

BARFOOT & THOMPSON

LICENSED REAA 2008

YOUNG

AUCKLAND
WRITERS
FESTIVAL

—
WAITUHI O TĀMAKI

20
22

AUTHORS
CHALLENGE

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BARFOOT & THOMPSON
LICENSED REAA 2008

YOUNG 30 MAY - 29 JULY 2022 AUTHORS CHALLENGE

PRIZE POOL

Category winners will each receive a **\$500** cash prize and books valued at **\$250**

Their school will also receive a **\$1000** cash prize and books valued at **\$1000**

A great day out

Tell us about **a great day out** with family or friends. Maybe it's a summer trip to the beach or Rainbow's End, a walk in the bush or up a maunga, a big celebration at your grandparents' house or movies at the mall. Whether you like to go out fishing, biking, exploring a river or visiting the T-Rex at Auckland Museum, we want to hear about it.

Please send any questions or queries to youngauthorschallenge@barfoot.co.nz

For more information and T&Cs go to barfoot.co.nz/yac



Winners will be announced prior to the 2022 Auckland Writers Festival taking place 23 - 28 August. With a special presentation to be held during the festival.

School competition categories

Primary: up to 250 words, Intermediate: up to 500 words, Secondary: up to 750 words

AUCKLAND
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WAIHUHI O TĀMAKI

PRIMARY CATEGORY FINALIST: AVA HART

THE DINOSAUR THAT CAN'T KILL

As we entered slowly, it all became real. The overwhelming amount of people, masked and unmasked, standing around, talking and staring at the exhibits. I touched my mask to remember that I was safe.

Panic rose in my mind. Large, crowded spaces were so overwhelming, especially with all of the extra noise.

It was... a lot.

Walls surrounded everything, trapping me into the crowds of people. I wasn't sure what to do, but the light brushing of my family's bodies against mine made everything seem a little safer. My parents led me and my brother in, and we all had one thing to see: Peter the T-Rex.

I expected the ginormous fossil to be far into the museum, but no; he was right near the entrance.

He looked free, not caged up. A small fence with mountains of cardboard held him up, a royal figure standing over all of us, his crown glowing magnificently.

His body was large and coal-black, his mouth wide open, waiting for the perfect kill.

"I can't believe this is a million years old!" I gasped softly.

"I know," my mum replied.

Looking up at him, I wondered: what was he like before he died?

He lashed his tail angrily, picking up the scent of his prey. He snapped his jaw, baring his gleaming-sharp teeth, and started running towards the smaller dinosaur, revelling in its fleeing terror. He bent down and snapped ...

I blinked, coming back to the present, and slowly stepped back...

PRIMARY CATEGORY FINALIST: ETHAN SHEN

A GREAT DAY OUT

Sword fighting, archery, axe throwing... three things you will never do in a normal holiday programme. But at NZSSCS (New Zealand Stage & Screen Combat School) I was trained by professional actors on how to do all three of those things!

When I first walked into the school, I couldn't believe my eyes. Axes were thrown, swords were clashing... The first thing that caught my attention was the collection of swords on the wall. Cutlasses, sabres, rapiers... all the types of swords you could possibly ever think of, their blades shining in the sun.

As I walked further into the school, the instructor called all the students to the mat. His bushy beard reminded me of Santa Claus, but without the outfit. After the students settled down, he divided the students into four groups. We were told to decide on a team name, but everyone wanted a different name. "How about the Paladins?" I suggested. "No, that's stupid! I think-" said someone in a blue shirt, before he was interrupted by a sea of suggestions and people interrupting each other. We finally decided on "The Bears".

The instructor with the bushy beard led us to do some sword fighting. We grabbed plastic swords and practised the 8 attacks and blocks! We also threw axes at wood, which was harder than I thought. Archery was difficult too, but I had fun in all of them!

After a day of sword fighting, archery and axe throwing, I headed back home.

PRIMARY CATEGORY FINALIST: GABRIEL TALBOT

MY FISHING ADVENTURE WITH DAD AND JOHNNY

I woke up excited! Today I was going fishing on a boat with Dad and friend, Johnny. The tide was high at the wharf that morning. As we waited, numerous kingfish were lazily swimming around. When the small blue boat arrived to take us to the Alderman Islands, I was ready for adventure. Johnny, Dad, and I hopped on and we sped away.

Along the silent hour-long ride across the expanse of flat ocean we saw a workup of sooty shearwater. I could tell because they are smaller than skua. I was becoming hungry for fishing when we finally stopped at a 70-metre deep mark that showed up on the sounder. We got our rods ready and began to drift in the sway of the current.

First, Johnny got his mechanical rig ready and dropped his line down. Almost immediately, he hooked up with a fish, but it was a barracouta! Next we dropped down our other lines. I placed my rod in the shiny rod holder and sat down for a rest. Then in only five minutes, I began to wind my line up and a heavy weight jumped on. There was a golden snapper on the line. Now I was really excited! After that I caught four more snapper and tarakihi that day. Johnny and Dad congratulated me on the six fish I'd caught. I had the biggest catch of the day. As we arrived back to shore that afternoon, I was already planning our next fishing adventure.

