

REDBACK, COME BACK





Write a Book in a Day



**THE KIDS'
CANCER
PROJECT**

Science. Solutions. Survival.

PARAMETERS FORM 2019

TEAM DETAILS

STATE: NSW

DIVISION: Upper School

SCHOOL/GROUP: Pymble Ladies' College (NORTH RYDE BC)

TEAM NAME: The Scribble Society

TEAM ID: 181

PARAMETERS AND RANDOM WORDS

Parameters

Primary character 1 University student

Primary character 2 Surveyor

Non-human character Redback spider

Setting Abandoned factory

Issue A missing pet

Random words

Community

Skipped

Magic

Canvas

Sings

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start at 8am
- Write an original story:
 - based on all **five parameters** (above)
 - including all **five random words** (above), 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** in both the hard and soft copy.
- 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 8pm.**

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
- Mail a hard copy of your book on the next business day to:

Write a Book in a Day, The Kids' Cancer Project, PO Box 6400, Alexandria NSW 2015

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DEDICATION:

This book is dedicated to anyone who wishes to be brave enough to pick this novel up and read it. We thank you; you have brought our book to life, and it wouldn't be here without you.

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CHAPTER 1.

Intense whispers reverberated around the lecture theatre. The final research paper was soon to be assigned to the university students undertaking their last semester of *Australian Zoological Studies*. If the previous year's students were to be believed, it would be a challenge to complete in only three weeks. Professor Brown's attempts to tame the increasingly difficult class were rendered futile.

"Class!" he shouted, his rounded face rapidly turning red. "Please, control yourselves!" Like a thick blanket, silence descended upon the room, muffling the frenzied chatter. The students fixed their attentive eyes upon him, awaiting the news of their assignment. Professor Brown sighed, and after fiddling with his computer, connected the HDMI cord to his ancient brick, projecting the assignment.

"This year, the department has decided to branch out a bit and give more hands-on assessments than we have previously. This year we will be giving each of you a small animal to investigate!" Professor Brown beamed out at the class, radiating excitement.

The class was silent. No one moved a muscle.

"Is this a joke?" One of the more outspoken female students asked incredulously.

"It was bad enough last year - and that was just researching! I have heard *horror stories* of what happened to the students last year. We have other assessments!"

Her posse of friends nodded behind her, humming in agreement.

Professor Brown sighed,

"That's what makes this assessment so brilliant and challenging. It'll be a great experience for many of you, especially those of you endeavouring to work at those big-time zoos. After all, when I sent a survey around at the beginning of this year, the main wish was to work in Taronga Zoo." He chuckled jovially as he gave students pointed looks.

"Each of you will receive a different animal. You must talk about the appearance and behaviour of your specimen. Your challenge is to learn the best way to take care of it and to research eating and breeding patterns. In three weeks, each of you will give a presentation on a range of ways to increase the population of your animal and produce an observational journal." He paused, scanning the students' expressions. "That's not *too* hard, is it?"

There were a few grumbles, but the room was relatively silent of protests.

"When I call your name, please come up and collect your specimen. Don't even think about trying to switch animals. They're in glass boxes, so please be careful."

Jo looked up from her notes when her name was called. She stood up and ambled to the front of the theatre to collect her assignment. The teacher's assistant handed her a glass box containing several leaves and a layer of sediment. She peered inside, searching for her animal.

Her heart **skipped** a beat when she found it. Partially camouflaged by the dirt was a small spider, approximately the size of a fifty cent coin. A red stripe decorated its back.

Her head snapped up to look at Professor Brown in horror.

"Are you sure I can't switch?" she begged, holding the redback spider as far from her body as possible.

He tutted cheerfully.

“You know the rules, Jo. No switching.”

Jo inhaled deeply, clammy fingers clamping down too hard onto the box, but nevertheless shuffled back to her desk, slumping into the chair and putting the spider on the linoleum floor next to her.

She ignored it for the rest of the class.

When they were dismissed, Professor Brown shouted after them, “Treat them as a pet! Each of them is a wonderful creature and absolutely vital to our everyday world, despite what you may believe. In the end, you’ll listen to your classmates as each **sings** the praises of their animal.”

