

Honors English 11

SHMITT 2011-12

Summer Assignments

DUE on the FIRST DAY OF CLASS

READ *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville. This book is available from Ms. Shmitt; stop by to get a copy any time during exam week. After June 17, the book will be available from Anne-Marie at the front desk.

From *Publisher's Weekly*:

Grenville's Australian bestseller, which won the Orange Prize, is an eye-opening tale of the settlement of New South Wales by a population of exiled British criminals. Research into her own ancestry informs Grenville's work, the chronicle of fictional husband, father and petty thief William Thornhill and his path from poverty to prison, then freedom. Crime is a way of life for Thornhill growing up in the slums of London at the turn of the 19th century—until he's caught stealing lumber. Luckily for him, a life sentence in the penal colony of New South Wales saves him from the gallows. With his wife, Sal, and a growing flock of children, Thornhill journeys to the colony and a convict's life of servitude. Gradually working his way through the system, Thornhill becomes a free man with his own claim to the savage land. But as he transforms himself into a trader on the river, Thornhill realizes that the British are not the first to make New South Wales their home. A delicate coexistence with the native population dissolves into violence, and here Grenville earns her praise, presenting the settler–aboriginal conflict with equanimity and understanding. Grenville's story illuminates a lesser-known part of history—at least to American readers—with sharp prose and a vivid frontier family. (*May*)

THE ASSIGNMENTS: Purchase a notebook designated for Honors English 11. I like those so-called “Composition Books” with the marbled covers, especially the ones with graphing paper in them, but get whatever works for you.

- 1) Designate a section of your notebook for **Vocabulary and Grammar**. Over the course of the year, we will be making an attempt to increase your vocabulary and improve your grammar, both for their own sake and for the SATs.
- 2)
- 3) As you read *The Secret River*, keep an ongoing list of vocabulary words that are unfamiliar to you. (Clearly, some of you will have longer lists than others.) For each word you encounter, 1) write the sentence in which the word is found, 2) underline the

word, and 3) write the definition of the word **that fits the context**. In other words, let's say the sentence is "Their bodies seemed all long, thin legs, the weight carried low over the hips, their feet setting down softly on the layer of brittle leaves and bark-scrolls."

Dictionary.com provides six definitions for 'brittle;' the definition that fits the context of *this* sentence is the second definition, "easily damaged or destroyed; fragile."

- 4) Choose one of the following topics:
- British Convicts' role in the Founding of Australia
 - Indigenous Australians: either their history, culture, or religion (e.g., look into the idea of "songlines"; view the film *Rabbit-Proof Fence*; research the ethnobotany of the indigenous people)
 - Australia's Environment: the colonists' and/or indigenous peoples' relationship to the natural world in Australia
 - A topic of your choice (with my prior approval) related to the Australia of *The Secret River*

Write a two to three page paper (word processed) in which you connect your chosen topic to *The Secret River*. Use at least one named, credible outside source and cite it, using MLA format (you will have a properly formatted Works Cited page). Use www.dianahacker.com if you need help with citing sources.

EXAMPLE: If you've chosen British convicts as your topic, you might write about how Thornhill exemplifies (or doesn't) the 'typical' convict sent to settle Australia. Or you might write about the conditions in England, like those experienced by the Thornhills, that caused the British social welfare systems to collapse. In any case, make sure you integrate the characters, the setting and/or the plot of *The Secret River* into your paper.

If you have any questions over the summer, feel free to email me at shmits@portlandschools.org.

See you in September!!