

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary (10–14 years)

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning Areas:** English; History (e.g. Family History); Science (e.g. Environmental Studies)
- **General Capabilities:** Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Intercultural understanding
- **Cross-curriculum priorities:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Story forms: historical fiction/faction, dual narratives, fairy tale and literary reference
- How an author constructs voice and character
- Researching history
- Building vocabulary
- Values: resilience, fortitude, bravery, selflessness, independence

THEMES

- History and culture of early Australian convict settlement
- Aboriginal culture and tradition
- Women's rights
- Love of landscape and country
- Family history, heritage and ancestry

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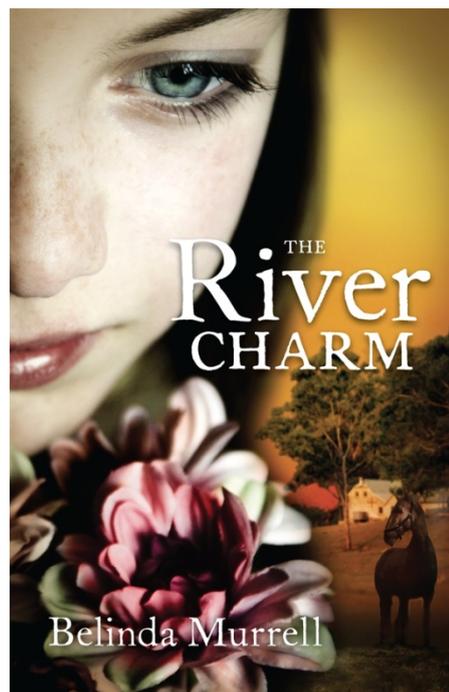
PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9781742757124 (paperback);
9781742757131 (ebook)

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The River Charm

Belinda Murrell

PLOT SUMMARY

'It is part of me,' whispered Charlotte to the tree trunk. 'And I am part of Oldbury' (p. 280).

'But as a woman I *have* no rights. My husband owns all my property – not me. Mr Barton is my husband. He can do what he likes and I can do nothing.' (p. 83)

The River Charm is a tribute to Charlotte Waring (Atkinson/Barton), who was an inspiring historical figure. It is also a family saga, a thriller and a romance. It tells in fictional form the incredible story of an early Australian female immigrant who married, and was widowed with four children. She was then forced to flee from her second husband, George Barton, a drunken tyrant, and to fight the laws of the land in order to have her children remain by her side. Her family's fierce love for the country attached to Oldbury, the grand home built by Atkinson before his untimely death, is one of the major themes. This love for the landscape is enhanced by the Atkinsons' interaction with local Aboriginal culture, and by their empathy with the Aboriginal people regarding their lamentable treatment at the hands of settlers.

This is an early Australian adventure story about the writer of the very first children's book published in Australia. A creative writer and artist, Charlotte was also resourceful, intrepid, feisty and brave. She could manage a property and a household, whilst writing, drawing, painting and teaching, and was able to adapt her skills from a life of pleasure and wealth to having to scrape a living in order to feed her family.

This exhilarating work traverses history, society and culture in a rich and heady mixture of intrigue which is imbued with love of family and country.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Murrell has worked as a travel journalist, technical writer, editor and public relations consultant. Her overseas adventures inspired her work as a travel writer for the *West Australian* newspaper and *Out & About With Kids* travel magazine. Her work has also appeared in the *Sun Herald*, *Sunday Telegraph* and *Sydney Morning Herald*. While Belinda studied Children's Literature at Macquarie University, her passion for children's books was reignited when she had her own three children and began telling and writing stories for Nick, Emily and Lachlan. Belinda's books include the Sun Sword fantasy trilogy, Scottish/Australian timeslip tale *The Locket of Dreams*, French Revolution timeslip tale *The Ruby Talisman*, Australian timeslip tale *The Ivory Rose* and Australian World War II tale *The Forgotten Pearl*. Visit Belinda's website for more information: <http://www.belindamurrell.com.au/>

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

For detailed information about the author's inspiration, see Belinda Murrell's **Acknowledgments** (pp. 295–302).

WRITING STYLE

This novel might be studied in relation to the F–10 Curriculum Topic 'English':

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/English/Rationale>

Faction

This novel is closely based on a writer's life and is an example of '**faction**', which is the deliberate blending of fact and fiction in a work of the imagination. In it the novelist employs the freedom of the imagination, but is also constrained by the need to be true to the original story.

