



Inceptstamption



Write a Book in a Day



PARAMETERS FORM

TEAM DETAILS

STATE: VIC
DIVISION: Middle School
SCHOOL/GROUP: Box Hill High School (BOX HILL)
TEAM NAME: INCEPTSTAMPTION
TEAM ID: 208

PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

Parameters

Primary character 1 Photographer
Primary character 2 Basketball player
Non-human character Seal
Setting Billabong
Issue Forgotten birthday

Random words

Whistle
Light
Gold
Hungry
Bubbly

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start at 8am
- Write an original story:
 - based on all **five parameters** (above)
 - including all **five random words** (above), and in bold type
 - with some identifiable **Australian content** (in theme or setting or characters, etc)
 - keeping within the allowed word count (remember every word on every page counts)!
 - include this parameters form in your book **immediately after the front cover**
- Remember: **Every word on every page** counts. This includes your front cover, back cover, blurb, acknowledgements and copyright form.
- **Be sure to give yourself enough time to submit your book and complete the following checklist before 9pm.**

Log on to the Team Coordinator Portal to:

- ☐ Check the spelling of your team name and team members' names (how these are spelt on submission will be how they are displayed on certificates)
- ☐ Complete the Declaration
- ☐ Submit your finished book in **both** PDF and plain text format by 9pm

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Dedication: To Ms Pearson and Ms McQueen and all the librarians of the world.

Chapter One: James

I survey the towering gums, leaves lingering just out of reach. A couple abandon their nest up in the trees, floating down towards the water, sending ripples all the way back to my feet at the edge. My eyes glance over the shimmering water and I'm greeted by the sun's **gold** reflection. A pair of glossy eyes rise and blink away the water. He is here. Flopping over onto his shiny back, Louis soaks in the midday sun. Louis is my only true friend – always by my side and always in my head. I rearrange my back against the firm rock and take a deep breath. I have never really had a friend. That is – apart from Louis – I did have a friend Becky back in Prep. She moved, of course. Like everyone else in my life – interactions have been fleeting, relationships have never stuck. He is not here yet.

I **whistle** to Louis – if he stays in the sunlight too long, he'll get sunburnt. And today I don't particularly feel like rubbing sticky aloe vera through his matted fur. The **light** glistens across the water and Louis glimmers in the sun as he glides toward me. Louis is a seal.

I prick up my ears in hopes of catching the sound of a distant car. Where is he? He was supposed to be here already. I mean, it's not as if this is the first time, he's let me down. I don't know why I thought today would be different. On my birthday I kind of hoped that – for once – he'd come through. I guess that was too much to ask for – that my father be around for our annual camping trip. It's my 12th birthday. Maybe he just forgot about his lonely son like he always does. Wouldn't be the first time he forgot me and my feelings either. I let out a sigh at the thought. He still appears to care about me, at least he seems to whenever he is around. Somehow, he still manages to convince me that the next time will be different, that I will be worth his time. But then, when the time comes, my father is not there. Just like right now. He's never there. A wholehearted promise (or so I thought) with him saying that there was no reason he'd miss this. Yet here I sit - left alone with just me, myself and Louis. I remember when I first found Louis. Becky was there that day. She was such a good friend, I miss her.

Becky's small hand grabbed mine. The mercury had reached a scorching 42 degrees. The hottest September temperature recorded in over 20 years. I had just lost my basketball grand final - and what a loss it was; 40-4. Basketball meant the world to me. If I wasn't crying over the loss of my Mother or emotional distance of my Father, I could be found dribbling a ball until late at night. He hadn't come. I decided this was the last time he promised and didn't arrive. Prior to that day he had let me down a whopping 35 times (pickups from school, sporting events, parties, presents, but mainly promises). I had had enough. Becky saw my crestfallen and crumpled face and quickly begged her mother to take us to the zoo as a treat. I felt drawn to the seal and sea lion enclosure, with their squished faces staring hopefully up at me. Becky wrapped her arm around me and stared. I followed her gaze and saw him. He was here. He couldn't come to my game, but he could be here. He was here talking with a fat smile on his face. I couldn't believe my eyes. Actually, I could – 35 times now and I should've known better. Becky's eyes met mine and I felt a cold stream run down my face – was that rain? No. It was my heart – I had completely lost hope. He had missed my birthday. If only I knew what was to come. I was only 7.

I finally turned 12 today, and I'm just as heartbroken.



