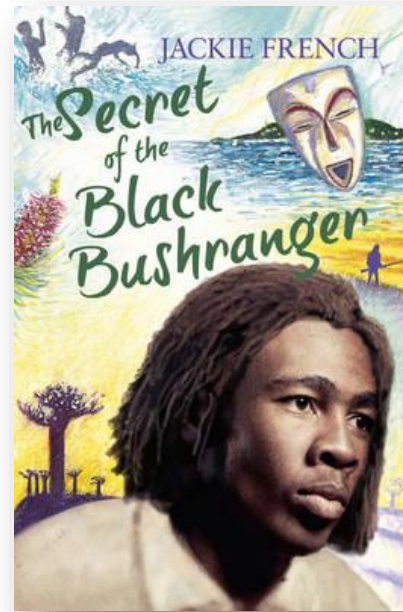


# The Secret of the Black Bushranger

By  
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By the 1790s, orphaned Barney Bean finally has his own farm in the early NSW colony. All his dreams are coming true! But now we are to learn of Barney's biggest secret yet: how he helped Australia's first bushranger escape. Was Black Caesar a wronged man, an ex-slave who vowed to be free? Or was he a laughing villain, a trickster who planned to terrorise the colony? And in helping him, did Barney do right or wrong? You decide.

**RECOMMENDED READING LEVEL: Mid to Upper Primary**

## TEACHER NOTES

- Research the Abolitionist Movement and how it relates to Australian history.
- 'There was not enough food to keep all the slaves alive. Only the most valuable were kept. It was better to have some slaves strong enough to walk ashore than have all of us weak and dying.' (p 23) What sort of picture does this quote paint of slave traders' attitudes to their slaves?
- Discuss: The novel suggests that even when slavery is abolished, people are often still in chains by virtue of servitude or mindset. Some convicts were granted freedom and many prospered, but many never escaped the shackles of their psychological pasts. Black

Caesar fails to take up opportunities offered to him, because he never recovered from being enslaved.

### **Colonial Society**

- ‘The Watch was made up of convicts who were the colony’s police, for the soldiers just lazed around, saying they were only here in case the French attacked, or the Indians.’ (p 12) Research the role played by convicts in early colonial life, in particular their role as ‘policemen’.
- The whipping of convicts was a barbaric torture. Research the forms of control exercised over convicts by their captors. Were they ever justified? Should prisons employ violent tactics?

### **Indigenous History and Culture**

- Barney calls his land at Rose Hill ‘my place’ (p 107). Discuss with reference to the original owners of the land and their claims to territory.
- ‘John Black Caesar had attacked Pemulwuy, the Indian who had speared and killed Governor Phillip’s game shooter years back.’ (p 125) Research the incidents referred to here.

### **Bushrangers**

- Black Caesar was a real figure, although his origins are obscure. He is said to be the first bushranger. Research his life and that of other bushrangers in this era.

### **Agricultural Self-Sufficiency**

- Discuss: ‘And that was what Mr Johnson had given me, with that lamb. A future.’ (p 45) The Johnsons’ birthday gift to Barney is an example of their belief in self-sufficiency. Instead of money or toys they give him an animal which would provide food, and might also form the basis of a breeding program.

### **Morality and Choice**

- Compare these three quotes:
  - ‘I looked at Mr Johnson’s face. And then I knew. Mr Johnson would keep God’s law, give food and drink to those who hungered and were thirsty. In the morning he would keep the law of the land, and tell Governor Phillip that John Black had escaped and that he had come to us. But in the morning, Black Caesar would be gone.’ (p 30)

- 'Did I help a slave be free, or did I give a thief the means to kill another man and to steal again?' (p 42)
- 'I broke man's law. But I kept God's law, feeding the hungry, doing unto others as I would have them do unto me, knowing a man in want was my brother, even though he was black and a bushranger.' (p 150).