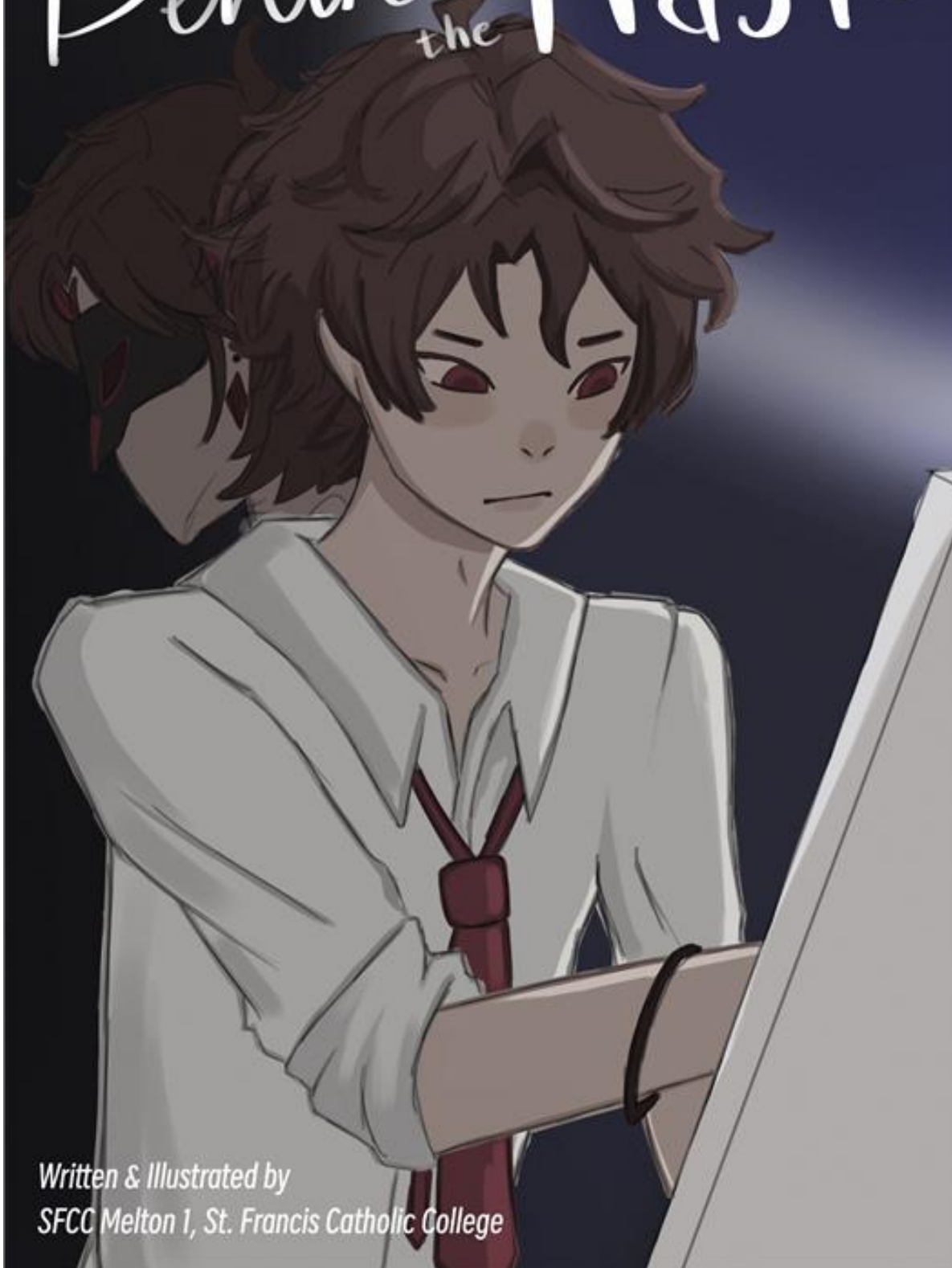


# Behind the Mask



*Written & Illustrated by  
SFCC Melton 1, St. Francis Catholic College*



## THE KIDS' CANCER PROJECT WRITE A BOOK IN A DAY

### Parameters Form

#### Team Details

STATE: VIC .....

