The Yield
Tara June Winch

PLOT SUMMARY

The yield in English is the reaping, the things that man can take from the land. In the language of the Wiradjuri, yield is the things you give to, the movement, the space between things: baayanha.

Knowing that he will soon die, Albert ‘Poppy’ Gondiwindi takes pen to paper. His life has been spent on the banks of the Murrumby River at Prosperous House, on Massacre Plains. Albert is determined to pass on the language of his people and everything that was ever remembered. He finds the words on the wind.

August Gondiwindi has been living on the other side of the world for ten years when she learns of her grandfather’s death. She returns home for his burial, wracked with grief and burdened with all she tried to leave behind. Her homecoming is bittersweet as she confronts the love of her kin and news that Prosperous is to be repossessed by a mining company. Determined to pass on the language of his people and everything that was ever remembered. He finds the words on the wind.

August Gondiwindi has been living on the other side of the world for ten years when she learns of her grandfather’s death. She returns home for his burial, wracked with grief and burdened with all she tried to leave behind. Her homecoming is bittersweet as she confronts the love of her kin and news that Prosperous is to be repossessed by a mining company. Determined to make amends she endeavours to save their land – a quest that leads her to the voice of her grandfather and into the past, the stories of her people, the secrets of the river.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tara June Winch is a Wiradjuri author, born in Australia in 1983 and based in France.
Her first novel, Swallow the Air was critically acclaimed. She was named a Sydney Morning Herald Best Young Australian Novelist, and has won numerous literary awards for Swallow the Air. A 10th Anniversary edition was published in 2016.

In 2008, Tara was mentored by Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka as part of the prestigious Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative.

Her second book, the story collection After the Carnage was published in 2016. After the Carnage was longlisted for the Victorian Premier’s Literary Award for fiction, shortlisted for the 2017 NSW Premier’s Christina Stead prize for Fiction and the Queensland Literary Award for a collection.

She wrote the Indigenous dance documentary, Carriberrie, which screened at the 71st Cannes Film Festival and is touring internationally.

**AUTHOR’S INSPIRATION**

Tara says:

The Yield was worked on during my mentorship with Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka, who spent his life in exile, was imprisoned for his activism and is one of the great and most prolific living writers today. It’s taken a decade since that experience to finally bring you The Yield, but as Wole said back in 2009, ‘If something comes out, next year, ten years from now, it will be affected by what she has undergone.’

It was true, and foreboding, he didn’t expect it to take me so long to write, but he was right that our tutelage has influenced this work. He always reminded me to let go of focusing so tightly on the sociological condition to tell a story. I believe I finally found the voices to tell the single story, and my concerns with history, of showing a powerful people, and highlighting intergenerational traumas — arrived on these pages naturally, without the characters being marched out and forced to speak.

2019 is the UN International Year of Indigenous Languages – I believe it is a relevant moment to read a book in the old language, the first language – because as Albert says in the opening pages ‘That is the way to all time, to time travel! You can go all the way back.’

With all my respect yindyamarra and thanks mandaang guwu.

**WRITING STYLE**

The way this novel is written has a marked influence on its message and impact on the reader.

**Questions**

1. Why did the author choose to give voices to August, Albert Gondiwindi and Ferdinand Greenleaf? What was the impact of using such diverse voices and experiences?

2. Did you find it surprising that Greenleaf was given such a strong voice in the novel? What might this suggest about the author’s attitude and purpose? How does it make the story less judgemental and accusatory?

3. Throughout the novel, the author has used the notion of duality. There are two sides to every story, and most circumstances and actions have both a positive and a negative aspect to them. Make a list of binary ideas you can find in the novel (e.g. family is both positive and negative; home has both push and pull factors etc.)

4. The fire is symbolic of this notion. Fires are both destructive forces, and a necessary factor for rebirth and new growth. How can the fire at the end of the novel be seen to be both destructive and a catalyst for renewal?