Activities

1. Compare Belinda's writing style with her great-great-great grandmother Charlotte's writing in *A Mother's Offering to Her Children* (1841) – the stories in which are structured as a dialogue between a mother and her children, like a playscript. For example, you might discuss the fact that Charlotte's stories, despite her obvious sympathy for the plight of Aboriginal people, sometimes sound quite patronising and racist, because they are a product of the times. (Online versions of Charlotte's book are listed under **Further Reading** below.)
2. There are links to Louisa Atkinson's stories about the family's descent down the Meryla Pass on the Trove website managed by the National Library of Australia. Belinda says: *'I've made my account of the story different to Louisa's in a couple of ways. In particular, Louisa says "the lady fainted" but I can't imagine strong, capable Charlotte Atkinson fainting – I wondered if that was Louisa trying to make Charlotte seem ladylike in the eyes of society at the time.'* (See links under **Further Reading** below.)
3. Compare this book to other works of fiction, such as Michelle Cooper's *A Brief History of Montmaray*, the stories included in the *My Australian Story* series (Scholastic), *A Ring through Time* by Felicity Pulman (HarperCollins), Jackie French's *A Waltz for Matilda* or *Nanberry: Black Brother White* (HarperCollins), or picture book *Meet Ned Kelly* by Janeen Brian, illustrated by Matt Adams (Random House Australia).
4. Read Louise Atkinson's poem 'The Light from the Mountain' at the beginning of the novel. Analyse its meaning, and the style (two rhyming couplets in each of three verses) in which it is written. What does it suggest about Louisa's feelings?

Questions

1. How does this story compare to the details found in online biographies of Charlotte Waring?
2. What problems might an author face in deliberately blending fact and fiction?

Dual narratives

The novel is **structured chronologically** and consists of **dual or alternate narratives** – that of Charlotte and her family, living in the 1840s, first at Oldbury and then in Sydney, and that of Millie, Charlotte's

descendent, and her family who live in contemporary times, and have come to visit Oldbury for the first time.

Activities

1. Map out the chronology of each of these narratives, marking key events on the two maps.
2. Compare this book to other novels which employ dual or alternate narratives, such as Marianne Musgrove's *A Beginner's Guide to Revenge* (Random House Australia).

Questions

1. How else might this story have been structured?
2. What insights did Millie's story add to the earlier narrative?
3. Charlotte's story is told by the narrator, Aunt Jessamine, who acts as an intermediary between the two groups of characters. This device is also commonly used in a range of novels such as the classic *Wuthering Heights* by Emily Bronte. Discuss how Jessamine's account is coloured or interpreted by her opinions.

Literary devices and symbols

Literary devices and symbols are often used by a writer to cement themes. The novel's title refers to **the river stone** which Charlotte brought from her home in England, and which offers her comfort in hard times. Later it was made into a gold charm which becomes **symbolic** of her past and of the comforts of home and heart and hearth. Aunt Jessamine says 'Now I wear it as a symbol, to give me hope and courage and remind me where I came from.' (p. 20), words which are echoed in Millie's acceptance speech for the art award (p. 290) when Millie is also wearing the charm bracelet which Aunt Jessamine has loaned her for the evening.

Activities

1. Invite students to discuss an object (like the river stone) which has some sort of significance in their lives or in that of their families. See also **Worksheet 3** for how students can unearth clues about their family.
2. Fiction depends for its effect on the creative usage of literary devices such as similes, metaphors, or personification. Find examples of devices such as the metaphor: 'bed of leaves' (p. 121) and discuss the impact they have on your reading.

Questions

1. What devices did you particularly notice in reading this novel?
2. Louisa dreams that her father tells her not to leave her mother (p. 187) and literally comes back from the dead. Millie sees the apparition of the 'Dream Girl' and paints an award-winning picture of her. What thematic role do such dreams and 'portents' play in this novel?

Fairy tale or archetypal tropes and literary references

This novel is redolent with fairy tale motif and literary references in story structure, plot and character.

- Setting: Castle/mansion (Oldbury): 'It looked like a house out of a fairy tale, a house protected by thorns and hedges, like a *Sleeping Beauty* castle.' (p. 4)
- Characters: Heroine (Charlotte); Villain/Wicked Stepfather (Barton); Younger Heroines and Hero (Charlotte, Emily, James, Louisa, Millie and Bella); Faithful family retainers (Charley, Mr Ash, Bridget); Rejected suitor (William Cummings); Vagabond (John Lynch); Long-lost relative and storyteller (Aunt Jessamine)
- Trope of journey, struggle against adversity, escape, and renewal or resolution;
- Romance
- The idea of the 'lost child in the bush' is also a potent reference in this text.

Activities

1. Discuss with students the parallels between this novel and several fairy tales.
2. When the children play (pp. 87–9) they mention Titania (William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) and Lancelot (Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*). Charlotte's horse is called Ophelia (William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*). They also recite 'Mariana' by Alfred Lord Tennyson (p.26). This family, despite having grown up in Australia, is steeped in English literature. What other such references did you notice? What other poems, plays or books from the history of English literature have you heard of or read?

Questions

1. What other literary or fairy tale tropes did you discover in reading this novel?
2. What were the key events in the journey undertaken by the family in this novel?
3. How does this novel fall into the 'romance' genre? What scenes or events are illustrative of this genre?

Characterisation

Charlotte is the central character, although in the modern-day story Millie is the focus. Each of their family members plays a role, as do the romantic suitors (Cummings) and the villain (Barton) and there are also a range of minor characters such as servants.

