

Byron College On-the-Spot
Write-a-Story Competition 2021

★ ★ ANTHOLOGY OF WINNING ENTRIES ★ ★

WORLD
BOOK
DAY

4 MARCH 2021



“Reading is dreaming



with your eyes open.”

To celebrate our love of reading and the world of the imagination for World Book Day, each form wrote short stories inspired by a series of pictures. The challenge was to make the story as imaginative and interesting as possible — while staying within a bite-sized word limit!

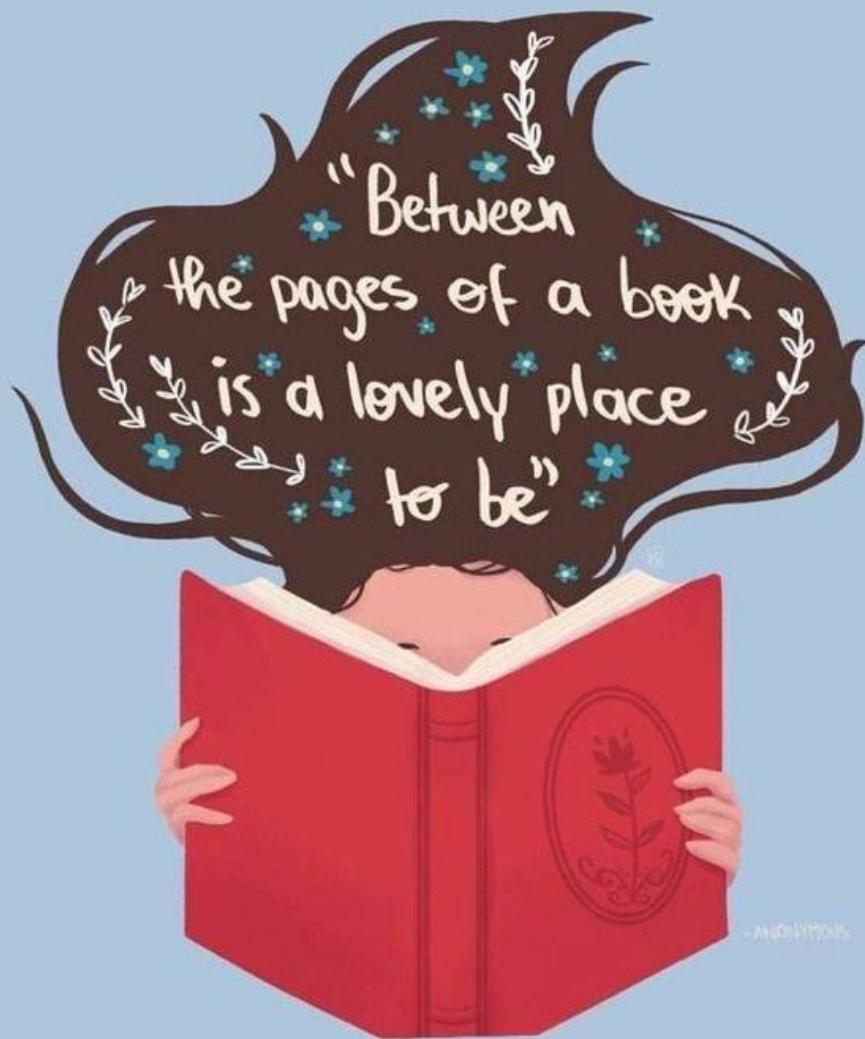
Amazing entries were sent in from all year groups and it was a real challenge trying to decide which to feature. Well done to everyone who took part and happy reading! ★ ★

★ ★ Contents ★ ★

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"You can't depend on your eyes when your imagination is out of focus." Mark Twain

The Posters



ON-THE-SPOT WRITE-A-STORY COMPETITION

WORLD
**BOOK
DAY**

4 MARCH 2021



Byron College
THE BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

KS1

YEARS 1 & 2



Draw a
picture of
what their
teacher
looks like.

OR

Discuss and make up a short story with your teacher.
What are they saying to each other?

ON-THE-SPOT WRITE-A-STORY COMPETITION

WORLD
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

KS2

YEARS 3 & 4

Write the story of how the octopus came to be here, and what happens next.

Questions:

- How did the octopus get here?
- Why is it wearing a hat?
- Is it speaking your language?
- Do you understand what it's saying?
- Where did the plants come from?

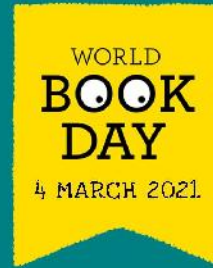
150-250 words

PICTURE CREDIT: TIM BVDGEN
TEXT CREDIT: ONCEUPONAPICTURE.CO.UK



ON-THE-SPOT WRITE-A-STORY COMPETITION

Write the story of what
you think is happening here.



KS2

YEARS 3 & 4



Questions:

150-250 words

- What's happening here?
- Do the two smaller mushrooms know the larger one?
- Have they done this before? How do you know?
- What is the larger mushroom reading?
- What kind of thing might you expect to find inside this book?
- What do you think might be in the background?

ON-THE-SPOT WRITE-A-STORY COMPETITION

WORLD
**BOOK
DAY**

4 MARCH 2021

KS2

YEARS 5 & 6

Write a short story.

- Where are the girl and the dragon? What can they see from this place? What are they looking at?
- Why are they here?
- Are they friends? Does the girl own the dragon as a pet? Or does the dragon own the girl as its pet?
- Is it friendly?
- Does anyone else know that they're up here? What might other people say about their friendship?



