



Barney and the Secret of the French Spies

By Jackie French

Book Summary:

In 1798 orphaned Barney Bean now has a flourishing farm in the New South Wales colony and everything he ever dreamed of ... except his childhood friend Elsie.

But when Elsie falls ill and Barney rushes to be by her side, he finally learns the deadly secret she has been hiding.

Who is this strange and beautiful girl who will not speak? And could France ever attack the isolated colony?

Written by award-winning author Jackie French and superbly illustrated by Mark Wilson, this fourth book in The Secret Histories series explores extraordinary and untold stories from Australia's past, including the female French botanist who could only work disguised as a man, French and English spies, and wars between two empires that threatened even a far-off colony.

The new title in the critically acclaimed series that explores Australia's early Colonial secret history.

Key Learning Outcomes

Language and Literacy, SOSE

Themes

Colonial Society, Indigenous History and Culture, Conservation and environment, Women's Rights

Recommended Ages: 9+

ISBN: 9781460751305 RRP 14.99

eBook: 9781460705357

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BOOK SUMMARY

'But do you not see?' said that strange musical voice that somehow was exactly right for Elsie. 'I was a spy, Barney. A French spy, sent to spy upon the colony.' (p 51)

'Remember this, whenever you study history: if women aren't mentioned, keep looking. They'll usually be there, somewhere.' (p 116)

Barney and the Secret of the French Spies opens in June 1798, nine years after we first met Barney Bean and his best friend Elsie, a year after Barney's arrival in the colony, as the child of a convict woman, in *Birring the Secret Friend*. In the sequels, *Barney and the Secret of the Whales* and *The Secret of the Black Bushranger*, we followed Barney and Elsie's further adventures. Nineteen-year-old Barney now has his own farm holding, after having been previously employed by Reverend Richard Johnson and his family on Sydney Cove.

He receives word from the Johnsons that Elsie is gravely ill and sets off to visit her. Mrs Johnson meets him at the hospital where Elsie (who has spoken only once since her arrival in the colony) is speaking feverishly, using words which seem gibberish to Barney. Mrs Johnson warns him not to let anyone else visit her, and Barney wonders why, since she has no contagion, but instead a serious congestion of the lungs. When she recovers, he asks her why she has chosen not to speak for so long, and what her background is. Elsie reveals that she is French and therefore an 'enemy' of the colony. She had arrived with the two ships '*L'Astrolabe* and *La Boussole* – French ships commanded by 'Jean-François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse', which arrived in Botany Bay just as the First Fleet were seeking better shelter and facilities in the nearby harbour of Port Jackson. She also reveals that her great-aunt Jeanne Baré or Baret (p 53), who with her husband Philibert de Commerçon, was a member of Louis Antoine de Bougainville's expedition on the ships *Boudeuse* and *Étoile* in 1766–1769 (p 105), and was forced to travel disguised as a man in order to pursue her passion for botany. Elsie had later also travelled incognito with her parents. But upon stepping ashore at Port Jackson, they were killed by convicts, and Elsie was taken in by the Indians (p 73). Later Barney had discovered her and they had both been fortunate to be employed by the Johnsons. Elsie's fear that Barney would spurn her as an 'enemy' proves ill-founded, and she accepts his marriage proposal. After their wedding, they begin to plan a larger home and a life together guided by Barney's careful management and astute dealings with both his employees and local Indigenous people. He is also careful to accommodate Elsie's interests and skills, and particularly her love for botany, and gives her a symbolic gift of a handmade flower press as a wedding gift. But in June–July 1802 the 'real' spies arrive; Monsieur François Peron

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(travelling with Baudin) visits Elsie (as a French-born citizen) and Barney. He reveals to Elsie the French plot to spy on the colony. She and Barney alert the powers-that-be and avert the crisis and the novel ends on an optimistic note for their future together.