5. Consider the title of the novel. The back cover tells us that the word has a different meaning in English (the reaping or things you take) and in the Wiradjuri language (the things you give to, or the space between things). How do these different meanings reflect the attitudes of the different cultures?

6. To yield can also mean to give in. Does this definition apply here? In what ways were the aboriginal people forced to yield to the white man’s ways?

7. Why do you think the author choose to illustrate this notion of duality throughout the novel?

**KEY STUDY TOPICS**

**Belonging**

Despite living in England for many years, August doesn’t feel whole until she returns to her homeland in Massacre Plains. She left to escape the ghosts, memories and guilt, but it is not until she returns and allows the land to seep into her skin that she achieves any sense of contentment.

August says that she was baptised by the sun, and that as far, far away as she went from her country, from her home, she still couldn’t remove the scent and taste of dirt and diesel and flesh and muddied water from that grey hemisphere of her mind (7). In what way do people remain connected to their hometown regardless of their physical distance?
Questions

1. Even as August turned her back on the place, she still wanted it to own her (p16). Why is home so important to August even after she has run away from it?

2. Alena’s boyfriend, James, tells August, ‘You’re a blow-in in this town anyway, so don’t stick your nose in shit where it don’t belong’ (243). Why does he see her as an outsider even though she grew up there and her family has always lived there?

3. When August heads into the city with her Aunt Missy she felt the pull like magnets to Prosperous...She had ached for that thing, that feeling to want something. To feel like she had a purpose (p247). Why does she desperately want to be home? What does it now offer her that it didn’t provide years ago?

4. Do you think that August needed to leave her home in order to really appreciate it and feel as if she belongs there?

5. Native title helps indigenous people fight for their homeland. Why is this so important to them? Why might it be even more important in this indigenous culture than in white culture?

Family

August doesn’t just belong to her land, but to her family. We are all shaped by our families and they form part of our identity.

Questions

1. Poppy writes, Where is your country? The question is not really about a place on the map. When our people say Where is your country ... (33). What does this question mean for them? Why is it important to know a person’s background or family?

2. Consider how a person’s family background is important in white society.

3. August says that her parents were more like playmates...Jolene would snuggle with them when she was high and play with them when she was drunk (38). The girls’ favourite meal was tomato sauce on toast which they cooked for themselves. Their parents grew marijuana and ended up in jail.

   What impact would this childhood have had on August and Jedda? What attitudes or behaviours does August display that have been shaped by this childhood?

4. August and Jedda are molested by Uncle Jimmy who eventually lures Jedda to her death. Why does Jedda sacrifice herself to protect August?

5. How does this shape August? Do Jedda’s actions save August or harm her?

6. What does August gain by returning to her family?

7. How can family be seen to be both a positive and a negative influence in our lives?

Grief and Loss

Consider the examples of loss in the novel:

- The death of Albert Gondiwindi,
- the loss of Jedda,
- the imprisonment of August’s mother
- the destruction of a culture
- loss of land

Questions

1. What impact do these losses have on members of the family?

2. How does this sense of loss threaten to destroy the family?

3. Why is the loss of Poppy different from the loss of Jedda?

4. How does Poppy ensure that his death has a positive impact on his family?

5. The novel starts with Poppy saying, ‘Nothing ever really dies.’ In what way is this idea supported in the novel? Consider the impact that those who are no longer alive still have on the family and the community.

6. No-one ever dies... You is only electricity and electricity cannot die (p35). In what way is this a comforting statement?

Stories

From infancy, we learn many things through the telling of stories. History is the telling of stories about people and events. The stories differ depending on who is telling them, the purpose for telling them, and the audience to which they are being told.

Questions

1. There is a saying that ‘history is always told by the victor’. How might that influence what we are told and taught?

2. How do the history books traditionally portray the relationship between the white settlers and the aboriginal people?

3. Why is it important that these beliefs have been revisited and a different version of events is now being acknowledged?
4. In her dream, Poppy tells August that there was a lot to remembering the past, to having stories, to knowing your history, your childhood, but there is something to forgetting it too (9). Why is it important to remember the past? Why is it important to let the past go?

