



What is ...

DUSTS ECHOES

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



www.metromagazine.com.au



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What is the Dust Echoes series?

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



Dust Echoes is a children's multi-platform series that presents twelve ancient Dreamtime stories, each story uniquely interpreted by contemporary animators, musicians, artists, writers and actors.

This collection of powerful and enchanting animations, underscored with original music, remains authentically Indigenous while being infused with youthful creativity and spirit.

It features a range of upper-primary and lower-secondary educational materials for teachers and students, including classroom activities that explore themes such as the diverse landscape of the Northern Territory, the Aboriginal moiety and kinship systems, Indigenous spiritual beliefs, power and responsibility in the community, safety and survival in the bush, and Indigenous ceremonies and traditional art and craft techniques.

The twelve stories and their major themes

The twelve stories and their major themes and ideas are:

- *Wagalak Sisters* – Creation and power
- *The Be* – Relationships and connections
- *Namorrodor* – Dangers in the bush
- *Morning Star* – Origins of natural phenomena, death and proper ceremonies
- *Mermaid Story* – Danger in the bush, community
- *Whirlpool* – Origins of natural phenomena, and danger
- *Moon Man* – Origins of natural phenomena, and proper behaviour
- *Brolga Song* – Relationships and connections with the natural world
- *Spear* – Envy, law, punishment and reconciliation
- *The Bat and the Butterfly* – Origins of natural phenomena, and proper behaviour
- *The Mimis* – Relationships
- *The Curse* – Power and proper behaviour, good and evil



Each is about five minutes long, and is accompanied by a study guide with suggested classroom activities and detailed questions. Students can explore information and themes in each story through an online quiz, or using worksheets that are supplied for classroom use.

Curriculum applicability

Dust Echoes suits the Society and Environment (or equivalent) curriculum area for upper primary and lower secondary levels in all states and territories, but can also be integrated with English, Art, Drama and Music activities.

The stories can help students achieve these learning outcomes:

- Develop knowledge about a number of Aboriginal Dreamtime stories from the Arnhem Land area
- Interpret the symbolism of these stories
- Analyse the meanings and messages in the stories
- Understand more about the nature of traditional Aboriginal life that is reflected in the stories
- Appreciate aspects of the Aboriginal Dreamtime and culture
- Reflect on the relevance of the meanings and messages of these stories to their own lives today
- Analyse how a variety of animation film techniques are used to create and realize the stories

- Develop a variety of educational skills through the classroom activities associated with the stories.

