



RECOMMENDED FOR Years 5 to 8; ages 9–13

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KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English; History
- **General capabilities:** Critical and creative thinking; Intercultural understanding; Literacy
- **Year 6 History:** e.g. ACHASSK135; ACHASSK136; ACHASSK137

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Through the story of a girl growing up in 1920s Melbourne, students will learn about the history of Melbourne; of the Russian Revolution and its displaced refugees; of the experiences of migrants to Australia; and of women's steps towards independence and equality in Australia's history.
- Positive messages of making a difference through individual actions, generosity and kindness, friendship and tolerance.

THEMES

- Differing experiences of refugees and migrants through Australia's history
- Making a difference
- Coping with change
- Kindness and generosity vs intolerance
- Wealth and poverty
- Growing up
- Preserving our heritage buildings

PREPARED BY Belinda Murrell

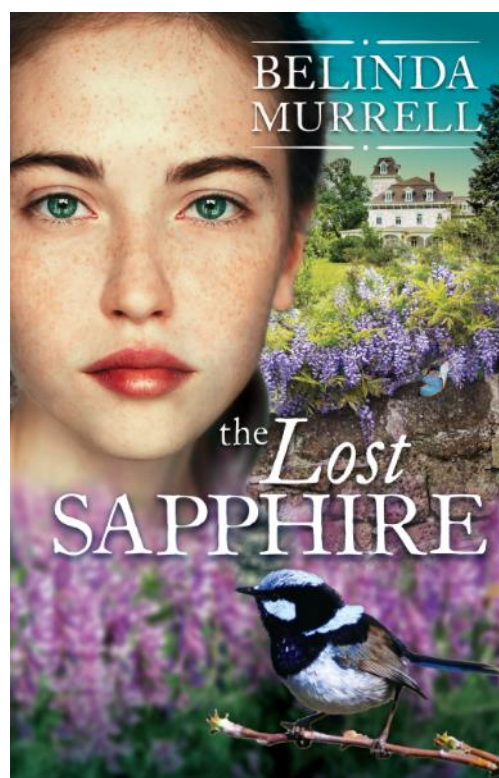
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The Lost Sapphire

Belinda Murrell

PLOT SUMMARY

Marli is staying with her dad in Melbourne, and missing her friends. Then she discovers a mystery – a crumbling, abandoned mansion is to be returned to her family after ninety years. Marli sneaks into the locked garden to explore, and meets Luca, a boy who has his own connection to Riversleigh.

A peacock hatbox, a box camera and a key on a velvet ribbon provide clues to what happened long ago . . .

In 1922, Violet is fifteen. Her life is one of privilege, with boating parties, picnics and extravagant balls. An army of servants looks after the family – including new chauffeur Nikolai Petrovich, a young Russian émigré.

Over one summer, Violet must decide what is important to her. What will Violet learn about Melbourne's slums as she defies her father's orders to help a friend? Who will her sister choose to marry? And what breathtaking secret is Nikolai hiding?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Belinda Murrell is a bestselling, internationally published children's and YA author with a legion of loyal fans and a history of writing in her family that spans over 200 years. After studying Literature at Macquarie University, Belinda worked as a travel journalist, editor and technical writer.

A few years ago, she began writing stories for her own three children – Nick, Emily and Lachlan. Her 26 books include the Sun Sword fantasy trilogy as well as the popular Lulu Bell series for younger readers. She is also known for her collection of historical timeslip tales including *The Sequin Star*, *The River Charm*, *The Locket of Dreams*, *The Forgotten Pearl*, *The Ruby Talisman* and *The Ivory Rose*, which have been recognised by various awards, including CBCA Notable Books, Honour Book in the 2013 KOALAs, and shortlisted in the 2011, 2012, 2014 and 2015 KOALAs.

Belinda's website is www.belindamurrell.com.au

AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

Belinda Murrell says:

There is something totally fascinating about walled gardens and abandoned houses. One of my favourite books as a child was *The Secret Garden*, written by Frances Hodgson Burnett in 1910. Some of the ideas for *The Lost Sapphire* were inspired by this book, particularly family secrets and discord, the idea of a girl and a boy who initially don't get on, building a friendship and being healed by bringing a lost garden back to life. The cheeky robin, who helped show the way into the garden, inspired my fairy wren.