Jo scoffed slightly and said, under her breath, “Not likely.”

She went back to her dorm and shoved the spider under her desk, resolving to not think of it for the rest of the day. She grabbed her notebook and sat on her bed by the window to do her biology homework.

From the window, she could see the derelict A2 Milk factory where several redback spiders, like her specimen, nested. She shuddered and closed her blinds.



CHAPTER 2

It had been almost a week since Professor Brown issued the class with their specimens, and Jo, stubborn as she was, remained unwilling to observe hers for a long period of time, even from a distance. She dreaded zoology class, knowing it would be another hour of gagging as she forced herself to look at the inky creature - not to mention the irregular, red splotch which stained the sleek, black figure.

The creature inside the glass box lived abandoned under her desk in between classes – feeding the specimen was the only time Jo had to be reminded of its existence; she preferred to believe it did not exist. She was frustrated by her bad luck; a beetle, a frog, a snake or any other specimen would have been manageable. But a redback spider? Professor Brown had continually refused her pleas to switch.

Clutching the box tightly, Jo headed towards her lab bench. The last thing she wanted was the specimen *out* of its box. She raised her eyes to the ceiling and made herself imagine anything except a redback spider in the box – a butterfly, perhaps. She exhaled in relief as the box was placed safely in the centre of the marble bench. Jo could swear the spider hadn't moved for the past week.

Today's investigation would involve placing the spider on a Petri dish and observing it under the microscope. *As if* she wanted to look at the vile organism any closer than the naked eye. Stepping back, she extended her arm and lifted the lid of the glass box, afraid that the spider would jump out of the box onto her arm. She begrudgingly walked towards the cupboard and grabbed the nearest microscope, heading back to her bench. The glass box remained exactly where she had left it. Glancing down to the vile creature, ready to grab it, Jo stopped in her tracks.

The spider. It was gone.

--Specimen Investigation Assignment --

Teacher: Professor Brown

Name: Josephine Sherman

Preliminary Entry

The redback spider, also known as the Latrodectus Hasselti, belongs to the Theridiidae family and is known to be one of Australia's most venomous spiders, preying on small insects but is also capable of capturing quite large animals in its web.

Redback spiders are native to Australia, Southeast Asia and New Zealand and are easily identifiable by their spherical black body and prominent red stripe on the abdomen. In suburban regions, redback spiders are known to be found in dark, dry areas, namely under roof eaves, floorboards, shelves, flower pots, to name a few.



CHAPTER 3.

Paralysed with panic, Jo's sweaty fingers locked around the box. She squinted hard, concentrating her gaze on its contents, waiting for spidery black limbs and a wavy red stripe to materialise before her.

But there was nothing.

Frantically, she began searching the sterile benches of the laboratory, peering into conical flasks and Petri dishes, shuffling around the mess of research papers littering its surface. Had someone stolen it? Had it vanished, as if by **magic**, into thin air? Yet she knew that she was simply avoiding the truth. The spider had escaped. She instantly recalled a passage from this month's edition of *Australian Arachnids; the Outback Web* which she had read in preparation for this assignment,

'The redback spider is guided by instinct and equipped with a natural sense of direction, regardless of the environment. Thus, in terms of the destination of such travel, redback spiders are attracted towards places with adequate food supply, shelter, a warm climate and darkness.'

Adequate food supply, shelter, warm climate, darkness. Like the equipment list in one of her many experiments, her mind checked off these conditions with clinical efficiency, determining the 'destination' with unsettling clarity. The abandoned A2 Milk factory down the road from her university.



The image of abandoned, motionless machinery, cobwebbed and crawling with hundreds of spiders, sent shivers down Jo's spine. Of all the stressful circumstances Jo had found herself in, being interviewed by a panel of academics, feeding a saltwater crocodile, sitting her HSC examinations, she recoiled at the mere thought of entering the A2 factory. But Jo had to complete the assignment. Failure was simply not an option. How could she 'observe and record the animal's behaviour,' let alone 'determine the best way to take care of it' if she had no animal to start with?

She needed to do something. She needed to find her lost pet.