This is the fourth in Jackie French's 'Secret Histories' series about Australia's hidden historical characters and events. It not only offers insights into the nature of colonial life and how European arrivals changed the country inhabited by Indigenous Australians, but also reveals the significant part played by women, and by the French, in the establishment of this British colony.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jackie French is a multiple award-winning author who deals with a very wide-range of topics. Of her books she says on her website that:

There were over 140 at last count, slightly more than we have varieties of apples. If something is worth doing you may as well go heart and soul and boot leather ... I write for kids and adults, fiction, history, gardening, pests control, chooks and some that must be a nightmare for book shops to work out what genre they are.

Jackie was the Australian Children's Laureate (2014–15). Her website offers further detailed and fascinating insights into her life and work. www.jackiefrench.com.au

AUTHOR INSPIRATION

Jackie French writes of her inspiration in her **Author's Notes** (pp 105–116).

CHARACTERS

- **The Significance of Character:** Characters are the heart of any narrative, the catalysts for action, and the central core around which all other narrative aspects must revolve and work. In this novel, there are a few major characters and a cast of minor ones.
- **Major Characters:** Elsie and Barney Bean are the main characters here and in previous novels in the series.

Discussion Point: Discuss the character of Elsie.

- **Minor Characters:** Reverend Johnson and his wife; Mrs Macarthur; Harry-One-Eye and Stinky – Barney's two convict shepherds; Bill, his convict overseer; Whiskers, a ticket-of-leave man who delivers Reverend Johnson's note; Maggie, the Johnsons' new servant; Monsieur Péron.

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- *Discussion Point:* Mrs Macarthur plays a small but pivotal role in this novel. How?
- *Discussion Point:* Is there a minor character who might have played a larger part? Why would you have liked to have seen more of this character?
- **Character Arcs** are the curve on which key events show how a character grows or develops in response to events and to interactions with other characters in the novel.

Activity: Choose a character and trace an arc on which key events indicate some aspect of their personality or change in their behaviour, eg. Bill, the overseer.

THEMES

- **Colonial Society**

'I headed back to my house. *My* house. They were two such grand words. My house! Ten years earlier I'd been a convict brat with only the rags on my back. I never dreamed I'd have a grand farm and a proper house.' (p 4)

Discussion Point: British settlement in Australia and the establishment of a colony occurred in a time when the French were also exploring the southern seas and fierce rivalry between the nations existed. Settlement also led to the displacement and destruction of many Aboriginal communities. This novel both imagines fictional people – Barney and Elsie – in this context and also includes some real characters who were early settlers, such as Reverend Johnson and Mrs Macarthur. What other aspects of colonial society were revealed in this novel?

Discussion Point: Barney and Elsie 're-invent' themselves in the colony, as many did, and create a farm that is entirely their own. They also plan a new home: 'Our new house had six chimneys and five bedrooms, not counting the housekeeper's room, and the attic for the maids, and a great long kitchen with a view of the river, because Elsie said most kitchens looked out onto rubbish bins or privies but the most important work of all was done there, so they needed the best view.' (p 88) Is their rise from abject poverty to wealth and success typical of many convicts and early settlers?

Discussion Point: 'I didn't kick the men off the farm as soon as the colony no longer gave me their clothes and rations, not when I'd spent so long training them to be good farmers. And if they wanted to get married, we built them cottages and gave their wives work if they wanted it.' (p 89) Barney's farm management techniques are based on his belief in equality and fairness. Was this typical of the attitudes of the times?

Activity: Several remarks are made in this novel about the scandalous influence of the New South Wales Corps (Rum Corps) and how many convicts and other people were corrupted by their need for alcohol, and by vices such as gambling. 'The convict maid looked up from her darning, little Milbah and baby Henry playing at her feet. She was new since I visited last — none stayed long these days. They'd get drunk and then there'd be bad language and worse behaviour ...' (p 11) Research events in their history such as the 1808 Rum Rebellion.

