

SYDNEY
THEATRE
CO
EDUCATION

ON CUE

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Compiled by Hannah Brown.

The activities and resources contained in this document are designed for educators as the starting point for developing more comprehensive lessons for this production. Hannah Brown is the Education Projects Officers for the Sydney Theatre Company. You can contact Hannah on

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ABOUT *ON CUE* AND STC

ABOUT ON CUE

STC Ed has a suite of resources located on our website to enrich and strengthen teaching and learning surrounding the plays in the STC season. Each show will be accompanied by an On Cue e-publication which will feature all the essential information for teachers and students, such as curriculum links, information about the playwright, synopsis, character analysis, thematic analysis and suggested learning experiences. For more in-depth digital resources surrounding the Elements of Drama, Dramatic styles, forms, conventions and techniques, visit the STC Ed page on our website.

SUCH RESOURCES INCLUDE:

- videos
- design sketchbooks
- worksheets
- posters

ABOUT SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY

In 1980, STC's first Artistic Director Richard Wherrett defined STC's mission as to provide "first class theatrical entertainment for the people of Sydney – theatre that is grand, vulgar, intelligent, challenging and fun."

Almost 35 years later, under the leadership of Artistic Director Andrew Upton, that ethos still rings true.

STC offers a diverse program of distinctive theatre of vision and scale at its harbourside home venue, The Wharf; Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay; and Sydney Opera House, as its resident theatre company.

STC has a proud heritage as a creative hub and incubator for Australian theatre and theatre makers, developing and producing eclectic Australian works, interpretations of classic repertoire and great international writing. STC strives to create theatre experiences that reflect Sydney's distinctive personality and engage audiences.

Strongly committed to engagement in the community, STC's Education and Communities programs aim to inspire theatre appreciation and participation not only in theatres but also in schools, community halls; wherever people get together. STC

offers an innovative School Drama™ program; partners with groups in metropolitan Sydney, regional centres and rural areas; and reaches beyond NSW with touring productions throughout Australia. Through these partnerships and initiatives, STC plays a part in ensuring a creative, forward-thinking and sociable future by engaging with young people, students and teachers.

The theatre careers of many of Australia's internationally renowned artists have been launched and fostered at STC, including Mel Gibson, Judy Davis, Hugo Weaving, Geoffrey Rush, Toni Collette, Rose Byrne, Benedict Andrews and Cate Blanchett.

STC often collaborates with international artists and companies and, in recent years, the company's international profile has grown significantly with productions touring extensively to great acclaim.

STC is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, by its arts funding and advisory body, and by the New South Wales Government through Arts NSW.

sydneytheatre.com.au

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

SUITABLE FOR
Years 10 to 12

SUBJECTS

Drama

English

History



Rory Potter, Georgia Adamson, Jennifer Hagan, Toby Challenor and Nathaniel Dean in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©

SYDNEY THEATRE COMPANY AND ALLENS PRESENT

THE SECRET RIVER

BY KATE GRENVILLE

AN ADAPTATION FOR THE STAGE BY ANDREW BOVELL

SAL THORNHILL
GEORGIA ADAMSON

DAN OLDFIELD
JOSHUA BRENNAN

DICK THORNHILL
TOBY CHALLENGOR

WANGARRA/BRANYIMALA
SHAKA COOK

WILLIAM THORNHILL
NATHANIEL DEAN

BURYIA
FRANCES DJULIBING

MRS HERRING
JENNIFER HAGAN

MUSICIAN
ISAAC HAYWARD

NGALAMALUM
TREVOR JAMIESON

DICK THORNHILL
HEATH JELOVIC

DHIRRUMBIN/DULLA DJIN
NINGALI
LAWFORD-WOLF

GILYAGAN/MURULI
MADELEINE MADDEN

THOMAS BLACKWOOD
COLIN MOODY

GARRAWAY/DULLA DJIN'S CHILD
JEREMIAH MUNDINE

GARRAWAY/DULLA DJIN'S CHILD
WESLEY PATTEN

YALAMUNDI
KELTON PELL

SMASHER SULLIVAN
RICHARD PIPER

WILLIE THORNHILL
RORY POTTER

NARABI
JAMES SLEE

LOVEDAY
BRUCE SPENCE

SAGITTY BIRTLES/SUCKLING/
TURNKEY
MATTHEW
SUNDERLAND

DIRECTOR
NEIL ARMFIELD

ARTISTIC ASSOCIATE
STEPHEN PAGE

SET DESIGNER
STEPHEN CURTIS

COSTUME DESIGNER
TESS SCHOFIELD

LIGHTING DESIGNER
MARK HOWETT

COMPOSER
IAIN GRANDAGE

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
ISAAC HAYWARD

SOUND DESIGNER
STEVE FRANCIS

TOUR DIRECTOR
KIP WILLIAMS

LANGUAGE CONSULTANT
RICHARD GREEN

DRAMATURG
MATTHEW WHITTET

VOICE & TEXT COACH
CHARMIAN GRADWELL

ADDITIONAL MUSIC
TREVOR JAMIESON

FIGHT DIRECTOR
SCOTT WITT

AUNTY IN RESIDENCE
GLENDR A STUBBS

PRODUCTION MANAGER
JOHN COLVIN

STAGE MANAGER
GEORGIA GILBERT

DEPUTY STAGE MANAGER
SARAH SMITH

ASSISTANT STAGE MANAGERS
TODD EICHORN
JAYMII KNIERUM

COSTUME SUPERVISOR
CHRISTINE MUTTON

WIG, MAKE-UP & WARDROBE
SUPERVISOR

LAUREN A. PROIETTI

DRESSER & WARDROBE
MAINTENANCE

JANE SELDON

HEAD MECHANIST
STEVE MASON

HEAD FLY OPERATOR
CHRIS FLEMING

FLOOR MECHANIST
DAVID STABBACK

HEAD ELECTRICIAN
ANDREW TOMPKINS

LIGHTING BOARD OPERATOR
HARRY CLEGG

HEAD OF SOUND
KEVIN WHITE

FOH SOUND OPERATOR
DAVID BERGMAN

RADIO MIC TECHNICIAN
OLIVIA BENSON

CHILD CHAPERONE
KATHRYN DRUMMOND

REHEARSAL PHOTOGRAPHER
HON BOEY

PRODUCTION PHOTOGRAPHER
HEIDRUN LÖHR

THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN ASSISTED BY THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT'S MAJOR FESTIVALS INITIATIVE, MANAGED BY THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, ITS ARTS FUNDING AND ADVISORY BODY, IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE CONFEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVALS, SYDNEY FESTIVAL, PERTH INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL AND THE CENTENARY OF CANBERRA.