PRIMARY CATEGORY FINALIST: JETT HIRST

JETT GOES TO THE ZOO

Today I was going to the zoo and I was feeling really excited. I got ready and my Mum, my brother and I drove to Auckland zoo. At the zoo we got our zoo passports. I got a red panda picture on mine. My brother got a normal panda picture. I couldn't believe Caleb from my class was at the zoo too! We played together on the playground then we went and saw the lions, the penguins, crocodiles, otters, red pandas, rainbow birds, Leopard gecko, Tasmanian devil, and monkeys! It was amazing and the animals were incredible. It was awesome, I never wanted to leave.

Then we went to see the kiwis. We saw one kiwi pool! It was really funny! We then saw some amazing butterflies. One of the butterflies flew on my nose then it flew away. After that we went to the shop and I got a meerkat soft toy I named him Zane. Next we went and saw the tarantulas. The tarantulas were hidden in the darkness. The tarantulas were big and hairy.

The zoo has really cute animals but the cutest animal that I like is the golden tamarin. The golden tamarin is a monkey that has golden fur all over it. We saw the new tiger exhibit and lions and after that we saw flamingos. The flamingos were beautiful and pink. The Tasmanian devil was really creepy, like a devil. I can't wait to go back, it was the best day ever!

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY FINALIST: BECCA THORPE

THE HOLIDAY OF SURPRISES

Splash! Gasp! I crawl to the surface from the depths of the lake gulping for air. "Did you see that jump, Dad!?" I yell. "Yeah Scarlett, it was amazing!" he murmurs, looking down at his phone. My smile drops. Ever since Mum died two years ago, Dad has never been the same. He's always on his phone, never paying much attention to me. I swim back to the shore. "Lets head back to the hotel; we'll need to get lots of sleep for the beach tomorrow," Dad says. I smile. I love the beach; it's my safe place.

When we arrive back at the hotel, I stride inside. I enter my room and crash onto the bed. I think about how this is the first holiday I've had since Mum died when I was fourteen. Minus Dad's inattention, it has been pretty good. I close my eyes and instantly fall into a deep slumber.

I wake up to the bright sun shining on my face. I hop out of my bed and change into my swimsuit. After eating breakfast, Dad and I get in the car and drive to the beach. Arriving there, the water shines brightly in the sunlight. Looking out into the waves, I spot a platform. What looks to be a teenager is on it. Something inside me draws me to the person, so I decide to swim out to the platform. The cold salty water hits my body as I swim, and the water stings my eyes. When I arrive, I climb onto the platform. "Hi!" I hear. I look up and lock eyes with a boy's green eyes. "Hello! I'm Scarlett," I introduce myself. "I'm George". It's love at first sight. Me and George talk and my feelings grow. When It's time to leave, I give George my number before swimming back to the shore.

When I get back to shore, I look to see my Dad upset. Ignoring him, I sit on the sand admiring the beach. From behind me I hear my Dad speak. "You shouldn't talk to that boy. He will break your heart." In a wave of rage, I yell, "Dad! Just because Mum died doesn't mean I can't find love! It's not like you love me! You never pay any attention to me!" I sob. An awkward silence follows. "I'm sorry... your mother's death really hurt me and I don't want you to experience that heartbreak... I just want to keep you safe!" Dad weeps. In a moment of clarity, I understand that we are both still in pain and we both need comforting. I stand up and walk over to my dad and hug him. "I'm sorry. I love you." He hugs me back, murmuring, "I love you so much," and I can already feel the dad of old times coming back.

My first love was a surprise, but my father's renewed love was the best surprise of all.

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY FINALIST: CHARLIE ROSE

A GREAT DAY OUT!

This was going to be the worst day ever. It was going to be so humiliating at my friend Zach's party when I was the only one who didn't go on the water slides.

One rainy Saturday, Zach's mum, Nicky, came to pick me up. I walked over to the car and got in the middle seat, in between Logan and Liam. It was an hour-long drive to Parakai Springs which was filled with lots of talking.

When we got there, Logan said "Oh, the slides look sick." I hadn't seen them at that point, and thought "how bad can it be?". Then they came into view. "There's no way I'm doing that," I thought, the slides looked as tall as the Sky Tower.

I took my bags and placed them down on a table next to everybody else's. Logan and Liam went to find Zach and the others on the slide, but Aaron and I stayed back. It turned out that he didn't particularly want to go on the slide either. So instead, we decided to go into the hot pool first. We walked into the indoor pool and there was a thick layer of steam rising from the water. We floated around in there a bit before Zach came in.

He told us that we didn't have to, but we should try the slides. We could start off on the smaller one, he said. Try it once and if you don't like it then don't go on it anymore. It all seemed reasonable to me, but the problem was trying it at all because I was scared.

It felt like about a year walking up those wooden stairs with our blue foam yoga mats. When we got to the split-off between the smaller and bigger slide, we went across to the smaller slide. Of course, it was still pretty big. Zach and Aaron, sharing a mat, had already started. When I reached the top, the height hit me. We were quite high up. I almost backed out and Liam said I could decide not to and nobody would care. But I was determined to do it. Liam hopped on the front and I tentatively sat on the back. Remembering the advice my friends gave me, I pulled my knees and feet onto the mat and held on tight.