Discussion Point: ' 'January 1789,' said Mr Johnson. 'It was a hard year, that one.' It was. The rations cut again, and few willing to labour to grow crops, and the Indians dying of the plague, yet the plague sparing all of us colonists. 'Me and Elsie were living off my rations and oysters and wild greens,' I said.' (p 29) This quote paints a picture of life in the colony vividly, giving an indication of both the difficulties, and of how some people survived against the odds.

Activity: Read some of Jackie French's other books set in colonial Australia to gain further insights into this fascinating time.

Activity: Read Jackie French's **Author's Notes** (pp 105–116).

- **Early European Naval Exploration and Rivalry between British and French**

'I'd crossed the world to the new colony in New South Wales, waves breaking right over the ship, rocks with wicked teeth that could wreck an armada, scurvy that rotted the teeth from your mouth and then killed you.' (pp 2–3)

Activity: Research the voyages, and the fates of seamen and women mentioned in this text. [See **Bibliography**.] [See also **SOSE-History** below.]

Activity: Research the rivalry between Britain and France and how this influenced the course of Australia's history.

Discussion Point: Research and discuss the point made about Britain settling here not purely to house convicts, but also to establish an outpost of power.

Discussion Point: 'The stories Great-Aunt Jeanne had told were all of grand expeditions, finding plants, strange Indians and their ways. She had never told us of sailors' teeth dropping from their swollen gums from scurvy, their hair falling out too, their gums bleeding.' (p 63) The privations suffered by early explorers are horrifying to contemplate; they make the success of some of them all the more incredible.

- **Women's Rights**

'And this is why I've told you Elsie's story. All of you who read this, no matter what your life's journey is, know that the brave companion next to you can be a woman. And never let those who say, 'But she's a girl!' hold you back.' (p 104)

Discussion Point: This novel is Elsie's story but also that of her great-aunt Jeanne Baré and all the women throughout history who have had to hide their gender in order to participate in the pursuits they loved. Research the achievements of women such as Jeanne Baré and Rose de Freycinet. Research the point made by Jackie French (p 106) regarding the eminent nineteenth century military surgeon James Barry [aka Dr. James Miranda Steuart Barry (1790s – 25 July 1865, born Margaret Ann Bulkley)].

Discussion Point: The women in this series are generally resourceful and strong like Elsie, Mrs Macarthur, Mrs Johnson and Birrung. This cements the theme that women's skills were often underestimated in earlier times.

Discussion Point: Elsie's comment about Maggie suggests that women had few options in this colony: 'I looked back at Elsie. She had the look on her face that meant, 'Maggie wants a husband with a good farm and the governor's favour, which will get him even more land and men to work it.' I hadn't realised I was getting to be the sort of man women might want to marry, not because of who I was, but for what I had and what more I might make.' (p 48)

Discussion Point: 'Some women were given no options at all in this society: 'She had been right to be frightened. We'd seen young convict women auctioned here in the colony by the officers of the Corps, sold to any man who had the money or rum to buy them. And worse ...' (p 50)

Discussion Point: Elsie's skills are manifold. She is a superb cook, a botanist, is multilingual, (She could read a book even faster than Mr Johnson ...' (p 10) and she is a kind and considerate partner to Barney. Her early experiences in losing her parents so violently and in being abandoned in a foreign land, in fear of discovery as 'an enemy' have taught her resilience rather than fear or despair. She is an excellent role-model for women to emulate.

- **Indigenous History and Culture**

'Only a few years ago this had all been bush, with thin blue spires of smoke from the Indians' fires.' (p 27)

Activity: Barney has learned from Reverend Johnson that racism is a bad thing and he is willing to work with and learn from the 'Indians' how to manage his land. 'Any bloke who didn't like it knew that, while there was no flogging at Jeanne's Farm, the master would give the boot to any man who thought the colour of a man's skin made him worse or better.' (p 92) What else has he learned about Indigenous culture?

