

Casa Felice

Teacher Resources

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CHAPTER 1: CASA FELICE

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever moved to a new city or country to study or work? What was the hardest part of settling in?
2. When you arrive somewhere new, what do you usually need to organise first (a place to live, paperwork, a phone, meeting new people)? Put these in order of importance for you.
3. Imagine meeting an important professor or teacher for the first time. What kind of impression do you want to make? What makes people feel nervous in situations like this?

2. Thinking About the Title

The building in this chapter is called "Casa Felice", which is Italian for "Happy House".

1. Why do you think a landlord might choose a name like this for a building?
2. Do buildings, shops, or restaurants in your country ever have foreign-language names? Why do you think this happens?
3. Does a name like "Casa Felice" create expectations about a place before you have even seen it? Discuss.

3. Opening Lines

Read the first two sentences of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"He had been in Kyoto for four days before he found the apartment, and in that time he had learned several things: that the hostel mattress was thinner than it looked, that his Japanese was good enough for convenience stores and train stations but developed small hesitations in administrative contexts, and that Kyoto in mid-March was doing something to the light that he didn't have the vocabulary for yet."

1. What do we learn about the main character from these first lines, even though we don't know his name yet?
2. What time of year is it? What clues tell you this?
3. Predict: what kind of story do you think this will be? What makes you think so?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

administrative (*adjective*)

relating to the organisation and management of official business, offices, or paperwork.

aspirational (*adjective*)

expressing a hope or ambition; suggesting something better or grander than reality.

assess (*verb*)

to carefully judge or evaluate a person, situation, or piece of work.

composure (*noun*)

a calm and controlled manner, especially under pressure.

embarrass (*verb*)

to cause someone to feel awkward, self-conscious, or uncomfortable.

hesitation (*noun*)

a short pause before saying or doing something, often caused by uncertainty.

landlord (*noun*)

a person who owns a building or apartment and rents it to tenants.

outskirts (*noun (plural)*)

the outer parts of a town or city, away from the centre.

permanence (*noun*)

the quality of lasting for a long time, or seeming fixed and unchanging.

register (*noun*)

the level of formality of language used in a particular situation (e.g. formal, informal, polite).

residential (*adjective*)

consisting mainly of homes rather than shops, offices, or factories.

self-reported (*adjective*)

based on information given by a person themselves, rather than checked or confirmed by someone else.

supervisor (*noun*)

a person (often at a university) responsible for guiding and overseeing someone's academic work.

unhurriedly (*adverb*)

in a calm, relaxed way, without rushing.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio had been in Kyoto for four days before he found his apartment.	
2. Claudio missed the cherry blossom by a week.	
3. Claudio's letter of introduction was written by Professor Hattori.	
4. Professor Hattori spoke to Claudio only in English during their meeting.	
5. Claire Moreau is French.	
6. "Casa Felice" is the most expensive building on the housing list.	
7. The person who answered the phone at Casa Felice gave their name.	
8. Claudio arrived at Casa Felice exactly on time for his appointment.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What three things had Claudio learned during his first four days in Kyoto?
2. Why had Claudio come to Kyoto, and who is Professor Hattori?
3. What impression do you get of Professor Hattori from the way she speaks and behaves in this scene?
4. According to Claire Moreau, what determines the price of the buildings on the housing list?
5. Describe the phone call between Claudio and the person at Casa Felice. What was unusual about it?
6. Describe the outside of the Casa Felice building. What details does Claudio notice?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text.

1. The text says Claire Moreau made "a small pause that contained a judgment she had decided not to make aloud." What do you think she was thinking, and why didn't she say it?
2. Claudio feels "mild disappointment" when he first sees the building. Why do you think he expected something different, even though he told himself not to?
3. What does the phrase "Yes... You can come and see it" suggest about the person on the phone? How is this different from how you would expect a landlord to answer a call?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Describing In-Between Feelings and Atmosphere

The author describes Kyoto in March as "not spring, not winter, something in between, leaning." This kind of language captures a feeling that is hard to name.

- Find another example in the chapter where the writer describes a mood, feeling, or atmosphere rather than a simple fact.
- In pairs, try to describe a season, time of day, or place that feels "in-between" to you, using similar techniques (short fragments, comparison, uncertainty).

2. Formal and Informal Register

Claudio speaks more formally with Professor Hattori than he might with a friend. Notice phrases like "I'm fairly fluent" and "I studied there for four years."

- Underline three phrases in the Professor Hattori scene that sound formal or professional.
- Rewrite two of these phrases as they might sound in an informal conversation with a friend.

3. Reported Speech vs. Direct Speech

The chapter mixes direct speech ("Come in.") with reported/summarised speech ("She asked two questions, sharp ones...").

- Find one example of reported speech in the chapter.
- Rewrite it as direct speech, imagining the exact words that might have been said.

4. Punctuation for Interruption and Hesitation

The writer uses dashes (—) to show pauses, interruptions, or unfinished thoughts, for example: "a small pause that contained a judgment she had decided not to make aloud —"

- Find one other example of a dash used this way in the chapter.
- Write two original sentences using a dash to show a character hesitating or holding something back.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What kind of person does Claudio seem to be, based on this chapter? Use evidence from the text.
2. Professor Hattori is described as having "composure" and being neither "unfriendly" nor "warm." What effect does this have on how the reader sees her?
3. What do we learn about Claire Moreau from the small details in her office and the way she speaks?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is partly about the gap between expectations and reality (the name "Casa Felice," the cherry blossoms not yet arrived). Where else in the chapter do you notice this gap?
2. Claudio arrives with a letter praising him, but then has to prove himself in person. Is it common to feel that reputation and reality don't quite match? Discuss.

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. How would you feel if you called about an apartment and the conversation went the way Claudio's did?
2. What do you think Casa Felice will be like inside? What kind of neighbours or landlord do you imagine Claudio will meet?
3. Where do you think this story is going next? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Meeting a New Supervisor

Student A is a new student meeting their supervisor for the first time, similar to Claudio meeting Professor Hattori.

Student B is the supervisor: polite, professional, but not overly warm. Ask about the student's background, language ability, and research interests.

Try to use a formal, professional register throughout.

Scenario B: Asking About Housing

Student A is looking for a room or apartment and visits a housing office, similar to Claudio and Claire Moreau.

Student B works at the housing office. Explain the options available, including price, location, and size, without giving a strong personal opinion.

Scenario C: A Short, Mysterious Phone Call

Student A calls to ask about renting an apartment.

Student B answers with very short, minimal responses (similar to the voice in the chapter), giving only the essential information.

Afterwards, discuss as a class: how did it feel to speak to someone so brief? What did Student A want to ask but not get the chance to?

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "I'm calling about..." / "I'm calling to ask about..."
- "Could you tell me a little more about...?"
- "I have every confidence that..." (formal)
- "That's within reasonable distance of..."
- "There's nothing wrong with it, but..."
- "Thank you for your time."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his first meeting with Professor Hattori.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write an email (100–130 words) from Claudio to a friend back home, describing his apartment search so far and how he feels about "Casa Felice."

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a place that felt very ordinary at first, but where a small detail (a name, a sound, a feeling) made you curious or uneasy. Try to use at least one example of the "in-between" descriptive style from the chapter.

CULTURAL NOTES

Japanese University Structure

Japanese universities are organised into faculties (such as the "Faculty of Letters" mentioned in this chapter) which are then divided into departments. Professors typically have private offices where they meet students individually, and knocking and waiting for a clear "come in" before entering is standard etiquette. Addressing a professor by their family name followed by a title (such as "-san" or, more formally in academic contexts, "-sensei") is the norm; using a first name would be considered inappropriate in most situations.

Housing for International Students in Japan

Many Japanese universities maintain lists of approved or recommended housing for international students, often compiled by an international affairs or student support office. These lists typically include a range of options at different price points, with listings self-reported by landlords. "Danchi" refers to a style of large, multi-unit residential building constructed in great numbers across Japan from the postwar period onward; many are concrete, several storeys high, and were originally built to house the growing urban population.

Formal Letters of Introduction

In academic contexts in both Italy and Japan, it is common for a supervising professor to write a formal letter of introduction or recommendation when a student moves to study at another institution. In Japan, such letters are often written with particular attention to formal, respectful language, especially when addressed to a professor at another university. Ca' Foscari University, mentioned in this chapter, is a public university in Venice, Italy, well known for its programmes in Asian languages and history.

Cherry Blossom and Plum Blossom Season

In Japan, the blossoming of trees in spring is followed closely and holds strong cultural significance. Plum blossom (ume) typically flowers in late winter, from around February to early March, while cherry blossom (sakura) follows several weeks later, generally from late March into April, depending on the region. The changing of the seasons and the brief blooming period of these flowers are frequently reflected on in art, literature, and everyday conversation.

CHAPTER 2: THE LANDLORD

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever signed a lease or rental contract? What documents or information did you need to provide?
2. In your country, is it common to need a guarantor (someone who agrees to be responsible for you) when renting a home? Who might act as a guarantor for a student?
3. Think about moving into a new home for the first time. What is the first thing you usually do once you have the keys?

2. Meeting the Neighbours

At the end of Chapter 1, Claudio was about to enter the courtyard of Casa Felice to view the apartment.

1. When you move somewhere new, do you expect to meet your neighbours quickly, or does it usually take time?
2. What makes a good first impression when you meet a new neighbour?
3. Have you ever received a small gift or gesture of welcome from someone? How did it make you feel?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The courtyard was small and swept clean. A drain in the centre. A few pot plants along the base of the building — ceramic pots, the kind that had been there a long time, with the particular solidity of things that had never been moved."

1. What tone or mood do these short, simple sentences create?
2. What does the description of the courtyard suggest about how the building is looked after?
3. Based on the title of this chapter, "The Lease", what do you expect will happen? What kind of scene usually involves a lease?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

acknowledge *(verb)*

to accept or admit that something is true, or to show that you have noticed something.

alcove *(noun)*

a small section of a room that is set back, often used for a specific purpose (e.g. a kitchen alcove).

businesslike *(adjective)*

efficient and practical, focused on getting a task done without unnecessary conversation or emotion.

faint *(adjective)*

very slight or weak; difficult to see, hear, or smell clearly.

frank *(adjective)*

honest and direct, saying what you think without hiding your opinion.

guarantor *(noun)*

a person who formally agrees to take legal or financial responsibility for someone else, for example when renting property.

hob *(noun)*

the flat surface on a cooker with rings or plates for cooking, often used in the UK/Ireland (US English: stovetop).

invert *(verb)*

to turn something into the opposite order or position.

lease *(noun)*

a legal contract that allows someone to rent property for a fixed period of time.

muffled *(adjective)*

(of a sound) made quieter or less clear because something is blocking or covering it.

scholarly *(adjective)*

relating to academic study; showing serious learning or intellectual interest.

settle *(verb)*

here: (of a building or structure) to gradually sink or shift slightly into a stable position over time.

thoroughness *(noun)*

the quality of being complete and careful, paying attention to every detail.

unambiguous *(adjective)*

having only one clear meaning; not open to more than one interpretation.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. The name plate beside apartment 101 had no name on it, only the word "Landlord."	
2. Claudio's new apartment is 202, on the second floor.	
3. The landlord asked Claudio for two guarantors.	
4. Claudio was allowed to see the apartment before signing the lease.	
5. Claudio moved in on a Saturday, three days after signing the lease.	
6. Bunta lives in apartment 205.	
7. Bunta gave Claudio a book as a welcome gift.	
8. The food Bunta gave Claudio was from a place called Nishiki.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What documents and information did the landlord ask Claudio for before the lease was signed?
2. Describe the landlord's manner and way of speaking. How is it similar to or different from the phone call in Chapter 1?
3. What does Claudio notice about the apartment when he first goes inside it (Room 202)?
4. How does Claudio describe his new neighbour, Bunta, when they first meet?
5. What did Bunta give Claudio, and what did Claudio think of it?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. This chapter includes several small, unusual details: the room's temperature that "did not fluctuate with the season," the landlord's name that Claudio cannot remember, and a faint sound from somewhere above. What effect do these details have on the atmosphere of the chapter?
2. Claudio says "He had a home" at two points in the chapter — once looking at the empty apartment, once after meeting Bunta. Why do you think the author repeats this exact phrase? Does it mean the same thing both times?
3. How does the contrast between the landlord and Bunta affect the mood of the chapter, especially towards the end?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Building Atmosphere Through Small Details

The writer creates atmosphere not through dramatic events, but through small, precise sensory details: temperature, smell, sound, light.

- Find three small sensory details in the chapter (something Claudio sees, hears, feels, or smells).
- For each one, discuss: does this detail seem completely ordinary, or slightly strange? Why?

2. Contrasting Speech Styles

The landlord speaks in very short, clipped sentences ("Yes." "Your name." "Italian."), while Bunta speaks quickly, warmly, and with exclamation ("New neighbour!" "Claudio! Good.").

- Find two more examples of the landlord's short, minimal speech.
- Find two more examples of Bunta's energetic, informal speech.
- What does each character's way of speaking tell us about their personality, even before we know anything else about them?

3. Japanese Naming Order

Claudio says his name as "Mazzanti Claudio" — family name first — explaining, "He had learned to invert it."

- In your own language, what order do names usually go in? Family name first, or given name first?
- Practise introducing yourself both ways: "[Given name] [Family name]" and "[Family name] [Given name]."

4. Repetition for Effect

The short sentence "He had a home" appears twice in the chapter, as its own separate line.

- Why might a writer repeat an exact phrase like this, rather than varying the language?
- Write a short paragraph (3–4 sentences) describing a simple, everyday moment, then end it with a short, repeated line for effect, in the same style.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How would you describe the landlord's personality, based on this chapter? Use evidence from the text.
2. How is Bunta different from the landlord? Consider their speech, energy, and behaviour.
3. What does the detail about the paper bag of food, and Bunta's comment about Claudio's glasses, tell you about Bunta as a person?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is about the process of making a new place feel like "home." What moments in the chapter mark steps in that process for Claudio?
2. Claudio signs an important legal document quite quickly and with very little discussion. Would you feel comfortable doing this? Why or why not?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. If you were Claudio, how would you feel about your new neighbour Bunta after this first meeting?
2. What kind of relationship do you think Claudio and Bunta might develop as neighbours?
3. What questions do you still have about the landlord or about Casa Felice after reading this chapter? Share them with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Signing a Lease

Student A is a landlord going through a rental contract with a new tenant, similar to the landlord in this chapter.

Student B is the tenant, providing personal details (name, occupation, guarantor) and asking any necessary questions.

Try giving the landlord very short, efficient responses, and the tenant slightly more talkative, polite ones.

Scenario B: Meeting a New Neighbour

Student A has just moved into a new building or flat.

Student B is a neighbour who comes to introduce themselves, warmly and enthusiastically, similar to Bunta.

Include a small gift or gesture of welcome in the conversation.

Scenario C: Describing Your Ideal Apartment

In pairs, take turns describing your ideal small apartment to a partner: layout, kitchen, light, atmosphere.

Your partner should ask at least three follow-up questions about the details.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "I'll need a guarantor / reference / deposit."
- "Could you sign here, please?"
- "Welcome to the building!"
- "If you need anything, just..."
- "It's small, but it has everything I need."
- "What's the neighbourhood like?"

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing the moment he signed the lease and received the key.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write an email (100–130 words) from Claudio to his family, describing his new apartment and his new neighbour, Bunta.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about what makes a new, empty space start to feel like "home." Use specific sensory details (light, sound, smell, temperature) rather than general statements.

CULTURAL NOTES

Renting Property: Guarantors in Japan and Italy

In Japan, it is common for landlords to require a guarantor (hoshōnin) when renting an apartment — a person or institution that agrees to take financial responsibility if the tenant cannot pay. For students, a university, a relative, or a professional guarantor company often fills this role. In Italy, a similar system exists: a garante is sometimes required, particularly for young people or students renting for the first time, often a parent or another family member. In both countries, this reflects a broader emphasis on personal accountability and trust within rental agreements.

Residents' Associations in Japanese Apartment Buildings

Many apartment buildings and neighbourhoods in Japan have a residents' association (jichikai or chōnaikai), a community group that organises matters such as rubbish collection schedules, local events, and building maintenance. Participation is often expected, if not strictly required, and meetings are typically held monthly. This system helps maintain shared spaces and a sense of community within a building or local area.

Naming Order in Japan

In Japanese, names are traditionally given family name first, followed by the given name (for example, Hattori Yūko: family name Hattori, given name Yūko). When foreign residents interact with Japanese institutions, such as universities or landlords, they are often asked to give their own name in this same order, family name first, which can feel unfamiliar to those used to giving their given name first.

Nishiki Market, Kyoto

Nishiki Market is a narrow, covered shopping street in central Kyoto, often nicknamed "Kyoto's Kitchen." It has operated for several centuries and is known for shops selling fresh, pickled, and prepared foods, including many local specialities. It remains a popular destination both for residents doing everyday food shopping and for visitors sampling Kyoto's culinary traditions.

CHAPTER 3: CHERRY BLOSSOM

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. When you meet a neighbour for the first time, what do you usually talk about?
2. Is it common in your country to give small gifts of food to neighbours, or to leave something for someone as a friendly gesture? Give examples.
3. Have you ever been invited somewhere by someone you had only just met? How did you feel about accepting?

2. Cherry Blossom Season

This chapter takes place during cherry blossom season in Kyoto.

1. Does your country have a season, festival, or natural event that people look forward to every year? Describe it.
2. Why do you think cities and parks become especially busy during a short natural event like cherry blossom season?
3. What do people typically do to celebrate or enjoy an event like this — food, activities, traditions?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The cherry blossoms came in the last week of March, and Kyoto lost its mind in the way that Kyoto apparently did every year, with the reliable enthusiasm of a city that had been doing this for a very long time and saw no reason to be modest about it."

1. The phrase "lost its mind" is used humorously here. What do you think this suggests about the city's reaction to the cherry blossoms?
2. What tone does the writer create in this opening — serious, playful, formal, affectionate? Give evidence.
3. Based on the title "Cherry Blossom," what kind of scenes or events do you expect in this chapter?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

compose *(verb)*

here: to arrange one's expression or manner deliberately (e.g. "had already composed a smile").

diverge *(verb)*

(of roads, paths, or opinions) to separate and go in different directions.

equanimity *(noun)*

a calm and even state of mind, especially when dealing with a difficult or surprising situation.

file something away *(idiom)*

to mentally note something without acting on it immediately, keeping it in mind for later.

find your feet *(idiom)*

to become comfortable and confident in a new situation.

flaky *(adjective)*

(of pastry) made of thin, delicate layers that separate easily.

matter-of-fact *(adjective)*

said or done in a plain, practical way, without showing much emotion.

pastry *(noun)*

a baked food made from a dough of flour, fat, and water, often used for sweet or savoury fillings.

precision *(noun)*

the quality of being exact and accurate.

put-together *(adjective (informal))*

well-dressed and carefully presented; looking organised and stylish.

rhythm *(noun)*

a regular, repeated pattern of movement or activity.

stringed *(adjective)*

(of a musical instrument) having strings, such as a violin or guitar.

texture *(noun)*

here: the overall quality or character of an experience, made up of many small details.

warrant *(verb)*

to justify or make appropriate; to be a good enough reason for something.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. The cherry blossoms arrived in the last week of March.	
2. Shimo lives in apartment 201.	
3. Shimo and Claudio walked to the station together.	
4. Aki works in an office.	
5. Aki told Claudio that Bunta had already told other residents about him.	
6. Claudio found a note on his door hook, not food.	
7. Claudio believes the food was left by Shimo, though he isn't completely sure.	
8. Aki invited Claudio to a ramen restaurant by text message.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does the writer describe Shimo's appearance when Claudio first sees her?
2. What does Aki tell Claudio about how she and Shimo can help him?
3. What did Claudio find hanging on his door, and what did he do with it?
4. What details does Claudio begin to notice about the building's daily "rhythms" after two weeks?
5. How does Claudio find out about the Friday ramen invitation, and who invites him?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. Claudio assumes the pastry gift is from Shimo but then wonders why he assumed this. What does this small moment suggest about how he is starting to think about his neighbours?
2. The chapter mentions a musician's sound from above, a heavy door closing, and a tall figure crossing the courtyard at night, none of whom Claudio has met. What effect does including these unmet, half-glimpsed residents have on the chapter?
3. Claudio is surprised to learn there is a residents' association list he never signed up for. Why might a small detail like this catch a reader's attention, even though Claudio quickly forgets about it himself?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Characterisation Through Physical Description

The writer introduces Shimo and Aki very differently through physical description: Shimo is "pale... as if the usual distribution of colour had been applied with a lighter hand," while Aki has "good shoes" and a bag that is "both practical and expensive."

- What impression does each description create of the two women, before they even speak?
- In pairs, write a two-sentence physical description that suggests a character's personality without stating it directly (e.g. "organised," "nervous," "confident").

2. Idiomatic Expressions

This chapter uses several idiomatic or figurative expressions, such as "lost its mind," "finding my feet," and "spring making its case."

