

READ GLOBAL BOOK GROUP

The Secret River by Kate Grenville

Questions

(Adapted from questions by LitLovers)

1. In Part 1 we see Thornhill's impoverished childhood in a large family in London. "He grew up a fighter. By the time he was ten years old the other boys knew to leave him alone. The rage warmed him and filled him up. It was a kind of friend" (p. 15). Discuss the effects of poverty on Thornhill and how it shapes the rest of his life.
2. Grenville describes Sydney as "...a raw scraped little place. There were a few rutted streets, either side of the stream threading its way down to the beach, but beyond them the buildings were connected by rough tracks like animals' runs, as kinked among the rocks and trees as the trees themselves" (p. 79). How do the Thornhills react and adjust to their new surroundings and circumstances?
3. After Thornhill and Blackwood encounter Smasher Sullivan for the first time, Blackwood advises William, "Ain't nothing in this world just for the taking.... A man got to pay a fair price for taking.... Matter of give a little, take a little" (p. 104). What does Blackwood already know and what is he trying to express to his friend?
4. Right from the beginning when the Thornhills stake out "their" land there is always a vague feeling of intrinsic threat. "My own, he kept saying to himself. My place. Thornhill's place. But the wind in the leaves up on the ridge was saying something else entirely" (p. 139). Nothing in William's experience has prepared him for the mysteries of this new land and its people. What does the land mean to him? What are his biggest delusions?
5. What is the biggest difference in Aboriginal culture and the white settlers' culture? How does this affect everything that happens from the time that the Thornhills move from Sydney?
6. Discuss the final battle scene as seen through the eyes of William Thornhill. "He closed his eyes. Like the old man on his knees he felt he might become something other than a human, something that did not do things in this sticky clearing that could never be undone" (p. 308). Did you find him aggressive, ignorant, innocent, naïve, full of rationales?
7. Do you have a favorite description of the environment or a favorite quote? Speaking of quotes, did you notice there aren't any?
8. Talk about the early relationship between William and Sal. What is the attraction of each to the other? How do they relate to each other at the various stages of their lives?

Explore

Indigenous Australian Authors

Carpenteria by Alexis Wright [FIC WRI]

Terra Nullis by Claire G. Coleman [SF COL]

Too Much Lip by Melissa Lucashenko [FIC LUS]

History

A Commonwealth of Thieves: The Improbable Birth of Australia by Thomas Keneally [994.02 K]

A Traveler's History of Australia by John H. Chambers [994 C]

Film (available on Kanopy.com)

Dreamings: The Aboriginal Art of Australia directed by Michael Riley (1988)

Coniston directed by David Batty (2013)

Five Short Films from the Australian Documentary Fund (Night Patrol; Straight from the Yudaman's Mouth; Look, Listen, Speak; Milerum – Whose Story?; Apekathe - 1997)

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