THIS PRODUCTION PREMIERED AT ROSLYN PACKER THEATRE ON 5 FEBRUARY 2016. THE WORLD PREMIERE SEASON OF THIS PRODUCTION OPENED IN SYDNEY THEATRE ON 12 JANUARY 2013.

2 HOURS 50 MINUTES, INCLUDING INTERVAL

COMMISSIONING &
TOURING PATRONS

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CATRIONA &
SIMON MORDANT AM

PRESENTING PARTNER

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ABOUT THE PLAY

THE RETURN OF A LANDMARK PRODUCTION

A sold out hit in 2013, *The Secret River* is a stirring adaptation of Kate Grenville's award-winning novel. In 2016, it returns for an encore season.

Directed by Neil Armfield, *The Secret River* is a story of two families divided by culture and land. William Thornhill arrives in New South Wales a convict from the slums of London. His family's new home offers him something he hadn't dare dream of: a place to call his own. On the banks of the Hawkesbury River, he plants a crop and lays claim to the soil in which it grows.

But the Hawkesbury is already home to another family. A family from the Dharug people, whose existence depends on that land. As Thornhill's attachment to the land deepens, he is driven to a terrible decision that will haunt him for the rest of his life.

Winner of six Helpmann Awards, including Best Play, Best Direction and Best New Australian Work, *The Secret River* was heralded as "a stunning, shattering piece of theatre that goes to the heart of our history" (The Sunday Telegraph). Don't miss out.



Trevor Jamieson in STC's *The Secret River*, 2013. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

ABOUT THE DIRECTOR

NEIL ARMFIELD AO

Neil was Artistic Director of Belvoir in Sydney from 1994 to 2010. He has directed for all of Australia's state theatre companies, plus many other companies including Opera Australia, The Welsh National Opera, Houston Grand Opera, English National Opera and the Royal Opera House, London.

Neil is the recipient of two Doctorates of Letters (University of Sydney and UNSW) and many awards including the Sidney Myer Performing Arts Award for Outstanding Achievement in the Performing Arts and the Sydney Theatre Award for Significant Contribution to Theatre. He has won many Helpmann, Sydney Theatre and Victorian Green Room Awards in theatre, and AFI Awards for the television mini-series *Edens Lost* (Best Director) and the screenplay for *Candy* (co-written with Luke Davies).

Neil's theatrical highlights include Belvoir's *The Diary of A Madman* with Geoffrey Rush, which toured Australia and Russia (1991) and returned to Belvoir (2010) with a transfer to BAM in New York; *Hamlet* with Richard Roxburgh, *The Seagull* with Cate Blanchett, the world tours of *Cloudstreet* (1999 and 2001); Casey Bennetto's *Keating!* which toured nationally; the premieres of Michael Gow's *Toy Symphony* and Stephen Sewell's *The Blind Giant is Dancing*; *Exit the King* on Broadway (2009) starring Geoffrey Rush (who won a Tony Award) and Susan Sarandon; *The Book of Everything*, which toured Australia (2011) and New York (2012); *The Secret River* (STC 2013) and *King Lear* with Geoffrey Rush (STC 2015); *Bliss* for Opera Australia Sydney and Melbourne seasons, as well as Edinburgh Festival (2010); *Billy Budd* for the Houston Grand Opera & Opera Australia; *Peter Grimes* for Houston Grand Opera & Opera Australia, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for Houston Grand Opera and Canadian Opera Company, and Wagner's *Der Ring des Nibelungen* for Opera Australia in 2013. His Hampstead Theatre production of David Hare's *The Judas Kiss*, starring Rupert Everett, transferred to the Duke of York's Theatre in London's West End in January 2013 and will be revived in 2016 in Toronto and New York.

Neil is dedicated to the development of works of Indigenous theatre: memorable productions include Jack Davis' *No Sugar*, John Harding's *Up The Road*, Dallas Winmar's *Aliwa!* and the one man show *Gulpilil*.

Neil co-wrote and directed *Candy*, starring Heath Ledger, Abbie Cornish and Geoffrey Rush. The film screened in competition at the Berlin International Film Festival and closed the Hong Kong International Film Festival in (2006). He Directed Tommy Murphy's screen adaptation of Timothy Conigrave's *Holding the Man*, which premiered at the Sydney Film Festival.

In 2007, Neil was made Officer of the Order of Australia for national and international service to the arts.



Neil Armfield in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©



TAKE A LOOK AT THE CLASSROOM HANDOUT TO FIND OUT WHY *THE SECRET RIVER* IS AN IMPORTANT PLAY IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRICAL HISTORY!

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT

The Secret River is adapted by Andrew Bovell, from the novel by Kate Grenville

The arc of Kate Grenville's novel is epic. It tells the story of William Thornhill, born into brutal poverty on the south side of London in the late 18th century, his place in the world already fixed by the rigidity of the English class system. In 1806 he is sentenced to hang for the theft of a length of Brazil wood. Through the desperate efforts of his wife, Sal, his sentence is commuted to transportation to the Colony of New South Wales. In this new land he sees an opportunity to be something more than he could ever have been in the country that shunned him. He sees "a blank page on which a man might write a new life". He falls in love with a patch of land on the Hawkesbury River and dares to dream that one day it might be his. After earning his freedom he takes Sal and their children from Sydney Cove to the Hawkesbury to "take up" 100 acres of land only to discover that the land is not his to take. It is owned and occupied by the Dharug people. As Thornhill's attachment to this place and his dream of a better life deepens he is driven to make a choice that will haunt him for the rest of his life.

Sometimes the best approach to adapting a novel is simply to get out of the way. This proved to be the case with *The Secret River*. The novel is much loved, widely read and studied. It has become a classic of Australian literature. My task was simply to allow the story to unfold in a different form. It took me sometime to realise this. Initially, I favoured a more lateral approach to the adaptation. I wanted to project the events of the novel forward in time and place the character of Dick Thornhill at the centre of the play. Dick is the second-born son of William and Sal. Arriving on the Hawkesbury he is immediately captivated by the landscape and intrigued by the people who inhabit it. With a child's curiosity and open heart he finds a place alongside the Dharug and they, perhaps recognizing his good intentions are at ease with his presence among them. Unlike his older brother, Willie he has no fear of the Dharug and seems to recognise that they understand how to live and survive in this place. He learns from them and tries to impart this knowledge to his father. William Thornhill's failure to learn the lesson his son tries to teach him is central to the book's tragedy.