With a push from Liam, we were off. We were a bullet, shooting through the tunnel and splashing everywhere. I was not prepared for the first turn. It tipped you to the side and you thought you were going to fall off. Eventually, we hit the bottom.

It had been fun. And you know what, an hour later after messing around in the hot pool with everyone, I did try the big slide. It was awesome too. So it turned out that what I thought would be the worst day ever, was actually one of the best days of my life.

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY FINALIST: HANNAH BARKER

OUR TIME IN MOZAMBIQUE

It was about five o'clock in the morning and the sun was waking up. I was helping my parents pack the car. It was school holidays and we had decided to spend a week in our neighbouring country, Mozambique. I had never been there and I was looking forward to it. Waking up at the crack of dawn was not the best, but I pulled through, and we got on the road. As our car bumped along our little town roads, I leant against the window and pointed out someone riding an excitable horse on the sheep-dotted hills. It was a long drive until we got onto the tarred highway, and then even longer before we got to the busy border between the two countries. We waited in the line until a friendly policeman checked over the car, in case we were trying to smuggle illegal goods. Once we were on our way again, I became more and more excited as we got nearer to our destination. We were planning on camping in a nearby campsite. All I wanted to do was go and swim in the sea. I saw the blue, foaming waves crash down on the smooth sand and wanted to hit them with my boogie-board. My parents unfortunately wanted to set up camp and have lunch before we went anywhere near the pebble-dotted shore. We put up our tent and had our delicious homemade sandwiches. Finally time came for us to take a visit to the beach. On the way down we went through the little local market. People were selling fresh vegetables and small accessories. We met so many friendly people and bought a few bracelets. It was dusk when we got down to the beach, and it was beautiful. The warm coloured sun reflected the water to form a magnificent sight. We sat on the sun-touched sand with our drinks and watched the sunset. I had hoped to spot a dolphin or two but none came into view. We waited until dark before we went for dinner. We made a fire and perfectly roasted steak, and ate it with fresh salad. My dad had gotten a new metal detector, and wanted to test it out. We walked down to the beach, and started scanning the seashore. We found many old, rusty bottle caps and a few tent pegs. After about half an hour of walking across the beach the detector gave off a persistent beep. We had assumed that it was just another bottle cap, but we dug and found nothing. The beep, however, assured us that we should dig some more. After a while we dug up a very expensive looking model truck. It was green with opening doors and bonnet. It was now very dark so we decided to go back to our cosy tent. It had been such a busy day that I fell asleep the moment my head touched the pillow.

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY FINALIST: SHELBY DICKIE

I SPY WITH MY LITTLE EYE, SOMETHING BEGINNING WITH...ROAD TRIP!

On a midwinter day my family and I went on a trip to Miranda Holiday Park. It's our favourite place to go on holiday and the weather is always perfect! We normally go on holiday because my mum feels stressed, she works so hard running 2 businesses so she definitely deserved it. We were staying Sunday to Wednesday so it was a good break for all of us.

When I woke up a couple of hours before we had to go, I felt so relieved that I had already packed my bags the night before. All I had to do was load my small pile of stuff into the car, but my sister's pile was unbelievable. I say that because my sister had packed so many things, it's like she had brought her whole room with her! 20 stuffed toys, 3 small suitcases and 4 extra bags. I don't know why she needed all of this seeing as she is only 7. Like I say, it was unbelievable. We all eventually packed our items into the car and then soon enough, we were on our way.

Eventually, we got to the holiday park and I felt so happy I could finally lay down on my bed. The only bad thing about my bed was that it was a triple bunk bed, which meant it was quite hard to get into, seeing as the amount of space there was, but I managed to squeeze in.

The cool thing about this holiday park is all the fun things we could do. There's a playground, a BMX track, a mini putt, tennis, pedal karting, but best of all, you could go swimming in the thermal hot pool, which was amazing! After a good night's rest, we went to Thames. Thames is an old and raggedy town built back in 1870. I'm surprised it is still standing. After shopping for a couple of hours we came back to the holiday park. I thought about how overpriced one of the second-hand shops was, it was really sucky because they had some really cool stuff too.

It was day 3 and we were having so much fun! We got to see the Karangahake Gorge Gold Refinery ruins. It was really cool walking around and looking at the site. The next day came and unfortunately it was time to go. In the car mum announced to us that we were all going to the Auckland Museum! I went to a Museum when I was younger with my grandparents. I had always remembered it as being kind of boring, but when we got there everything was so fascinating. We learnt about animals, ancient times and much more. Overall my favourite thing there was the volcano exhibit. We got to sit in a little room that showed what it would be like if Rangitoto erupted! It was all so realistic. There were lights flickering and the room was even shaking! It all looked so real and the experience was so much fun!

HIGH SCHOOL CATEGORY FINALIST: ALICIA CARR

AN UNEXPECTED MEMORY

Sweat dripped down my forehead eagerly as I sat squished in the back of the taxi. It was only nine in the morning but already the sun was beating down and the temperature was in the late 30s. The lack of air conditioning didn't help.