- Find one more example of figurative or idiomatic language in the chapter.
- Explain each idiom in your own words, then use it in a new sentence of your own.

3. Formality in Text Messages

Aki's text message to Claudio is short and direct: "There is a good ramen place ten minutes from here... Would you like to come?"

- How does the level of formality in the text message compare to the way Aki speaks in person?
- Write a short text message (2–3 sentences) inviting a new neighbour or classmate to do something, using a similarly friendly but efficient style.

4. Describing Food and Taste

The writer describes the pastry as "extraordinarily flaky and light, with a quality of cold precision," and the filling as "dense, and sweet but not too sweet."

- Underline the specific adjectives used to describe texture and taste in this passage.
- Describe a food you know well using at least three specific adjectives of texture, taste, or temperature (avoid general words like "nice" or "good").

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. Compare Shimo and Aki. How are they different in manner, appearance, and the way they speak to Claudio?
2. What impression do you form of Bunta in this chapter, even though he doesn't appear directly?
3. How does Claudio seem to feel about settling into Casa Felice by the end of the chapter?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is partly about being gradually included in a community. What specific moments show Claudio being "folded in" to the life of the building?
2. Cherry blossom season is famous for being beautiful but brief. Do you think there's a connection between this and anything else happening in the chapter? Discuss.

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Would you have accepted Aki's invitation to the ramen restaurant? Why or why not?
2. What do you imagine the other residents of Casa Felice, the ones Claudio hasn't met yet, might be like?
3. What do you think will happen at the ramen dinner on Friday? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: A First Meeting in the Corridor

Student A has just moved into a new building and meets a neighbour by chance, similar to Claudio meeting Shimo.

Student B is the neighbour: friendly but reserved, offering a small piece of local knowledge (a good bakery, a shortcut, a quiet café).

Scenario B: An Unexpected Invitation

Student A receives a message from someone they've only just met, inviting them to dinner.

Student B sends the invitation. Include the restaurant, the day, and the time.

Student A should respond politely, either accepting or asking a follow-up question.

Scenario C: Recommending Local Places

Student A has just moved to a new neighbourhood and asks for recommendations.

Student B recommends two or three places (a restaurant, a shop, a park) and briefly explains why each one is worth visiting.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "You must be the new..."
- "If you need anything, just ask."
- "Are you settling in all right?"
- "Would you like to come?"
- "I'll remember that, thank you."
- "I know a good place for..."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing meeting Shimo and Aki for the first time.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a text message conversation (6–8 messages total) between two neighbours arranging to meet for dinner, in a similarly friendly and efficient style to Aki's messages.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a seasonal event or celebration in your own country, capturing both the atmosphere of the event and how people behave during it.

CULTURAL NOTES

Hanami: Cherry Blossom Viewing in Japan

Hanami, literally "flower viewing," is a centuries-old Japanese tradition of appreciating cherry blossoms (sakura) in spring. Parks and riverbanks become popular gathering spots, with people picnicking, eating, and drinking beneath the trees, often with friends, family, or colleagues. Because the blossoms typically last only one to two weeks, the timing is watched closely, and forecasts predicting the peak bloom date are widely reported each year.

Food as a Neighbourly Gesture

In many parts of Japan, small gifts of food are a common way of welcoming a new neighbour or acknowledging a small kindness, often left without a note or requiring formal thanks. This reflects a broader cultural preference for understated, low-key gestures of goodwill over more direct exchanges. Similar customs exist in parts of Italy, where bringing homemade food to new neighbours or to mark an occasion is also common, though often accompanied by more direct, verbal exchanges of thanks.

Texting Etiquette Across Cultures

Text messaging norms vary between cultures and contexts. In Japan, messages between acquaintances or new contacts are often brief and functional, focused on practical information (time, place, purpose) rather than extended small talk, even where the underlying relationship is warm. This can differ from texting norms in Italy, where messages between friends or new acquaintances may include more expressive language, even in short exchanges.

CHAPTER 4: THE SEMINAR ROOM

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Think about the first day of a course, class, or job. What do you usually notice first — the people, the room, the atmosphere?
2. When you meet several new people at once, how do you usually remember who is who?
3. Is it common, in your experience, for a group to go for coffee or a drink together after a class or meeting? What's a natural way to suggest this in English?

2. Talking About Where You're From

In this chapter, Claudio introduces himself to new classmates and talks briefly about his background.

1. What questions do people usually ask when they meet someone from another country?
2. How do you usually describe your own hometown or region to someone who has never been there?
3. Is there anything about your city or country that people often have a fixed idea about, right or wrong?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The Faculty of Letters building smelled of old paper and floor wax. On the third floor where the history departments were, it also smelled very faintly of the kind of coffee that had been made in a small machine many thousands of times."

1. What does the writer mean by describing the coffee smell as "a kind of academic constant"?
2. What effect does starting the chapter with smell, rather than an event or a person, create?
3. Based on the title "First Seminar," what kind of scene do you expect this chapter to focus on?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

accumulate (*verb*)

to gradually increase in number or amount over time.

alert (*adjective*)

quick to notice things; paying close attention.

beat (*noun (idiom)*)

"after a beat" = after a brief pause, often for emphasis or effect.

commit (*verb*)

here: to decide to take part in something or take a clear position, rather than staying uninvolved.

deniable (*adjective*)

able to be denied or explained away; not completely certain or provable.

drift (*noun*)

here: "collective drift" = a group moving somewhere gradually, without anyone making a clear decision.

evaluating (*adjective*)

carefully judging or assessing something, often before deciding how to react.

frantic (*adjective*)

done with a lot of hurried energy, often because of pressure or a lack of time.

functional (*adjective*)

here: (of a language skill) good enough to communicate effectively for practical purposes.

lateral (*adjective*)

approaching something from an unexpected or indirect angle, rather than the obvious direction.

measured (*adjective*)

careful and controlled; not said or done impulsively.

readily (*adverb*)

easily, willingly, or without hesitation.

thoroughly (*adverb*)

in a complete and careful way, covering every detail.

wagashi (*noun (Japanese)*)

traditional Japanese sweets, often served with tea, made from ingredients such as red bean paste and rice flour.

workable (*adjective*)

practical and likely to succeed; able to function well.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio's first seminar was taught by Professor Hattori.	
2. There were three students in the seminar besides Claudio.	
3. Shiori offered Claudio a seat because it had more light.	
4. Nakamura Satoshi is studying philosophy.	
5. Lina Weber studied at Heidelberg before coming to Kyoto.	
6. Satoshi said there are "stories" about Casa Felice.	
7. All four students went for coffee together after the seminar.	
8. Claudio found a package of food on his door hook when he came home.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does Claudio interpret the smell of the Faculty of Letters building?
2. How do Shiori, Satoshi, and Lina each introduce themselves to Claudio?
3. What does Satoshi say when Claudio mentions he lives at Casa Felice, and how does Claudio respond?
4. What is Lina Weber studying, and what does she find interesting about it?
5. What does Claudio find on his door when he returns home that evening, and what does he do with it?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The writer describes Satoshi's reaction as "Not alarm. Not quite warning." Why might the author describe a reaction by listing what it is not, rather than simply saying what it is?
2. Lina says "I'm sure it is" in a tone that is "not quite agreement and not quite something else." What do you think she might actually be thinking?
3. Claudio repeats the exact sentence "The neighbours are a bit strange, but they're nice" twice in this chapter. Why might a writer have a character repeat the same words rather than rephrasing them?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Introducing Several Characters Quickly

This chapter introduces three new characters in a short space of time. The writer gives each one a distinct way of speaking to help the reader tell them apart: Shiori is warm and direct, Satoshi is brief and careful, Lina is confident and analytical.

- Find one line of dialogue from each of the three new characters that shows their personality.
- In pairs, introduce three imaginary classmates to each other in a short dialogue, giving each one a distinct speaking style.

2. Marking a Language Switch

The writer sometimes tells us directly which language a character is speaking, for example: "Since I was eighteen,' he said, in Japanese."

- Find two more examples in the chapter where the writer tells us which language is being spoken.
- Why might a writer need to include this information in a story where all dialogue is written in English?

3. Describing Uncertainty Through Negatives

The writer sometimes describes a feeling or reaction by saying what it is not: "Not alarm. Not quite warning."

- Find one more example of this technique in the chapter.
- Try describing a mixed or uncertain feeling of your own using the same technique (e.g. "Not disappointment. Not quite worry, either.").

4. Academic and University Vocabulary

This chapter uses a range of vocabulary related to university life: seminar, faculty, thesis, professor, programme.

- Make a list of all the academic/university-related words you can find in the chapter.
- In pairs, use five of these words to describe your own experience of studying (school, university, or a course you have taken).

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. Compare Shiori, Satoshi, and Lina. How does each of them treat Claudio differently in this first meeting?
2. How would you describe Satoshi's reaction when Claudio mentions Casa Felice? What words or phrases in the text create this impression?
3. What do we learn about Lina from the way she talks about her studies and the Kyoto School?

2. Themes

1. Claudio describes feeling "both inside the scene and slightly adjacent to it" while watching Shiori and Satoshi talk. What does this phrase mean, and have you ever felt this way in a group?
2. This chapter shows Claudio building an academic and social life in a new city, alongside his life at Casa Felice. How do these two sides of his life seem to compare so far?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Satoshi says there are "stories" about Casa Felice but doesn't explain further. What kind of stories do you imagine he might mean?
2. If you were Claudio, would you want to ask Satoshi more about what he meant? Why or why not?
3. What do you think Claudio's life will look like once he has more settled friendships at university and at Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: First Day of a Seminar

Students sit in a group of three or four, as if on the first day of a university course.

Take turns introducing yourselves: name, subject, where you're from, and one detail about your background.

Ask at least one follow-up question to each person.

Scenario B: Coffee After Class

In pairs or small groups, imagine you have just left a class together and are getting coffee.

Discuss the class you just had, and ask each other about your studies or work more generally.

Scenario C: Reacting to Unexpected News

Student A mentions something ordinary about themselves (where they live, a hobby, a plan).

Student B reacts with a brief, careful pause, as if they know something but don't want to say it directly, similar to Satoshi's reaction in the chapter.

Student A should try to ask follow-up questions to find out more.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "Are you new to...?"
- "What's your thesis / project about?"
- "How long have you been studying / working on...?"
- "Is something wrong with it?"
- "Nothing specific, it's just..."
- "Can I ask you something?"

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his first seminar and the new people he met.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write an email (100–130 words) from Claudio to Professor Andreotti (his old supervisor in Venice), describing how his studies in Kyoto are starting.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a time you felt "inside a scene and slightly adjacent to it" — present in a group, but not yet fully part of it. Focus on specific details rather than simply saying how you felt.

CULTURAL NOTES

Japanese University Seminars

University seminars in Japan typically involve a small group of students meeting regularly with a professor to discuss readings, present research, or work through a topic in depth, similar to seminar formats in many countries. Addressing a professor as "[Family name]-sensei" is standard, while addressing a fellow student as "[Family name]-san" is a polite, neutral way to refer to a classmate, whether or not the two students know each other well.

The Kyoto School of Philosophy

The Kyoto School refers to a group of twentieth-century Japanese philosophers, most notably Nishida Kitarō and Tanabe Hajime, associated with Kyoto University. Their work is known for bringing Buddhist philosophical traditions into dialogue with Western (particularly German) continental philosophy, addressing questions such as the nature of self, time, and nothingness. It remains a significant and actively studied area of Japanese philosophy today.

Wagashi: Traditional Japanese Sweets

Wagashi are traditional Japanese confections, often served alongside green tea. They are typically made from ingredients such as red bean paste (anko), rice flour, and agar, and are known for their refined, not-too-sweet flavour and often delicate, seasonally inspired appearance. Kyoto in particular has a long history of wagashi-making, with many shops specialising in particular styles passed down over generations.

Old Cities and Local Lore

Very old cities, in Japan and elsewhere, often accumulate local stories, legends, and reputations attached to particular buildings, streets, or neighbourhoods over centuries. Kyoto, having served as Japan's capital for over a thousand years, has a particularly rich tradition of such local lore. Italy's older cities, including Venice, Florence, and Rome, have similarly long histories of local legends attached to specific buildings and quarters, often blending historical fact with folklore over time.

CHAPTER 5: KURO

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever been to a themed café (cat café, owl café, board game café, etc.)? What was it like?
2. What rules do you think a café with animals in it might need to have, for the animals' wellbeing as well as the customers'?
3. Do you think of yourself as a "cat person," a "dog person," both, or neither? Why?

2. Noticing Patterns

This chapter involves Claudio noticing a small detail and wondering whether it means something or is simply coincidence.

1. Have you ever noticed two things that seemed strangely similar or connected, and then decided it was probably just coincidence? Describe it.
2. Why do you think people's minds sometimes look for patterns or connections, even in ordinary things?
3. Is it easy or difficult for you to simply let a small mystery go unanswered? Discuss.

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The cat café was Lina's idea, or at least she was the one who said it first. They had been walking back from a seminar in the second week of April when she stopped in front of a small sign on a side street — a painted cat, a coffee cup, an arrow pointing up a narrow staircase."

1. What impression do you get of Lina from the way she suggests the cat café?
2. What time of year is it in this chapter? How do you know?
3. Based on the title "The Cat Café," what kind of scene do you expect this chapter to focus on?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

contentment (*noun*)

a feeling of quiet happiness and satisfaction.

dedication (*noun*)

a strong commitment to a task or activity.

deliberateness (*noun*)

the quality of doing something slowly and carefully, as if fully intended.

elevated (*adjective*)

raised above the surrounding surface or ground level.

irregular (*adjective*)

not having an even, symmetrical, or expected shape or pattern.

landing (*noun*)

a flat area at the top of a staircase, or between flights of stairs.

mystique (*noun*)

an air of mystery or fascination that surrounds someone or something.

onigiri (*noun (Japanese)*)

a Japanese snack of rice shaped into a ball or triangle, often wrapped in seaweed and containing a filling.

orientation (*noun*)

here: an introductory talk or briefing explaining the rules or layout of a place.

platform (*noun*)

a raised, flat surface that something can stand or sit on.

regular (*noun*)

a person (or, here, an animal) who visits a particular place often.

scepticism (*noun*)

an attitude of doubt; not being easily convinced or impressed by something.

self-conscious (*adjective*)

feeling awkward or embarrassed about being noticed or observed by others.

sentiment (*noun*)

a feeling or emotion, especially a tender or sentimental one.

tabby (*noun*)

a cat with a distinctive striped or swirled coat pattern.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Going to the cat café was originally Claudio's idea.	
2. Shiori had never been to a cat café before, because they don't exist in Japan.	
3. The café had a rule against picking up the cats.	
4. Kuro lives permanently inside the café.	
5. Claudio had visited a cat café once before, years earlier.	
6. The cat on the landing at Casa Felice was orange with white paws.	
7. Claudio was completely certain the two cats were the same animal.	
8. Claudio found onigiri on his door hook that evening.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does the staff member describe Kuro's relationship to the café?
2. How do Lina, Shiori, and Claudio each react differently to the cats around them?
3. Describe the black cat Claudio notices on the second-floor landing at Casa Felice.
4. What reasons does Claudio give himself for why the two cats might simply look similar?
5. How does the chapter end? What does Claudio do after finding the onigiri?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The narrator lists several reasons the resemblance between the two cats could be a coincidence, then trails off with "well..." What effect does this have on you as a reader?
2. The chapter ends with the short line "It didn't really matter." Do you think this is completely true for Claudio? Why might a writer choose to end a chapter this way?
3. Why might the writer choose not to tell the reader clearly whether the two cats are the same animal?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Personification: Writing About Animals

The writer often describes the cats' behaviour using human-like language, for example: "granted an audience," "consulting a document," and "the complete lack of sentiment only a cat is capable of."

- Find two more examples of human-like language used to describe the cats' behaviour.
- Write two original sentences describing an animal's behaviour using similar human-like language.

2. Short Sentences for Tension

When Claudio sees the cat on the landing, the writer switches to very short, simple sentences: "Claudio stopped. The cat looked at him. He looked at the cat."

- What effect do these short sentences have on the pace and mood of the scene, compared to the longer sentences earlier in the chapter?
- Rewrite a short everyday moment (e.g. noticing something outside a window) using this same short-sentence technique.

3. Language of Doubt and Self-Reassurance

Claudio talks himself through the coincidence using careful, hedging language: "These were not, in themselves, unusual characteristics... He was probably not a reliable judge."

- Find one more example of this kind of cautious, self-reassuring language in the chapter.
- Practise this language pattern: write two sentences reassuring yourself about something uncertain, using words like "probably," "not, in themselves," or "it's likely that..."

4. Repeating a Description Exactly

The description "black, medium-sized... a white patch on its chest, slightly irregular, like a mark rather than a pattern" is used almost word-for-word for both cats.

- Why might a writer repeat a description exactly, rather than describing the second cat differently?
- What effect does this repetition have on you as a reader?

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How does each of the three friends react differently to the cat café — Lina, Shiori, and Claudio?
2. What do we learn about Kuro's personality, even though he's a cat and doesn't speak?
3. How does Claudio's reaction to the cat on the landing show his personality — how he thinks and how he handles uncertainty?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is partly about coincidence, and how much meaning we give to small, unexplained details. Where else in the story so far has Claudio noticed something small and then talked himself out of thinking too much about it?
2. Claudio seems to enjoy his afternoon with Lina and Shiori, and also seems slightly unsettled by the cat later. Can both feelings exist in someone's day at the same time? Discuss.

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Do you think the two cats are the same animal, or simply similar-looking cats? Explain your reasoning.
2. If you were Claudio, would this small coincidence bother you, or would you forget about it quickly, as he seems to?
3. What do you think Claudio might notice next, as he continues to settle into life at Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Visiting a Themed Café

Student A works at a themed café (cat café, board game café, or another idea of your choice).

Student B is a first-time visitor. Student A explains the rules and layout; Student B asks questions.

Scenario B: Noticing a Coincidence

Student A describes noticing something that seems like a strange coincidence (similar to Claudio and the cat).

Student B reacts, and the two discuss possible explanations, some serious and some more playful.

Scenario C: Describing a Pet or Animal

In pairs, describe an animal you know well (a pet, a neighbourhood animal, or one from your childhood).

Try to use at least one example of human-like language to describe its behaviour or personality, as in the chapter.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "No picking up the cats, please."
- "He/She always comes to me."
- "That's strange... probably just a coincidence, though."
- "I've never been especially good at telling ... apart."
- "It didn't really matter, but..."
- "He/She seems to like it here."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing the afternoon at the cat café.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a message (100–130 words) from Claudio to Lina, thanking her for suggesting the cat café and mentioning (lightly, without too much concern) the cat he saw later on the landing.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a small coincidence or strange pattern you noticed once in your own life, and how you eventually explained it to yourself (or decided not to).

CULTURAL NOTES

Cat Cafés in Japan

Cat cafés (neko café) originated in Taiwan in the late 1990s and became especially popular in Japan from the mid-2000s onward, particularly in cities where apartment living often makes keeping a pet impractical. Customers typically pay an entrance fee, often by the time spent, to relax in a space with resident cats, with strict rules in place to protect the animals' wellbeing, including limits on handling and guaranteed rest areas the cats can retreat to. Similar themed cafés featuring owls, rabbits, and other animals have since become common across Japan.

Onigiri: An Everyday Japanese Food

Onigiri are a staple of everyday Japanese food culture: rice shaped by hand into a ball or triangle, often wrapped in a sheet of nori (seaweed) and containing a filling such as pickled plum, salted salmon, or seaweed flakes. They are sold everywhere from convenience stores to train station kiosks, and are also commonly homemade, often given as a quick, practical gift or packed lunch.

Neighbourhood Cats in Japan

In many Japanese neighbourhoods, cats move relatively freely between gardens, courtyards, and communal spaces, and it is common for a single cat to be informally fed or cared for by several different households or shopkeepers without belonging exclusively to any one of them. Such cats are sometimes known as machineko ("town cats"). It is not unusual for the same cat to be recognised in more than one part of a neighbourhood, sometimes at a considerable distance from where it is normally seen.

CHAPTER 6: GOLDEN WEEK

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. When you have a long holiday or a break from study/work, do you usually travel or stay home? What influences your decision?
2. Have you ever stayed somewhere while most people around you went away for a holiday? What was that experience like?
3. What does a busy tourist season look like in your city or country? What changes do you notice?

2. Sharing a Meal with Someone New

In this chapter, Claudio is invited to eat with a neighbour he has just met.

1. Have you ever been invited to eat at someone's home shortly after meeting them? How did you feel about accepting?
2. If someone asked you to taste their cooking and give honest feedback, what would you focus on when describing it?
3. What questions do people often ask when getting to know a new neighbour or colleague over a meal?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"Golden Week arrived and the city shifted register. The tourists, who had been present in the usual quantities, became suddenly and comprehensively everywhere — in the temple districts, on the buses, at the konbini at seven in the morning looking slightly lost in front of the onigiri."

