

# Open Air

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SMART OWLS





## Write a Book in a Day 2016 Book Summary



The Team Supervisor must confirm the details on this page. When the book is complete, please mark the checklist items and sign where indicated. Please add this page as the first page in the final book.

### TEAM DETAILS

Writing Division: Middle School (WA)  
 Writing Date: 16-08-2016  
 Group or School: Methodist Ladies' College  
 Team Name: Smart Owls  
 Team Members: Chana Van Wyk  
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### PARAMETERS

Primary Character 1: Songwriter  
 Primary Character 2: Skydiver  
 Non-Human Character: Snake  
 Setting: Uluru  
 Issue: Fundraising event

### RANDOM WORDS

Delicious  
Nonsense  
Hums  
Cracked  
Danger

### AFFIDAVIT

I, JANE STARK (Team Supervisor), certify that the above team:

- completed all work on their book in accordance with the competition rules
- completed all work between 8:00am and 8:00pm on the day of writing
- included all five random words
- Word Count: 4278 words

Date: 16/8/2016 Signed: [Signature]

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# CHAPTER 1

The car rolled over the red dust, a speck in the vast, dry landscape. I unfolded the letter, smoothing it carefully. It felt like this letter was like the Great Rainbow Snake, laying out the path of my life before me. This was my chance to make a better future for myself, to follow my passion for music.

Dear Marlee

Thank you for submitting your song demo to the Rainbow Snake Foundation. After careful consideration, you have been listed to perform at the Rainbow Snake Fundraising Concert for Aboriginal Culture Awareness. This event will be held as an open-air concert for talented young Aboriginal-Australian artists between the ages of 14 and 25 years old. You will be given the chance to perform the self-written song that was sent in. Musical accompaniment may be provided on request; instruments and backing tracks must be posted to the concert site. The concert will be hosted on the 21st of April in the Uluru area. We look forward to your performance.

Thank you for supporting our cause,

The Rainbow Snake Foundation

The driver pulled to a stop and I glanced out the window. The burnished red peaks of Uluru rose out of the ground like looming giants, surrounded by silver eucalyptus trees. I opened the car door and breathed in the red dust smell,



wanting to shake off my shoes and feel the dirt on the soles of my feet. Next to the massive rock, I could see the beginnings of a stage frame, with a multitude of people scurrying about it like ants. A row of spotlights was being hoisted into the air, and instrument cases lay strewn on the sand.

"Your bags ma'am." The driver interrupted my reverie, lifting my tattered suitcase from the boot. I thanked him and smiled. No one had called me ma'am before. I'd been called a selection of other things, but nothing quite so refined. No need for fancy names in a rundown outback town like mine. Maybe one day, no one would call me anything but my name, because it would be the word on everyone's lips. I dreamed of being a famous singer, or at least successful songwriter. Maybe performing here would give me that chance. Next to the stage a huge heap of colourful satin material was sprawled on the ground, connected to a mass of tangled strings. A chorus of mechanical drones and **hums** filled the air, and to my surprise, a small white plane came into view. As it passed, a tiny figure launched itself into the air, starting a hurtling descent towards the red sand below. As I watched in disbelief, a colourful flare filled the sky as a parachute shot out behind the figure. The person hit the ground running, sending sand spraying as he tumbled over, the parachute billowing over him like a mushroom.

A muffled voice yelled incomprehensibly from beneath the collapsed parachute. I realised I'd been rooted to the sand for quite some time, so I leapt into action, pulling away swathes of fabric, uncovering a dishevelled dark head of hair and a smug grin. His face was... tolerable I supposed.

"How was that for an entrance?" The boy asked, sounding like an eager puppy dog. I studied him. He looked to be about 18 years old, but with a certain youthful mischievousness, which could also be construed as being irresponsible.

"What are you doing?" I asked dumbly as if it wasn't already obvious.

"Practicing." He stated like I should already know.

"Are you alright?" I inquired, remembering why I'd dug him out of the dust.

"Never been better." He kept speaking, but the plane's engines drowned him out as it descended nearby, the sun glinting off a shiny logo on the side.

"I beg your pardon?" I asked.

"Who are you?" He asked bluntly.