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150-250

words



ON-THE-SPOT WRITE-A-STORY COMPETITION

WORLD
**BOOK
DAY**

4 MARCH 2021

KS2

YEARS 5 & 6

Write a short story.

Who is she?

What is she doing?

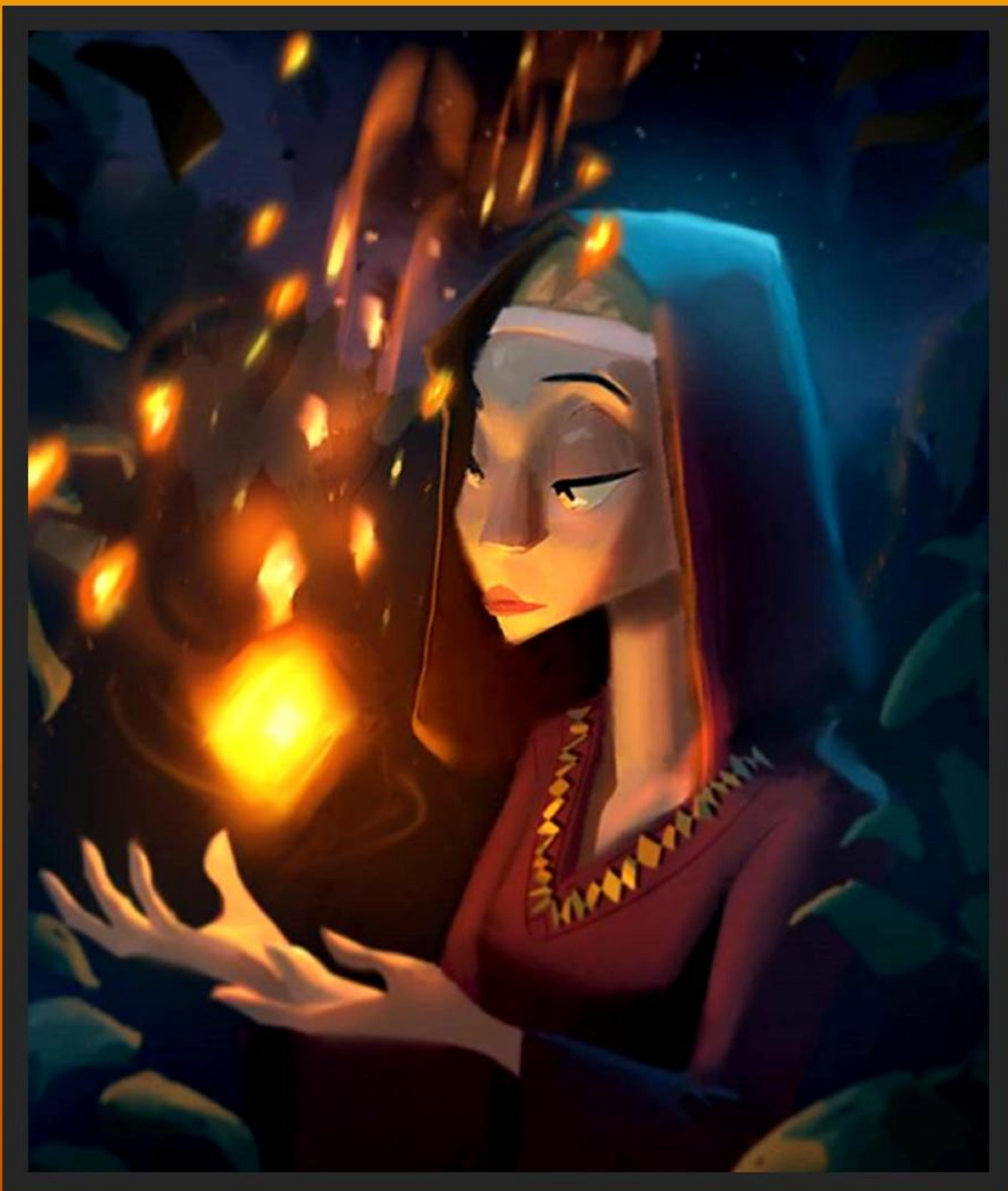


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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

150-250
words



ON-THE-SPOT WRITE-A-STORY COMPETITION

WORLD
**BOOK
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4 MARCH 2021

KS2

YEARS 5 & 6

write a

short story.



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150-250

words



Who is the woman?

Why is she looking out of the house?

