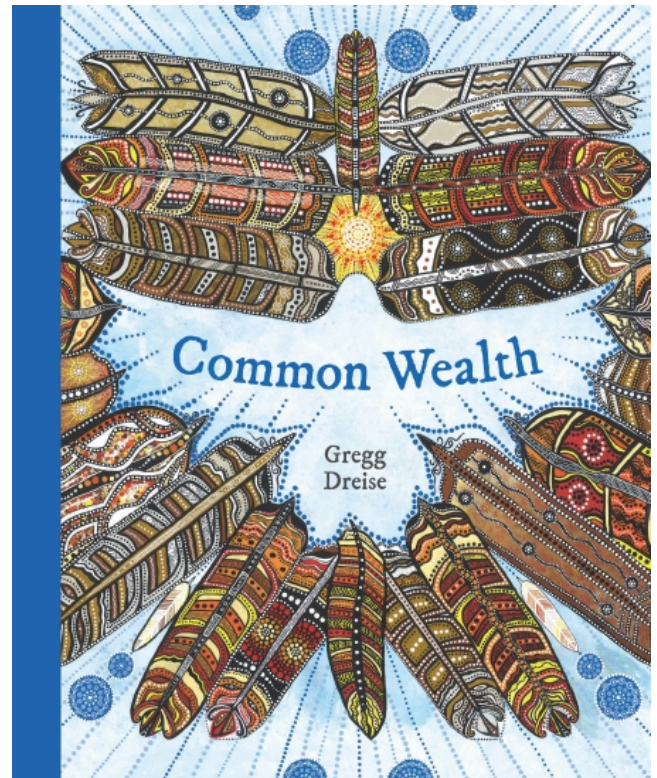


Common Wealth

Author/Illustrator
Gregg Dreise



Synopsis

A Slam Poetry Persuasive presented as an exquisitely illustrated picture book for older readers, *Common Wealth* is an insightful and introspective analysis of the lyrics of the Australian National Anthem, and the ways in which it falls short and fails to represent all the people of this country - and most especially the ways it fails to acknowledge and respect Indigenous Australians. It is, however, also an affirmation of hope and positivity, addressing the aspects of the National Anthem which embrace diverse populations and laud the wonders of this incredible land in which we all live, as well as the ways in which reality fails to reflect the hopes and dreams expressed by the lyrics. Sharing his vision of our joint future, and of how it might combine with our fraught past to create a place of hope, caring, and respect for each other and for the land, Dreise's *Common Wealth* is a powerful and thought-provoking exploration of just what an in-depth contemplation of the National Anthem can and should bring to all of our lives as Australians.

About the Author/Illustrator

Gregg Dreise is an award-winning author, artist and musician. He began writing poems as song lyrics for his band, and later developed a taste for telling old yarns, especially around a campfire. Gregg plays the didgeridoo and guitar in his lively performances at schools, libraries and festivals. He is a proud descendant of the Kamilaroi and Euahlayi people of south-west Queensland and north-west New South Wales.

Themes

Key Themes include: Australia; Indigenous Australians; The National Anthem; Respect for Country; Respect for Indigenous Australians; Respect for each other; Hope; History; Unity; Peace; and Positivity for the future.

Writing Style

Written throughout in the first person, Dreise created this story as a Slam Poetry Persuasive. As such it is replete with rhyming verses, with strong rhythmic undercurrents that encapsulate the passion and

emotive content of the story overall. A first person perspective from a proud Indigenous Australian, it is most powerfully understood when read aloud by an impassioned reader, and contains thoughtful and thought provoking insights into what it means to be Australian. Dreise's lyricism is strongly present throughout, and the shifting tensions and tone of the verse maintains interest and draws the reader into the story and invites them to answer the questions posed in Dreise's work for themselves.

Illustration Style

Created using black pen, black permanent markers, pencils, watercolours and acrylic paint, Dreise's artwork is richly evocative, and a bright combination of modern western art forms and traditional indigenous representations and patterning. Free flowing and sure of line and form, the figures, imagery, and shapes all contain natural curves within crisp line work, and a blend of soft watercolour backgrounds and traditional indigenous dot-artwork creates a cohesive visual narrative that reflects and expands upon the textual narrative throughout. Additional text that comments upon and expands on the main textual narrative is embedded in the artwork throughout, adding an extra dimension to Dreise's storytelling and adding visual interest as well as narrative depth.