5. What is the Stolen Generation? Why were children designated half-caste taken away from their mothers?

6. Why were aboriginal children placed in service with white families?

7. The government believed that the so-called half-caste children would be better off if they were schooled and immersed in white culture to Think White. Act White. Be White (p23). What are the arguments for this practice? What are the arguments against?

8. What was the White Australia policy? How did the federation of Australia reinforce prejudices and cultural divides rather than unify the country?

9. Many people argue that the past is the past and the modern generation should not be held accountable or have to apologise for past actions. Do you agree or disagree with this sentiment? Why?

10. What was the impact of Kevin Rudd’s ‘sorry’ speech?

11. Poppy was told by Great-aunty just tell the truth and someone will hear it eventually (46). Why is it important for everybody’s stories to be told? What are the dangers in silencing some people’s stories?

12. August says that as a child she loved reading, but she never saw herself reflected on the page. What would be the impact of this?

13. Consider the books you have read, films you have seen, or television shows that you have watched. What people in society are represented in them? Which people are marginalised or excluded? What messages does this send to society?

14. How do stories such as ‘The Yield’ help to bridge the gap between the cultures?

15. When we view history through a modern lens it is sometimes easy to condemn decisions and behaviours. We need to remember that as time changes, so do people’s attitudes and the law. While we can look at the past with the benefit of knowledge and hindsight, the people of the time didn’t have that luxury and did what they believed to be best at the time. Make a list of the attitudes, events and language from Poppy’s past that would be condemned today. Have our attitudes changed? Do we still need to do more in order to close the cultural divide?

Language

Throughout the novel, language is seen to be a powerful tool that can both empower and disempower individuals. Without language we would be unable to tell our stories.

Questions

1. Why did Poppy believe it was so important for him to write his language down before he died?

2. Why is he determined that the language of his people will stay alive?

3. Historically, people who wish to destroy a culture have done so by destroying books and limiting language. List any examples in which a culture was destroyed by the destruction of language.

4. Consider the way Albert Gondiwindi’s dictionary is written. Is this different from a traditional English dictionary? What is the impact of him telling stories about the words rather than just providing definitions? What do his entries reveal about his people and their culture?

5. Poppy says that he doesn’t think his people have a word for fortune. What does this reveal about the different attitudes of the whites and Aboriginal Australians?

6. Consider the words used by the white men to describe the aborigines. Even Greenleaf, who is sympathetic, refers to them as natives. How do these terms create a system of power?

7. Why were the children not allowed to use their native language on the mission?

8. Consider the statement: You can’t talk about things for which you don’t have words. How does this reflect the beliefs of the white society?

9. Many dystopian novels such as George Orwell’s ‘1984’ explore the idea of manipulating people through the change or limitation of language. Why is it a powerful tool?

10. How can language both include and exclude people?

11. How does the existence of a national language create a system of inequality? How does language create power?

12. The Australian Aboriginal languages are predominantly oral. Has this made it easier for white culture to destroy them? Why might there have been so many different Australian Aboriginal languages? Consider how many of the Wiradjuri
words stem from the land and nature. Does this help to explain the differences?

13. Consider the names given to places in the novel such as Massacre Plains and Poisoned Waterhole Creek. What does this imply about what happened in these locations? What does it say about white culture and attitudes that we would proudly name places in this way? Do you think this has been done out of respect, or, as a way of owning our mistakes and actions?

14. August thinks every family has its own special language (140). In what way is this true? How can families be seen to have their own language? How does this help to shape families? Why might it cause difficulties for people outside of the family?

Civilisation

The question of civilisation is always contentious. How do we determine if a society is civilised or not? Who sets the criteria? Development and progress are often seen as the cornerstones of civilisation, but they do not always have positive impact on society.

