

A STUDYGUIDE BY ROBERT LEWIS



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TEACHER'S GUIDE

Brief summary

Whirlpool shows the pursuit of one group of Aboriginal people by their enemy neighbours. The first group is trapped, but is saved by the serpent they summon from the river. It creates a whirlpool that destroys the enemy group.

The main theme of the story is the need for silence and caution when in a dangerous place where you are not welcome.



The original story

There is a side of Limmen Byte River, where fresh-water people will not fish, swim, hunt or even make a sound. You are not to spit, scratch your head, eat, or talk if you happen to journey on that side of the river.

One day, long ago, the salt-water people pursued the fresh-water people in canoes. They pursued them until they eventually reached this sacred and superstitious region of the Limmen Byte.

Now this river is a place of caution, and fresh-water people take it very seriously. This time as always they made no noise and paddled light. They didn't spit, scratch their hair, talk or make a sound.

Their respect and fear prevented them from making a sound despite the pursuit of the salt-water people.

At the same time, the saltwater people had no respect or knowledge of the dangers at Limmen Byte River. They made all kinds of noise, confident that they would defeat the fresh-water people and steal their women away.

When the fresh-water people made it safely to the other side of the Limmen Byte River, a songman began to sing a song, thanking the river for a safe deliverance and asking for help against their pursuers.

All of a sudden, the salt-water people got their canoes caught in a sand bank in the middle of the river. Slowly they realized that what they thought was a sand bank was actually a giant king brown snake!

The salt-water people jumped out of their canoes in fear and tried to swim to the riverbank but the rainbow serpent circled them creating a huge whirlpool. They were all swallowed up and drowned in the raging whirlpool.

The serpent at Limmen Byte River heard their song and saved the fresh-water people.

This is why you must never spit, scratch your hair, eat, or even talk if you happen to journey on that side of the Limmen Byte River.

What this story means

This is a cautionary tale that is passed on from generation to generation.

The salt-water people from the Gulf of Capenteria fought often with the fresh-water people of Roper River which leads inland (and includes the people of Beswick).

The Roper River was the means by which the local people used to travel. Dug out canoes were the means of transport.

Salt-water and fresh-water peoples often fought along the Roper River. A lot of fighting was over women who had been stolen from their respective clans. This legend warns the fresh-water people to take care of themselves when they are in close quarters with neighbouring clans.

Where this story comes from

Whirlpool Song is a Yirritja story that is told in Mara language in Central Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, Australia.



Suggested classroom activities

Introducing the story

I 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 I-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 the need for silence and caution when in a dangerous place where you are not welcome.



STUDENT WORKSHEET

Title: Whirlpool

Sorting out the story

I Here is a summary of the story. But it is mixed up. Rearrange the sentences and number them I-8 so that they tell the story in the correct sequence or order.

Order No. Summary

	A group of Aborigines is in a canoe.
	But the attackers are thrown out of their canoes by a monster.
<u></u>	During the night the single group is attacked by the others.
	The monster creates a whirlpool that destroys the attackers and their canoes.
	The monster looks at the stranded group, but does not hurt them.
	The single group lands and sets up camp.
	The single group lands on an island and cannot escape.
	They are being pursued by men in two other canoes.

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 the men in the first canoe behave differently from those in the second two canoes?
 - Are we on the side of the people in the first canoe, or the two following canoes?
 - Do the men in the two canoes want to hurt the ones in the first canoe?
 - How do we know the men are trapped and cannot escape?
 - Is the monster a good or bad creature?
 - Why does the monster appear?
 - Do the trapped men control the creature?
 - Why does it leave them alone?

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 Whirlpool trying to achieve? Give reasons to support your answer.



STUDENT WORKSHEET CONTINUED

- 4 The stories are also about ideas. Write one sentence to explain what this story tells about each of these:
 - Power
 - Trespassing
 - Rivalry or being enemies.
- 5 One of the main emotions in this story is fear. Write about a time you were scared. How did you react?

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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