

Education Resources Pre-Production

Sydney Theatre Company presents

The Secret River

By Kate Grenville

Adapted for the Stage by Andrew Bovell

PRE-PRODUCTION RESOURCES

About Sydney Theatre Company **2**

About STC Ed **2**

Creative Team and Cast **2**

Themes **2**

Synopsis **3-7**

Historical and social background **8-10**

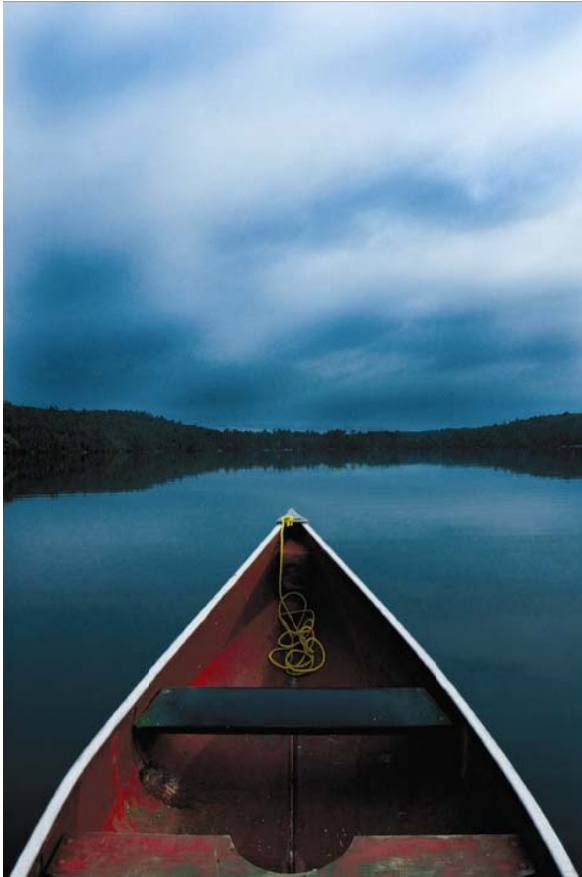
Additional Resources **11-15**

PRE-PRODUCTION EXERCISES

My Place **16-18**

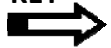
At Cross Purposes **19-22**

The Art & Craft of Adaptation **23-25**



Education Resource written and compiled by Kerreen Ely-Harper

KEY



AIM of exercise or section



Extension Exercises



Download and watch



Drama Exercises



English Exercises



Play online

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Education Resources 2013

© Copyright protects this Education Resource.

Except for purposes permitted by the Copyright Act, reproduction by whatever means is prohibited.

However, limited photocopying for classroom use only is permitted by educational institutions.

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

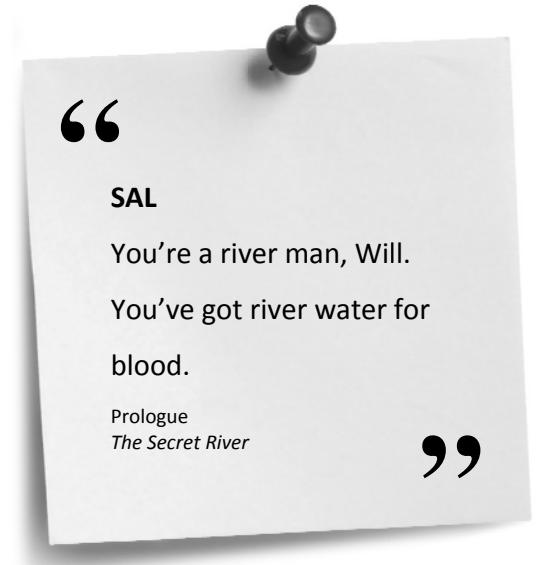
www.sydneytheatre.com.au/about

ABOUT STCED

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced/about/us

CREATIVE TEAM

Director	Neil Armfield
Set Designer	Stephen Curtis
Costume Designer	Tess Schofield
Lighting Designer	Mark Howett
Composer	Iain Grandage
Sound Designer	Steve Francis



CAST

Dhurrumbin Ursula Yovich
William Thornhill Nathaniel Dean
Sarah Thornhill Anita Hegh
Willie Thornhill (boy 13 yrs) Callum McManis/ Lachlan Elliott
Dick Thornhill (boy 11 yrs) Tom Usher/ Rory Potter
Yellamundi (Whisker Harry) Roy Gordon
Ngalanalum (Black Dick/Jack) Trevor Jamieson
Wngarra (Long Bob) Rhimi Johnson Page

Buryia (Polly) Ethel Anne Gundy
Gillyagan (Meg) Miranda Tapsell
Narabi (boy 13yrs) James Slee
Garraway (boy 11 yrs) Bailey Doomadgee/ Kamil Ellis
Blackwood Colin Moody
Smasher Sullivan Jeremy Sims
Sagitty Birtles Matthew Sunderland
Loveday Bruce Spence
Mrs Herring Judith McGrath
Dan Daniel Henshall

THEMES

Belonging & Identity

Dharug Culture

Australian History

Contemporary Australian Drama

Adaptation

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

The play is set on the Hawkesbury River between September 1813 and April 1814. The Dharug people who lived there at this time knew the river as Dhurrumbim.