Activities

1. Characters can be ambivalent. For example, Charlotte is described as a 'notable she-dragon' (p 269) which is contrary to her children's perceptions of her. But to retain her family she had to be fierce. Discuss this ambivalence in her character and in that of her children.
2. This novel has main characters but also mentions many minor characters as well. Choose one of them (e.g. Charley, Bridget or Mr Ash) and find all the references in the novel to them. What picture do you build of that person?
3. Draw a character arc for one of the characters and show how they change during the story.

Questions

1. How are the two characters of Millie and Charlotte alike? How are they different?
2. Which is your favourite character and why?
3. Which character would you have liked to have known more about and why?

KEY STUDY TOPICS

Several **historical, social and environmental topics** are raised in the novel which might be studied in relation to F-10 Curriculum Topics:

History

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/History/Content-structure>

Science

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Science/Rationale>

History and culture of early Australian convict settlement

Convict stories are but only one part of this early history of white Australian settlement (or invasion). Many, like James Atkinson, came as free settlers determined or forced to make a new life for themselves. Charlotte's story is typical too, but is hard to conceive of these days: left by a wealthy family virtually penniless, she chose to sail halfway around the world to become a governess rather than to stay at home in genteel poverty. James Atkinson, who was to become her husband, was able to buy land and eventually build himself a large estate and home, but when he arrived he too was without a home to go to.

The frontiers and pioneering spirit of families like the Atkinsons is depicted here in the daily hard work which was necessary even with servants and workmen. Their interaction with Aboriginal people was a significant part of the adaptation they made to this environment. The dangers they confronted from bushrangers when travelling was another challenge. (See also **Fast Facts about Australia in the 1840s** pp. 291–4.)

Activities

1. The localities described give a clear understanding of how recently this settlement had been established. For example, James lived in a makeshift timber cottage until they built Oldbury. When the family move to Sydney they choose to rent at Double Bay, which is described as being a small fishing village which was affordable (pp. 193–4) – a far cry from the exclusive and much-developed area it is today. Choose an area mentioned in the book (or the local area where you live) and research how it has changed and developed over time.
2. Research the daily life lived by early settlers, their leisure pursuits, and how they did things such as cooking, sewing, and crafts such as blacksmithing and carpentry.
3. The distance between Australia and Europe meant that people here often didn't hear news for months or even years. When Mr Ash brings the mail to Budgong it includes a letter from Charlotte's sister Jane reporting that Queen Victoria has married her cousin Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg in February that year (p. 168). (It is now summer which means it is late in the year.) Discuss the differences in methods of

communication between Charlotte and Millie's times.

4. 'It is happening all over the colony. Many of the leading businessmen have gone bankrupt ...' (p. 270) Despite their apparent wealth, Will Cummings' family were experiencing financial difficulties like many in the colony at that time. Research the reasons for this depression in the 1840s. What other periods of history have had times of depression or recession? (For comparison, read Belinda Murrell's book *The Ivory Rose*, about times of hardship in the 1890s.)
5. One of the things you learn when studying history is both the changes in attitudes and the origin of aspects of contemporary culture, society and economics. This novel reveals that society was generally rather patronising towards Aboriginal people. It also reveals that early farming methods resulted in the introduction of species and to the degradation of land. What other aspects of society were revealed in this novel?
6. People were very much victims of the lack of advanced medicine and health services during this early time in Australia and illness, infant mortality and death in childbirth were far more frequent than they are today. For example, the arrival of the doctor to treat Louisa proves to be a harrowing event (pp. 181–4) during which his harsh and arcane treatments might easily have contributed to her death. Compare this scene to the gentle holistic treatments her mother administered to her, and to the fact that we have antibiotics today which can cure people relatively quickly. Childbirth was far more dangerous then, too, as was illustrated by the untimely death of Louisa after this novel concludes. Research the difficulties faced by women in labour during this period, or which illnesses or medical conditions could be fatal in those times but are usually treatable now (such as whooping cough), or have been almost eradicated through widespread use of vaccines (such as smallpox or polio). What were the most common ailments which threatened families in the years of early settlement?
7. Bushrangers are mentioned in a number of incidents in the novel, first by Aunt Jessamine when she speaks of 'Jackey Jackey and the Berrima Axe Murderer John Lynch' (p. 14). He is later mentioned again (p. 46, 79–83, 231–2). John Lynch is typical of the myth of the wild and

violent bushranger (p. 231) and his murderous acts act as a backdrop to the family saga being enacted in this novel. Known as the Berrima Axe Murderer, he killed at least nine people before being apprehended and hung at the age of nineteen. Charlotte also tells the story of the attack made by bushrangers on her and Barton, which led to her marriage to Barton (pp. 262–5). This is typical of the many tall stories which have contributed to the legends of frontiersmen and heroic resistance. Research the life of John Lynch in original sources such as this transcript of his trial:

'Berrima Circuit Court Criminal Side, Monday March 25' *Sydney Morning Herald*, Friday 25 March 1842

