

2017 *What Matters?* Competition

YEAR 11/12 WINNER TASMANIA

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Simple Things

It's summer, so we leave the city behind and head for the beach. We drive for hours on dirt roads, a line of P-platers heading for freedom in our parents' cars. The sky is clear and the ocean is clean and cold and we hurl ourselves into the depths. We spend our days in the sun and out nights in the sand and in these simple little things we find peace. They call us the lucky ones.

I don't want us to be the lucky ones. This wonderful country in which I live, these beaches I love and the clear skies; these things that everyone, everywhere needs to feel. The children of the future need to grow up and grow old in places like this; they need the ocean and the air to remain clean, they need forests to camp in and mountains to climb. And I want us to give them more. I want these children to experience freedoms that we can never know.

Because even when I'm at my happiest, as I count the stars in the summer sky, listen to the waves and feel the warmth of the fire mingle with the warmth of love in my bones; even then I am not completely at peace. Without knowing for sure that the possibility of this unparalleled joy is not limited to a few more generations, without being certain that this dirt from which we come and go will remain fertile, these oceans will be clean for centuries to come; how can we just live? Just be happy? These things need to be beautiful forever, for all that are yet to come, because without the wonder of the natural world, how can we, humanity, even exist?

There is something beautiful about the word *humanity*. In four syllables we define not only our own existence but who we really *are*, who we want to be, what matters to us beyond all else. It means empathy, goodwill, kindness, tenderness. It means acceptance, respect, love. It's what sets us apart, makes us special, defines our kind. It means *us*, and so it is that when those who come after us remember this generation, they won't tell stories about the coalmines we built or write songs about how safe our borders were. They will remember us by our humanity.

It matters to me that our generation is known not for building our largest ever mine even as the North Pole melted, but rather for how we preserved the wonder of the Great Barrier Reef. That we are not defined by the victims we locked away indefinitely for the sake of political posturing. Or by how we discarded the lives of the sick, the desperate, over a handful of chemicals. What matters to me is that we are remembered as the ones who *changed*. The ones who realised that in the end it's who we are rather than what we have, that it's not how we live but why: that facing the truth is better than pulling the covers over our eyes.

What matters to me is that every single human being who is ever born into this life gets an opportunity to grow up with the freedom of not having to worry, the joy of knowing that the wonders of nature will outlive them. So next summer, and for all the summers to come people like us can leave the city behind and find their peace in the simple things.