

# ERASMUS JAMES & THE GALACTIC

# ZAPP

# MACHINE

Teacher Notes & Student Activities

BY TEACHER AND AUTHOR,  
MATT PORTER

[www.barrelbooks.com](http://www.barrelbooks.com)

## Activity Summaries

**Numbers** – Students practise writing attention-grabbing opening sentences. After the activity, students could read the opening sentences of other books. As a class, discuss the features of each opening sentence. Also discuss what makes a good opening sentence.

**Detailed Descriptions** – Students write detailed descriptions of a character after a traumatic event (eg. a cyclone). If students have difficulty coming up with their own mental image they could write descriptions of people in photos from the newspaper.

**Hospital Report** – Students write a hospital report for Erasmus' dad, imagining he has blown himself up inventing a fart-magnifier. Students write in a different format and you can discuss the appropriate language and terminology for a report.

**Emotions** – Students explore the use of facial expressions to convey emotions in Erasmus James and the *Galactic Zapp Machine*. As a follow-up activity, students can find similar examples in other books. As a class you could compile a photo board of pictures showing emotions and ask students to write sentences about each picture.

**Uncool** – When writing in a different setting it's important students research beforehand. This activity lets students do that. After compiling the 'what's hot and what's not' lists, students can present them as an entertainment reporter.

**Warning** – Students design warning signs for the *Galactic Zapp Machine* and other hazards/features of Uponia. Students develop the skill of conveying a message without using words.

**Time to Pack** – Students compile a list of ten things they would take on a galactic adventure and justify their choices. As a further activity, students could make pairs and compile a new list of ten from both lists. The pair could then make a four and compile another list. Students will practise using co-operation, discussion and expressing their point of view.

**Character History** – Students invent their own character and develop a family tree for them. This helps students think about their character, ensuring they will act consistently throughout their stories. As a follow-up, students could compile a 'This Is Your Life' type TV show.

**The Ultimate Horse** – Students design the ultimate horse. They also write a 100 word summary of their creation. Students could also make an ad for their

horse. The ad could be a thirty second radio advertisement, a page in a newspaper or a TV ad.

**What a View** - Students sketch a setting from a descriptive passage in the book. They then imagine their own setting and write a passage describing it.

**What If?** - What if all waterfalls on Earth ran up? Students ponder this question, and others, then write the consequences. Activities like this help develop lateral thinking skills.

**Character Characteristics** - Explores the way DC Green conveys character's intelligence and attitude through their dialogue. Students write phrases for characters to convey their personalities. As a follow-up, students could investigate what characters say in other books and how it relates to their personalities.

**Awesome Adjectives** - Highlights the way adjectives are used in the book. Students develop their own list of adjectives to use in their own stories. As a follow-up, the grade could develop a giant adjectives poster for display in the room.

**Question Time** - Students write eight questions they would like to ask a character at any stage of the book. They then place themselves in the character's situation and answer the questions. Encourage students to think about the character and information that is not directly stated in the text.

**Two Sides to Everything** - Franklin recognises everyone has their own motivations and simply because you don't agree with them doesn't mean they're wrong. Students explore this concept and take the side of King Reginald, the rebels or bloodhorses. As a follow-up, students could investigate fairy tales and try to justify the actions of characters such as the wolf and troll.

**New Creatures** - DC Green created Uponia and everything that lives in it. Students create their own creature. They also write a fact sheet about it and compile a food web showing their creature's position on the food chain.

**Secret Message** - Smoke signals are used to deliver messages throughout the text. Students create their own signals for each letter of the alphabet. They then write a message about the book using their signals. This activity can also be used for students to practise spelling.

**The Great Handover Treaty** - Students can demonstrate their overall comprehension of the book by writing and designing what they believe the Great Handover Treaty would look like. As a class you could discuss that the Great

Handover Treaty is an official document and therefore would be presented in a certain way.