<http://trove.nla.gov.au/ndp/del/article/12874354>

'Early Australia Exciting Events in its History: The Notorious Lynch Murders' *Singleton Argus*, 23 October 1909

<http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article76906821>

8. Research the lives of other bushrangers of the era. See: 'Early Australian Bushrangers' <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/early-austn-bushrangers>
9. Read non-fiction and fiction about bushrangers such as the non-fiction picture book *Meet Ned Kelly* by Janeen Brian, Sophie Masson's *The Hunt for Ned Kelly* (2011) or the many other novels and sources about Kelly listed at <http://www.ironoutlaw.com/html/books.html>

Questions

1. What did you think was the most striking difference between life in the nineteenth and the 21st centuries?
2. What problems arose as a result of the large numbers of immigrants arriving in Australia in the 1840s? Why did so many come from Ireland?
3. 'My dearest friend Eliza died at the age of eleven of consumption caused by poor food and cold dormitories.' (p 202) It is hard to believe that wealthy people put their children at risk like this. Could they have been unaware of the mistreatment of their children, or were they simply negligent?
4. When did convict transportation cease in Australia? And why did so many convicts turn to bushranging?

5. Is a bushranger necessarily a criminal or were there reasons for their behaviour? Were some of them rebels? Or were they, like John Lynch, still very young and dehumanised by years of abuse or poverty?
6. What does the song 'The Wild Colonial Boy' say about the bushrangers and public attitudes to them? See lyrics and music at: 'The Wild Colonial Boy'
<http://www.imagesaustralia.com/thewildcolonialboy.htm>

Aboriginal culture and tradition

The Waratah story told by Charlotte and then Charley (pp. 123–4) is one of many references to Aboriginal traditions and culture in this novel. Charlotte goes on to lament the treatment of the Aboriginals (pp. 124). The skills of trackers are referred to several times, e.g. the story of how Yarrowambie and James Atkinson had become lost when they trekked over the pass and how he saved them; Charley also helps the family survive the Meryla Pass. When they arrive at Budgong there is a gathering of Aboriginals (p. 158) and the bond between them and the land, and the bond which Charlotte's family feels for the land, is mentioned as a shared emotion; Charley returns to his family (p. 163) and a corroboree takes place (p. 165); Charlotte acknowledges the sadness of their dance and lament for the dead (p. 166).

Activities

1. Research the Gandangara people's history. See 'Selected bibliography of the Gundungurra language and people held in the AIATSIS Library'
http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/docs/langbibs/Gundungurra_may09.pdf
2. Discuss the treatment of Aboriginal people during these early years of settlement. Read the passage beginning: 'Did you hear another shepherd's been murdered by the blacks down south at Hume River?' said Dandy Jack.' (p. 71) and continuing with the conversation between Dandy Jack and the sawyer (p. 72). Discuss what it reveals about nineteenth-century attitudes to Aboriginal people and the practice of violent white retaliation to such incidents.
3. Apart from frontier conflicts between black and white, many Aboriginal people died of introduced diseases such as influenza and smallpox. In the **Author's Note** (pp. 293–4)

Belinda Murrell mentions the influenza epidemic of 1846 which destroyed much of the remaining local Aboriginal population. Research what the effect of such disease was in the first years of contact.

Questions

1. How were Charlotte Barton's attitudes to Aboriginal people different to those of her contemporaries?
2. What did you think of Dandy Jack's attitude to Aboriginal people?
3. Are contemporary attitudes to Aboriginal people and understanding of their various cultural beliefs more enlightened in your opinion? What has changed in the past hundred and fifty years?

Women's rights

Charlotte finds, as Atkinson's widow, that she is at the mercy of the executors and has no control over her own finances despite being very capable of managing both the house and property. When in a panic she marries Barton she finds herself even more at risk since he has no skills in managing the estate (despite being an overseer), and his drunken rages soon become dangerous to both their well-being and to the finances of the property; she has even less control of her own affairs since a husband was considered to be free to treat his family in any way he wished to. She receives an ominous letter from executors (p. 40) and Barton considers that he has become owner of Oldbury by default and has no hesitation in declaring that he is 'master of the house' (p. 61). When Charlotte leaves Barton she is considered by the courts to have deserted her marriage and is in danger of losing custody of her children despite the fact that they have been abused as she was. When young Charlotte rides to tell her mother that Barton is removing the furniture from the house, the response in the town is not helpful; a woman suggests that her behaviour is not befitting a young lady (pp. 93–4). Charlotte stands up to the executors (p. 190) and is considered a difficult woman. Later she speaks of warnings that executors might be going to take the children away (p. 201). But Aunt Jessamine praises her and says that 'She was an unusually independent woman for her time, with strong opinions on education for girls and the importance of women's rights' (p. 12).