Fear was the only thing holding her back. She thought about how the many animals she studied protected themselves when threatened. The echidna exposed its sharp spines to overhead predators, the cassowary reared its keratin casque. That was what she needed – protection!

Exploding out of the doors of the laboratory, still wearing her pristine white coat and safety glasses, she navigated the labyrinthine halls of the university towards the student dormitories. Having entered her apartment, she quickly scanned the room, searching for anything that she could shield herself with. With frantic vigour she pulled on everything she laid eyes on; three of her father's oversized ACDC T-shirts, a brown beanie, koala-fur earmuffs, black puffer jacket and oven mitts, emblazoned with the Australian flag. Momentarily pausing, she tucked the glass box into her pocket.

Clad from head to toe, the marshmallowed Jo descended into the hallway of the dormitory and stepped out into the street.



CHAPTER 4.

Face red after only ten minutes walk, Jo pushed her way past the chicken wire fence that surrounded the old dairy factory. Once white, its exterior was now brown from years of rust and plastered with leaves and gum nuts from the surrounding eucalypts. Caked in dust, the walls were littered with rubbish, cardboard, and broken sections of the buildings roof. In front of the doors, the ground was paved with cracked asphalt, dirt, and leaves, crammed into the deep crevices by generations of wandering possums and loitering teenagers alike. Outside the factory, a lone figure stood, dressed in a fluorescent vest, white singlet, shorts and a hard hat.

“Hey! Tradie guy! Do you know your way around here? I really need your help...”

He looked at her, face contorting in bewilderment and outrage, as she rattled on about her assessment.

Eventually, he interrupted, “Well, I was about to go into the ol’ A2 factory anyway, so you could follow me if you want. I’m a surveyor by the way, not a tradie. Name’s Andy.”

They gingerly stepped through the large, decaying, double doors, patterned with mould, into the shadow-streaked hall of the factory. Large sheets of rusted metal lay haphazardly over the floor, the bolts that once attached them to the ceiling strewn between amongst empty bottles and rubbish left by those who visited the abandoned factory previously. Ancient machinery filled the rooms, the skeletal remains of the productive environment this once was, now left in disrepair. Washed-out A2 signage and smashed milk bottles littered the ground both inside and outside the building. Shards of light filtered through missing segments in the corrugated iron roof. Colourful graffiti lined the walls, an assemblage of cracked and peeling plasterboard, faded due to years of water exposure. Under their feet, years of grime encrusted the floor, disturbed only by Andy’s confident strides and Jo’s hesitant shuffling as he led her towards a staircase hidden haphazardly behind a pile of broken pipes.



“Do you know where you’re going?” Jo’s wavering voice cut through the dead silence that filled the factory.

Andy paused momentarily, perched on the third step, but immediately continued his descent, this time with extra conviction in his tread.

“Of course. I’ve been here before. This is my *job*.”

They proceeded into the factory, navigating its old, metallic bones, Jo’s impatience compounding with every step.

“You said you’ve been here before. Why? What exactly are you surveying here?”

Andy looked up with a start.

“Sorry?”

“You said you’ve been here before. Nobody ever comes here more than once if they can help it. The first time was most likely an accident anyway. What’s so important that you’ve been here often enough to know the place?”

“Well, the company I work with wants to demolish this block, set up a few shops or apartments in its place. After all, it’s just unused land. I’ve been sent out here to survey this area and measure its geographic viability and potential for commercial development.” He paused, “Actually, to be frank, this is only my second time here. The first was with my supervisor.”

Jo stopped dead in her tracks.

“You mean to say you don’t actually know your way around?”

He looked over her shoulder at her and shrugged.

“You mean to say you’ve gotten us lost in the middle of an abandoned factory which *nobody* comes to!” her voice rose steadily, troubled and scared.

“I mean, I recognise some of the rooms-”

“But not all of them.”

He gave her a begrudging nod.

“Do you...?” She gestured at the corridor in front of them. Averting his eyes, he shook his head slightly.

“Oh gosh, we’re really lost, aren’t we?”