1. What does the phrase "the city shifted register" suggest about how Golden Week changes Kyoto?
2. What is slightly humorous about the image of tourists "looking slightly lost in front of the onigiri"?
3. Based on the title "Golden Week," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

aftertaste (*noun*)

a taste that remains in the mouth after eating or drinking something.

assessingly (*adverb*)

in a way that carefully judges or evaluates someone or something.

comprehensively (*adverb*)

completely and thoroughly; covering everything.

contained (*adjective*)

here: (of an emotion or reaction) controlled and restrained, not fully expressed.

dashi (*noun (Japanese)*)

a savoury Japanese soup stock, typically made from ingredients such as kelp and dried fish, used as a base for many dishes.

defeat (*verb*)

here: to overcome or frustrate someone's plans or intentions.

konbini (*noun (Japanese, informal)*)

a convenience store; a common informal term used even by English speakers living in Japan.

latch (*noun*)

a small fastening device used to keep a door, box, or gate closed.

logistics (*noun*)

the detailed practical arrangements needed to make something happen.

nimono (*noun (Japanese)*)

a category of Japanese dishes made by simmering ingredients (vegetables, tofu, meat, or fish) in a seasoned liquid.

palate (*noun*)

a person's ability to distinguish and appreciate different flavours.

practised (*adjective*)

done skilfully as a result of much repetition and experience.

stride (*noun*)

"without breaking stride" = without pausing or slowing down while walking.

upright (*adjective*)

having a straight, vertical posture.

variation (*noun*)

a different version of something, based on a familiar form but changed in some way.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. During Golden Week, the number of tourists in Kyoto increases noticeably.	
2. Satoshi spent Golden Week in Fukuoka.	
3. Claudio decided to stay in Kyoto for Golden Week mainly because of work.	
4. Hana lives in apartment 204 and works as a school cook.	
5. Hana asked Claudio to taste her cooking and give feedback.	
6. Sachiko works at a train station called Hanazono.	
7. Claudio's bus arrived exactly four minutes after Sachiko's.	
8. Claudio learned the name of the elderly woman on the third floor.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Why did Claudio decide to stay in Kyoto instead of travelling during Golden Week?
2. How does Claudio end up having lunch with Hana?
3. What does Hana ask Claudio about his neighbours in Venice, and how does he answer?
4. What is Sachiko's job, and how does she seem to feel about it?
5. Describe the elderly woman Claudio sees on the third-floor corridor.

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Sachiko catches her bus, it arrives "not in the way that buses sometimes happened to arrive... but immediately." Claudio then checks his own bus against the timetable. What effect does this small detail have on you as a reader?
2. Hana watches Claudio eat "with the careful attention of someone waiting for a specific piece of information." What do you think she might be looking for?
3. This chapter ends with several small, unresolved details — the cat, the elderly woman, Hana's questions. Why might a writer choose to end a chapter this way, rather than tying everything together?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Showing Skill Through Action

The writer never directly says "Hana is very skilled," but shows it through her movements: "a speed and precision that was slightly beyond what the task seemed to require," "no longer needed to think about the logistics."

- Find one more phrase in the chapter that shows Hana's skill through her actions rather than stating it directly.
- Write two sentences showing that a person is skilled at something (cooking, driving, a sport) without using the words "good at" or "skilled."

2. Understatement and Restrained Compliments

Hana gives Claudio a compliment in a very restrained, matter-of-fact way: "Better than most foreigners I've met... Admittedly, I don't meet many foreigners, so make what you want of it."

- How is this different from a more enthusiastic or emotional way of giving a compliment?
- Rewrite Hana's compliment in a more openly enthusiastic style. Which version do you find more convincing, and why?

3. Precise vs. Approximate Timing

The chapter contrasts vague timing ("a wait of variable length") with very precise timing ("His bus came four minutes later, which was exactly on schedule").

- Find the sentence describing how buses "sometimes happened to arrive." How is its phrasing different from the description of Sachiko's bus?
- Practise this contrast: write one sentence describing something happening vaguely/approximately, and one describing something happening with unusual, exact precision.

4. Making Comparisons

Hana asks Claudio about his old apartment building in Venice, and he replies: "An apartment building. Older than this one."

- Find one or two other moments in the chapter where Claudio or another character compares two things.
- Practise comparative language: write three sentences comparing where you live now to somewhere you used to live (older/newer, quieter/busier, bigger/smaller, etc.).

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How would you describe Hana's personality, based on how she cooks, speaks, and asks questions?
2. How is Sachiko different from Hana in energy and manner?
3. What do we learn about Claudio through the way he answers Hana's questions about food and about Italy?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is partly about choosing to stay somewhere rather than travel. What does Claudio seem to gain by staying in Kyoto for Golden Week?
2. Several neighbours reach out to Claudio in this chapter in small, different ways. What does this suggest about how community works at Casa Felice?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Hana was "waiting for" as she watched Claudio eat? What specific piece of information might she have wanted?
2. Do you think Claudio should introduce himself to the elderly woman on the third floor? What do you imagine she might be like?
3. What do you think Claudio will discover next about Casa Felice or its residents? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Tasting and Giving Feedback

Student A has cooked something new and wants honest feedback.

Student B tastes it (imagined) and gives specific, detailed feedback about flavour, texture, and balance — not just "it's good."

Scenario B: Holiday Plans

In pairs, discuss your plans for an upcoming long holiday or break.

One of you is travelling, the other is staying home. Explain your reasons to each other.

Scenario C: Meeting a Neighbour in a Hurry

Student A is on their way somewhere and meets a new neighbour briefly, similar to Claudio meeting Sachiko.

Student B introduces themselves quickly, mentions their job, and continues on their way.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "I'm trying something — could you tell me if it works?"
- "There's something in it I can't quite place."
- "You have a good palate."
- "I'm just going back inside."
- "It's good to know your neighbours."
- "For later — tell me tomorrow."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his lunch with Hana.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write an email (100–130 words) from Claudio to a friend, describing how he has been spending Golden Week and the neighbours he has met this week.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a meal someone cooked for you that you remember well. Focus on specific details of taste, texture, and atmosphere, rather than simply saying it was "delicious."

CULTURAL NOTES

Golden Week in Japan

Golden Week is a cluster of national holidays in Japan falling within the same week in late April and early May, including Shōwa Day, Constitution Memorial Day, Greenery Day, and Children's Day. It is one of the busiest travel periods of the year, as many people take extended time off work or study, leading to crowded transport, popular tourist destinations, and, in cities like Kyoto, a particularly high concentration of both domestic and international visitors.

School Cooks in Japan

Many Japanese schools provide *kyūshoku*, a standardised school lunch prepared on-site or at a shared kitchen facility and served to all students. School cooks prepare food in large quantities according to nutritional guidelines, often with limited scope for variation on a daily basis. This structured, high-volume style of cooking is quite different from home cooking or restaurant work, which may explain a professional cook's enthusiasm for experimenting during time off.

Understatement in Everyday Communication

Giving praise in a restrained, matter-of-fact way, rather than with open enthusiasm, is a common communication style in many Japanese social contexts, particularly among people who don't know each other well. A comment delivered plainly, without excessive warmth, is often intended and received as sincere, sometimes more so than an emotionally expressive compliment would be. This can differ from communication norms in Italy, where compliments, particularly about food, are often given more openly and enthusiastically.

CHAPTER 7: THE SENTŌ

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Are public baths, saunas, or communal bathing spaces common in your country? What are the customs around using them?
2. Have you ever been invited to try something new by a friend who was very enthusiastic about it? How did you react?
3. What unwritten rules exist in shared or communal spaces in your culture (a gym, a pool, a shared kitchen)?

2. Meeting Someone's Friends

In this chapter, Bunta introduces Claudio to other people connected to the building.

1. When a friend introduces you to people they already know, how do you usually feel — comfortable, a little nervous, curious?
2. Have you ever met someone described to you beforehand as "a bit reserved" or "a bit particular"? How did that shape your first impression?
3. What kind of first impression does a calm, quiet person often make, compared to a talkative one?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"Bunta knocked on his door on a Thursday evening in mid-May with the energy of someone who had just had a good idea and wanted to act on it before the feeling passed."

1. What does this sentence suggest about Bunta's personality and the way he makes decisions?
2. What do you predict Bunta's "good idea" might involve, based only on this line?
3. Based on the title "The Sentō," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

bearing (*noun*)

a person's manner of standing or moving; their overall presence.

damp (*adjective*)

slightly wet.

finality (*noun*)

the quality of being final or complete, with no further discussion expected.

inclined (*verb (past tense)*)

here: tilted or bowed slightly ("inclined his head").

kanji (*noun (Japanese)*)

the Chinese-derived characters used in Japanese writing, alongside hiragana and katakana.

musculature (*noun*)

the arrangement and development of muscles in a person's body.

noren (*noun (Japanese)*)

a traditional fabric curtain hung in doorways, often marking the entrance to a shop, restaurant, or bathhouse.

patron (*noun*)

a regular customer of a shop, restaurant, or establishment.

proportions (*noun (plural)*)

the relative size or scale of different parts of something in relation to each other.

readable (*adjective*)

here: easy to understand or interpret from outward signs.

sentō (*noun (Japanese)*)

a public bathhouse in Japan, typically used by local residents rather than tourists.

stuck-up (*adjective (informal)*)

behaving as if one is superior to other people; arrogant or distant.

tsukemono (*noun (Japanese)*)

Japanese pickled vegetables, commonly served as a side dish.

unreadable (*adjective*)

impossible to interpret or understand from outward appearance.

weathered (*adjective*)

showing the effects of long exposure to sun, wind, or outdoor conditions.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio had never been to a sentō before this chapter.	
2. Bunta explained several rules before they went inside.	
3. Isamu lives in apartment 105.	
4. Isamu reacted normally, without hesitation when Claudio mentioned Kinosaki.	
5. Toki teaches swimming lessons.	
6. Bunta warns Claudio to leave Toki alone.	
7. Claudio and Bunta walked back to Casa Felice after the sentō.	
8. Claudio spoke directly to Toki on the second-floor corridor.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What basic rules does Bunta explain to Claudio before they go into the sentō?
2. Describe the large man Claudio notices at the washing station. How does Claudio react to noticing him?
3. How does Isamu respond when Claudio mentions he has visited Kinosaki?
4. Who is Toki, and what does Bunta tell Claudio about him?
5. What does Claudio see when he and Bunta return to Casa Felice, and how does Bunta react to it?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. Claudio notices something unusual about the large man's back but stops himself from looking, thinking "There were things you didn't do in a sentō and staring was one of them." What effect does this self-interruption have on you as a reader?
2. Isamu's response to "Kinosaki" is slow and repetitive: "Good... good... Kinosaki, yes? Good." Why might the author write this exchange this way, without explaining what Isamu is thinking?
3. At the end of the chapter, Claudio tells himself "He'd probably left earlier. Taken a different route. That was the explanation," about Toki being home before them. What does this tell you about how Claudio deals with unusual moments at Casa Felice?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Giving Instructions and Rules

Bunta explains the rules of the sentō using short, direct imperatives: "Wash first, completely, before you get in. Don't put your towel in the water. Don't splash."

- Find one more example of an instruction or rule given in the chapter.
- Write four short rules for a place you know well (a gym, a library, a shared kitchen), using the same short, direct style.

2. Avoiding Saying Something Directly

When Claudio notices something odd about the large man's back, the writer doesn't describe it directly: "he registered something else... he looked away again. There were things you didn't do in a sentō and staring was one of them."

- What effect does this technique of trailing off or changing the subject have, compared to simply describing what Claudio saw?
- Write two sentences in which a character notices something but the writing avoids stating exactly what it is, similar to this technique.

3. Punctuation for Hesitant or Repetitive Speech

Isamu's dialogue uses repetition and ellipsis (...) to show hesitation: "Good... good..." "Kinosaki, yes? Good."

- What impression does this create of Isamu, compared to if he had simply said "That's a good place"?
- Write a short exchange (3–4 lines) in which a character hesitates or repeats a word, using ellipsis to show this.

4. Building an Explanation

At the end of the chapter, Claudio reasons through an explanation step by step: "He'd probably left earlier. Taken a different route. That was the explanation."

- Notice how short, separate sentences are used here rather than one long sentence. What effect does this create?
- Practise this pattern: write a short explanation (3 short sentences) that someone might give themselves to explain away something slightly strange.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How would you describe Bunta's role in this chapter — how does he act as a guide for Claudio?
2. What impression do you form of Isamu from his brief, unusual reaction to "Kinosaki"?
3. What does Bunta's warning about Toki ("a bit stuck up... leave him alone") suggest about Toki's position at Casa Felice?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is partly about Claudio being brought further into the community of Casa Felice through a shared ritual (the sentō). What does this experience add to his sense of belonging?
2. Bunta tells Claudio to "relax" more than once in this chapter. Why might relaxing be difficult for Claudio in this particular situation?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Isamu's unusual reaction to "Kinosaki" might mean?
2. How do you explain Toki being on the corridor at Casa Felice before Claudio and Bunta arrived? What are the possible explanations, realistic or otherwise?
3. What do you think Claudio will learn next about the residents of Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Explaining the Rules of a New Place

Student A is taking Student B somewhere new (a gym, a public bath, a club) for the first time.
Student A explains three or four important rules before they go in, using short, direct instructions.

Scenario B: Introducing a Reserved Person

Student A is about to introduce Student B to someone described as talented but reserved or a little intimidating.
Student A gives Student B some brief advice on how to behave, similar to Bunta's advice about Toki.

Scenario C: An Unusual Reaction

Student A mentions a place, a name, or a topic that seems ordinary to them.
Student B reacts slowly and a little strangely, repeating a word or pausing, without explaining why.
Afterwards, discuss as a class: what did Student A want to ask, but decide not to?

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "The rules are the same everywhere."
- "Bring a towel / bring your own..."
- "He's a bit... just don't mention it unless he brings it up."
- "Leave him/her alone."
- "Relax. You're in a bath." (or: "Relax, it's fine.")
- "That was the explanation."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his first visit to the sentō.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a text message conversation (6–8 messages total) between Claudio and a friend, describing the sentō and the interesting new people he met there.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a shared, ritual-like activity in your own culture (a communal meal, a sport, a type of bathing, a ceremony), focusing on the unwritten rules and atmosphere rather than simply describing what happens.

CULTURAL NOTES

Sentō and Onsen: What's the Difference?

A sentō is a public bathhouse using regular heated tap water, historically built for neighbourhoods where private homes lacked their own bathing facilities. An onsen, by contrast, uses naturally heated water from a hot spring and is often located in a place chosen specifically for that natural feature, sometimes as part of a resort or ryokan (traditional inn). While onsen are often associated with travel and tourism, sentō remain a more everyday, local institution, though many have declined in number as home bathrooms have become standard.

Sentō and Onsen Etiquette

Both sentō and onsen share a core set of customs: bathers wash thoroughly at a washing station before entering the shared bathing water, small towels are kept out of the water itself, and loud behaviour or splashing is discouraged. These customs exist to keep the shared water clean and the atmosphere calm, and are generally observed without needing to be explained to regular users.

Teacher-Student Relationships in Japanese Martial Arts

In Japanese martial arts such as karate, the relationship between a teacher (sensei) and their students is often marked by a noticeable degree of formality and respect, even outside the training space. Senior students, in particular, are expected to show attentiveness and deference toward their teacher in everyday interactions. A respected teacher may also be treated with a certain reserve by the wider community, out of respect for their position, rather than because of unfriendliness.

CHAPTER 8: THE RECORDING

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever had a teacher, supervisor, or coach who was very strict but also very fair? What was it like working with them?
2. How do you usually feel before a meeting where you know you'll receive critical feedback on your work?
3. Do you think direct, critical feedback is more or less useful than gentler, more encouraging feedback? Discuss.

2. Capturing an Experience

Later in this chapter, Claudio tries to record something using his phone.

1. Have you ever tried to record or photograph something (a sunset, a concert, a moment) and felt the result didn't capture what you experienced?
2. Why do you think a recording or photo sometimes feels like it's "missing something," even when it's technically accurate?
3. Is there a piece of music, art, or a place that feels difficult to describe in words? What makes it hard to describe?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"Hattori-sensei's office hours were on Thursday mornings, nine to eleven, and she received him at nine exactly, which Claudio understood meant he should have been there at eight fifty-five. He filed this away for future reference."

1. What does this opening tell you about Hattori-sensei's expectations, without her saying anything directly?
2. What does the phrase "filed this away for future reference" suggest about how Claudio is learning to work with her?
3. Based on the title "The Recording," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

allusive (*adjective*)

referring to things indirectly, assuming the reader already understands the context.

audible (*adjective*)

able to be heard clearly.

compressed (*adjective*)

made shorter or more condensed than usual, with information packed closely together.

cross-reference (*verb*)

to compare information from one source with another to check or connect it.

decay (*verb*)

here: (of a musical note) to gradually fade away in volume after being played.

foundation (*noun*)

here: the basic idea or evidence that an argument is built on.

gloss (*noun*)

an explanatory note or translation added to a difficult or historical text.

phrasing (*noun*)

here: the way a musician shapes and delivers a sequence of notes.

preamble (*noun*)

an introduction before the main part of a conversation or piece of writing.

preliminary (*adjective*)

coming before the main part of something; an early, introductory stage.

primary source (*noun (phrase)*)

an original document or piece of evidence from the time period being studied, rather than a later analysis of it.

proprietary (*adjective*)

behaving as if one owns something, or has a right to be in a particular place.

resonant (*adjective*)

(of a sound) deep, rich, and continuing to be heard for some time.

skim (*verb*)

to read something quickly, without paying attention to every detail.

substantial (*adjective*)

large in size, amount, or importance.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Hattori-sensei's office hours are on Thursday mornings.	
2. Arriving exactly at nine o'clock was considered on time and acceptable by Hattori-sensei.	
3. Hattori-sensei said Claudio's overall argument was completely new to the field.	
4. Hattori-sensei found a problem with Claudio's reading of the Engishiki passage.	
5. Claudio was given a reading list of twelve texts.	
6. Claudio worked in the library for four hours after the meeting.	
7. The cat was sitting at Claudio's door when he came home that evening.	
8. The recording of the music sounded exactly the same as what Claudio heard live.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What criticism does Hattori-sensei give about Claudio's reading of the Engishiki passage?
2. What does Hattori-sensei mean when she says the reading list "is not a gift... it is a requirement"?
3. What does Claudio do at the library after his meeting with Hattori-sensei?
4. What makes the music Claudio hears that night different from the previous nights he had noticed it?
5. What does Claudio discover when he plays back his recording of the music?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The chapter compares the "something underneath" the music to the "something underneath" Hana's cooking in an earlier chapter. Why might the writer connect these two moments?
2. Claudio can't identify exactly what is missing from the recording, only that something is. Why might the author describe an absence so carefully, rather than stating clearly what's missing?
3. After sitting with the strange silence, Claudio simply picks up his pen and goes back to work. What does this reaction suggest about how he has learned to live with the things at Casa Felice he can't fully explain?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Academic Feedback Language

Hattori-sensei gives direct, precise feedback: "Your reading of the English passage on page two is incorrect," and explains exactly why.

- Find two more examples of Hattori-sensei giving direct, specific feedback in the chapter.
- Practise giving feedback on a piece of imaginary work (an essay, a presentation) using similarly direct, specific language, rather than vague praise or criticism.

2. Describing Sound and Music

The writer uses precise vocabulary to describe the music Claudio hears: "the resonant, slightly dark quality of the instrument, the particular way the notes decayed."

- Find two more phrases in the chapter that describe the sound of the music in a specific, sensory way.
- Describe a piece of music or a sound you know well, using at least three specific descriptive words (avoid "nice" or "beautiful" alone).

3. Describing an Absence

The writer describes something missing from the recording without ever naming exactly what it is: "The recording had the music but not the thing the music was doing... He couldn't have said what that thing was."

- Why might a writer choose to describe an absence this carefully, circling around it, rather than naming it directly?
- Write two or three sentences describing something you noticed was "missing" from an experience (a photo, a memory, a copy of something) without stating exactly what it was.

4. Echoes Between Chapters

The phrase "something underneath" is used here to describe the music, echoing a similar phrase used earlier in the story to describe Hana's cooking.

- Why might a writer repeat a phrase like this across different chapters, in different contexts?
- Think of two very different experiences (a taste, a sound, a feeling) that might share a similar, hard-to-name quality. Describe the connection in a sentence or two.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How would you describe Hattori-sensei's teaching style, based on this meeting? Use evidence from the text.
2. How does Claudio seem to feel about Hattori-sensei's criticism? What in the text suggests this?
3. What do we learn about Claudio's own standards and work ethic from how he responds to the reading list and revises his argument?

