



Searching For The Secret River

Kate Grenville

Download now

Read Online ➔

Searching For The Secret River

Kate Grenville

Searching For The Secret River Kate Grenville

Searching for the Secret River is a memoir about the writing of Kate Grenville's international bestseller, *The Secret River*.

It tells the story of the research behind the novel - from the transcript of Grenville's ancestor's trial at the Old Bailey in 1805, to the information that contemporary historians are uncovering about what happened on the Australian frontier. It also takes the reader through the process of turning that research into living fiction - the false starts, dead ends and failures as well as the strokes of luck, flashes of inspiration and surprises.

It contains sections of personal memoir, the record of the research, and a journal of the evolution of the book from non-fiction to novel. It quotes sections of early drafts and compares them with the final version, and goes into some detail about technical issues such as point of view, voice and dialogue.

For anyone interested in the writing process - and in particular the writing of a historical novel - *Searching for the Secret River* provides a unique behind-the-scenes exploration.

The Secret River has proved to be a controversial book among Australian historians. They feel that fiction is an untrustworthy mechanism by which to understand the past. A novelist may alter, simplify or even distort the truth about history in ways the reader will not be aware of.

Kate Grenville has always had the same reservations about historical fiction. Even before *The Secret River* was completed, she was planning a book which would make transparent the process by which she'd adapted the historical record for the purposes of fiction, and her reasons for the decisions she made.

She says "The subject matter of *The Secret River* is so important, and so politically charged, I didn't want readers to be able to say oh, it's only a novel - she just made it all up. The events and characters in the novel are adapted from the historical record. These things really did happen on our frontier, even if at a slightly different time and in a different place. I wanted readers to be able to retrace the journey I took in coming to terms with what I found about our history, and to see how I chose to adapt it for a novel."

Twenty years of teaching Creative Writing in universities, and three books about the writing process, were the other impetus for *Searching for The Secret River*. "Writing is such an enrichment of life - whether or not it results in publication - that I wanted to leave a record of my own process, so that others might not have to re-invent the wheel completely," Grenville says. "Historical fiction has its particular challenges for the writer - I would have loved to read a book like this one while I was writing *The Secret River*. It would have made the process a little less laborious."

Searching for the Secret River has become a classic for book groups, students and writers looking for guidance.

Searching For The Secret River Details

Date : Published July 28th 2007 by Harper Perennial (first published 2006)

ISBN : 9780002007115

Author : Kate Grenville

Format : Paperback 240 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, History, Language, Writing, Cultural, Australia

 [Download Searching For The Secret River ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Searching For The Secret River ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online Searching For The Secret River Kate Grenville

From Reader Review Searching For The Secret River for online ebook

Rosemary Atwell says

This is a rewarding read, especially for the writer and/or researcher. 'Searching for The Secret River' documents Kate Grenville's journey of discovering her great-great-great grandfather and of the satisfactions and frustrations of the writing process, as she grapples with the ways in which truth and fiction both conspire and inspire when bringing a text to life.

Although the book isn't exactly a memoir or a writing guide, it fits both genres equally well.

Megan Warren says

This book was recommended to me by a writing friend and I found it to be a fascinating insight into Grenville's writing process. I've borrowed The Secret River to read now.

Sarah says

A beautifully written memoir.

Mat says

There's a passage in Kate Grenville's historic novel 'The Secret River' that perfectly encapsulates the avarice that took over Australia's emancipated convicts. In it, the protagonist gazes over a piece of coveted Aboriginal land:

He took off his hat with an impulse to feel the air around his head. His own air! That tree, its powdery bark flaking around the trunk: his! That tussock of grass, each coarse strand haloed by the sunlight: his own!

What is surprising, on reading this 'making of' book, is that the protagonist is based on Grenville's own ancestor, Solomon Wiseman, after whom the Sydney hamlet of Wisemans Ferry is named.

Grenville originally intended 'The Secret River' to be a work of non-fiction, and this book works perfectly as just that. It's also a generous and honest insight into her writing process. A refreshing admission is that - unlike many white "experts" - she does not claim to understand the Aboriginal culture that she writes about. Though the book is a dry telling of events, Grenville includes at the end a flash of the brilliant poetry that makes 'The Secret River' so outstanding.

Wisemans Ferry, a crossing of Sydney's Hawkesbury River, still captivates visitors and even invokes avarice within them. My in-laws, who emigrated to Australia from India nearly 40 years ago, have often talked of the place, noting - without irony - that when they visited, "we had the place all to ourselves".

On a scorching summer's day, I cycled the 42km in from the nearest train station. The temperature hit 47C. In the shimmering heat, the place was stunningly beautiful. But having read Grenville's whole 'Secret River' trilogy and this 'making of' book, I could only liken it to journeying into the heart of darkness.

