

59: observing the night sky

teachers' notes

1) This activity depends on being able to access a clear night sky away from city lights. It is a magical experience to sit on top of a crag like The Cave of Hands in the western Grampians of Victoria – like humans have done for tens of thousands of years – and watch falling stars, celestial teapots and flying saucers. It is a great opportunity to engage students in discussion about stuff like the origin of the Universe. A student teacher participated in several such trips to the Grampians. He shall be known simply as Super Gordon. His knowledge of the night sky, including aboriginal mythology, was awesome.

2) Under the banner of integrating the curriculum, check and see when your students do astronomy back at school, just in case you can plan ahead and time night excursions for maximum effect. You might even be able to justify taking an astrophile science teacher with your on camp. (They always have dirty big telescopes and know how to find stuff like Jupiter and its moons.)

3) If you have sufficient class time, there are lots of little projects that you can get kids to do relating to aboriginal stories. (Google “aboriginal astronomy for kids” for inspiration.) Email info@wipeout.com.au if you want a worksheet on ancient astrology.)

4) **Not running** at night is a safety rule that should be *strictly* enforced. Even just walking at night can be very dangerous. There is a story about a teacher on camp in central Victoria back in the '80s falling during an activity at night feet-first into a vertical mineshaft, but luckily landing in soft deep mud. The author (moi) never fell into a mineshaft but he or she stopped playing games like spotlight or lantern stalk with younger secondary students in the mid-'90s because – even when these were sold as “games of stealth” and kids were automatically out if they ran – too many kids kept running.

5) While not strictly involving night skies, watching sunrises and sunsets can be really memorable. Amongst the most memorable of such experiences (pour moi) was organising yoga sessions down on the beach as the sun rose as a part of a surf camp program. (See photo.)



Cosy Corner, Torquay, Victoria

6) There are lots of other really good observation-based night activities such as spotlighting for possums and other critters. In the forests of south-eastern Australia, you might see greater gliders or powerful owls, both of which are spectacular. Enlist a friendly ranger with local knowledge and a super strong spotlight. You might hear yellow-bellied gliders, which sound like piglets having their throats cut – shrieks followed by gurgles. (If you would like to listen to recordings of night sounds in the Australian bush, google “night sound Australian bush.”) In the south-east and south-west of our fair land, you might see ghost fungus, which lights up in the dark and looks freaky.

7) You could tell a scary story or two. Even older kids love not only listening to scary stories, but telling them as well. (The wipeout brains trust are not really sure what the educational value of scary stories is.)

8) There are heaps of good touch phone apps which enable you to locate the position of stars and planets even during the day and even have links to some basic information about the given star or planet. Google: “Which is the best touch phone app for astronomy?”