Overview

This intriguing, fast-paced novel will keep adolescent readers enthralled to the very end as they unravel the true facts and the motives behind what is happening to Doug and his siblings. The Smith family lost their parents in a level-crossing smash some eighteen months previously. They were determined not to be separated as a family, and the person living next door, Tori, undertook to look after them. Her application to the Family and Children's Services for custody of the teenage family of five was refused, as Tori, who is only 22, has a heart condition. Rather than be split up, the Smith family, together with Tori, became fugitives. They have been living, always on the alert, but managing, for the past fourteen months. Now, however, Detective Sergeant Scott Backer and the partner he has been assigned to in Perth are tracking them down - for a very important reason.

Opening

The beginning of the story is gripping in that there is an ostensibly routine situation but there is an underlying tension. The sight of the police causes fear in Doug as he goes to great lengths and tries desperately to avoid a routine licence check. He is driving a Mercedes Benz. We have no idea why he is acting as he is, although there are hints throughout the text that indicate to the reader that there is more going on than meets the eye.

Title

Where does the title of the novel come from? Explain how it was devised.
Characters

The main character is Doug. What is his real name? Why does he go under a different one? Give a profile of Doug stating what he looks like, his age, and what sort of person he is. Who is Victoria Marie Smythe? Draw up a list of the names and ages of all the members of the Smith family. Who is Anna? What is Anna's position? What is her role in the story? Do a pen portrait of Detective Sergeant Scott Backer. Imagine you are a detective whose job it is to compile profiles of people for whom the police are searching. Taking all the evidence you can glean from *Operation Foxtrot Five* make up a file on Doug and Tori stating as much information as you can about each person. Who is Uncle Jock? What is his contribution? What is his relationship to the fugitives? Write up a description of each policeman and how they work. (Refer to page 81.)

Plot

The plot is a complex one in that there are a lot of things happening and the reader has to determine where everything fits in. Do a summary of the story for your school magazine. Throughout the story the author drops clues as to the fact that there is more happening than we realise on the surface. Find some examples of this and make up a list with the class. At times, even Doug thinks that things do not add up. Look at instances where he feels this.

Time

Examine the use of time in the novel and look at the sequence of events in the story. For example, consider where and how the story starts and how it comes full circle on page 109.

Language and Literacy

Why does Doug try so hard to evade police and avoid a routine licence check at the beginning of the story? How did Doug come to be driving a Mercedes Benz car? Why didn't he deny that he had stolen it when the police questioned him? What happened when the twins completed their SOSE assignment? (See page 18.) There are numerous words that portray emotions used throughout the novel. Make a list of as many as you can. What are the children's circumstances? (See pages 21-2.) What conclusions does the detective draw from looking at photos of the children? There are several instances in the story of how police operate. List some of these. When the police search the house where the fugitives have been living, what do they find of interest? (See page 30.)
What does Scott keep from the rubbish left behind by the fleeing family? Why? What pressures are on the seventeen-year-old Doug? Some evidence is given on page 36.

What are the motives for the actions of the Smith family, Tori, the police? Jot down some occasions where the group outwit the police.

Are there places where the police outwit the family and Tori?

What are some of the tactics the police use?

What do Scott and the partner he is given in Western Australia find out about each other? How and why do they establish each other's credentials? What were the black arrows all about? What did you think they were for as you were reading?

What other elaborate signs had been worked out between the children to avoid being traced? Why does the detective conclude the group will be harder to trace because they have access to money?

On page 71 the detective is able to confirm how the children look now they have changed their appearances. However, he knew most of this already. How did he? How is suspense and tension established by the author?

What does the conversation between Scott and Doug reveal on page 86?

What things impress Doug about these police? (Refer to page 127.)

On page 134 we have Doug recalling things that didn't make sense. What were some of these things?

How do we know about Scott's background?

By what shorthand do you think the name *Operation Foxtrot Five* would be referred to by those on the case?

Are there any other organisations or bodies that use code names? What is the purpose of code names? Make up your own code name for a story you are writing. Give examples of entrapment. What effect do the notes left by Steven Douglas Smith have on the policeman? (Refer to page 41.)

How did Scott know about the beach house at Dongara?

How do the police trace people? There is an example on page 44. Find others from the story. What facilities do the police have at their disposal?

How is the atmosphere of fun we see the group enjoying on pages 47-8 different for the reader than for the family? Have a look at how D. J. Stutley allows the reader to learn what is going on. See one instance on page 40. Clues are given bit by bit by the author. Find some other examples from the text.

What does Scott hurting himself at the Hallen's place do for the story?

What is the proposal that Scott puts forward on page 175?

There are breaks within the story scattered throughout the chapters. What is the effect of these? What is a red herring? What are they used for? Find some examples from the text and explain why they are red herrings.
Setting

Where is the story set? Is the setting important?
There are many changes in scenery in this novel. List them and say why they are in the story.

Style

Comment on the way the story is written.

Genre

What type of story is *Operation Foxtrot Five*? Describe it to a friend.

Health and Human Development

Two of the people in the story have health problems. What are these? How does their condition play a part in the story?
We see Doug as a teenager who has responsibilities far beyond his years. What are these? How do we see him develop as a person?
Despite the fact that the children are fugitives from the law the reader sees them manage to enjoy themselves on occasions. Find places where this is evident in the story.
There is a definite affinity between Scott and Doug. What is this based on? There is a great deal of evidence in the story that the group has strong attachments and know each other very well. Give some examples from the text, there is one on page 50.
What was the purpose of taking Doug to the Hallen's place?

Technology

In *Operation Foxtrot Five* the police have very sophisticated means of surveillance and detection at their disposal. Look at these in detail, make a list of them and talk about these methods.

Ending

It is not until the last few pages that the story reaches a climax and the Smiths, together with the reader, learn why the police had mounted such an operation to find them. Comment on this. What is the explanation at the end?
**Issues**

At the very end of *Operation Foxtrot Five* what is at stake is revealed, although we have had various hints and clues throughout the whole novel. Why were the police so interested in finding the Smith children? Conduct a class discussion on the subject.

**Discuss**

Trust, honesty, betrayal, courage, responsibility. The importance of family.

You set me up. (Page 76.)

**The Craft of Writing**

Pretend you are in the police force and it is your job to write a police report on the case of the Smith children after it has finished.

Describe the place the two detectives took Doug on Sunday and what they did there. Recount, in your own words what happened there. (Refer to page 141.) What does Doug learn from the experience?

Scott says to Doug on page 163: You ran away instead of standing up for what you believed. Is this fair? Does Scott mean this? Is it true that Doug didn't have the courage to stand up for what he believed?

Scott uses psychological tactics in his approach to connect with Doug. Look at some of these and write about them. Did they work? What do these methods show about Scott? What do they reveal about Doug?

Write a critique of *Operation Foxtrot Five* for your local newspaper, outlining what happens in the story and some of the features that kept you reading until the very end.

Write a mystery thriller of your own and give it a code name.

**About the Author:**

Doris Stutley was born in the United States, but her family moved to the small south-west town of Wagin, in Western Australia, in the 1960s. Later they moved to Port Hedland where Doris met her husband.

Doris and her husband spent four years in Papua New Guinea where they took on the role of Hostel Parents at a Missionary Kids hostel. There they looked after thirteen children from Australia and New Zealand, plus two of their own. Doris now lives in Perth and has four children.

Sections of *Operation Foxtrot Five* are being used in course notes by the Australian College of Journalism. *Operation Foxtrot Five* is Doris Stutley's first novel.