In the decades-old white Hyundai, four of us – my mum, my two brothers and I – were piled into the backseat meant for three. It felt as though the taxi was bursting at the seams. As the oldest, I had earned the privilege of a window seat, not that it meant much in this piece of crap. The windows didn't roll down and there was no cushioning on the door, only sharp plastic that pierced my exposed skin like a knife.

Up in front, the friendly driver appeared to be unveiling his life story to my dad who sat in the passenger seat. His thick accent and constant change between English and Arabic made him difficult to understand. At times, the driver would become distracted by his own words and accidentally drift into the other lane, jolting us in all directions. His driving was chaotic, however, that seemed to be the norm here.

We knew we were getting close when we began to leave the city. The tall brown buildings slowly became farmland and then nothing more than desert. A mere five minutes later we came to a screeching halt. Opening the door, I jumped out of the taxi gasping for fresh air like a fish out of water. Several metres away I saw another taxi pull up in the unpaved carpark. Some of our friends clambered out. Grabbing their belongings from the car, they gathered themselves and then took a look at their surroundings. Suddenly, all four individuals stood up straight, eyes bulging. The youngest pointed towards me. Confused, I followed their glance. Using my left hand to block the sun, my eyes gradually focused on the sight before me.

Three jagged structures shot out of the surrounding desert. They were golden in the sunlight. Ahead, hundreds of tourists flocked, snapping selfies, huge, humped camels dressed in colourful blankets strolled, and locals wearing the traditional galabeya roamed selling cheap souvenirs on metal trays. Abruptly, I realised that the rest of my family had already begun making their way over following a winding path. I pulled my hat onto my head, swung my bag over my shoulder and then began to jog in their direction, desperate to keep up. By the time I reached them, despite the short distance, I was panting like a dog – the weather wasn't getting any cooler.

We then began to explore. It was nothing like the lush greenery and developed suburbs I was accustomed to back home, however, I couldn't help the sense of awe that washed over me. The scene was like something you see on postcards! I noticed that others held similar expressions – bright eyes and mouths open.

As the morning drew to a close, despite the collective protest, Mum decided to get our families together for a "quick photo" – an unrealistic standard when a bunch of pre-teens are involved. Silly faces and possibly inappropriate hand signs were made as Mum yelled at us to stand up straight and smile nicely. Aware that my sweaty face would likely become her latest Facebook post, I grimly complied.

Suddenly, one of the men who had been selling souvenirs came toward us with a big greeting of, "Hello! Sabah al-khair!" His brown galabeya blew in the wind and he wore a white Taqiyah cap on his head. The man struck up conversation, introducing himself and asking where we were from.

As the small-talk died, he asked if we wanted to see something cool. Gesturing for my mum's phone, he positioned each of us, one at a time, in front of the camera with the ancient structures behind us. He barked out orders: body at a 45-degree angle, right arm in the sky, hand pointing downwards, face looking at the camera with a big smile. We followed his instructions without question, and then surrounded the small screen when he had finished his handiwork.

Looking at the final result, a laugh slipped from my mouth. I decided that I wouldn't be too mad if Mum posted that photo on Facebook. We thanked him profusely as he departed, returning to his tray of souvenirs – a friendly stranger who had given us a memory that would last for years to come.

HIGH SCHOOL CATEGORY FINALIST: ANNA JOSE

MEMORIES AT KITEKITE FALLS

My ears woke up hearing not even a single droplet of the unwelcoming rain that had been eating up west Auckland for the last few days. My ungraceful hands threw open the curtains that barricaded light from interrupting my room. The kowhai tree that gave life to my unmowed lawn was embellished with the tiny transparent autumn drops from the cat and dog weather last night. As far as my eyes could tell, not even a single cloud dared to rain. Six days had blown by from the term holidays like a breeze and not once did my heart tell my unmotivated body to step out of our cozy house. But today was different. Today, I wanted to go out to the bucolic air. I rushed into my living room which smelled like toasted smores because of the wood-devouring fireplace providing summer to our house. My mum was sipping away on her spice-infused chai that I despised. "Good morning Eesha. Fine weather to go on a walk, right?" my mum asked with a genial smile that suited her graceful face. I don't know how she does it, but it's like she's in my mind saying things before I could even function my voice to ask.

My hands were numb from clutching the woven leash of Simba, my puppy. The moist mud stood still to be stepped on by my soiled canvas as I walked through the skyscraper ferns, towering above me which swayed in the sultry winter breeze. My sister was gripping my parents' hands, humming a melody that could never beat the tui's chorus which ringed in the forest air. It had been over 30 minutes since our legs had been busy trying to force us to come to our destination and I knew we were approaching it because the dominating roar of the falls was the only thing that our ears managed to pick up. "Finally" I sighed registering the incomparable beauty that encapsulated around me. A mountain of rocks, sprouting with lush moss, cooled down with carpets of fresh water, pouring down to produce a swimming pool as a gift for the people. Before I knew it, my punctured feet were dipped in the tranquil water along with my little sister. Simba was already enjoying his swim, splattering around as he created waves to disturb us. I tilted my head to my right to distinguish my parents splashing each other with water just like they did with me before my sister was born. Suddenly I felt someone's bony hands push me from behind, sending my face to meet with the shallow water. The next thing I heard was booms of laughter echoing above me. I let out a vehement gasp of relief and confusion as I scrambled up to the surface to find myself with my family who decided to prank me. "Very funny" I exclaimed with a tone of sarcasm in my voice as I managed to get out of the water which was as graceful as a ballerina at the surface but a vicious monster below. Mum wrapped a towel around me like I was a baby, but it didn't stop the water from bugging me from head to toe. My sister was laughing at me like I was her personal clown, so the war began.