When Dick discovers that his father has played an instrumental role in the massacre of the very people he has befriended he leaves his family and goes to live with and care for Thomas Blackwood who has been blinded in the course of the settler's violent attack on the Dharug.

One of the most haunting images of the book is contained in the epilogue. Thornhill, now a prosperous and established settler on the Hawkesbury sits on the veranda of his grand house built on a hill and watches his estranged son passing on the river below onboard his skiff. He lives in hope that one day Dick will look up and see him. But Dick never does. He has made his choice and keeps his eyes steadfastly ahead refusing to acknowledge his father and all that he has built.

Perhaps I was drawn to Dick because I'd like to think that if I found myself in those circumstances I would share his moral courage and turn my back on my own father, if I had to. I

would hope that I too would refuse the prosperity gained from the act of violence and dispossession that the novel describes. I suspect though, that like many at the time I would have justified it as a necessary consequence of establishing a new country and found a way to live with it by not speaking of it. I would have chosen silence as so many generations of white Australians did.

It was here that I wanted to begin the play; on the moment of Thornhill watching his estranged son passing on the river. I created an imagined future for Dick. The novel reveals that Tom Blackwood had an Aboriginal 'wife' and that they had a child together. The gender of this child is not specified but I imagined that if she was a girl that, once grown, she and Dick might have 'married' and eventually had children of their own. So, whilst William Thornhill and his descendants prospered on the banks of the Hawkesbury and became an established family of the district, another mob of Thornhill's lived a very different life up river, like a shadow of their prosperous cousins.

I mapped out a life for these two branches of the same family over several generations until I came to their contemporary incarnations. One family was white, the other black. I wondered whether they would be aware of their shared past and how the act of violence which set them on their separate paths would be carried through each generation and whether reconciliation was ever possible between them. I imagined the story of Australia being revealed through the very different stories of these two families who shared a common ancestor and a dark secret. Importantly, in my mind was the idea that through the generations of Dick Thornhill's descendants, Aboriginal identity had not only survived but had strengthened.

My collaborators Neil Armfield and Stephen Page and the Artistic Directors of the Sydney Theatre Company, Andrew Upton and Cate Blanchett, heard me out but encouraged me to return to the book. They were right to do so. Perhaps by inventing this other story I was simply delaying the inevitable confrontation with the material at hand. Besides, Kate Grenville answered my curiosity about what happened to Dick Thornhill in her sequel to the novel, *Sarah Thornhill*. However, reaching beyond the source material into an imagined future was an important part of the process for me. I was trying to come to terms with the legacy of the violence depicted in the novel. I wanted to understand how this conflict is still being played out today.

When a connection is drawn so clearly between then and now, history starts to seem very close. I think this is one of the novel's great achievements. In William Thornhill, Kate Grenville has created a figure modern audiences can recognise and empathise with. He is a loving husband and father, a man who wants to rise above the conditions into which he was born and secure a better future for those who will come after him. This aspiration seems to me to be quintessentially Australian.

FROM THE PLAYWRIGHT (CONT.)

The Secret River is adapted by Andrew Bovell, from the novel by Kate Grenville

Once Grenville has placed us so surely in Thornhill's shoes, she leads us into moral peril for we find ourselves identifying with the decisions he makes. We may not agree with them but we understand them. And so we come to understand that the violence of the past was not undertaken by evil men, by strangers to us but by men and women not unlike ourselves. That's the shock of it. Grenville wasn't writing about them. She was writing about us. Above all I wanted to retain that sense of shock.

A number of key decisions started to give shape to the work. We decided to use the device of a narrator. This allowed us to retain some of Grenville's poetic language. We gave the narrator the name Dhirrumbin, which is the Dharug name for the Hawkesbury River. In effect, she is the river, a witness to history, present before, during and after the events of the play. She knows from the start how the story ends and it falls upon her to recount the tragedy of it. This quality of knowing gives Dhirrumbin a sense of prophetic sadness. As well as performing the classic task of moving the narrative forward, Dhirrumbin stands apart from the action and is able to comment on it. Even more importantly, she is able to illuminate the interior worlds of the characters, particularly the Dharug, and hence act as a bridge to our understanding of their experience.

Building the Dharug presence in the play was fundamental to our approach and became one of the key differences between the play and the novel. Grenville chose to keep the Dharug characters at a distance. They are seen only through Thornhill's and the other white character's eyes and their actions and motivations are explained through the white character's comprehension and often misinterpretation of them. In part, Kate chose to do this for cultural reasons. She felt there was a line that as a white writer she couldn't cross and that it was not possible to empathise with the traditional Aboriginal characters.

We didn't have that choice. It's an obvious point to make but in transforming words on a page into live action on a stage we rely on the work of actors. And we simply couldn't have silent black actors on stage being described from a distance. They needed a voice. They needed an attitude. They needed a point of view. They needed language.

We assumed that there wasn't one available to us. We thought that the languages spoken around the Hawkesbury had largely been lost. For a while it seemed like an insurmountable problem. And then Richard Green, an actor and Dharug man, joined the project. We put the problem to him. He laughed and opened his mouth and spoke and sang in Dharug. It was, he argued passionately, a lie that the language didn't exist. If it had been lost it had now been re-found, rebuilt and reclaimed. It was a living language. And no white academic was going to tell Richard that he had no language. He enlivened the rehearsal room with his presence and gave us the confidence to find the voices for the Dharug characters. He translated the language and made it fit the needs of the production and he taught the ensemble how to speak it and sing it.

We began by giving the Dharug characters names in their own language; Whisker Harry in the book became Yalamundi in the play, Long Jack became Ngalamulum, Polly became Buryia, Meg became Gilyagan and Blackwood's unnamed wife, Dulla Dyin and so on. In this simple act of naming the characters the Dharug world began to live on stage.

