



[Bila Yarrudhanggalangdhuray]

By Anita Heiss

Genre and Subject

Wiradjuri (Australian people) -- Fiction

Interpersonal relations -- Fiction

Australian fiction

Historical fiction

Synopsis

Gundagai, 1852. The powerful Murrumbidgee River surges through town leaving death and destruction in its wake. It is a stark reminder that while the river can give life, it can just as easily take it away. Wagadhaany is one of the lucky ones. She survives. But is her life now better than the fate she escaped? Forced to move away from her miyagan, she walks through each day with no trace of dance in her step, her broken heart forever calling her back home to Gundagai. When she meets Wiradyuri stockman Yindyamarra, Wagadhaany's heart slowly begins to heal. But still, she dreams of a better life, away from the degradation of being owned. She longs to set out along the river of her ancestors, in search of lost family and country. Can she find the courage to defy the White man's law? And if she does, will it bring hope ... or heartache? Set on timeless Wiradyuri country, where the life-giving waters of the rivers can make or break dreams, and based on devastating true events, *Bila Yarrudhanggalangdhuray* (River of Dreams) is an epic story of love, loss and belonging.

Author Biography

Dr Anita Heiss is an award-winning author of non-fiction, historical fiction, commercial women's fiction, children's novels and blogs. She is a proud member of the Wiradyuri Nation of central New South Wales, an Ambassador for the Indigenous Literacy Foundation, the GO Foundation and Worawa Aboriginal College. Anita is a board member of University of Queensland Press and Circa Contemporary Circus, and is a Professor of Communications at the University of Queensland. As an artist in residence at La Boite Theatre in 2020, Anita began adapting her novel *Tiddas* (S&S, 2014) for the stage. Her novel *Barbed Wire and Cherry Blossoms* (S&S, 2016) set in Cowra during World War II, was the 2020 University of Canberra Book of the Year. Anita enjoys eating chocolate, running and being a 'creative disruptor'.

If you liked this book, you may also like...

- *Ariadne* by Jennifer Saint
- *After story* by Larissa Behrendt

Discussion Starters

1. Wagadhaany's father, Yarri, warns Henry Bradley when he is building his house that the flat land by the river isn't suitable because it's a flood plain. Did you notice any other instances where Wiradyuri knowledge of the land was disregarded? Did you notice any examples of when Wiradyuri knowledge of the land was capitalised on, to the benefit of White people?
2. When the river floods, many families including the Bradleys rely on sandbags to control the water. Did you notice other instances in the book where characters act as if nature can be tamed?
3. Wagadhaany treasures the headband her mother gives her, and she wears it at various times throughout the novel. What other things does Wagadhaany do to try to feel closer to her family?
4. How is the idea of family represented throughout the novel? What does family mean to you?
5. What is the significance of Wagadhaany's name – who she reveals it to, what she answers to, David and James's attempts to pronounce it, or their deliberate dismissal of the true way it's pronounced?
6. What are the different kind of friendships Wagadhaany has, for example with her cousins in Gundagai, with Louisa, with Yiray, and with the other women at the camp in Wagga Wagga? What does each friendship mean to her? Do you have friendships that mean different things to you?
7. Yindyamarra is a stockman. Looking at the language he uses to speak about it, what do you think his feelings might be about his work, especially in terms of the damage stock does to the land?
8. Louisa displays varying levels of self-awareness throughout the novel. What do you think of the difference between what she says and how she acts?
9. What is the significance of food in the novel? You might like to think about cooking food, sharing food, buying food, finding food and a lack of food.
10. Yiray tells us that many of the women working at the Hansen homestead have been sexually abused. Wagadhaany tells us that David often makes her feel uncomfortable. What do you think holds David back?
11. How did the events in Wagadhaany's life shape her identity? What events have shaped your identity?
12. In light of the Masters and Servants Act, what do you think drove Wagadhaany and Yindyamarra to take such risks, to go back to Gundagai?
13. How do you think Wagadhaany might have felt when she discovered that her family had been forced out of Gundagai and onto a mission?
14. What is the significance of the river?