

DUST ECHOES

Morning Star

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



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TEACHER'S GUIDE

Brief summary

The story takes us through some of the rituals associated with death.

The main message is that there are stages that must be gone through in respecting the dead.



The original story

A man is walking in the bush towards camp when he hears people wailing and screaming because a man in their camp has died. This is the first death in their camp. Mardiyhin – the ceremony of birth, life and death – has begun.

The man climbs the black stringy bark tree and looks and watches the people crying. So the man starts singing Mularra. He calls out from the tree to the spirit world with the song.

In the tree he starts making the platform to put the dead on. The platform is carefully built in the tree from branches and limbs from the stringy bark.

The people help to lift up the body of the dead man and lay him on the platform. They cover him with branches and leaves. Then they leave him there and go to dance corroboree.

They smoke themselves up by making a circle on the ground, beside the circle they dig a fireplace. They cover the fire with Ironwood leaf, then smoke themselves by brushing the smoking branches all over their body and singing. This will release the spirit of the dead person.

The ceremony goes on for a couple of weeks whilst the body on the platform decays. During this time they also make a hollow log coffin, also out of stringy bark tree, called a lorrkon. They paint it up too.

The man calls out to begin a new ceremony which signifies the time to collect the bones. So the family travel half way to the tree, then the Dhuwa men go further with the coffin to the tree where the body was laid on the platform.

Again the man calls out to the spirit world. The crows (Dhuwa moiety) and kites (Yirritja moiety) fly out of the tree where they were cleaning the bones of flesh. They dance the crow dance as they approach the tree and the crows fly away.

They take the bones down and put them into the log coffin. Then they carry the coffin and dance all the way up to the hill. They put the coffin inside the cave ... the final resting place.

Then the men come back to the camp and paint themselves all up with red ochre and the man calls out again and everyone runs into the water, once, twice, three times. Everyone comes out and the water is red. As they are running in and out of the water the morning star rises in the background. The spirit of the dead is released to the universe.

The morning star rises to signify the cycle of life – Mardiyhin – and the cry of a baby just born is heard in the bush.

What this story means

This story depicts the first death in the Dreamtime. It is the beginning of Mardiyhin – the life/death cycle – and shows part of a traditional funeral ceremony. The ceremonial information presented includes preparation of the deceased, use of the traditional coffin (the lorrkon), body painting, the corroborees which take place, and various other ceremonial activities.

The rising morning star signifies the cycle of life and the connection between people, animals, plants and the Universe.

Where this story comes from

This story is told in Rembarrnga language in parts of Arnhem Land in Australia's Northern Territory. The Story of the Morning Star is a very ancient one. The storyteller, Victor Hood, says it comes 'from the dust', which means it comes from the Dreamtime. Victor's father taught him this story and many others.

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.



STUDENT WORKSHEET



Title: *Morning Star*

Sorting out the story

1 Here is a summary of the story. But it is mixed up. Rearrange the sentences and number them 1-7 so that they tell the story in the correct sequence or order.

Order No. **Summary**

	A man is walking in the bush towards a camp when he hears people wailing and screaming.
	He builds a platform in a tree.
	The morning star rises, and we hear the cry of a baby.
	The people build a fire inside a marked out place, and smoke themselves.
	The people make a coffin out of a hollow log.
	The people place the body on the platform in the tree.
	They collect the bones in the hollow log, and carry the bones to a cave.

Understanding what this story is about

2 Why does the story end with a morning star?

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 *Morning Star* 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:

- Death
- Mourning

STUDENT WORKSHEET CONTINUED

5 *Morning Star* tells us about the rituals (the ceremonies, appropriate behaviours and actions) associated with death. Describe some rituals in your life, and explain why it is a comfort to have such set actions for certain occasions.

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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