The task of representing a traditional Indigenous point of view in what is a white narrative about history is fraught with difficulty and cultural sensitivity. Even with the best intentions and thorough research and consultation a number of assumptions are still made. I wrote a line for Garraway, one of the children. "I hate snake," he says as his mother is preparing a meal in the same way as a contemporary child might say, "I hate broccoli." Richard pointed out that there was no word for hate, as such. But even the idea that a child in a traditional Indigenous context would express dislike for a food central to their diet is an assumption we can't really make.

This is perhaps the greatest challenge for white storytellers in this country – how do we make sense of what Indigenous peoples thought and felt about the arrival of Europeans in this country. Even first hand accounts from the time have been written down and interpreted by European writers. We can only be led by contemporary Indigenous people who with great generosity show us the way back so that we may begin to reconcile with our past.

This is an excerpt from a longer article available online. To continue reading, please visit sydneytheatre.com.au/secretriver



Rory Potter in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

SYNOPSIS

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

PROLOGUE

William Thornhill is an English boatman. Having committed a crime of petty theft, he, his wife Sal and two sons, Willie and Dick, are transported to Australia.

ACT ONE

William receives absolute pardon for his crime and William and Sal discuss how they can make enough money to return to England. The Thornhills set up camp along the Hawkesbury and encounter the Dharug family who live there. Tensions between the two families escalate around access to the land.

The Dharug children and Dick Thornhill become friends and play with one another. Sal reveals she is pregnant. William purchases a rifle.

ACT TWO

William gives his son Dick a beating for swimming with the Dharug children. Time passes. The Thornhills' crop of corn has grown successfully. They trade with the Dharug family. Sal becomes seriously ill. Another Englishman, Thomas Blackwood, brings his Dharug wife, Dulla Dyin, to help Sal recover. Tensions increase. William visits the camp of Smasher Sullivan to buy dogs. He finds that Smasher has a Dharug woman held against her will. Violence breaks out repeatedly on both sides. Smasher urges the settlers to attack the Dharug's camp. William agrees and together with a vigilante group they go to Blackwood's camp and massacre the Dharug people living there. Everyone is killed except Ngalamalum. Blackwood is shot trying to defend the Dharug people and loses his eye.

EPILOGUE

Ten years later. Ngalamalum, meets William on the same spot by the Hawkesbury.



Georgia Adamson and Frances Djulibing in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©



Georgia Adamson, Rory Potter, Nathaniel Dean and Joshua Brennan in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

CHARACTERS

DHIRRUMBIN – THE NARRATOR

Dhurrumbin is the play's Narrator. Her name is also the Dharug word for the Hawkesbury River. According to playwright Andrew Bovell, "In effect, she is the river, a witness to history, present before, during and after the events of the play" (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016). Dhurrumbin speaks the first words of English in the play and is almost constantly on stage, watching the action unfold and illuminating the interior worlds of the characters in the play, particularly the Dharug family. Her poetic language reveals an omnipresent perspective that is cognisant of the impending tragedy. The actor playing Dhurrumbin also embodies Blackwood's wife Dulla Dyin at various points, a character who is also a begrudging witness to the massacre of the Dharug people. This dual role emphasises her status as witness to history. The haunting notes of Dhurrumbin's mourning song close the play, suggesting that the psychic wounds of what has occurred will stretch across time.



Colin Moody in STC's *The Secret River*, 2013. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

CHARACTERS (CONT).

WILLIAM THORNHILL

William Thornhill is a former convict who discovers at the beginning of the play that he has been granted an absolute pardon for his crimes. He is determined to make the most of his freedom and realises that his social status, once fixed in place by the rigid English class system, is now a malleable thing. He is ambitious and regards the establishment of a farm on the Hawkesbury as a chance to overcome the poverty of his past.

As a father to his two young sons, Thornhill is patient, affectionate and motivated by the desire that they will inherit the fruits of his labour. Thornhill and his wife Sal have a relationship defined by honesty and loyalty, and he is often influenced by her opinions.

Initially, Thornhill's interactions with the Dharug people are characterised by sheer optimism – he believes he can persuade them to move on from the land. He is influenced by the advice and approaches of Blackwood and his son Dick, who respect and admire the Dharug people's way of life. Although he witnesses, and is horrified by, various atrocities committed against the Dharug people, he does not take action on their behalf. Instead, driven by his fear of losing his family and newfound freedom, he eventually makes a terrible decision that will haunt him forever. Thornhill's moral failing is that when he finally decides to take action, it is against the Dharug people rather than in their defence. This decision changes Thornhill irrevocably, and while in time he grows richer and more elevated in social status, he damages their relationship and loses the love of his younger son Dick, and becomes a harsh, mistrustful man.

SAL THORNHILL

Sal is a strong, resourceful woman who followed her husband to Australia when he was convicted of a petty crime, raising their two sons alone while waiting for his freedom to be granted. She is better educated than Thornhill, can read and once taught her husband to sign his name. As a young woman in London, she was known as a local beauty and was friendly to everyone. She fell deeply in love with Thornhill and remains fiercely loyal to him. She is perceptive and assertive, seeing an opportunity for their family to make enough money to return to England with dignity. While she is initially overwhelmed by the isolation of their new life in the Hawkesbury, Sal makes the best of it, marking off the days on a tree and singing nursery rhymes to her sons as a way of keeping her dreams of London alive. From the outset, she is wary of Thornhill's assertion that land is available to be owned without challenge.

Sal instinctively believes that they should treat the Dharug family with respect and co-exist with them as Blackwood and Mrs. Herring have done. She establishes an economic system of bartering with the women of the Dharug family, and eventually comes to see them as friends. Her strong and assertive character is epitomised when she insists to Thornhill that she will take their sons and leave the Hawkesbury, with or without him, as tension between the settlers and Dharug people escalates. Sal's yearning for London keeps her going, although by the end of the play it is evident that she has given up hope of ever returning.



Nathaniel Dean in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©



Georgia Adamson in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

WILLIE THORNHILL

Willie is the eldest son in the Thornhill family and from the beginning displays a wariness of the Dharug family. He disapproves when his younger brother Dick befriends the Dharug children, although it appears he wishes he could do the same. His wariness evolves into fear and he encourages his father to purchase a gun and move the Dharug people from the land by force.