'The Secret River' refers to the secret river of Aboriginal blood that flows throughout Australia's history.

Lauren says

I knew it! After grinding through *The Secret River*, the impression I got from it was that it was that 1) Grenville put a crap load of research into the book, and 2) it was a personal story of sorts, and *Searching for the Secret River* confirms this. To my mind, Grenville was too involved with the story to really be objective with it. She talks about having to stop thinking of the main character in terms of who he was in real life (he's a thinly disguised version of her own ancestor), and start looking at him with more of an author's eye, but given the main character's lack of characterisation, I don't think she was very successful with that. Maybe it was only a subconscious decision, but still, the main character was extremely dull, like she didn't want to paint him as one way or the other because in some sense she would still be making up a personality for someone real and connected to her, and I can understand that it would be a tricky thing to commit to.

I'm starting to think Kate Grenville just isn't my cup of tea, though. Like the *The Secret River*, *Searching for the Secret River* had the same lack of ... urgency, I guess? Compelling-ness? That factor that makes you think "yes, I want to know where this is all going and what happens next". They're not *bad*, just boring. Grenville openly admits that her books, or at least some of them, have little plot. As far as I'm concerned, without that plot there's nothing else that emerges instead to grab the reader's attention. Not style or interesting writing, not character motivations, or in this case, *her* motivations. It just plods along with no surprises, like an automaton, or a bland rube goldberg machine. I'll give her another chance with the sequel to *The Secret River*, but needless to say my hopes aren't high.

Brenda says

Such a great look into the process of writing a novel.

Sara says

Having devoured *The Secret River*, I felt lucky to have this to hand. I am always fascinated by other people's writing processes, and there were a number of things I really enjoyed about this book. I felt a strong kinship with Kate's search among archives for pieces of information that would help her put together her story, having just done something similar for *Shallow Breath*. I thought she did pretty well in not getting the book bogged in details that were probably fascinating to her but perhaps not so much to an outsider – there were only a couple of times I felt I was getting a bit lost in facts and figures.

I really valued the importance Kate placed on visiting the places she was writing about, where possible, to get a feel for them, to try to become a part of the story, and flesh out the small details that would make the book interesting and memorable. I loved envisaging Kate climbing down to stand next to the Thames, and

pocketing a bit of old roof tile!

What I also liked very much was how Kate outlines her struggles to find the way to tell this story – the false starts, the realisations, the certainties becoming uncertainties. I think it's a wonderful thing for all writers to see that a fantastic book comes about through hard work, through being prepared to question your own decisions and change your mind, and that it is not just an effortless slipstream from mind to paper for even the most talented of novelists.

Pauleen says

I read this book some time ago and absolutely loved reading about the process behind the novel.

I was much amused, when she talks about researching her ancestor and she declares she's not one of those family historians....um, yes you are!

Angela Young says

This is a wonderful and encouraging book about the journey towards a novel. It took Kate Grenville five years to write *The Secret River*: *Searching for The Secret River* describes what happened in those five years. *The Secret River* wasn't going to be a novel at all in the beginning, but a memoir. But slowly things begin to change and evolve - always through her determination to stay with it and to discover. Even when she realises, 'With a sinking heart - *how can I do this?* - that I would have to create a whole society on the riverside.' It's one thing to create one or two or three or even several characters. It's quite another to create a whole society, and particularly a society which the writer knows little or nothing of, yet novels create whole worlds so they need whole societies even if they're not altogether described.

Grenville's memoir of the writing of *The Secret River* is so honest, so beautifully-written and so full of the recognitions and the difficulties, the solutions and the problems that are endemic to the writing of a novel - 'The solution to every problem creates another' - that, apart from being an intriguing account of how a writer makes a piece of work, it is a gloriously reassuring piece of work for those of us who also write. Eventually, each search will yield up its treasure.

Anna says

I really enjoyed *The Secret River*, and rated it five stars, so was intrigued by this book which covers the background and process of how it was researched and written. And I wasn't disappointed. I found this to be really fascinating. In part one, the reader follows Kate Grenville as she initially begins researching her convict ancestor and his transportation to Australia, then realises that his claiming of land on the Hawkesbury River must have put him in conflict with the Aboriginal inhabitants of the area. The dark history she discovers makes for uncomfortable but important reading.

Parts two and three of the book are also interesting, providing insights into the process of writing *The Secret River* and how it evolved. It is particularly interesting to see the many sources from which Grenville drew inspiration, including minor details and phrases which contribute to the authentic sound and atmosphere of

the novel.

