

DUSTS ECHOES

The Mimis

A **STUDYGUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



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TEACHER'S GUIDE

Brief summary

A young man believes he is a disappointment to his father. He is taken by the friendly creatures, the mimis, who teach him to be happy and joyful. His father finds him, and there is a joyful realization that his father loves him.

The main theme of the story is about relationships and identity.



The original story

There is a boy sitting at the camp while everybody else goes hunting. He is sitting and thinking, 'I've gotta get out and do some hunting! I've gotta try it!'. But then he remembers the fact that he is a bad hunter – hopeless – he just doesn't possess the skills or talent for hunting. He can hardly throw a spear and he definitely can't track an animal, even if his life counted on it!

In the late afternoon, the cool-time, everyone comes back with heaps of fish and kangaroo, and the boy looks at them and feels shamed and embarrassed because he doesn't have the same hunting abilities.

So, inspired, the boy gets up and leaves the camp to go hunting. He takes with him a sharpened stick because he wants to catch an echidna.

He walks and walks and looks and searches all the way up to the hills, but can't find a single echidna!

But as the sun sets, a magical thing happens. The hills begin to move and change shape. All around him the hills begin to part as the shadows stretch and slide.

This is the time of day when the mimis come out of the underworld, from out of the earth and hills to prepare the land for the next day.

They are the ones who keep the country tidy. They groom the bushes, feed the fish and fix broken branches. They look after the land!

The mimis are very tall and thin. They are human-like stick people. The mimis are spirit creatures, who leave no tracks! They are also fun, playful, and magical.

The boy looks on in amazement as

the small group of mimis tend to the land.

At first the boy is scared of the mimi spirits. The mimis entice and enchant him with their magic and carry him into their home in the hill. Then the hills close over and return to their original position and shape.

The mimis take the boy into their underworld, where there is dancing, eating, fun and frivolity. They play and tease. They are good spirits, happy spirits!

The boy forgets about his world. The mimis give him wives and make him part of their family! They keep him in their underworld and the memory of his own family and his own camp fades.

In the meantime, his father is waiting all night.

‘Where is my son?’ he thinks. ‘I’ve been waiting all night. Where could he be?’

So the boy’s father walks out of the camp at the crack of dawn and follows his son’s tracks. He is skilled at the art of tracking. Even if someone jumped on a rock, he could tell because of the marks left under the stone!

The old man follows his son’s footsteps until, for some magical reason, there are no more tracks! If some wild animal ate him there would at least be some sign of a struggle. But there is nothing – not a trace!

The boy’s father is confused and perplexed by the sudden disappearance of his son. So he sits on the ground, and begins to chant, and eventually goes into a trance. With his magic he can hear the mimis dancing and singing and

making merry. So, he continues to sing and chant. He wants to reach this underworld.

The old man’s hair grows and grows. It seeps into the ground and creeps deep into the earth in search of his son. His chanting follows his hair and the son begins to hear the chanting of his father as his hair grows closer and closer!

‘What’s that sound?’ he thinks. ‘Do I know that sound?’

The old man’s hair grows until it coils itself right around the boy, and the father pulls up his son out of the earth, as if he had just caught a large fish out of the river!

The boy snaps back into reality, and his father takes him back to the camp. The boy then realizes that the camp needs all kinds of people with all kinds of skill and he is no longer envious of his fellow hunters.

What this story means

In Bongalin Bongalin there is a song and dance for the mimi spirits. In this story it takes the old man’s songs to bring his son back from the mimi’s underworld.

The message of this story is that acceptance shouldn’t be experienced by trying to be something or someone we aren’t. Accepting our weaknesses may help us discover our strengths, but pursuing our weaker skills may lead to being lost forever.

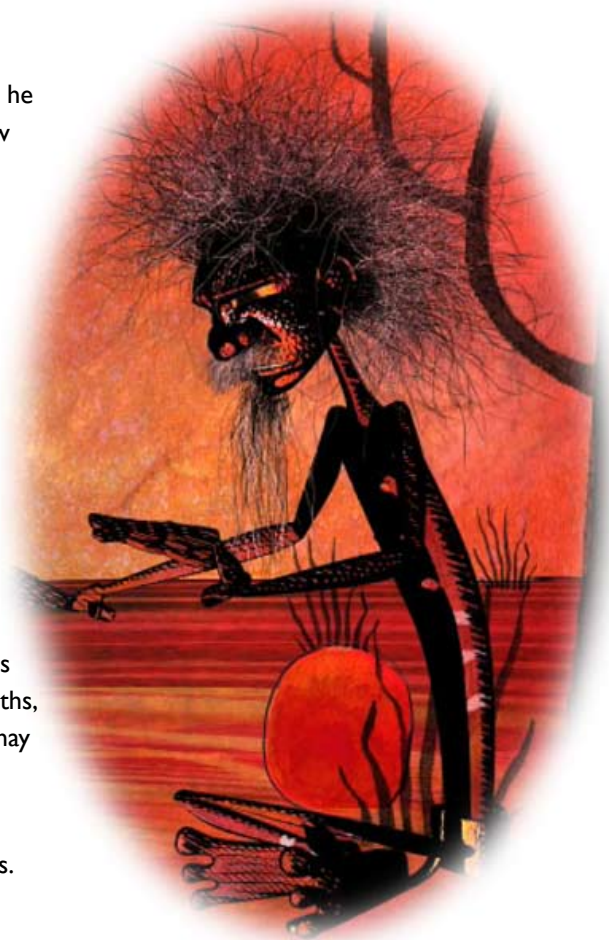
In this story the father loves his son regardless of his weaknesses. When the boy leaves, the camp

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loses some of its much needed diversity.

Where this story comes from

The story is owned by the Dhuwa moiety at Wugularr (Beswick) Community. This is an old story from Tom’s uncle George Weisen, brother of old Jimmie Weisen. It was told when they used to go hunting in the spring country at lunchtime, making teas and cooking their catch for the morning. Old George used to tell this story around the campfire.



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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.

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 main theme of the story is about relationships and identity.



STUDENT WORKSHEET



Title: *The Mimis*

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

	He is angry and disappointed by this, and runs away.
	His father misses him and searches for him.
	A young man tries to be a great hunter like his father, but he fails.
	The boy and his father finally find each other.
	He is taken by the mimi spirits, who teach him to dance and be happy.

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.

- Why does the boy want to be a great hunter?
- Why is each person important for the group?
- What type of creatures are the mimis?
- What do the mimis teach him?
- Why is he able to be so happy with them?
- When his father finds him, what does the boy realize?
- Why is this important to him?
- Is the boy different as a result of his experience?

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 *The Mimis* 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
- Identity

STUDENT WORKSHEET CONTINUED

5 *The Mimis* is about joy. Describe a moment when you felt joy. Find some music to back that story – such as is done with the joyful music in *The Mimis*. You might listen to a hymn like Ode To Joy as a starting point.

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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