

3 A story from Australia

1 Before you read

The text you are going to read is about an Australian boy who moves from the country to a big city. *Imagine what problems you might have if you and your family had to move to a different place. (Think of friends, activities, school, weekends ...)*

2 Thomas

‘You are not the only person who has ever had to move school,’ Thomas’s mother said. ‘C’mon, love. It’ll get better. You will make friends, you know.’

‘So why did you come to Sydney?’ Five of them were sitting with their desks together. Problem solving, Ms Kelly called it. She’d told Thomas to go with them, Troy, Pete, Rodney and Andrew. They looked over the top of their pieces of paper at him. ‘Mum got a job. Dad reckons he’s got more chance of a job down here.’

‘Where d’you come from?’ ‘Dungog.’

‘Where’s that?’ ‘Up the bush.’

‘Did you live on a farm?’

‘No. In town.’ Not a farm, but an empty block next door and kids everywhere. Always kids. His friends. Stacey’s friends. Kids playing, eating, sleeping over, disappearing all day and no one worried. Not like now. A small house with no spare room. Empty. Quiet. Just Mum and Dad and Stace.

The others were quiet after that. Maybe he should have said a farm. Could’ve talked about horse riding or a four-wheel drive. Trouble was, he’d never ridden anything but

a bike, unless you counted a Shetland pony at the Show when he was five.

Back home he and Dad had bred budgies. They’d built cages all along one side of the shed and they’d calculated the chances of getting certain colours from different pairs. Every day Thomas had raced home to check if there were eggs, if they had hatched, if the babies were flying. He’d fed and watered and cleaned. And then Dad lost his job. Thomas scribbled on his sheet. Maths problems were easy. He could manage problems on paper.

At the weekend, Thomas sat on the back step, flopped on the sofa in front of the television or lay on his bed.

‘If you want to go to a friend’s place,’ his mother said, ‘that’s fine by me.’

‘I haven’t got any friends.’

‘Why don’t you invite someone here then?’

‘Because I don’t like any of them.’

‘How do you know till you’ve tried? You’ve never had to try before.’

‘It’s all right for you.’ His voice was rising.

‘You knew the people you were coming down to work with. It’s easy for you. It’s not fair! I hate this place. Bloody Sydney.

I hate, hate, hate it.’ He was screaming.

a) What do you find out from the text about Thomas’s life before the family moved?

b) Talk about how you think Thomas feels at different times in the story – and why:

- 1. before school starts;
- 2. in his new class;
- 3. when he does work for school;
- 4. at weekends;
- 5. when he talks to his mother;
- 6. when he compares Sydney with his old home.

Example: I think Thomas feels worried before school starts in Sydney because ...

bored? (un)sure of himself? worried? ...?

Thomas slowly gets to know the other kids a little. Then one day at school, there's a note on his desk – with an invitation to go to a rock concert with the others.

They all met up at the station on Saturday. Thomas stood for the fifteen minutes in to town.

It was the first time he'd been on a suburban train. He hadn't even seen a double-decker train before the move.

They heard the music from the station exit. A heavy, thundering bass. Guitar. Keyboard. Drums. The huge crowd carried them up the steps from underground, across College Street and down Art Gallery Road. They could see thousands and thousands of people, on the grass, standing, watching, dancing to the music. The crowd started to run. They ran, too. Thomas felt his hands grabbed, one by Pete and the other by Cass. She grinned at him. He hadn't held hands with a girl, with anyone, since folk dancing in sixth grade.

He smelt the Harbour salt and felt the wind and the warm sun on his face.

They bought cold drinks and then pushed their way closer to the front.

Wall-to-wall people. More than the whole of Dungog and all in one place. He was singing along. He was dancing. He was grinning. With Rebecca. With Cass, Fran, Cathy.

The heat went out of the sun. Finally the stage lights went down and didn't come back up again.

'We can't go home yet. Every station's going to be chock-a-block,' said Cathy. 'Let's go down through the Gardens.'

'Where's that?' said Thomas.

'Don't you know anything?' said Rebecca.

'It's kindergarten excursion stuff.'

'Come on, let's take him.' Cathy grabbed one of Thomas's hands. Troy grabbed the other one.

'Hey, where are we going?'

'You'll see.'

'You're all crazy,' said Thomas. But he

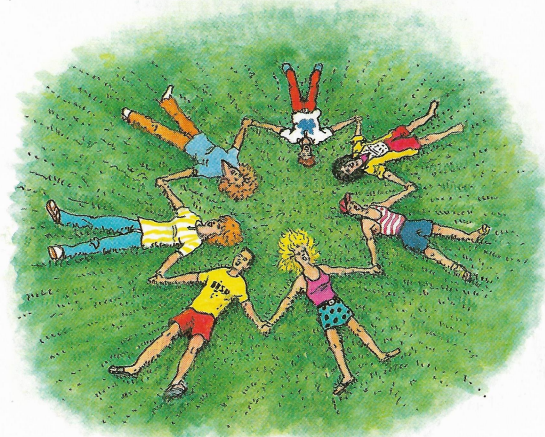
laughed and ran again with them, to the wall around the Harbour. Ahead was the Opera House.

'Let's go round to the bridge,' said Cathy. They stopped on the grass by one of the huge southern pylons. Cars, buses and trains roared above them. The wind blew cool off the water.

Cathy pulled them into a circle to hear her above the noise. 'I've always wanted to do this,' she said, and as the next wave of vehicles thundered above them, she spread her arms wide and screamed. The others watched for a moment, and then Cass and Pete, Troy and Rebecca began. Thomas watched. He dropped down on his back on the grass and looked up at the dark underbelly of the Bridge.

He spread his arms and legs. The others dropped to the grass with him. They all held hands, in a circle of cutout dolls. Thomas felt the cool grass, the warm air, the sounds of machines above and friends all around. He opened his mouth and hurled to the world a long, long, wild and joyful cry.

(From 'Love Me, Love Me Not' by Libby Gleeson, adapted)



c) Collect words from the text that show positive feelings. Write a list – or make a mind map.

Example: to invite, warm sun ...

Try to explain how Thomas's feelings change.

→ LM 15.2

→ LM 16.2