Soon we were all giggling about, sneaking up and staining each other with water. "I guess it's time to leave," dad said calling Simba to sit by his side. We resembled people who had survived a tsunami but it was the most fun I had with my family in a long time. As we reached the newly tarred road where our car was waiting for us outside the forest trail, we noticed our favorite ice cream truck, Mr. Whippy. I've been pigging into Mr, Whippy's ice creams since I can remember. The smell of delectable melted chocolate flowed out from the van drifting up our noses. "Dad, can we please buy it" my sister and I begged dad. "Alright," he allowed. We're going home, our car blasting with Katy Perry, with our tongues wrapped around our ice cream topped off with flamboyant sprinkles and a flake on top all possessed in a cone. Simba was munching away on his treats since he doesn't like to be left out. "I'm glad we went today" mum added. "Me too" I replied back with the hope of knowing that we could have another day just like this.

HIGH SCHOOL CATEGORY FINALIST: HAZEL COOK

CURATED EVENTS OF A BYGONE DECEMBER

It was one of those Summer storms that starts as a gathering of humidity in the sweltering air, turning everything slow and sticky. People started to bring collapsible umbrellas to school, and Dad put up the clothes rack inside for the first time in months.

On Friday night, I loitered on the deck and stared up at the sky. Around me, silhouetted trees loomed before amorphous plumes of cloud. Nature felt very powerful, which should have made me feel very small. Instead the enormity of it all was invigorating. Each breath, I imagined electricity dancing into my lungs until they swelled with light. A surreal stillness had gathered, within which inhaling lightning seemed entirely possible. Somewhere in the distance, a car engine roared. In my head it was thunder.

Saturday was the beginning. The problem with storms is that they are always more interesting before they actually start, and this one was no exception. While up in the atmosphere, it had potential. At any time it could've struck, and that was exciting. Once it did, there was little but continuous downpour and darkness, interspersed by a flash-boom of thunder and lightning. Before a storm, there is always a wonderful frenzy of activity as all around people attempt to finish things they can not possibly do in the wet. They start moving things indoors, surrounding themselves with belongings like magpies hoarding pieces of glass and metal. Yet once the first drops start to fall, activity halts. Culd sacs previously bustling with life empty. Doors slam. People seal themselves away in the glow of their houses, listening to the pounding on the roof and praising their marvellous foresight.

In retrospect, my eager anticipation for the clouds to finally crack open seemed foolish. Once the storm had begun, it would follow a predictable linear progression until it was completely drained away. All of suburbia would settle into a gentle hibernation, from which they seemed unable to wake until the return of the Sun. However it was important to note my irritation was probably more to do with having to sit in a cramped ute, surrounded by whiplashed rain and saturated wind, than to do with the storm itself.

The ute belonged to the Karekare surf club, and was overflowing with lifeguards. Under the canopy, a group shared a canteen of coffee and listened to crackling messages over handheld radios. Most of the other guards were playing cards in the back, although the deck was incomplete. Up front, Stella and I were taking turns to watch over the breakers through binoculars. A dilapidated paperback she'd read twice before balanced on her knee.

Our combined breath was fogging the glass, and I had to regularly wipe down the inside of the windscreen to see anything. Luckily there was little to see, our surveillance merely a procedural safety measure. Not even gulls dared brave this weather. The entire coastline had bled into a monotone watercolour, excluding the two brilliant red and yellow flags crossed before the swells. Beach closed. No swimming.

I scanned the shore. Jolted to a stop. A dark shape. There, on the foamy tideline.

"Stella!" I whispered. Or at least meant to. All eyes turned to me in confusion. Wordlessly, I handed her the binoculars. For a moment, she searched the beach. I found myself fixating on the startling orange of her nail polish. My heartbeat boomed.

"Is that... a seal?" She asked. A thousand hands shot forward to grab the binoculars from the backseat, cards forgotten.

"I reckon so!" called a voice.

"Nah, too small."

"Could it be a pup? Probably injured or somethin'. It's real still."

With a rush, the doors were flung open and we spilled out into the stinging deluge. Chunks of sodden sand were tossed up by our racing feet. Rain caught in my eyes, casting the seal's form an inky blur that grew closer, closer... Until I blinked and saw that it wasn't a seal at all. Only a piece of driftwood.

In silence, we gathered around the not-seal, hair plastered to our scalps. Regretfully, I looked back to the discarded shelter of the ute. Somebody had left their door open and now damp shadows blossomed over the seats. Lightning split the sky, singing the air. Outside suddenly felt very dangerous. One by one, we began to laugh. It was a maniacal mirth, our veins leaping electric with adrenaline. We were idiots. We were alive. So immensely alive.