Before viewing the stories

Introducing the concept of stories

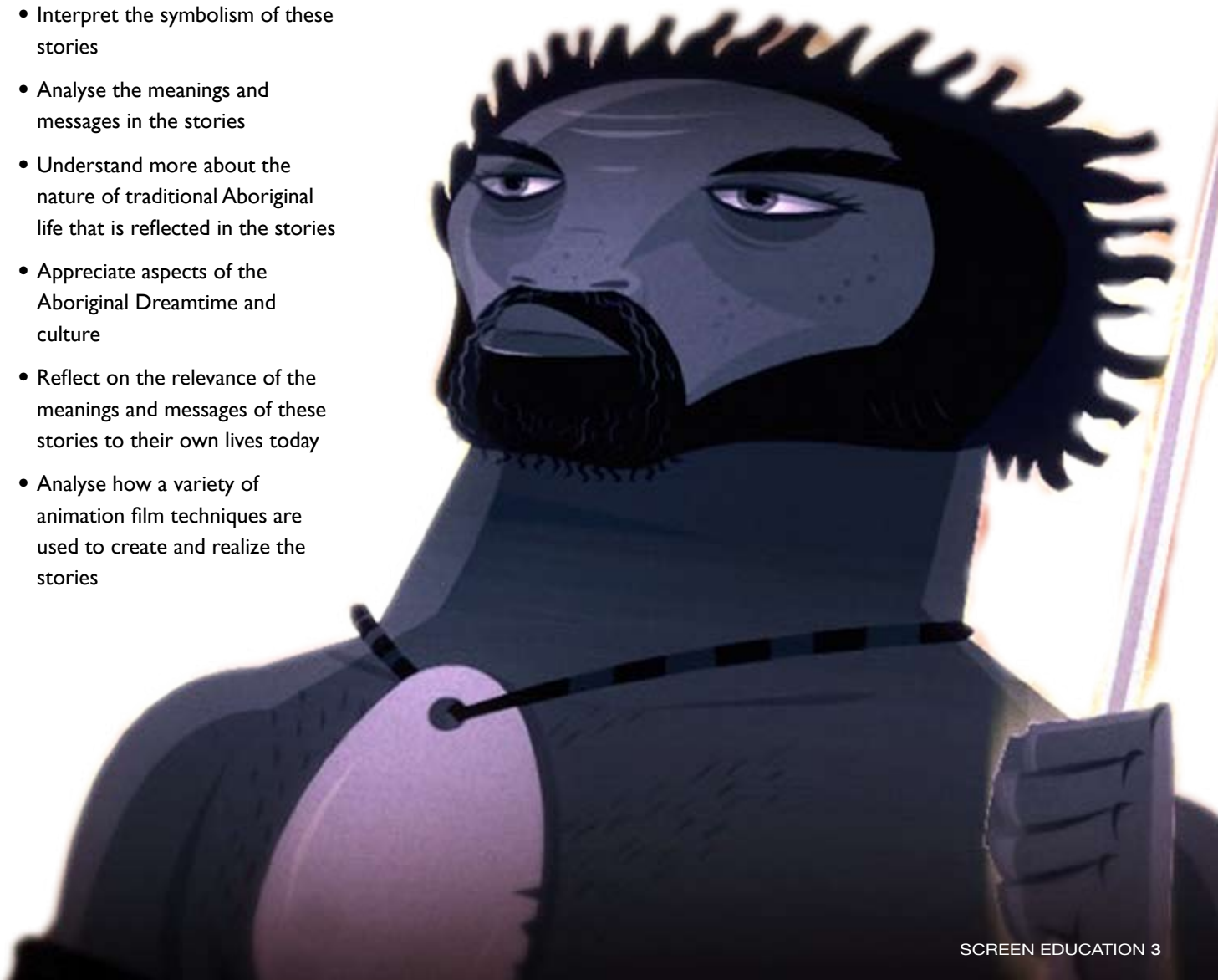
Dust Echoes is about stories. Teachers can introduce students to the concept of stories through reference to their own lives in this way:

- 1 Have students brainstorm to list stories they know. As they are given, the teacher can list them in categories: fairy tales, Bible or Koran stories, stories from television or books or films, personal family stories, other types. The main point to establish

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is: all students know some stories; they are part of their lives.

- 2 Who tells stories? Ask students to identify different ways they receive these stories. They may be by the written word, the spoken or sung word, by pictures. Ask students to identify two of each that they know about.
- 3 Now ask what the message or meaning or purpose of some of these stories is. For example, students might decide that a



story is to teach them some proper way of behaving; or just to entertain; or to warn or scare children so they do not do dangerous things; or to explain the origins of something. Students will be able to apply these types of categories later to the *Dust Echoes* stories.

Traditional Aboriginal life and culture

The *Dust Echoes* stories also

- Technology (tools and weapons)
- Relationships with others
- Roles
- Emotions.

This will reveal students' existing knowledge and ideas, or their image of traditional Aboriginal life. As students look at the stories they will be able to refer back to their list and see if any of their ideas and knowledge change.

Teachers can choose which approach (online or from printed worksheets) is more appropriate for their own students.

Both approaches stress comprehension and understanding. Further activities and discussion topics are suggested on the Teacher's Guide for each story.

