

Indo Dreaming by Neil Grant

“Indo Dreaming” by Neil Grant is the story of a surfin’ safari with a difference. Goog’s best mate Castro (‘Is he Cuban?. . .No, we called him that because his last name was Fidle.’) is taken by a shark in the Southern Ocean. Then Goog starts getting postcards from Castro from Indonesia. Goog saves up the airfare and takes off to follow the trail laid by the postcards, teaming up with Niagara Falls, an American surfer ‘whippet thin and tall as the Statue of Liberty’. (All his siblings are named after waterfalls: ‘Sister’s Victoria after that great fall in Africa. She’s okay with her name, kinda normal. Brothers are another story...Angel’s the youngest. Middle brother got Krimmler after some Austrian thing...He’s been pissed about that one all his life. Gonna change it when he’s old enough.’) Along the way Goog discovers he has more in common with Niags than first meets the surface. But the story is not so much a mystery as an Australian getting to know another part of the world – so near and yet so far – and learning more about his family. Already, it should be obvious the author has a liking of words – and not only unusual names. A description of a plane landing brings it all back to anyone who has flown: ‘After three centuries, we graze the tarmac, rise, dip, wallop it hard, a scream ... the wings break up.’

So where could this book fit?

- Any school with a multicultural focus
- Any school with a marine studies program

This is one for older readers.

Jan Brown, Croydon High School, SA

Neil Grant's first book, *Rhino Chasers*, has been very popular with a certain segment of boys at my school, so I was keen to read his latest. Although there is nothing on the cover of *Indo Dreaming* to say it is a sequel to the earlier book, it apparently is. Thus, some questions I had about loose ends and a few poorly defined characters might be answered by reading *Rhino Chasers*.

I also approached this book with some trepidation, as it’s really not my kind of book. But I enjoyed *Indo Dreaming*. There is lots of surfing lingo and other slang used which made it a bit cryptic at times, however I think the excerpt on the cover from a review of *Rhino Chasers* that says "Grant's ear for speech is unerring..." is spot on. The scenes of life on Indonesia’s islands are convincing, and the young protagonist is a character for whom we can have great sympathy. This is a book about an inner journey and a physical one too. Friendship, family and love are important themes. As Goog seeks his friend along the Indonesian archipelago, each time seemingly just a little too late, he is gradually stripped of all his material possessions, and a good deal of his mental preconceptions. The story goes a bit over the top towards the end, and there is rather a lot explained by the older and (questionably) wiser ones. Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and the film *Apocalypse Now* are both explained for the uninitiated. Perhaps this will add to the interest for a certain group of young readers who come without the literary baggage. Earlier references to surf films, like *Endless Summer 1 & 2*, and some that I didn't recognise, were used more subtly. Or does it just seem so because they aren't part of my literary knowledge? Whatever, there is certainly a group of young men, at least, who will love this book.

Indo Dreaming would make an excellent literature circle choice. It could have a place amongst a lifestyle or survival theme, or coming of age stories. Books like *Secret Scribbled Notebooks*, *The Cave*, *The Fire Eaters*, and *By the River*, all share some thematic elements and a certain wistfulness in the narration.

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