Prologue

A family is gathered around a fire. This is their place and the place of their ancestors. The old man, Yalamundi sings a mourning song. Dhurrumbin, the narrator begins the story of the river and the people

William Thornhill is an English boatman. Having committed a crime of petty theft, he and his wife Sal and two sons, Willie and Dick were transported to Australia. Thornhill receives an early pardon from Governor Macquarie. But they only have thirty three pounds and this is not enough to pay their passage back to England. Will tells Sal he'd like to buy land on the river seeing it as a chance to do well. Sal is sceptical but she agrees, "to give it five years".

Act One

The family make their way down the river in Thornhill's boat, *Hope*. They set up camp in a small clearing. From a platform of rock looking down beyond their camp and the river, Thornhill imagines the hundred acres laid-out before him will be his one day.

Thornhill and Willie prepare the ground to grow corn. Dick sees what looks like a potato 'taters'. Three men appear. The elder, Yalamundi and the two younger men, Ngalamalum and Wangarra, hold spears. Yalamundi tells Thornhill this "This is our place. Our country". And asks, "Who are you? Where are you from?" He says they've come to get the yams ("taters"). Thornhill tells them this is his place now. Yalamundi picks up Willie's spade. A scuffle breaks out over the spade, which Thornhill and Willie think he is going to steal. The men raise their spears. Ngalamalum tells them to wurrawa "go away".

Frightened, Sal says there is no shame in going back to try their luck in Sydney again. Will tries to reassure her it was all a "misunderstanding". The next morning, Thornhill finds spears lodged in the ground. Seeing Willie at the tent door, he says "It's a show" and makes him promise not to tell Sal.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

There are other white settlers who have set up camp along the river. Tom Blackwood, Smasher Sullivan, Saggitty Birtles, Loveday and Mrs Herring are neighbours. Tom has a Dharug wife and a child and speaks her language. Smasher hates him for it.

Dick soon develops friendships with two boys, Narabi and Garraway, who live at the Dharug camp.

Thornhill and Willie are visiting Smasher's place when a young man Braniyamala, appears eating an oyster. Braniyamala tells Smasher that he must leave what oysters he doesn't eat for the Dharug. A furious Smasher flicks his whip catching Braniyamala full in the chest leaving a gaping wound. Smasher goes to strike again but Braniyamala catches the whip. Then without a word he lets it go and disappears into the bush. Thornhill is angry with Smasher's show of violence. Smasher snidely tells him to get himself a gun.

Sal confides in Mrs Herring that she is pregnant.

On a trip to Sydney Harbour Thornhill meets up with Captain Suckling, from the same ship he was transported to Australia in. Suckling humiliates Thornhill in front of Willie, telling him he'll always be the son of a common thief. Reunited with an old friend Dan Oldfield, now a convict, Thornhill takes him on as a labourer. Will having purchased a gun returns to the family camp.

Yalamundi and Ngalamalum stare up at a newly built hut along the river. They acknowledge that the white people are here to stay.

The neighbours have gathered for a singalong. Sal's pregnancy is now visible. They discuss the recent spearings. A fight breaks out between Smasher and Tom Blackwood. As Loveday sings to the white settlers, the Dharug family gather around a fire and sing a song of melancholy.

Act Two

Narabi and Garraway are swimming in the river. Dick leads Willie into the clearing. Dick runs down to the river to join his friends. Willie refuses to join them and leaves to tell Sal he's seen Dick swimming with Narabi and Garraway. An angry Thornhill goes to bring Dick back and comes upon his son and the boys crowded around Ngalamalum as he works on striking a fire.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Thornhill's curiosity gets the better of him and he makes a tentative approach. Ngalamalum glances up but makes no sign to greet him. Thornhill and the boys crowd in for a better look. They all watch as Ngalamalum works to make a fire. Thornhill and Ngalamalum speak each other's name for the first time.

That night back at the Thornhill's hut Dick is given a severe beating for swimming with the Dharug boys.