2. Themes

1. This chapter contrasts the rigorous, evidence-based world of Claudio's academic work with the harder-to-explain experience of the music. How does the chapter move between these two worlds?
2. The phrase "something underneath" connects Hana's cooking and the music Claudio hears. What do you think this recurring idea suggests about Claudio's experience of Casa Felice so far?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Why do you think the recording didn't capture whatever Claudio heard live? What are some possible explanations, realistic or otherwise?
2. If you were Claudio, would you try to find out who is playing the music, or would you leave it alone? Why?
3. What do you think Claudio might discover next about Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: A Supervision Meeting

Student A is a supervisor reviewing a piece of work (an essay, a proposal, a project plan).

Student A gives direct, specific feedback: what works, what doesn't, and what needs to change.

Student B, the student, responds and asks clarifying questions.

Scenario B: Describing Something Indescribable

Student A describes a piece of music, art, or a place that had a quality they find hard to put into words.

Student B asks follow-up questions, trying to help Student A find the right words.

Scenario C: A Recording That Doesn't Match Memory

Student A describes an experience they once tried to photograph or record, and how the result didn't match what they remembered.

Student B asks what, specifically, felt different or missing.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "Your argument is that... This is not a new argument."
- "If you use this as a foundation, the argument will not hold."
- "There's something in it I can't quite place."
- "It's not X, exactly. More like..."
- "It had the [thing], but not the [quality]."
- "I couldn't say what was missing, but something was."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his meeting with Hattori-sensei.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write an email (100–130 words) from Claudio to Professor Andreotti in Venice, describing the feedback he received from Hattori-sensei and how he plans to revise his work.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a time a photo, video, or recording failed to capture something you experienced. Focus on specific details of what was present in the real experience, rather than simply saying it was "better in person."

CULTURAL NOTES

Direct Feedback in Japanese Academic Supervision

Academic supervision in Japan, particularly at the postgraduate level, often involves direct, detailed critique of a student's work, delivered with an expectation that the student will take full responsibility for revising and improving it. This directness in an academic context can differ from the more general social preference for indirectness in everyday Japanese communication, reflecting the value placed on rigorous scholarship. Supervisory relationships in Italian universities can vary considerably by institution and individual professor, ranging from similarly rigorous and direct to more informal and dialogic.

The Biwa: A Traditional Japanese Instrument

The biwa is a traditional Japanese stringed instrument, related to the Chinese pipa, played with a large plectrum called a bachi. Historically associated with travelling storytellers and Buddhist chanting, the biwa produces a resonant, percussive sound quite different from Western stringed instruments. Although less common in everyday life today than in earlier centuries, it remains an important instrument in traditional Japanese music and is still taught and performed by dedicated practitioners.

The Engishiki and Heian-Period Sources

The Engishiki is a lengthy set of regulations and procedures compiled in the early tenth century, during Japan's Heian period, covering court ceremony, administration, and religious practice in considerable detail. Alongside court diaries and provincial records, it is one of the key primary sources historians use to study the administrative structure of early Japan. Interpreting such documents accurately often requires careful attention to later annotations and commentaries (glosses), which may reflect the assumptions of the later period in which they were added, rather than the original historical context.

CHAPTER 9: KASUGA TAISHA

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever visited somewhere first as a tourist and later returned for work or study? How did the experience feel different the second time?
2. What do you imagine it's like to work with very old historical documents? What kind of care or rules might be involved?
3. Have you ever had to cancel or postpone an important meeting? How did you handle telling the other person?

2. Working with Archives

In this chapter, Claudio visits an archive to study historical documents.

1. What do you think the job of an archivist (someone who looks after historical documents) involves day to day?
2. Why might handling very old documents require special equipment, like gloves?
3. If you were shown an old document and it contained something unexpected, what would you do next?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The first research trip to Nara was on a Thursday in early June, which meant cancelling his morning office hours with Hattori-sensei. That involved sending an email that he rewrote three times before sending."

1. What does the detail about rewriting the email three times suggest about Claudio's relationship with Hattori-sensei?
2. What tone does Hattori-sensei's one-line reply create? Is it what you expected?
3. Based on the title "Nara," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

anomaly (*noun*)

something that is unusual or different from what is expected, and doesn't fit the normal pattern.

classical (*adjective*)

here: relating to an older, historical form of a language, distinct from its modern form.

correspondence (*noun*)

letters or written communication exchanged between people.

estate (*noun*)

here: an area of land, along with the rights to manage or benefit from it, historically held or administered by an individual or institution.

evidently (*adverb*)

clearly, or as shown by the available evidence.

finding aid (*noun (phrase)*)

a document or tool that helps researchers locate and understand the contents of an archive or collection.

formulation (*noun*)

the particular way in which something is worded or expressed.

gratefully (*adverb*)

in a way that shows thanks or appreciation.

parse (*verb*)

to carefully analyse a sentence or text in order to understand its structure and meaning.

preservation (*noun*)

the act of keeping something in its original or existing state, protected from damage or decay.

protocol (*noun*)

an official or established procedure for doing something correctly.

provincial (*adjective*)

relating to a province or region, as opposed to the capital or central government.

recataloguing (*noun*)

the process of reorganising and re-recording items in a collection, often according to a new system.

spatial (*adjective*)

relating to space, position, and the arrangement of things within it.

transcription (*noun*)

a written copy of a text, often produced from an original document or spoken recording.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. This was Claudio's first ever visit to Nara.	
2. Claudio cancelled his office hours with Hattori-sensei to make the trip.	
3. Miyamoto works at the cultural properties office at Kasuga Taisha.	
4. Miyamoto criticised Claudio's Japanese as poor and difficult to understand.	
5. The documents Claudio examined were provincial records from the late Heian period.	
6. Miyamoto found a similar unusual phrase in one other document in the collection.	
7. Miyamoto asked Claudio where he lives in Kyoto.	
8. Claudio wrote a note in his research notebook linking the document's phrasing to something Isamu once said.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Why did Claudio have to cancel his office hours with Hattori-sensei?
2. What is Miyamoto's role, and how does he describe Claudio's Japanese?
3. What does Claudio find unusual about the Jōan 3 document, and how does Miyamoto respond?
4. What does Miyamoto say about Kyoto near the end of their conversation?
5. What connection does Claudio draw in his notebook that evening, and what does he do with the note afterwards?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. Miyamoto says "Kyoto has old things in it. Some older than others," and the narrator adds, "There was nothing in the remark that required further attention." Why might a writer include a line that seems to dismiss its own significance?
2. Claudio describes the shrine as having a quality "not contained by" everything he knows about it. Where else in the story has a similar quality been used to describe a place or a person?
3. At the end of the chapter, Claudio crosses out the word "Check" in his notebook and replaces it with a question mark. What do you think this small action suggests about how Claudio is choosing to handle what he's noticing?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Vocabulary of Archives and Research

This chapter uses precise, professional vocabulary related to archival research: finding aids, handling protocols, cotton gloves, transcriptions.

- Make a list of all the archive/research-related vocabulary you can find in the chapter.
- In pairs, describe the steps you imagine are involved in visiting an archive to study an old document, using as much of this vocabulary as you can.

2. Dismissing Significance

After Miyamoto's comment about Kyoto, the narrator writes: "It was not a remarkable thing to say... There was nothing in the remark that required further attention."

- What effect does this dismissive statement have on you as a reader, directly after an unusual comment?
- Write two sentences in which a character says something ordinary on the surface, followed by a narrator's comment that seems to play down its importance.

3. Reporting Restrained Praise

Claudio recalls that Hattori-sensei described his revised argument as "better," in "the same tone she used to describe things that were satisfactory but not yet sufficient."

- What does the sentence tell about Hattori-sensei's way of giving feedback, without directly quoting her?
- Practise this technique: describe how someone said something (their tone) rather than quoting their exact words.

4. Describing a Process Step by Step

The chapter describes Claudio's research process in a clear sequence: reading a passage, parsing it, writing down his reading, marking uncertainty with a question mark.

- Find the sentence that describes this process and underline the linking words and verbs that show the sequence of steps.
- Describe a process you know well (a task at work, a hobby, a routine) in a similar step-by-step way, using clear sequencing.

1. Character

1. How would you describe Miyamoto's manner and professionalism, based on this chapter?
2. How is Miyamoto similar to or different from Hattori-sensei in the way he interacts with Claudio?
3. What do we learn about Claudio's growing confidence and skill through the way he handles the documents and the conversation with Miyamoto?

2. Themes

1. This chapter draws a parallel between Claudio's historical research and his everyday life at Casa Felice. Where do you see this parallel appearing most clearly?
2. Claudio says he is "getting good at filing things away." Is this a useful skill, a limitation, or both? Discuss.

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Miyamoto meant by "Kyoto has old things in it. Some older than others"?
2. Why do you think Claudio connects the phrasing in the historical document to the way some of his neighbours speak? What might this connection mean?
3. What do you think Claudio will do with the note he wrote and then changed? Share your predictions with the class.

4. DISCUSSION

5. 1. Character

1. How would you describe Miyamoto's manner and professionalism, based on this chapter?
2. How is Miyamoto similar to or different from Hattori-sensei in the way he interacts with Claudio?
3. What do we learn about Claudio's growing confidence and skill through the way he handles the documents and the conversation with Miyamoto?

4. 2. Themes

1. This chapter draws a parallel between Claudio's historical research and his everyday life at Casa Felice. Where do you see this parallel appearing most clearly?
2. Claudio says he is "getting good at filing things away." Is this a useful skill, a limitation, or both? Discuss.

3. 3. Personal Response and Prediction

4. Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!
1. What do you think Miyamoto meant by "Kyoto has old things in it. Some older than others"?
2. Why do you think Claudio connects the phrasing in the historical document to the way some of his neighbours speak? What might this connection mean?
3. What do you think Claudio will do with the note he wrote and then changed? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Visiting an Archive

Student A is a researcher visiting an archive for the first time to study a specific document.

Student B is the archivist, explaining the handling protocols and answering questions about the collection.

Scenario B: Discussing an Unexpected Finding

Student A has found something unusual or unexpected in their research (a document, a piece of data, an old photo).

Student B, a colleague or supervisor, asks questions to help Student A think through what it might mean.

Scenario C: Cancelling and Rescheduling

Student A needs to cancel an important meeting or appointment and explain why, politely and professionally.

Student B responds and helps arrange an alternative.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "The documents you requested are prepared."
- "I may be misreading it, but..."
- "There's a note in the finding aid about it."
- "I'm afraid I need to cancel / reschedule..."
- "That's not a remarkable thing to say, but..."
- "I'll need to follow up on that."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his day at the Kasuga Taisha archive.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a short research summary (100–130 words) from Claudio to Hattori-sensei, describing what he found in the Jōan 3 document and why it matters for his argument.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a very old place you have visited (or would like to visit), focusing on a quality about it that felt "not contained by" the facts you knew about it.

CULTURAL NOTES

Kasuga Taisha and the City of Nara

Kasuga Taisha is a Shinto shrine in Nara, founded in the eighth century and famous for its long avenues of stone and bronze lanterns, many donated by worshippers over the centuries. Nara served as Japan's capital from 710 to 784, prior to the capital's later move to Kyoto, and the city retains numerous temples, shrines, and historical sites from this period, alongside its well-known population of freely roaming sacred deer.

Archival Research and Document Handling in Japan

Researchers working with historical documents in Japanese archives and shrine collections are typically required to follow strict handling protocols: wearing cotton gloves, using documents only in designated reading areas, and following photography restrictions set by the institution. Access to original documents, as opposed to published transcriptions, is often arranged in advance through a formal request, and researchers may need to demonstrate relevant academic affiliation or purpose.

Provincial Administration in Heian-Period Japan

During the Heian period, land in Japan was often organised into estates known as *shōen*, which were managed by local officials but connected through networks of rights and obligations to central court nobles or religious institutions such as major shrines and temples. Studying the correspondence and land registers produced by this system gives historians insight into how power and resources were actually distributed and negotiated, often quite differently from the more formal picture presented in central court records alone.

CHAPTER 10: YOSHI

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. How do you usually pay rent or bills where you live? Do you receive a receipt or confirmation?
2. Have you ever had an administrative process change suddenly (a new system, a new person in charge)? How did you find out about it?
3. What do you think it says about someone if they consider handling money "beneath them"?

2. Meeting Someone You've Only Heard About

In this chapter, Claudio meets someone that other residents have already described to him briefly.

1. Have you ever met someone after hearing a little about them first? Did the description match your first impression?
2. If two friends both used the same word to describe someone (e.g. "diligent"), what would you expect that person to be like?
3. What kind of first impression does a very tall, physically imposing person often make, fairly or not?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"It was Aki who told him, on a Tuesday evening in late June, in the corridor outside their doors. She had come up the stairs with the particular air of someone who had had a good day and was mildly pleased about it, and she stopped when she saw him coming out of his apartment."

1. What does this opening suggest about the kind of news Aki is about to share — serious, minor, exciting?
2. What effect does starting with "It was Aki who told him" have, compared to starting with what she actually said?
3. Based on the title "The Receipt," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

aesthetic (*adjective/noun*)

relating to beauty or artistic style; here, a deliberate visual or design choice.

density (*noun*)

here: a strong, concentrated quality of presence or seriousness.

diligent (*adjective*)

showing careful, steady effort and attention to one's work or duties.

even (*adjective*)

here: calm and unvarying, without noticeable emotion.

formation (*noun*)

here: the specific shape or structure of a written character or letter.

hanko (*noun (Japanese)*)

a personal or official seal, stamped in ink, used in Japan in place of (or alongside) a signature on official documents.

impeccable (*adjective*)

perfect; without any flaws or mistakes.

imperceptible (*adjective*)

so slight or subtle that it is very difficult to notice.

inflection (*noun*)

a change in the tone or pitch of the voice while speaking.

lanyard (*noun*)

a cord or strap, often worn around the neck, used to hold an ID card or keys.

lucre (*noun*)

"filthy lucre" = an old-fashioned, disapproving idiom for money, suggesting it is a slightly shameful thing to care about.

navigate (*verb*)

here: to move carefully through a space, especially one that is difficult or awkward.

self-evidently (*adverb*)

in a way that is obviously true, without needing further proof or explanation.

stroke (*noun*)

here: a single line or mark made in writing a character.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Aki told Claudio about the change in how rent is paid.	
2. The landlord decided he no longer wants to handle the rent money himself.	
3. Yoshi lives in apartment 105.	
4. Yoshi gave Claudio a handwritten, stamped receipt.	
5. Claudio had always received a receipt when paying rent to the landlord before.	
6. Yoshi told Claudio rent must be paid before the tenth of the month.	
7. Claudio threw the receipt away without looking at it closely.	
8. Claudio noticed something unusual about the kanji forms in Yoshi's handwriting.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does Claudio find out about the change in how rent is paid?
2. Describe Claudio's first impression of Yoshi when the door opens.
3. What does Yoshi do after taking Claudio's rent envelope?
4. What does Claudio notice about the receipt — the handwriting, the kanji, the hanko?
5. What does Claudio do with the receipt at the end of the chapter?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Claudio asks what Yoshi is like, Aki and Shimo exchange "a glance that was brief enough to be almost imperceptible" and answer only with "Diligent." What do you think they might be choosing not to say?
2. The writer describes Yoshi's presence without settling on a single clear description: "large was not quite the right word... broad was not quite right either." What effect does this have on you as a reader?
3. Claudio notices that the kanji on the receipt carry "a quality of age," similar to something he noticed in the historical documents in the previous chapter. Why might the writer connect these two details across chapters?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Describing Something Resistant to Description

The writer describes Yoshi's physical presence by rejecting simple words one at a time: "large was not quite the right word, though he was large. Broad was not quite right either, though he was broad."

- What effect does this technique have, compared to simply saying "He was a very large man"?
- Try describing a strong impression of your own (a place, a person, a feeling) using this same "not quite the right word, though..." pattern.

2. Characterisation Through Handwriting

The writer uses the quality of Yoshi's handwriting — "impeccable... every character correctly formed" — to add to the reader's impression of him as careful and serious.

- What does the description of the handwriting add to your picture of Yoshi, beyond his physical appearance?
- Describe a person's handwriting in a way that suggests something about their personality.

3. Short, Loaded Exchanges

When Claudio asks what Yoshi is like, Aki and Shimo's entire answer is: "Diligent." "Very diligent."

- Why might two short, matching answers like this feel more significant than a longer explanation?
- Write a short exchange (3–4 lines) in which two characters answer a question with very short, matching answers that seem to hide more than they reveal.

4. Practical, Functional English

This chapter includes practical, everyday language: rent deadlines, a covering slip, payment instructions ("Not after the fifth").

- Find two more examples of practical, functional language in the chapter (instructions, deadlines, official information).
- Write a short formal note (2–3 sentences) that might accompany a payment or an official document, similar to Claudio's covering slip.

1. Character

1. How would you describe Yoshi's manner, based on this chapter? Use evidence from the text.
2. What does the landlord's decision to stop handling money suggest about his character, even though he doesn't appear directly in this chapter?
3. How do Aki and Shimo's reactions to Claudio's question about Yoshi add to the atmosphere of this chapter?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows Claudio slowly accumulating small pieces of evidence (the receipt, the hanko, the handwriting) without drawing conclusions. How does it compare to his approach to his historical research?
2. Claudio doesn't throw the receipt away, but adds it "to the pile with the others." What might this small habit suggest about him?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you imagine Aki and Shimo were silently agreeing not to say about Yoshi?
2. Why do you think the landlord might consider handling money "beneath him"?
3. What do you think Claudio will do with the growing collection of small, unexplained details he's been keeping? Share your predictions with the class.

4. DISCUSSION

5. 1. Character

1. How would you describe Yoshi's manner, based on this chapter? Use evidence from the text.
2. What does the landlord's decision to stop handling money suggest about his character, even though he doesn't appear directly in this chapter?
3. How do Aki and Shimo's reactions to Claudio's question about Yoshi add to the atmosphere of this chapter?

4. 2. Themes

1. This chapter shows Claudio slowly accumulating small pieces of evidence (the receipt, the hanko, the handwriting) without drawing firm conclusions. How does this compare to his approach to his historical research?
2. Claudio doesn't throw the receipt away, but adds it "to the pile with the others." What might this small habit suggest about him?

3. 3. Personal Response and Prediction

4. Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!
1. What do you imagine Aki and Shimo were silently agreeing not to say about Yoshi?
2. Why do you think the landlord might consider handling money "beneath him"?
3. What do you think Claudio will do with the growing collection of small, unexplained details he's been keeping? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Paying Rent or a Bill in Person

Student A is paying rent or a bill to Student B in person for the first time.

Student B explains the process, gives a receipt, and mentions the payment deadline.

Scenario B: Asking About Someone New

Student A is about to meet someone they've heard about but never met.

Student B, who already knows this person, describes them in a brief, slightly evasive way, similar to Aki and Shimo.

Scenario C: A Sudden Administrative Change

Student A explains to Student B that a process has suddenly changed (a new system, a new contact person).

Student B asks questions to understand exactly what they now need to do.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "From next month, you'll need to..."
- "He's/She's officially in charge of..."
- "Not after the fifth." (giving a firm deadline)
- "I'm sorry, we haven't met properly."
- "What's he/she like?"
- "Diligent." / "Very diligent." (a short, careful answer)

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his first meeting with Yoshi.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write the short covering slip (30–50 words) that Claudio might have written to accompany his rent envelope, giving his apartment number, the month, and a polite closing line.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a person whose presence was hard to describe simply, using the "not quite the right word, though..." technique from the chapter at least once.

CULTURAL NOTES

Hanko: Personal Seals in Japan

A hanko is a carved stamp used in Japan in place of, or alongside, a handwritten signature, pressed onto official documents, bank paperwork, and receipts using red ink. Individuals typically register a personal hanko for legal use, while businesses and institutions often have their own official seals. A well-used hanko, like a signature, can show visible wear over years or decades of use, and older seals may have designs or styles that differ noticeably from those in common use today.

Paying Rent in Japan

Rent in Japan is most commonly paid by automatic bank transfer, arranged when the tenancy begins, though smaller or older buildings sometimes retain more informal or traditional arrangements, particularly where a building is managed directly by an individual landlord or a resident acting on their behalf, rather than a management company. A formal receipt, whether handwritten or printed, provides the tenant with proof of payment and is generally expected practice.

Samurai Attitudes Toward Money and Commerce

In the traditional social hierarchy of pre-modern Japan, the samurai class was ranked above merchants, and directly handling money was often considered distasteful for someone of samurai status, who was expected to be motivated by duty and honour rather than profit. This attitude, along with the English idiom "filthy lucre," reflects a broader historical pattern across many cultures in which higher social status was sometimes closely tied to distance from the direct handling of money and trade.

CHAPTER 11: FUJIKO

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. What's summer like where you live? How do people prepare for or cope with extreme heat or cold?
2. Have you ever lived above, below, or next to someone whose habits (noise, schedule) affected your sleep? How did you handle it?
3. Do you know anyone who seems to be a genuine "night person," more comfortable and alert late at night than during the day?

2. Sharing Something You Can't Quite Explain

In this chapter, Claudio shares a recording with his friends and struggles to explain what feels different about it.