DIVISION: Middle School .....

SCHOOL/GROUP: St. Francis Catholic College .....

TEAM NAME: SFCC Melton 1 .....

TEAM ID: 1292 .....

#### Parameters and random words

##### Parameters

Primary character 1 Art teacher .....

Primary character 2 Acrobat .....

Non-human character Fruit bat .....

Setting University .....

Issue Moving house .....

##### Random words

ruby .....

melts .....

shiver .....

tasty .....

sponge .....

#### Instructions

- Start no earlier than **8am**
- Write an original story:
  - based on all **five parameters** (above)
  - including all **five random words** (above) as written, 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

## **Copyright**

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# Chapter 1

## Standing Out

“Alright class, settle down. Remember your assignment is due in two days so don’t waste any time.” I announced to the class.

Chatter and the sound of paintbrushes gliding across the canvas filled the room. I looked around, scanning the place. The walls of the art room were an old yellowish colour and the paint was peeling off. It didn’t look as new as my father said it did. All the students had their own canvas, and the canvasses were laid out in columns and rows. I walked across the aisles, observing my students. They were all so talented, but someone stood out to me. His art gave a sense of nostalgia to me. It felt familiar. Ezra was a quiet, introverted guy. Always keeping to himself. But he had this aura around him that I couldn’t seem to ignore.

“Ms. Reyes, I need advice on how to make my art pop.”

Ezra called, cutting through the noise.

“It’s looking great so far, but to make your art pop, you need to add more vibrant colours to it. Otherwise, your painting **melts** my heart.”

I got his paintbrush and tapped it on the colour red that was placed on his paint palette.

I glided the brush on his canvas. After I had done so, I wiped my hands on my art smock.

“Ah, I understand.”

I nodded and walked back to my desk. Suddenly I heard a sound.

*DING!!*

All of the students left the room as the bell rang, and as I was cleaning up, I noticed that Ezra had forgotten his bag.

“Hey Ezra! You left your bag behind.” I called out.

I realized that his zipper was open, and I peeked through the crack. I saw a mask sitting on top of the art supplies in his bag. I was intrigued but resisted the urge to look. Just as I zipped the bag back up, I saw Ezra standing there with an alerted look on his face.

“Thank you, Ms. Reyes, I should get going now.” Ezra said as he rushed over and grabbed his bag.

He left the room, mumbling something under his breath. I was left there, struck with bewilderment, why was he so concerned about his bag being left with me? Maybe I shouldn't have touched his bag. I shrugged it off as I turned off the lights and locked up the classroom.

## Chapter 2

### Losing my mind

The sun was setting, and I was sitting in the train, the sun was glistening through the windows. The day was already ending. I sat there in confusion and pondered, "*What was that mask?* It looked like something I had seen before. I felt a connection, but I couldn't tell what it was. "Next Stop: Swanston Street," said the announcer. The journey from work was far but I arrived at my house. It was a small cottage with vines dangling from the side. I got ready for bed. I laid down on my bed, staring at the ceiling. The mask. It was stuck in my head. The thoughts weren't leaving my mind, my imagination taking over me. *Why did I keep thinking about this?* I stood up and I went to the kitchen. I decided to begin grading the work to try and ease my mind. I was flicking through the folios when I read the name, 'Ezra'. I opened his folio to grade his work. His art was admirable, there was meaning. He has great potential; he has an appealing art style that catches the viewer's eye. It was truly a masterpiece. My eyes began feeling dry and I found myself dozing off.

I woke up the next morning confused. *Who was that?* He appeared in my dream, but I've never seen him before. A masked man spinning around the air. I tried not to think too deeply about it.

"I'm going to be late for work, I have to hurry." I said to myself.

The sun was shining brightly through the curtains. I glanced around. Everything was so messy. The paintings fell off the walls, all my clothes were scattered around.

*What happened?* I just fell asleep, and I woke up to this! *Did I do something?* I peeked through the window.

“WHAT?! WHERE AM I!? I mean... Those are some pretty flowers.” I exclaimed.