Time passes. The corn now stands high in the summer sun. Thornhill names a platform of rock as 'Thornhill Point' and declares this will be where he builds a house one day with a parlour, a sitting room and a fire place in every room. On the rock Dick sees a drawing that depicts their boat *Hope*. Thornhill refuses to see the boat in the rock drawing. He walks away uncomfortable knowing he is being watched by the Dharug people. But despite his reservations he and Sal trade clothing and flour in exchange for Dharug goods.

Thornhill returns home to find Sal has taken seriously ill. Tom Blackwood brings his wife, Dulla Dijin to their camp and she feeds Sal eel. When Sal makes a good recovery, Thornhill offers Dulla Dijin and the other women some coins in gratitude but they refuse, saying "just go out of our place".

The sound of singing and clapsticks can be heard. In the Dharug camp they are striped with white, their faces masks in which their eyes move. Thornhill watches from a distance in awe and fear to see so many people gathered.

Tensions are increasing between the settlers and the Dharug people. Thornhill visits Smasher's camp to buy some dogs. He finds that Smasher has a Dharug woman held against her will.

The Dharug have been sending out hunting parties to take revenge against the continuing assaults on their people. Due to the increase in violent attacks, Governor Macquarie decrees the settlers right to drive away the Dharug 'by force of arms'.

Thornhill is sailing his boat and goes past 'Darkey Creek' and sees there is no smoke and gets out of his boat to investigate. He finds a family murdered and holds a dying child in his arms.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

The corn stands tall and the cobs are ripe for picking. Buryia, Gilyagan, Narabi and Garraway are among the patch, picking it, laughing, calling out to each other, filling their dilly-bags up. Thornhill tries to stop them believing they have no right to the corn. Ngalamalum, Wangarra and Yalamundi enter. Thornhill pulls out a gun and points it at them. Ngalamalum stands his ground. Thornhill shoots. But Ngalamalum suddenly disappears. Dan drags a wounded Garraway out of the bush. Sal begs Thornhill to let him go. Much to Dan's disgust he agrees. Garraway staggers off into the bush, his arm broken. There is a stunned silence. They pick up the corn. Nobody can sleep that night. Thornhill keeps the loaded rifle by his bed.

Sal makes her way to the Dharug camp. Thornhill tries to stop her going but to no avail. When she arrives at the camp, it is empty of people but everything is left untouched - the humpy, the mixing bowls, the grinding stones, even the broom made of rushes. Nothing had been taken.

Sal knows they are now in serious danger and wants them to leave. Thornhill refuses. She gives him an ultimatum. Dan calls him away as the Dharug have started a fire at one of the settlers place.

They find Sagitty wounded from a spear but still alive. They attempt to remove it but he dies soon after.

Thornhill, Dan, Loveday and Smasher are silent as they pass a bottle of rum between them at the bar of *The Maid of the River*. Smasher urges they take revenge by attacking Blackwoods' camp. He argues that if they get rid of the Dharug Sal will have no reason to want to leave. Thornhill agrees they should do it tonight in the dark, in secret. They take *Hope* down the river toward Blackwood's camp.

At Blackwood's place the Dharug are gathered around their fire; Yalamundi, Ngalamalum, Buryia, Gilyagan, Wangarra, Narabi, Garraway.

Sal is seated by the light of a lamp. Willie and Dick have fallen asleep at the table. Their belongings are packed ready to go.

Thornhill returns to Sal and the children and tells them there is no need to leave now.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Epilogue

Dhurrumbin describes the horror of the massacre that happened that night.

Ten years later. Ngalamalum survives but is badly wounded. Thornhill offers him food. He says nothing. When Thornhill goes to touch him, Ngalamalum, comes to life, screaming "This me. My place".

References: The Secret River, by Kate Grenville, adapted by Andrew Bovell for the stage.

Consider

Where do you belong? Where is your place?

How important is place to our sense of identity?

Who owns a place?

Can you have reconciliation without recognition of past injustices?

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL BACKGROUND OF THE PLAY

The River People

The Dharug name for the Hawkesbury River is Dhurrumbin.

Governor Arthur Phillip named the river after a British aristocrat, Charles Jenkinson, the Baron Hawkesbury. Land along the river was granted to both free settlers and ex-convicts to establish housing and farming in the colony. The Hawkesbury became the major transportation route for the supply of food and other goods from Sydney to the river camps.