**A Dose of Democracy** - Near the final stages of the book an election takes place to decide the new ruler of Uponia. Students select a candidate from the book and become their official campaign manager. They write a speech for their candidate, how to vote cards, a poster and a slogan. As a follow-up, you could hold a class election with each campaign manager presenting their candidate and the class casting votes.

**Photo Time** - Sanders orders a picture of the main characters during the final stages of the book. Students sketch this scene. Remind students to re-read the section for the finer details.

## Numbers

*Three! I was just three mouse clicks away from hacking into Bayfield High's computer system when...*

***BOOM!***

Every story needs an attention-grabbing, gob-smacking, opening sentence. DC Green has used the number three in his attention grabbing opening sentence. It grabs your attention as it raises the questions -

What three clicks must he complete?

Why does he want to hack into Bayfield High's computer system?

What was the ***BOOM!***

Use the numbers below to write attention grabbing opening sentences. Here's an example -

Five! I was just *five* metres from scoring the try of the century when...

***CRUNCH!***

One!

Two!

Three!

Four!

Five!

Six!

Seven!

Eight!

Nine!

Ten!

## Detailed Descriptions

*He just swayed and smoked in the hall like a black dog on a hot tin roof, eyes bug-wide open, beard half-shaved, the hair on his head part gone, part pointing in every direction (looking for the missing crop circle perhaps).*

This sentence describes Erasmus' dad after he blew himself up... again. Authors use descriptive sentences like this one to help you picture the characters and situation. Imagine a character. Also, imagine something shocking has just happened to them. They could have been drenched by a massive water bomb or blasted by a cyclone. What would happen to someone in that situation? What would happen to their hair, clothes, body?

Write a detailed description of your character's appearance after their shocking experience.

Read your detailed description to a classmate. Ask them to sketch what you describe. Does their picture match what you imagined your character would look like?

## Hospital Report

Erasmus says he doesn't need the worry of his dad *'blowing himself up inventing a fart-magnifier at nine in the evening.'*

Imagine you are the nurse on duty and Erasmus' dad has arrived at hospital after blowing himself up inventing the fart-magnifier. Complete the incident report -

Date -
Patient name -
Symptoms patient exhibits -
Patient's physical appearance -
How illness/injury occurred -
Recommended treatment -
Other comments -

## Emotions

*My dad's mouth went round, like it was ready to catch donuts.*

Rather than saying 'my dad was shocked,' Erasmus uses the above description to inform the reader of his dad's emotions. It's a clever way of keeping the story entertaining while connecting the character with the readers. You can use this strategy in your writing. Start with a facial feature, like the mouth. Then list emotions -

**Mouth-** happy, sad, worried, angry, scared, surprised, horrified, sick, repulsed.

Describe the facial feature to convey each emotion. For example -

My dad's mouth shot open, like there was a limited supply of oxygen and he wanted it all.

Write more emotion-conveying sentences using other facial features such as eyes, eyebrows, ears, nose/nostrils.

## Uncool

*Horses haven't been cool since the Middle Ages, since cars were invented.*

If you want your stories to be a little different you could try setting them in a different time period. If you're writing about a real time period or place, it's important you research the facts or you could end up getting confused like Erasmus! Pick a time period - Jurassic, French Revolution, American Civil War, Ancient Greece/Rome/Egypt, Stone Age, Industrial Revolution or Cambrian Period. Research your time period then compile a list of what was hot and what was not back then.

