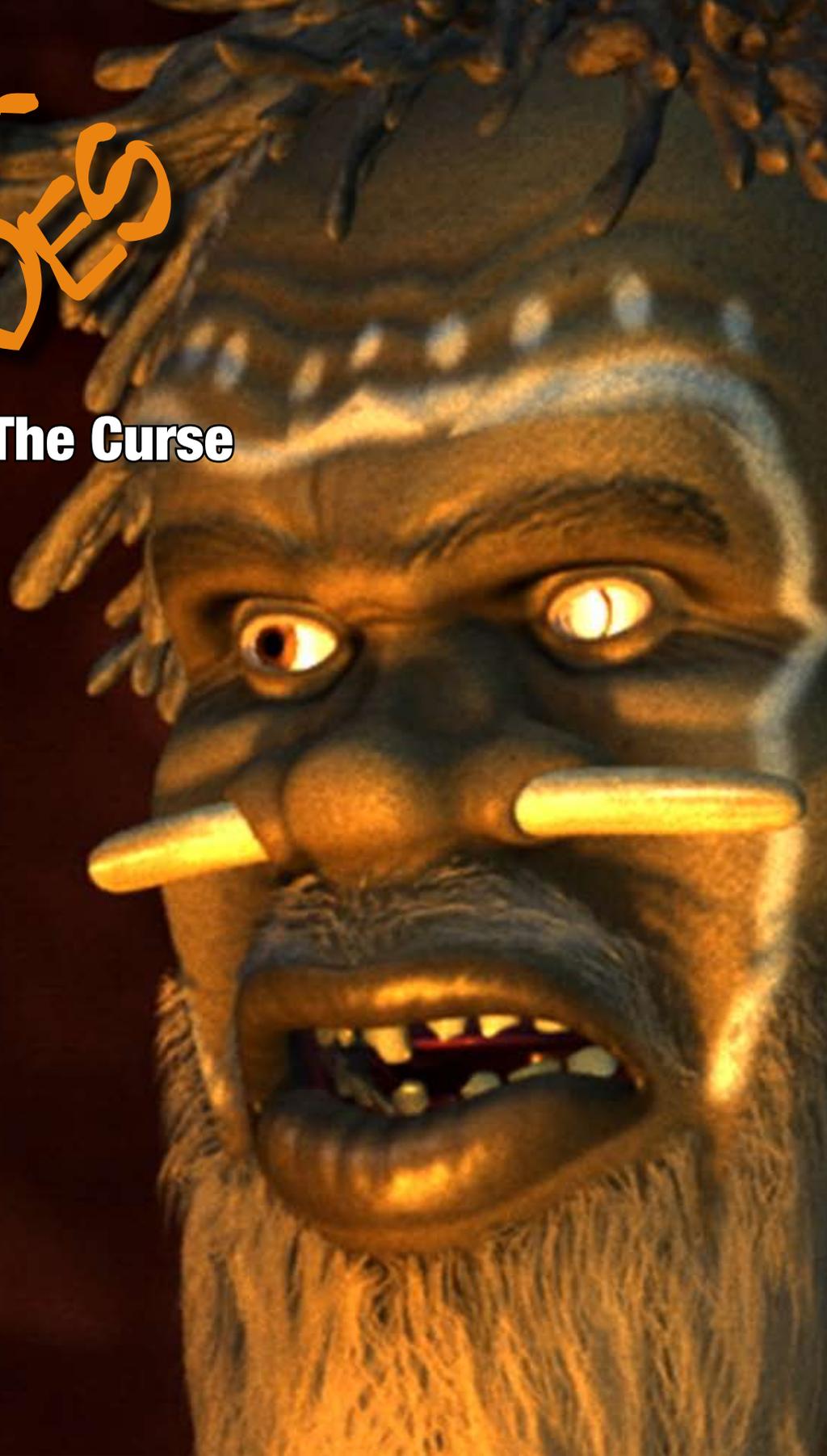


# DUST'S ECHOES

## The Curse



A **STUDYGUIDE** BY ROBERT LEWIS



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# TEACHER'S GUIDE

## Brief summary

*We see a story  
of good magic  
fighting bad  
magic, and  
triumphing.*

The main message is about being aware of and protecting yourself against evil and harm.