After viewing the stories

The worksheets and activities provided are designed to make sure students understand the stories (comprehension), and identify their messages and meanings (reflection and understanding). Teachers may want students to respond in more creative ways to one or more of the stories.

Here is a possible list of activities that are appropriate for all stories. Teachers can consider which of these they want students to do, or can suggest other activities that express the students' knowledge and understandings developed through the *Dust Echoes* stories in an alternative form.

- Prepare a storyboard for their own version of a story.
- Do a drawing or painting of a scene from the film.
- Make up a new story or develop further some aspect of an existing one.
- Write and perform a song or a piece of music to perform with part of a story.
- Create some sound effects for part of a story.
- Create a dance about one of the characters in a story.
- Mime a sequence from a fairy story, and have other students



provide glimpses of traditional Aboriginal life and culture through the animation format, and the emphasis on including children's stories and mythology means that historical accuracy is not necessarily a concern of the series.

4 Have students brainstorm their knowledge and ideas about various aspects of Aboriginal life, such as:

- Food
- Work
- Family
- Society
- Law and rules
- Duties
- Spiritual/religious beliefs
- Education

Viewing the stories

Classroom activities

Each story has a study guide associated with it. The study guides include:

- A Teacher's Guide that includes the original story and comments about its meanings
- A Student Worksheet that includes questions to help students understand the story, and explore its meanings and messages.
- An online quiz that provides an alternative way for students to make sure they understand the story.

guess what the story is.

- Research and present an Aboriginal story from another part of Australia.
- Invite and host a visit by a local Indigenous story teller or musician.
- Create an artwork or a montage of geographical images from Arnhem land.
- Create a map to accompany one of the stories.

Aboriginal life and culture

Cultural context

The two dominating cultural features of the stories in *Dust Echoes* are the Dreamtime, and society.

The Dreamtime refers to the time before time, or the time of creation. A person's Dreaming is his or her sets of beliefs or spirituality or personal connection with the Dreamtime stories.

In the Dreamtime, ancestor spirits came to earth and created the land, animals and people.

These spirits also established relationships between individuals and groups, human and animal.

Once this was done the spirits changed into animals, celestial bodies, geographic features or places.

For more information see <http://www.dreamtime.net.au>

The **social organization** of Arnhem Land society is governed by clan and kinship.

A clan is a number of family groups who share an area of land over which they have ownership.

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Every person, and every thing (animal, plant, song, dance, ceremony, natural feature), is one of two moieties (or skin groups) – it is Dhuwa or Yirritja. These are opposites, yet they exist in harmony. This defines how people relate to each other, and there are strict rules about obligations and prohibitions. The key rule is that marriage has to be within the opposite skin group. In Arnhem Land, moiety is inherited from the father's line.

The **Geographical context** of the stories is Arnhem Land.

Arnhem Land is an area of about 97,000 sq km in the north-eastern corner of the Northern Territory. The region was named by Matthew Flinders after the Dutch ship Arnhem which explored the coast in 1623.

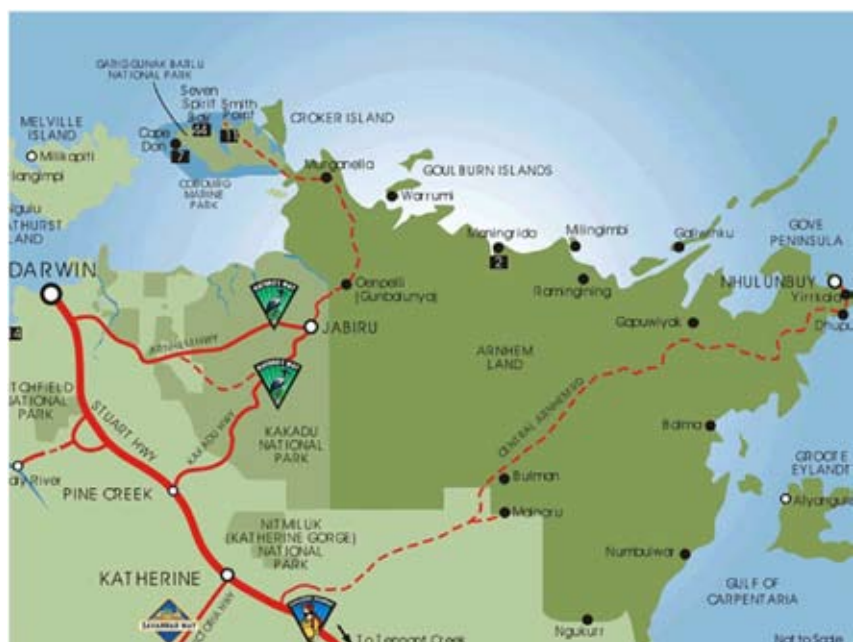
The area extends from Port Roper on the Gulf of Carpentaria around the coast to the East Alligator River where it adjoins Kakadu National Park, and south to Katherine.

