Australian Heritage

Read the following two texts about convict ancestors in Australia. Answer the questions that follow, either by writing a few words or by choosing the best alternative – A, B, C or D. Base your answers on the information in the texts.

Text 1 - Searching for Roots

Kate Grenville *grew up in Australia, where having a convict ancestor was known as 'the taint'. Years later, she came to London to uncover the truth about her great-great-great-grandfather.*

I'd always known there was a convict in the family—my mother had often talked about her great-great-grandfather Solomon Wiseman, transported to Australia in 1806. The story Mum had heard was that Solomon Wiseman had worked on the docks in London and, "for an offence we don't know about", he was sent to Australia as a convict.

Having a convict ancestor is quite the thing in Australia now. There's even a society for descendants of the very first ones, the First Fleeters—the aristocracy of convicts. It's a perverse kind of prestige.

When I was growing up in the 60s, though, it was nothing to be proud of. The index cards in the state library were regularly thinned-out by people who surreptitiously ripped out the card that proved their convict ancestry. Having a convict in the family was called 'the taint'. There was even a suspicion that it might be a hereditary defect.

So it took me a long time to go looking for more about Solomon. The push came during the walk for reconciliation in 2001, when hundreds of thousands of people walked across the Sydney Harbour Bridge as a gesture of acknowledgement of the wrongs that had been done to the Aboriginal people. I walked with everyone else, in a cosy fug of self-righteousness, until I met the eye of an Aboriginal woman watching us walk. We exchanged smiles—it was a warm moment—but then a thought occurred to me that gave me a chill. This woman's ancestor had been here in 1806, and so had mine—it was possible that they had met. What kind of meeting would it have been?

Mum's story had included the fact that Solomon, after being freed, had "taken up land", as the phrase went, not far from Sydney. To my shame, I'd never thought about what this really meant—that my ancestor had simply taken land that had been the home to Aboriginal people for some 40,000 years. Did Solomon, like so many of the early settlers, carry a rifle with which to "disperse" them?

It became a very urgent need to know what kind of man he had been, and how he might have dealt with the local Darug tribe.

1 Why was Solomon Wiseman sent to Australia?

_____

2 According to the text, what is the attitude in Australia today to having convict ancestors?

A Their offences are best forgotten ☐
B It could harm your reputation ☐
C People don't talk about their ancestry ☐
D It brings respect and admiration ☐

3 Why did people in the 60s remove index cards in the state library?

_____

4 What encouraged Kate to further investigate Solomon's life?

A She talked to someone in the same situation ☐
B She knew Solomon had treated the Aborigines unjustly ☐
C She felt the cold look of an Aboriginal woman ☐
D She realised she might have something in common with a stranger ☐

5 After his release from prison, what did Solomon do?

A He settled down in Sydney ☐
B He helped Aborigines find homes ☐
C He claimed an area for himself ☐
D He used force to move people ☐

One of the few advantages of having a criminal in the family is that they leave an excellent paper trail. The family story that my mother had inherited "didn't know" what Solomon's crime had been, but for nearly 200 years the story had retained the two details that made it very easy to find out: the date of his arrival in Australia and the name of the ship that brought him. From that, it was a simple matter to establish that his trial had taken place at the Old Bailey in 1805, and I soon learned that those trials had been taken down in shorthand and were freely available on microfilm. If he'd lived a blameless life, there'd been no way to go looking for him.

It turned out that he had just been a thief of a fairly ordinary kind, and not a very good one at that. (If he'd been a better thief, some version of "me" would now be a Londoner.) He'd been a boatman on the Thames and one dark night had pinched a load of timber, valuable enough to make the death penalty inevitable if he were caught. His employer was lying in wait for him, presumably tipped off in advance, to catch him in the act. Mr Lucas tells the story at the trial: "I seized Solomon by the collar and he called out, 'for God's sake Mr Lucas, have mercy, you know the consequences!"

It was an extraordinary moment—to hear the voice of my great-great-great-grandfather coming through 200 years as vividly as if he were standing next to me. For the first time I felt him not just as that bloodless abstraction—"an ancestor"—but as a living, breathing terrified man begging for his life.

I was on fire now to find out who he was—what kind of man, from what kind of life. Following the paper trail of birth records, apprenticeship bindings, marriage registers and so on, I was able to place Solomon in London, and go to many of the places he'd have known. It was an extraordinary journey for an Australian to make, seeing London not as a foreign city, but a place that held my own ancestry. It was a journey that made me "belong" in London in a way I'd never expected.

I never did find out about how Solomon dealt with the people whose land he took. Some settlers "dispersed" the Aboriginal people, while others found ways to co-exist on cordial terms. Nothing that I could find in the records gave any clues about what choice Solomon had made. What began on the Sydney Harbour Bridge as a feeling of unfinished business is still unfinished—I'll probably never know.