Activities

1. Read the legal case which is studied today by Macquarie School of Law students: 'Atkinson v.

Barton [1841] NSWSupC 70' [**succession – guardianship and maintenance of children – Court of Claims – married women's legal disabilities**] Supreme Court of New South Wales Dowling C.J., 6 July 1841 Source: *Sydney Herald*, 3 July 1841 ATKINSON AND OTHERS V. CHARLOTTE BARTON AND OTHERS.
http://www.law.mq.edu.au/research/colonial_case_law/nsw/cases/case_index/1841/atkinson_v_barton/ Discuss what it reveals about the findings of the court.

2. Her daughter Charlotte decides not to marry since she has doubts about her own feelings for William: she fears that she is marrying for security, that she is too young to make such a decision, and that she is responding to being 'admired' rather than to becoming an equal partner in a marriage. Discuss her reasons for rejecting her suitor. Was she also influenced by the nostalgic idea of returning to her childhood home?
3. The story of Eliza Fraser (p. 205) is another story of an intrepid woman. Read more about her life.

Questions

1. If Charlotte is 'difficult', is this a bad thing?
2. Do you think that the executors treated her very badly? Or were they just doing their job?
3. Do you think that young Charlotte made the right decision in returning to Oldbury with her family rather than marrying William?

Love of landscape and country

The love of place and home lies at the heart of this novel, for the Atkinson family wanted only to return to the scene of their happiest days with their lamented father James. They each loved drawing and painting and being outside in the bush. They also loved caring for wildlife and frequently brought home 'native' animals. Maugie the koala is found injured (p. 33) and becomes a much-loved family pet until their removal to Sydney. Mount Gingenbullen is a feature which is mentioned with respect in the novel as well. The family also acknowledged the love and understanding which Aboriginal people had for this landscape, which is thus a strong theme in the novel.

Activities

1. Read more about the Sutton Forest area at: 'The Southern Highlands of New South Wales: Sutton Forest'

http://www.highlandsnsw.com.au/towns/sutton_forest.html

2. Charlotte explains (p. 39) the origin of the word 'koala' for what they then thought of as a 'native bear'. Research the names of other native animals and their Latin and Aboriginal derivations.
3. Make a note of all the native plants mentioned in this text and try to find images of them. Make your own watercolour paintings and drawings of them as well.

Questions

1. In keeping native animals as pets the family were expressing their love for nature; but was this really such a good thing to do? Would you be able to keep a pet koala today?
2. The formal flower garden at Oldbury (p. 49) contained a range of introduced flowers, unlike the wildflowers the girls collect in the bush. What environmental effect did such introduced genus of species have on the natural environment in Australia? For example, Lantana and Bougainvillea are both prolific plants and are considered pests in some areas. See: Thuillier, Clémentine 'Introduced Plants Outnumber Natives' *National Geographic* <http://www.australiangeographic.com.au/journal/invasive-plants-outnumber-australian-natives.htm>
3. Do you think that we should attempt to grow only native plants in our gardens or is this an unrealistic objective?

Family history, heritage and ancestry

Charlotte speaks of her family background (p. 201) to her children. Millie is told that her artistic talents run in the family, and go back nearly two hundred years: 'It is a heritage you should be proud of.' (p. 10)

The F-10 Curriculum Topic of Family History is an area you might study in relation to this text.

'Personal and Family Histories'

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/History/Curriculum/F-10>

Activities

1. Have fun trying to discover more about the Waring and Atkinson family backgrounds and create a simple family tree for Charlotte and James and their descendents, including writers Belinda Murrell and her sister Kate Forsyth.

2. Discuss family history and how such research might uncover both unwelcome and welcome news.
3. Find clues about your own family history. (See **Worksheet** below.) If you (or a member of your family) become really serious about family history research, there are online family tree websites which allow you to create a 'living' document. Examples: Ancestry.com or MyHeritage Family Tree Builder. You might also find some interesting sources on the TROVE website managed by the National Library of Australia.
4. Family history might be recorded in other ways apart from on a family tree. Examples might include oral storytelling or recording of oral history, photo albums, artefacts (such as war medals, or jewellery), books, films, other digital media, or by donating records, documents, photos or artefacts to a library or museum as a permanent record. Discuss these various methods and undertake one of them. (See **Worksheet** below.)
5. Local history is another topic which might be researched under this topic. Discover the history of the area you live in and create your own 'tourism guide' to the key historical features of your region. (See Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins' classic picture book *My Place* (1988) about the diverse history of an area.)

Questions

1. What do you know about your own family background?
2. Where would you start to research your family's history?
3. What would be the most exciting thing you could discover about your family history?
4. What are the most exciting or important things which have happened in the suburb, town, city, or region in which you live? How are they recorded? Are there monuments, books or other records of these events?
5. Are exciting events what make a family's story interesting? Or is everyone's story interesting no matter how mundane a life they have led?