Questions

1. What criteria are used to determine whether a society or culture is deemed to be ‘civilised’ or ‘uncivilised’ (p231).

2. Consider the impact of ‘civilisation’ on the environment:
   - the building of the dam stopped the water flow and affected the crops
   - the introduction of other species – cane toads, Paterson’s curse, cape weed, skeleton weed, wild radish etc.
   - the introduced species that spread like certain death for grazing animals (p80)

3. What other problems have been caused by civilisation? What benefits has civilisation brought? Stage a debate as to whether civilisation has been a positive or negative thing.

4. What evidence has been given to prove that Australian Aboriginals were uncivilised?

5. What evidence does this novel (as well as books such as Dark Emu and other more recent articles) provide that indicate that the indigenous society was far more agricultural and advanced than traditional history has led us to believe?

6. The history books present the Roman Empire as one of the greatest and most influential civilisations. But were they leaders of civilisation or brutal conquerors (p 247)?

7. Why might Australians see the artefacts of Middlesbrough as being important, but not value those of Australian Aboriginals? (p249).

8. Why are non-indigenous Australians so in awe of European history and civilisation when we have the oldest in the world?

9. Why does Falstaff invite Rinepalm to look at his property?

10. Why do some people want the tin mine? Why do others not want it?

11. Australia is currently facing the same tension with the Adani mine. What are the arguments for and against the mine?

12. Consider the propaganda distributed by Rinepalm, particularly the pamphlets given to school children (p245). Why would they target school children in their marketing?

13. People so scared of not having everything ... that our people are gunna have nothing (p268). In what way can development be seen to be driven by people’s need to have more?

14. Is development really an indication of progress?

15. What is the irony in the excavation work for the Rinepalm mine revealing a sacred indigenous site?

Education

Society values formal education and it is often seen as a means to improve your life. Yet are there negative impacts in valuing only formal education? What skills do we need in life that can’t be taught in schools or through books?

Questions

1. Why did the Aboriginal Protection Board believe that half-caste children should be educated in white schools?

2. What were children taught in the missions and the boys homes?

3. What impact would this have had on them?

4. Why did the ancestors visit Albert? What did he learn from them that he could never learn in the white men’s schools?

5. Why is formal education seen as being superior?

6. Why does Greenfield realise that he can learn a lot from the natives? What could they teach him that his years of education couldn’t?

7. How does time in jail help Joey? Should education be made compulsory for those in jails?
Religion
The arrival of Christianity in Australia had a marked impact on the indigenous people. The lack of formal religion made the white men assume they were heathens who needed to be converted to Christianity in an effort to save their souls.

Questions
1. Why did ministers such as Ferdinand Greenleaf believe it necessary to convert native people?
2. Historically, what other cultures have missionaries tried to Christianise? What does this behaviour suggest about Christians and their attitudes to non-Christians? What problems has this practice caused?
3. Why does Albert believe that his people were happy to believe in Jesus and the teachings of the Christian church (p41)?
4. After Jedda went missing Albert had August christened to protect her. What does this suggest about his beliefs?
5. The indigenous people believed that the trees and plants are sacred. I was only to use them for Gondiwindi, not for selling just for living (p32). How does this attitude differ from that of white culture?
6. In what ways might Christians use their teachings to justify the words of God (252)?
7. August defends Greenleaf’s actions saying that he believed that what he was doing was right and he regretted the outcome. Aunt Missy tells her that he only regretted it when it negatively affected him. After reading Greenleaf’s letters, which perspective do you agree with?
8. Poppy’s dictionary talks about Biyaami’s son (256). Is this really any different from the Christian stories about Jesus? What other similarities can you see between the two religions?
9. Do you agree that the indigenous people were heathens?
10. What is the significance of Christianity worshipping the person or spirit and the aboriginal culture worshipping his creations? What does this suggest about the different attitudes and values?
11. Greenleaf questions what damage has been done by Christian men taking the words of our God and turning them on their heads for our own purposes (p272)? Do you agree that this is what they did? What damage did it cause?

Good Intentions
Throughout history, many governments and individuals have acted with the best of intentions, and yet their actions, decisions and policies have had negative rather than positive effects. While it is easy to criticise their actions with the benefit of hindsight, is it fair to judge them based on modern beliefs and attitudes?