"I'm Marlee." I held out my hand for him to shake. Apparently, this guy had no manners, because he just stared at my hand like it was infected, and then started scrutinising my face. I dropped my hand, feeling slightly uncomfortable. Why was he staring? Was it my skin? It wouldn't be the first time someone had a problem with my Aboriginal heritage.

"This is the part where you introduce yourself?" I prompted him. He shook his head and a self-assured smirk slipped onto his face like a mask.

"Ace Griffiths, at your service." He gave a mock bow. He had a certain air of superiority. I hated to say it but he had the attitude of someone who was used to buying his way

through life. I studied his parachuting suit, noticing an embossed emblem on the breast pocket. It read: 'Griffiths Corporations'. The emblem was similar to the logo on the side of the plane.

"Hello? Anyone in that pretty little head?" I blinked, realising he was talking to me, and then scowled. He'd managed to compliment my appearance and insult my intelligence in one sentence. Achievement.

"Sorry, could you repeat that?" He arched an eyebrow at me, and I rolled my eyes. "Please?"

"All I asked was how old you are. Care to answer?"

"I'm sixteen." I snapped at him.

"Ooh, getting a bit touchy, are we? What's wrong, Marlee?" He said my name like it was an insult. I was beginning to tire of his arrogant attitude, no matter how tolerable his face was. I was still curious about him, though. Why was he here?

"Why choose a fundraising event in the middle of the Australian outback as a landing site?" I questioned, letting sarcasm colour my tone.

"I am a skydiver." He said like it was something to be proud of. "This," he went on, gesturing at Uluru, "is the perfect location for my next stunt." Oh, boy. He was a rich kid with a private plane and a penchant for extreme sports. This sounded like a brilliant combination.

"I'm going to parachute onto the top of Uluru. The crowds will love it!" He announced. I stared at him in disbelief. What had he just said?

"What?" I blurted.

"I beg your pardon. Much more polite." He corrected me, seemingly unaware of the furious expression invading my face.

"You can't do that."

"And why not, Marlee?" He said condescendingly.

"It's Marlee! Say it properly, or don't say it at all." I told him, feeling my hackles rising. I kept going. "You can't just parachute anywhere you feel like. Uluru is a sacred place for my people."

"It's just a rock. A large rock, I'll give you that, but not much more." He shrugged.

"I can't believe this. You know, I'd tell you not to break your face when you jump out of a plane, but I honestly don't think it would make a difference." I retorted, collecting my suitcase and storming away. I stewed silently. Uluru was a landmark, a meeting place. This rock had withstood the ravages of time, watching over the land as generations of Aboriginal people had lived here, inscribing their stories into the stone. My grandfather had been the last of my family to live by tradition, but his stories and rituals had kept my heritage alive, and none more so than his reverent accounts of the great Uluru. I could feel angry tears pricking behind my eyes. The performance was tonight, and I needed to relax. My sound check was in half an hour, so I decided to find my guitar and practice somewhere quiet. I headed for the delivery truck.

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I'm up in the open air

I'm soaring across the sky  
Nobody can touch me there  
Nobody can make me cry  
Nobody can get to me  
Nobody can let me go  
Nobody can hurt me  
Nobody can take control  
In the open air

In the open air

I strummed the last chord, feeling the strings vibrate under my fingers, letting my imagination fill in the roar of a crowd and the heat of the stage lights. I wanted to share my words, my melody, with other people. I'd spent my whole life feeling nameless and helpless like I had to hide from the world. I had something to share with the world, but for the time being, this fundraising event was as good as it was going to get. I stood up and started packing my guitar back into its case, lovingly rubbing the artwork my grandpa had painted onto the wood when I heard a thud from behind. I dropped my guitar and whipped around, searching for the culprit. The feeling of someone watching, listening, without my knowledge made me uncomfortable. I'd found a secluded spot behind the caravans the performers were staying in, and there was no one else nearby. I grabbed my guitar and made for the stage, ready for my sound check. I rounded a corner and ran straight into Ace, who was carrying the bundled up parachute in his arms. The material spilt onto the sand, sending our foreheads careening into each other.

"Hey, watch it, that's expensive!" Ace complained as I stumbled over the folds of fabric.

"I suppose I should know better than to expect an apology." I sighed. He had the grace to look marginally chastised.