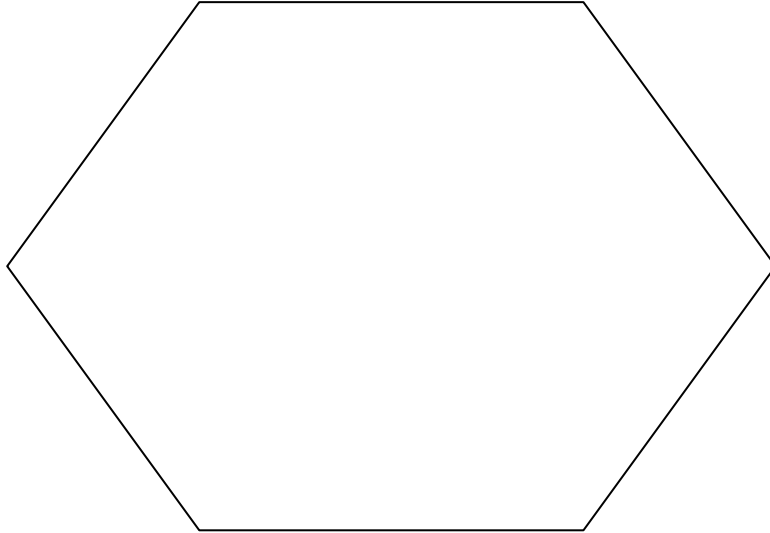
**HOT!**

**DEFINITELY NOT!**

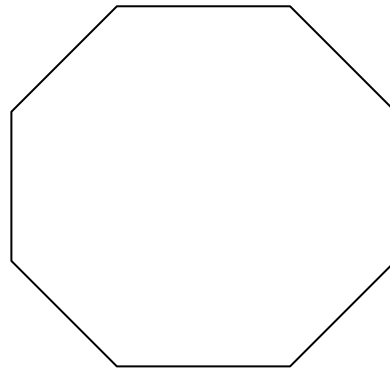
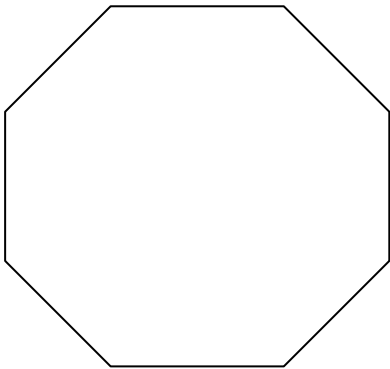
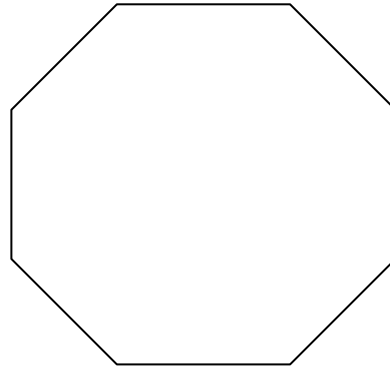
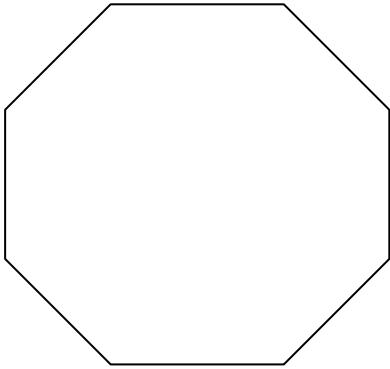
## Warning!

*For I knew better than to care about his dramatic warnings.*

Maybe Erasmus would've taken more notice of his dad's warning to leave the Galactic Zapp Machine alone if he had attached a warning sign? Design a warning sign (with no words) warning of the dangers of using the Galactic Zapp Machine -



Design other warning signs for hazards you may come across in Uponia such as bloodhorses or King Reg with a bazooka.



## Time to Pack

Erasmus lists the items he packs before he becomes the *'first person in history to ride that galactic zapper.'* He also justifies why he packs each item, such as *'Sunscreen, in case I zapped too near to the sun.'*

Make a list of ten items you would pack before riding the galactic zapper. Include a justification of why you would take each item.

1.  
Justification -

2.  
Justification -

3.  
Justification -

4.  
Justification -

5.  
Justification -

6.  
Justification -

7.  
Justification -

8.  
Justification -

9.  
Justification -

10.  
Justification -

## Character History

*'Indeed,' the king boomed. 'I am King Reginald the 77<sup>th</sup>, Ruler of Uponia from the foothills of the Bloodhorse Mountains to the farthest beach in Seahorsia, Conqueror of the Trots Flats and several bits of the eastern territories, heir of the late lamented Reginald the 76<sup>th</sup> and Monarch of Just About Everything.'*

When writing, it's important you know everything about your characters. Even if you don't mention everything in your story, having an in-depth knowledge of your characters ensures they behave consistently.