DICK THORNHILL

Dick is the younger and more playful son in the Thornhill family. He instinctively understands the Dharug family, warning his father that they shouldn't dig up the 'taters' on the land. While Thornhill and Willie are away in Sydney, Dick's curiosity blossoms into a playful friendship with the Dharug children. He enjoys their company, begins dressing similarly and admires their skills, especially making fire from sticks. Dick's openness with the Dharug family challenges his father to consider whether the Dharug's approach to life on the Hawkesbury may be better. His innocence and adoption of the Dharug's ways point to a better course of action than that of the adult settlers. However, Thornhill ultimately fails to learn the lesson Dick tries to teach him. When Dick discovers his father's actions, he leaves the family shack.

THE DHARUG FAMILY

The Dharug family are deeply connected to the land, understanding how to thrive in a landscape while also caring for it. Their connection with the land on the Hawkesbury contrasts to that of Thornhill, who applies English farming techniques, and Smasher, who wastes natural resources. Unlike Kate Grenville's novel, the Dharug family are an immediate and vocal presence in the play. As playwright Andrew Bovell describes, "They needed a voice. They needed an attitude. They needed a point of view. They needed language" (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016).

Members of the Dharug family share common experiences with the Thornhills, such as when Narabi and Garraway play with Dick, and Buryia and Gilyagan exchange food for clothing with Sal. Although Sal and Dick attempt to build relationships with the Dharug family, they remain essentially unknowable to them. While Sal gives Buryia and Gilyagan the English names Polly and Meg, they do not respond to her cries of hello. At times the Dharug family seem to look straight through the Thornhills without seeing them. While they burn parts of the landscape, the stagedirections read "It seems as though the part of NSW on which the Thornhill's hut was built is invisible to them." The final lines of the play, spoken by Ngalamalum, communicate the essence of the play – the land and the importance of land to Aboriginals: "This me... My place."



Rory Potter, Georgia Adamson and Toby Challenor in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

CHARACTERS (CONT.)

THOMAS BLACKWOOD

Thomas Blackwood is a reclusive settler who gives William Thornhill valuable advice on how to interact with the Dharug people with whom he shares the land. Unlike the other white settlers in the area, Blackwood believes that while the Dharug people need nothing from the settlers, the settlers need something from the Dharug people. Blackwood provides a stark contrast to Smasher and his violent approach to the land and the Dharug people. His philosophy of 'give a little, take a little' encourages Thornhill to attempt to negotiate with the Dharug family over the use of the land.

Blackwood is an obvious outsider to the settler community in the Hawkesbury, and his suggestion to share out their crops is met with scorn. Blackwood has learned parts of the Dharug language, in which he converses with his wife, an Aboriginal woman who is embodied on stage by Dhirrumbin (the Narrator). While Blackwood is concerned about keeping this relationship a secret, he also acknowledges to Thornhill that she is a better wife to him than any he had in London. Although patient and reserved, Blackwood is moved to action in the final scenes of the play, fighting for the Dharug people. Despite his being an outsider, Blackwood represents a noble alternative as he respects and learns from the Dharug culture.

SMASHER SULLIVAN

Smasher is an alcoholic, erratic and cruel settler who admits that the silence of the Hawkesbury has probably driven him crazy. Smasher was the youngest child of six and was starved as a child in order to fit inside chimneys to work as a sweep in the East End of London. He commits the first act of violence seen in the play when he whips Braniyamala, unprovoked. His brutish manner and violent actions contrast with the Thornhill's tentative attempts to make their way in their new home.

Smasher becomes talkative in the company of other settlers and enjoys spinning a yarn. While Smasher is proud about his claim to the piece of land he calls Sullivan's Creek, his treatment of the land is as brutal as his treatment of the Dharug people. He has cleared his block of timber and wasted many of its resources, including oysters that have been in the river for over a thousand years. He trains his dogs to attack the Dharug people and, to Thornhill's horror, brutally rapes and enslaved Indigenous woman. Smasher's malice and fear-mongering eventually brings about a brutal massacre.

MRS. HERRING

Mrs. Herring is a pragmatic and wry settler who has survived on her own since her husband's death. She is unafraid of her isolation and gives valuable advice to Sal on settling into life on the Hawkesbury and letting go of her dreams of returning to England. Mrs. Herring has established a peaceful relationship with the Dharug family, as she chooses to turn a blind eye when the family take some of her food. While she does not pursue violence like Smasher or integration like Blackwood, her way of life on the Hawkesbury indicates that there may be a middle path of mutual tolerance available to the Thornhills. However, when tensions escalate she understands that the cycle of retribution will continue, warning Sal that things are not likely to settle down.



Jennifer Hagan in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS

CROSS CULTURAL RELATIONSHIPS – GIVE A LITTLE, TAKE A LITTLE

A major difference between Kate Grenville's novel and Andrew Bovell's adaptation is the perspective from which they are written. Grenville's story is written from the singular white perspective of William Thornhill. While Bovell, with the help of Richard Green (Original Language Consultant), an actor and Dharug man, gives voice to the Dharug people on stage and in doing so shifts the narrative to encompass the story of two families – the Thornhills and a Dharug family living on the Hawkesbury River. Andrew Upton describes the story of *The Secret River* as “about two families encountering each other, misunderstanding each other and, eventually, through a series of tragic moral failings on William Thornhill's part, coming into conflict with each other” (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016).

The Dharug people also have Dharug names in the play, while in the novel their names are those bestowed upon them by William and Sal, such as “Jack” and “Polly.” Kate Grenville made a choice as the writer of the novel to do this. She discusses her reasoning in the following quote from a Radio National interview. “That was tricky because what I didn't want to do was to step into the heads of any of the Aboriginal characters. I think that kind of appropriation...there's been too much of that in our writing.[...] Sure, if another writer wanted to do it I would say good luck to them. I certainly didn't feel comfortable about doing it. That was just a decision I made, and I suppose it's not so much a matter of principle as realistically seeing my own limitations, and also that the subject of this book is actually white settlers, it's the white settler response to the fact that the Aboriginal people were on the land they wanted to settle on. It's not actually about the Aboriginal response to the white settlers. That's not a story I could tell” (Koval, 2005). Dhirrumbin's narration serves to further illuminate the experience of the Dharug family. Through broadening the perspective to include two families, the failed cross-cultural relationship between the two is revealed as the true tragedy of the story.

