

DUST'S ECHOES

Brolga Song

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



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TEACHER'S GUIDE

Brief summary

A boy is alone, without his father or grandfather to teach him his proper place in life. He searches for the spirit of his fathers, and finally finds them in the brolgas.

The major theme of the story is the importance of culture, and of knowing one's place in Aboriginal society.

The original story

This story is about Victor, who has a quest to find his fathers through the animals.

Old Victor, a song man, is one of the elders and is greatly respected. Growing up he never knew or even saw his father, nor his grandfather. His grandfather died before he was born and his father was killed shortly after.

Victor journeys through the land longing to find his dreaming-fathers in the animals. As he journeys he sings the Brolga song.

As Victor sings, animals are attracted by the song and migrate towards him.

First Victor meets a goanna in the desert.

'Are you baring news of my fathers?'

The goanna shakes his head. He does not carry the spirit of his fathers.

Next it is a barramundi in the river. The fish looks sadly at him. Barramundi does not carry the spirit of his fathers.

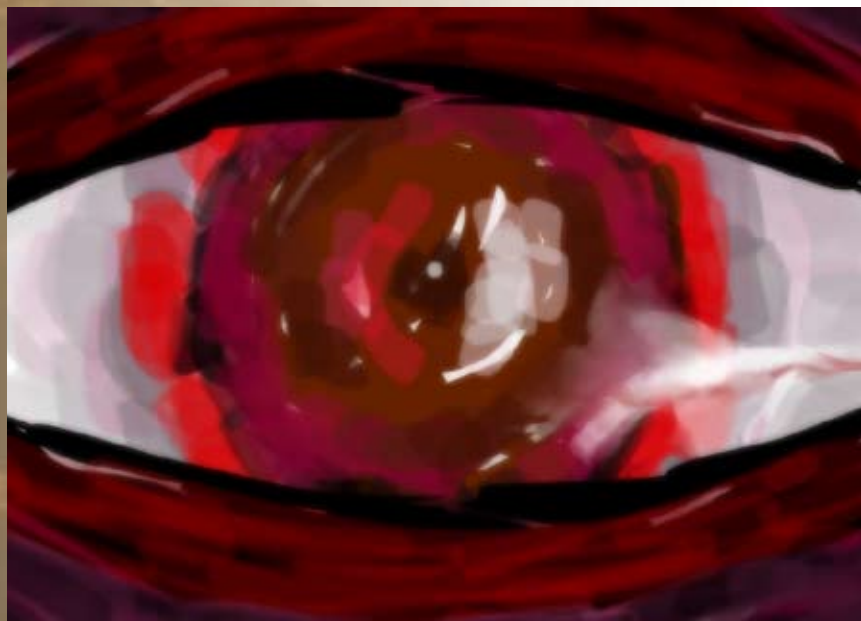
Victor continues to walk along the riverbank and the animals follow him on his quest.

Next is a kangaroo and an emu. They cry with Victor because they can see the sadness in his face and the loneliness he has experienced over so many years never knowing or talking to his fathers.

Victor falls to his knees. Will he ever have the opportunity to speak with his fathers?

He sings the brolga song once more with tears streaming down his face. The song is like a prayer ... 'Please fathers, hear my prayer. Reveal yourselves.'

Victor looks up into the sky with tears in his eyes and to his



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amazement he sees the image of his father and grandfather take form in the clouds. [Aboriginal belief is that the clouds are spirits who can take any form – even animal and human form.]

Then soaring gracefully from out of the clouds comes a small flock of Brolgas, and they begin landing all around him.

The brolga is Victor's dreaming-body and the birds hold the message and spirit of his fathers.

The brolgas dance with Victor in the presence of the emu, kangaroo and barramundi. They sing and laugh with tears of joy.

Victor is overjoyed. After all these years he has finally been reunited with his fathers through the brolgas and at last finds happiness.

What this story is about

In this story we explore the importance and meaning of a 'dreaming-body' to indigenous Australians.

The belief of the aboriginal people is that there was a time where supernatural beings roamed the face of the earth. Many were like the animals we see around us today, like the kangaroo, emu, goanna and the king brown snake, to name a few.

But back then, thousands of years ago, they were human-like. Some were even huge giant people. These beings travelled across the land with their songs, laws, ceremonies, stories and beliefs and eventually they changed into the native animals we see today.

This is why all the native animals are sacred to indigenous Australians, and this is why preservation of life and land is so

important. The kangaroo, the snake, the emu or the barramundi may be one of our brothers, fathers, sisters or mothers because the spirit of our ancestors lives and communicates through these creatures.