Chapter 2: Harold

"Move that one over here!" "Could you make him look less **hungry**?!" Its absolute chaos. I arrived at the zoo four hours ago, and we still haven't finished. The everlasting stench of fish infiltrates my nose. I gag. I can barely hear myself think. I walk backwards, glancing down at my camera, hitting my back against the monkeys' exhibit. Time is slipping through my hands as I photograph each animal with an unchallenged precision. Water puddles draw across the concrete - almost suffocating the hard floor. Lugging my equipment from enclosure to enclosure whilst being assaulted by an array of artificial and natural **light** sends me into a daze. Suddenly, I'm overwhelmed by an excruciating, indescribable pain, similar to that of a hundred of elephants stomping on my feet - my suitcase is on the floor, lens', batteries, SD cards, and all my technology is scattered around my foot. From the blunt impact I sense a bruise forming.

Nothing is going right, and everything is going wrong. I've had to make a tight arrangement. After all, money doesn't grow on trees and James must learn that everything I do is out of love and in his best interests. His future is of great importance to me. I can still make it to the billabong, but I know that in his eyes a promise broken too many times hurts the heart more than any physical pain. I check my watch. Time is falling through my fingers.

"Quickly sir, the giraffes are waiting." The attending zookeeper chuffs.

"The animals must continue their everyday activities in order for authentic photos to be taken."

If they want me to photograph the animals, they should at least attempt to listen to what I have to say. I don't need their inexperienced suggestions or judgmental comments all covered up as 'constructive criticism', all I need is the animals' co-operation and silence. Why do they feel the need to question my experience and professional knowledge? It simply makes everything difficult and wastes time.

Finally, after too long, the giraffe shoots are complete - what an exhausting encounter. I promised James I would be there on time. And what have I done? Messed up my one and only chance to prove myself and my love to him. My chance to prove that I can stay and that I can be there for him. I know I have messed up before, but I have changed. I've settled down, got myself a job, and I'm ready to come back into his life. *If* he'll let me that is.

"Hurry up, we've five more exhibits to go!"

The blinking green letters on the clock torture my head. 4:30PM. I might still have time! I scoop up all the equipment around me and rush towards the next enclosure. *The Monkeys*. We could be here for a while. I almost envy them, the way they have no commitments and no cares. I can see them sneering at me; the silly man who made one too many promises. The man who broke one too many promises. I almost forget that I must take photos. As I pass through each exhibit, I hear a clock ticking away in my head. Soon enough there's only one more animal to go, the famous lions. The lions are always easy, they don't move too much or run away. Instead, they lay around and lounge,

looking majestic without a care in the world, and, when they do move, it'll only be to soak up the sun or luxuriously stretch their limbs.



Chapter 3: James

As the crickets chirp and the day fades into evening, my dad is yet to appear. Louis sits loyally beside me; I gently caress his head. He lets out a high-pitched bark. I smile. He has and always will be here for me. The only constant in a life of uncertainty and inconsistency. I stare at the sky and hope. For what is life without hope? I listen out for the rumble of a sputtery four-wheel drive and slump back down when all I can hear is the occasional rustle of leaves and the call of a bird.

Sunlight ricochets off the trunks of gum trees and douses the bushes in a warm golden paint. What's the point of waiting? I make up my mind to leave. After catching a bus here and sitting against a rock for ages I feel the need to stretch my stiff legs. Motioning to Louis to follow, I jump up from the sandy gravel and pitch a rock into the water. Plonk. I begin scaling a large rock face and reach for a rope. With a leap of faith, I jump off the rocky ledge and grasp the mossy rope tightly. Swinging through the air confidently, I feel like Tarzan. Louis remains behind me, swimming through the billabong to keep up. My hands grip tightly until I feel myself slipping halfway across. Using my legs to clutch I lose my grip entirely and fall backwards.

"AAAGHHHHHH!"

I wait for the thwack of cold water to hit my head, but it doesn't come. I close my eyes and take a deep breath before trying to pry them open slowly. I see branches dangling from the sandy sky and clouds beneath me. It takes me a moment of comprehending near death before I'm thrown back into the body of a 12-year-old boy that has been abandoned by his father and just happens to be suspended upside down over a billabong. My thongs dangle precariously off my toes and I groan. Losing these would mean the fifth lost piece of clothing in a week. I doubt my father could be bothered sparing his money on a new pair of Australian rubber.

I wonder how I could I extricate myself from this situation? You know I like big words. I like the way they make me feel – smart, intelligent, knowledgeable and mostly, significant. My mum taught me to explain myself in a respectable manner. She left when I was 5 and Dad has been broken ever since. They're more alike than he realizes. I wonder whether he even realizes that he is doing the one thing to his child that broke him as an adult. I think the worst part is that he doesn't know. His ignorance has left him stomping on my young heart with steel capped Blundstone boots.

Back to the situation. I'm stuck dangling on a moldy rope, upside down, across a billabong that probably has many eels. Luckily, I am close to the bank – quite a sandy bank I must say – I consider just letting myself drop whilst there is still momentum. Louis cackles from the bank and claps his flippers – mocking me. Using my torso to propel myself I swing towards the bank. Remembering my experience on the bars at school I execute a perfect genie. Some of you may not know what that is. Google it.