From Once upon a time in 1806 ...(abridged)

6 What clues helped Kate to trace Solomon?

_____

and _____ *(1 pt)*

7 What was Solomon's crime?

_____

8 Why was Mr Lucas present to see the actual crime taking place?

_____

9 What do the "consequences", which Solomon talks about, refer to?

A Being forced to give up his job ☐
B Having to pay for stolen good ☐
C Being publicly humiliated ☐
D Fearing his life would end ☐

10 What was Kate's immediate reaction to the new information?

A Solomon was still unreal to her ☐
B Her ancestor suddenly came alive ☐
C She felt like a stranger in London ☐
D She understood the employer's reactions ☐

11 What was it that Kate had hoped to find out about but that she would never know?

_____

12 After reading the whole text, how could **the style of writing** be characterised?

A Romantic ☐
B Personal ☐
C Historical ☐
D Ironic ☐

Text 2 - Convictism in Australia

One of the primary reasons for the British settlement of Australia was the establishment of a penal colony to alleviate pressure on their overburdened correctional facilities. The last convicts to be transported to Australia arrived in Western Australia in 1868.

Reasons for transportation

The industrial revolution saw an increase in petty crime in Europe due to the uprooting of much of the population, leading to pressures on the government to find an alternative to confinement in overcrowded jails. The situation in Britain was so dire in fact, that derelict ships known as hulks were used as makeshift floating prisons. Transportation was a common punishment handed out for both major and petty crimes in Britain from the 17th century until well into the 19th century. At the time, it was seen as a more humane alternative to execution, which would most likely have been the sentence handed down to many of those who were transported, if transportation hadn't been introduced. Around 50,000 convicts were transported to the British colonies in North America in the 17th and 18th centuries. When the American War of Independence brought an end to that means of disposal, the British Government was forced to look elsewhere. After Captain Cook's famous voyage to the South Pacific in which he visited and claimed Australia in the name of the British Empire, he reported his findings to the government, and the British, for the first time, became aware of the existence of the continent of Australia.

On 18 August, 1786 the decision was made to send a colonisation party of convicts, military and civilian personnel to Botany Bay. There were 775 convicts on board six transport ships. They were accompanied by officials, members of the crew, marines, their families and children who together totalled 645. In all, eleven ships were sent in what became known as the First Fleet. Other than the convict transports, there were two naval escorts and three storeships. The fleet assembled in Portsmouth and set sail on 13 May, 1787. The fleet arrived at Botany Bay on 20 January, 1788. It soon became clear that it would not be suitable for the establishment of a colony, and the group relocated to Port Jackson. There they established the first permanent European colony on the Australian continent, New South Wales, on 26 January. The area has since developed into Sydney. This date is still celebrated as Australia Day.

Legacy

Australia's history as a penal colony is etched into the minds of most Australians even today. The lasting effects of the long dead practice are still felt in some areas of life. Many Australians can accurately trace their lineage back to colonial times, and in most cases, being related to one of the original convicts invokes a sense of national pride. It should be remembered that these convicts were, for the most part, not violent criminals, but rather petty thieves and the like. This attitude is, however, a relatively new phenomenon in Australia. Until after the Second World War most Australians felt a sense of shame about their convict status, and many did not even attempt to investigate their families' origins for fear that they could be descended from criminals. This is known as the Convict Stain attitude. This makes the research today all the more difficult.

From Wikipedia

The text has been checked against other related sources.

13 How could the industrial revolution lead to poverty and crime?

A The government encouraged people to move ☐
B People had to move to new locations ☐
C The increasing crime rate made them move ☐
D They had no alternative but to steal ☐

14 Why were the so-called hulks used as prisons?

_____

15 What was a probable penalty for many crimes over a period of 200 years?

_____

16 Why did Britain stop sending convicts to North America?

_____

17 What had happened that had made Australia a possible prison colony?

_____

18 How long did the voyage from England to Australia take?

A A little over eight months ☐
B About one year ☐
C More than nine months ☐
D Almost two years ☐

19 Where in Australia was the first colony founded?

A Portsmouth ☐
B Port Jackson ☐
C Queensland ☐
D Botany Bay ☐

20 Why do the Australians celebrate “Australia Day”?

_____

21 After reading the whole text, how could **the style of writing** be characterised?

A Provocative ☐
B Persuasive ☐
C Objective ☐
D Argumentative ☐

After reading text 1 - Searching for Roots and text 2 - Convictism in Australia

Both texts are about the beginnings of Australia as a penal colony. **Compare the two texts.**

22 The expression the *Convict Stain* is used in the last paragraph of text 2—*Convictism in Australia*. What is the corresponding expression in text 1—*Searching for Roots*?

_____

23 What used to be the attitude to having a convict ancestor **and** what do people think today?

_____

_____ *(1 pt)*