While traveling along the Hawkesbury River, Governor Lachlan Macquarie wrote in his journal on Saturday 17th April, 1813 :

Breakfasted at the confluence of the Grose & Nepean Rivers;
crossed the latter on Horseback by an easy Ford close to our
Breakfast Place, and ascended the mountain to the Summit,
which we reached about Noon – the distance thither from
where we crossed the Nepean being about Five miles.

Seven months later, on Thursday, 11th November, 1813, he wrote on the progress of farming in the area:

Rode wt. Capt. Mitchell &c. &c. along the Banks of the Hawky.
as far as the confluence of the Nepean & Grose Rivers; and was
equally gratified wt. the fine appearance of the Crops in that
part of the Country.

The abundance of natural resources, flora and fauna and fish on which the Dharug relied on to survive came under increasing threat with the activities of farming and land clearing. European settlement along the Hawkesbury was rapid and without negotiation or consensus with the Dharug people. This led to a series of violent confrontations between the settlers and the Dharug.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

The Novelist Descendent

Kate Grenville based the character of William Thornhill on one of her own ancestors, Solomon Wiseman, also a waterman and convict who settled and prospered on the Hawkesbury River. Grenville conducted an intensive and extensive research process in writing *The Secret River* and wherever possible adapted actual historical events into the book. In her 'Reader's Notes' she gives some examples:

Thornhill's first meeting with the Aboriginal people on the Hawkesbury is based on a similar incident involving the first Governor, Captain Arthur Phillip. The incident in which Captain McCallum fails to ambush a group of Aboriginal people is based on many accounts of similar failures by the military. The Proclamation which gives settlers permission to shoot aboriginal people is taken verbatim from Governor Macquarie's Proclamation of 1816. The massacre scene is based on eyewitness accounts of the Waterloo Creek killings in 1838.

Some characters are also loosely based on historical figures, and some of their dialogue is taken from their own mouths. Smasher, for example, quotes the early settler William Cox when he suggests the Aboriginal people should be shot and used for manuring the ground. Blackwood is based on accounts of particular settlers who protected Aboriginal people and fought for their rights. Mrs Herring takes some of her qualities from Margaret Catchpole, an indomitable early Hawkesbury settler.

The novel continues to enjoy popular success as well as extensive criticism for its dramatisation of history, most notably by eminent historian, Inga Clendinnen, who criticised Grenville for her dramatising of history. In her own defence Grenville claimed she never aimed to write history alone, but fiction based on historical events.

The Playwright Interpreter

Andrew Bovell believes the stage adaptation of *The Secret River* will give audiences the opportunity to examine 'who we are as a people'. For Bovell the key question at the heart of the Sydney Theatre Company's adaptation is the character of Thornhill: 'What price is a man prepared to pay for a future that is different to his miserable past?' In the story we are given small glimpses of mutual understanding and negotiation between Thornhill and the Dharug. But Thornhill's failure and refusal to understand the possibility of 'mutual understanding and accommodation' becomes invariably his tragic downfall.

Bovell is committed to bringing 'big stories that matter' to the stage and screen, that challenge Australian perceptions of our cultural and national identity, in the present and the past. His

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

stage and screen plays have not been afraid to challenge the status quo and are concerned primarily with contemporary social and political issues. Considered a writer from the 'Second Wave' of Australian drama in the early 1980s he began his early career as a writer in residence at the Melbourne Workers Theatre. Second Wave dramatists were primarily concerned with contemporary issues and questions of national identity. His best known works of this period are *After Dinner*, *Ship Of Fools*, *State of Defence*, and *The Ballad of Lois Ryan*. In the 1990's he began to work on adapting his own stage plays into film scripts (*Speaking in Tongues* was adapted into the screenplay *Lantana*) and co-authored a number of other screen works, *Strictly Ballroom* (from the stage play) and *Head On* (adapted from the novel by Christos Tsiolkas).

References

Diary extracts from Lachlan Macquarie's journal

<http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/lema/about.html>

<http://www.lib.mq.edu.au/digital/lema/1813/1813april.html>

http://kategrenville.com/The_Secret_River_Readers_Notes

<http://www.darug.org.au/DarugPeopleHistory.html>

Inga Clendinen 'The history question: who owns the past?', *Quarterly Essay*, 2006

<http://www.au.timeout.com/sydney/theatre/features/11548/the-secret-river-andrew-bovell-writes>

Paul Makeham, *Contemporary Dramatists*, 6th edn. 1994, pp. 70-71.



THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION



Additional Resources

Place & Identity

Digital Storytelling Project Videos that explore themes of belonging, place and cultural identity

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/belonging-and-identity/place-and-identity>

My Place, ABC 3 Television Series <http://www.myplace.edu.au/home.html>

Indigenous Cultural Identity

Video interviews with Indigenous filmmakers (Warwick Thornton, Ivan Sen, Beck Cole, Rachel Perkins) on representing culture and identity on film

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/belonging-and-identity/indigenous-cultural-identity>

Redfern Now, ABC Television Series

Aboriginal History

Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate On Earth: How Aborigines made Australia*, 2012

<https://upperlachlan.wordpress.com/2012/12/04/upper-lachlan-landcare-presents-an-evening-with-bill-gammage/>

First Australians (book and DVD) Rachel Perkins and Marcia Langton, 2010.

Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Australian Aborigines Since 1788, Bruce Elder, 1998

A Concise Companion to Aboriginal History, Malcolm D Prentis, 2008

With intent to destroy: reflecting on genocide, Colin Martin Tatz, 2003

Sydney Aboriginal Sites

http://www.australiaforeveryone.com.au/aborsites_sydney.htm

Waterloo Creek Massacre, 1838

Roger Milliss, *Waterloo Creek: the Australia Day massacre of 1838, George Gipps and the British conquest of New South Wales*, 1992.

See also massacre at Myall Creek, which occurred a few months before the Waterloo massacre.

<http://www.myallcreek.info/massacre/article/the-story-of-the-myall-creek-massacre/>

<http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/myall-creek-massacre-1838>

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Dharug People & Culture

<http://www.darug.org.au/DarugPeopleHistory.html>

<http://darugweavers.tripod.com/ourblackandwhitefamily/id53.html>

<http://www.dharug.dalang.com.au/>

<http://www.blacktownsun.com.au/story/388176/darug-people-no-longer-recognised-by-blacktown-council/>

Dharug National Park

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkHome.aspx?id=N0010>

Dharug Language

<http://www.dharug.dalang.com.au/index.php/latest>

Richard Green, Dharug Language Consultant



http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jt_yKiM5Krk

<http://www.baulkhamhills.nsw.gov.au/external/hillsvoices/RichardGreen.htm>

Dharug words & pronunciations

<http://www.dharug.dalang.com.au/index.php/word-list>

Hawkesbury River

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawkesbury_River

Yarramundi Cultural Heritage Report – available on line

Oyster Farm (2004) film set on the Hawkesbury

Australian National Maritime Museum

<https://anmm.wordpress.com/tag/hawkesbury-river/>

Kate Grenville

Biography

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/a-history-in-fiction/story-e6frg8h6-1226121481589>

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Public presentations & Interviews

- 'Difficult Art Is Like Spinach For The Brain' paper presentation at 2009 Melbourne Festival Of Ideas

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXe8aM_S7nU&feature=fvsr

- Melbourne Writers Theatre, 2011, In Conversation With Ramona Koval

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHBtx-Sd7bE>

- Sydney Writers Festival, 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OTvUupDcYsU>

- ABC Book Club *Meet The Author* series

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s3443627.htm>

- ABC Book Club Review, 2007

<http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/s1847953.htm>

- ABC Radio National, audio download, 2006

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/bookshow/book-show-book-club-kate-grenville/3336606>

Writing on The Secret River by Kate Grenville

- 'Secret River – Secret History', *The Sydney Papers*, Summer 2006, vol 18, Issue 1

- Searching for the Secret River, 2011

http://kategrenville.com/The_Secret_River_Readers_Notes

Novels & Film Adaptations

- Sarah Thornhill
- The Lieutenant
- Lilian's Story, (adapted into a film in 1996)
- Albion's Story
- The Idea of Perfection
- Bearded ladies: stories
- Dreamhouse (adapted into a film, Traps in 1994)

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Critiques & Reviews of *The Secret River* novel

<http://www.theage.com.au/news/reviews/the-secret-river/2005/07/08/1120704543439.html>

- Inga Clenndinen 'The history question: who owns the past?', *Quarterly Essay*, 2006
- Sue Kossew, Voicing the "Great Australian Silence", Kate Grenville's Narrative of Settlement in *The Secret River*, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 2007, vol 42, no 2, pp7-18
- Adam Gall, 'Taking/ Taking Up: Recognition and the Frontier in Grenville's *The Secret River*', *Journal Of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 2008
- Mark McKenna, 'Writing The Past', *Australian Financial Review*, 2005
- Mark McKenna, 'Australian history and the Australian 'national inheritance'', *Australian Cultural History*, 2009
- Sarah Pinto, 'Emotional histories and historical emotions: Looking at the past in historical novels', *Rethinking History*, Vol 14, Issue 2, 2010
- Sarah Pinto, 'History, Fiction and *The Secret River*' in *Lighting Dark Places: Essays on Kate Grenville*, 2011,

Andrew Bovell

<http://www.au.timeout.com/sydney/theatre/features/11548/the-secret-river-andrew-bovell-writes>

Andrew Bovell on writing, 'The Space Before Me', *Storyline*, Issue 31, 2012.

