

## Writing competition

Step into a symphony of stories!

Imagine a world where books burst open and amazing characters from every kind of story leap out!

**Write a short story about a wonderful world filled with colourful characters.** (Limit of 3 pages per entry.)

The cool air over the Parramatta River was crisp, smelling faintly of salt and eucalyptus. I walked along the familiar concrete path, mind drifting, when a bizarre spark of light caught my eye. Just beneath the murky surface, a ribbon of iridescent violet light and soft blue light began to pulse. I leaned over the railing, captivated. Suddenly, the quiet evening shattered. A swelling musical chord echoed directly from the riverbed. The sound felt physical, wrapping itself around me like a warm current. Before I could react, an invisible force yanked me forward, plunging me headfirst into a vortex of pure melody and blinding light.

Instead of choking on muddy river water, I took in a breath of warm, sweet air. I opened my eyes to find myself floating in a surreal, luminous ocean. Every time a wave rippled, it didn't make a loud splash: it made a chime that sounded like delicate silver bells. Down here, gravity felt optional.

As I stabilised myself in the glowing blue water, a school of tiny fish darted in front of my face. I gasped, for they were not made of scales, but intricately folded book pages. As they swam, the printed text on their fins glowed with a warm light. A folded dolphin, made perfectly out of an old atlas, leaped over my head, leaving a trail of sparkling musical notes. The water's melody was their life, the beautiful fuel giving breath to the creatures. Inspired by this breathtaking magic, I took my notepad and pen out, desperate to record the scene, until it vanished like smoke.

The moment my pen met the paper, the world died. The soft, chiming melody cut out instantly, replaced

with a black silence that pressed against my ears like lead. Horrified, I watched my ink dry up and turn to ash on the page. All around me, the magic was draining away like water down a plughole.

"What is happening!" I cried out, my voice swallowed by a dark, empty void. A turtle weakly rustled its paper head, its voice sounding like nails on a chalkboard,

"It's the Shadow Witch," It murmured, "She's set out to rid the Symphony of Stories ocean of all imagination! You must help us, Celine!"

The turtle carried on, "The Shadow Witch has locked our symphonies in her sunken library. Without the melodies, we will shrivel into nothing but black paper. You're our last hope!"

Before I could process the weight of the request, a colossal shadow loomed beneath me. Out of the gloom glided a majestic whale folded from a poetry book. It sank low, offering its broad paper back as sanctuary. I scrambled aboard, gripping the soft pages in between my clammy hands as it launched forward into the eerie darkness.

Our journey to the Quiet Trenches was a gauntlet of pure terror. The ocean had turned into a void lacking any colour, freezing cold and painted with an oppressive gloom. Suddenly, the water around us began to churn. Monstrous, shapeless ink-blobs leaped from the shadows with jagged teeth made of dark pen nibs.

"Think, Celine, think!" I yelled to myself inside my head. I closed my eyes and reached deep into the dusty corners of my mind. All the stories and fairytales weren't made of swords or power, but of words.

"A shield of blazing sunlight!" I yelled into the darkness, "A wall of roaring, golden fire!"

The sheer force of my words materialized into a blinding barrier of golden light around the whale. The moment the ink-monsters slammed into the spoken descriptions, they dissolved into harmless puddles of watercolor, melting away into the dark current. We pressed on, diving deeper until we reached the absolute bottom of the sea, where a twisted, sunken library loomed like a haunted castle. Water-logged bookshelves floated through the ruins like ghostly sentinels, guarding the heart of the darkness.

In the center of the ruined library stood the Shadow Witch, a towering phantom draped in cloaks of pure midnight and smoking ash. Floating in a halo around her head were dozens of heavy glass music boxes. Inside them, the stolen symphonies thrummed frantically, bouncing against their icy cages like trapped lightning bolts.

"Your stories end here, child," the Witch hissed, her voice a chorus of tearing paper that threatened to paralyze me with fear. The temperature plummeted, and the edges of my origami whale began to freeze and tear.

Knowing this was my only chance, I locked eyes with the phantom. I turned away from the cold and focused entirely on my happiest human memories: the roaring laughter of my friends, the comforting warmth of the summer sun, and the sweet smell of old library books on a rainy day. I gathered those

feelings into a tight ball of emotion and let them detonate.

A supernova of brilliant, sun-gold light exploded from my chest, shattering the heavy silence of the library. Cracks webbed across the glass music boxes before they shattered simultaneously into a million sparkling, harmless shards. The grand, trapped symphonies rushed outward in a magnificent, roaring tidal wave of brass and strings. The Shadow Witch shrieked, her smoky body evaporating into nothingness as the triumphant music washed over the ocean floor.

Instantly, the world reeled back to life. The dead silence was replaced by the glorious, familiar chime of silver bells. The encyclopedia whale beneath me let out a deep, resonant song of joy, its pages glowing with brilliant shades of sapphire and gold. All around us, millions of paper creatures revived, dancing and swimming through the musical currents like confetti in the wind.

Before I could even say goodbye, a sudden, powerful whirlpool of melody caught me, spinning me around and rocketing me upward through the glowing sea. I blinked against a flash of blinding light, and when I opened my eyes, the weight of the water was gone.

I was sitting cross-legged on the damp, grassy bank of the Parramatta River. The evening air still smelled like salt and eucalyptus, and the water before me was dark and quiet once more. As I looked down on the notebook resting in my lap, my mind was no longer a desert. It was an ocean, a tidal wave overflowing with ideas. I immediately flipped to the next page and my pen began to fly across it.

INNER WEST

SYMPHONY OF  
STORIES