The idea of writing a book about an abandoned house was first suggested to me by Leeza Wishart, and her daughter Ella. The Wishart family, who love my books, raised money for me to visit their home town of Tenterfield in northern New South Wales, to visit a number of local schools and run writing workshops. While I was there, Leeza organised for me to be invited to visit Tenterfield Station homestead, the original homestead for the area established in the 1840s, which had been abandoned for many years and was slowly being restored. This old house was filled with history and stories – it was where famous Australian poet Banjo Paterson met and later married one of the daughters of the station family, Alice Emily Walker, and the

homestead is rumoured to be haunted by the ghosts of old tragedies.

I loved writing this book, particularly the vibrant history of the 1920s. Some of the books I used to research etiquette, entertaining and homes in this era included *The House in Good Taste* by Elsie de Wolfe, and *Etiquette* by Emily Post, written in 1922. For an insight into the experience of refugees fleeing the Russian Revolution I studied several memoirs including *Russians in Exile* by Valerian Obolensky and *The Russian Countess: Escaping Revolutionary Russia* by Edith Sollohub.

Life in Melbourne during the 1920s was brought to life by newspaper articles, film clips and memoirs of wealthy debutantes, factory workers, and servants. The Hamilton Fine Gloves factory was inspired by the Simpson's Glove Factory which was located on Victoria Street, Richmond, and its collection of artefacts held by Museum Victoria. Riversleigh was inspired by several old Melbourne mansions I visited including Como House, Labassa, Balmerino and Rippon Lea.

My father's family was originally from Melbourne, and I spent many long summer holidays playing and swimming on the banks of the Yarra River. More recently, I have explored this beautiful city on multiple trips, visiting old mansions and gardens; wandering the streets, laneways and markets; and eating food from many different cultural backgrounds including Vietnamese, Chinese, Italian, Greek, French and Russian. It is one of my favourite cities in the world!

PRE-READING QUESTIONS

- What do you know about life between the two World Wars?
- Do you know any stories about the experiences of your relatives?
- How do you think World War I affected Australian families?
- How and why did your family come to Australia?

THEMES

1. **Differing experiences of refugees and migrants** – Scottish, Russian, Italian and Irish
2. **Intolerance** – discrimination based on religion, social standing and ethnic background, as when Mr Hamilton dislikes Tommy when he finds out his family is poor and Catholic

3. **Growing up** – finding your voice, finding what is important to you and bravely standing up for what you believe in, as Marli does when she works to save Riversleigh from being demolished, or as Violet does when she defends Nikolai, when she helps Sally and her family, and when she writes an article about the plight of the poor families living in the slums
4. **Making a difference** – an individual can make a difference to their lives and the lives of others, as Violet does when she helps Sally's family in Richmond and helps to raise money to help those suffering from the famine in Russia
5. **Coping with change and grief** – Nikolai learns resilience as he and his family must leave their home and start a new life in Australia to avoid being murdered because of their aristocratic background; Marli leaves friends behind when she comes to Melbourne and must learn to cope without her mum and get to know her dad better; the Hamilton family copes with their grief at the loss of two beloved sons and a mother in World War I, with each family member reacting to their grief in a different way
6. **Friendship** – standing up for your friends, as Violet does when Nikolai is arrested; making friends, as Marli does with Luca, who she meets at Riversleigh
7. **Family relationships** – such as the relationship between Violet and her father, and Marli and her parents
8. **Forgiveness and reconciliation** – Mr Hamilton disowns his daughters for what he perceives as unforgivable actions, but later regrets his actions
9. **History** – the 1920s; the lives of rich and poor and the changing role of women in Australian society; preserving the relics and architecture of the past; the history of the suburbs of Melbourne and the changing cultural make-up of Melbourne and its people
10. **Forbidden love** – Violet's father, Albert Hamilton, is very conservative in his politics and beliefs. He does not approve of romance or marriage between his daughters and men from different religious, socio-economic or cultural backgrounds. This means that the blossoming romance between Imogen and Tommy, and between Violet and Nikolai, is forbidden, and