"Excuse me, but I'm the one carrying the jumpsuit and the parachute, I'm pretty sure I have right of way in this situation," Ace argued, still trying to gather up the parachute.

"Why don't you slip into something more comfortable then? Like a coma." I replied. Ace couldn't stop the hint of a smile from coming across his features.

"I was going to give you a nasty look for that. But I see you already have one." Ace said, with an impressive poker face.

"Very funny. Did your dad make that one up?" I giggled.

"No. My Dad's too busy making the millions to make jokes." Ace gave a forced laugh.

"At least he's making something. My Dad couldn't really hold down a job. He left it to me to make myself a future." I replied, but not bitterly. I realised Ace was looking at me intently, and I looked away, embarrassed.

"That's... good for you. I've got a call to make. A few actually, so excuse me." Ace blustered, awkwardly stumbling away, the parachute tripping him up. Why had I even bothered talking to him? I found myself feeling irate all over again. How could someone be so ignorant? Of all the frivolous, selfish pursuits, skydiving onto the top of a natural wonder had to take the cake. What **nonsense** would he think up next? Tightropes across the Grand Canyon? He was just a bored thrill seeker, obsessed with **danger**. I tried to console myself, picturing him leaping from the plane and encountering a parachute malfunction in mid-air. It would serve him right if something went wrong. In fact, it would be even better if he never got the chance to jump out of the plane in the first place...

## CHAPTER 2

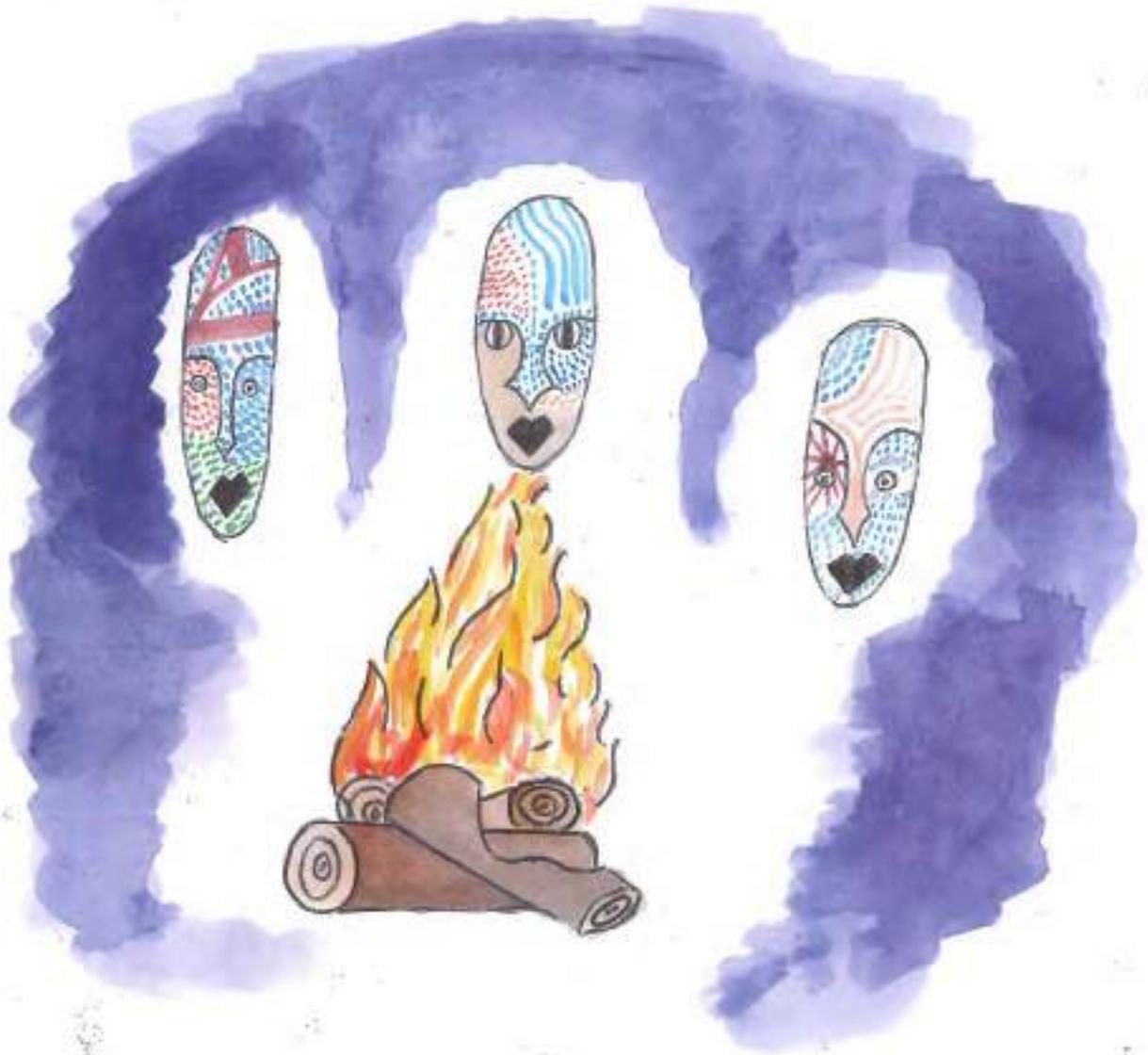
The late afternoon sun illuminated the Eucalyptus trees with a soft, golden glow. With every step I took, small pebbles pressed into my bare feet and fluffy clouds of red dust drifted into the air before dispersing. I squeezed the handle of my small hunting knife, feeling the sharp edge of the blade pressing against the back of my arm. My grandpa had made it for me, using red gum resin to shape the handle.