Activity: Elsie lived with the 'Indians' when she first found herself alone after her parents were murdered by convicts (pp 73--5). What did she learn from that experience?

Activity: Elsie recalls many Indigenous people dying from introduced diseases such as 'the plague'. Research this question in relation to Indigenous history.

- **Conservation and Environment**

'Now the land was carved into squares of orchards, or fields of wheat, some stunted, planted in ground that hadn't been dunged nor the tree roots grubbed out properly, others ready to give their grain come summer.' (p 27)

Activity: Choose a passage which gives you insights into the need to be careful with the environment and to learn how to manage it well.

Discussion Point: What other aspects of conservation or land management are implied or raised in the novel?

- **Agricultural Self-Sufficiency**

'Below we could see the slush lamps lit in the farm cottages, the people we loved and spent our lives with roasting chunks of kangaroo or eating mutton stew rich with winter onions, leeks, potatoes, carrots and even garlic, for those who liked the taste, and cornbread with good cow's butter and cheese, with apples, persimmons, medlars, quinces and pears stored from summer's harvest, and every good thing that land had given us.' (p 101)

Discussion Point: Jackie French's books reveal her interest in how the landscape can yield food. Find passages in this novel which provide evidence of this interest in agricultural self-sufficiency.

Activity: Make a list of some of the food eaten and crops grown in colonial Australia.

Activity: Research some of the 'bush tucker' eaten by Indigenous people, for example, Elsie recalls: 'I drank from the small gullies, ate wild figs and herbs.' (p 75)

Activity: Medical knowledge, too, was gleaned from the Indigenous people: 'The lavender and native oil will help her breathe.' (p 13)

- **Friendship and Love**

'Just don't leave me, Elsie. It's always been just you and me!' (p 15)

Discussion Point: Elsie and Barney met when neither had very much at all and have very different backgrounds. What lies at the heart of their friendship?

Discussion Point: Elsie and Barney discover that despite her wealth and the ambition of her husband, Mrs Macarthur is a kind and loving friend; appearances can be deceptive.

Activity: Reverend Johnson has become more of a friend than an employer to Barney and Elsie. How easy was it for someone to ignore class differences and to befriend a servant in this way in colonial society?

KEY QUOTES

<p>'The Corps hated Mr Johnson because he helped the poor and spoke out against the wrong things they did.' (p 17)</p>	<p>'I hadn't thought a grand lady like Mrs Macarthur would do that for a servant.' (p 19)</p>
<p>'Well then, I will tell you the secret Elsie has been keeping from us all for so long. Mr and Mrs Johnson have put her here so no one else can hear her speak French in her delirium — true French, the French of France, not the kind my governess taught me. This girl you love must be French, and so is an enemy of our nation.' (p 19)</p>	<p>'The jacket was only a little too big. I'd never grow tall — Mr Johnson said when you'd been starved like I was when you were very young, you hardly ever did grow tall.' (p 23)</p>

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	<p>'But for the British government, New South Wales was to be a port to supply the navy, in case war with the Netherlands meant our ships could no longer resupply at the Cape. Our supply base here in New South Wales means English ships can now attack Dutch ports like Batavia, or French ports in Mauritius or India, and supply ships for the southern whaling grounds or the route to China.' (p 33–4)</p>
<p>'The land felt lost and a bit empty without them, but I knew they were right not to trust the new chums. I might be able to keep my convict gang off the grog, but the convicts didn't know the Indians like I did, having shared a house with Birrung back when the Johnsons rescued her as well as me and Elsie.' (p 45)</p>	<p>'Our land. And no enemy would ever take it.' (p 101)</p>
<p>'Invasions that don't happen mostly don't get written about. If the French hadn't tried to involve my Elsie, I'd probably never have thought twice about the French plotting to invade us after the first scare was over. There are probably a million invasions that never happened, all across the world, and a good thing they didn't too.' (p 103)</p>	<p>'Do you know the real secret in this book? Not that the French wanted to invade, and not that Elsie was born French either, but that it was a French woman, the great-great-aunt of my children, who was the first woman to sail around the world. I'd never thought much about it, but having Elsie for a wife, seeing Mrs Johnson and Mrs Macarthur and all they did, hearing about Great-Aunt Jeanne, knowing Birrung all those years ago, seeing all the skills the Indian women had, it made me wonder about all the other history that doesn't mention women. It's only men telling the stories, because that's who gets listened to. Maybe they left the women out. Makes you think.' (p 103)</p>