Everyone has a dreaming-body. These dreaming-bodies are the beings that lived many thousands of years ago. Everyone has knowledge of who their dreaming-body is. A dreaming-body can be described as having dreaming 'parents'.



Where this story comes from

Brolga Song is a Dhuwa story that is told in Rembarrnga language in Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia.

Suggested classroom activities

Introducing the story

1 Tell the students the original story. Ask them to create a rough storyboard setting out how they would tell the story themselves. Students then watch the film.

OR

Have the students reorganize the summary sentences on the Student Worksheet to tell a coherent story. Students then watch the film.

Understanding the story

2 Now have students answer the comprehension questions on the Student Worksheet (Questions 1-3), or from the online quiz.

Finding meanings, reflection and analysis

3 Students can now discuss the themes and issues set out in questions 4-9, including their analysis of how the filmmakers use the medium to tell the story.

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Follow-up activities

4 Teachers can select from the activities list in the *What is ... 'Dust Echoes'* study guide to suggest appropriate follow-up activities for this story.

The major theme of the story is the importance of culture, and of knowing one's place in Aboriginal society.



STUDENT WORKSHEET

Title: *Brolga Song*

Sorting out the story

1 Here is a summary of the story. But it is mixed up. Rearrange the sentences and number them 1-5 so that they tell the story in the correct sequence or order.



Order No. Summary

	A small boy has no father or grandfather.
	Finally he sees two brolgas, and realizes that his questions are answered.
	He starts to dance.
	He tries to find out who he is from various animals.
	The animals are not able to help him.

Understanding what this story is about

2 Here are some more questions about the story. To answer these, you will sometimes need to look carefully at how the animators have depicted the scene.

- How do we know the boy is sad and lost?
- How do we know his quest takes a long time?
- Why are the various animals not able to help him?
- How does he know that the brolgas are special when he sees them?
- How do we know at the end of the story that he has found his identity and a sense of belonging?
- What do you think is the main message of this story?

Understanding what this story means

3 Aboriginal stories may exist to:

- teach young people about natural events
- warn them about dangers
- explain relationships and identity
- teach them about the law and right behaviour

Which of these is *Brolga Song* trying to achieve? Give reasons to support your answer.

4 The stories are also about ideas. Write one sentence to explain what this story tells us about each of these:

- Love
- Belonging
- The strength of family and country
- Duties and responsibilities
- Journeys

STUDENT WORKSHEET CONTINUED

5 *Brolga Song* is a story about belonging. Have you ever had moments when you felt the joy of belonging? Find a song that expresses this idea, and prepare a list for the class.

What does the story help us understand about Aboriginal people's lives?

6 What does the film help us understand about any of these topics or aspects of traditional Aboriginal life and society?

- Food
- Work
- Family
- Society
- Law and rules
- Duties
- Spiritual/religious beliefs
- Education
- Technology (tools and weapons)
- Relationships with others
- Roles
- Emotions.

Write one sentence for any of these that you think is touched on in the story.

Understanding how the story has been told

7 What were your reactions or feelings during the story?

8 You had these reactions and feelings not only because of the story itself, but also the way the story was told and shown to you.

Here are some of the elements or parts of a film that can influence you. Divide them among your group, and have group members report back on them.

- The film's **graphic style** – What do the people look like? What does the background look like? What colours are used?
- The film's use of **music** – Is it traditional Aboriginal music or modern music? How does the music influence your reactions? Is it effective?
- What other **sounds** are in the film – Are natural sounds used? Is there any other sound, such as people's voices?
- The use of **viewpoint** – There is no camera filming the action in each story, but you can see the artists presenting the images as if there is. What are the 'camera' angles that are used? Does the 'camera' remain at ground level, or does it change angles? Does it move? What is the effect or impact of changing our viewpoint as we watch the film?
- **Narration** – Some of the stories have a narrator. What sort of voice is it? How does the narrator tell the story? Does he just speak, or are there other elements that he includes? Is it effective?

Applying the story to your life

9 *Dust Echoes* is one way that we are bringing everyone back to the same campfire – black and white. We are telling our stories to you in a way you can understand, to help you see, hear and know. And we are telling these stories to ourselves, so that we will always remember, with pride, who we are.

– Tom E. Lewis, Djilpin Arts Aboriginal Corporation.

The makers of the story want it to be a part of your life. Do you think the story has any relevance to your life today? Explain your ideas.



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