'I can't let him go through with this.' I thought, looking over my shoulder at Uluru, glowing in the light of the dying sun. My heartbeat quickened as I crept closer to Ace's plane. The door was wide open and the parachute was draped lazily across one of the wings. I stabbed my knife into the rubber tires, hearing a slightly satisfying whoosh of air as they deflated. The plane wouldn't be going anywhere anytime soon. Just to be on the safe side, I decided to tie do some work with the parachute too. The parachute now in front of me, I hesitantly pulled the knife forward and positioned it close to the soft material. With a glance over my shoulder, I drew in a deep breath.

'One. Two. Three.'

Slice! The sharp blade ripped through the fabric leaving a gaping wound. I bit my lip. Slice! Slice!

"This is such a stupid idea..." I muttered under my breath. Despite my lingering regret, I moved left of the parachute and shredded the harness. It had to be obvious enough that he didn't try and jump out of a plane with it. Then again... No, only joking. After a few minutes, I stepped back and surveyed my treacherous handiwork. Satisfied that the damage was visible enough, I turned and sprinted away from the crime scene.



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A smile played on my lips as I watched glowing embers flicker in the sky, the fire crackling warmly. The other performers had joined me while we waited to be called onto the stage, and the sweet melody of music filled the night sky. Some of them had brought drums and a didgeridoo, and the rest of us danced lazily in front of the flames. Music has a way of bringing strangers together. Many of them were like me, half Aboriginal, and trying to grasp the last vestiges of their heritage. I was interrupted from the **delicious** harmony of rhythm and the deep voice of the didgeridoo by a sharp tug on my arm. Ace loomed above me, a thunderous expression twisting his features. For the first time, he actually looked angry instead of arrogant.

"Did you need something?" I asked, raising an eyebrow. I tried to keep my tone nonchalant, but I'd never been a talented liar.

"I need an explanation." He demanded, grabbing my wrist tightly and pulling me after him. We arrived at his caravan, where the parachute lay in pitiful tatters. Looking at it now, I thought that I might've been a bit too enthusiastic in my efforts. He finally let go of my wrist and turned to face me.

"What. Is. This." Each word was slow, deliberate and soft. I steeled myself before meeting his blazing gaze. Never let it be said that I don't stand by my decisions.

"I couldn't let you jump onto Uluru. This place is sacred to my people." My voice was firm and decisive. This place meant too much to too many people for one person to jump around on it like a trampoline.

"So you just decided it would be a good idea to destroy my gear! Do you have any idea how expensive skydiving equipment is?" Ace yelled, raking his hands through his

mop of hair, making it stand crazily on end. "I can assure you, you'd never have the money to replace it." He said derisively. I bristled, scowling defiantly. I realised that slashing the parachute of a rich, arrogant son of a millionaire was potentially not the smartest move I could have made, but at this point, I was past caring. Who did he think he was? I could feel embarrassment and anger bubbling through my veins. How many times had I been told I didn't have the money, didn't have the talent, didn't have the right skin? Too many times, and I wasn't going to stand for it any longer.