Biography & Interviews

<http://www.australianstage.com.au/200910072892/features/melbourne/andrew-bovell.html>

<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/arts/reverberations/story-e6frg8n6-1225991122397>

<http://teaching.austlit.edu.au/?q=node/12281>

Hilary Glow, *Power Plays: Australian theatre and the public agenda*, 2007

Writing Tips, 2009

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0QJT_ZSQ

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Films

- Edge of Darkness
- Lantana
- Strictly Ballroom
- The Book of Revelation
- Head On
- Blessed

Plays

- When The Rain Stops Falling
- Scenes From a Separation
- After Dinner
- Holy Day
- Speaking In Tongues
- Cloudstreet

What I Wrote, DVD

<http://www.whatiwrote.com.au/writer/bovell.php>

See Teacher's Notes

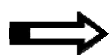
THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION



AIM: To explore the associations of place and identity and how belonging to a specific place contributes to our sense of self.

Place & Identity



Close your eyes.

Think of a place that is very special to you.

Imagine your special place – what do see, hear? How do you feel in this place?

Write down your memories of this place.



Form storytelling pairs.

Share the memory stories of your special place with each other.

Craft monologues or short scenes to present to the class based on your special places.



Watch & Discuss the short films on Generator on themes of identity, place and belonging.

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/belonging-and-identity/place-and-identity>

Address these questions:

What does 'home' mean to you? Where is 'home' for you?

Where do you belong? How do know you belong in a place?



Make a short film on theme of home and 'my place'.

OR

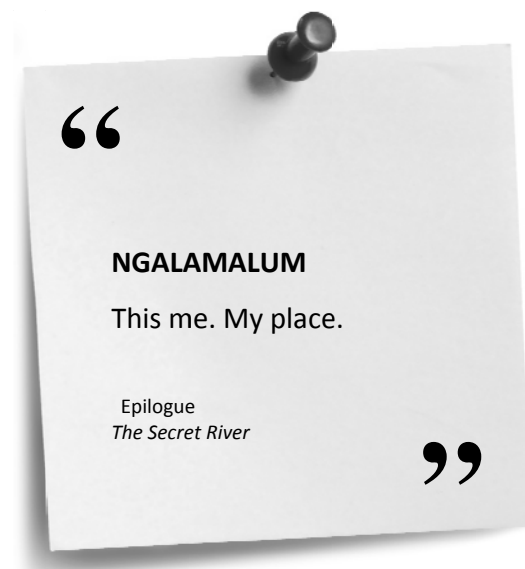
Write a short piece.

Upload the works onto your school website.

Have a film/writer's festival on theme of 'My place'.

Discuss when belonging to a place, family or social group is not a positive experience.

When is it time to leave a place?



THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company



Devise & Present a short scene on the theme of leaving a place or situation you feel is potentially harmful.

Homesickness

SAL: I can't... I won't. This place will never be home.

*Act 1, Scene 10
The Secret River*



Have you ever been homesick?

Describe the feeling in your body.

Tell us your story of wanting to go back home.

Write & Perform a 3 minute scene on the theme of homesickness.

Performance Reflection:

Sal refers to 'home' more than any other character in the play.

Why is Sal homesick for England?

Why does William see his family's future in Australia and not England?

The River, The People

YALAMUNDI Diya ngalaium nura warrawarra. Ngaya Buruberongal. Ngalaium bembul.
Murray murray nura. Durubin Ngayri mulbu. Ngyina ni diya nura. Ngan
giyara? Wellamabami?
(This is our place. Our country. All around here. The river and beyond
those ridges. We look after these places. Who are you? Where are you
from?)



Google the history of the Hawkesbury River.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hawkesbury_River

List 3 reasons why it became so popular with the European settlers.

Research the history of the Dharug people with reference to the 'Additional Resources'

List 3 reasons why the Dharug lived along the Hawkesbury River.

How did the Dharug 'look after' the places along the river?

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

Give specific examples of how they practiced land management and conservation of the natural resources.



Extension:

Discuss why Yalamundi claims the Hawkesbury as ‘our place’.

Discuss why the Hawkesbury River was so fiercely contested by the European settlers and the Dharug people.

Performance Reflection:

Discuss the significance of Ngalamalum saying “This me. My place” at the end of the play?
Why does he identify himself as being a place?