Once I'm down I venture further into the bush – stepping over large stones and menacing roots before coming to a halt behind an imposing Eucalyptus tree. Upon closer inspection I find a hollowed section inside and see a flash of ochre. I peer inside the hollow and whip out my Philips

torch. Swiveling the beam around I discover Indigenous drawings, paintings and etchings telling many different stories. One catches my eye – a picture of a boy and his dingo. As I go to take a picture of it with my phone, I realize there is also two adult characters standing over the boy's shoulder. It mesmerizes me – so much so that I don't even hear the screeching of rubber until it is on the other bank.



Chapter 4: Harold

As soon as the clock hits 6 I grab my camera and case and sprint out of the zoo and into the car park. My hands fumble around in my pockets trying to find the right key to start the car. I get in and slam the door behind me, turning the key, the engine stutters for a few seconds before coming to life, making my heart jump right out of my chest. *I can make it.* I carefully hurry out of the car park before merging onto the highway at a ridiculously high speed. I don't care. The only thing on my mind is the image of my son's face if I don't show up; it's a face that I am sadly all too familiar with. Travelling at an extreme speed, a surge of pure, undistilled determination courses through my veins. I continue to swerve and storm past other cars. There goes a Hyundai, Toyota, and Audi. Before I have the time to react properly, the windshield glows red as the brake lights of the car in front flash to life. I slam my foot down on the brakes and watch helplessly as I witness my life flashing before my eyes.

What is wrong with me?

What sort of father can't fulfil a promise to his son? What have I done to deserve such an intelligent and pure – hearted son whom I continue to disappoint? I am in debt to my son. The universe has gifted me so many opportunities to make it up to James – and yet I still haven't provided for him. I haven't been there for him. I haven't been a father to him. Why does he still show me so much love?

I am in shock. The car grinds to a halt, simply millimeters away from cascading into the car in front of me. My hand trembles at the wheel as I urge the car forward and proceed to roar down the highway. Again, I still consider that I once again will be late. I only slow when passing a police officer. The amber-light ahead blinks and is replaced by a dull red glow. I'm forced to bring the car to a halt. Although this time I'm in control. I reach into my bag and pull out the remains of what *was* a cardboard box, an item that now resembles a soggy sandwich. I shake the box slightly and to my dismay, I hear the tinkle of broken glass. It was meant to be his present. The small snow globe had caught my attention as I walked past the window of the gift shop on my way out of the zoo.

In the center of the globe there is a small, grey seal that floats up and down when you shake it. It was the perfect gift for James. He's always loved seals and has an inexpressible connection to them.

"Merge left at the next exit". The sound of the GPS only frustrates me more as I drive even faster towards the exit, prompting a loud honk from a fellow driver of whom I narrowly miss. As I drive up the ramp and spin around the corner, I am met with a stunning view. The evening sun peeks through the trees surrounding the billabong - the last rays of daylight reflecting off the smooth water. Just the thought that I have arrived floods my body with a long-awaited relief. I ease into the clearing, parking my car next to a few barren bushes. I swing open the door and tumble out into the fresh air, almost neglecting the picnic rug, sandwiches, and bottle of 'Extra **Bubbly** Pepsi' I bought this morning, which, has since fallen flat. As I jog into the clearing, a menacing shiver travels up my body. Something is wrong. I can't see James.

“James!” I yell out. No one answers. I spend the next 15 minutes running around the billabong searching behind bushes, up in trees, and behind fallen branches. *He could just be playing hide and seek*; I can’t seem to swallow the truth. A part of me knows why I can’t find him. He’s given up on me. He has every right to. My face falls and I sink to the ground, dropping the rug and sandwiches next to me. A lone tear drips from my eye.

Chapter 5: Harold

Slumped against a sturdy rock I reach behind me, feeling for an irritating object against my back. I fumble around before my fingertips brush the lens of a camera. I pull the camera out I from behind my back for further inspection. It's the tiny red camera that I used to take with me when I first started photography. I cradle it lovingly in my hands. Alice gave it to me. Alice is James' mother. It holds some of the strongest, most beautiful memories of our loving, committed family. Flicking it on with one finger a whirring sound escapes and I am reminded of capturing the alluring memories from my past. I hold the camera up to the bewitching trees and take a few photos of ghastly branches reaching towards the sky. The resolution on the camera is rather inadequate for the editing programs I have now, however, no amount of professional hardware will be able to replace the memories that this little red block holds within. Tentatively, I get up off the ground and brush myself off before walking around the billabong once again, this time though, I'm taking pictures of the many plants and animals that reside here. They all live here together in agreement, resembling a big harmonious family. I take some more pictures, just to capture an overview of the whole billabong. As I turn around to take more, I notice a slight movement from the corner of my eye.

