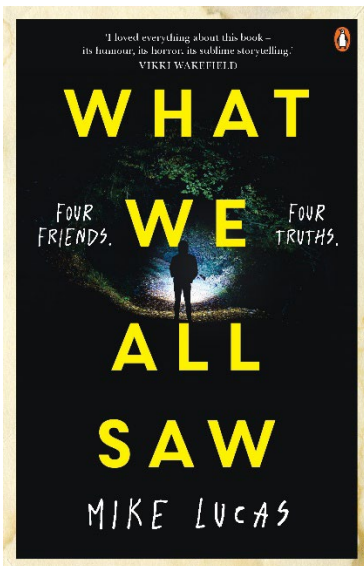
The horror genre is not as recent as you might think. Popular horror novels include the work of Stephen King, R. L. Stine and Anne Rice. But even in the 18th century, readers loved reading novels that scared them. Many gothic novels are still read and loved today and continue to inspire the horror genre, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula*; Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*.

Questions and activities

- Research the basic tenets of the horror genre and make a list. See if you can identify these tropes in other books/movies/TV shows you've come across. What scared you most?
- Identify similar tropes present within *Archives of Despair*. For instance, some of these might include
 - nightmares
 - an abandoned or decrepit house
 - bodily possession
 - a local legend
 - the supernatural
 - inanimate objects coming to life
 - sinister sounds
 - hyperreal or artificial environments
 - a curse that comes true
- Make a list of how the author uses these tropes, but also how he subverts them or



FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



What We All Saw
Mike Lucas

'I loved everything about this book – its humour, its horror, its sublime storytelling.' VIKKI WAKEFIELD

Witches only exist in stories. Everyone knows that. But what if the stories are real?

FOUR FRIENDS. FOUR TRUTHS. ONE NIGHTMARE.

If you wander into the wood ...
If you hear scratching sounds from the Old Quarry ...
If you go too close to the edge ...

WATCH. OUT.

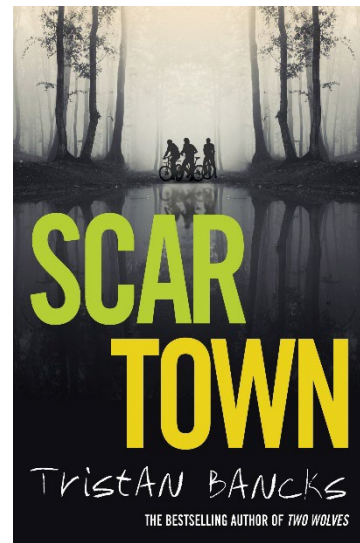
Teachers' notes available.



House of Hollow
Krystal Sutherland

Iris Hollow and her two older sisters are unquestionably strange. Ever since they disappeared on a suburban street in Scotland as children only to return a month later with no memory of what happened to them, odd, eerie occurrences seem to follow in their wake. And they're changing. First, their dark hair turned white. Then, their blue eyes slowly turned black. People find them disturbingly intoxicating, unbearably beautiful and inexplicably dangerous. Now, ten years later, 17-year-old Iris is doing all she can to fit in and graduate high school – something her two glamorous globe-trotting older sisters, Grey and Vivi, never managed to do. But when Grey goes missing, leaving behind only bizarre clues, Iris and Vivi are left to trace her last few days. They aren't the only ones looking for her. As they brush against the supernatural, they realise that the story they've been told about their past is unravelling and the world that returned them unharmed ten years ago, might just be calling them home.

Teachers' notes available



Scar Town
Tristan Bancks

A missing father. A drowned town. A buried secret. Three friends on a dangerous mission to uncover the truth.

Seven years after Old Scarborough was drowned, a house is emerging from the water. Will and his friends Dar and Juno dare each other to explore it.

But when they find bones – and a stash of cash – they realise they're not the only ones interested in its secrets.

Now they're fighting for their lives against the men who want what they found. Will can't leave the mystery alone, though. What if the bones belong to his missing dad?

A DANGEROUS JOURNEY TO UNCOVER THE TRUTH IN A TOWN THAT WANTS THE PAST TO STAY BURIED.

From the bestselling Australian author of *Two Wolves*, *The Fall*, *Detention* and *Cop & Robber*.

Teachers' notes available



ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
Archives of Despair	Caleb Finn	9781761341694	9-12	\$19.99		
What We All Saw	Mike Lucas	9781761045936	8-12	\$19.99		
House of Hollow	Krystal Sutherland	9780143796992	8-12	\$19.99		
Scar Town	Tristan Bancks	9780143791812	6-9	\$16.99		
TOTAL						

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