The idea of “give a little, take a little”, as articulated by Blackwood, encapsulates the relationship between the two families in the first act of *The Secret River*. The slaughter of the Dharug people and culture may have been prevented if colonisers had adopted this reciprocal philosophy in settling the Hawkesbury. A glimmer of such harmony is seen in the characters of Blackwood and Mrs. Herring. Blackwood has learned the Dharug language and elements of traditional culture, and in doing so, respects the Dharug people on whose land he has set up camp. Blackwood also understands that in order to survive in the harsh Australian bush, he has to learn from those around him – “They ain't got no need for what we have. Same can't be said the other way...I hope you can come to understand that, Will” (*The Secret River*, pg. 25). Blackwood also has an Aboriginal wife and child, which disgusts the other settlers but is a strong reminder of his peaceful philosophy. Mrs Herring also lives harmoniously with the Dharug people around her stretch of the river, often turning a blind eye to belongings that are taken.

Ironically, in the play, the same ‘give a little, take a little’ argument is taking place amongst the Dharug people. Ngalamalum can see where the situation is heading and favours a more aggressive response to the intruders, while the Elder Yalamundi counsels a wait-and-see approach – tragically believing that the whites will move on soon or, if they don't, will see the sense of the Dharug's relationship to the land and emulate it (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016).

Both Blackwood and Mrs. Herring represent a potentially very different path that history could have taken, while Thornhill represents the shameful, violent reality of Australian colonial history. Thornhill's greed was motivated by a sense of legitimacy and his decision to take part in the killings was a reflection of his inability to understand, negotiate and rationalise any way to live harmoniously. Kate Grenville discusses this idea in a Radio National interview saying, “So i have tried to say, look it happened on both sides and it did not happen because these people were just bad people or evil, it happened because when you have a complete lack of understanding and you have two different sets of people needing the same resource (that is; good riverside land), it's almost inevitable that you're going to have violence. Unless the people involved have enormous insight and imagination, it's going to be quite hard to avoid violence but neither side were simply evil specimens of humanity. (Koval, 2005).

The innocence and open-mindedness of the Dharug children and Dick Thornhill also works in stark contrast to the actions of Thornhill and his compatriots pointing to a potential “... better course of action chosen by the adults” (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016), says Bovell. Dick is untainted by the expectations and judgements of white society and finds his place alongside the Dharug children, happily having water fights and learning how to make fires. Dick, like Blackwood, understands and appreciates how the Dharug people live and eagerly tries to pass this on to his father. However, Thornhill's inability to see what his son has learnt is “central to the...tragedy” (Sydney Theatre Company program, 2016).

In one of the production's most powerful moments, the nursery rhyme ‘London Bridge’, first sung by Sal to her sleeping sons early in the play, has by the end become a battle cry sung by the men as they march, guns firing into the Dharug camp. In this moment, the nursery rhyme becomes a symbol of white settlement and English culture prevailing.

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

ABORIGINAL MASSACRES

The killing of the Dharug people by Thornhill, Smasher and their vigilante group is a massacre. During the 1800s, the massacring of Aboriginal people through raids on their camps and poisoning by white settlers was common. The exact number of Indigenous people killed is not known, although historians have cited between 20,000 and 40,000 deaths. The white settlers did not consider the Aboriginal people they killed to be human and so burnt the dead bodies without naming or recording them (Reynolds, 2013).

In *The Secret River*, prior to the attack on their camp the Dharug people had raided crops and taken possessions from the settlers' camps. These tales carried down the river are regaled by Saggity and Smasher in an attempt to generate fear and garner support for their violent plan. The fear felt by settlers was contagious, "...fanned by every story...which swept through the frontier districts like a communal fire" (Reynolds, 2013, pg. 92). In the play, it is fear that provides impetus for the men who commit the gruesome massacre at the end the play.

The raiding of crops by Aboriginal people has been described by several historians as a type of "guerrilla warfare" to which white settlers then retaliated. However, it was also a response to the dispossession of the Aboriginal people, whose food supply and cultural traditions had been systematically destroyed by colonisation. This is seen when Thornhill plants his corn crop on top of the yams which he believes are some form of worthless radish or 'taters' (potatoes). Blackwood understands the importance of this food supply to the Dharug people, saying "See, them yams grow where you put the corn. You dig them up, they go hungry. You best share your crop when it's ready" (*The Secret River*, pg. 63).



Trevor Jamieson in STC's *The Secret River*, 2013. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

POSSESSION AND OWNERSHIP

In the 1700s, there were only three terms by which Britain was legally allowed to take possession of another country:

1. If the country was uninhabited, Britain could claim and settle that country. In this case, it could claim ownership of the land.
2. If the country was already inhabited, Britain could ask for permission from the Indigenous people to use some of their land. In this case, Britain could purchase land for its own use but it could not steal the land of the Aboriginal people.
3. If the country was inhabited, Britain could take over the country by invasion and conquest- in other words, defeat that country in war. However, even after winning a war, Britain would have to respect the rights of Indigenous people. (NSW Government, Department of Education, 2015).

However, Britain did not follow any of these rules in practice and despite the presence of Indigenous people in Australia, declared “terra nullius”, meaning land belonging to no-one. This allowed the white colonisers to justify the dispossession of Indigenous people when in fact they had illegally invaded their land (Australian Museum, 2015). Furthermore, the Indigenous and white settler understanding of land and its use was very different. The British believed land was for farming, agriculture and development, while Indigenous people believe they are the custodians of the land, to which every aspect of their lives is connected (for more on this, see the next section). Seeing no signs of development and having made no effort to understand Indigenous connection to the land, the British declared sovereign ownership of Australia (Australian Museum, 2015). Herein lies the tension of *The Secret River* and ultimately, the tension that underpins 250 years of Australian history. Andrew Bovell describes this situation as when “two peoples with a different understanding of the land and its ownership come face to face. The question was whose definition of ownership of land would prevail” (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016). Thornhill, following the British mandate of terra nullius, believes the land on the Hawkesbury is his for the taking. When the Dharug people appear, Yalamundi tells him “This is our place. Our country. All around here. The river and beyond those ridges. We look after these places”, to which Thornhill replies “Listen old man...this my place now. You got all the rest” (*The Secret River*, pg. 18).