Beswick, where the stories in *Dust Echoes* were recorded, is not marked on this map, but is near the end of the Central Arnhem Road, where it meets the Stuart Highway.

The major centres are Jabiru, Maningrida and Nhulunbuy.

Much of the area was declared an Aboriginal Reserve in 1931.

The climate of Arnhem Land is tropical monsoonal, with a wet and dry season. Temperatures do not fluctuate widely throughout the year, though it can range from overnight lows of 15°C in the



<http://www.ealta.org/maps.html>

dry season (April to September) to daily highs of 33°C in the wet season (October to March).

The region has many diverse landscapes. In places the landscape consists of gently rolling hills covered with high grasses, a few trees and several rocky outcrops; in others, rocky plateaus with deep gorges, trickling creeks and pockets of rainforest. Closer to the coast the landscape during the wet season consists of wide flooded coastal plains dominated by melaleuca forests, or swampy tidal mangrove forests.

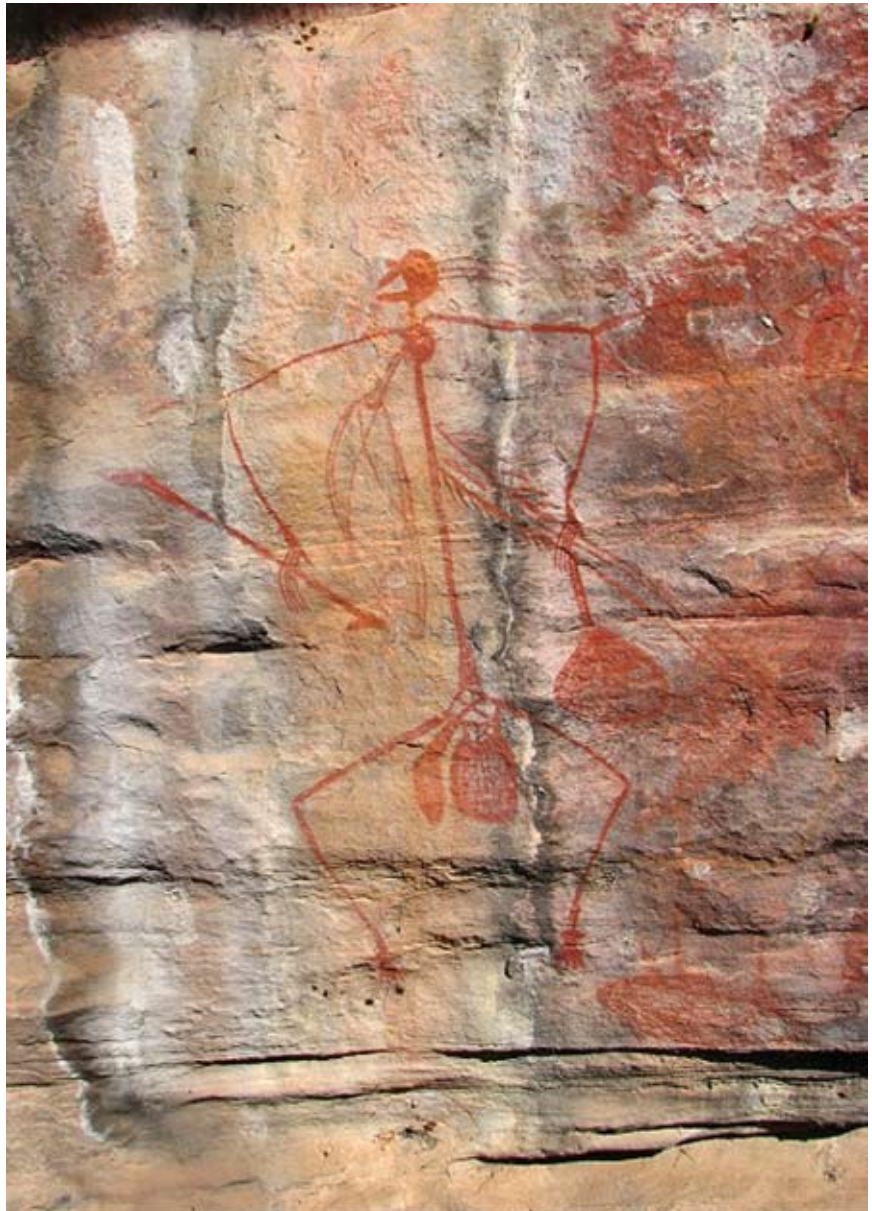
For a more detailed description of the geography of Arnhem Land go to the Savanna Explorer website at <http://www.savanna.org.au/all/geology.html>