Create a character and then develop a family tree (going back several generations). Include one sentence about each family member outlining the most interesting facet/event of their life.

## The Ultimate Horse

*'If only horses came with recliner seats, extra bum padding, a bug shield and air-conditioning.'*

At the beginning of the book Erasmus does not like horses, or horse travel. Design the ultimate horse for riding. No luxuries should be left out. No expenses spared. Draw your ultimate horse -



Write a 100 word summary of your creation.

## What a View!

*We stopped beneath a grove of umbrella trees. I scowled around. Stone bridges crossed tinkly streams. A farmer and horse ploughed lines in the earth, quietly conversing. Next gate, songs squawked from a chicken tea party in a field of bulbous pumpkins. What bleak sights. Not one TV aerial anywhere! On the horizon, mountains jagged skyward.*

What a descriptive passage! Could you picture the scene? Draw it -



Close your eyes and imagine a setting for a story. Now write a descriptive passage of the setting. Try and make your passage detailed enough so other people can picture it the same as you did.

## What if?

The waterfall in Uponia falls (or runs) up. Using your lateral thinking skills, write what would happen if all the waterfalls on Earth ran upwards.

For example -

They would be called water-ups not waterfalls.

What would happen if all the horses on Earth became bloodhorses?

What would happen if all the chooks on Earth could talk?

## Character Characteristics

*Hammerhoof kicked a rancid, half-eaten piece of ponybread (more hay than bread) towards me. 'Yo. Your dinner... prince,' he smirked.*

*Crook (Number Two): 'Duh... Yes, your Highship.'*

It's important when writing that your characters speak differently. The way a character speaks should convey their attitude, intelligence and personality. Hammerhoof talks like a rapper, using slang and hip words. Crook number two sounds like he's low on the intelligence scale.

Write phrases for the following characters -

A professional basketball player who thinks he's the best in the world.

A mathematician who has more brains than sense.

An extremely nervous astronaut.

An over-friendly nurse.

A heavy metal musician.

A commentator who speaks at a million miles an hour.

A gardener who gets over-excited about gardening.

## Awesome Adjectives

*Bleakhead himself approached, all thick neck, boof head, wild mane and cruel eyes.*

Adjectives are descriptive words. In the above passage, thick, boof, wild and cruel are all adjectives. Adjectives describe nouns and, in this passage, enable the reader to picture Bleakhead (Bleakheart). You can use adjectives in your stories to describe characters.

Around the body features write adjectives (one example has been done for you). Use this sheet as a reference next time you write a story.

Eyes

Hair

matted

Arms

Teeth

## Question Time

*I had 1,000 questions for my white knight's black horse, but I couldn't ask any of them while he galloped at top speed.*

Erasmus has 1,000's of questions for Franklin but he limits them to eight. Pick any section of the story. Write eight questions you would like to ask one of the characters involved in that section.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

Imagine you are the character and answer the questions. Use your knowledge of the character and how they have been behaving to guide you. Think of the character's motivations, friendships, enemies, history and personality.

## Two Sides to Everything

*'I do not support the actions of Bleakheart. Nor do I not support them. He is what he is.'*

*'Rebels fight for their beliefs. As does the king. As we all do what we must do, in our own ways.'*

Franklin has an interesting and considered view of others. He asks Erasmus, *'Why are bloodhorses evil? Because they eat meat? Or because you do not like the meat they eat?'* Franklin recognises every living thing has its needs and if they do not agree with your own it does not necessarily make them wrong or evil.