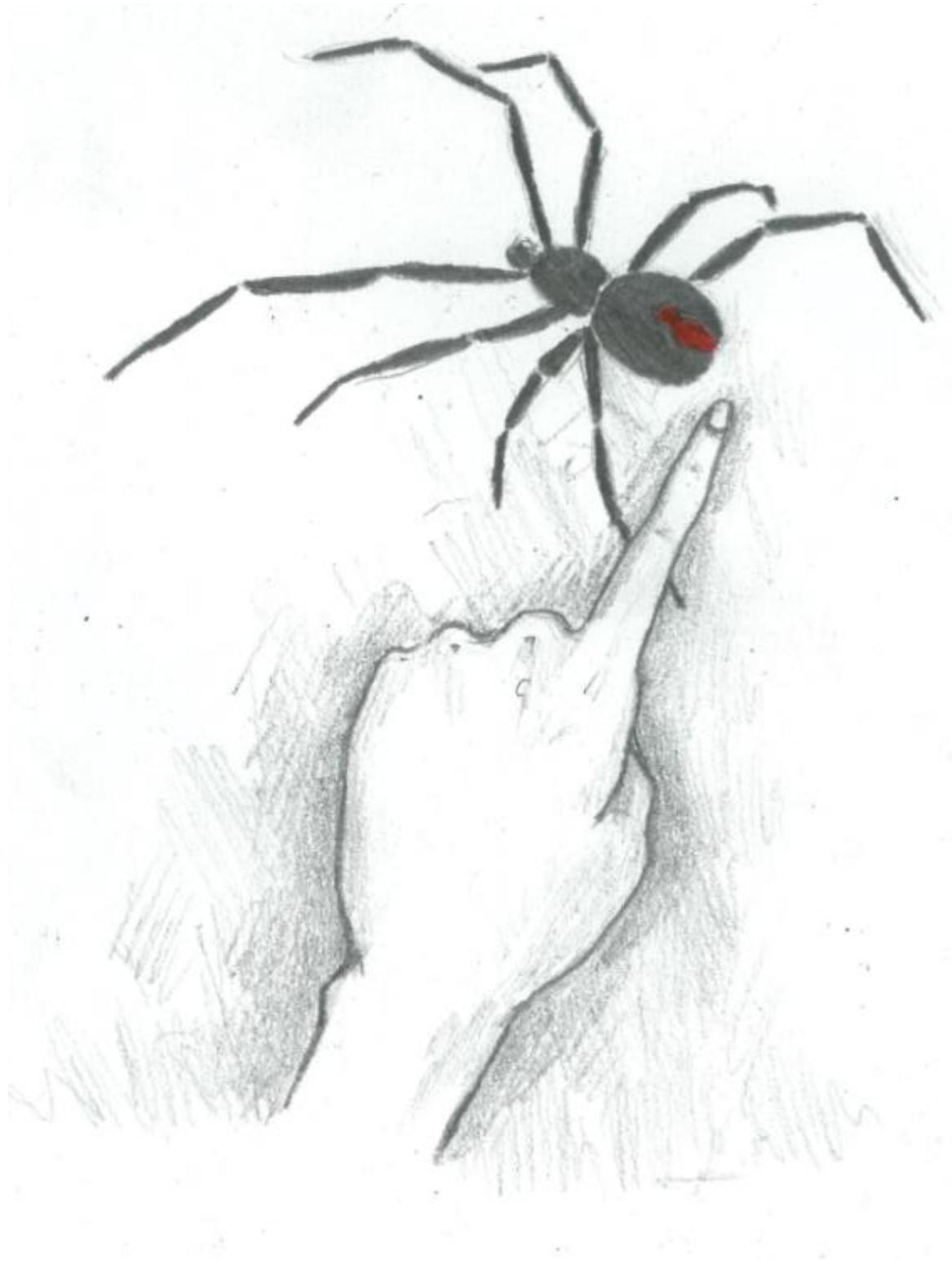
Not wanting to proceed any further, Jo broke into a purposeful stride, desperately attempting to retrace their path. Yet weighed down by the excessive clothing, her pace gradually slowed until she, succumbing to fatigue and exasperation, was forced to a stop. Doubling over and respiring deeply, she took off her mask, earmuffs, and beanie- shedding the layers which had previously inhibited her movement. Faced with corridor after corridor, the rows of doors and hallways blended together, indistinguishable from each other. Jo shuffled forwards slowly before coming to a stop, face fallen. They were completely and utterly lost. Returning reluctantly to Andy, she found him waiting for her, his solitary figure shrouded in shadow, hands in his pockets and eyes fixed intently on the floorboards.