On-the-Spot Write-a-Story Competition

WORLD
BOOK
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4 MARCH 2021

DEPARTMENT
OF ENGLISH
SECONDARY



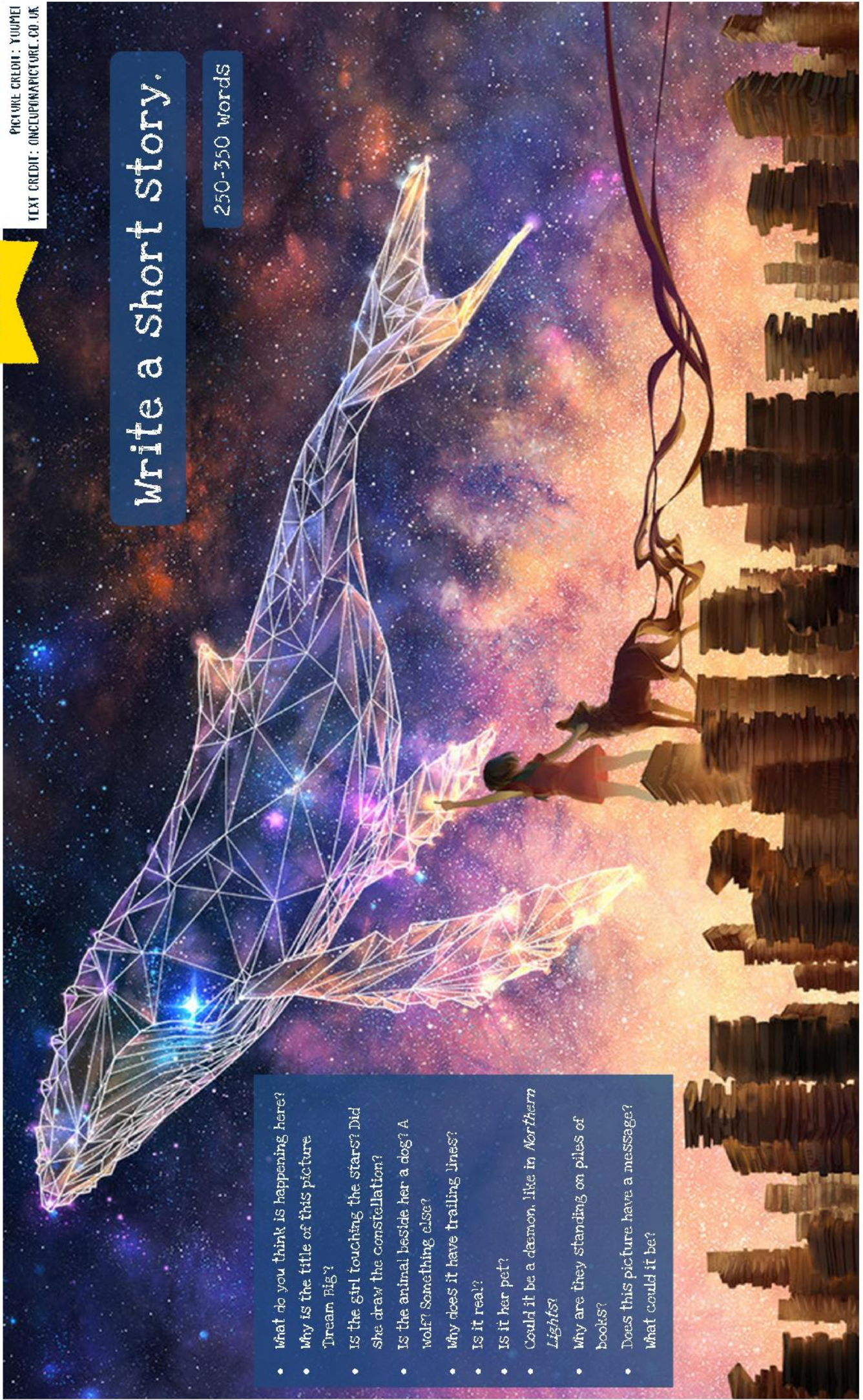
Byron College
THE HART HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION

PICTURE CREDIT: YUUMEI
TEXT CREDIT: ONCLOUPICTURE.CO.UK

Write a short story.

250-350 words

- What do you think is happening here?
- Why is the title of this picture Dream Pig?
- Is the girl touching the stars? Did she draw the constellation?
- Is the animal beside her a dog? A wolf? Something else?
- Why does it have trailing lines?
- Is it real?
- Is it her pet?
- Could it be a daemon, like in *Northern Lights*?
- Why are they standing on piles of books?
- Does this picture have a message? What could it be?



SECONDARY

On-the-Spot Write-a-Story Competition

WORLD
**BOOK
DAY**
4 MARCH 2021



Byron College
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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Write a short story.

- What can you see?
- Who is the woman?
- Why is she holding an umbrella and a bag?
- Where did she come from?
- Where is she going?
- How can she survive here?
- What might she be thinking at this moment?
- If you could ask her a question, what would you ask?
- Imagine you could go above the sky. How would you describe what you could see to someone who wasn't with you?

250-350 words

PICTURE CREDIT: DANITY BIANCHINI
TEXT CREDIT: UNCLEPUNAPICTURE.CO.UK



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THE BRITISH INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

SECONDARY

WORLD BOOK DAY

4 MARCH 2021

On-the-Spot Write-a-Story Competition

Write a short story.

- What is this person doing?
- Are the piano and the cogs in the background connected?
- Why is the person glowing?

250-350 words



youmei.deviantart.com

PICTURE CREDIT: YOUMEI
TEXT CREDIT: ONCEUPONAPICTURE.CO.UK

KEY STAGE 1



WINNER



The Best Teacher

Once upon a time, in the heart of the evergreen forest there was a class of clever kittens. They had a strict teacher called Miss Mooana Myaw. She had emerald green eyes and was as tall as a tree.

One day Miss Mooana Myaw disappeared. The kittens went looking for her. They found her in the big forest. She was very angry and scared because she had stepped on a sharp twig. The kittens helped her and took her home.

Younes Juma, Year 1 (Ash)



1ST RUNNER-UP

Little Four Cats at School

Once upon a time there were four cats called Lily, Ryan, Poppy and Cutie.

Lily was putting her hand up, but Ryan was scrunching up his written work, Poppy was dreaming, and Cutie had forgotten to do her homework, and it was maths. Then while the teacher was talking Ryan threw the paper he had scrunched up and the teacher was so angry she put Ryan on red.