Questions
1. Of all the clergymen who have called here, you are the first who seems to care … (p74). What evidence is there that Reverend Greenleaf was a good man, trying to help the aboriginal people?
2. In building Prosperous Mission, Greenleaf wanted to build a home of safety for the poor waifs and strays (104). What assumptions are inherent in this statement?
3. Why was he misguided in this decision? Make a chart listing the pros and cons of the mission
4. What was the response to Greenleaf when he tried to get the government to take steps to alleviate the conditions experienced by the indigenous people? (p75)
5. Greenleaf asks, How could it be that Australia, professedly the new home of liberty and light, had become a theatre of oppression and cruelty (p75)? How was the reality of Australian attitudes different from those projected to the rest of the world?
6. Why was the mission built on the outskirts of town sufficient distance from the town to minimise contact with White society (101)? Was this for the benefit of the indigenous people or the white settlers?
7. The aborigines only visited town once a year for blankets. What does this reveal about their treatment?
8. Why did Greenfield pay for the home himself? What does this reveal about the government of the time?

Prejudice
Despite the fact that many white Australians rarely encountered indigenous people, the majority of them had a negative opinion of them. Until 1967, Australian Aboriginal people were not counted in the Commonwealth census. They were banned from attending many public places and confined to specific areas of land. Workers’ wages were held by the Aboriginal Protection Board who were also responsible for providing (or denying) permission for many basic rights such as marriage.
Questions
1. How does the presence of half-caste children indicate that First Nations people were exploited by the whites?
2. The Aboriginal Protection Board ordered that all but the full-blood Natives should be handed over for employment (203). Why were half-caste children seen to be a problem that needed to be addressed by the government?
3. What does the existence of the Aboriginal Protection Board suggest? Did it really protect the aborigines? Or did it protect white society?
4. Greenleaf writes, It seemed every white man was cut from the same cloth, born disgruntled by the Natives (p198). Why were they viewed so negatively?
5. How did people react when the university students took the Wiradjuri children to the public pool (p285)?
6. Why did the white men give alcohol to the women at Prosperous Mission?
7. Greenleaf comments that people distrusted the aborigines. Yet whose behaviour was worse?
8. How could the mission be seen to make life more dangerous for the Wiradjuri?
9. Why were white people’s crimes against Australian Aboriginals either ignored or given only paltry fines (p199)?
10. In contrast, Joey and Jolene made mistakes, but the punishment outweighed the crimes (p206). What does this reveal about the law?
11. Poppy writes about respect: I think I’ve come to realise that with some things, you cannot receive them unless you give them too. Unless you’ve even got the opportunity to give and receive. Only equals can share respect, otherwise it’s a game of masters and slaves – someone always has the upper hand when they are demanding respect - yindyamarra (p108). Did the white men deserve to be respected? Were the aborigines ever in a position to be able to show respect?

Culture and Exploitation
Despite being the oldest living culture, traditionally the aboriginal culture was at best ignored and at worst an entity to be destroyed. Yet at times white society deliberately promotes Australian Aboriginal culture if it is of benefit to them.

