First Light by Katie Waters, age 15, Cheltenham Bournside School

First light. The battlefield was too vicious to disrupt, yet too near to turn away from.

Guarding the bay were rigid giants, cut deeply with the scars of the thousands of battles they’d fought. Against the reckless waves, they stood their ground and their silent protest was more powerful than any thunder-struck force from the sea.

Their wounds were ploughed in deep. From afar, they appeared garish. Inside, there was sure to be hidden terror; immigrant creatures smuggled in by the waves, carried on the ocean’s volatile journey. The gaping mouths, bearing broken teeth, revealed inner darkness. They swallowed the water that dared attack the jaws. Then they heaved it out - it tasted foul.

The waves, too, pushed out the souvenirs of their battles and the shore was lined with these dagger-like shards. It was intended as an insult to their strong, sturdy enemies - but the enemies just watched, unmoved.

Every explosive attack at the barricades was thrown with the same amount of power. They put all their strength into hitting the guards. They never lost the rhythm of their rowing - back, forth, back, forth - never giving up.

I thought in the night of the armies that battled outside and, not knowing when it would end, shivered at the prospect of such a storm so close to where I was.

Yet, eventually, along with the gradually relenting waves, I rolled into sleep.

As softly as the sun wakes the land, I was awoken by my grandfather the following morning. We made our way down together and took pride in being the early birds, allowing the others to stay back while we gladly took the world into our own hands.

The battlefield lay silent. The tide had retreated; fallen back generously so that we could walk along the sand and shingle. Among that abandoned collection, we uncovered so many treasures, and it became clear to us that these were offerings from the sea. It was like a distant relative that took our yearly visits as opportunities to give us everything they had to give.

Across the cloudy sapphire stretch, I watched the waves lap gently over the rocks in motherly gesture to smooth the wounds that had been inflicted before. And as they now reached out for the caves, longing to enter, I too felt the previous fear of the unknown drift away… and so I ventured in.

In these caves, I found, not savaging beasts, but comforting niches to be in; alone – and safe – with my imagination. I saw mermaids peer out from behind crystal-rich rocks and heard the gentle purr of sleeping dragons. I was in the presence of mystery and magic. And all this within the hospitable cliffs with their grave yet kind jagged faces. They watched over us while we stayed in their care: a family we grew to know; to love - even through the bad times, with the surging storms and ferocious fights.

Over years and years, it became our home.