Next the teacher's friend came, and she was an alien. Then she scared the cats and Lily, Ryan, Poppy and Cutie hid under the desks. Then they found out she was wearing a mask. The cats calmed down quickly so Cutie cuddled the teacher, and everyone said 'Aah!'. Finally, they had a party and were happy.

Apostolos Machias, Year 2 (Pine)



2ND RUNNER-UP



Cat Academy

The Beginning of a New Friendship

Early one morning there was a lovely brown cat. His name was Leo. Leo was getting ready for his first day of school. He was feeling a little bit nervous and a little bit excited.

When he got into his classroom, they all welcomed him. Leo was sitting next to a generous, fluffy, white cat whose name was Cleo. So when their class started, they learned all sorts of things until the bell rang. Everyone ran outside to play. Cleo asked Leo if he wanted to play together. Leo said 'Yes!' So, they played and played and played until just about two seconds before the bell rang.

Cleo asked Leo if he wanted to come over to her house after school. Cleo could teach Leo how to do handstands and cartwheels, and of course Leo said 'Yes! I would love that!'. After school, Cleo went to Leo's house and they had so much fun! Leo stayed for two hours! When Cleo had to go, he felt like a professional gymnast. After that day, they were best friends forever and they lived happily ever after.

Harmonie Borshell, Year 2 (Birch)



KEY STAGE 2

(LOWER)



WINNER

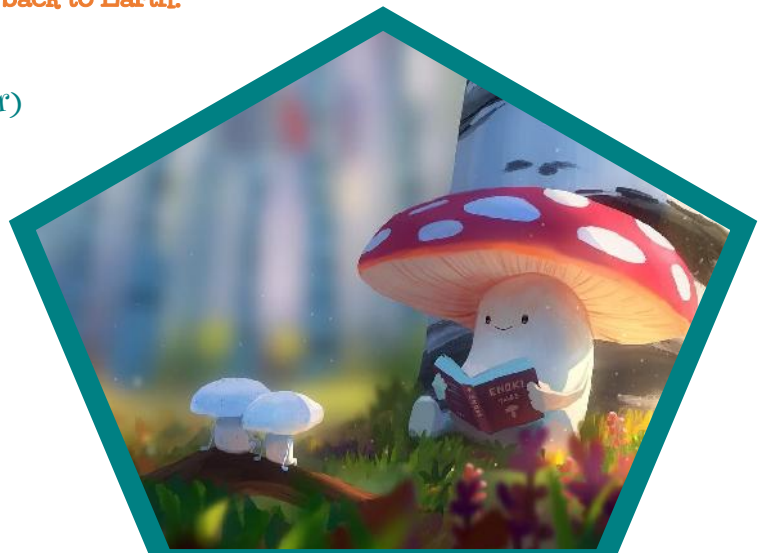
THE MAGIC BOOK

One sunny day, in a beautiful, muddy jungle with tall trees lived a mushroom with some young mushrooms. The kids were small and white - one was named Fred and the other Mary. The older mushroom was their mom - she had a red head like a hat with white dots on it. Her name was Jamie. The family was sitting under a damp, towering tree. The mom was reading her children a book, with a red cover and golden writing. But when she turned the page something happened...

They all got sucked into the book, Fred was screaming, and Mary was shouting, 'Mom, help me!' After that, they suddenly landed on soft sand. They were very confused. Next to them was a calm sea and behind them was an old bar with soothing music. They walked a few miles where they met a wise, old wizard. The wizard had a long, white beard and a blue hat with a small golden bell on top. He stated, 'I can get you back to your universe, but you need to find some yellow berries.' And off they went - they searched and searched for the yellow berry. After one or two hours, they found the yellow, small berry and they gave it to the wizard. 'Thank you so much!' The wizard answered politely. 'Now, can you take us home?' asked Mary worriedly.

'Yes, of course,' and off they went back to Earth.

Sofia Petropoulou, Year 4 (Elder)



THE OCTOPUS THAT GOT STUCK IN THE SINK

1ST RUNNER-UP

Once upon a time there was a little girl called Lili. She woke up early one morning to go to the bathroom. She went to wash her hands but surprisingly, inside the sink, there was a pink, kind and funny octopus. The girl screamed in fear! The octopus was just trying to ask her to help him get back to his dad and family in the Atlantic Ocean.

He had been travelling all around the world for three months. He had been to a lot of other children's houses. One of them thought he was a stuffed animal! One of them even put a hat on him! She giggled a lot! And another child put seaweed on him like he had just swum through the ocean! Anyway, she said yes. The octopus was so happy!

They thought and thought of a way to get him back. Until they had an idea to sail to the Atlantic Ocean, but the only problem was that they didn't have a boat, so they had to make one. They thought it would be easy

but when they started, they realised it was not that easy! They planned all the things they needed to do, and they never gave up! Eventually, they did it! Off they sailed! Eventually they made it to the Atlantic Ocean.

Lydia Rigogiannis, Year 3 (Chestnut)



2ND RUNNER-UP

THE CHARITY SHOP

Not so long ago, by a stream near a forest lived a family of mushrooms. One sunny afternoon after the mushrooms had eaten their lunch, they wanted to listen to a story. The youngest mushroom chose the story. The story was about two mischievous mushrooms. The trick they played in the story was a clever one about a charity shop. The mushroom who wrote the story spied on humans and she had seen humans entering a charity shop. That's where the story came from. The story started like this. One day a mushroom's mother said to her daughter (called Harriet) to give something to the charity shop. Harriet disagreed. She then came up with a sneaky plan.