1. Have you ever tried to explain a feeling or experience to friends and struggled to find the right words?
2. When someone offers a simple, practical explanation for something you experienced ("it's probably just..."), how do you usually react?
3. Do you think it's more common for people to agree on a shared unusual experience, or for everyone to interpret it differently? Discuss.

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"July arrived and the city stopped pretending it was going to be moderate about the heat. It came down with the complete commitment of a Kyoto summer — thick and layered."

1. What does the phrase "stopped pretending it was going to be moderate" suggest about earlier parts of the summer?
2. What effect does describing heat with words like "commitment," "thick," and "layered" create?
3. Based on the title "Fujiko," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

account for (*phrasal verb*)

to explain the cause or reason for something.

coincide (*verb*)

to happen at the same time as something else.

commitment (*noun*)

here: full dedication or intensity, without holding back.

contemporary (*adjective*)

belonging to or characteristic of the present time.

cumulative (*adjective*)

increasing gradually as more things are added over time.

depth (*noun*)

here: a quality of seriousness or complexity beneath the surface of something.

economically (*adverb*)

here: using very little (time, words, or effort) to communicate something effectively.

invest in (*phrasal verb*)

to spend money on something useful or worthwhile, expecting future benefit.

linger (*verb*)

to stay in a place longer than necessary, often because it is pleasant to do so.

moderate (*adjective*)

average in amount, intensity, or degree; not extreme.

nocturnal (*adjective*)

active during the night rather than the day.

resignation (*noun*)

the acceptance of something unpleasant that cannot be changed.

sprawl (*noun*)

here: a relaxed, spread-out way of sitting or occupying a space.

unconvinced (*adjective*)

not persuaded that something is true or correct.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio had been warned by several people about how intense the Kyoto summer heat would be.	
2. Aki said she has been sleeping worse since the start of summer.	
3. Fujiko lives in apartment 303.	
4. Claudio played his recording of the biwa music for his friends at the university café.	
5. Satoshi thought the difference Claudio described was caused by the phone's microphone.	
6. Shiori suggested that some qualities of an experience can't be captured in a recording.	
7. Claudio met Fujiko for the first time at midnight in the corridor.	
8. Sachiko openly explained to Claudio why Fujiko reminded him of a character from Lupin III.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Why has Aki been sleeping better since the start of summer, according to what she tells Claudio?
2. What explanation does Satoshi offer for why the recording sounds different from the live music?
3. How does Shiori describe the thing that can't be captured in a recording?
4. Describe Fujiko's appearance and manner when Claudio meets her for the first time.
5. What does Sachiko reply when Claudio asks how she knew he was awake at midnight?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Claudio compares Fujiko to a character from Lupin III, Sachiko's reaction is described carefully: a smile that says "yes, I know, she does, doesn't she?" What do you think this reaction suggests, without anything being confirmed directly?
2. Sachiko replies to Claudio's question with "The building knows these things." What effect does this line have on you as a reader?
3. Shiori's explanation — "You can record the music but not the... presence" — closely matches Claudio's own unexplained feeling from an earlier chapter, without the two of them having discussed it before. Why might the writer have another character independently arrive at a similar idea?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Managing Multiple Voices in a Scene

This chapter has to keep track of four people in one conversation, each with a distinct reaction to the recording: Shiori is moved, Satoshi is sceptical, Lina is analytical.

- Find one line from each of the three friends that shows their different reaction to the recording.
- In groups of three or four, react to a piece of music or a story in character, each person taking a different attitude (moved, sceptical, curious).

2. Agreeing and Disagreeing with an Explanation

Satoshi offers a practical explanation ("It's a phone microphone"), and Claudio partly agrees but pushes back ("I know... But it's not a quality problem").

- Find the exact phrases Claudio uses to acknowledge Satoshi's point while still disagreeing with it.
- Practise this pattern: respond to a simple explanation someone gives you, first acknowledging it, then explaining why you don't think it's the full answer.

3. Restrained Description of Beauty

The writer describes Fujiko's beauty carefully and without exaggeration: "Not the beauty of someone who tried for it, but the beauty of someone who simply was beautiful, completely and without effort."

- What effect does this restrained description have, compared to a more exaggerated one?
- Describe someone's appearance (real or imagined) using a similar contrast structure: "Not X, but Y."

4. Implication in Short Text Messages

Sachiko's text reply, "The building knows these things," is short but carries a lot of unstated meaning.

- What would change if Sachiko had texted a long, detailed explanation? Would the effect be the same?
- Write a short, three-message text exchange in which one person's short reply implies more than it states directly.

1. Character

1. How do Shiori, Satoshi, and Lina each react differently to Claudio's recording? What does each reaction suggest about their personality?
2. What impression do you form of Fujiko from this brief first meeting?
3. How does Sachiko's reaction to the Lupin III comment differ from Aki's? What might this difference suggest?

2. Themes

1. For the first time, someone else than Claudio (Shiori) puts into words something he has been feeling about the "something underneath." How does this change the way you read Claudio's earlier experiences?
2. This chapter shows several small, separate observations (Aki's relief, the recording, meeting Fujiko, Sachiko's text) accumulating without being tied together. What effect does this build-up have?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Sachiko's knowing smile about Fujiko might mean?
2. How did Sachiko know Claudio was awake at midnight? What are some possible explanations, realistic or otherwise?
3. What do you think Claudio will do next with all these small pieces of information he's been collecting? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How do Shiori, Satoshi, and Lina each react differently to Claudio's recording? What does each reaction suggest about their personality?
2. What impression do you form of Fujiko from this brief first meeting?
3. How does Sachiko's reaction to the Lupin III comment differ from Aki's? What might this difference suggest?

2. Themes

1. For the first time, someone other than Claudio (Shiori) puts into words something close to what he has been feeling about the "something underneath." How does this change the way you read Claudio's earlier experiences?
2. This chapter shows several small, separate observations (Aki's relief, the recording, meeting Fujiko, Sachiko's text) accumulating without being tied together. What effect does this build-up have?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Sachiko's knowing smile about Fujiko might mean?
2. How did Sachiko know Claudio was awake at midnight? What are some possible explanations, realistic or otherwise?
3. What do you think Claudio will do next with all these small pieces of information he's been collecting? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Sharing Something You Can't Explain

Student A plays or describes something (imagined) to a group of friends and tries to explain why it felt different from how it sounds now.

Students B, C, and D each react differently: one is moved, one is sceptical, one is curious and asks analytical questions.

Scenario B: A Late-Night Meeting

Student A meets someone unexpectedly late at night in a shared space (a corridor, a garden, a kitchen).

Student B is quiet and a little mysterious, but polite. They introduce themselves briefly.

Scenario C: A Cryptic Text Exchange

In pairs, write and act out a text conversation in which Student A asks a simple question and Student B replies with something short and slightly mysterious.

Discuss afterwards: what did Student B's reply seem to imply?

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "I want you to hear/see something."
- "It sounds/looks different from... I don't know why."
- "That's probably just..." (offering a simple explanation)
- "I know, but it's not that. It's something else."
- "You didn't disturb me."
- "This is going to sound silly, but..."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his first meeting with Fujiko.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Continue the café scene as a short script (8–10 lines of dialogue), starting after Lina says "Play it again." Include reactions from at least three characters.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about someone whose appearance or presence struck you strongly before you could say exactly why. Use restrained, precise language rather than exaggeration.

CULTURAL NOTES

The Kyoto Basin and Summer Heat

Kyoto sits in a basin surrounded by mountains on three sides, a geography that traps heat and humidity during the summer months, making its summers notably more intense than those of many other Japanese cities. Temperatures regularly climb into the mid-thirties Celsius from July through August, combined with high humidity, and the city is often cited as one of the more physically demanding places in Japan to experience summer, particularly for visitors unused to such conditions.

Lupin III: A Shared Pop-Culture Reference

Lupin III is a long-running Japanese manga and anime franchise created by Monkey Punch, first published in 1967, following a gentleman thief and his associates. It became hugely popular internationally, including in Italy, where dubbed versions were widely broadcast on Saturday afternoon television for decades, making the characters a familiar shared reference point for many Italians of Claudio's generation, as reflected in this chapter.

"You Had to Be There": Why Recordings Sometimes Fall Short

The feeling that a recording or photograph fails to capture the full quality of an experienced moment, sometimes summed up in English as "you had to be there," is a widely recognised and studied phenomenon, not unique to any one culture. Researchers who study memory and perception note that live experience involves far more sensory and contextual information (atmosphere, anticipation, physical presence) than any single recording device can capture, which may help explain why Claudio's recording felt technically accurate but emotionally incomplete.

CHAPTER 12: BEACH DAY

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever been on a group day trip organised by friends? Who usually plans the details, and who just goes along?
2. Do you ever feel a specific kind of homesickness for a landscape (the sea, mountains, a particular kind of countryside)? Describe it.
3. Have you ever unexpectedly run into someone you know while travelling, somewhere far from where you'd normally see them?

2. Being Asked a Direct Question

In this chapter, a friend asks Claudio a direct question about something he has been avoiding explaining.

1. How do you usually respond when a friend notices something about you that you haven't mentioned yourself?
2. Is it easier to talk about something unusual with someone who already suspects it, or someone who has no idea?
3. When is it a good idea to invite a friend to see a place for themselves, rather than trying to explain it in words?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The day trip was Shiori's idea. She had been talking about the Wakayama coast since May — something about needing to see the sea."

1. What does "needing to see the sea" suggest about Shiori, beyond simply wanting a nice day out?
2. What effect does starting the chapter with whose idea the trip was, rather than the trip itself, create?
3. Based on the title "The Coast," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

assessor (*noun*)

here: someone whose role involves judging or evaluating; "assessor's tone" = a tone that carefully evaluates rather than simply praises.

collective (*adjective*)

shared by, or done by, a group of people together.

conurbation (*noun*)

a large urban area formed when several cities or towns have grown and merged together.

discursive (*adjective*)

(of conversation or writing) wandering freely between topics, rather than staying tightly focused.

dispute (*verb*)

to question or challenge the truth or validity of a statement.

homesickness (*noun*)

a feeling of longing for one's home, or for a familiar place, while away from it.

junction (*noun*)

a point where two or more routes, lines, or roads meet or cross.

kelp (*noun*)

a type of large brown seaweed that grows in coastal waters.

mineral (*adjective*)

here: having a smell or quality suggestive of rock, stone, or salt, rather than plant or animal life.

overcast (*adjective*)

(of the sky) covered with cloud; not sunny.

pride of ownership (*noun (phrase)*)

a feeling of satisfaction and personal investment in something one is responsible for.

proximity (*noun*)

the state of being near or close to something.

reassuring (*adjective*)

making someone feel less worried or afraid.

unself-conscious (*adjective*)

not feeling awkward or overly aware of oneself; natural and relaxed.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. The day trip to Wakayama was Satoshi's idea.	
2. Satoshi planned the train route in detail.	
3. The group saw Sachiko at Kyoto Station, where their journey began.	
4. Sachiko told them their platform and how full the train would be.	
5. The group had lunch at a restaurant that served grilled fish, beer, and rice.	
6. Shiori asked Claudio directly why his Japanese seemed unusual for someone at his stage.	
7. Shiori asked if she could visit Casa Felice sometime.	
8. On the way home, Sachiko did not notice the group passing through her station again.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Why does Claudio think Shiori wanted to go to the Wakayama coast?
2. How does the group unexpectedly meet Sachiko during their trip?
3. What does Sachiko do to help them before their connecting train, and how does she seem to know this information?
4. What does Shiori say about the way Claudio engages with classical Japanese texts?
5. What does Shiori ask Claudio at the end of their conversation on the rocks?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. Shiori uses the word "familiarity" to describe Claudio's relationship with classical Japanese — the same word Miyamoto used in an earlier chapter — and the narrator notes that Claudio "noted and did not mention" this. What effect does this small detail have on you as a reader?
2. When Claudio says his neighbours are "a bit strange... but genuinely nice," Shiori responds with "Strange how?" rather than moving on. How is her reaction different from how other characters have responded to similar comments earlier in the story?
3. The chapter ends with Sachiko giving Claudio "not the general wave of a station employee, but the wave of someone waving at a particular person." Why might the writer draw this distinction so precisely?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Handling a Group Scene

This chapter follows four friends on a day trip, giving each one small, distinct moments: Satoshi's timetable, Lina's bare feet in the water, Shiori's homesickness.

- Find one small detail or action in the chapter that is specific to each of the four friends.
- In groups of four, plan an imaginary day trip together, with each person taking on a distinct role (the planner, the relaxed one, the curious one, the quiet one).

2. Multi-Sensory Description

The coast is described through several senses at once: "the sea grey-green and present, the light flat and bright... the smell of salt and kelp and something mineral coming off the rocks."

- Identify which senses (sight, smell, sound, touch) are used in this description.
- Describe a place you know well using at least three different senses in a single short paragraph.

3. Reporting Tone, Not Just Words

The writer tells us how Shiori's comment was said, not just what she said: "She said it as an observation rather than a compliment — the precise, assessor's tone she used in seminar."

- Find one more example in the chapter where the writer describes the tone of a comment, not just its content.
- Write a short sentence someone might say, then describe the tone in which it could be said two different ways, changing the meaning.

4. Short Sentences for Building Resolve

Near the end of the chapter, Claudio's thoughts move in short, separate sentences: "He had a research note... He had not followed that up. He should probably follow that up."

- What effect do these short, choppy sentences have, compared to one longer sentence?
- Write three short sentences showing a character building up to a decision, in a similar step-by-step way.

1. Character

1. How does each of the four friends behave differently on the day trip? What does this reveal about their personalities?
2. How is Sachiko's behaviour at the station similar to or different from how she behaves at Casa Felice?
3. What do you make of Shiori's directness when she asks "Strange how?" rather than letting the comment pass?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows someone outside Casa Felice (Shiori) starting to notice and ask questions about what Claudio has been experiencing. How does this change the story's atmosphere so far?
2. Claudio decides at the end of the chapter that he "should probably follow up" on his research note. What do you think has been stopping him until now?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Why do you think Shiori wants to visit Casa Felice?
2. How do you think Claudio will feel about Shiori visiting the building?
3. What do you think Claudio will find if he finally follows up on his research note about Isamu's conversation? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How does each of the four friends behave differently on the day trip? What does this reveal about their personalities?
2. How is Sachiko's behaviour at the station similar to or different from how she behaves at Casa Felice?
3. What do you make of Shiori's directness when she asks "Strange how?" rather than letting the comment pass?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows someone outside Casa Felice (Shiori) starting to notice and ask questions about what Claudio has been experiencing. How does this change the story's atmosphere so far?
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1. Why do you think Shiori wants to visit Casa Felice?
2. How do you think Claudio will feel about Shiori visiting the building?
3. What do you think Claudio will find if he finally follows up on his research note about Isamu's conversation? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Planning a Day Trip

In small groups, plan an imaginary day trip: destination, transport, food, and timing.

One person should take the role of the meticulous planner, similar to Satoshi.

Scenario B: An Unexpected Encounter

Student A is travelling with friends and unexpectedly meets someone they know who works at the location (a station, a shop, a museum).

Student B, the acquaintance, is pleased to see them and offers some helpful local information.

Scenario C: Being Asked a Direct Question

Student A has been avoiding fully explaining something unusual in their life.

Student B, a close friend, asks a direct follow-up question ("Strange how?") rather than letting a vague comment pass.

Student A responds as honestly as they can without giving a complete answer.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "It's a good day for..." / "Not too crowded this week."
- "Platform three. You have four minutes."
- "There's a quality to how you... that is unusual."
- "It has a reputation."
- "Strange how?"
- "I'd like to come and see it sometime, if that's all right."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing the day trip to the Wakayama coast.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a postcard or short message (100–130 words) from Shiori to a friend back in Fukuoka, describing the day at the coast and how it made her feel.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a landscape or place that addresses a specific kind of homesickness for you (or an imagined character), using details from at least three different senses.

CULTURAL NOTES

Wakayama and the Kii Peninsula

Wakayama Prefecture, on the Kii Peninsula south of Osaka, is known for its dramatic coastline, pilgrimage routes (the Kumano Kodo), and easy accessibility from the Kansai region by train. Its coastal towns offer a notably different landscape and pace of life from inland cities such as Kyoto and Nara, making it a popular day-trip or weekend destination for students and residents of the Kansai area.

Japanese Train Stations and Staff

Japanese train stations, particularly on busy commuter lines, are known for highly organised, punctual operation, supported by station staff who assist with directions, ticketing, and platform information. Staff on smaller or regional lines often develop detailed local knowledge of passenger patterns, timetables, and even individual regular passengers, given the relatively stable, repeating nature of commuter traffic.

Homesickness and Landscape

A specific longing for a particular type of landscape (the sea, mountains, flat open land), separate from general homesickness for people or routines, is a widely recognised experience, especially for people who have moved from a coastal or geographically distinctive region to somewhere with a very different landscape. This kind of longing is sometimes addressed simply through proximity, spending time in a similar environment, rather than through returning home itself.

CHAPTER 13: RIGATONI

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever cooked a meal from your own culture for friends who had never tried it before? How did you prepare?
2. Is there a specific food from home that you miss when you're away for a long time? What makes it hard to replace?
3. When hosting people in a small space, what kind of practical problems come up (seating, plates, timing)?

2. Explaining Unfamiliar Food

In this chapter, Claudio has to explain pasta to neighbours who have never eaten it before.

1. How would you explain a food from your own country to someone who has never seen or tasted it?
2. Is it more helpful to compare an unfamiliar food to something the listener already knows, or to describe it completely from scratch?
3. Have you ever tried a food for the first time that turned out to be very different from what you expected?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"He had been thinking about it since the nimono in Hana's apartment in May, and more seriously since the coast trip, and what finally decided it was a Tuesday afternoon in late August when he found, in a small import shop on a side street near Shijo, a shelf of dried pasta that was not the generic supermarket spaghetti."

1. What does this sentence suggest Claudio has been thinking about for some time before acting on it?
2. Why might finding real, specific pasta (rather than any pasta) be the detail that finally decides things for Claudio?
3. Based on the title "Rigatoni," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

acid (*noun*)

here: a sharp, tart quality in flavour, as found in tomatoes or citrus fruit.

analogy (*noun*)

a comparison between two things, used to help explain or clarify one of them.

authority (*noun*)

here: a confident, expert manner that comes from real knowledge or experience.

batch (*noun*)

a quantity of something made or handled together at one time.

bento (*noun (Japanese)*)

a single-portion boxed meal, common in Japan, often containing rice, protein, and vegetables.

capacity (*noun*)

here: the maximum amount a space or container can hold.

decisiveness (*noun*)

the quality of being able to make decisions quickly and confidently.

discharge (*verb*)

here: to carry out or perform a duty or responsibility properly.

elaborate (*verb*)

to give more detail or explanation about something already mentioned.

generic (*adjective*)

not specific or unique; a standard, ordinary version of something.

manageable (*adjective*)

able to be handled or dealt with successfully.

proprietary (*adjective*)

here: behaving as if one owns, or is personally responsible for, something.

verdict (*noun*)

a decision or judgement reached after consideration.

yakisoba (*noun (Japanese)*)

a popular Japanese stir-fried noodle dish.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio found imported Italian pasta at a shop near Shijo.	
2. Claudio asked Bunta first whether the dinner idea would be manageable.	
3. Hana agreed to lend Claudio a large pan.	
4. Bunta brought wine to the dinner.	
5. Aki brought wine because she thought sake didn't go well with pasta.	
6. Shimo said she had never encountered pasta before, even at work.	
7. Everyone at the dinner drank both sake and wine throughout the evening.	
8. Aki asked Claudio where in Italy he was really from, and he answered Ravenna.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What made Claudio finally decide to cook a pasta dinner for his neighbours?
2. Why did Claudio go to Hana first with his idea?
3. How do Bunta and Aki each react to seeing and trying the pasta for the first time?
4. What does Shimo reveal about her own connection to pasta, through her comment about work?
5. What does Aki ask Claudio just before she leaves, and how does he answer?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. Aki and Bunta exchange "some communication... that Claudio could not read" when he describes the pasta as "a noodle." What do you think might have passed between them?
2. Aki mentions that autumn has "specific implications" for her without explaining further. What might this suggest, especially considering what she said earlier in the story about her sleep during different seasons?
3. The chapter ends on Aki's question — "Where are you really from?" — rather than on the warmth of the dinner itself. Why might the writer choose to end the chapter this way?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Describing a Process in Sequence

The chapter describes the cooking process step by step: the sauce first, then keeping it warm, then the pasta in batches.

- Find the sentence where Hana explains the order of steps to Claudio, and underline the sequencing language.
- Describe a recipe or process you know well in a similar step-by-step way, using clear sequencing words (first, then, once, after that).

2. Consistent Character Gestures

Each guest is shown through a small, consistent gesture: Bunta's confident first reaction, Hana's professional tasting, Shimo's quiet composure.

- Find one small gesture or habit associated with each of the five people at the dinner.
- Invent a new minor character and describe them through a single consistent gesture or habit, without stating their personality directly.