KEY QUOTES

1. 'You girls are so lucky to be growing up in a time when you can be anything you want to be.' (p. 12) Is Millie more likely to be able to become a professional artist than Charlotte was? Are women given greater opportunities today, in your opinion?
2. 'Can you imagine the work involved in carving farmland from utter wilderness?' asked Mum. 'We think we work hard, but it must have been a tough life for the early settlers.' (p. 14) Discuss the difficulties faced by early settlers. One of the things not mentioned here, though, is the fact that so much of the knowledge of the land which Aboriginal people had gathered for thousands of years was disregarded by these settlers due to ignorance, and many of their efforts also created environmental problems later on. Discuss.
3. 'There's all sorts of dangers that could harm a couple of young ladies like you – wild dogs, poisonous brown snakes, bloodthirsty natives ...' (p. 36) What does this quote say about Dandy Jack's attitudes to Aboriginal people?
4. 'Mr Barton whacked Charlotte with the back of his arm, sending her flying across the room. She squealed, slid across the floorboards and banged her head on the skirting board.' (p. 61) Barton mistreats his wife and her children. Would this sort of behaviour be tolerated today? What do we do today to try to prevent such behaviour?
5. 'There is never a reason why a lady should be in an unseemly haste. You are not all alone? I am surprised your mother allowed you to leave the house like that. But then, perhaps she does not realise how young ladies are expected to conduct themselves.' (pp. 93–4) This quote gives an indication of how restricted the life of girls and young women was in these times. Charlotte is desperate to alert her mother to her stepfather's theft of their furniture but here is berated for unladylike behaviour. Discuss.
6. 'I think perhaps the Aborigines have many reasons to be sad,' suggested Mamma. 'Did you know that when your father first came to Oldbury in 1820 there were about fifty Aborigines in the local Sutton forest tribe? After I married him and moved here in 1827, there were only eighteen left – and now there is only a handful. Smallpox, influenza and rum have all

taken their terrible toll.' (p. 124) This comment by Charlotte summarises many of the factors which contributed to the decline in Aboriginal populations all over Australia. Research and discuss.

7. Charley smiled cheekily. 'It's time for me to go back,' he explained. 'I miss living free. I miss the bush. All you white people are slaves to work. It's a hard life sometimes in the bush, but we live free and happy.' (p. 163) What does this quote tell you about the different attitudes of Aboriginal and white people?
8. 'It is lucky the house is so small, so we do not need quite so much.' (p 195) Charlotte's comment is a 'glass half-full' sort of remark. Is she an eternal optimist or is she simply trying to make her children feel better about the situation?
9. 'We study English composition, grammar, arithmetic, English history, natural sciences, geography, drawing, music ... French, Italian, German.' (p. 217) The list of accomplishments which the Atkinson children have learned from their mother is truly impressive. Do you think you could have mastered so many skills while also helping so much with the running of the household?
10. 'When we are married will you be constantly asking me questions about my business? It is not your concern.' (p. 269) Should William speak to his fiancé like this? Why/why not?

FURTHER READING

See the author's **Acknowledgements** for some of her sources (p. 295–302). See also:

Sources about the Atkinsons

- Atkinson, Louisa *A Voice from the Country* Mulini Press, 1978.
- Jinks, Catherine *The Dark Mountain* Allen & Unwin, 2008.
- Muir, Marcie *Charlotte Barton: Australia's First Children's Author* Wentworth Books, 1980.

Other historical fiction

- Bowen, Victoria *War's End* Woolshed Press, 2008
- French, Jackie *Nanberry Black Brother White* HarperCollins, 2011.

- French, Jackie *Tom Appleby Convict Boy* HarperCollins, 2004.
- French, Jackie *A Waltz for Matilda* HarperCollins, 2010.
- Masson, Sophie *The Hunt for Ned Kelly* Scholastic, 2011.
- Murray, Kirsty *Market Blues* Allen & Unwin, 2001.
- Pulman, Felicity *Ghost Boy* Random House Australia, 2004.

Picture books about family, local history and Australian history

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WORKSHEET ANSWERS

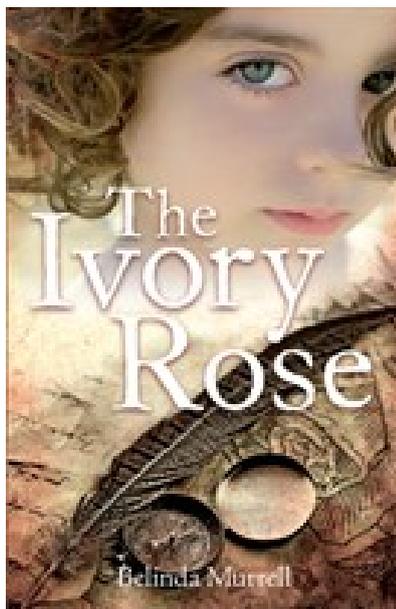
Worksheet: Comprehension

1. James Atkinson. 2. Maugie the koala. 3. Charley.
4. Swanton. 5. Gingenbullen. 6. *Cumberland*.
7. Budgong. 8. Croup. 9. Double Bay.
10. Mr Broadhurst. 11. 1841. 12. John Lynch.
13. At a ball held by Kitty Curlewis, a friend of Charlotte's. 14. From 1841 to 1845.
15. An Irish coachman named Thomas McNeilly.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THESE RESOURCES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright has operated *justified text* writing and publishing consultancy services since 1997, and has published widely on children's and YA literature. She has judged a number of literary awards and was Inaugural Chair of the Prime Minister's Literary Awards Children's and YA panel (2010-1). She is a Member, IBBY Australia Inc Committee; Member, ACLA Board; Deputy-Chair, ASA Board, and President, Curtis Coast Literary Carnivale Committee. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, and in 2012 the CBCA (National) Nan Chauncy Award for Outstanding Services to Children's Literature in Australia.