Harriet gave her mother a board game for the charity shop. The charity shop opened a month later. Harriet had been saving her pocket money for weeks waiting for this day. The day the charity shop opened, she woke at the crack of dawn. Harriet took her pocket money and sped to the charity shop. Once she got there she peered inside. Her eyes fixed on a board game. Her board game. Harriet dashed inside and bought it. When Harriet got home, her mother did want to scold her. But for some reason she chose not to. The reason was that it was very clever of Harriet to plan all this. Harriet was slightly surprised that she didn't get scolded. That day, she learnt an important lesson that the rules could be bent, ever so slightly.

Themis Chaidou, Year 4 (Elder)



KEY STAGE 2

(UPPER)



WINNER

THE GIRL IN DRAGONDALE

Over the hills, mountains, and oceans, at nine o'clock exactly, a lustrous train arrived at Dragondale Station, with quite an extraordinary person aboard.

This person was called Emily. She had sleek, brown hair that was tied back in a ponytail with a red band. She wore a burgundy jumper and dark blue jeans which matched her khaki combat boots.

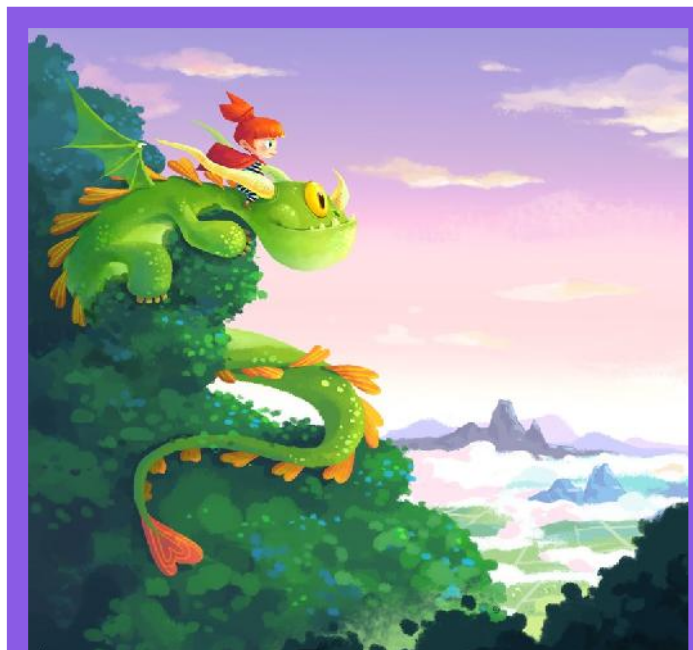
From the word Dragondale, you have probably figured out that, well, DRAGONS? So, Emily had a dragon: her name was Netherite and she was pitch-black like midnight. Emily ran silently across the station, trying as hard as she possibly could to keep that grin off her pale face.

Running swiftly through the forest, glancing back once or twice, Netherite's galaxy lair came into sight. She leaped in and yelled, 'NETHERITE! I HAVE COME, I'M BACK!'

She suddenly found herself wrestling and then cuddling a huge, black dragon, of course, Netherite. Happily leaping onto the dragon's scaly back, Emily and Netherite took to the cloudy skies. They flew, flew away up to the shiny stars, until suddenly a loud 'TOOOOOOOOT' was heard in the distance.

'I need to go! To the station!' They twisted and turned, and they were just in time for Emily to leap on to the train and sit beside a surprised group of elderly people. As the handkerchiefs waved and the dragon moaned sadly, Emily left into the disappearing sunset.

Anna Kulynych, Year 5 (Spruce)



1ST RUNNER-UP

DRAGON SAVIOUR

As Zoya walked up the trail to the snow-peaked mountains overlooking the village, she suddenly came to a halt. Zoya could hear whimpering coming from the bushes in front of her. Courageously, she crept towards the sound, pushing through the bushes' thick leaves. Zoya couldn't believe what she saw. It was a baby dragon coated in a colour of periwinkle blue; the scaly dragon was shaking with fear and curled up. Zoya reached out her hand to the dragon to assure him that there was no need to be afraid. Cautiously, the dragon lifted his head up to Zoya's hand and purred at its warmth. 'I am going to name you Xanadu,' she whispered. As if agreeing with her, the baby dragon yipped in excitement and joy. Zoya knew that this would be the beginning of their adventure and that their futures were intertwined together.

Day after day, night after night, year after year, Zoya fed and protected the baby dragon until he was old enough to take care of himself and raised to what he was destined to be. Zoya knew that Xanadu was in danger since the moment he was born. Her father was the emperor of their village Iranhill. He was known for killing and capturing dragons, and now that Xanadu was older and next in line for dragon royalty, he would be the most targeted, now that his father was dead. Therefore, all the other dragons would be vulnerable as their leader had fallen. Zoya had to protect Xanadu with her life and teach him how to defend himself from her evil father. Hearing a loud screech, Zoya knew that it was Xanadu's screech. She ran as if it was the end of the world, only to find out that she was too late. He father had taken Xanadu back to their village to die. Now Zoya had a new mission which was to go back to her village and free Xanadu.

Hooded under a black cloak was Zoya. She walked through her village, heading towards the palace where her father was. With her stealth-like moves she slipped past the guards and went to the dragon arena. Once she was there, Zoya looked into each of the dragon cells, looking for Xanadu, but all she saw were Gremlins, Ashfires and Slynkys. They must have kept Xanadu in a special cage. That's when Zoya could hear the sound of cheering coming from the fighting arena. She rushed out of the back to see Xanadu held in place by chains. They were about to execute Xanadu. Before they executed him, they heard the sound of shouting coming from outside the arena. The near-by village had declared war and that's when the bloodshed happened. Zoya ran quickly to Xanadu to release the chains and hopped on him to help in the war.