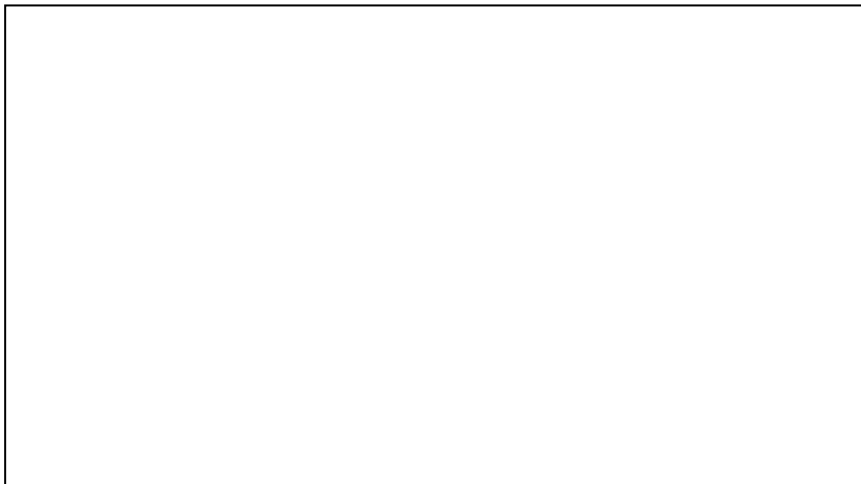
Take the view point of the bloodhorses, rebels or King Reginald. Write your version of events from throughout the story. Remember to justify everything you say.

## New Creatures

*The giant bird had a wingspan the length of two buses and giblets like a rack of crimson wetsuits. Her van-sized head was mostly beak, jaw and ancient TV-sized eyes. Along her back ran two ridges that formed a carrying compartment, half loaded with... red rocks?*

This passage describes Phooey the roccor. When writing stories in made-up settings, you must make up animals that live in your setting. In Uponia, DC Green also created many other creatures like bloodhorses, talking chooks and rainbow-coloured horses with angelic wings and fishing rods for tails. All the creatures share Uponia and therefore he has also created the ways they exist with each other.

Create your own animal. Sketch it -



Create a fact sheet on your animal -

Name -

Physical features -

Habitat -

Diet -

Movement -

Lifespan -

Interdependence (another animal it relies on for survival) -

On the back of the sheet create a food web showing your animal's position. Show what it eats and what eats it (if anything).

## Secret Message

*Smoke signals drifted skyward, announcing my return. Ooh, big news. Boy with secret returns. Smoke it up.*

Create your own system of smoke signals. Design a smoke signal to represent each letter of the alphabet -

A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M
N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	V	Q	X	Y	Z