Theatre & Place

For me the theatre is a place to tell the important stories
about who we are.

Andrew Bovell



Discuss the role of the theatre as a place to explore questions of identity.

Name 3 Australian plays that deal with issues of place and identity.



Extension:

Watch the interviews with contemporary aboriginal filmmakers on Generator

<http://generator.acmi.net.au/education-themes/belonging-and-identity/indigenous-cultural-identity>

Watch a film or television production made by an aboriginal filmmaker.

Discuss how and why filmmaking has become a vehicle for representing and exploring indigenous cultural identity.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**



AIM: To examine the representation of colonisation and cultural misunderstandings in the play.

In doing all the research for this book, what I came away with overwhelmingly was the feeling that there had been no particular ill-will on both sides, at least in the beginning, but a complete inability to communicate.

Kate Grenville



Drawing on your research activities on the history of colonisation of the Hawkesbury River

Discuss Kate Grenville's comments with reference to how relationships between the Europeans and the Dharug people developed and changed.

Do you agree or disagree with her statement?

Performance Reflection:

What is the significance of the children-swimming scene in the play?

At Cross Purposes

Cross-purpose a contrary purpose

confusion in conversation or action by misunderstanding

Chambers English Dictionary



To be 'at cross purposes' is when people are having or acting under a misunderstanding of each other's purposes.

When have you been at cross-purposes with another person?

Tell us what happened.



Form storytelling pairs.

Share your stories of misunderstandings.

Devise a short scene to present to the class entitled 'at cross-purposes'

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company



Read the following excerpt from the play.

YALAMUNDI Ngaya biyal wural, ngyini ngarra ngaya. Yalamundi gugarug. (I'm not going to hurt you but you need to listen. I am the law man here. You need to do things the right way.)

THORNHILL Very good old bugger. Now you listen to me.

He takes a stick and draws a curving line in the dust for the river and a tidy square representing his one hundred acres.

THORNHILL This mine now. Thornhill's place. You got all the rest. You got the whole blessed rest of it, mate, and welcome to it. But not this bit. This is mine.

Yalamundi takes a handful of the daisy yams.

YALAMUNDI Dah biyi, Budyari. Wyabuinya gulyangarri, maana mudang-ga. (It's food. Good to eat. You give it to your children. Make them strong fellas.)

He bites one, chews, swallows, nods. He holds one out to Thornhill.

THORNHILL Kind of you old boy. But you keep your radishes. Monkey food I would call that, mate, but good luck to you.

Discuss this scene as an example of the characters having a different understanding of each other's intentions.

What are their different views on ownership of land and food?

Families & Neighbours

Tug of War



Tug-of-war is a game where two opposing sides test each other's strength and will power.

Both teams want the same thing – possession of the rope.

Two groups of players play tug-of-war with an imaginary rope.

Feel the rope! Feel its texture! Feel its thickness!

Use as much energy as you would if you were pulling an *actual* rope.

Make it real!

Research & Discuss how disputes between neighbours can occur.



<http://www.smh.com.au/national/neighbour-disputes-a-recipe-for-disaster-20120504-1y2iq.html>

http://www.crs.org.au/html/neighbourhood_disputes.htm

Has your family ever been involved in a neighbourhood dispute? Do you know somebody who has?

What happened? Was the conflict resolved peacefully or not?



Form storytelling pairs/groups.

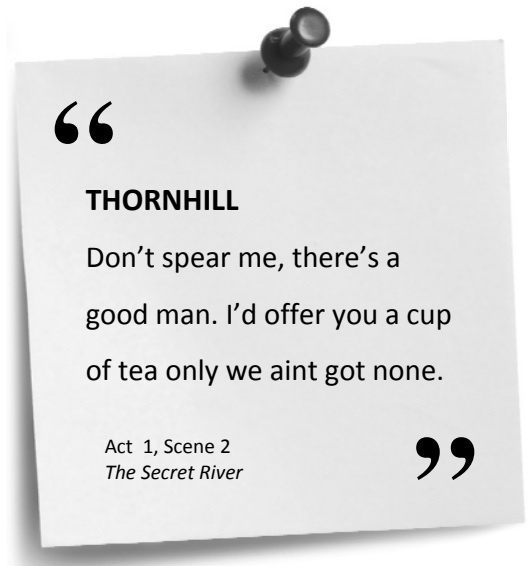
Drawing on your research

Devise a short scene to present to the class based on a neighbourhood dispute.

Performance Reflection

Read the following excerpt from the play.

The children from both families are playing and swimming together. Both mothers call to their sons.