CURRICULUM TOPICS

Language and Literacy

- *This novel is a work of Historical Fiction or 'Faction' — it tells a story set in the past including real (Reverend Johnson and Mrs Johnson and Mrs Macarthur) and also imagined (Barney and Elsie) people:*

Discussion Point: The theme of the series is that history contains 'secrets'; that often certain types of history are deliberately erased or forgotten. What other events in our history are not widely known? Encourage students to discover and research another such event.

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Activity: Read some of the historical fiction listed in the **Bibliography** and compare to this novel.

- **Suspense in a story hinges on the intended ending and also on what the reader or audience expects to happen:**

Discussion Point: The novel begins with a mystery when Mrs Johnson tells Barney not to allow anyone to see Elsie in the hospital, although she is clearly not contagious. What are the strange words Elise mutters in her sleep, the first she's uttered since she had said 'I love you' to Barney when he went to sea? (Readers may recognise that the words are French.) Were you surprised by the novel's revelation that she was a spy? What ending did you predict in this novel?

Activity: What was the most excitingly suspenseful moment in the novel, in your opinion?

- ***Narrative Structure* — Relies on chapters leading the reader from one to the next, and requires both strong chapter beginnings and endings:**

Activity: Chapter endings are dramatic turning points in a novel's action: (p 7) 'And did she really want to stay in an English colony ... and with me?' (p 39) What other chapter ending was particularly gripping, in your opinion?

- ***Narrative Perspective* — Barney tells the story in first person, past tense:**

Discussion Point: How might the story have changed if it had been written by Elsie instead? Describe an incident through her eyes, as if written as a diary or letter.

Discussion Point: Write a letter as if written by Mrs Macarthur to Elsie at the farm.

- ***Use of Ornate and Poetic Language* — Devices such as Simile and Metaphor:**

Discussion Point: 'rocks with wicked teeth that could wreck an armada.' (p 3) What device is used in this quote?

Activity: Choose other quotes which include an effective usage of literary devices.

- ***Setting:***

Discussion Point: How evocative was the description of life on Barney and Elsie's farm? What detail or device does the author use to create these impressions?

Discussion Point: 'The shadows were striding up the hill. We walked down as the moon rose like a vast golden apple above the trees. An owl boomed, and another answered far away. An old-man o'possum grunted in the trees above us.' (p 101) What feelings for the land does this description convey?

- **Series and Sequels:**

Discussion Point: Jackie French says (p 110) that there will be a fifth book, *Barney and the Secret Rebel*. Where might Barney be in ten years' time (1808), and how might his life have changed? Read the end of the fourth book again to give you clues to his and Elsie's future. Write a synopsis of the fifth book.

Discussion Point: Writing a series demands that the author keep the reader informed about earlier titles (particularly if they haven't yet read them) without being repetitive. Here are two examples of such information being subtly included: 'The hospital smelled of old blood, and of even older thatch on its huts' roofs. This was where Ma had died, when an oyster cut went bad. This was where I'd tended Black Caesar.' (pp 11–12) and: 'Or was it? Who *was* Elsie? I'd given her Ma's name, back when I found her, starving and hiding in the rock ledges above the colony, in her faded blue and white dress, so different from any of the clothes brought for the convicts on the First Fleet.' (p 23) What other references to earlier titles in the series did you discover?

- **Critical Literacy — this text might be used to encourage students to use critical literacy skills:**

Activity: Read the two passages: 'I wouldn't have swapped my house for the King of England's castle. I bet I was happier than he was too, especially as the newspapers from England said that King George III was mostly mad and locked up in his room.' (p 7) and: 'King George III had exiled the convicts like Ma as a punishment for their crimes, but for me New South Wales was the greatest gift I ever had.' (p 31) What do these quotes suggest or imply about Barney's opinions of the British powers that sent him to the Colony?

Discussion Point: Read the novel carefully and discover other quotes which imply meanings beyond what the words actually say.

- **Writing Tasks — This novel might be suggest several written responses from students:**

Activity: Invite students to write an expository essay about any aspect of history explored in this novel.

Activity: Then invite students to write an argumentative essay or to conduct a debate about any historical issue which is contentious.

- **Visual Literacy — Images enhance text in many ways:**

Activity: The cover by acclaimed artist and picture book creator, Mark Wilson, is a creative response to the themes explored in the text. The cover of a book is an ideogram for the contents, and a marketing tool as well. Examine the cover of this book which features a portrait photo of Elsie with a female figure standing behind to her left, and a couple hand-in-hand in the further background. What does it suggest about the novel?

Discussion Point: The cover features the words: 'What is Elsie's deadly secret?' Discuss the relevance of this question to the book's contents.

Activity: Create a new cover for the work, drawing on either theme or incident to create the image. Use techniques such as collage. Write a blurb for the back cover of the book as well.

Activity: Create a Book Trailer based on this book. (See **Bibliography** for resources.)

Activity: Mark Wilson's illustrations for the chapter headings are suggestively based on historical research. Choose one of the images and discuss what it reveals about colonial times.

SOSE

- **History** — Although this is a fictional story, as were the other titles in this series, it also gives the reader detailed insights into the historical background as well.

Activity: Jackie French delights in historical detail which lends veracity to any tale she writes, eg. 'The writing was in the colony's brown ink, made of boiled wattle galls thickened with egg yolk, not the black ink the governor and officers used.' (p 8) What other details did you discover in this novel?

Activity: One of the points Jackie French makes in her **Author's Notes** is that women were often left no choice but to dress as men in order to pursue the lives they wanted to lead.

Activity: Mrs Macarthur is presented as a more ethical and generous spirit than her husband is, in this novel. Research the role that the Macarthurs played in the early days of the colony.

Activity: Research the lives of Nicolas Baudin; Jean-François de Galaup, comte de Lapérouse; Rear Admiral Antoine Raymond Joseph de Bruni d'Entrecasteaux; Hyacinthe de Bougainville; François Auguste Péron, Elizabeth Macarthur and Chaplain Richard Johnson (1753–1827).

Activity: Several historical 'myths' are explained in Jackie French's **Author's Notes**, eg. It is commonly believed that many convicts had committed very negligible crimes, but French suggests that 'some of the convicts sent to New South Wales had done worse things than the records show.' (p 110)

'Another popular myth is that the Macarthurs' wool meant the colony was able to trade its way to prosperity. Instead, whaling and sealing kept the colony afloat until the gold rushes.' (p 110)

Gold wasn't suddenly discovered: 'Australia's gold rushes happened because a crook worked out a public relations plan to get a reward for it — but that is another story. (See my book *Gold, Graves and Glory*.)' (p 111)

Activity: Research any of these points and make a list of other myths about this period in our history, for example, the following website outlines specific myths: 'Fabricated Myths in Aboriginal History' *Convict Creations*
<<http://www.convictcreations.com/history/aborigines.html>>

Activity: Read some other historical fictions about this period and compare to this one. [See **Bibliography**.]

- **Social Class** — Class divisions in colonial Australia were more fluid than in Britain at the time, but were certainly a determinant in how Australia developed as a culture.

Discussion Point: Barney was a member of the lower classes in Britain and when he arrived in the colony, a convict's child. But in less than a decade he has become a landholder and a person invited to dine with the wealthy aristocratic Macarthurs. Was this an entirely egalitarian society, or were there still class divisions?

- **Values** — Throughout this series, the importance of key values is emphasised.

Activity: What values are particularly evident in this text?

Discussion Point: What qualities does Elsie value in others?

Discussion Point: 'I sat on my good solid chair — I'd made the chairs and table myself, just like Mr Johnson had shown me. Do you know what it's like to sit in a chair that's full of memories?' (p 7) What value does this quote suggest?

Discussion Point: What sort of values does this quote suggest: 'We both liked reading books, seeing the world and ideas beyond the colony.' (p 6)

Discussion Point: Reverend Johnson's selflessness is contrasted to many in the colony who are greedy for riches or depraved by addiction. 'You need to rest more, sir,' I ventured. He smiled at that. 'And so my wife keeps telling me. But how can I rest, with so many souls and bodies in such desperate need?' (p 28)

Activity: Create a table and list some of the values demonstrated in any of the scenes or events in this book with a corresponding quote to illustrate it.

FURTHER POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Discussion Point:* The prologue reads; '*Some secrets are hidden till someone tells the truth.*

But there is another kind of secret: one people make themselves forget. This book has two secrets. The first secret is about the girl I love most in all the world. The second secret is one every person needs to yell out loud, at least once in your lifetime. Maybe, when you've read this book, you will.' What is the second secret?

2. *Discussion Point:* 'It needed to be too, because New South Wales was a gaol without walls — you were only put in chains if you committed another crime after you were sent here.' (p 5) What must it have been like to be imprisoned so far from home and to know that amidst all this natural bounty and apparent freedom you were still a captive?

3. *Discussion Point:* 'One day I might be rich in money, but I'd already learned that other riches matter far more than coin.' (p 7) What are the riches Barney refers to here?

4. *Discussion Point:* This 'prison' was also a place of startling natural beauty and abundance in produce (if you knew where to look for it). The irony was that these early settlers were so used to an English landscape and to particular foods that they

set about replicating that home in this new country; they introduced crops and wildlife; they cut down trees and built roads; they erected homes in the English style. Discuss this point in relation to how Barney manages his farm.

5. *Discussion Point:* 'But there was no rum on my farm. After seeing what grog did to the colony once we grew enough wheat and potatoes to brew alcohol, I let all my men know I wasn't having home-made rum turning them into lazy swine or drunkards bashing each other.' (p 6) Rum ruined many lives in these early times and Barney was wise to avoid it and to forbid his employees, too, from imbibing.

6. *Discussion Point:* 'I don't want Elsie to be anybody's servant.' (p 18) Barney's ambitions extend to his beloved Elsie. He is determined from an early age that he will be a free farmer and not a servant.

7. 'There I'd been thinking Elsie had never thought of marrying me, and there she'd been for years embroidering and hemming stuff because she wanted to marry me but thought I wouldn't want her — and both of us too scared to ever tell each other.' (p 87) Even between friends, there can be misunderstandings.

8. 'Invasions that don't happen mostly don't get written about.' (p 103)

9. *Discussion Point:* Jackie French writes: 'My friends and I said, 'A woman's place is everywhere,' but we had to fight to get there. In so many places, that battle is still to be won.' (p 116) Are women better recognised today than in decades past? In what areas are they still lobbying for equal rights?

10. *Discussion Point:* Several issues are canvassed here, but what point did Jackie French most want to convey in this novel?

AUTHOR'S NOTES ON THE TEXT

At the back of the book, there are extensive **Author's Notes** (pp 105–116) by Jackie French on many of the historical and cultural issues referred to in this text. This should be an invaluable resource to teachers in using the book, in conjunction with these notes, in the classroom.

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