This book is likely to be of interest to aspiring authors and family history researchers, or those who enjoyed *The Secret River*.

Jiajia Chen says

It is an quite honest memoir of Grenville's writing process of her MASTERPIECE *The Secret River*. The memorandum reveals when and how she gets the inspiration and motivation of writing such a book, and the detailed efforts of her research. It helps people to get a better understanding of her standpoint of writing *The Secret River*. basically, after reading the memoir, I would agree that TSR is a whitewashing novel; yet it also demonstrates her respect for the aboriginal people and their wisdom by not getting into their minds, despite this causes problems concerning a more appropriate representation of the Indigenous people.

Hariklia Heristanidis says

I am searching for my own way to tell the story of my grandparents, so reading about Kate Grenville's search for her great great great grandfather and of how to tell his story, obviously resonated with me. Most of us will know of her award-winning book "*The Secret River*". It was made into an excellent two-part mini-series and has also been adapted for the stage. This book tells the tale of how that book came into being.

It follows the trajectory of the author's interest in her forebearer, through to research and struggles with how best to tell the story of what happened. She considers memoir, hybrid forms of writing etc before realising that it's not just her ancestor's story she wants (or needs) to tell, but the wider story of all colonialists and their relationship to the indigenous people they displaced, which mirrors their relationship to the land: this land.

This is a thoroughly Australian story, that Kate Grenville tells from a personal viewpoint. It is beautifully written and totally absorbing - whether you're writing your own book or not. I loved it and am grateful that she has shared her struggles and insights.

Kim says

Reading *The Secret River* earlier this year was a profoundly moving experience, as was seeing the superb theatrical adaptation of the novel produced by the Sydney Theatre Company*. Together, the novel and the play spoke to me about the colonial experience in New South Wales in a way that all of my other reading on this subject has failed to do. It personalised the dilemmas faced by the new arrivals and the conflict between them and the indigenous people of the country. It made those dilemmas and that conflict real in an emotional, not just in an intellectual sense. That emotional impact has remained with me over the months, fed and revitalised by reading the other novels of what has become Grenville's trilogy about the colonial experience, *The Lieutenant* and, over the past few days, *Sarah Thornhill*.

Until I noticed that my GR friend Gaeta was reading this book, I didn't know it existed. How grateful I am to have come across it. The theme of the work is there in the title. Grenville, inspired by family stories about her ancestor Solomon Wiseman - whose name is immortalised in Sydney geography by the settlement of

Wiseman's Ferry on the Hawkesbury River - decides to write a biography of the convict turned wealthy landowner. She researches his story in London and in Australia and spends five years writing and re-writing what becomes not a biography, but a novel, and not a novel about her ancestor, but a novel centred on a character inspired by him and about the cultural misunderstanding which contributed to the difficult relationship between white settlers in the colony and the local indigenous people.

Grenville's writing method - the research, the re-imagining, the writing, the revision - is interesting in and of itself and would be, I imagine, of particular interest to other writers. However, that's not what captivated me about this work. What moved me at times to tears, was the recognition and memory of shared experiences. When Grenville describes the Reconciliation Walk across the Sydney Harbour Bridge in May 2000, I was taken back to that day, because I was one of the 300,000 people who participated. When Grenville described standing next to the Thames realising that this was the place where Solomon Wiseman had been arrested, I remembered touching a headstone in a cemetery in a churchyard in Cornwall, knowing that this was where generations of my ancestors were buried. When Grenville described looking at Sydney Harbour, imagining what it was like when the ship on which Wiseman arrived in the colony, I remembered having done exactly the same thing, as I imagined the arrival of my ancestors. While I found her journey as a novelist very interesting, it was her struggle to find meaning, connection and belonging with which I most identified.

This is quick to read and highly recommended to anyone who loves *The Secret River*, who is interested in the process of researching and writing a novel or who has tried to make sense of family history. Thank you, Gaeta, for leading me to it.

*Excerpts from the play and interviews with playwright Andrew Bovell, director Neil Armfield and cast member Ursula Yovich can be seen [here](#).

Nicola says

Interesting enough but I doubt I shall read any of her fiction.

Lisa says

Kate Grenville is one of my favourite writers and I was bitterly disappointed when her novel *The Secret River* was passed over by the Miles Franklin judges. It was a brave and beautiful book, exploring the mutual incomprehension and inevitable conflict that occurred when early Australian settlers encountered the indigenous people. It was Grenville's first venture into historical fiction, and coming as it did in the middle of the so-called History Wars, it was criticised for failing to be 'true' history. Searching for the Secret River was Grenville's response to those critics.

See the rest at <http://anzlitlovers.wordpress.com/201...>