Questions
1. We are often told that the colonisation of Australia was bloodless and achieved without war. Does this appear to be the case?
2. Elsie says, There was a war here against the local people. In that war the biggest victim was the culture, you know...well, culture has no armies does it’ (p93). How can societies declare war on other cultures?
3. There were no native plants in the Falstaff garden, only hedges, tulips, half-century-old rose bushes and the fruit grove. The house was painted pumpkin with a grey trim, but it used to change every few years: Dulux blue gum, Dulux crème, Dulux terracotta (p111). How does this description sum up the clash of the two different cultures?
4. Massacre has only one statue, a soldier in metal regalia, draped in ammunition and slouch-hatted, leant against his gun (p86). What does this statue symbolise? What does it imply about Australia’s culture? Why is the ANZAC soldier often used as a symbol of our culture? What is excluded from this image?
5. Please don’t be a victim, Augie. It’s an easy road, that one... The land, the earth is the victim now (p93). In what way is it easy to be a victim?
6. Elsie tells August, food isn’t just the things you can eat (p94). What do we need in order to sustain us?
7. Consider the ways in which the Australian Aboriginal culture is exploited for white benefits. The native people were invited to perform in the sesquicentenary Flower Show for all the gathering crowds (p77).
8. In modern society consider how indigenous culture was displayed at the Gold Coast Commonwealth Games
9. Consider how many tourist shops sell indigenous artefacts
10. Greenfield was asked to supply craft of the indigenous people for the World’s Fair (p200). What does this indicate about our attitudes towards our indigenous culture?
11. People at the World’s Fair also wanted to carry out scientific tests on aboriginal skeletons, a request that Greenfield denied. What sort of tests were they wanting to perform? What did they expect the findings to reveal?
12. August says I think for some people you always find your way home. Gaol becomes like home. Reckon Kooris know how to stay locked up (p215).
Why would some people actually want to stay in jail?

13. Why is August’s drink of choice always oblivion (p215)?

14. August is surprised that the protestors are not Koori. Is it appropriate for non-indigenous people to protest over aboriginal land rights?

15. Do you think they really care about the land in the same way, or is it another form of exploitation?

16. How do the cultural artefacts created for the World Fair help August to protect her land?

Protest

In a country that allows freedom of speech, people have the right to protest against actions or decisions they regard as being unfair. But do we really deal with these people in a democratic way?

Questions

1. How do many people in society feel about protestors?

2. Do you agree that people should have the right to protest? What are the advantages and disadvantages to society?

3. Who was Eddie Mabo and what was the significance of his legal battle?

4. What are the criteria for proving native title of land?

5. Mandy tells August, these days we can’t do anything as somebody, we can only do something as nobody (p300). What does she mean by this?

6. Has social media changed the nature of protests? Is this still a relevant way to make your voice heard today?
The Drover's Wife
by Leah Purcell

Leah Purcell's play caused a sensation on performance and won the NSW Premier's Prize Book of the Year and now she is expanding that play and a film script to write a novel that while still 'Tarantino meets Deadwood' is also so much more.

In the titular character The Drover's Wife, Purcell has created a figure who is as resonant and significant as Ned Kelly. Lawson's original short story is reimagined vividly to portray the drover's heroic wife as a righteous avenger - on behalf of herself, her children and her race - in a savage male world. Challenging responses to family violence and black white relations. A taut thriller of our pioneering past, The Drover's Wife is full of fury, power, family love and intimate friendships.

Why Weren't We Told?
by Henry Reynolds

Historian Henry Reynolds has found himself being asked these questions by many people, over many years, in all parts of Australia. The acclaimed Why Weren't We Told? is a frank account of his personal journal towards the realisation that he, like generations of Australians, grew up with a distorted and idealised version of the past. From the author's unforgettable encounter in a North Queensland jail with injustice towards Aboriginal children, to his friendship with Eddie Mabo, to his shattering of the myths about our 'peaceful' history, this bestselling book will shock, move and intrigue. Why Weren't We Told? is crucial reading on the most important debate in Australia as we enter the twenty-first century.

Heart of the Grass Tree
by Molly Murn

Pearl remembers Nell's feet stretched towards the campfires on the beach, her fourth toe curled in and nestled against the middle toe like a small prawn. They all have a curled fourth toe – Diana, Lucy, Pearl.

When Pearl's grandmother Nell dies unexpectedly, Pearl and her family – mother Diana, sister Lucy – return to Kangaroo Island to mourn and farewell her. Each of them knew Nell intimately but differently, and each woman must reckon with Nell's passing in her own way. But Nell had secrets, too, and as Pearl, Diana and Lucy interrogate their feelings about the island, Pearl starts to pull together the scraps Nell left behind – her stories, poems, paintings – and unearths a connection to the island's early history, of the early European sealers and their first contact with the Ngarrindjeri people.
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