FURTHER READING FROM RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



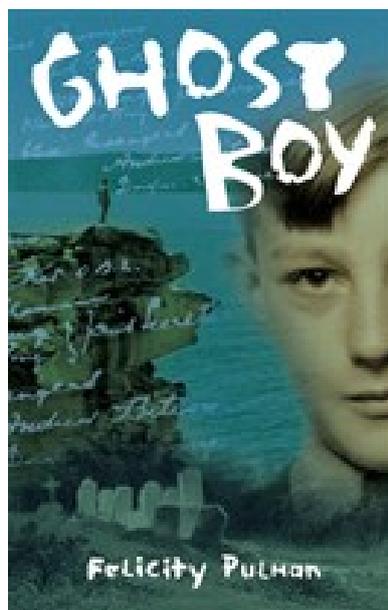
The Ivory Rose
by Belinda Murrell

Why this story? Explore the history of Sydney further with this story about the 1890s.

Jemma has just landed her first job, babysitting Sammy. It's in Rosethorne, one of the famous witches' houses near where she lives. Sammy says the house is haunted by a sad little girl, but Jemma doesn't know what to believe.

One day Jemma discovers a rose charm made of ivory. As she touches the charm she sees a terrifying flashback. Jemma runs for her life, falling down the stairs and tumbling into unconsciousness. She wakes up in 1895, unable to get home. Jemma becomes an apprentice maidservant at Rosethorne - but all is not well in the grand house.

Teachers' resources available



Ghost Boy
by Felicity Pulman

Why this story? The experiences of migrants to Australia.

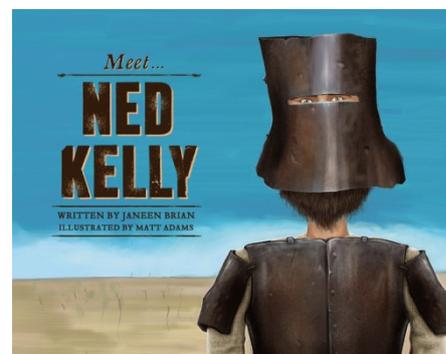
Tad must cross time and space to tell the secrets of the past ...

Froggy dreams of drowning. Just as his nightmare is coming true, he is saved by a Ghost Boy, Tad. But is Tad telling him the truth, and why can Froggy now see back to the past - to 1881, when Sydney was gripped by a smallpox outbreak and the Quarantine Station was full of the stench of death?

With Cassie's help, Tad and Froggy realise they must trust each other in order to find what has been lost for more than one hundred years ... and allow both boys to be set free.

Teachers' resources available

* School tours based on *Ghost Boy* are available from the Quarantine Station in Manly, Sydney. Visit <http://www.qstation.com.au>



Meet Ned Kelly
by Janeen Brian
illustrated by Matt Adams

Why this story? Great for visual literacy, *Meet Ned Kelly* explores the life of one of Australia's most notorious bushrangers.

With stunning illustrations and facts about the lives of the extraordinary men and women who have shaped Australia's history, the 'Meet ...' series is an excellent resource for studying Australian history.

Teachers' resources available

WORKSHEET: Comprehension

Questions	Answers
1. Which character arrived in Australia in 1820?	
2. What animal do the Atkinson children find and what did they name it?	
3. What is the name of the Aboriginal boy employed at Oldbury?	
4. What is the name of the cottage where Aunt Jessamine lives?	
5. Which mountain is mentioned several times in the novel?	
6. What ship did Charlotte Waring arrive on?	
7. Which outstation did Charlotte and her children escape to?	
8. What illness did Louisa contract?	
9. What is the name of the Fishing Village where the family go to live in Sydney?	
10. Who was Mamma's lawyer?	
11. What year did Mamma publish her book?	
12. What was the name of the Berrima Axe murderer who was tried and hung?	
13. Where did Charlotte meet William Cummings?	
14. How long did the mid-nineteenth-century depression last?	
15. Who did Charlotte eventually marry?	

WORKSHEET: Vocabulary

This book contains some words that you may be unfamiliar with. Use a dictionary and thesaurus to write a meaning and then a synonym in the columns below.