Hours passed. The sun was setting and Zoya's village had won the war; injured and dead bodies surrounded her. Xanadu walked over to her and kneeled down, motioning her to climb on. She swiftly got on top of him and they soared into the night sky and never came back.

Jada Rhagdanan, Year 6 (Oak)



2ND RUNNER-UPTHE
WITCHES'
SPELL

As I opened my eyes in the darkness, I saw someone staring back at me with big, red eyes as red as fire. She was so furious and unhappy. I stood there just staring at her with scared eyes. I was not moving because I was so frozen that I was stuck to the floor. I was in a dark, scary place that had rusty, old chairs with tables that looked like they had never been used for a hundred years. I was in a room that had couches which had been ripped, and they had so much blood on them that shivers ran down my spine and through my bones. The old, haggard witch was making something red. Suddenly, I saw blood that was dripping from my arm.

After I looked at my blood dripping, I fainted because of the smell. She was so scary. I was so afraid of what she was going to do. I was so tired and dizzy that I could not stand up. She was wearing a long black dress with gold triangles on the top and she had black hair that was really soft, and she was shivering from the cold, but then we turned back time and we vanished into a scary, dark, black space. It was with dark, black chairs and had an old, brown couch that was really ripped and destroyed. It had a bed that was black, and it had creepy old dolls with a white, old, red pillow.

As my eyes closed and I could not feel anything on my body, I heard the witch doing something with her hands. It was really loud and she shot something towards me. It banged on me and I opened my eyes. I was in my room. Was it a dream?

Evelina Tsiko, Year 5 (Sycamore)



Key Stage 3



Winner



FACING OUR SHADOWS

Eerie darkness: everything distorted, deformed. And there was she; falling inside the calamity of her memories; the ones she wanted to forget...

Her eyes twinkled in the unknown moonlight. Blurred dots, enveloping her, seemed to lighten the nightmare she was stuck in. In the world of books and stars, there is no limit to imagination...

Andromeda had a rough life. Tangled in misery and doom. All she ever wanted was an escape from the cold reality. A mixture of screams, shouts and cries swirling inside her head. 'Take me away from them...'

When she opened her eyes, she was in a world unknown to many: her imagination. Where things like responsibilities didn't exist. She was free.

A pale figure was stooping in front of her, those crystal-blue eyes staring into hers. It was as if he could read her like an open book.

'Who are you?' she trembled. She was fascinated by the creature with trailing lines, carried by the wind.

'I'm your guardian, Perseus. I'm here to protect your past, your present, and your future.'

Andromeda wasn't listening anymore. She was captivated by the surroundings: piles of books everywhere – *so many things to explore!* The creature followed her, jumping between each pile.

She looked up at the sky, all that blending of colours creating a serene atmosphere. And then she saw it... Each star bonding together, the Cetus towering over her with flaming-red eyes, reminding her of what she didn't want to remember....

Faces appeared, circling her: her parents, her bullies... But how could she face all those responsibilities alone? Tears stung her eyes, flowing like drops of molten lead. 'G-go away!' she cried.

Her angel creature shook her, dragging her away from those memories. 'Look at me. We can do it together. The only way is to accept Cetus and confront it; the more you avoid it, the more you'll suffer. Never stop dreaming. It's what keeps us alive. But know the limits. Knowledge and wisdom are the key.'

She finally realised the power she had. Piles of books, lifting her towards the stars.

'Go on. Raise your hand; touch it.'

Valentina Kiliorides & Ioanna Arvanitakis, Year 8A





1st Runner-up

THE PIANO

My fingers became one with the cool keys of the piano, creating musical ripples which flowed across the cluttered room. As I felt the music circulate through my body, my heart gushed with a feeling of serenity. My eyes dimmed and finally closed, darkness encapsulating my every breath. Out of the blue, I sensed my body shift while the music played. My limbs felt foreign somehow, like they belonged to someone else. I tried to lift my shoulders, but they refused to budge; I felt paralysed. My body hummed and I had no other option than to yell. As I did, my throat felt like it had shattered into a million pieces.

Before I knew it, my body was wide awake and my feet capable of holding my weight up. How long had I been stranded *here* for? It must have been an exceedingly long period; not that I had a sense of time. But where exactly was *here*? I didn't know and had given up on finding out. The only thing I could see was a mechanism of sorts: it loosely resembled what I guessed the insides of a clock to look like.

Today was the day. I was going to play my piano again. It was still here, even though I couldn't wrap my head around the logistics of that. It seemed to have grown into the clock, like they were now perpetually connected somehow. My fingers shook against the keys; they had once felt so secure. But now I felt like I was riding a bike for the first time, shaky and insecure. The dulcet melody absorbed my worries, filling my world with once-lost hope. The keys got the better of me; I had missed this.

As I begin to play, the clock seems to tick backwards. For some reason, things seem odd. Light is projected by the piano, and my eyes begin to blur into a haze of colors and shapes. In the middle of all this, all I am sure about is that a window has been opened in thin air. Where will it lead me? I am about to find out.

*Penny Tritsinis, Joud Abusalah, Dafni Andrikopoulou
& Anastasia Stamatelopoulou, Year 9A*



2nd Runner-up

THE MELODY OF TIME

He strode through the small bar and quickly made his way towards the piano on the wooden stage. He looked around; the bar looked fairly new and one could tell that it was meant for wealthier society to eat in. Everything was spotless; the only thing that stood out was the piano in the middle. He finally reached it. The man took a second to admire the marvellous craftsmanship. The piano looked old, hence not matching at all with the rest of its surroundings. He had heard it was an ancient relic, so he was itching to play on it, to feel the thump of the keys beneath his fingers.