A person reveals themselves. Tousled brown hair, fading out to blonde tips, a basketball uniform and an innocent face. As he steps away from the trees and out from the shadows, he catches a glance at the red camera in my hands and I watch him break inside; his body washed over with utter sadness.

"James." I plead with a sigh relief. "Why were you hiding?" He shifts from foot to foot. From instinct I can tell that he isn't in the mood to speak, this time however, I need him to listen. "Here." I throw him the small camera, it clatters upon contact with the rocky sand. He stares at it, unmoving.

"Go on then", I say gently, "Pick it up."

He bends down and slowly picks it up. The whirring sound of the camera makes my heart jump once again, however, this time it isn't because of the fond memories, this time it's because he listened to me. A few moments of silence go by before I hear him murmuring quietly.

"What was that, boy?" I gently prompt, "Speak up."

"I *asked* where this photo was taken." He lifts his head up and his eyes meet mine.

He passes me the camera. The photo on the screen shows a family of seals, two older ones, and three little ones. I instantly recall the taking their photo.

"Around two years before you were born when I was on holiday with your mother." At the mention of Alice his eyes seem to light up. "She liked seals too, you know."

I suddenly remember the broken snow globe in my bag. I rummage through my bag and pluck out the soggy cardboard box. Reaching inside I gently lift out the broken glass sphere and hand it to James.

"Happy Birthday son."

He looks down towards the present in my hands. "I know that it's kind of broken but if you look at it from this angle and put this piece here-"

"Thanks Dad. I like it." He presses his lips together in a slight smile. I'm stunned to the point where I don't know what to say.

We sit in silence for a few minutes, the sounds of the frogs and the crickets bouncing off the trees. James slowly sits up and turns to me.

"I want your complete, utter, and silent attention," he says sternly with a calm undertone, "I want you to listen."

I nod my head slowly. At least he is willing to talk.

"I don't like it when you promise me things, and then break them. I don't like it when you say you'll come to my game and never show up. I don't like when you pretend to care, but then you put countless other things before me." He furrows his brow looking down into his lap.

I nod my head again to prove that I am listening.

"And..." he says, "I don't like it when you forget me."

At this, I jerk my head up. "Forget you? Why would I forget you?"

Chapter 6: James

What had miraculously changed about him? What sparked his sudden interest, care and understanding towards me? How do I know that this isn't just another time he shows a dot of affection then breaks his word and my heart? Don't get me wrong it means a lot to me, I watch his face, twisting into a mixture of curiosity and understanding with an underlying anxiousness anticipating my every response. Curious, at least I hope so. I look behind dad's shoulder and I can see Louis smiling at me. Louis has always been there for me ever since I could remember, as young as 7 years old.

"Dad..." I say softly, not brave enough to look him in the eye - afraid of the tears which threaten to escape.

"Yes?" he says holding my chin up to face him.

"Listen son, I know what you have gone through." I envision him thinking about Mum.

"Trust me, I know the feeling, and I know that I haven't always been the best father."

"Yeah?" I interrupt him.

Hoping he would say everything I've dreamed of, hoping that this was real, and that finally, he would change his ways.

"Whenever I break a promise, believe it or not, it kills me. I hate seeing you so unhappy and standing alone when I should be carrying you on my shoulder. I know that there is no excuse for how I have treated you in the past and I understand that you may have lost all trust in me. I can acknowledge that my promises must mean nothing to you now and have lost all credibility. I apologize for introducing all my issues and sorrows with your mother from the past into our relationship today. I never considered how they would affect you. I am sorry I never gave you the attention, appreciation, acknowledgment and stability that you wanted. Above all, I'm sorry my actions haven't always shown my true feelings towards you, they may tell a different story, but the truth is, I really do care and love you with my whole heart, more than anything else in this entire world."

I look back over his shoulder, tears blurring my vision, and see a small figure smiling at me. It's Louis. He's here. He smiles and nods at me before sharp turning towards the edge of the billabong. I cry out, but my voice dies in my throat. He looks back at me and lifts his small flipper up, as if to wave goodbye. Louis magically fades away, as if he had never existed at all. As he slowly waddles away from me, he takes with him every feeling of abandonment and loneliness previously stored inside me. He has faded.

Dad's love has shined brighter than anything else.

All is forgiven.

In this emotional story Harold and his son James navigate their unstable relationship. After years of inadequate support and neglect felt by James, he develops a special connection with Louis, a young seal who provides him with support and companionship. A sudden turn in James' father – son relationship occurs on his 12th birthday, triggering something that could change their connection forever.