both girls are disinherited because they rebel against their father's prejudices.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What do you think is the most important theme of the book? Find examples of scenes and quotes in *The Lost Sapphire* which explore this theme. How is this theme relevant to you and your own life?
2. Do you think characters such as Violet, Nikolai, Luca and Marli change through their adventures? How do they alter? Brainstorm some of the ways these characters change throughout the book.
3. In *The Lost Sapphire* there are many stories of different characters from diverse backgrounds. Make a list of characters and summarise some of their experiences, feelings and history. Are there similarities in some of their experiences despite their different backgrounds?
4. What kind of film do you think *The Lost Sapphire* would make? Brainstorm ideas, including: cast, setting, key scenes, style and genre.
5. Brainstorm some of the ways that the roles of women and children changed after the First World War.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Collage

Create a collage using words and images that represent one major theme of *The Lost Sapphire*.

Letter writing

Pretend you are a character in the book and write a letter explaining what you have experienced. How do you feel? How has your life changed? How can you make your letter as interesting as possible for your reader?

Living in Australia during the 1920s

Write a newspaper report describing what life is like for families like Sally and Frank's, living in the slums in Australia during the 1920s. Consider food, work, clothes, lifestyle, education, entertainment and changes to society. Include quotes from fictional characters to give differing points-of-view and find images on the internet to illustrate your story.



Setting

The narrative explores two distinct settings: Riversleigh, the mansion and gardens of a wealthy family on the banks of the Yarra River in Hawthorn; and just across the river on the opposite bank are the working class slums of Richmond, where Sally's family lives.

Describe the difference between these two settings in 1922, and again in the modern day. Your description could include the year, season and weather, landscape, buildings, the cultural and historical background, and the emotional atmosphere.

Find paragraphs from the book to support your descriptions, highlighting the ways in which the author has used figurative language to create character or setting.

Book cover

Analyse elements of the book cover design by Nanette Backhouse and comment on what makes them effective. Consider colour, font and images in your discussion. Why were these elements chosen? What would you have done differently if you were designing this book cover?

Sharing stories

Interview a relative, such as a grandparent, about their childhood experiences. Do they have any mementoes such as photos, letters or artefacts to show you? This interview could be recorded on video or audio to share with other members of the family or your class. Remember to ask for permission before sharing stories with others as some memories are private.

Famous people

The book mentions some real people who were famous during the 1920s such as Dame Nellie Melba, Coco Chanel, Rudolph Valentino, Clara Bow, Squizzy Taylor, Czar Nicholas II and Czarina Alexandra and other real people not so well known such as Alice Anderson and Alexander Zuzenko. Research some facts about these people.

1920s afternoon tea

Research some recipes for some of the interesting food mentioned in the book such as Russian apple shalotka cake, Russian tea biscuits or Italian cannoli, or students can make delicacies from their own family recipes. Organise a 1920s themed afternoon tea, with students wearing costumes

inspired by the 1920s. Play 1920s music such as 'Angel Child' by Al Johnson or watch videos of popular 1920s dances.

Change the world

'Nikolai, have you ever wished that you could change the world?' she asked suddenly. 'Well, perhaps not the whole world – but, I mean, fix things that are unfair, do something to make things better for people?'

As Violet learns more about life in the slums of Melbourne, she yearns to be able to change the inequality she sees. What are the things that you would like to change about the world now? What are some strategies that you could implement to make changes no matter how small? Write a letter to the Prime Minister or the editor of your local newspaper, outlining what changes you would like to see and how people could change their behavior to make this happen.

Living in 1920s Australia

Violet and Sally are girls who are about the same age, and live in the same house, yet their lives are vastly different. Make a list of some of the differences between their lives (think about food, clothing, schooling, lifestyle, family, opportunities). Compare their lives to children who live now.

Writing your own story set in the past

Write a short story set in a different time. Where and when is it set? Describe the setting including your five senses (sight, sound, smell, taste and touch). Who is the story about? What happens? How do the characters feel (e.g. relieved, happy, sad, angry)?

