

# The Dreamtime

In Australian Aboriginal mythology<sup>1</sup>, 'The Dreamtime' (also known as 'The Dreaming') is the time of creation<sup>2</sup>.

## 1 Before you read

- What adjectives can you think of to describe the moon? Write them down.
- Say whether the moon is a symbol to you at all. If it is, explain what kind of symbol.



## 2 An Aborigine myth

Now read a traditional Dreamtime myth. While reading, take notes about the following questions.

- When does the story take place?
- Who is the story about exactly?
- Who are Yelma and Lilga?
- Can you think of a title for the story?

Thousands of years ago, in a time the Aborigines call 'Dreamtime', Gidja, the Moon, lived close to a beautiful river with the Bullanji people. Because he was the Moon, Gidja was round and fat, and the Bullanji people, who were strong and athletic hunting people, made fun of him.

Gidja was sad because he was in love with a beautiful woman – Yalma, the Evening Star. But Yalma made fun of him, too. She did not see that Gidja truly loved her. So Gidja remembered an old spell<sup>3</sup>. Every night when the sun went down, he made a circle of stones, and sat down in the middle. Then he started to sing. He sang about the world, about his life, but especially about his love to Yalma. Yalma heard the songs, she heard the voice – and liked what she heard. She then agreed to marry Gidja, and the Bullanji people stopped laughing and instead celebrated the love of Yalma and Gidja.

Yalma soon had a daughter, who she called Lilga, the Morning Star. One Day, when she was still a little girl, Lilga went hunting with her father. While she was collecting honey, she was hit by a falling tree – and died. Nobody had ever died before. The Bullanji people were scared, and they accused Gidja of bringing death to the world.

Gidja was sad again. He put his little daughter into a coffin<sup>4</sup> and started to walk across the bridge to the other side of the river. But when he was on the bridge, the Bullanji people cut the ropes which held the bridge up, and Gidja fell into the river together with the coffin. The river took the coffin and carried it out to the sea. Even today, you can see Morning Star shining on the horizon above the sea.

Gidja got back to the shore and made a huge fire. He then took a burning log<sup>5</sup> and started to walk into the forest. When the people saw him, they approached him because they were still angry that Gidja had brought death to the world, and they tried to kill him, but couldn't. So they grabbed him and threw him up into the sky. Gidja was very angry. He cursed<sup>6</sup> the people; he told them that they would all die, and remain dead, yes, and that he would die, too. But he would come back to life again and again!

And so it happened and still happens. Gidja grows in the sky every night, and when he is really fat and round, he dies and fades away like an old man. And then he comes back to life and grows again.

<sup>1</sup>mythology [mi'θɒlədʒi] = very old stories of gods, spirits and heroes in a particular culture • <sup>2</sup>creation [kri'eɪʃn] = here: the making of the world • <sup>3</sup>spell [spel] = words/actions with magic power • <sup>4</sup>coffin ['kɒfɪn] = a box a dead person is buried in • <sup>5</sup>log [lɒg] = a thick piece of wood • <sup>6</sup>to curse [kɜ:s] = to ask a magical power to do bad things to sb

### 3 Reading comprehension

1. Why is Gidja sad at the beginning of the story?
2. What does he do to get Yalma's love?
3. When and how does Lilga die?
4. What happens to her after she dies?
5. What happens to Gidja after Lilga's death?

### 4 Post-reading projects

**OPTION 1:** You are a storyteller. Try to retell the story as professionally as possible.

1. Choose background music that goes well with your story.  
Let it play softly while you tell your story.
2. Choose two objects which you could show while you tell the story.
3. Think of two questions you would like to ask your audience while you tell the story.

#### TIP

While you tell the story, speak clearly, speak slowly, do not walk around, look at your audience. And try not to use notes.

**OPTION 2:** Imagine you are Yalma. After Gidja disappears, she decides to write a poem for her daughter and her husband.

1. Your poem has to have three stanzas. Each stanza has four lines.
2. The poem does not have to have any rhyme.
3. Look for a picture which might support the message of your poem. Say why!

### 5 Internet activity

The story of Gidja is just one of many traditional Dreamtime myths. Find others on the web, take notes, and tell them to your partner / your class.

**Lösungen:**

1  
a) Lösungsvorschläge: awesome, beautiful, big, breathtaking, huge, interesting, round, white  
b) Sehr individuelle Antworten, z.B.: The moon is a symbol for magic.

2  
1. The story takes place thousands of years ago, in Dreamtime;  
2. It is about Gidja (and the Bullanyi people).  
3. Yalma is Gidja's wife, Lilga is their daughter.  
4. Lösungsvorschläge: 'The (story of the) moon'; 'How the moon was created'; 'Gidja, the moon'; 'The story of Gidja'

3  
1. He is sad because he loves a beautiful woman who makes fun of him.  
2. Gidja remembers an old spell: He makes a circle of stones, sits down in the middle, and then he sings about the world and about his love for Yalma.  
3. While Gidja and Lilga are hunting, Lilga is hit by a falling tree.  
4. Gidja puts his daughter into a coffin and starts to walk across the bridge to the other side of the river. But when he is on the bridge, the Bullanyi people cut the ropes which hold the bridge up, and Gidja falls into the river together with the coffin. The river takes the coffin and carries it out to the sea.  
5. The Bullanyi people try to kill Gidja because they think that he has brought death to the world. They grab him and throw him up into the sky. He curses the people and tells them that they will all die.