3. Explaining Food Through Comparison

Claudio and Bunta try to explain pasta using comparisons to udon and yakisoba, even though the comparisons are "not entirely wrong... and not right in any other respect."

- Why might an imperfect comparison still be useful when explaining something unfamiliar?
- Explain an unfamiliar food from your own culture to a partner using a comparison to something they might already know, then discuss how accurate the comparison really is.

4. Ending on an Unresolved Question

The chapter, which is mostly warm and social, ends on a more serious, unanswered question from Aki, followed by Claudio simply washing up.

- What effect does ending on this question, rather than on a warm goodbye, have on the reader?
- Write a short scene (4–6 lines) that is warm and light throughout, but ends with one character asking a brief, more serious question.

1. Character

1. Choose two of the five guests and compare how they each react to trying pasta for the first time.
2. What does Hana's role during the dinner (tasting, managing timing) suggest about how she sees herself?
3. What do you make of Aki's shift in tone at the very end of the chapter, compared to how she behaved for most of the evening?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows food acting as a bridge between Claudio's Italian background and his life at Casa Felice. Where do you see this most clearly?
2. Several times in the story, someone asks Claudio a question that goes slightly deeper than small talk (Miyamoto, Shiori, and now Aki). What might explain this pattern?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Why do you think Aki wanted to know exactly where in Italy Claudio is from, rather than just "Italy" being enough?
2. What do you imagine Aki's "specific implications" for autumn might be?
3. What do you think Claudio will do next with the connections he's building at Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. Choose two of the five guests and compare how they each react to trying pasta for the first time.
2. What does Hana's role during the dinner (tasting, managing timing) suggest about how she sees herself?
3. What do you make of Aki's shift in tone at the very end of the chapter, compared to how she behaved for most of the evening?

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1. This chapter shows food acting as a bridge between Claudio's Italian background and his life at Casa Felice. Where do you see this most clearly?
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2. What do you imagine Aki's "specific implications" for autumn might be?
3. What do you think Claudio will do next with the connections he's building at Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Hosting a Meal from Your Culture

Student A is hosting friends and serving a dish from their own culture for the first time.

Students B and C have never tried it before and ask questions about the ingredients and how it's eaten.

Scenario B: Explaining Food Through Comparison

Student A describes a food from home using a comparison to something Student B already knows.

Student B asks whether the comparison is really accurate, and Student A clarifies the differences.

Scenario C: A Question at the Door

Student A is saying goodbye to Student B after a warm, relaxed evening together.

Just before leaving, Student B asks one slightly more serious or personal question.

Student A responds honestly but briefly.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "How many people? What's your hob/oven like?"
- "I don't know what goes with it, but I know what's good."
- "It's a bit like... but not exactly."
- "That's all? / Just that?"
- "You should do this again sometime."
- "Where are you really from?"

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing hosting the pasta dinner for his neighbours.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a short message (100–130 words) from Claudio to his grandmother in Italy, describing the dinner and how the sauce turned out.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a meal that reminded you (or an imagined character) of home, focusing on specific ingredients, smells, and the reactions of the people you shared it with.

CULTURAL NOTES

Italian Pasta and Regional Producers

Italian pasta varies significantly by region and producer, with dried pasta from certain areas, such as Emilia-Romagna, prized for the quality of the wheat used and traditional production methods, including slow drying at lower temperatures. San Marzano tomatoes, grown in a specific volcanic-soil region near Naples, are similarly well regarded for sauce-making, valued for their balance of sweetness and acidity. Italians living abroad often seek out specialist import shops for these specific regional products, considering supermarket equivalents a noticeably different experience.

Sharing a Meal: Hosting Customs

Hosting a home-cooked meal for neighbours or colleagues, rather than meeting at a restaurant, carries a particular significance in many cultures, often signalling a deeper level of trust or friendship. In Japan, being invited into someone's home, or inviting others into one's own small living space, can feel especially significant given the relatively private nature of home life compared to more common social settings such as izakaya (casual pubs) or restaurants.

Ravenna: A City of Layers

Ravenna, in northeastern Italy, served as the capital of the Western Roman Empire in its final years and later of the Ostrogothic Kingdom and Byzantine Exarchate, leaving the city with an unusually rich concentration of well-preserved fifth- and sixth-century mosaics, recognised by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. The poet Dante Alighieri also spent his final years in Ravenna and is buried there, rather than in his native Florence, making the city a significant literary and historical site in its own right.

CHAPTER 14: THE CLASSICAL REGISTER

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever been praised for a skill in a way that made you slightly uncomfortable, because you weren't sure you could explain how you'd developed it?
2. How do the seasons change where you live? Is there a specific moment when you notice a season has truly ended?
3. Do you ever vary your route home, or do you usually take the same way? Why?

2. Meeting Someone Outside Their Usual Context

In this chapter, Claudio meets someone from his building in a completely different setting.

1. Have you ever run into a teacher, neighbour, or colleague somewhere completely unexpected? How did it feel?
2. Do people sometimes seem different outside their usual environment (a workplace, a classroom, a specific building)? Why might that be?
3. If someone intimidating in one setting spoke to you unexpectedly in another, how do you think you'd react?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"September arrived and the heat began, finally, to relent — not quickly, not all at once, but in the way of a long summer ending, a degree at a time."

1. What does the phrase "a degree at a time" suggest about how this change happens?
2. What effect does describing a season change so gradually and carefully create, compared to a simple "summer ended"?
3. Based on the title "Toki," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

accommodate (*verb*)

here: to have enough space for something or someone, often requiring adjustment.

anticipation (*noun*)

a feeling of excitement or expectation about something that is going to happen.

approximation (*noun*)

something that is close to being accurate or correct, without being exact.

articulate (*verb*)

to express an idea or feeling clearly in words.

comparable (*adjective*)

similar enough to be usefully compared with something else.

conscientiously (*adverb*)

in a careful, thorough way, guided by a sense of duty to do something properly.

edge (*noun*)

here: a sharp, intense quality noticeable within something otherwise calm or controlled.

engagement (*noun*)

here: the level and quality of someone's involvement with or connection to a subject.

level (*adjective*)

here: calm, steady, and even in tone.

methodical (*adjective*)

done in a careful, orderly, and systematic way.

relent (*verb*)

to gradually become less severe or intense.

rhetorical (*adjective*)

relating to the effective or persuasive use of language and structure in speech or writing.

uprightness (*noun*)

here: a quality of straight, upright posture or bearing.

vary (*verb*)

to change or differ from one instance to another, rather than staying the same.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. By mid-September, Claudio realises he hasn't thought about the heat in a while.	
2. Claudio had visited Nara only once since June.	
3. In the seminar, Satoshi spoke first.	
4. Watanabe said Lina's contribution was exactly what he had asked for.	
5. Watanabe told Claudio his Japanese still needed a great deal of work.	
6. Watanabe said Claudio's reading had a quality unusual for someone with his level of experience.	
7. Claudio met Toki inside Casa Felice that afternoon.	
8. Toki told Claudio that the building suited him.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does the chapter describe the change of seasons from summer to September?
2. What happens when Claudio gives his reading of the classical text in the seminar?
3. What does Watanabe say to Claudio after the seminar, and how does Claudio respond?
4. How does Claudio end up meeting Toki outside Casa Felice?
5. What does Claudio notice about Toki's appearance and presence on the street, compared to inside the building?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The narrator says Claudio felt like he had "revealed something without intending to," though he isn't sure what. What effect does this uncertainty have on you as a reader?
2. Watanabe's reaction is described as "carefully composed but contained something else underneath," and several classmates react in different, careful ways. Why might the writer show so many small reactions rather than having someone simply say what everyone is thinking?
3. Claudio describes Toki outside the building as "bigger... not physically... but in some way that the word bigger was the closest available approximation to," and wonders if the building had been "containing him" in some sense. Why might the writer choose such a careful, searching description rather than a more direct one?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Describing a Shift in Atmosphere

The writer shows the seminar's mood changing through the reactions of individual people, rather than stating directly that the atmosphere changed: "Satoshi was looking at the table... Shiori was looking at him with the particular expression she had on the coast."

- Why might showing several individual reactions be more effective than simply writing "the room went quiet"?
- Write a short paragraph in which a room's atmosphere shifts, shown only through three different people's small reactions.

2. Subverting Expectations in Dialogue

Claudio expects Watanabe to criticise his Japanese, but Watanabe says: "That's not what I was going to say."

- What effect does this small twist have on the pace and tension of the conversation?
- Write a short exchange (4–6 lines) in which one character assumes they know what the other is about to say, but is corrected.

3. Comparative Description Without a Fixed Reference

Toki's height is described relative to another character rather than in absolute terms: "not Yoshi-tall... tall in a way that had a different quality to it."

- Why might comparing one character to another, rather than giving exact measurements, be more effective here?
- Describe a person's height or build by comparing them to someone else, rather than using numbers or simple adjectives.

4. Searching for the Right Word

The writer shows Claudio actively searching for language: "Claudio searched for the word and arrived at more."

- What effect does narrating the search for a word have, compared to simply using the final word chosen?
- Write two sentences in which a character searches for the right word to describe something difficult to name, ending with the word they settle on.

1. Character

1. How does Watanabe's careful, measured way of speaking shape how you read this scene?
2. How is Toki different outside Casa Felice compared to how he has appeared inside it in earlier chapters?
3. What do Satoshi, Lina, and Shiori's individual reactions in the seminar tell you about each of them?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is the most direct moment yet where an academic authority figure notices something unusual about Claudio's ability. How does this compare to earlier, more casual comments from other characters?
2. The idea that someone or something might seem different, or "more," outside a specific place recurs in this chapter. Where else in the story might this idea apply?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Claudio "revealed" in the seminar, even though he isn't sure himself?
2. Why do you think Toki seemed different, or "bigger," outside the building?
3. What do you think Claudio will do next, now that his unusual ability has been noticed by a professor? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How does Watanabe's careful, measured way of speaking shape how you read this scene?
2. How is Toki different outside Casa Felice compared to how he has appeared inside it in earlier chapters?
3. What do Satoshi, Lina, and Shiori's individual reactions in the seminar tell you about each of them?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is the most direct moment yet where an academic authority figure notices something unusual about Claudio's ability. How does this compare to earlier, more casual comments from other characters?
2. The idea that someone or something might seem different, or "more," outside a specific place recurs in this chapter. Where else in the story might this idea apply?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Claudio "revealed" in the seminar, even though he isn't sure himself?
2. Why do you think Toki seemed different, or "bigger," outside the building?
3. What do you think Claudio will do next, now that his unusual ability has been noticed by a professor? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Unexpected Praise

Student A (a teacher or supervisor) tells Student B that their work shows a level of skill unusual for their experience.

Student B tries to explain how they developed this skill, without being entirely sure themselves.

Scenario B: An Unexpected Meeting

Student A runs into Student B (an intimidating acquaintance) somewhere completely unexpected, away from their usual context.

They have a short, slightly formal conversation, and Student B says something that stays with Student A afterwards.

Scenario C: Describing a Changed Impression

Student A describes to Student B how someone they know seemed different when they met them somewhere unusual.

Student B asks questions to help Student A find the right words to describe the difference.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "Can you say more about where that reading/idea comes from?"
- "That's not what I was going to say."
- "It has a quality I wouldn't expect from..."
- "We've seen each other in/at..."
- "You've been here since..." (making an observation, not a question)
- "[Place] suits you."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing what happened in the seminar.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a follow-up email (100–130 words) from Claudio to Hattori-sensei, describing what happened in Watanabe's seminar and asking for her thoughts.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about meeting someone outside their usual context and noticing they seemed different — using comparison rather than exact description, as in the chapter.

CULTURAL NOTES

The Kamogawa and Kyoto's Old Districts

The Kamogawa (Kamo River) runs through central Kyoto and is a popular route for walking, cycling, and simply sitting by the water, especially in the cooler evenings after a hot summer. The districts to the east of the river include some of Kyoto's oldest residential areas, with narrow streets, traditional wooden buildings, and small shrines tucked between houses, offering a quieter, older atmosphere than the busier commercial streets closer to the station.

Recognising Unusual Skill in Academic Settings

In academic contexts, a student demonstrating a level of skill notably beyond their stage of study, particularly with difficult primary-source material, is often remarked upon directly by supervisors and professors, since it can affect how a research plan or thesis is structured going forward. Such comments are usually intended as genuine observations rather than simple praise, and may prompt further questions about how that skill was developed, especially in fields like classical philology where expertise is normally built up slowly over many years.

Posture and Presence in Martial Arts Training

Long-term training in martial arts such as karate often visibly shapes a person's posture, balance, and manner of moving, even outside the training environment, sometimes described as a settled, centred quality of bearing. Senior practitioners and teachers, in particular, may carry themselves with a noticeable stillness or uprightness that is recognisable even to people unfamiliar with martial arts, reflecting years of disciplined physical practice.

CHAPTER 15: AUTUMN

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Does autumn (or a similar seasonal change) have any special traditions or rituals where you live?
2. Have you ever bought food from a small stall or stand and been pleasantly surprised by how good it was?
3. If you noticed a neighbour or friend seemed tired or unwell without them saying anything, how might you show you cared without prying too much?

2. Sitting with Someone in Silence

Later in this chapter, two characters sit together at night without needing to talk much.

1. Do you think comfortable silence between two people is a sign of closeness? Why or why not?
2. Have you ever had a late-night conversation that felt different from a daytime one? What made it different?
3. How do you usually ask someone if they're okay, when you suspect they might not be?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"Autumn came to Kyoto the way autumn came to old cities that had been observing it for a long time — with ceremony."

1. What does the word "ceremony" suggest about how the city treats the arrival of autumn?
2. What effect does personifying the city (giving it human-like habits) have in this sentence?
3. Based on the title "Star Anise," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

absorption *(noun)*

here: a state of being completely focused on and involved in an activity.

amber *(adjective)*

having a warm, golden-orange colour, like the fossilised resin of the same name.

ceremony *(noun)*

here: a sense of formal ritual or tradition surrounding an event.

companionable *(adjective)*

friendly and comfortable, in the manner of good companions.

disposable *(adjective)*

designed to be thrown away after use.

fragrant *(adjective)*

having a pleasant, noticeable smell.

instinct *(noun)*

a natural ability to know or decide something without needing to think it through.

insufficient *(adjective)*

not enough for a particular purpose.

modest *(adjective)*

here: small or simple in size or appearance, not showy.

momentum *(noun)*

the force or energy that keeps a process or activity moving forward.

pilgrim *(noun)*

a person who travels to a place for a meaningful or reflective purpose, often religious or personal.

profile *(noun)*

the outline of someone's face or figure as seen from the side.

resume *(verb)*

to begin again after a pause or interruption.

star anise *(noun (phrase))*

a star-shaped spice with a strong, liquorice-like flavour, commonly used in East Asian cooking.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Fujiko returned to the building in early October.	
2. Aki was relieved and happy that Fujiko had returned.	
3. Claudio bought four portions of food from a stall near the station.	
4. Claudio kept all four portions of food for himself.	
5. Shimo asked Claudio where he got the food.	
6. Hana left a written note thanking Claudio and correctly identifying an ingredient.	
7. Claudio met Fujiko again the same week he left the food containers.	
8. Fujiko told Claudio she hasn't slept properly in a long time.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does Claudio know Fujiko has returned to the building, even before he sees her?
2. What does Claudio do with the four portions of food he buys, and how do people react?
3. What does Hana's note say, and what does it reveal about her?
4. Describe the setting and mood when Claudio meets Fujiko on the corridor bench.
5. What does Fujiko tell Claudio about her sleep, and how does he respond?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. Claudio tells Aki "it's not your fault" about Fujiko's return, and later says almost exactly the same thing to Fujiko herself. What do you think this repeated exchange suggests about Claudio's role in the building?
2. The chapter says something in Fujiko "shifted slightly... not resolved, not gone, but acknowledged." Why might the writer choose such a careful, incremental description of change rather than a clearer emotional resolution?
3. Kuro sits with Claudio on the bench "without either of them deciding to." How does this small, quiet detail fit into the larger pattern of Claudio settling into life at Casa Felice?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Describing a Season Through Communal Atmosphere

The chapter opens by describing autumn as something the whole city does together, "with ceremony," rather than simply describing the weather.

- Find two more phrases in the opening paragraph that describe the season through people's collective behaviour, rather than temperature or colour alone.
- Write a short paragraph describing a season or holiday in your own country through how people collectively behave, rather than through weather alone.

2. Natural Text Message Exchanges

The text messages in this chapter are short and realistic: "Thank you for the food. What was it?" "Yes. Very good. Where exactly?"

- Notice how each message is short and directly follows on from the last. Rewrite one exchange as a more formal conversation, and discuss how the tone changes.
- Write a short, realistic three-message text exchange thanking someone for a small kindness.

3. Echoing a Phrase Across Scenes

The exchange "It's not your fault" / "No, but still..." appears twice in the chapter, first with Aki and then with Fujiko.

- What effect does repeating this exact exchange with two different characters have on you as a reader?
- Write a short exchange of your own that could naturally be repeated with two different characters in a story.

4. Describing Incremental Emotional Change

The writer describes a small emotional shift in three careful steps: "not resolved, not gone, but acknowledged."

- Why might describing an emotional change in three careful steps be more convincing than saying simply "she felt better"?
- Describe a small emotional shift of your own (or an imagined character's) using a similar three-part structure: "not X, not Y, but Z."

1. Character

1. What does Aki's reaction to Fujiko's return reveal about the cost of living near her, even though Aki never complains directly?
2. How does Hana's note ("Good instinct. The star anise is right.") add to your picture of her character?
3. How would you describe the mood and tone of the conversation between Claudio and Fujiko at the end of the chapter?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows care being expressed through small, wordless gestures — food left on hooks, a note, sitting quietly with someone. Where do you see this pattern most clearly?
2. Claudio reflects that he felt "exactly where he should be," even without being able to explain why. What do you think is contributing to this feeling?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Why do you think Fujiko doesn't sleep? What are some possible explanations, realistic or otherwise?
2. What do you think it means that Fujiko allowed herself to be asked "Are you all right?" and to answer honestly, when she hasn't done this with others?
3. What do you think might happen next between Claudio and Fujiko? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What does Aki's reaction to Fujiko's return reveal about the cost of living near her, even though Aki never complains directly?
2. How does Hana's note ("Good instinct. The star anise is right.") add to your picture of her character?
3. How would you describe the mood and tone of the conversation between Claudio and Fujiko at the end of the chapter?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows care being expressed through small, wordless gestures — food left on hooks, a note, sitting quietly with someone. Where do you see this pattern most clearly?
2. Claudio reflects that he felt "exactly where he should be," even without being able to explain why. What do you think is contributing to this feeling?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Why do you think Fujiko doesn't sleep? What are some possible explanations, realistic or otherwise?
2. What do you think it means that Fujiko allowed herself to be asked "Are you all right?" and to answer honestly, when she hasn't done this with others?
3. What do you think might happen next between Claudio and Fujiko? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Sharing Food with Neighbours

Student A has bought or made extra food and wants to share it with neighbours.

Students B and C receive the food and respond with a short thank-you message or conversation.

Scenario B: Asking If Someone Is Okay

Student A notices Student B seems tired or upset, without knowing exactly why.

Student A asks a gentle, direct question ("Are you all right?"), and Student B decides how much to share.

Scenario C: A Quiet Late-Night Conversation

Two students sit together (imagined: on a bench, by a window) late at night, speaking only occasionally.

Include some comfortable silence, then one small, honest exchange.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "I'm sorry." / "It's not your fault." / "No, but still..."
- "This is extraordinary. Where did you get it?"
- "You're working/up late."
- "Are you all right?"
- "I haven't, for a long time."
- "Thank you," quietly (acknowledging something without over-explaining).

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing buying and sharing the food from the stall.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write the full text message exchange (8–10 messages) between Claudio and one neighbour of your choice, thanking him for the food and asking about it.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a quiet, late-night conversation (real or imagined) with someone, focusing on the atmosphere and what was left unsaid as much as what was said.

CULTURAL NOTES

Momijigari: Autumn Leaf Viewing in Japan

Momijigari, literally "maple hunting," is the autumn counterpart to spring's cherry blossom viewing, focused on the changing colours of maple and other trees, typically peaking from mid-October to early December depending on the region and elevation. Kyoto's temple gardens are particularly famous destinations for momijigari, drawing visitors specifically for the combination of traditional architecture and vivid autumn foliage.

Chinese Food Stalls in Japanese Cities

Small stalls and stands run by Chinese immigrants or their descendants, often specialising in a single regional dish such as braised pork, dumplings, or noodle soups, are a long-standing feature of many Japanese cities, particularly those with historical Chinatown districts or communities. These stalls often operate with minimal signage, relying on reputation and word of mouth rather than active promotion, and can be easy to miss unless one happens to pass at the right time.