"No amount of money could ever buy what you seem to be missing." I hissed, watching Ace step back at the venom in my voice.

"And what could that possibly be that?" He asked sarcastically, rolling his eyes like a twelve-year-old. I felt like a kettle,

"A soul, you heartless jerk!" I yelled.

"I wasn't going to do it anyway!" He shouted back, turning and raking a hand through his hair before facing me again. I stumbled backwards, confused.

"What do you mean you weren't going to do it?" My voice **cracked**.

"I wasn't going to jump! I heard you singing, and I realised how important this place is. I've always lived off the back of my parents, but you haven't you've had to make your own way, and I really respect that. I don't really respect you ripping up my parachute, but I understand why you did it. I didn't know why it was such a big deal to you, but I understand now. I decided that it wasn't worth it, to desecrate such a spiritual place for my own fun. I was going

to tell you, but of course, you had to go and ruin everything. You seem to be awfully good at it, don't you?" He stopped, finally out of breath. He spun on his heel and strode off.

"Ace..." I trailed off, taking a single step forward. My eyes followed his retreating figure as he disappeared around the corner. I sighed, feeling ashamed. The scraps of parachute fluttered in the breeze, like white surrender flags. Ace had been reckless and selfish, but he'd realised his mistake and fixed it before he'd done any damage. He'd proven to me that people could change. I'd really messed up, however. I honestly didn't know how yet, but I needed to find a way to set things right.

"Ace!" I called out, breaking into a run. I heard no reply. I sighed, figuring he was too furious with me to answer. I wouldn't blame him if that was the case. I caught sight of him and stopped in my tracks.

"Watch out!" I screamed.

## CHAPTER 3

"Ace!" I yelled, looking at his figure crumpled on the ground in front of me. He resembled the shredded parachute, and I felt guilty all over again. I ran over and knelt down next to him, too late catching sight of a hissing snake sinking its teeth into his calf. I had to move quickly, as every second I wasted let more venom seep into his blood. My grandpa had taught me how to skin a kangaroo, set a baited trap and, most importantly, how to catch a snake. I deftly grabbed the snake by its tail, twisting away as it whipped around, fangs outstretched. I flicked my wrist and flung it away from the caravans. I took careful note of the wide head and large rusty red scales, like burnt amber. It looked like a type of brown snake, one of the several types found near Uluru. It was more than two metres long. I turned my attention back to Ace, quickly ripping off the bottom of my shirt to tourniquet the bite wound.

"That's inconvenient," Ace muttered, lifting his head to see his leg. His eyes rolled back at the sight of the blood staining the bandage and he flopped onto the sand like a limp balloon.

"HELP!" I screamed as loudly as I could. My voice was beginning to feel hoarse from all the shouting. I needed a phone, to call an ambulance. Ace needed medical treatment, and he needed it now.

"SOMEBODY HELP!" I screamed again. People rushed over to see what was happening. I explained what had happened as quickly as I could, and asked someone to call the hospital. The nearest medical centre was almost an hour away. Several stage managers helped pile his lifeless form into the back seat.



"Excuse me, ma'am." A stagehand dressed in black tugged on my sleeve. "You're needed on stage." He said, holding my guitar out. I shook my head. This could be my chance to become a singer-songwriter. Here I was, choosing between the career of my dreams or a boy I hated. At least, I thought I hated. I was no longer sure, but I knew what I had to do.

"I need to go with him, to identify the poison." I got into the back, where Ace still hadn't stirred.

"Please be ok," I whispered, squeezing his hand. He didn't squeeze back.

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"Can you please describe the snake that you saw?" The doctor asked. Ace had been strapped to a bed and wheeled away. I had the morbid thought that this might be the last time I saw him.

"Long, more than two metres. Wide, flat head and large flat scales. It was a rusty brown and red colour. I think it's a type of brown snake. Possibly a Mulga." I replied. A Mulga was large, poisonous and liked to hang onto its victims, injecting large amounts of poison. My grandpa had shared more than just stories. He'd told us all the practical stuff too.