She glanced at Andy again, her eyes pleading, a silent question ever obvious within them. At Andy’s embarrassed, downcast look, she sunk to the ground.

CHAPTER 5.

Jo jerked her head up and rose at the echo of skitters, her features twisting with panic. Perturbed, the two hurried into the centre of the factory, eerie sounds emanating from all directions, unbearable to their ears.

“What- what was that?” Jo asked, voice shaking with fear.



Startled by a sudden movement, they looked down in horror as spiders, one by one, lunged out of the shadows. Thousands more teemed over the walls in streams of glinting thread, covering them with saturated colours of red and black.

From the corners of the factory, the spiders surged towards Andy and Jo, swarming the duo. "See, this is why this place needs to go," Andy mumbled under his breath, "This building should have been demolished years ago when it shut down."

The spiders paused in their formidable pursuit for a moment, still filtering into the room. Seeing an opportunity to escape, Jo took Andy's hand, dragging him further into the depths of the factory as they leapt over broken pipes and equipment. But the swarm of arachnids continued to trail behind them.

"I should never have come here! This was a very, very, bad idea- I'm never going to find my spider, I'm going to fail my class, and what'll happen to me then?" Jo hyperventilated as Andy lead her down another set of stairs into a room full of giant pasteurisation vats.

They could see no other door other than the one they had just entered through, which was rapidly being swarmed by hundreds of redback spiders.

Both heads whipped around as they searched desperately for an exit.

"It's a dead end," said Andy finally, defeated.

As a group, the spiders began to encircle Jo and Andy, threatening to drown them in a sea of black and red.



CHAPTER 6.

Jo's eyes scanned the factory before them, searching for anything that seemed slightly useful. Trembling in defeat, she found herself completely immobile, hyper-aware of how many spiders lay near her. There was nothing she could do. Jo began calling out, hoping that someone might be nearby, no matter how much she knew it was all in vain.

"Help!" Her cry echoed through the lifeless rooms of the factory.

As if in answer to their call, more spiders began to scuttle towards Andy and Jo. They seemed to approach in formation, in vague lines like ranks of an army. Bewildered, she shot frantic glances at Andy, who returned them in a panic, apparently thinking along the same lines. As they followed the undulating movements of the spiders, a thread of spider silk, waving slightly from the disturbance, caught their attention. As they followed the thread upwards towards the ceiling, their eyes were drawn to a vast structure of interlocking webs, creating a geometric net that spanned the entire ceiling.

Jo blinked, taking a moment to process the sight she saw before her. Millions of intricately wound, silver threads clung to the dilapidated roof of the building. Like a tapestry, the silk seemed to be woven, reflecting the light that entered the room onto the peeling drywall around it.

