Sunset State School

Slavery to Survival

Slavery to Survival is a tribute to the untold stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - stories of pain, loss, resistance, survival, strength, and resilience. It represents a journey through generations of hardship while honouring those who fought to protect their families, Country, culture, and identity.

Slavery to Survival tells two sides of our story. One side reflects the darkness of our past - oppression, imprisonment, suffering, and loss. The chains symbolise the attempts to take away our freedom, identity, connection to Country, and culture. Yet they also represent what our people endured and overcame. The other side represents the strength that emerged from that struggle. The shield symbolises protection, courage, and the warriors who stood fiercely for their families, Country, and people.

The emu feathers in the artwork represent cultural adornment, traditional materials from Country, and our deep relationship with the land and natural world. The Torres Strait Islander headpiece honours the connection to culture, sea, ancestry, community, and identity, and the grass skirt represents Torres Strait Islander culture, traditional dress, and the traditions passed down through the generations.

At the heart of this artwork is a message of survival. Despite attempts to silence our voices, break our families, take our land, and suppress our cultures, our stories, languages, traditions, and families survived.

We survived. We are still here.

Slavery to Survival is not only about what our people have suffered, but what we have overcome. We carry the scars of our history and the strength of our ancestors. Our culture is alive. Our stories are alive. Our people are still here.

Slavery to Survival 2026

Cotton, Feathers, cardboard, shells, rope, wire, raffia and beads