"Thank you. Your quick thinking may just save his life." The doctor told me. I felt sick. If I hadn't made the stupid decision to shred his parachute, we'd never have fought, and he'd have looked where he was going before storming off. A nurse led me to his hospital bed, but his eyes were still firmly shut.

"I know I told you to go into a coma, but I didn't actually mean it," I muttered, pushing his hair back from his forehead. He'd seemed like a really nice guy, towards the

end, but I seriously doubted he'd let me get to know him now.

"Well, that's good to know."

I gasped. "Ace?"

His bright green eyes opened, and he looked up at me.

"You can't get rid of me that easily."



## CHAPTER 4

"What are you doing here?" He asked, sounding confused and slightly irritated. I felt insulted. I'd given up the biggest opportunity in my life to make sure he didn't die, and this was the greeting I received?

"In case it slipped your mind, you managed to get bitten by a poisonous reptile. I had to come with you, to tell them which snake it was." I huffed.

"But there's a record producer waiting to see you perform," Ace said, his face falling in disappointment.

"Why?" I asked incredulously.

"I called him. My Dad knows him, and I thought he should hear you." Ace explained.

"Why would you do something like that?" I asked, trying to figure out why he'd want to help me.

"Because I heard you singing and I think you deserve to be heard. I can do nice things for other people if I want to." He said defensively. I stared at him open-mouthed. He may have seemed like nothing more than a self-centered adrenaline junkie with too much time and money on his hands, but this was a genuine act of kindness. In the same moment, I realised the incredible chance he'd given me and the fact that it had been taken away from me. I felt hot tears building behind my eyelids.

"Why are you crying? I thought you wanted to be a singer?" Ace cried, sounding even more disappointed.

"Because I thought you were a selfish jerk, but you actually turned out to be a half-decent person. And now, I'm going to spend the rest of my pathetic life in a miserable outback town." I couldn't help sobbing. Ace peeled himself out of the hospital bed and awkwardly wrapped his arms around my shoulders.

"I'm sorry for being a selfish jerk. You won't spend the rest of your life in a miserable outback town, you're too talented for that."

"Doesn't matter. No one will listen to a poor young hopeful singer without any background." I said, feeling the despair start to drown me.

"But you do have a background. I can help you, I have connections." Ace waggled his eyebrows, and I couldn't help grinning.

"Also, I might have slashed the tires on your plane."

## EPILOGUE

As I stepped out onto the stage, the cheers and screams of the crowd filled my ears. My fingers played with the shoulder strap of my guitar as I made my way over the microphone. I lifted my hand and adjusted the height. My name flashed across the light boards at the back of the arena. The glowing lights, the black expanse in front of me, the electric atmosphere, it was perfect.

"Thank you all for coming!" I yelled. I was greeted with more cheers. Warm red and orange lights filled the stadium with mysterious shadows, reminding me of the flickering of a campfire.

"I have something really special for you tonight. Close your eyes and picture this with me. This is the first song I ever performed and it's dedicated to the first person that really believed in my dream. My best friend and my boyfriend, Ace Griffiths."

The air  
Turns and twists around me  
Soaring through the sky  
Believing I can fly  
The air  
Catches me and holds me  
Keeping me alive

I'm up in the open air  
I'm soaring across the sky  
Nobody can touch me there  
Nobody can make me cry  
Nobody can get to me  
Nobody can let me go  
Nobody can hurt me