The Secret Garden

One of the inspirations for *The Lost Sapphire* was *The Secret Garden*, written by Frances Hodgson Burnett in 1910. Read *The Secret Garden* and make a list of characters, setting, themes and plot for the book. Which elements of *The Secret Garden* do you think inspired *The Lost Sapphire*?

Manners and etiquette

During the 1920s there were strict rules about manners and etiquette, particularly in middle and upper class society. Using the internet, research some of the rules that children were taught about manners. Do you think manners are still important today? How has etiquette changed since the 1920s?



Dancing

Dancing and music were very important forms of entertainment in the 1920s. Watch videos of dances mentioned in *The Lost Sapphire*, such as the foxtrot, shimmy, Viennese Waltz, Grand Polonaise, the Polish mazurka, and the Cossack hopak, or dances such as the Charleston, which became hugely popular later in the 1920s. Try learning and practising some of these dance steps.

MORE RESOURCES

You can find a 'Fast Facts' section in the back of the book with more details about the historical background of the book.

Here are some memoirs of life growing up and working in Hawthorn and Richmond in the 1920s.

Bill Aylen started work as a strainer in a tannery in Richmond at the age of 11, while Alice Austin worked as a seamstress from the age of 15.

- http://www.hawthornhistoricalsociety.com.au/images/hhs/Downloads/bill_aylen%20copy2.pdf
- http://www.hawthornhistoricalsociety.com.au/images/hhs/Downloads/alice_austin%20copy.pdf

Working life at Simpson's Glove Factory in Richmond:

- <http://collections.museumvictoria.com.au/articles/2702>

Some dances mentioned in the book:

- Foxtrot: <https://youtu.be/tyOWM6S1ITA>
- The Shimmy: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IcemYjTdvZ8>
- The Russian Mazurka: https://youtu.be/_a-4zG5J_Zw
- The Cossack *hopak*: <https://youtu.be/t9Gpm62kq00>
- The Viennese Waltz: <https://youtu.be/Ge9b8jld1oM>



BELINDA MURRELL'S PHOTO INSPIRATIONS

Here are Belinda's photos she took while researching *The Lost Sapphire*. Some of these Melbourne heritage houses can be visited by school groups, including Rippon Lea (<http://www.ripponleaestate.com.au/>) and Como House (<https://www.nationaltrust.org.au/places/como-house-and-garden/>).



Belinda Murrell at Balmerino,
inspiration for Riversleigh



Hawthorn Town Hall foyer



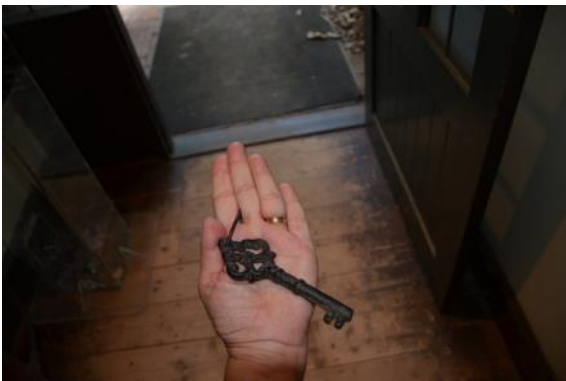
Hawthorn Town Hall –
setting for the Russian Ball



Servant bells at Como House



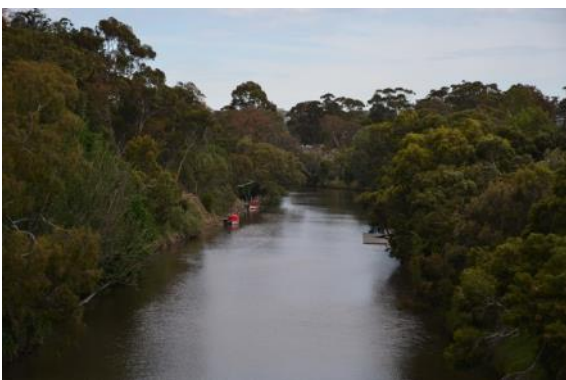
Como House (Melbourne mansion with fountain)



