DELTA RIDGE TECHNOLOGIES

Campfire Tales

Fifteen stories for three ages, and the nerve to tell them

Five for lantern light · five for firelight · five for midnight

Rated and marked on the next page. Read the rating before you read the story to anyone small.

First edition · 2026

SAMPLE

HOW THESE ARE RATED

Every story carries one of three marks on its first page. The mark tells you who it was written for and what is inside it. Read the content line before you read the story out loud, and read any Midnight story to yourself first, because the rating is my judgment and not a guarantee about your kid or your camp.

● LANTERN

Ages 10 and under

Spooky, never cruel. No deaths on the page, no blood, nothing that follows a kid home. The scare is a sound, a shadow or a wrong-looking shape, and every story lands somewhere safe, often with a laugh.

◆ FIRELIGHT

Ages 13 and up

Real stakes. People are lost, followed and not always found. Endings stay unresolved on purpose. No gore, but there is menace, and one story has a death that already happened.

▲ MIDNIGHT

Adults

Dread rather than shocks. Bodies, grief, confinement, and endings that do not resolve because that is the point. No sexual content and no torture. Read one before you tell it to anyone else.

THREE RULES FOR TELLING THEM

Read it first, out loud, alone. A story that reads fine in your head changes shape in your voice, and you want to know where the shape changes before there is an audience.

Keep it shorter than you want to. A fire makes people generous with their own suspense. Cut the ending short and let the quiet do the rest. If someone says "is that it?" you told it right.

Match the mark to the youngest listener. One eight-year-old at the fire makes the whole night a Lantern night. The other stories will still be there next year, and they will be better for the wait.

What is never in here: no sexual content, no torture, no animal cruelty played for entertainment, and no story that turns on a real person or a real death. Everything in this book is invented, including the towns.

SAMPLE

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SAMPLE

Page numbers are the printed page. Every story starts on its own page, so you can read exactly as many as the fire lasts.

THE LANTERN ACROSS THE LAKE

LANTERN · AGES 10 AND UNDER
Read aloud in about 2 minutes
Content: two children signalling across water, entirely friendly. No peril.

A light answers a light, and the answer turns out to be the best part.

Maya got the lantern for her birthday. It was green, the color of a bottle, and it had a switch you had to press with your thumb until it clicked. Her father said it was for finding the bathroom at night. Maya had other plans.

On the first night she stood at the edge of the lake where the gravel ran out and the mud began, and she pointed the lantern across the water. Nothing happened. The lake was the color of a closed eye. She blinked it twice, on and off, quick, the way you would knock on a door.

Across the lake, something blinked twice back.

She ran to get her father. He stood where she stood, looked at the water, and said what grown-ups always say at night, which is that it was probably a reflection. But when he went back to the fire, Maya blinked three times, and the far shore blinked three times, and then it was quiet, and then it blinked four.

Every night that week they talked like that. Two meant hello. Three meant where are you. Four meant you are silly. Once Maya blinked a long string that she made up entirely, a whole sentence of blinks, and the far shore waited and waited, and then blinked back the very same string, exactly right, and then blinked it again, which felt like laughing.

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On the last morning her father walked her around the lake, because she had asked eleven times. There was a camp on the far side under the pines, and a girl about her age sitting on a cooler, eating cereal out of a mug. She had a lantern too. It was green, the color of a bottle.

"You blink funny," the girl said.

"You blink faster than me," Maya said.

They swapped names. They swapped which sites they liked best. They agreed on two blinks for hello, and they agreed to do it next summer, and Maya walked back around the lake feeling like she had found the one thing better than a lantern, which is somebody on the other side of the dark holding one too.

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Activities for children need an adult present. Several activities involve scissors, small parts, water, heat, food, outdoors, tools or fire. Adults are responsible for choosing what is age appropriate, supervising it, and checking the surroundings and materials first. Nothing here replaces your own judgment about the children in your care. No educational, developmental, behavioral or health result is promised or implied by any page in this pack.

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