He sat down on the wooden stool in front and began to play.

His fingers danced over the surface, generating a heavenly melody that seemed not of this world. He quickly finished a short song; after all, he has to prepare for the bigger performance this evening. Suddenly, he heard a soft thump on the ground. He looked down to see one of the keys of the piano. He looked at the piano, but before he could bend down to get the key, something glistened at the corner of his eye. He looked to where the key once stood and saw a tiny golden coin in the hollow space underneath. He reached for it, but the second he did he felt a sharp pain across his fingertips. He grasped his hand in pain, but that wasn't the biggest problem anymore. He looked around the what-used-to-be bar and found that it was all slowly disappearing, as if evaporating into thin air. The world around him was spinning and it made his head hurt. He could see the last wall behind him falling apart, to reveal a wall of carefully arranged clogs. The entire room was glowing, and suddenly – it was all gone.

Yana Danina & Michelle Aliaj, Year 8A



Key Stage 4



Winner

MELODY OF LIFE

On the top floor of the ivy-covered, timeworn clocktower, in a windowless, candle-lit room, there lay an old-fashioned grand piano covered with a sheet of velvety dust. It had been a while since the last time he played his song; that one song with the sombre, soulful melody that brings chills down your spine and makes you quiver. It was a song that could turn back the clock and give him the most desired gift of all: time. He looked at himself through a piece of fragmented mirror. His face was starting to crack and wrinkle once again. A single strand of grey caught his eye as it tried in vain to blend in with his blond curls. He longed for the day that he could play his song. He wanted to live, no matter what the cost; he wanted to live forever.

He pulled open a small latch on the wood-panelled ceiling and silvery moonlight flooded the dim room. Today was the perfect day he could play his song: the perfect day to gain eternal youth. As he sat down, he began to play his angelic melody, hitting the keys gracefully but with an abundance of passion. While he played the instrument elegantly, decrepit keys snapped into pieces. He ignored the pieces collapsing and continued playing, maniacally now, absolutely certain that it would not matter. If he continued playing his divine piece, he would stay young and immortal. There was nothing to fear as he was God, someone with eternal youth in his grasp.

He kept playing. He couldn't break off. He felt pain with every key that he pressed – F#? That's a broken little finger. The pain was never-ending, but he didn't halt. He was sure that nothing could terminate his eternal youth. The once sweet and heart-warming melody started turning into a discordant combination of sounds. He felt both the piano's and his spinal chords crumbling into pieces. 'There is no way that this is the end,' he thought to himself as he kept hammering the now cracked keys of the remains of a once stunningly beautiful instrument. He was dead.

Ellie Papa, Alex Bortnyk & Maneesha Mahamadachchi, Year 10B



1st Runner-up

THE HANDS OF TIME

Keys flashed left and right, the pianist's weight leaning heavily into the stool. His chest rose and sank with each movement across the piano. The huge clock kept ticking with such force, it shook each one of the pianist's bones. Time. It was running out faster than he could carry out the melodious piece he had so rehearsed for. He started to panic. Never in his life had he felt so helpless – was it stage fright? He knew he had come prepared. Then what was that burning itch that persisted in the back of his neck, urging him to quit, convincing him that he wasn't good enough? The gears of the enormous clock grinding and clicking did not help this feeling subside; on the contrary, it made it worse. He looked back up at the enormous clock and could hear the ticking of time running out. His clothes were drenched in sweat. There were twenty seconds left. His consciousness grew wary of the perspiration dampening his forehead. He wanted nothing more than to dab at it but with hands that were occupied and trembling, his work was his only priority.

His fingers started to tap frantically on the keys, even though they were aching as if they had been crushed by tons of solid rocks. But he had to keep playing: it was as if his whole life depended on it. Ten seconds now – he had to make them count. In a single fluent movement, he waltzed through the remainder of his piece, ending in a smash on the final key that echoed across the room.

He stood abruptly, shame clouding his thoughts as he took a bow towards the crowd. He awaited their disapproving remarks, though none came. The audience erupted in applause as the pianist heaved in exasperation. Pure relief struck the rusted cogs of his brain and for the first time in a while, a genuine smile lit up his face. The forces working so hard to sabotage him didn't manage after all, for his passion was too strong.

*Adrita Akbar, Matina Papageorgiou, Rafi Firdouse
& Antoine Bozzoli, Year 10A*



2nd Runner-up

TALK TO THE MOON

The bright moon high in the scintillating sky emitted a cold and ethereal silver glow, covering the vast world with a hazy and dreamy white gauze, turning the world into a dazzling place. The moonlight streamed onto the black and white piano keys with my fingers dancing, which connected to form a gentle piece of melody reaching everyone's ears.

I was born to take on the family mission. If I stopped playing, time would freeze. In keeping with the law, I never stopped.

Until she entered my life. Her sweet, delightful voice cut through the air and hit my ears. I couldn't move my eyes away since my first sight of her. The cool breeze blew her hair, with her smile brighter than the sun. She approached slowly and sat beside me as the sweat cascaded down my forehead. I have never seen such a gorgeous woman in my life.

She whispered, 'Henry?'

I was aware that my heartbeat was audible, and with a trembling voice I replied, 'Yes...?'

'Must be great to play the piano.' I shook my head. She smiled to comfort me and giggled, 'I will keep you company then.'