HIGH SCHOOL CATEGORY FINALIST: MELISSA XU

A FESTIVE NIGHT

Moonlight poured from the hand of the night sky, blessing its light on the lives below. The festive mood was in full swing. Smiles and joy could be evident on everyone's faces; not a single frown was visible. The sweet smell of food wafted through the air as the sounds of people's laughter and chatter lingered all around. Fairy lights blinked and flared, illuminating the starry night.

I felt myself freeze at the sight of the giant swarm. Inhaling deeply, I let my eyes drift to the delectables that were being sold instead. I imagined the many aromas mixing and blending as they hung in the breeze. I imagined biting into the soft cream which lays atop the spongy cakes. I imagined digging into the juicy pieces of meat as if I were a carnivorous beast, all while taking short breaks to enjoy the chewy pearls within the milk tea. I was so immersed in my fantasies that the crowd seemed to fade into the background like extras in a book. I finally felt my rapid heartbeats slow down and my tense body starting to relax.

All of a sudden, an almost overpowering gust of wind blew toward me, my jet-black hair fluttered and danced, before violently colliding with my face.

Just great.

The night really was starting in the best way possible. I grimaced in contempt as I tucked a few loose strands of hair behind my ears.

I looked around the different stalls, unsure of where to start. At the sight of so many living and breathing humans, I clutched my grandparents' hand tighter. There were people everywhere, and they seemed to only ever increase by the minute. It was almost as if they were spilling onto the streets from an invisible portal. Everything was just so overwhelming. Panic gripped my heart, threatening to immobilize me once again. I wanted to hide somewhere far far away where no one would ever find me, away from all the people.

"Are you alright?" My grandfather's voice pulled me back into reality, its warmth melting the fear in me.

I bit my quivering lips and nodded.

My grandfather's gaze softened as my grandmother gave a gentle squeeze with her hand. I evened my breathing and smiled back at them. Everything will be okay. After all, I have my grandparents with me; they promised that this would be fun.

Together hand in hand, we toured the fair and visited a variety of stands, each selling different things. I tried many kinds of delicacies, some sweet, some savoury. There were even toys, strange toys, toys I had never seen before.

I watched as a person passed out balloon animals to the children who gathered around him like moths to a flame. Each of their little faces lit up with joy when they received a balloon. Right next to them was a stall selling elegantly decorated kites. All the kites had a base of vibrant red with dashes of other colours. Some were shaped like birds, others like dragons, and some even looked like fishes. When the strings curled out and the kites were let into the freedom of the skies, they would flutter and flitter in the currents. As they soared through the air, they left behind a trail of feathery ribbons in their wake. I wrapped my arms tightly around a dragon kite as my grandparent led me to the food court. The food was just like what I imagined. They were all so delicious.

Time passed by quickly. Before I even realized, the clock had ticked past the hours that the night was already drawing to an end. I had so much fun and delicious food that time completely slipped out of my grasp.

I watched as the vendors cleared their area and took down their stalls. The stars blinked longingly as they watched the people leave one by one. The moon hurriedly pulled dark clouds over it as if to cover its tears. There was no longer any lingering aroma of food nor the festive mood seen at the start. There was only fatigue in the remaining eyes.

The clock struck midnight as we left behind the area entirely to the mercy of the night. I could almost imagine silence enveloping the deserted domain as darkness covered every corner.

"Did you have fun?"

The corner of my lip perked up, and I grinned, "Of course! Did you even need to ask?"

PRIMARY CATEGORY WINNER: EMMA WHITE

WAITOMO CAVES - THE WONDERS BELOW!

Our group halts, and Moi, (our humorous tour guide,) chatters excitedly about the cavernous cave we are standing in. My mind drifts back to moments earlier, when I had walked into a miniscule cavern, stooping to avoid the stalactites that had hung from the low limestone ceiling. I then slowly shuffled across a bridge, gazing in awe at the humongous abyss spread before me..." Come on!" My brother cried softly, and I realise we're beginning to move again. A million steps later, after Ooo-ing at a trillion beautiful stalactites and stalagmites, I entered an enchanting, grand cave, with a magnificent rock that seemed similar to a church organ, and after gazing close-up at trillions of Titiwai on something raised above the dark, ripple-less water, we arrive at a metal platform with a metallic boat tied up tight to a pole. Everyone - (strangers, Moi, my family- mum, dad, my brother- and I) clambered inside, careful to balance the boat before Moi untied the thick rope. We drifted along silently, staring above us, because above us lay... the Titiwai! They seemed like vibrant stars in a stygian night sky, illuminated perfectly. But all too soon, we approached the end of the cave and slowly emerged into a brilliant, seemingly brand-new world. Everyone left the boat (apart from Moi) and made the trek back to the car-park, along the way observing the beautiful greenish-blue river and the abundant plants and towering trees like the Kahikatea tree.

Titiwai: Glowworms

Stygian: Dark

INTERMEDIATE CATEGORY WINNER: DEMI KINSELLA

A GREAT DAY OUT CAMPING

There's no better feeling than waking up warm and cosy in a tent as the sun rises. It's an even better feeling when you know you have two whole weeks of northland camping ahead. Two weeks of sunshine, beaches, road trips, swimming, fishing and making new friends.