In Western societies, ownership of land, houses, boats and other material possessions is typically a way of displaying status, wealth and power. Thornhill’s hunger to retain his piece of land on the Hawkesbury and make a life for himself

is motivated by his past as a poor boatman from London’s East End. Having been given the chance to start his life again on the other side of the world, he is desperate to prosper and elevate himself in the oppressive British class system – “One day we will build our house up here. And not just a thing of bark. A house made from stone. With rooms for all. A parlour. A sitting room. A fire place in every room” (*The Secret River*, pg. 84). This sentiment is shared by Smasher Sullivan, albeit in a more aggressive manner, towards the Dharug people. The wonder of ownership is seen in Smasher’s line – “You ever think Sal that the likes of us could be standing on dirt that belongs to us? Me? A nasty little sweep from the East End of London, owning something other than some other man’s coat” (*The Secret River*, pg. 31).



Nathaniel Dean in STC’s *The Secret River*, 2013. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

POSSESSION AND OWNERSHIP CONTINUED.

Faced with the decision to kill the Dharug people, Thornhill is in a state of “moral peril” with the desperation to prosper and protect his family on one side, and a gruesome act of violence on the other. Bovell says that as an audience “...we find ourselves identifying with the decision he makes. We may not agree with them, but we understand them” (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016). While Bovell says that if he were Thornhill, he would like to think he would refuse the prosperity gained from the violent crime, but in the 18th century the mentality towards Aboriginal massacres was that it was simply “...a necessary consequence of establishing a way to live” (Sydney Theatre Company Program, 2016).

Thornhill’s perceived victory over the Dharug people is symbolised by his house being built on top of the fish that was drawn by the Dharug people. However, his ownership of this piece of land on the Hawkesbury is a bittersweet victory and the destruction of the Dharug family will forever be etched in his psyche. Living on the land he fought for, he becomes a prisoner of his own guilt. This is symbolically indicated at the end of the play as he paints a fence on the back wall resembling prison bars. Thornhill tries to relieve his sense of guilt in a display of remorse by offering Ngalamalum his coat and something to eat. But Ngalamalum doesn’t want Thornhill’s offerings, he wants his land and his people; slapping his hand on the ground and raising the dust he says “This me...My place” (*The Secret River*, pg. 121). This is also beautifully encapsulated by Kelton Pell (who plays Yalamundi) in the Pre-Season Briefing who said “we belong to this country, we don’t come from anywhere else.”



Nathaniel Dean and Trevor Jamieson in STC’s *The Secret River*, 2013. Image: Heidrun Löhr. ©

THEMES AND IDEAS (CONT.)

WHY IS THE LAND IMPORTANT TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS?

The Dreaming is the overarching knowledge, beliefs and practices that set the rules, behaviours and ceremonies for Indigenous people in order to live on the land (Australian Museum, 2015). In the beginning, the creator God Baiame came down from the sky and journeyed across the earth. The track of Baiame's journey is seen through the creation of mountains, waterways and forests. The formation of these landforms is depicted in well known Dreamtime stories like the Rainbow Serpent and Tidalick the Frog. These are the stories that come from the practice of Dreaming that provide layering for how to live, how the world was created, why the creatures are one with the land and the people (Working with ATSI, 2015). The land is inhabited by ancestral beings making certain sites sacred and used for ceremonies. The journey also connected groups in particular regions and gave them a certain language. Baiame also gave people their laws, traditions and culture such as songs and dancing.

Each tribe has places significant to their tribe's history, stories and beliefs. Each generation of a tribe travels through these places which tell them of their ancestors and their way of being, thereby forming their cultural inheritance. When those places were dispossessed through white settlement, a part of their identity was lost and an element of spirituality taken away (City of Sydney, 2013).

This connection is described by Kelsey Strasek-Barker, a Gamilaroi/Yuwalaarday woman from Lightning Ridge who is completing an internship at STC, "If a mining company was to come and exploit the land where I come from and where my grandfather's people lived for thousands of years, a piece of my heart would be torn and my life taken from me, it would die with it. Because that land has been there since the Dreaming and it is a place that is significantly spiritual, a place that has a tradition and therefore significant value."



Madeleine Madden and Frances Djulibing in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

STYLE

CONTEMPORARY AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

The Secret River is a piece of Contemporary Australian Theatre. Neil Armfield as director, alongside the creatives, has created a production where the past and present collide. The narrator, Dhurrumbin, personifies the river, witnessing the history of the Hawkesbury, the action of the play and seeing into the future.

THEATRICALITY

The production of *The Secret River* doesn't hide the act of theatre making for the audience and allows them to be aware they are in a theatre, watching a play. This is achieved through the visible lighting on the side of the stage, actors bringing props on and off, and the live band in view of the audience. These directorial choices make the audience more aware that the story is being told by a company of actors – people who live with the inherited consequences of Australia's past. In doing this, they are able to think objectively about the issues, perhaps establishing a sense of generational responsibility, respect and reconciliation.

HISTORICAL FICTION

Adapted from Kate Grenville's 2005 novel by the same name, *The Secret River* is a piece of historical fiction as it is based on research conducted by Grenville about her own family history. Historical fiction takes true events from the past and writes them into a fictional narrative with imagined characters. The story of *The Secret River* is particularly poignant as it depicts a shameful part of Australian history where the privileges of white settlement were founded on violence that dispossessed the first peoples of Australia. The book and the play, confront this often silenced part of Australian history, laying bare the atrocities of the past and exposing how they have shaped present day Australia.



Nathaniel Dean in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

PRODUCTION ELEMENTS

SET

From Stephen Curtis, Set Designer for *The Secret River*

In some ways I feel as though I have been preparing for this production for 30 years or more – Neil and I started working together in 1981, and I have been living on the Hawkesbury River, where this story is set, for a bit longer than that. The world of

the River is deeply ingrained in me. It is a spectacularly beautiful landscape. I have no difficulty understanding why Thornhill would fall in love with it and want to make it his, and the middens and rock engravings – images of fish, wallabies, men and women that are everywhere in the valley – are a testament to how the Dharug made it theirs. The place is such an important part of this story, and I suppose my task is to give the audience some experience of that beauty and wonder without trying to literally describe it. I took my cue from Kate Grenville's Thornhill who on his first night on the Hawkesbury compares it to his experience of a church: "... so big it made his eyes water. He was dizzy, lost in panic... it was a void into which his very being expanded

without finding a boundary, all in the merciless light that blasted down..." From the earliest days of our script workshops I started to imagine a clear light-filled space that extended high out of view; a space in which our Aboriginal family would stand out boldly, and into which our settler family would tread muddy footprints like careless children; a space in which pictures could be drawn as part of the storytelling and the two families could play and play out this wonderfully complex and tragic story