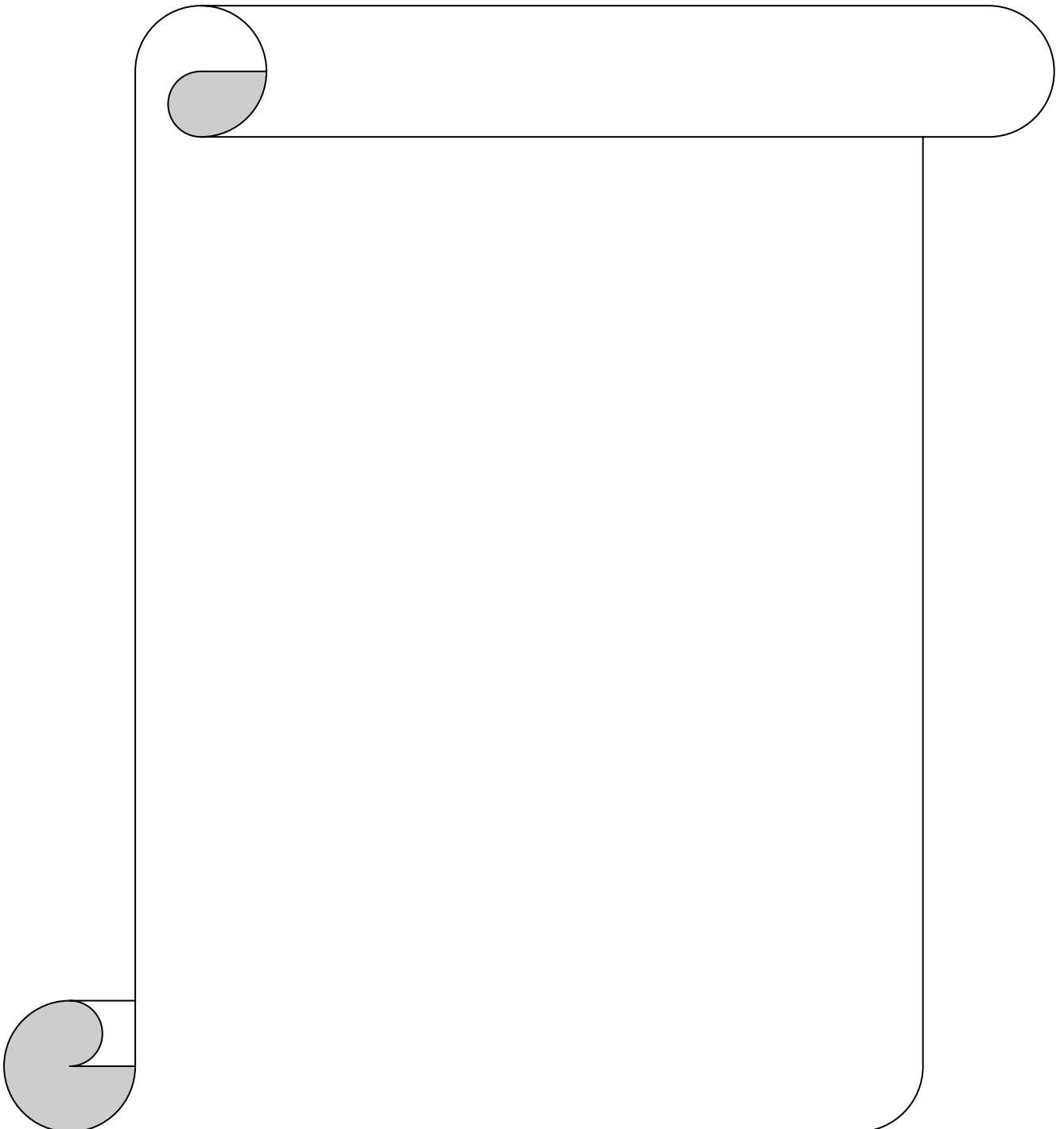
Write a message (something from/related to Erasmus James and the Galactic Zapp Machine) using your smoke signals.

Give your message to a friend. See if they can solve it.

## The Handover Treaty

*'Franklin speaks the truth.'* Harsha stepped forward. *'For I am the rebel co-leader! And I challenge that you, Reginald the 77<sup>th</sup>, have broken the Great Handover Treaty! You are unfit to be king! You have not maintained the peace!'*

Harsha speaks of the Great Handover Treaty. Using your knowledge of Erasmus James and the Galactic Zapp Machine write what you think would be on the Great Handover Treaty and what it would look like -



## A Dose of Democracy

*'No, silly killy. It's where everyone votes for a leader. Every human, horse and... chook, I guess. Every man, woman and child over ten, of course.'*

The election ended up a three-way race between Harsha, Marindi and Whizman. Pick a candidate. You're going to be their official campaign manager. You must perform several important tasks -

- Write their campaign speech outlining their election promises of what they'll do for Uponia.
- Make a slogan. It should be short, catchy and sum up your candidate's election promise/s.
- Design posters promoting your candidate.
- Make 'How to vote for \_\_\_\_\_ (your candidate)' cards.

## Photo Time

*Sanders slicked her feathers. 'This is an historic moment. It should be recorded for eternity. I'll arrange a picture of the main characters to be taken. It shouldn't take long.'*

As you know, Uponia has no cameras so it took a rooster in a beret four hours to draw the scene. I'm sure you could do it quicker. Draw the scene. Remember to re-read the section of the book detailing the scene so your picture is accurate.