That's how I woke up on the 31st of December 2021 and had my greatest day out.

Stretching, I snuck out of my camp bed, careful not to wake my brother and sister. I unzipped the tent and was greeted by the sounds of Pukekos and the smell of bacon cooking. The sun was rising and the grass outside the tent gave way to the beach and the vast ocean.

After a breakfast of bacon and eggs we packed up and headed out for a road trip to Cape Reinga. Eye spy games on the trip made the drive quick and we were soon walking up to the lighthouse. Cape Reinga is where the Tasman sea meets the Pacific Ocean at the northernmost part of New Zealand. It is said that this is where Maori spirits begin their final journey. The view was amazing but we were keen to get to the beach so we took photos and headed back to the truck.

At 90 mile beach we sunscreened up as the sun was beating down. Grabbing my boogieboard I raced my family as fast as I could to the top of the sand dunes, my feet sinking into the hot sand as I tried to run. I had to run fast because the sand was so hot! I turned around at the top and realised how high the dunes were. With my heart beating hard I sat on my boogie board, pushed off and surfed down the dune.

Exhausted, we hopped in Dad's truck and offroaded through Te Paki stream onto 90 mile beach. We found the perfect fishing spot and sent the Kontiki out into the waves hoping it would catch us dinner. We dug for Tuatuas in the sand and steamed them over the stove for lunch. I was excited to pull in the line to see what we caught but was disappointed with our catch. Five baby sharks and a tiny snapper were all set free. Carrying the hammerhead back into the ocean was my job. I was careful to avoid its teeth as it wiggled about when I tried to release it. No fish meant a stop off for pizza in Kaitaia on our way back to camp, which I was really pleased about. Back at camp the sun was setting as I joined a game of spotlight and lit some sparklers. Counting down to the new year, I could hardly keep my eyes open. I was happy when midnight came so I could crawl into my camp bed. I was asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow but my last thought was that today was my BEST day out!

HIGH SCHOOL CATEGORY WINNER: JULIA WILKINS

BEST DAY EVER

Water surges up the embankment, vicious waves snarling at my feet. They don't make it, spitting as they're forced to slide back into the lake. The waves should really pick another victim, because my toes are already numb from the combination of the cold, damp concrete, the biting spray, and the fierce wind. Yet despite the miserable conditions, a smile pulls at my lips. The lake stretches out before me, and there's a wild taste in the air, an electrifying buzz. My blood pounds. In this moment, it feels like anything is possible.

I step into the lake. Compared to the icy blades of wind, the water is almost warm against my legs. Waves slap against my board, a call to my soul. I can smell the storm, a scent of smoke and darkness curling in the air. It's going to be right above the lake soon. My face is greeted with the patter of the rain, the water falling in billowing sheets. The wind ripples the droplets until the rain is an echo of invisible sails, swelling and deflating. It's time.

I clamber up onto the board, rocking with the waves. We float down the shoreline until I heave the sail out of the water, arms straining and knees screaming. The lake water falls away, and my breath catches as I pull the sail up to its full height, rising like a fiend out of the lake. It is a red of warm, wet blood and the glowing embers from a dying fire. I greet it with a smile, then turn to stare down the storm.

Claws of wind catch the sail in a scream of defiance, half tearing it away from me. But I hold on, my arms burning. Beneath my feet, the board is slammed by waves; it turns uselessly with each slap. Fear turns my body numb. If it turns too far, then the sail will crash down on top of me and I'll be devoured by the hungry jaws of the tempest. Desperate, I fight the sail, trying to force it to be steady and still alongside me. It snarls and bucks away, refusing to work with me. A howl of triumph echoes through the air, rain seeping into my wetsuit. No, dammit! We've drifted out into the maelstrom, the shore now just a dark mound obscured by fuzzy layers of rain. Water washes over the board against my feet, almost warm compared to the icy air. My wetsuit clings to me, soaked with rain and spray, and my fingers are so, so tired. Maybe I should just give up. The grey crown of the sky is a cruel grin above me, it's jagged teeth flashing bone white. A wave of rain splatters against me, kissing my cheeks with a cold whisper. Give up, give up, give up. The wind rages anew, pushing and pulling the sail, waves spinning and drowning the board. And I stand, clinging on, in the middle of the raging turmoil.

No. No, I will not give up.

Ever so slowly, I relinquish my death grip on the sail, loosening my trembling fingers. The sail pulls away, but steadies. Realisation hits me; I had the sail on too far an angle. Laughter bubbles up in my throat. The board slows its futile spinning, my feet grounding it as I adjust my position to mirror the sail. The wind roars. All I need to do now is pull back on the sail. I grin at the sail. Stormrider. A name worthy of a magnificent vessel.

Then I pull back on the sail.

A gale catches, and Stormrider bumps up over a wave, slamming down on the lake. I feel the challenge of it in my bones, and the storm answers with a thunderclap, a ringing boom across the skies. It only makes me smile harder. Ahead, the water ripples and turns dark, phantom hands of wind rushing across its surface towards me. When they're on top of me, snarling and slashing, I lean back and let Stormrider's sail fill. She enters a glide, speeding over the water, a dragon with wings spread. We curve over the lake, wind in my hair and rain on my face, a wild grin ripped free. The storm hisses, but we slice through its rain and ride on its wind, learning its secrets with each roar torn from its mouth.