Nobody can take control  
In the open air

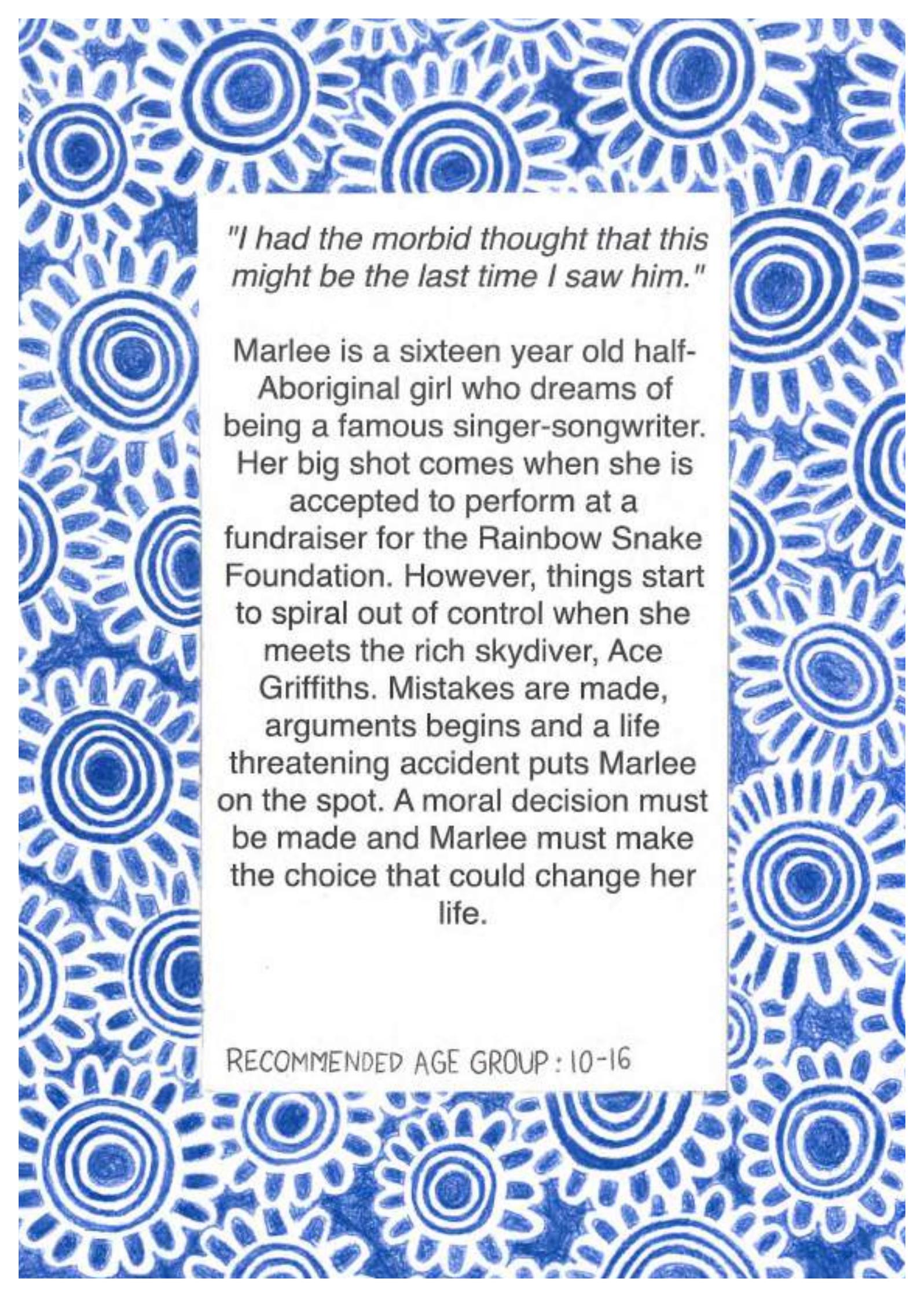
The air  
Whispers to me softly  
Saying I'm ok  
Won't let me slip away  
The air  
Sings to me sweetly  
Childhood lullabies  
I'm opening my eyes

I'm up in the open air  
I'm soaring across the sky  
Nobody can touch me there  
Nobody can make me cry  
Nobody can get to me  
Nobody can let me go  
Nobody can hurt me  
Nobody can take control  
In the open air

I'm up in the open air  
I'm soaring across the sky  
Nobody can touch me there  
Nobody can make me cry  
In the open air

I'm up in the open air  
I'm soaring across the sky  
Nobody can touch me there  
Nobody can make me cry  
Nobody can get to me  
Nobody can let me go  
Nobody can hurt me  
Nobody can take control  
In the open air





*"I had the morbid thought that this might be the last time I saw him."*

Marlee is a sixteen year old half-Aboriginal girl who dreams of being a famous singer-songwriter. Her big shot comes when she is accepted to perform at a fundraiser for the Rainbow Snake Foundation. However, things start to spiral out of control when she meets the rich skydiver, Ace Griffiths. Mistakes are made, arguments begins and a life threatening accident puts Marlee on the spot. A moral decision must be made and Marlee must make the choice that could change her life.

RECOMMENDED AGE GROUP : 10-16