WORD	EXAMPLE	DICTIONARY MEANING	SYNONYM
mottled	p. 2		
debris	p. 4		
fathom	p. 12		
portico	p. 15		
indisposed	p. 65		
perilous	p. 120		
comely	p. 123		
cavalcade	p. 128		
pannier	p. 136		
sanctuary	p. 144		
nausea	p. 151		
lethal	p. 173		
boisterous	p. 192		
calligraphy	p. 205		
vestibule	p. 216		
impertinence	p. 227		
rampage	p. 232		
enigmatically	p. 232		
nostalgia	p. 238		
knoll	p. 357		

WORKSHEET: Becoming a family history detective

Genealogists use all sorts of tools and evidence to work out a family's history. Belinda Murrell was lucky that her ancestors, the Atkinson family, wrote lots of stories and letters about their lives in the 1840s and beyond.

As a family history detective, what evidence can you unearth about your family's past – or about your life today that someone in the future could use to learn more about your family? See which of these clues you can find . . .

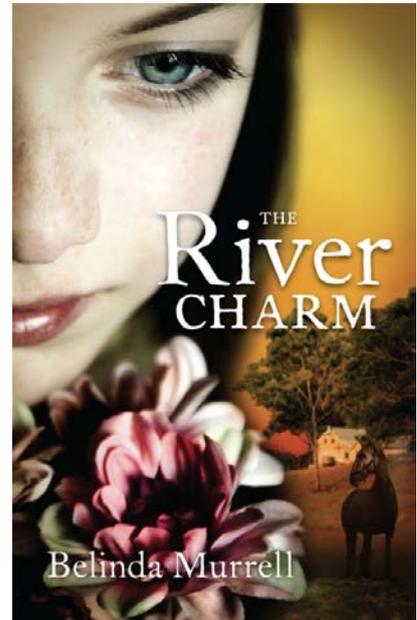
Type of clue	What clues did Belinda Murrell find?	What clues did YOU find?
A birth, marriage or death certificate or notice	<i>Belinda found birth and death notices in the newspaper at the Trove website</i>	
A photo or account or newspaper clipping of a family celebration or achievement	<i>Belinda found a newspaper article about Charlotte being dux of her school</i>	
An oral story from an older person about what their life was like when they were young	<i>Belinda's Nonnie and Papa told her stories about the Atkinson family</i>	
A special object that has been handed down the generations	<i>Belinda's mum still has the charm bracelet with the river pebble charm</i>	
A map or address showing where someone in your family lived	<i>Belinda visited Oldbury, the house in the NSW Southern Highlands where her ancestors lived</i>	
A letter or journal someone in your family wrote	<i>Belinda found letters between Charlotte and the executors of her husband's estate, and Charlotte's journal of her journey to Australia</i>	
A school report or class photo of someone in your family	<i>Belinda found evidence that the Atkinson children attended College High School in Sydney</i>	
A newspaper article about someone in your family	<i>Belinda found lots of articles written about or by her family at the National Library's Trove website</i>	
Something unique to your family – perhaps related to their job?	<i>Belinda found botanical sketches and paintings by her ancestors, and read Charlotte Atkinson's published book</i>	

Mother-Daughter Reading Group Questions

Belinda Murrell's books are a fantastic choice for book clubs, especially mother-daughter reading groups, with plenty of interesting themes and issues to discuss.

Here are some questions to inspire your reading group in your discussion of *The River Charm*.

- How has life changed for women and girls since Charlotte Atkinson's time? What can girls and women do now that they couldn't do then? Can you imagine what it would have been like for Charlotte to be told that her children would be taken away from her?
- Mums or adults in the group might like to share a story about what life was like for girls when they were growing up, or a story about how an older generation of the family lived.
- What heirlooms do you have in your family that are precious to you in the same way Aunt Jessamine's charm bracelet with the river stone is precious to her? What memories and emotions do your heirlooms evoke when you look at them or think about them?
- What are the most important things you would like your children, and future generations, to know about your family's history?
- Which of your ancestors or members of your family inspires you, in the same way that hearing the story of the Atkinson family's courage through adversity inspires Millie to be more confident in herself? What is it about that person that inspires you – is it their personality, or an achievement?
- Was younger Charlotte right to call off her engagement to William Cummings?
- How did you feel about Charlotte Atkinson's marriage to Mr Barton at the beginning of the book? How did you feel after she explains her actions in Chapter 25? Did she make the wrong choice, or did she have no choice at all? What would you have done if you were in Charlotte's situation?
- Could you live in an isolated, tiny cottage in the middle of the wilderness, as the Atkinson family did? What would you miss the most about civilised life? How would you keep yourself and your family busy and entertained?
- Is there a place you have lived or visited that you would love to return to, as Charlotte does when she wishes to return to Oldbury? What makes you want to return? Would the place be the same as you remember – and would you be upset if it had changed?
- Who is your favourite character and why?



Have you read all of Belinda Murrell's books? If you loved *The River Charm*, you'll also love Belinda's Scottish/Australian timeslip tale *The Locket of Dreams*, French Revolution timeslip tale *The Ruby Talisman*, Sydney timeslip tale *The Ivory Rose* and Australian World War II tale *The Forgotten Pearl*.