I taste its fierce, eternal heart with a smile on my face.

And I ride the storm.

THANK YOU TO ALL THE ENTRANTS

ACG Parnell College
Albany Junior High School
Aorere College
Ardmore School
Auckland Normal Intermediate School
Avondale College
Bairds Mainfreight Primary School
Balmoral School
Baradene College Of The Sacred Heart
Bay Of Islands International Academy
Bayswater School
Beach Haven Primary School
Beachlands School
Berkley Normal Middle School
Bethlehem College
Birkdale Intermediate School
Blockhouse Bay Intermediate School
Bombay School
Brookby School
Bucklands Beach Intermediate School
Cambridge High School
Cashmere High School
Chelsea Primary School
Churchill Park School
Cockle Bay School
Cornwall Park District School
Diocesan School For Girls
Dominion Road School
Edendale Primary School
Elim Christian College (Golflands Campus)
Elim Christian College (Mt Albert Campus)
Epsom Girls Grammar School
Epsom Normal Primary School
Everglade Primary School
Fairfield Intermediate School
Farm Cove Intermediate School
Freemans Bay School
Gladstone Primary School
Glamorgan School
Glen Eden Intermediate School
Glenbrook School
Glenfield College
Green Bay High School
Green Bay Primary School
Gulf Harbour School
Hamilton Girls High School
Hare Krishna School
Hauraki Primary School
Hobsonville Point Primary School
Hobsonville School
Holy Trinity Catholic Primary School
Homeschool NZ (HSNZ)
Howick College
Howick Intermediate School
Huanui College
Invercargill Middle School
Iqra School
Kadimah School
Kaipara Flats School
Kamo High School
Kamo Intermediate School
Karaka School
Katikati College
Kauri Park School
Kaurilands Primary School
Kerikeri High School
Kerikeri Primary School
King's School
Kingsway School
Kohia Terrace School
Kohimarama School
Kokatahi-Kowhitirangi School
Konini Primary School
Kowhai Intermediate School
Kristin School
Leigh School
Lytton High School
Macleans College
Manurewa South School
Marian Catholic School
Marist College
Marist Primary School
Marlborough Girls College
Marshall Laing Primary School
Matarau School
Matua School
Mission Heights Junior College
Moanataiari School
Mount Albert Grammar School
Murrays Bay Intermediate School
Murrays Bay Primary School
Newmarket Primary School
Northcote College
Northcote Intermediate School
Northcross Intermediate School
Okaihau College
Omanu Primary School
One Tree Hill College
Onehunga Primary School
Oratia District School
Orewa College
Otahuhu College
Otamatea High School
Our Lady Star Of The Sea School
Owairoa Primary School
Pakuranga Heights School
Palmerston North Boys' High School
Palmerston North Girls' High School
Palmerston North Normal Intermediate School
Pamapurua School
Peninsula Primary School
Pigeon Mountain Primary School
Pirongia School
Pompallier Catholic College
Pukekohe East School
Pukekohe Intermediate School
Puni School
Putaruru College
Raglan Area School
Rangeview Intermediate School
Rangitoto College
Remuera Intermediate School
Remuera Primary School
Reremoana School
Rise Up Academy
Riverhills School
Riverina School
Riverview School
Rosehill College
Royal Oak Intermediate School
Russell Street School
Rutherford College
Sacred Heart Girls' College
Saint Kentigern College
Shelly Park School
Sherwood Primary School
Silverdale School
Snells Beach School
Somerville Intermediate School
Southland Boys' High School
Springbank School
St Cuthbert's College
St Francis Catholic Primary School
St Johns School Mairangi Bay
St Joseph's Catholic School
St Joseph's School
St Mary's Catholic School Ellerslie
St Mary's College
St Patrick's Catholic School
St Paul's Primary School
St Peter's Catholic School
St Peter's College
Stanmore Bay School
Stonefields School
Tairua School
Takapuna Normal Intermediate School
Takapuna Primary School
Taupaki Primary School
Tauranga Intermediate School
Te Kauwhata College
Tirimoana School
Tokoroa High School
Valley Primary School
Verran Primary School
Victoria Avenue School
View Road School
Waimahia Intermediate School
Waimauku School
Waiuku Primary School
Waterlea School
Westburn School
Western Heights School
Westlake Boys High School
Westlake Girls High School
Westland High School
Whangaparaoa College
Wiri Central School

INFORMATION

We received an astounding total of **1150 entries** from **177 different schools** around the country.

It was a tough decision to choose the finalists from all of the excellent entries we received, and very difficult to choose a winner for each age category.

We will be in touch with the winners to attend your school and award the prizes.

We will be running another Young Authors Challenge in 2023 in line with the **Auckland Writers Festival 2023**.

Thank you to everyone for all your hard work and effort towards the 2022 Young Authors Challenge. We have really enjoyed reading all your stories.

Thank you on behalf of **Barfoot & Thompson**.