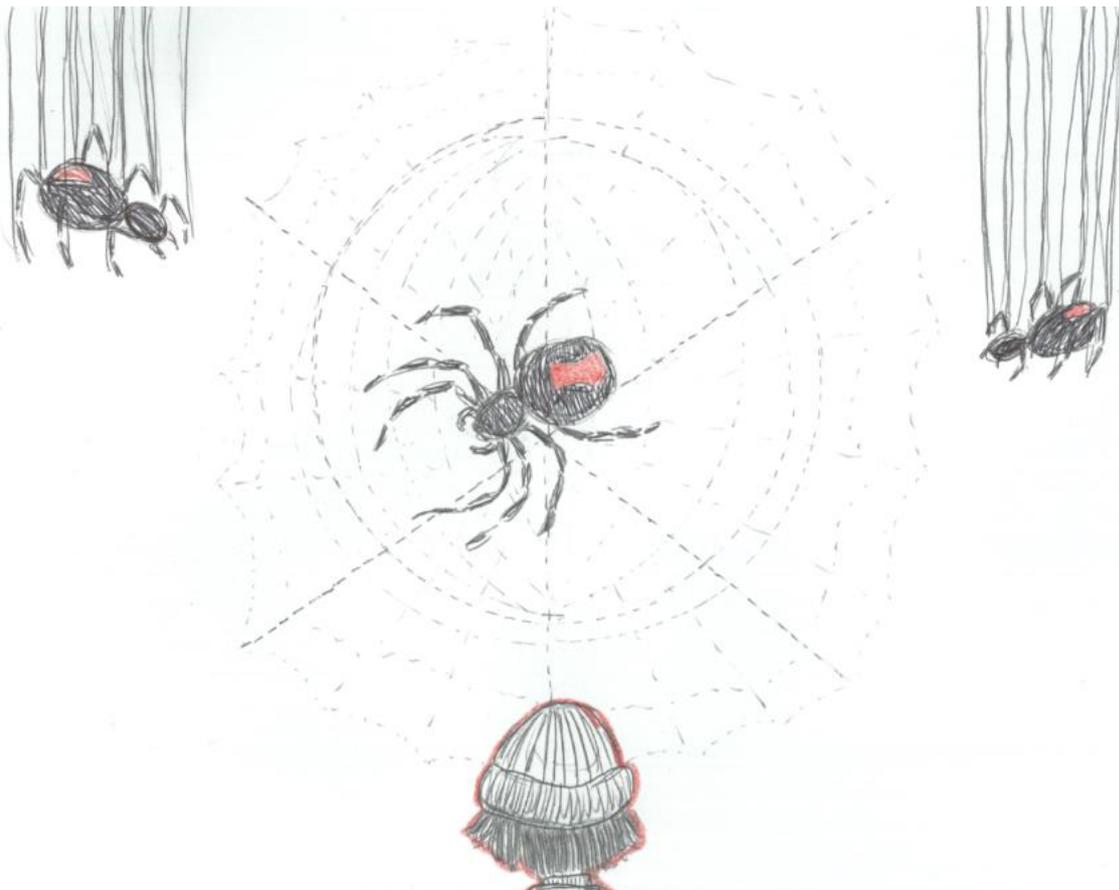
Andy and Jo stood, equally stunned by the empire of spider webs which hung across the remaining scaffolding of the building. Both remained silent.

Mesmerized, Jo began to feel begrudging admiration for the redback spiders who had made these intricate webs. She felt a newfound appreciation for the hard work of these spiders.

However, as her wonder wore off, Jo began to remember just how hopelessly lost they had become. Regardless of how beautiful the webs may have been, they were still several stories up in an abandoned factory neither knew their way around.

Panicked words began to force their way out her mouth.

"Help! We're lost, we need a way out!"



CHAPTER 7.

As Jo's hands began to shake, Andy absently hit the side of her arm, gesturing towards the spiders which his gaze was currently fixated upon.

The redbacks weaved between one another, not spinning webs, but painting an image on the **canvas** made of spider silk. The mass stopped moving, solidifying the image.

It was an arrow. An arrow made of spiders was suspended from the ceiling. It pointed in the direction of a rusty ladder that hardly looked stable enough to hold the weight of a moth.

"That was unexpected," Jo chuckled, "just like *Harry Potter*, looks like we should follow the spiders."

"*Why spiders? Why couldn't it be "follow the butterflies"?*" Andy retorted.

"Exactly."

As Andy and Jo gazed up the ladder, the spiders swarmed up its sides, climbing onto the landing on top of it. Jo shuddered, desperately hoping that she wouldn't have to climb up the ladder while the spiders were still there. But, as soon as they came, the spiders, retreated up the ladder, revealing two perfectly empty rungs.

Placing her hands on the bottom rung, Jo began to climb. She only reached the second rung, when her hands began to slip out of her oven mitts. Originally meant to protect her from the spiders, the mitts were getting in her way. She would have to take them off.

Inhaling deeply, Jo eased a glove off one hand and flung it down to the base of the ladder, hitting Andy on the head. Apologising, she took off the other glove and resumed climbing.