COSTUMES

From Tess Schofield, costume designer for *The Secret River*

The process of visually 'solving' *The Secret River's* menagerie of characters for the stage has meandered through layers of family, fact, fiction, story, history, the freedom of theatricality and rehearsals – all in the great spirit of play. During research, I became fascinated with ideas of 'otherness', the whiteness, the blackness, the contrast, the difference. How ignorance and misunderstanding sit at the very heart of fear, how chaos springs from that, and tragically how intrinsically similar we all are. This is not a story to hide behind layers of muslin. How extreme the 'others' must have appeared is seen in Indigenous illustrations of the recently arrived Anglo boat people, and likewise early European artworks reflect curious observations of the first Australians. 'Charcoal and Ash' became an extreme visual metaphor for this idea. With the potential to move, crumble and smear across the faces of our chipped and crudely glued, scurvy-riddled Anglo Toby jugs, and the Hawkesbury's ancient Aboriginal inhabitants. Improvised period and tribal looks are assembled loosely from contemporary elements, with the same relaxed energy that rehearsal clothes are cobbled together, and our whole human river world is roughly painted with the wear and tear of life, salt, tar, rich river mud, ochre and clay. Perhaps we can remind our audience and ourselves what it really means to walk both ways.



PRODUCTION ELEMENTS (CONT.)

MUSIC AND SONG

Throughout the play both traditional English nursery rhymes and folk songs are sung by Sal and the other English settlers. Traditional Indigenous songs are also sung by the Dharug people. At the beginning of the play these songs create light, jovial moods where the two families express their culture and a connection to what they call home. In one moment, 'London Bridge is Falling Down' overlaps with a traditional Indigenous song of the Dharug people, foreshadowing the ways in which the two families and their cultures will clash but could have also worked together.

Perhaps the most haunting moment of the play is when 'London Bridge is Falling Down' is sung as Thornhill, Smasher and the white settlers of the Hawkesbury massacre the Dharug people. What is supposed to be an innocent children's rhyme contrasts with the appalling violence of the massacre and further serves to shock the audience and make them reflect on the brutality of the crime. The nursery rhyme is aggressively sung with the actors shouting the lines, which strengthens the horrifying mood of the moment.



Iain Grandage in rehearsal for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016.
Image: Hon Boey. ©



Instruments in the rehearsal room for STC's *The Secret River*, 2016. Image: Hon Boey. ©

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

CHARACTER

Characterisation is the process of developing from a role to build a complex personality and background for a particular character. Intention, status and attitude are integral ingredients for a character's motivation and belief. Complexity in character can be developed through interaction and relationship with others.

TENSION

Tension is the force which drives all drama. It creates a powerful and complex form of energy on stage which, in turn, generates a level of excitement in the audience. Tension strengthens audience engagement as it motivates the audience to continue watching while influencing them to question the ideas in the play

TIME AND PLACE

All dramatic action occurs at a time and place. Different settings dictate other characters that might be introduced, certain settings will intensify the action, multiple locations can enable us to explore many aspects of the situation, while the use of contrasting settings can help build the dramatic tension.

TAKE YOUR CUE

How would you describe the attitude and beliefs of William Thornhill towards his new life in Australia? How does this attitude compare to Sal's? And Smasher's?

Kate Grenville chose to not give the Dharug people a voice in her novel. As a white woman she was conscious of cultural sensitivity. In the play, the Dharug people speak their own language. Why is this an important choice?

Because the Dharug people speak their own language in the play, which most audience members won't understand, how are you able to make a connection with them as characters?

Has Andrew Bovell positioned you to ally with one family over another? Why or why not?

TAKE YOUR CUE

Two very different worlds collide in this play to create the main source of conflict. Describe how this has been visually represented by Neil Armfield and his creatives such as the set, costume and sound designers?

William Thornhill has his own personal conflict, what is this conflict? Is it resolved at the end of the play?

The tension escalates quickly at the end of the play. How does this affect you as an audience member?

Tension can manipulate the atmosphere of the play. How would you describe the mood in the massacre scene as described by Dhirrumbin? How did it make you feel? Why?

TAKE YOUR CUE

How does Ningali Lawford-Wolf who plays Dhirrumbin – the river – create a sense that she is the past, present and future all in one?

Why is the set a more abstract representation of place, rather than a literal representation?

What other symbolic gestures are used on stage to represent place?

How does the scale of the set relate to the story?

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT).

MOMENT

Moments in the drama are fundamental to the pacing of the dramatic action. The tempo which refers to the management of time in a broad sense, is often punctuated by the moment. The control and manipulation of key moments affects the audience's engagement and understanding of the performance.

SYMBOL

Symbols can help you understand and focus the drama – they can sum up the meaning of a performance, sometimes on a subconscious level. They can be expressed through the visual imagery of language, movement, gesture, objects, design and staging, helping to reinforce the meaning of the whole experience.



CHECK OUT OUR PRE-SHOW IN-THE-KNOW FACT SHEET FOR ALL THE ESSENTIAL INFORMATION PRIOR TO THE SHOW!

TAKE YOUR CUE

The Secret River rouses many emotions. In what moment of the play did you feel angry? Sad? Shocked?
What other feelings were conjured in certain moments?

Which moment affected you the most and why?

TAKE YOUR CUE

What are the following symbolic of?

The fish

Thornhill painting the fence at the end

The boat which was called 'The Queen', and is renamed 'The Hope'

The white powder shot from the guns and thrown by the Dharug people before they die

The song London Bridge is Falling Down

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA (CONT).

DRAMATIC MEANING

Dramatic Meaning is created through the manipulation of the elements of drama which are interrelated and interdependent. Dramatic Meaning is what is communicated between the performers and the audience to create an actor-audience relationship.

TAKE YOUR CUE

Looking at the Themes and Ideas section of this On Cue, what would you say the Dramatic Meaning of the production is?

What do you hope audiences will take away from the experience of watching The Secret River?

Why do you think this is a story that should be told?

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OTHER RESOURCES

- Designer Sketchbook with sketches from Tess Schofield's costume designs
- Pre-Show In-the-Know handout for fast facts and what to look for in the performance
- Classroom poster about the importance of the play *The Secret River*