Most students will only be familiar with the dot painting form of Aboriginal art – the style used in the *Dust Echoes* introduction. However, there are many different Aboriginal art styles. The dot painting style is actually a Central Desert art style, and is not indigenous to the Arnhem Land areas. In **Arnhem Land traditional art styles** have changed over time. The two best-known styles are the dynamic figure or mimi style, and the x-ray style.

To see more detail about Arnhem Land art styles over time go to <http://www.environment.gov.au/parks/kakadu/artculture/art/>

In the *Dust Echoes* animations several of the stories are based on versions of the mimi style, so this should be introduced to students.

Here is an example of a Mimi figure at Ubirr site, Kakadu.



<http://people.cryst.bbk.ac.uk/~ubcg60a/oz/art.html>

The oldest cave paintings in Western Arnhem Land are of Mimi figures running and hunting, often wearing head dresses and carrying several weapons and utensils.

Paintings of Mimis in the traditional Mimi art style depict them as thin spirit creatures in various positions which display their extreme agility and flexibility. The oldest cave paintings in Western Arnhem Land are of Mimi figures running and hunting, often wearing head dresses and carrying several weapons and utensils.

The Mimis are thought to be the original beings who occupied the land before humans and continue to live in rocks, caves, trees and water although they are rarely seen. According to Kunwinjku people, mimis taught them everything they needed to know to survive; how to hunt, gather and prepare food, sing, dance and perform ceremonies.

http://www.injalak.com/the_paintings.html

But even within Arnhem Land there are different modern styles. Central Arnhem Land art centres on flora and fauna of inland freshwater country and fish species of the coast; North-east Arnhem Land art typically uses cross-hatching laid in grid patterns to illustrate creation stories; Western Arnhem Land includes x-ray and mimi styles.

For more information and illustrations of the different styles throughout Australia go to <http://www.aboriginaltourism.com.au/artroom.asp?data=060B07074D4C4F4975474319655E5F5F4845>

The **music** in *Dust Echoes* is a mixture of the traditional – using didgeridoo, clapsticks and voice. All the stories, however, also include very modern instruments, rhythms and harmonies. It is a fascinating and effective mixing of the old and the modern, and students are asked to listen to and discuss this feature of each story.

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