The rust on the cold metal rough underneath her fingers, she adjusted her grip and set up the ladder yet again.



CHAPTER 8.

They reached the top of the ladder and peeked over the final rungs.

Jo gasped for air and breathed, “Oh thank goodness.” Andy heaved himself over the ledge bracketing the ladder.

Excited by the smell of fresh air, Jo and Andy unquestioningly followed the spiders through seemingly endless corridors. The spiders swarmed the walls, moving from web to web as a single body, dust lifting from the floors and abandoned machinery as they flew past. Their webs covered the walls of the entire factory, patterning the dull surfaces with silver silk. Jo and Andy had now fallen into a rhythm with their arachnid guides, their bodies coalescing into arrows and other directory shapes. Jo was entranced by the methodical movements of these spiders, amazed at the strength and intricate construction of their webs. They were truly a **community**, an eight-legged chorus singing soundless melodies, harmonising and counterbalancing each other as they did so. An audible laugh almost escaped her lips; how different her perception of redback spiders was before she entered the factory compared to now.

Only a few hours ago, she had arrived at the factory in layers of clothing, a sign of just how fearful she had been of the spiders, purely because she had had no understanding of them. Now, with her mitts, beanie and mask gone, she gazed upon the spiders with a new admiration.

Stepping out of the factory’s corrugated iron walls, Jo looked back, her eyes wandering as she became painfully aware of the glass box tucked into the pocket of her puffer jacket. She drew the box from her pocket. The mass of spiders seemed to bristle.

Maybe the redback should be where it belongs, not used as an experiment, Jo thought.

To her astonishment, the spiders, who were amalgamated in a group, parted before her to reveal the familiar stripe of her spider. She gasped and knelt. “I thought I had lost you!” She examined the glass cage and held it high. “One assignment is not worth hurting another living being.” She smashed the cage on the ground, dispersing glass shards around the room. With one last look, she and Andy walked out of the factory, pushing the rusting wire gate behind them as they left.

Once they reached the main street, Jo cast one last look at the factory before turning to Andy. “You still going to demolish this thing?” Jo asked, looking at him sadly.

Andy stood, reflecting, his attention held by the factory’s architecture. Once, he had hated the rusting facade, but now, he no longer viewed it as a derelict, ugly building, but a living relic of Australian life during the 1940s. Although sitting incongruent to the eucalyptus green and sky-blue of the surrounding bushland, the A2 factory was the home of the redbacks. It was a work of art.

“No,” At Jo’s surprised look, he chuckled. “It has become a haven for the spiders. I can’t take that away from them. It’s beautiful in its own way I guess. People just can’t see it. The architecture is very ‘40s. I’m going to tell my boss that it would be a bad site to build on and that’ll be that.”

Jo’s face broke into a beam. “Good.”

The two smiled at each other, satisfied at their journey within the cracked walls. Looking back, the dark shadows dissipated and the factory which had once haunted her did not seem quite as abandoned any more. Content, both waved at each other briefly before walking their different ways down the road.



--Specimen Investigation Assignment--

Teacher: Professor Brown

Name: Josephine Sherman

Report Conclusion

'Redback spiders are commonly disregarded as a species, however, despite their menacing appearance, are known to display communal behaviours. These behaviours can be seen through their ability to interact and cooperate in the building of webs and the capturing of food. Despite their territoriality, the timidness of redback spiders means humans are unlikely to get bitten... Redback spiders are incredibly complex and intelligent animals and are able to communicate their needs to humans minimally. In conclusion, one is not to underestimate these arachnids or judge them by their reputation.'

JO'S REPORT!

aim - to find my lost redback spider!
(which ran away) and complete my assignment.

hypothesis - i'll probably find it, right?

equipment -

- me
- glass box
- lost redback spider
- an abandoned AZ milk factory
- surveyor who is NOT a tradie
- earmuffs, beanie, t-shirts, oven mitts and ANYTHING that will keep spiders away from me.

method -

1. get lost in a spider infested abandoned AZ factory with a surveyor
2. find the spider if you care about your final grade
3. GET OUT

conclusion - ??????

recommended
reading age:

12-14 ☺☺☺