## The original story

It is evening time and a family is camping by the banks of the Matjalambu waterfall. It's a safe place: plenty of water and fresh barramundi. It's a sandy place, encircled by the tall cliffs of the waterfall.

The old man is sick. He is lying close to the small campfire, lit by his wife. He has been sung.

Another man, an evil witchdoctor is singing up there in the caves. He is singing and chanting curses, throwing different coloured ochres in the fire, performing dark magic. The witchdoctor man wants revenge and this is why the old man is sick and feverish in the camp. He sings to summon the star of Namorrodor in the night sky.

Suddenly, there is a bright explosion as Namorrodor materializes. It looks like a shooting star has landed and exploded near the camp.

The woman is making medicines to rid her husband of this evil that has befallen him.

The old woman feels a strong wind blowing through the camp. She knows that an evil force is very close to the camp.

The beast, Namorrodor, senses that he cannot enter into the camp because the woman has prepared medicines to protect the camp.

So the spirit of Namorrodor enters the heart of her baby. The little baby is now Namorrodor.

The witchdoctor man is still controlling Namorrodor with his dark magic and ochres.

The baby begins to move towards the sick old man. The old woman sees this horror and seeks to find



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a way to heal the child without harming him.

She takes a large mouthful of water from her dilly bag and sprays it on her baby. It's like Holy water. The spirit of Namorrodor is repelled by the water.

Namorrodor's spirit leaves the baby and flies into the trees and into the cave where the witchdoctor is.

The medicine woman feels uneasy because the old man is still dying, and the child is now screaming.

She is angry. She is furious. She must protect her family and fix this evil once and for all. She moves over to the water's edge, with dilly bag in hand and begins to dance and chant until she transforms into a crow!

The crow takes off into the night sky in search of the evil that has taken hold of her family. She sees a burning fire inside a distant cave and flies toward it. 'Ah, there it is', she thinks. The crow then perches inside the entrance of the cave.

The witchdoctor doesn't realize that this is no ordinary crow. He throws things at it to get rid of it, but the crow taunts the witchdoctor man.

The crow stares at the witchdoctor and unsettles him. He throws a stone at the crow, who dodges it easily. As soon as the witchdoctor realizes who the crow is, the crow materializes into the medicine woman!

The witchdoctor is horrified because he knows the power of the medicine woman and her dilly bag. He tries to kill her by throwing a spear at her but she catches it. Traditionally, this is the ultimate insult.

She takes her dilly bag and pours the water on the fire. The dust, smoke, curses and ochres used to poison her husband fly into the witchdoctor's open mouth and destroy him. The witchdoctor man turns to dust and crumbles.

The medicine woman flies back to the waterfall campsite to be with her husband who is now healthy and holding the baby.

They are safe and happy again.

## **What this story means**

This story is told mostly to children to keep them close to the camp at night. Namorrodor is a night creature, who should be feared. It also tells of the power of medicine and the knowledge of the elders in the camp.

## **Where this story comes from**

*The Curse* is a Yirritja story that is told in Dalabon 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 on-line 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 introduction to this study guide to suggest appropriate follow-up activities for this story.

*The main message is about being aware of and protecting yourself against evil and harm.*



# STUDENT WORKSHEET

**Title** *The Curse*

## Sorting out the story

1 Here is a summary of the story. But it is mixed up. Rearrange the sentences and number them 1-8 so that they tell the story in the correct sequence or order.

### Order No.      Summary

	A mother's son is very ill.
	His evil enters the baby, but the mother recognizes it, and is able to cast it out.
	However, he can enter through the baby.
	She enters his camp, and destroys his power.
	She returns to camp and finds her son well, and holding the baby who has also been restored to normality.
	The illness has been caused by a witch-doctor casting a spell.
	The mother now decides to attack the witch-doctor.
	The witch-doctor wants to destroy the woman as well, but her power is too great for him to enter the camp.

## 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 witchdoctor is evil?
- We do not know why the witchdoctor has cursed the boy. Does this matter?
- Power of the dilly bag?

## 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 Curse* 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:

- Good and evil
- How children should behave at night

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## STUDENT WORKSHEET CONTINUED

5 *The Curse* is a dark and violent story. Stories about good and evil are common in children's stories. Find one that you heard as a child and compare its messages with those of *The Curse*.

### 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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editor@atom.org.au

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