As time passed, she kept her promise – until one day her entire existence turned to ashes and disappeared before my eyes.

My fingers can play no more cheerful melodies but only depressing tunes; sometimes, they hit the keyboard in rage. The clock ticks as time passes; I cannot stop until I'm utterly exhausted. After the final Bang! of the piece, everything turned to silence. There is something in my throat that makes me unable to make a sound, not even to cry out. It felt like centuries until a white slender hand appeared in front of me. It slowly pressed each key on the keyboard until it reached my face, gently tracing my eyes, nose, lips.

'Wake up,' I heard her whisper next to my ear. 'Won't you welcome me back?'

Qinqin Li, Fima Amin & Yingtong Zhou, Year 11A



Key Stage 5



Winner

THE LAST GOODBYE

Do you ever wonder what life is beyond the one you know of? Have you ever felt something so surreal you never wanted it to end? Let me let you in into a utopian experience I will forever cherish.

I decided to flee a chaotic city, one which was lively, a city that did not sleep at night, where lights spoke louder than people. To free my mind, I took a drive down to a place I would lie with my father when I was younger: one where stargazing was unreal, as if the stars would come to talk to you, tell you a story, whisper a mesmerising secret, that would make you tear up with the slightest smile, lighting up your heart. On this particular day, the stars were missing my father as much as I was as I watched the lionising white pearls in the sky fill up the void and dance in between the soft, sleepy clouds.

A story was about to be told to me, a masterpiece of sorts. As I stared into the extraordinary painting drawn across the night airglow, a little girl appeared dancing so softly, corresponding to the movement of the clouds. Stars formed a dazzling barricade around her petite body as she floated with her magical vehicle – strangely, an umbrella. She seemed like she was travelling to another universe beyond the starscape. ‘Where are you going?’, I whispered to myself. I felt the urge to reach out for her hand and ask her to set out on this adventure together, even as two total strangers. The serenity gushing through my soul was breathtaking, goosebumps making my body quiver.

I watched the unknown creature slowly dissolve into the sky dome, gradually rising as her heel touched a sheet of endless stars, leaving me with nothing but a farewell. I blinked; a teardrop ran down my flushed cheeks. I felt a powerful bond with this young girl. I looked up, and the sky expressed tranquillity. Flashbacks burst, taking me back to a vivid fantasy that that was me, a young girl who the stars took on a journey to see someone who the skies and stars loved as much as I did.

Liya Aksir, Year 13A



1st Runner-up

POLARIS

The umbrella was the only thing keeping me from sinking into the void below. My eyes were shut; I could not bear to look at the ground far beneath me, where the buds of almond trees lay dead and cold on the wet ground, deceived by a few azure mornings. Since then, the swirling mists had rolled in, casting their frozen pall over all they touched and obscuring the beauty that once was – but those are bygone days, bygone times. Down below in their midst, with a star as their only guide, ships sailed into the thick veil of gloom. Down there is where the halcyon days are signalled by kingfishers, only to be followed by the bleak and unforgiving March. But I am not there anymore; Polaris now floats beside me. 'I am as close as anyone could ever reach,' I thought aloud, 'but nothing has changed'—

Suddenly, the umbrella vanished and I began to shrink; I was reduced to a microscopic cluster of colours and my limbs were integrated into the thin mist. I was nothing, but everything concurrently. I could sense warmth within me, as if my bare soul was merely what remained of me. I raised my hand – or was it air where my hand once was? – and the light shone through.

I began to fall, my soul surging amongst the clouds and stars, until all ceased at once. I can no longer breathe; I am no longer occupied with thoughts; I exist amongst the soil, trees and the ocean. I have united with my past and future selves. I am a daughter of the universe.

Aithra Anagnostopoulou, Year 13B



2nd Runner-up



A WISH UPON A STAR

I close my eyes and make my last wish. Taking my last look at this town I call home, I glance upon the brown bricks that would've been red if the smoke from the ashes hadn't smothered them. I take in for one last time the zoo that's around me: the chimneys, tall and spotted with dirt like giraffes; the river of waste that poisons our food and minds like a serpent; and the steam engines moving like melancholy elephants going clinically insane. As I walk away I say my last goodbye to the walls and floors that embodied the doll house I called home. In the distance, I hear the echoes of those who once filled my perfect doll house with complete memories, laughter and love; now all they are capable of is producing unforgettable sorrow. I turn my back on the dolls I once loved dearly and prepare for my journey.

An umbrella in one hand and a bag that contains all I want to remember from this life: memories so light and joyful that they could never drag me back down.

After a lifetime of relying on my dolls for happiness and trying to please them, I only ended up drowning my self in a glass of sorrow I called home. I drew some final breaths before sipping down my happiness. The fear that rushed through my veins was a small price to pay for eternal bliss, or so I thought.

Suddenly, I find myself floating through the clouds. I see the fragments of my past, deceptively shining and shimmering like stars, but I ascend above them. I allow myself to be swallowed by the empty void that surrounds me, and hope that now I can be part of something. My new doll house – a hollow, endless, and meaningless space – yet my bag and I are prepared to give light to my new home. I hear a voice familiar to me: 'Lola, we're different. People like us will never give up on sharing our love. But if it ever consumes you, fly above the clouds and find me. Because I will always be there when you wish upon a star.'

Milana Malyan & Alex Velissarios, Year 13B



Toby Reynolds

“Once you learn the joy of reading

a whole world of discovery opens up

and you never look back.”



*“Books are a uniquely
portable magic.”*

Stephen King