TEACHER NOTES

- 1) Before reading the story, as a class look closely at the cover and title, and discuss what you can learn about the story and author from the artwork and title. Some things that you might like to include in your discussion could be:
 - What is the title of the story?
 - What are the different ways in which the title could be interpreted - what is the difference between *Commonwealth* and *Common Wealth*?
 - What genre would you predict this book to be?
 - What do you think the main topic of this book might be - and why do you think this?
 - What might you assume about the author from the cover artwork and title?
 - What is Slam Poetry?
 - What is a Slam Poetry Persuasive?
- 2) How does reading *Common Wealth* make you feel? How does listening to it read aloud make you feel? Watch some videos of other pieces of Slam Poetry being performed, and as a class discuss the performance style and what you have learned about the genre as a whole. Practice reading *Common Wealth* aloud, trying to imbue your performance with the passion that is so intrinsic to the Slam Poetry genre.
- 3) Create an artwork that you feel shares your emotional reaction and response to hearing this story performed.
- 4) There are several lines in our current National Anthem that the author of *Common Wealth* feels express positive sentiments, but don't reflect the reality of the world we are living in. Do you agree or disagree with this interpretation? Why/why not? In pairs or small groups, discuss this, and come up with examples of the types of situations that the author is describing. What do you think that we as Australians can, and should, be doing to address these types of inequalities within society, and destructive behaviours by industry and government?
- 5) Can you think of a different song that might serve as a better National Anthem for Australia? As a class reread the book, and note down all the different points the author has raised about where and how the current anthem fails to include and recognise all Australians, and particularly Indigenous

Australians - not to mention all the areas where the sentiment expressed is inspiring, but the Anthem does not reflect reality.

- Can you think of any more issues with our current National Anthem?
 - As a class discuss what a new and more inclusive and representative National Anthem would require to fully address all these points.
 - In pairs or small groups craft a draft outline of what you see as the core essential requirements for a fully inclusive and representative National Anthem.
 - As a class, discuss everyone's draft outlines, and use them to create a more comprehensive class outline.
 - Do you think that our current National Anthem can be altered to meet these criteria, and if so how?
 - Do you know of any songs that already exist which fulfil all the criteria that you have listed in your outline?
 - As a class discuss the lyrics to any songs suggested by class members, and in what ways they fulfil the criteria, and where they might be lacking.
 - In pairs, or small groups, write the lyrics for at least one verse of a poem that you would like to see set to music as part of a new National Anthem.
 - Join with another pair or group, and workshop each other's lyrics to make sure that they are meeting your requirements.
 - Share your workshopped verse with the rest of the class and discuss how and to what type of music you would like it to be set.
- 6) Hold a class debate on the topic of the National Anthem. Your debate question should be along the lines of *A National Anthem that excludes, alienates, or insults the Indigenous people of a country, causes actual harm to the Nation as a whole and should be replaced or amended as soon as possible.*
- 7) What is Australia's true history, and how does it differ from the narrative that Captain Cook discovered Australia? Consider the difference in meaning of the words *Colonisation* and *Invasion*. Which word do you feel most accurately describes the events that occurred within Australia after the arrival of the First Fleet in 1788? Who at the time would be more likely to use which word and why?
- 8) Describe the arrival of Europeans to the east coast of Australia from the point of view of an Indigenous teenager watching the ships sail in. What might they have thought and surmised about the actions and behaviours of the colonising Europeans? In groups or as a class think of ways that this perspective might be incorporated into any future history lessons in Australian schools or into our National Anthem.
- 9) As a class, take part in the activity the author suggests about discovering more about your neighbour. You might choose to take part in this activity at school, asking someone who sits next to you at assembly, in a class, or on the bus about themselves; or you can ask someone who lives near your house about themselves. Share this information about yourself in turn and as a class discuss why it is important to know about each other as people, and how it can affect our perception of others.
- 10) How does Gregg Dreise conceptualise the ideal of Unity? Write a brief piece detailing your answer to this question, and be sure to include at least three pieces of evidence from the text supporting your assertions.
- 11) How do you perceive and conceptualise the ideal of Unity? What do you see as the most important aspects of it, and how do you imagine it being attained? What do you envision a world which has

embraced Unity looking like? Write a brief description of your idealised conception of Unity and how it could be attained.

- 12) Create an artwork inspired by Gregg Dreise's illustrations that you feel captures the essence of the community you live in. Before creating your artwork, look closely at the illustrations in the book, discuss how they have been created, and what techniques and methods you think have been used in their creation. You might wish to experiment with different ways of applying different paints to paper before starting your artwork.
- 13) The Author wrote *Common Wealth* as a Slam Poetry Persuasive. As a class, perform *Common Wealth* at a school assembly, at an open night, or for another class.