I resisted myself from panicking. This wasn't the first time something strange happened after moving into my house. I was rushing to get ready for work. I pulled out my phone, opened 'Maps' and typed in 'RMIT University'.

“2 HOURS? THAT'S SO FAR AWAY! I'M GONNA BE LATE!” I shouted.

I hopped on my bicycle and followed the route, riding to the nearest train station. The sun was shining in my eyes, and I kept stumbling but I arrived at the station safely. My body was exhausted after riding with 2 bags in a rush. The train arrived and I sat on an empty seat. I made sure to notify my boss that I would be late.

It was already 3<sup>rd</sup> period when I arrived at the campus. The classroom was dark. I walked in. It was silent. “WAIT, WHAT? I thought I had a class today!” I shouted as I checked my schedule.

My schedule read, “Tuesday: no classes”. I stood there looking at my phone, distraught. I felt like a fool, but I wasn't going to waste my time. As I walked towards my desk to put my bags down, I noticed something written on the board. It was difficult to read as it was messy. I tried to make out the words.

“ENGLISH EXAM MOVED TO ROOM 78”



I grabbed a **sponge** and rubbed it against the board. It made a screeching sound that irritated my ears. As I was erasing the writing, the door slid open.

“Oh sorry Ms. Reyes, I just left something in here,” A voice peeped from behind me. I know that voice, it was Ezra.

“It’s okay Ezra.” I replied.

I let him do what he needed to do but I noticed something out of the corner of my eye. He picked up a small duffel bag. It was slightly zipped up and I saw a long black coat sticking out. First the mask and now a coat? My curiosity grew. I finished all the work that needed to be graded and decided to head home. Lunch had just passed, and I hopped onto the train on my way home. As I arrived at my stop, I checked my GPS and it read:

“30 minutes walking distance”

I had lost my bicycle, so I had to walk home. I was carrying less bags as I left my folios at the office. The sun began setting and the sky was painted a deep pink velvet and the sun was shimmering across the horizon. The flowers were being pushed against the wind. It was truly beautiful. I arrived home and was walking up the stairs, I looked back. Admiring the beauty of the sky and flowers. It had been a quick and easy day and I was able to sleep without worries, but the thought of the mask was lingering in the back of my mind.

## Chapter 3

### Under the spotlight

The next morning, I woke up to an unusual sight outside my window again—a vibrant circus had taken over the neighborhood. My house, which was once in a peaceful area among trees and lawns, was now surrounded by colorful tents and bustling performers.

Intrigued and slightly disoriented, I ventured outside with my sketchbook to explore the unexpected spectacle. As I stepped into the circus grounds, the aroma of popcorn and cotton candy filled the air. Stalls offering games and face painting lined the pathways, and children's laughter echoed around me.

My eyes were drawn to the center ring, where a breathtaking acrobat was gracefully defying gravity. As I watched in awe, I quickly grabbed my sketchbook and drew an animal. It was poise and graceful, its wings were round, and its legs were pointed. The fruit bat resembled an acrobat, a circus animal.

And then I noticed something familiar, something that was drawn to me. I look closer in and see something that my state of mind couldn't handle. *The mask*. It was that same mask I've been going crazy about. The one in Ezra's bag. I continued to stay just to make sure it was who I thought it was. As the circus act reached its climax, applause roared, people cheered, and there was me, trying to get a closer look.

As I was trying to move closer to this stage performer, a crowd of people were in my way, and I got crushed. My vision was blurred, and I couldn't see him anymore. It's like he disappeared into thin air. I got up and swiftly walked through the crowd back to my house. I went to my room and put my drawing of the fruit bat on my desk. I observed it then went to sleep to drown in my thoughts.

*Why did he have that mask?*



## Chapter 4

### Up, up away

The sun shone brightly into my eyes, and I woke up. I looked out the window and saw a lake with a bright orange star resting upon it. The light of the sun made the water look like glass; it could be broken with a touch. Big tall trees watched over the lake, and it seemed like my house was on land, right in front of the water. For a few minutes, I stared at the shimmering pond, and I could only think about the mask. Silence was broken by a chirping bird, and I got up and went downstairs to make myself a cup of tea, it was warm and **tasty**. Once I finished with my drink, I quickly packed my bag and grabbed my phone to find my way to university. Luckily, I wasn't that far from my destination, and it only took about 10 minutes to get there.