An old key like the one Marli finds in Violet's hatbox



Rippon Lea – one of Melbourne's mansions that inspired the setting



Yarra River with Hawthorn on left and Richmond on right

FURTHER READING FROM PENGUIN RANDOM HOUSE AUSTRALIA



The Sequin Star
by Belinda Murrell

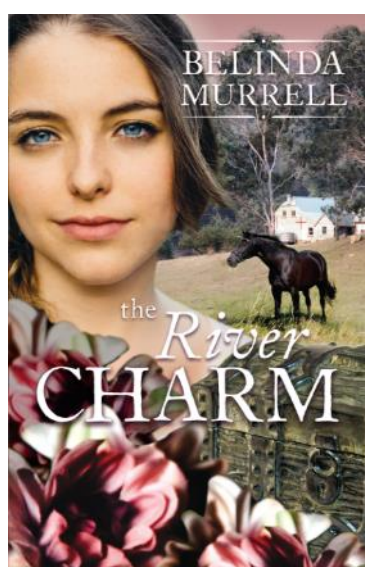
Everyone in the circus has a secret - Claire's is just more unusual than most . . .

After her grandmother falls ill, Claire finds a sequin star among her treasures. Why does Claire's wealthy grandmother own such a cheap piece? The mystery deepens when the brooch hurtles Claire back in time to 1932.

Claire finds herself stranded in the camp of Sterling Brothers Circus. She is allowed to stay – if she works hard. The Great Depression has made life difficult for everyone, but Claire makes friends with circus performers Rosina and Jem, and a boy called Kit who comes night after night to watch Rosina perform.

When Kit is kidnapped, it's up to Claire, Rosina and Jem to save him. But Claire is starting to wonder who Kit and Rosina really are. One is escaping poverty and the other is escaping wealth – can the two find happiness together?

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



The River Charm
by Belinda Murrell

'Could I be anything I want to be? What do I want to be? Maybe just . . . brave?'

Could the ghost girl Millie has painted be her own ancestor? The river pebble charm has an astonishing story to tell . . .

In 1839, Charlotte Atkinson lives on a grand estate with her mamma and her sisters and brother. But after her father dies, things go terribly wrong – murderous convicts, marauding bushrangers and a cruel new stepfather. The family flees on horseback to a hut in the wilderness. They must fight to save their property, their independence and even their right to stay together. Will they ever return to their beautiful home?

Based on the incredible true-life battles of Belinda Murrell's own ancestors, the Atkinsons of Oldbury.

[Teachers' resources available.](#)



The Locket of Dreams
by Belinda Murrell

Sophie discovers a golden locket in an old treasure box that belonged to her grandmother's grandmother. When she falls asleep wearing the locket, she magically travels back in time to 1858 to learn the truth about the mysterious Charlotte Mackenzie.

Daughter of a wealthy Scottish laird, Charlotte and her sister Nell live a wonderful life with their parents and animals, on a misty island with its own ruined castle. Then disaster strikes and it seems the girls will lose everything they love.

Why were Charlotte and Nell sent halfway around the world to live with strangers? Did their wicked uncle steal their inheritance? What happened to the priceless sapphire – the Star of Serendib?

With the magic of the golden locket, Sophie begins to unravel the mysteries as she shares the adventures of Charlotte and Nell - outwitting their greedy relatives, escaping murderous bushrangers, and fighting storm and fire. But how will her travels in time affect Sophie's own life?

[Teachers' resources available.](#)

ORDER FORM

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QUANTITY	TOTAL
The Lost Sapphire	Belinda Murrell	9781925324112	5-8	\$17.99		
The Sequin Star	Belinda Murrell	9780857986931	4-8	\$17.99		
The River Charm	Belinda Murrell	9780857986979	6-9	\$17.99		
The Locket of Dreams	Belinda Murrell	9780857986955	4-8	\$17.99		
The Ivory Rose	Belinda Murrell	9780857986986	4-8	\$17.99		
The Forgotten Pearl	Belinda Murrell	9780857986962	5-8	\$17.99		
The Ruby Talisman	Belinda Murrell	9780857986948	5-8	\$17.99		
TOTAL						

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