Star Anise and Five-Spice in East Asian Cooking

Star anise, a star-shaped spice with a strong, sweet, liquorice-like flavour, is a key ingredient in Chinese five-spice powder and is widely used in braised and slow-cooked dishes across East and Southeast Asia. Its distinctive flavour is often what gives certain braised dishes their recognisable depth, and an experienced cook can frequently identify its presence in a dish even without being told the recipe.

CHAPTER 16: THE HANKO

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever done detailed research or detective work of some kind (academic, personal, or just curious)? What was the process like?
2. If you found evidence that confirmed something you had long suspected but couldn't prove, how do you think you'd react in the moment?
3. Do you have a place (a river, a park, a particular street) that you go to when you need to think something through quietly?

2. Sitting with Someone Without Explaining Everything

In this chapter, Claudio spends time with a neighbour without fully explaining what's on his mind.

1. Do you have someone in your life you can sit with comfortably, without needing to explain everything you're thinking?
2. Is it easier to process something difficult alone, or in quiet company with someone who doesn't ask too many questions?
3. How do you usually respond when a friend says "I found something" but doesn't immediately explain what?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"His next research trip to Nara was in early November, on a day when the autumn had reached its fullest point — the maples at their deepest red, the light particular, the air with the smell of fallen leaves and the specific dry cold of a clear November morning."

1. What mood does this description of a clear November morning create, before anything happens in the chapter?
2. Why might the writer take time to establish the season and light so carefully at the start of this particular chapter?
3. Based on the title "The Seal," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

cap (*verb*)

to close something with a lid or cover.

coherent (*adjective*)

logical and well-organised; easy to follow and understand.

dignity (*noun*)

a calm, serious manner that deserves respect.

fold (*verb*)

here: (of a bird) to draw in its wings and settle into a still position.

heron (*noun*)

a large wading bird with long legs and a long neck, often found near rivers and lakes.

notation (*noun*)

a system of written symbols or short notes used to record information precisely.

passive (*adjective*)

not actively doing something; present without real engagement or effort.

purr (*verb*)

(of a cat) to make a low, continuous, contented sound.

reassert (*verb*)

to become noticeable or dominant again, after a period of being less present.

reed (*noun*)

a tall, thin plant that grows near water.

reel in (*phrasal verb*)

to pull in a fishing line by winding it onto its reel.

remnant (*noun*)

a small remaining part of something.

thermos (*noun*)

a container designed to keep liquids hot or cold for an extended period.

withdraw (*verb*)

here: to leave a room or place quietly, often to give someone privacy.

yield (*verb*)

here: to produce useful results or information.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio arrived at Kasuga Taisha before the tourist groups.	
2. Hattori-sensei had described Claudio's argument as "excellent" in their last supervision.	
3. Miyamoto brought Claudio tea without being asked.	
4. The document Claudio examined that afternoon was from the early Edo period.	
5. Claudio noticed that a seal on the document looked identical to one he had seen before.	
6. Claudio stayed at the archive later than planned because he wanted to keep working.	
7. Claudio met Isamu by chance at the Kamogawa river.	
8. When Claudio compared the photo to the rent receipt at home, the two seals were similar but not identical.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What does Claudio notice about the seal on the property record he examines at the archive?
2. How does Claudio document what he has found, and what does this show about him as a researcher?
3. Describe the mood and setting when Claudio meets Isamu by the river.
4. What does Isamu say about Kyoto, and how does this echo something said earlier in the story?
5. What does Claudio discover when he compares the photograph to the rent receipt at home?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Claudio tells Isamu he found something, the narrator says "He had not intended to say this. It arrived on its own." What does this suggest about how much Claudio has been holding back?
2. Isamu repeats, almost word for word, something Miyamoto said in an earlier chapter — "Kyoto has old things in it... Some older than others." Why might the writer have two separate characters say almost the same thing?
3. At the end of the chapter, after comparing the seals, Claudio simply goes back to his research notes when the building "reasserted itself, ordinary and present and his." What do you think this reaction shows about how Claudio processes what he's found?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Precise Documentation Language

Claudio records his discovery using exact, professional notation: "Property record, ref. KT-1089-B. Seal in lower right corner — cross-reference with Casa Felice receipt."

- What effect does this precise, clinical style of writing have, given the significance of what Claudio has just noticed?
- Practise this style: write a short, precise research note (2–3 lines) recording an imaginary discovery, using abbreviations and a formal, notation-like structure.

2. Pacing Through Paragraph Breaks

The moment Claudio recognises the seal is broken into very short paragraphs and sentences: "He looked at it." "This should have been perfectly normal here, but he had seen this before elsewhere."

- What effect do these short paragraphs have on the pace of the scene, compared to longer, flowing paragraphs?
- Rewrite a moment of sudden realisation (your own idea) using very short paragraphs and sentences to control the pace.

3. Unfinished Questions

Claudio starts to ask Isamu something but stops: "He was not sure what he had been going to ask... and then let it go."

- Why might a writer show a character deciding not to ask a question, rather than either asking it or saying nothing at all?
- Write a short scene (4–5 lines) in which a character begins to ask something important, then chooses not to finish the question.

4. Minimal Confirmation After Build-Up

After a long, careful build-up, the chapter ends the comparison with two very short sentences: "Not similar. Matches."

- What effect do these two short, blunt sentences have after such a long, careful lead-up?
- Write a short paragraph building up to a discovery, then end it with a two- or three-word sentence for maximum effect, similar to "Matches."

1. Character

1. How does Miyamoto's quiet hospitality (bringing tea without being asked) fit with what you know of his character from earlier chapters?
2. What kind of companion is Isamu, based on how he behaves by the river? Consider what he says and what he chooses not to ask.
3. How does Claudio's reaction to his discovery (documenting it precisely, then going quiet) reflect his character as we've come to know him?

2. Themes

1. This chapter brings together a research thread that has been building since Claudio's first trip to Nara. How does it feel to see these smaller details connect?
2. Both Miyamoto and Isamu say almost the same thing to Claudio, in different chapters, months apart. What might this pattern suggest about the world of the story?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you make of the fact that the seal from an 1085 document matches the one on Claudio's modern-day rent receipt exactly?
2. Why do you think Claudio chooses to keep working on his notes that night, rather than doing anything else with what he's discovered?
3. What do you think Claudio will do with this discovery next? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How does Miyamoto's quiet hospitality (bringing tea without being asked) fit with what you know of his character from earlier chapters?
2. What kind of companion is Isamu, based on how he behaves by the river? Consider what he says and what he chooses not to ask.
3. How does Claudio's reaction to his discovery (documenting it precisely, then going quiet) reflect his character as we've come to know him?

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1. This chapter brings together a research thread that has been building since Claudio's first trip to Nara. How does it feel to see these smaller details connect?
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1. What do you make of the fact that the seal from an 1085 document matches the one on Claudio's modern-day rent receipt exactly?
2. Why do you think Claudio chooses to keep working on his notes that night, rather than doing anything else with what he's discovered?
3. What do you think Claudio will do with this discovery next? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Reporting a Research Finding

Student A is a researcher who has found something significant and explains it precisely to a colleague, using notation-like language.

Student B asks clarifying questions about the finding's significance.

Scenario B: Sitting Quietly with a Friend

Two students sit together (imagined: by a river, in a park) after one of them has had a difficult or significant day.

One begins to share something ("I found something...") without fully explaining; the other listens without pushing for more.

Scenario C: An Unfinished Question

Student A begins to ask Student B an important question, then decides not to finish it.

Student B notices and gently checks in, without forcing the issue.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "The documents are prepared."
- "I found something." (without further explanation, at first)
- "Good day?" / "Research trip."
- "I've seen this before."
- "Everything all right?" / "Yes. Just — thinking."
- "Not similar. Matches." (short, definite confirmation)

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his day at the archive and the seal he noticed.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write the research note Claudio might expand on later that evening (100–130 words), describing the property record, the seal, and why it matters for his research, in a clear, organised style.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a quiet place (a river, a park, a bench) where you have gone, or might go, to sit with something difficult without needing to fully process it right away.

CULTURAL NOTES

Hanko Design and Historical Continuity

Hanko designs and carving styles in Japan can, in some cases, be passed down or preserved within families, businesses, or institutions for many generations, particularly where seals are treated as significant heirlooms or symbols of institutional continuity. While exact matches across many centuries would be historically remarkable, the broader tradition of maintaining and replicating a seal's design over long periods of time is a genuine and documented practice in Japanese institutional and family history.

The Kamogawa as a Public Space

The banks of the Kamogawa in Kyoto function as an important shared public space throughout the year, used for walking, cycling, quiet reflection, and informal socialising. In the cooler months, the riverbank becomes a popular spot for people to sit, read, or simply watch the water, and it is common to see the same individuals occupying similar spots along the river at similar times, developing an informal, recognisable presence within the landscape.

Herons and River Wildlife in Kyoto

Grey herons and other wading birds are a common sight along the Kamogawa and other waterways in and around Kyoto, often standing motionless for long periods while watching for fish. Their stillness and patience have made them a recurring image in Japanese art and poetry, frequently used to evoke calm, solitary observation.

CHAPTER 17: VISITORS

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. When friends visit your home for the first time, what do they usually notice or comment on?
2. Have you ever had to protect or keep private something meaningful to you, without actually lying about it?
3. If a friend asked you directly "Is everything all right?" after noticing something unusual in your life, how would you want to respond?

2. Reading a Space

In this chapter, two different friends visit Claudio's apartment and building for the first time and each notice different things.

1. Do you think people notice different things about the same place, depending on their personality? Give an example.
2. What can you tell about a person from how they look around a room they're visiting for the first time?
3. If you sensed a place was somehow "older than it looks" or different from what it seemed, would you say so out loud?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"It was Shiori who came first, in the third week of November, with a folder of notes she said she had left at his apartment after a study session. As far as Claudio could recall, there had been no study session that had taken place there."

1. What does Claudio's uncertainty about the study session suggest, without the text stating it directly?
2. Why might Claudio choose not to question Shiori's explanation, even though he doesn't remember it?
3. Based on the title "Visitors," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

cataloguing (*adjective/gerund*)

here: observing and mentally recording details in a systematic, thorough way.

deceleration (*noun*)

a reduction in speed; here, a slight, noticeable slowing down while walking.

decisive (*adjective*)

showing clear, confident judgement; not hesitant.

gaze (*noun*)

a steady, prolonged look at someone or something.

genuine (*adjective*)

real and sincere; not pretended.

laminated (*adjective*)

covered with a thin protective layer of plastic.

postwar (*adjective*)

built or occurring in the period after a war, especially after the Second World War.

pursue (*verb*)

here: to continue asking about or investigating a topic.

spine (*noun*)

here: the narrow bound edge of a book, usually showing the title.

tuck (*verb*)

to push or fold something into a small, secure space.

uninflected (*adjective*)

spoken without a noticeable change in tone; flat and even.

unnecessary (*adjective*)

not needed.

unnoticed (*adjective*)

not observed or noticed; "doesn't go unnoticed" = is impossible to overlook.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Shiori came to Claudio's apartment to collect a folder she said she'd left there after a study session.	
2. Claudio clearly remembered the study session Shiori mentioned.	
3. Bunta greeted Shiori by name, even though Claudio had never told him her name.	
4. Shiori commented that the writing on the noticeboard sounded very modern and casual.	
5. Satoshi came to return Claudio's umbrella.	
6. Satoshi mentioned seeing Yoshi and Shirotama on his way up to Claudio's apartment.	
7. Satoshi directly told Claudio that something dangerous was happening at the building.	
8. Satoshi said the stories about Casa Felice involve bad or frightening events.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Why does Shiori say she has come to Claudio's apartment, and what does Claudio privately think about her explanation?
2. What does Shiori notice about the language used on the residents' association noticeboard?
3. What does Shiori say about the building itself as she's leaving, and how does Claudio react?
4. Who does Satoshi mention seeing on his way up to Claudio's apartment, and how does Claudio respond?
5. What direct question does Satoshi ask Claudio, and how does Claudio answer?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Shiori asks how Bunta knew her name, Claudio offers an explanation — "The building knows these things" — that echoes something Sachiko said in an earlier chapter. Why might the writer have Claudio use this same phrase himself now?
2. Shiori says the building "feels older than it looks," and Claudio isn't sure what she "saw." What do you think Shiori might be starting to sense?
3. Satoshi says the stories about Casa Felice "are not bad stories... nothing bad happens here. It's just strange." Why might the writer have Satoshi state this so directly at this point in the story?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Reading a Space Through Implication

The writer shows Shiori assessing the apartment without stating her conclusions directly: "She had been in enough student apartments to read one quickly, and she read this one."

- What does the metaphor of "reading" a room suggest about how Shiori processes what she sees?
- Describe a room or space through what a visitor might silently notice and conclude, without stating their conclusions directly.

2. Deflecting Without Lying

When Shiori raises a question Claudio can't fully answer, he offers a vague but true-sounding explanation: "He probably heard it from someone, maybe I mentioned it."

- Find one more example in the chapter of Claudio giving an answer that avoids the full truth without actually lying.
- Practise this language: write two responses to a difficult question that are vague but not dishonest.

3. Meaningful Pauses

The chapter includes several noticeable pauses: Shiori stopping at the gate, Satoshi's pause on the stairs "longer than the stairs warranted."

- What do these pauses suggest about what each character is thinking, even though neither says it directly?
- Write a short scene (4–5 lines) in which a character's pause before speaking suggests they're deciding how much to say.

4. Sincere Check-In Questions

Satoshi asks Claudio directly: "Is everything all right? Here. With the building. With... everything."

- How is this question different from simple small talk? What makes it feel sincere?
- Practise asking a friend a sincere, caring question about their wellbeing, using pauses to show you're choosing your words carefully.

1. Character

1. How is Shiori's way of noticing things different from Satoshi's, based on this chapter?
2. How has Claudio's role changed in this chapter, compared to earlier in the story? Is he still just noticing things, or is he doing something more?
3. What do you make of Satoshi's decision to ask Claudio directly if he's all right, rather than simply asking about the building?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows two different friends starting to sense something about Casa Felice on their own, without Claudio explaining anything. How does this change the story's atmosphere compared to earlier chapters?
2. Satoshi insists that "nothing bad happens here." Why might this reassurance matter at this point in the story?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Shiori noticed about the building that she chose not to fully explain?
2. Why do you think Claudio answers Satoshi's question so simply — "Yes... I'm very settled" — rather than saying more?
3. What do you think will happen the next time Shiori or Satoshi visits Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How is Shiori's way of noticing things different from Satoshi's, based on this chapter?
2. How has Claudio's role changed in this chapter, compared to earlier in the story? Is he still just noticing things, or is he doing something more?
3. What do you make of Satoshi's decision to ask Claudio directly if he's all right, rather than simply asking about the building?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows two different friends starting to sense something about Casa Felice on their own, without Claudio explaining anything. How does this change the story's atmosphere compared to earlier chapters?
2. Satoshi insists that "nothing bad happens here." Why might this reassurance matter at this point in the story?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Shiori noticed about the building that she chose not to fully explain?
2. Why do you think Claudio answers Satoshi's question so simply — "Yes... I'm very settled" — rather than saying more?
3. What do you think will happen the next time Shiori or Satoshi visits Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: A Friend Visits for the First Time

Student A is showing Student B their home for the first time.

Student B comments on small details and asks a question Student A finds slightly difficult to answer fully.

Scenario B: Giving a Vague but Honest Answer

Student A asks Student B a direct question about something Student B would rather not fully explain.

Student B responds in a way that is vague but not dishonest, and Student A decides whether to push further.

Scenario C: Checking In on a Friend

Student A has noticed something unusual about Student B's life recently.

Student A asks a sincere, caring question ("Is everything all right?"), and Student B responds honestly but briefly.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "It's quieter/older/stranger than I expected."
- "Have you noticed that?"
- "Nothing. It's interesting, that's all."
- "Is everything all right? With... everything?"
- "I realise that might look strange from the outside. But I am."
- "They're not bad stories. It's just strange."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing Shiori's visit to his apartment.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a short diary entry or message (100–130 words) from Satoshi's point of view, describing his visit to Casa Felice and what he chose to ask Claudio.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a time you (or an imagined character) chose to protect something private without lying, focusing on the careful, indirect language used.

CULTURAL NOTES

Bulletin Boards in Japanese Apartment Buildings

Notice boards displaying residents' association announcements, rubbish collection schedules, and emergency procedures are a common feature in Japanese apartment buildings, typically maintained with careful, formal presentation. Meeting minutes and formal notices posted in these spaces are often written in a notably formal register, sometimes preserving conventions and phrasing considered old-fashioned by everyday spoken standards, reflecting the traditionally formal nature of written administrative Japanese.

Uchi and Soto: Insiders and Outsiders

Uchi (inside) and soto (outside) is a well-known framework in Japanese social life describing how people adjust language, behaviour, and information-sharing depending on whether someone is considered part of one's inner circle (uchi) or an outsider (soto). Deciding how much to share with a visitor, and choosing careful, indirect language rather than either full disclosure or outright dishonesty, reflects a broader cultural pattern of managing this inside/outside boundary thoughtfully.

Checking In: Asking "Are You Okay?" Across Cultures

The directness with which friends ask about each other's wellbeing varies across cultures and individual relationships. Some cultures favour direct, explicit check-ins ("Is everything all right?"), while others rely more on indirect cues, offers of practical help, or simply spending time together without naming a concern outright. Both approaches can reflect equally genuine care, even though they look different on the surface.

CHAPTER 18: THE PRESENTATION

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever prepared intensively for a presentation, exam, or review? How did you manage the preparation?
2. Is it more nerve-racking to be assessed formally, or informally by people whose opinion you respect? Why?
3. Have you ever been told by someone else that you did something (spoke, moved, reacted) differently without realising it yourself?

2. Being Asked About Something You'd Rather Not Fully Explain

In this chapter, friends ask Claudio direct questions that he answers only partially.

1. If a group of close friends asked you directly, "Is there anything you want to tell us?", how would you feel?
2. Is it possible to be honest with friends without telling them everything? Give an example.
3. How do you think friends should react when someone gives a partial answer to a direct question?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"It was not a formal assessment, it was what Hattori-sensei called a presentation of his progress. Claudio had correctly understood it to mean that it was a formal assessment with a different name."

1. What does this opening suggest about the relationship between what things are officially called and what they actually are?
2. What does Claudio's reaction tell you about how well he has learned to interpret Hattori-sensei?
3. Based on the title "Progress," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

acknowledgement (*noun*)

a sign that something has been noticed or recognised.

adequately (*adverb*)

in a way that is sufficient or good enough for a purpose.

arrest (*verb*)

here: to stop or halt the progress of something.

deflating (*adjective*)

causing someone to feel suddenly less confident or impressive.

devolution (*noun*)

the transfer of power or responsibility from a central authority to a more local one.

erosion (*noun*)

here: the gradual wearing away or weakening of something over time.

evidential (*adjective*)

relating to or based on evidence.

foreground (*verb*)

to give particular emphasis or prominence to something.

granularity (*noun*)

the level of fine detail present in something.

hypothesis (*noun*)

a proposed explanation or idea, put forward for further testing or discussion.

iteration (*noun*)

one version of something in a repeated process of development or refinement.

outline (*noun*)

here: a general summary or basic shape of something, without full detail.

relocate (*verb*)

to move to a different place.

steward (*noun*)

here: a person responsible for managing or looking after property or affairs on behalf of someone else.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. The December presentation was officially described by Hattori-sensei as a formal assessment.	
2. Claudio had prepared for the presentation for about three weeks.	
3. During the presentation, Claudio's way of speaking noticeably shifted for a period, according to Hattori-sensei.	
4. Hattori-sensei said the shift in his speech made his phrasing less precise.	
5. Hattori-sensei asked Claudio where he lives.	
6. Satoshi told Claudio directly that Hattori-sensei knows the true nature of Casa Felice.	
7. At the ramen restaurant, Lina asked Claudio directly if there was anything he wanted to tell them.	
8. Claudio fully explained everything about Casa Felice to his friends at dinner.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What is Claudio's academic argument about, briefly stated?
2. What happens to Claudio's way of speaking partway through the presentation, and how do people react?
3. What does Hattori-sensei ask Claudio near the end of the questions, and how does he react to the question?
4. What does Lina ask Claudio at the ramen restaurant, and how does he respond?
5. How does the chapter end, in terms of what Claudio does with his thoughts about the day?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The narrator says Hattori-sensei asked where Claudio lives "in the way of someone who already knew the answer." What do you think this suggests about her?
2. Claudio decides not to "file" the accumulated details about the building, but leaves them "in the place where the things he had not yet found words for lived... getting quite full." What does this suggest about how his relationship to these unexplained things is changing?
3. When Lina asks if there's anything Claudio wants to tell them, he gives a slightly fuller answer than usual, adding "Ok, fine, a bit more than just a bit strange." Why might this small change matter, even though he still doesn't explain anything specific?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Formal Academic Presentation Language

Hattori-sensei's feedback uses careful, precise academic language: "The argument is coherent. The evidential basis is stronger than it was in September."

