



Karla Dickens: Rise and Fall

Worksheet for High School Students

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Karla Dickens: Rise and Fall
Curated by Daniel Mudie Cunningham
15 March - 2 June 2025

Rise and Fall is a powerful new installation by acclaimed Wiradjuri artist Karla Dickens. This evocative work responds to the climate catastrophe that struck Dickens' hometown of Lismore during the devastating floods of February 2022. Through sculpture, photography, and video, *Rise and Fall* reimagines mermaid mythologies with a post-apocalyptic twist, reflecting the urgent need for survival, change, and shared responsibility in a world on the brink.

Rise and Fall is a compelling exploration of climate crisis from a First Nations perspective, offering a poignant commentary on resilience and the fight for a better future.



Question 1
Subjective Viewpoint

Image above: *Rise & Fall*, 2024, photographs on tarpaulin, 233 x 350cm (1), Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Australia.

Karla Dickens states:

"The Aboriginal mermaid in my photographic series is wading in the flood waters at Lismore's Trinity College School watching and waiting as she cleans the waters. She wears a *Countdown* t-shirt and looks

beaten and bruised. While creating this this work, I enjoyed connecting the river to the sea, especially given the fact that most Aboriginal mermaids are portrayed as freshwater creatures living in rivers, lakes and billabongs.... Around the world, mermaids are an omen, foretelling disasters, rough weather and impending storms. I identify the mermaid in this body of work as doing just that".

In this exhibition there are five large *Rise and Fall* photographs printed on tarpaulin which feature an Aboriginal woman as a mermaid.

With the above statement in mind, choose one of these photographs and below, write a personal response to how you feel when viewing these works.

Question 2

Structural Viewpoint



Image: *Deeply Rooted Memorial*, 2023, mixed materials including uprooted tree with metal letters on trolley, 130 x 120 x 110cm, Courtesy of the artist and STATION, Australia

Karla Dickens states:

"Art is a spiritual act for me. It is one way I can reduce, renew and resist consumerism and the capitalist structures the world clings to. I also love found and used objects as they hold memory and past histories. The large sculptures are titled *Deeply Rooted* and constructed from tree

roots that were retrieved after the floods. As such, they hold a powerful history, before the flood and since. The roots form the backbone of each sculpture, upon which I have added objects such as saw blades, petrol pumps, tools and vintage human leg brace. They are situated on industrial trollies meant to read as mortuary tables".

There are four *Deeply Rooted* sculptures in this exhibition: *Memorial*, *Toxins*, *Fuel* and *Cry's*.

With the above statement in mind, choose one of the *Deeply Rooted* sculptures and below, write your answers to the following *structural viewpoint* questions:

What signs or symbols can you identify in this work? Interpret and decode their meanings.

Why has the artist chosen to use these materials to represent their ideas?

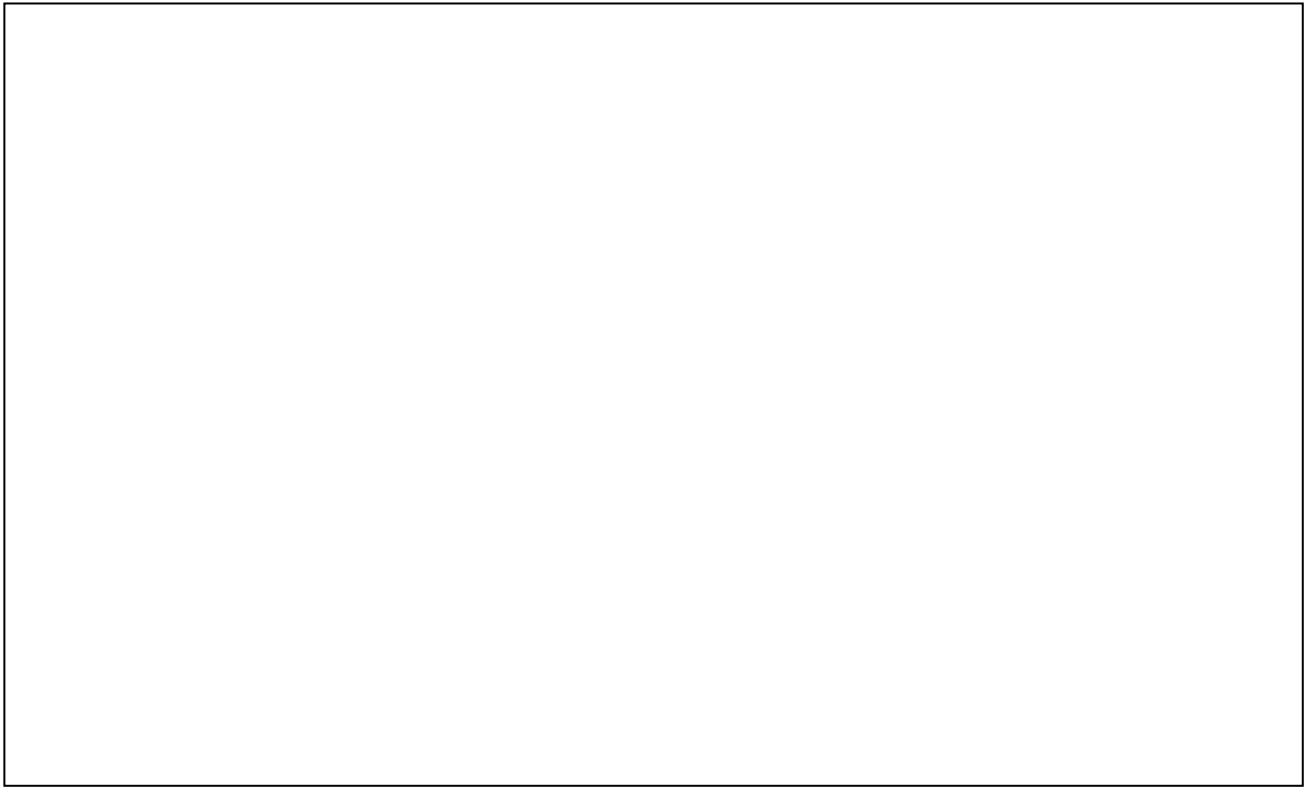
Explain how we can consider the artist's practice as environmentally friendly or sustainable?

Question 3

Practical Activity: Drawing

Still looking at your chosen *Deeply Rooted* sculpture, draw a section of it below using lead pencil.

Focus on the following elements in your drawing: line, shape and tone.



Question 4

Activity: Haiku Poem

In the exhibition, read the artist's poem: *Tides Rise and Mermaids Fall*

Now it's your turn to write a haiku poem, using the theme of climate change as inspiration.

The haiku is a Japanese poetic form that consists of three lines, with five syllables in the first line, seven in the second, and five in the third.