“

THORNHILL

Don't spear me, there's a good man. I'd offer you a cup of tea only we aint got none.

Act 1, Scene 2
The Secret River

”

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneystheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**

DHIRRUMBIN

They splashed each other until they were soaking wet. They ran until they had no breath. They laughed until their sides wanted to split. And they did not stop until the sun began to set and they heard their mothers calling; Sal from her side of the point and Gilyagan from hers. Neither knowing they were calling for the same thing.



Discuss the significance of the narrator's reference to the mothers not knowing 'they calling for the same thing'.

What is the writer trying to demonstrate through this scene?

*Reference: Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theatre**

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

**SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION**

 **AIM:** To examine and explore the writing techniques required in adapting history to narrative fiction and for the stage.

From History to Fiction

The Secret River isn't history but it's based solidly on history.

Kate Grenville, 2005



Read Kate Grenville's notes on her approach to writing *The Secret River* in

http://kategrenville.com/The_Secret_River_Readers_Notes

What does the writer mean by 'imagining the past'?

List 3 key strategies employed by Grenville in writing a fictional story based on real events.



Debate 'The past is a way into the present'



Research an historical event or famous story from your local area, suburb or town.

Form groups 3-5

Create a scene or a series of scenes about this event/s using exact details of correct names and places.

Re-set the scene in a fictional location – change the names and places.

Present & Discuss the scenes and how you can change a non-fiction story to make in more engaging for an audience.

Reflection:

What are the advantages of adapting a real life event to a fictional setting?

From Novel to Play



Read Andrew Bovell's interview on his approach to adapting the novel into a stage play in

<http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/magazine/posts/2012/september/feature-andrew-bovell.aspx>

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company



Describe in detail what he regards as the challenges of writing this adaptation and his approach to the task.



Extension:

Read Jo Liston's feature on adaptation in

<http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/magazine/posts/2011/may/feature-the-art-of-adaptation.aspx>

Compare & Contrast the opening paragraph of the novel with the opening scene of the play.

The *Alexander*, with its cargo of convicts, had bucked over the face of the ocean for the better part of a year. Now it had fetched up at the end of the earth. There was no lock on the door of the hut where William Thornhill, transported for the term of his natural life in the Year of Our Lord eighteen hundred and six, was passing his first night in His Majesty's penal colony of New South Wales. There was hardly a door, barely a wall: only a flap of bark, a screen of sticks and mud. There was no need of lock, of door, of wall: this was a prison whose bars were ten thousand miles of water.

The Secret River

Kate Grenville

Prologue

Let us begin with the sound of water as it laps against the riverbank and of birds rising and of the wind gathering in the tops of the trees.

A family is gathered around a smouldering fire. The old man, Yalamundi is silent as he stares over the water as the others talk about the day to come. Buryia, the old woman is telling everyone what they should do and when they should do it.

No one's listening much. She chastises her grandsons, Narabi and Garraway.

THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneytheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

This only makes them laugh all the more. She waves them away, stern but already forgiving them. Gilyagan, the daughter-in-law and the two men, Ngalamalum and Wangarra laugh at the old woman.

This is our family. This is their place.

Prologue, The Secret River
Andrew Bovell

Consider

Point of View – who is speaking?

Emotional Tone

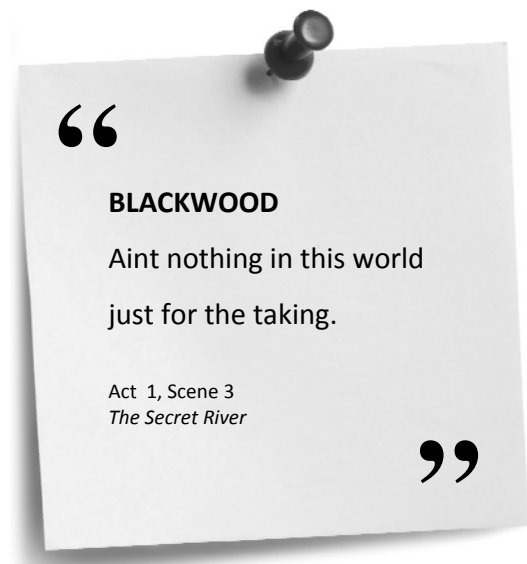
Narrative structure

Time and Space

Imagery

Use of language - word usage, sentence structure and rhythm

Writer Intention - differences of approach when writing for a reading audience and when writing for a live theatre audience.



THE SECRET RIVER

Sydney Theatre Company Pre-Production Education Resources 2013

www.sydneystheatre.com.au/stced

© Sydney Theatre Company

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION