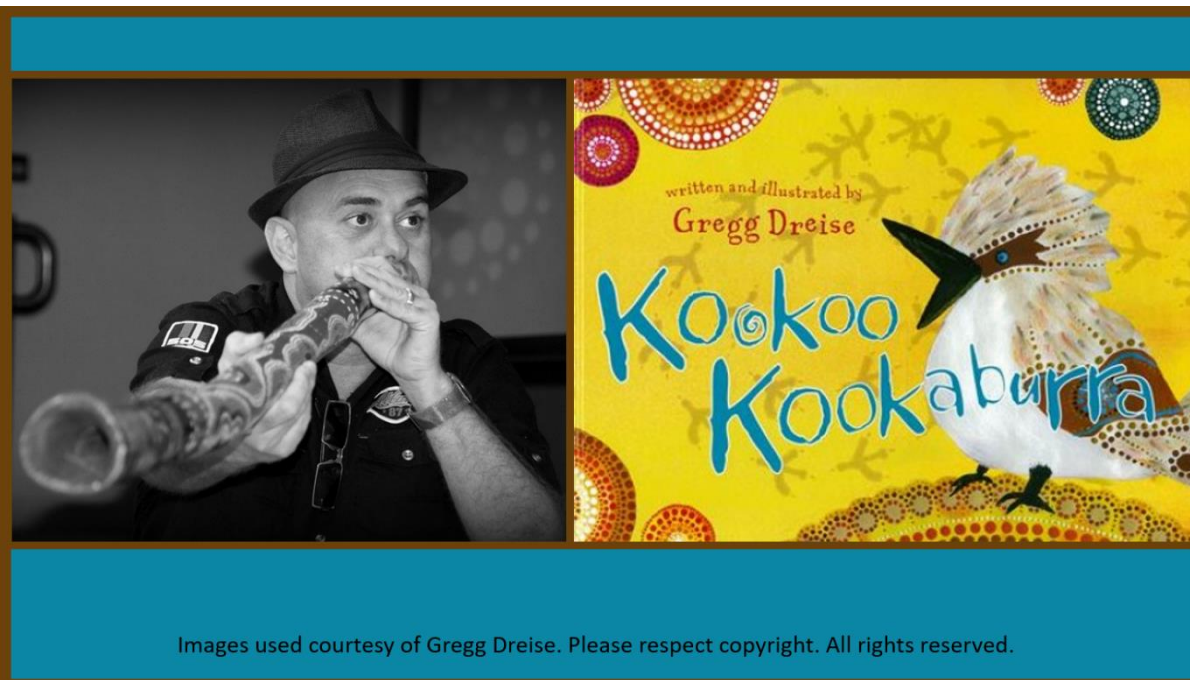




Author-Illustrator Spotlight: Gregg Dreise



Gregg Dreise: Award-winning author and illustrator

Yarma - hello, I'm Gregg Dreise the author and sillystrator of Kookoo Kookaburra. This is a story about a storyteller who is taught that you need to look and listen to tell a good story. However, whilst things begin well, he begins to show off and loose his kindness - and in doing so, he gets no kindness in return.

Gregg, you tell your stories with words and pictures. When did you know you wanted to be a storyteller and share your stories with others?

I first became passionate about writing whilst creating song lyrics for my band through high school. After my first child was born, I began to create her homemade story books. People loved them and encouraged me to send some work to publishers - and here I am today.

What comes first—the stories or the pictures?

Definitely the stories. However, I always imagine the characters and settings in my mind as I write - it allows greater imagery through my choice of words.

Do you consider yourself a writer or illustrator first?

I consider myself a 'storyteller' first. I have always been passionate about getting up and entertaining people with a good yarn. Being a writer and illustrator allows me to take my passion to another level.

Where do you like to work on your stories?

Usually around the dining table, surrounded by family. However, I have just built a studio - so time will tell whether that is a greater place to work, or if I need the comfort of my family around me.

What do you use to write – pencil and paper or computer?

My laptop is always close by for when I get a good idea. Then I type like a madman.

What media do you mainly use for illustrating?

Usually acrylic paint on art paper. However, I like to add anything I need to get the look I have in my head. My latest illustrations are dabbling in mixed media then compiling the layers on the computer. Keep an eye out for *Why are you Smiling* later this year to see if it all worked out.

When is the best time for you to work on your stories?

At night. The calm allows me to go into my own world and my imagination runs free. Other people watch their favourite TV shows at night, however I create my own relaxation downtime by writing or painting.

Where do you get your ideas?

The birds series; 'Silly Birds', 'Kookoo Kookaburra' and 'Mad Magpie', all come from wise old sayings and bits of broken stories from our elders. I then use my own skills to try to stop these endangered story ideas from becoming extinct. Sadly, lots of indigenous culture has been lost in the last 200 years. I love the thought that we can preserve such captivating stories and breathtaking art work.

Do you plan the story in your head before you begin to write or illustrate it?

I usually have planning points, however some of the best things I think I have written just flow from my imagination through my fingers and onto my laptop.

What gave you the idea for Kookoo Kookaburra?

It is based on the old yarn about "kindness is like a boomerang. If you throw it often - it comes back often. If you never pick it up and throw it - then it can never come back." It was said that a kookaburra's laugh is there to remind us to say or do something kind. That kindness will then come back to you with happiness and laughter.

Kookoo Kookaburra is a storyteller too. Is he in any way like you?

Every story I write includes parts of me. That's why I am passionate about what I do. I truly believe that people will enjoy what you do - if your passion shines through.

What do you like best about Kookoo Kookaburra's story?

The moral - all children and adults need reminders to throw kindness out there. When did you last say or do something kind? If it is a hard question to answer..... the next time you hear a kookaburra laugh - that is your reminder to say or do something kind.

Do you have a favourite illustration?

I love the sunsets. In our culture, we work hard during the day, but when the sun begins to go down - that is our chance to play music, spread some laughter and tell a good yarn.

How did you feel when you wrote about Kookoo Kookaburra?

I always feel passionate about what I think is a great story. It is always wonderful to see that other people have enjoyed what I created.

How do you hope readers will feel?

Empowered to live their life spreading kindness around and feeling wonderful when some kindness flies back to them. The best part is that kindness is a wonderful gift - and it doesn't cost a thing.

How would you like teachers to present your book to children?

With the same amount of passion that I present it. You have to be a passionate kind of person to yearn to be a teacher in the first place - so I think reading it with passion and encouraging a kind-hearted classroom would be an easy task with a lifelong effect.

Are there any messages you would like them to discuss?

When was the last time you said or did anything kind?

Do you have any advice for teachers in their role as writing guides?

Encourage your class to shape each and every writing task towards their passions. Anything written with passion is easy to read.

Do you have any advice for children as writers?

If you ever tell a story outside of the classroom that draws an audience, then entwine it into your next writing task. If you enjoy the story, then others might too.

What is your favourite picture book?

The Rainbow Serpent by Dick Roughsey. I remember being excited to think that our elders' stories can also be made into books. This made every young indigenous student I know feel a part of their classroom.

Who is your favourite author? What do you like about his or her work?

See above. Bringing ideas from cave walls and campfires into a book is not as easy as it sounds. But it is easy to appreciate something that has been created with passion.