As I entered the building and strolled down the hallways, I saw Ezra. He was holding his art folio and his backpack was on his back. I was going to walk up to him and ask about the mask, but it seemed that I was interrupted by one of his friends. They walked into class, and I followed behind.

"Good morning class, I hope you're all doing well. Today we are going to keep working on our landscape folios, so could you please get them all out?"

Ezra looked at me blankly then took out his artwork that was in the folio. Did he recognize me last night? Or was that even him? Thoughts about that night are taking over my mind. I hate it. I want to ask him if that was him, but I feel as if something is in the way.

“Ms. Reyes! I need your help.” One of my students called out.

My mind was interrupted by them, and I quickly stood up. While I was walking over to them, I could feel Ezra looking at me. He probably saw me last night, but how!? There were thousands of people watching and he would’ve been focusing on his moves. I shook it off, I’m more mature than this. I need to stop.

“What’s up Amelia-Suzie?” I asked her.

“I’m not sure how to draw these trees.”

“Oh, okay so, you need to use this brush and then do this...”

A few hours pass and university has finished for the day. I was in my office since I had a free period. My head was throbbing, and I felt like I couldn’t think straight. I packed my small bag and slowly walked out of my building. On my way home, I used my phone to figure out where I was going.

When I arrived, I stopped dead in my tracks.

## Chapter 5

### Gone

There I saw nothing but a plain lake in front of me. The place where my house once stood was deserted. A **shiver** went down my spine. It wasn't there. My eyes clouded



with tears. I couldn't believe that my house was gone. *Where do I sleep tonight? I can't even go to someone for help because I don't know anyone.* A million thoughts were whizzing through my head, but my face couldn't express what I was thinking. It felt as if time had stopped right in its tracks. Everything had gone so still that I could feel my heart pounding against my chest. Finally, I snapped out of it and the only thing I could see in front of me was my art class. Then the only thing I could think of was going back to my class, my only comfort place. I didn't hesitate, I just turned and sprinted as fast as my legs could carry me. As I was running, the memories of me and my students flashed through my mind, and it made me feel like I had been running for days. Eventually I saw the facade of the school and my heart was finally at ease. I stood in front of the school, my whole-body trembling. Everything was silent. I could hear the chirps of the birds that were perched on top of the sky-high trees. My soul had finally found sanctuary.

# Chapter 6

## Lost

As I walk through the corridor getting closer to my classroom with each step, I sweat heavily wondering if this is how I'll find my house. I swung the door open to my classroom, and I ran to my desk, grabbed my folio and I looked through all the pictures that I had drawn. "These look like every place I've already been to, so where is it now?" I mumble to myself. I can't shake the thought of losing my house; all the things I love are just completely gone.

I run out of the classroom with my papers in hand ready to look at every place my house has been in. I check all the places. I had already been running from place to place but there was nothing, not even a trace of my house. It was gone and it looked like there was no hope of ever finding it. As I sighed in defeat, I went to the only place that could comfort me at a time like this. It was the university. I ran back over with tears in my eyes, entering my classroom and sitting at my desk wondering what I was going to do. I put my head down and I kept thinking on how I was going to fix this, until suddenly a thought appeared in my head:

"I should look in Ezra's book. He knows me the best. He is my last resort and I do still have to do some grading."

# Chapter 7

## Discovering the truth

I sat at my desk. I felt stressed at the sight of all my students' folios. I picked up a pen and started to mark every folio, I had to get these done.

At the bottom of the pile was Ezra's folio, I flicked through the pages to look at his pieces when a page caught my eye, it was a picture of a circus. The latest one he has created. I flicked through to the start and looked through every single piece, all beautiful artist interpretations of settings in Melbourne. I furrowed my eyebrows and then it hit me. His paintings were the places my house visited. Standing up, I walked the fastest I could to the circus.

As I sat down, I realized I didn't even know where this circus was. I tried googling circuses near me, luckily enough, there was only one result: 'Lucille's Circus of Dreams'. I remembered that was the circus I woke up to. I turned on the navigation and walked to the location. I couldn't help but think of the worst-case scenarios, rushing through my head like lightning. *What if I become homeless? What if I need to move into a bad apartment in the dodgy parts of Melbourne?* All that was making me feel more and more anxious.

