

Teacher Notes

Dingo's Tree

written and illustrated by Gladys Milroy and Jill Milroy

Magabala Books

SYNOPSIS

When Dingo draws a beautiful rain tree, little does he realise the lasting legacy he has created. *Dingo's Tree* provides shade for the animals, a home for the birds and precious water for a land that has been adversely effected by drought and mining.

The rain tree transcends to the heavens, leaving *little tree* in its place. This tree contains one precious raindrop that is entrusted to the care of Dingo. Dingo must be wise and patient, being careful to use it only when he absolutely must.

Dingo's Tree is told in four illustrated parts, each focussing on the importance of country, community and custodianship.

THEMES

Country

- To care for country, personal gain must be abandoned
- Plants, animals and humans work in tandem to preserve Mother Earth

Custodianship

- We all have a responsibility to look after the world in which we live
- Decisions need to be made for the enduring good of the earth as well as country

Friendship

- Wombat is a loyal and supportive friend to Dingo
- Dingo shares water with animals who wouldn't share their shade with him; they regret their selfishness in the light of Dingo's generosity
- Moon is a good friend to Dingo

Leadership

- Dingo is a natural leader — he is entrusted with the responsibility of deciding when is the best time to use the last raindrop
- Effective leadership means putting one's own needs aside

Humans and the Environment

- Mining has led to the degradation of the environment, impacting the water cycle and the natural flow of rivers
- The authors make a comment about the detrimental effects humans have had on the land

WRITING STYLE

Written in third person, past tense, *Dingo's Tree* is a timeless fable that allows readers of all ages to appreciate the virtues of friendship, leadership and a sense of community. The narrative comments on the negative impact of human endeavours such as mining on the natural landscape, in particular the degradation of mountains and rivers.

The audience will easily identify with characters such as Dingo, Wombat and Crow. The cycle of life and the impact of mining will also resonate with readers.

STUDY QUESTIONS

- Discuss the dedication at the front of *Dingo's Tree* that indicates the importance of country and stories.
- Magpie and Emu both turn Dingo away when he tries to share the shade of their trees. The text tells us that Dingo turns away 'dejectedly'. What does this word mean? What other words would describe how Dingo was feeling? Discuss the authors' choice of vocabulary and the role that words play in sentences.
- Draw your own rain tree using *Dingo's Tree* as inspiration.
- Dingo often thinks things but doesn't say them aloud. Why do you think he keeps certain thoughts to himself rather than saying what he thinks?
- Moon is a special friend to Dingo. Discuss the role that friends like Moon play in *Dingo's Tree*. Do you have friends in your life like moon? Discuss.
- Dingo is a very sharing and considerate character. Find examples of his thoughtfulness and generosity throughout the text.
- When the cyclone comes, Dingo's tree disappears. Why does this happen? What effect does this have on Dingo?
- Why does Magpie decide to share his shade with Dingo?
- Dingo has to sacrifice certain things for the benefit of others. Create a table of these sacrifices and the reasons for these sacrifices as follows:

Dingo sacrifices...	because...
his tree	when it goes to the heavens, it can do greater good
using the raindrop to save the old crow	even more can be saved if he waits for the right time

- The illustrations emphasise the integral role of nature in *Dingo's Tree*. Brainstorm these elements of nature visible throughout the text.
- Choose one or more of the textless page openings. Write the text for these page/s in keeping with the rest of the narration.
- Discuss the authors' choice to break the story into smaller segments. Why might they have done this? Graph each of the segments of the story, showing the part they play in the whole text.
- What role does Wombat play in *Dingo's Tree*? Why is he a good friend to Dingo?
- Water is an important theme in *Dingo's Tree*. In small groups, brainstorm examples of the importance of water throughout the text. Ideas could include:
 - Dingo sharing his water with the other animals
 - The rain tree saving the community from potential disaster by agreeing to walk to find water
 - Dingo having to wait and use the last rain drop at precisely the right time
 - Mining having an impact on river systems
- Examine the illustration of the mountains on p 21. What is happening in this illustration? Discuss how this illustration contributes to the text.
- Wombat and Dingo see a scene in the raindrop on p 33. What does this scene reveal about the message in *Dingo's Tree*?
- Friendship and leadership both play an integral role in *Dingo's Tree*. Discuss the role of these themes in the book. Discussion points may include:
 - Together, the community helps the tree to become a 'walking tree' in order to search for water
 - When the Walking Tree is disheartened by the state of the country, the animals help him to find water.
 - Ultimately, it is Dingo's decision to use the last raindrop to free Walking Tree from the muddy ravine. This in turn salvages the state of the earth.
- The tree often looks sad. Why is this?
- On a blank A3 page, draw a diagonal line from one corner to the other. On one side, show country as it should be. On the other side, show the impact of human intervention on nature as shown in *Dingo's Tree*. This representation could include both words and images.