Passing every lit-up restaurant and dimly lit parking garage, weaving my way through lines of people waiting for service and crowds of parties. My hands were gripping my cardigan shakily, my heartbeat was going faster and faster. I felt exhausted as I pushed forward and saw on my phone, I only had a few hundred meters left to go.



“You have arrived, your destination is on the left.”

The navigation said in its monotone voice. I’m here.

## Chapter 8

### Turn the magic on

I stepped into the car park and looked at the tent in awe. The circuses were illuminated by lights of all colours from **ruby** red to deep violet. The main tent is big and has little flags at the tips. I never really appreciated the beauty of the circus the first time I was there, but it really was a sight to be seen. In the distance I heard the commotion of people inside the tent. The clapping and cheering of the attendees made me nervous. Am I at the right place? What if I went to the wrong circus? I walked towards the tent and was about to enter the main area when a lady stopped me in my tracks.

“Miss I'm sorry but do you have a ticket to enter?”

A ticket collector looked at me, awaiting a response.

“Uh, can I buy one?”

I said while crossing my fingers.

“Well, you're in luck. Today wasn't a sellout night so we've got a few tickets left. One adult ticket is \$25.”

The ticket collector said as she collected the cash I handed to her; the lady teared the ticket.

“You are just in time for the main act. Enjoy your visit.”

The ticket collector said, beaming from head to toe. I was finally able to enter. I slowly inched my way in, pulling back the draped cloth to see the seats and the main stage. I looked down to read the ticket and made my way to my seat.

## Chapter 9

### All magic comes with a price

I sat in the audience, my eyes shining with joy. Watching all the acts, lions, the ringmaster, plus all the other people in the show. I looked up with a large smile until this one performer stepped up. His name was Lucille, and he had a black and red mask in the shape of a fruit bat.

He had a large black vest with ends shaped like bat wings. His hair was chocolate brown, and his skin was as clear as a porcelain doll. I watched as he danced in the air doing all his tricks. They all looked so beautiful I almost shed a tear, but then something happened. It looked like he was struggling. He plunged headfirst from 60 feet in the air, and I heard a crack. His mask was broken, and I saw that Lucille was Ezra. My heart tore from sadness as he was bruised, and his leg was broken. I called an ambulance as people in the crowd were screaming, I could hear the faint noise of sirens in the background. There was indistinct chatter between the audience and a sense of panic lurked through me. *Is he ok?*

# Chapter 10

## Thanks for the memories

∞

I clicked on the website reading 'Lucille's Circus of Dreams has closed due to the injury of the star of the show'. Since the day of the accident with Ezra, or should I say Lucille, I haven't seen him since. I walked into class today just to see that Ezra wasn't in his usual spot. Class went on as usual, but it just felt different. It struck me and made me feel lost and scared. Suddenly I had the urge to continue my passion: painting. I picked up the paintbrush and got to work. I painted what my heart desired without a clue about what was happening around me. After what felt like hours, I stopped and looked at what I had just created. As I examined the canvas, I came to the realization that I painted my house. I was overwhelmed with sadness, remembering the void it had left in my life. Having lived with one of my colleagues for a few weeks, I completely forgot I even had a house before this situation unfolded. I finally decided that it was time for me to go back. I packed my stuff up and got up to leave. As I got to the door I looked back into the classroom where I had made so many memories, friendships and beautiful masterpieces. I walked down the street looking at the gorgeous sunset in front of me. I knew this day would never come again. As I kept walking, I turned to look where my house was once situated, and then I saw it. My house was back.



Ms. Reyes, otherwise known as Akira, is a teacher who works at RMIT University. Despite her pretty normal life, she has a very abnormal secret: her house moves from place to place. Her most talented and creative student, Ezra Daigo, has two sides to himself. One side for his friends and the other for the rest of the world. One day when Akira's house has magically disappeared, she has no choice but to accept the fatal truth. But little did she know that it was Ezra's imagination that's caused her life to be so difficult.