- Find two more examples of formal academic feedback language in the chapter.
- Practise giving formal feedback on an imaginary piece of work, using similarly precise, qualified language (stronger than, coherent, needs another source).

2. An Unconscious Shift Noticed by Others

Claudio experiences his own change in speech only indirectly, through the room's reaction: "He did not hear it as it happened. He heard it in the quality of the room."

- Why might describing a change through other people's reactions be more effective than describing the change directly?
- Write two sentences describing a character noticing something has changed about themselves, only through how others react to them.

3. Group Reactions at an Informal Gathering

At the ramen shop, Satoshi, Lina, and Shiori each respond differently to the day's events, continuing a pattern from earlier chapters.

- Find one line from each of the three friends that shows their distinct way of processing what happened.
- In groups of three, react to a piece of surprising news in character, each taking on a distinct attitude (practical, curious, intuitive).

4. Giving a Slightly Fuller Answer

Claudio's usual line — "The neighbours are a bit strange, but they're genuinely nice" — gets a small addition this time: "Ok, fine, a bit more than just a bit strange."

- What effect does this small addition have, compared to the exact repeated phrase used in earlier chapters?
- Write a short exchange in which a character slightly expands on something they've said many times before, without fully explaining it.

1. Character

1. What does Hattori-sensei's way of giving feedback (precise, restrained, but genuinely observant) reveal about her as a mentor?
2. How does Satoshi's reaction after the presentation ("Good," then his careful questions) show his particular way of caring about Claudio?
3. Compare how Lina, Shiori, and Satoshi each approach the topic of Casa Felice at dinner. What does each person's approach say about them?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows Claudio's academic success and the mystery of Casa Felice becoming increasingly connected, rather than separate parts of his life. Where do you see this most clearly?
2. Claudio describes a growing mental "place" for things he hasn't found words for. What do you think will eventually happen to everything kept there?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Do you think Hattori-sensei already knows something about Casa Felice? What makes you think so, or not?
2. Why do you think Claudio gave his friends a fuller answer this time, rather than his usual exact phrase?
3. What do you think will happen the next time Claudio's friends ask him directly about the building? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What does Hattori-sensei's way of giving feedback (precise, restrained, but genuinely observant) reveal about her as a mentor?
2. How does Satoshi's reaction after the presentation ("Good," then his careful questions) show his particular way of caring about Claudio?
3. Compare how Lina, Shiori, and Satoshi each approach the topic of Casa Felice at dinner. What does each person's approach say about them?

2. Themes

1. This chapter shows Claudio's academic success and the mystery of Casa Felice becoming increasingly connected, rather than separate parts of his life. Where do you see this most clearly?
2. Claudio describes a growing mental "place" for things he hasn't found words for. What do you think will eventually happen to everything kept there?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Do you think Hattori-sensei already knows something about Casa Felice? What makes you think so, or not?
2. Why do you think Claudio gave his friends a slightly fuller answer this time, rather than his usual exact phrase?
3. What do you think will happen the next time Claudio's friends ask him directly about the building? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: A Progress Presentation

Student A presents a short summary of imaginary research or work in progress.

Students B and C give formal, precise feedback, including at least one challenging question.

Scenario B: Noticing a Change in Someone

Student A tells Student B that they did or said something differently without seeming to realise it.

Student B tries to explain what happened, honestly admitting they're not entirely sure themselves.

Scenario C: Friends Asking for More

A small group of students play close friends at a casual meal.

One friend gently asks another, "Is there anything you want to tell us?" about something they've all noticed.

The person responds with slightly more than their usual answer, without fully explaining.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "The argument/evidence is stronger than it was."
- "Something happened. What happened?" / "I'm not entirely sure."
- "Where are you living these days?" (asked meaningfully)
- "Is there anything you want to tell us?"
- "Ok, fine, a bit more than just..."
- "That's not how [X] works." / "I know. But here we are."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing how the presentation went.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a short summary (100–130 words) of the Yamamoto paper that Claudio might write in his research notes, imagining what it says based on how it's described in the chapter.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about a growing collection of things (thoughts, objects, questions) that someone has chosen not to sort out or explain yet, focusing on why they might be putting this off.

CULTURAL NOTES

PhD Progress Presentations in Japan

Japanese postgraduate programmes often include periodic progress presentations, in which a student presents their current research to their supervisor and other faculty members, followed by questions. While sometimes described informally, these presentations frequently carry real weight in determining a student's readiness to proceed to the next stage of their research, and can shape future funding, fieldwork approval, or thesis committee decisions.

The Ritsuryō System: Background for Heian Administrative History

The ritsuryō system was a centralised system of law and administration adopted in Japan from the seventh century onward, based partly on Chinese models, establishing a structure of central and provincial governance. By the late Heian period, the practical authority of this system had weakened considerably in many areas, even as its formal structures persisted on paper, creating exactly the kind of gap between official administrative theory and actual local practice that Claudio's research examines.

Ramen Shops as Informal Gathering Places

Ramen shops in Japan often serve as casual, low-cost gathering spots for students and young people, valued for their combination of quick service, informal atmosphere, and reasonable prices. Unlike more formal dining settings, ramen shops typically encourage relatively quick turnover, meaning conversations tend to be relaxed but efficient, well suited to a group catching up after a shared event.

CHAPTER 19: CHRISTMAS

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever spent a major holiday away from your family, in a different country or city? What was that like?
2. What's the most thoughtful gift you've ever given or received? What made it feel thoughtful?
3. Do you think a very simple, practical gift can sometimes mean more than an expensive one? Why?

2. Teaching Someone Something New

In this chapter, Claudio teaches a neighbour how to use something for the first time.

1. Think of something practical you know how to do well (cooking, a piece of technology, a skill). How would you explain it to a complete beginner?
2. What makes an explanation easy or difficult to follow, when someone is teaching you something hands-on?
3. Have you ever given someone a gift they didn't understand the purpose of, at first?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"Christmas Eve was quiet in the way of a city that did not observe it. Claudio and Lina had agreed on the evening — her apartment, because it was slightly larger, with whatever they could assemble that felt appropriate to the occasion."

1. What does "a city that did not observe it" suggest about how Christmas is treated in Kyoto?
2. What impression do you get of Claudio and Lina's friendship from how simply this evening is described?
3. Based on the title "Eight Hours," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

assemble *(verb)*

to gather or put together the parts of something.

dry *(adjective)*

here: (of humour or tone) understated and deadpan, delivered without obvious emotion.

fond *(adjective)*

having warm, affectionate feelings towards someone or something.

Glühwein *(noun (German))*

mulled (warmed and spiced) red wine, traditionally drunk in winter, especially around Christmas.

indicator light *(noun (phrase))*

a small light on a device that shows its current status (e.g. charging, on, ready).

pairing *(noun/verb)*

here: connecting two electronic devices (e.g. headphones and a phone) so they can communicate wirelessly.

panettone *(noun (Italian))*

a traditional Italian sweet bread, studded with candied fruit or raisins, typically eaten at Christmas.

presence of mind *(noun (phrase))*

the ability to think and act sensibly and quickly, especially in a surprising or difficult moment.

recurring *(adjective)*

happening repeatedly, again and again.

tamp *(verb)*

to press something down firmly, especially ground coffee, into a compact layer.

urgency *(noun)*

the quality of requiring immediate attention or action.

valve *(noun)*

a device that controls the flow of liquid or gas through a pipe or opening.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio and Lina spent Christmas Eve together at Lina's apartment.	
2. Both of their mothers had asked if they had found someone.	
3. Claudio left small gifts on his neighbours' hooks on Christmas morning.	
4. Shimo opened her gift in front of Claudio immediately.	
5. Claudio gave Aki a set of noise-cancelling headphones.	
6. Aki understood immediately what the headphones were and how to use them.	
7. Aki managed to sleep for eight hours using the headphones.	
8. Hattori-sensei told Claudio outright that Casa Felice is dangerous.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How did Claudio and Lina spend Christmas Eve, and what did they talk about?
2. What gifts did Claudio give to his different neighbours?
3. Describe Aki's reaction when she first tries the noise-cancelling headphones in Claudio's apartment.
4. Why does Aki come to Claudio's door early on the morning of the 26th, and how does she react?
5. What does Hattori-sensei say to Claudio about Casa Felice at the end-of-year gathering?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Aki asks why the headphones matter and Claudio mentions they cancel "whatever is above you too," neither of them says Fujiko's name. Why might the writer keep this exchange indirect?
2. The chapter ends with Claudio repeating, almost word for word, something Toki said to him back in September: "The building suits me." What do you think this repetition shows about how Claudio has changed since then?
3. Hattori-sensei says "stories that old are usually old for a reason" and then simply says "Very well" after Claudio's response, without pushing further. What kind of relationship do you think this exchange shows between them?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Showing Emotion Through Physical Detail

Aki's reaction to the headphones is shown through small physical details rather than naming her feelings: "Her eyes closed briefly. When she opened them she looked at him and then looked at the headphones and then looked at him again."

- What emotion do you think Aki is feeling in this moment? How did you work it out without the text naming it?
- Write two or three sentences showing a character's strong emotional reaction through physical detail alone, without naming the emotion.

2. Instructional Language

Claudio teaches Shimo how to use the moka pot with clear, step-by-step instructions: "The water in the lower chamber, to the valve, not above. The coffee in the filter, level, not tamped."

- Underline the specific, practical details Claudio includes in his instructions.
- Write step-by-step instructions (4–6 steps) for a simple everyday task, using a similarly clear, practical style.

3. The Weight of a Simple Sentence

Claudio's final line, "The building suits me," is short and simple, but carries significance built up over many chapters.

- Why does this short sentence feel important, even though the words themselves are ordinary?
- Write a short, simple sentence that could carry a lot of emotional weight if it appeared at the end of a much longer story.

4. Natural Holiday Text Messages

The holiday text messages in this chapter are brief and warm: "Merry Christmas! The wine is excellent. I opened it immediately."

- What makes these messages feel natural and specific, rather than generic ("Thanks, Merry Christmas!")?
- Write three short holiday or thank-you text messages, each specific to a different imagined gift.

1. Character

1. What do Claudio's gift choices for each neighbour (wine, a cookbook, a moka pot, headphones) suggest about how well he has come to know them individually?
2. What does the exchange between Aki and Shimo (the hidden laugh from behind the door) suggest about their relationship?
3. How does Hattori-sensei's way of raising a serious topic (calm, indirect, unhurried) compare to how other characters have approached Claudio about Casa Felice?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is full of small acts of care — gifts, teaching, a hug. How does this compare to the growing mystery running through the rest of the story?
2. Claudio says "The building suits me" as "the most accurate thing available" to him. What do you think this tells us about how he now sees his life at Casa Felice?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Why do you think the headphones meant so much to Aki, beyond simply blocking noise?
2. What do you think Hattori-sensei meant by "stories that old are usually old for a reason"?
3. What do you think will happen in the new year, now that Claudio has told Hattori-sensei that "the building suits him"? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What do Claudio's gift choices for each neighbour (wine, a cookbook, a moka pot, headphones) suggest about how well he has come to know them individually?
2. What does the exchange between Aki and Shimo (the hidden laugh from behind the door) suggest about their relationship?
3. How does Hattori-sensei's way of raising a serious topic (calm, indirect, unhurried) compare to how other characters have approached Claudio about Casa Felice?

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1. This chapter is full of small acts of care — gifts, teaching, a hug. How does this compare to the growing mystery running through the rest of the story?
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1. Why do you think the headphones meant so much to Aki, beyond simply blocking noise?
2. What do you think Hattori-sensei meant by "stories that old are usually old for a reason"?
3. What do you think will happen in the new year, now that Claudio has told Hattori-sensei that "the building suits him"? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Giving a Thoughtful Gift

Student A gives Student B a gift chosen specifically for them and explains why they chose it.
Student B reacts and asks a follow-up question about the gift.

Scenario B: Teaching a Practical Skill

Student A teaches Student B how to use or make something (a device, a recipe, a tool) step by step.
Student B asks clarifying questions along the way.

Scenario C: A Mentor's Careful Warning

Student A (a mentor or senior colleague) raises a serious or sensitive topic calmly and indirectly with Student B.
Student B responds carefully, without over-explaining, similar to Claudio's response to Hattori-sensei.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "You didn't need to, but thank you."
- "Show me." / "Again." (asking to be taught properly)
- "What do they/does it do?"
- "I haven't [done X] in a very long time."
- "In my experience..."
- "Very well." (calm, formal acceptance of an answer)

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing giving out the Christmas gifts.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a short message (100–130 words) from Aki to a friend outside the building, describing the headphones and what they meant to her, without going into full detail about why.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about receiving a gift that turned out to be far more meaningful than it first appeared, focusing on the moment of realisation.

CULTURAL NOTES

Christmas in Japan: A Different Kind of Holiday

Christmas is not a public holiday in Japan and is not widely observed as a religious occasion, given that Christianity is practised by only a small percentage of the population. It has instead become a largely secular, commercial event, often associated with couples spending a romantic evening together or with festive seasonal food, rather than the family-centred gathering typical in many Christian-majority countries. New Year (Oshōgatsu), by contrast, is the major family holiday in the Japanese calendar.

Panettone and Italian Christmas Traditions

Panettone, a tall, dome-shaped sweet bread studded with candied fruit and raisins, originated in Milan and is now a staple of Italian Christmas celebrations nationwide, typically shared among family and friends throughout the holiday period. Italians living abroad often go to considerable lengths to source an authentic panettone, considering mass-produced or foreign supermarket versions a poor substitute for the real thing.

The Moka Pot: Italy's Everyday Coffee Maker

The moka pot, invented in Italy in the 1930s, is a stovetop coffee maker that brews coffee by passing boiling water pressurised by steam through ground coffee, producing a strong coffee similar to, but technically distinct from, espresso. It remains one of the most common ways of making coffee in Italian homes, valued for its simplicity, durability, and the ritual of its use, and is often one of the first practical items an Italian abroad might introduce to non-Italian friends.

CHAPTER 20: NEW YEAR

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. What does New Year's Eve usually look like where you're from? Is it a big family occasion, a night out, or something quieter?
2. Have you ever chosen to stay somewhere for a major holiday instead of going home? What made you decide that?
3. Do you have a phone call or conversation with family that follows a familiar, comfortable pattern every time? Describe it.

2. Marking the Turn of the Year

This chapter describes a midnight visit to a shrine at the end of the year.

1. Does your culture have a specific ritual or tradition for the exact moment a new year begins? Describe it.
2. Why do you think many cultures mark the passing of time with bells, countdowns, or specific rituals?
3. If you had a quiet moment at midnight on New Year's Eve, what do you think you would find yourself thinking about?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The building emptied for New Year in the way Claudio had not quite anticipated — not all at once, but over the days between Christmas and the thirty-first, a gradual quieting, doors that were usually occasionally open now consistently closed."

1. What does the word "quieting" suggest about how this change happens, compared to a sudden event?
2. Why might the writer focus on small, physical signs (doors, the staircase, the courtyard) to show the building emptying, rather than simply stating that people had left?
3. Based on the title "Midnight Bell," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

abstract (*adjective*)

here: existing as a general idea, rather than something directly experienced or felt.

ambient (*adjective*)

surrounding and constant, forming a background condition rather than a specific event.

cedar (*noun*)

a type of evergreen tree with a distinctive, fragrant wood, often used in temple and shrine buildings in Japan.

chill (*adjective*)

unpleasantly cold, in a way that is noticeable but not extreme.

grace (*noun*)

here: polite, good-humoured acceptance; "minimal grace" = accepted reluctantly, without much good humour.

monitor (*verb*)

to watch or observe something carefully over a period of time.

origin (*noun*)

the place or point where something begins or comes from.

persistent (*adjective*)

continuing to exist or happen over a long period of time, without stopping.

purposeful (*adjective*)

having a clear aim or intention; done with determination.

ritual (*noun*)

a fixed set of actions performed regularly, often with symbolic or traditional significance.

sufficient (*adjective*)

enough for a particular purpose.

territory (*noun*)

here: an area of activity or experience that someone is familiar with.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. The building empties out gradually in the days leading up to New Year.	
2. Bunta went to Osaka for the New Year holiday.	
3. Aki told Claudio she was staying at Casa Felice for New Year.	
4. Claudio decided to travel back to Italy for New Year.	
5. Claudio spent New Year's Eve with Sachiko.	
6. The shrine they visited was one of Kyoto's most famous tourist shrines.	
7. The temple bell was rung 108 times, representing human desires.	
8. Sachiko told Claudio that the building was upset he was there.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Which neighbours leave Casa Felice for New Year, and where do they go, as far as Claudio knows?
2. Who remains in the building over the New Year period, according to the chapter?
3. Why does Claudio decide not to go home to Italy for New Year — both the reasons he gives and the "whole truth" the narrator describes?
4. Describe the shrine Claudio visits with Sachiko at midnight.
5. What does Sachiko say to Claudio at the bottom of the staircase, and how does he respond?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The narrator describes the landlord as someone who "had, Claudio suspected, never left, not in any meaningful sense," and Ryōen as "the wandering musician without a fixed origin." What do these descriptions suggest, without stating anything directly?
2. Aki mentions going to her "great-grandmother's" for New Year, and the narrator notes Claudio's odd feeling of "not yet sure what folder it belonged in." Why might this small detail be included without further explanation?
3. Sachiko says "The building is glad you're here" as simple information, "without ceremony." Why might the writer choose to have such a significant line delivered so plainly?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Summarising Through a Chain of Memories

As the midnight bell counts down, the narrator moves rapidly through a list of moments from across the whole year: "He thought about March, the hostel... He thought about the bench in the corridor and Kuro on the bench."

- What effect does listing so many small memories one after another have, at this point in the story?
- Write a short paragraph summarising a significant period in your own life as a list of quick, specific memories, in a similar style.

2. Suggesting Age and Permanence Indirectly

Sachiko's home is described as somewhere she has lived "for longer than the building had existed in its current form," without stating a number of years.

- What effect does this kind of indirect time reference have, compared to simply saying how many years someone has lived somewhere?
- Describe a person's long connection to a place using a similar indirect technique, without giving an exact number of years.

3. A Question That Isn't Quite a Question

Sachiko says "You're all right," which the narrator describes as "not quite a question and not quite a statement... the kind that required an honest answer."

- Why might this in-between phrasing invite a more honest answer than a direct question would?
- Practise this pattern: write a short line of dialogue that sits between a question and a statement, inviting an honest response.

4. A Sound That Completes Rather Than Continues

The final image of the chapter is the biwa music "not practising tonight. Something complete, something played through from beginning to end, unhurried."

- How does this description differ from earlier descriptions of the same music in the story?
- Write two sentences describing a sound or action that signals something is finished, complete, or resolved.

1. Character

1. What do you learn about Sachiko in this chapter, particularly through the shrine visit and her final words to Claudio?
2. How does Claudio's phone call with his parents show the two sides of his life (Italy and Kyoto) coexisting?
3. Compare how different residents of Casa Felice are described in this chapter (Sachiko, the landlord, Ryōen, Fujiko). What patterns do you notice?

2. Themes

1. This chapter reflects on a full year of change for Claudio. What do you think has changed most for him since Chapter One?
2. Claudio chooses Casa Felice and its residents over travelling home for the holidays. What does this suggest about how he now defines "home"?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Sachiko meant, exactly, by "The building is glad you're here"?
2. How do you feel about Claudio's choice to stay, now that you've followed his year at Casa Felice? Would you have made the same choice?
3. What do you think the new year will bring for Claudio and the residents of Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What do you learn about Sachiko in this chapter, particularly through the shrine visit and her final words to Claudio?
2. How does Claudio's phone call with his parents show the two sides of his life (Italy and Kyoto) coexisting?
3. Compare how different residents of Casa Felice are described in this chapter (Sachiko, the landlord, Ryōen, Fujiko). What patterns do you notice?

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1. This chapter reflects on a full year of change for Claudio. What do you think has changed most for him since Chapter One?
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3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think Sachiko meant, exactly, by "The building is glad you're here"?
2. How do you feel about Claudio's choice to stay, now that you've followed his year at Casa Felice? Would you have made the same choice?
3. What do you think the new year will bring for Claudio and the residents of Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Calling Home for the Holidays

Student A calls their parent (Student B) from abroad during a holiday period.

Student B asks caring, practical questions (about food, friends, work); Student A answers honestly but doesn't share every detail.

Scenario B: A Quiet New Year's Conversation

Two students spend a quiet moment together at midnight on New Year's Eve (real or imagined setting).

Include a reflective exchange about the year that has passed.

Scenario C: Explaining Why You're Staying

Student A explains to Student B (a concerned friend or family member) why they've decided to stay somewhere for a major holiday instead of going home.

Student B listens and responds with understanding.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "You're still here." / "I'm still here."
- "Are you eating properly?" / "I'm eating well, actually."
- "You're all right?" (a caring check-in, not quite a question)
- "I think I am."
- "[Something] is glad you're here."
- "Happy New Year."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing New Year's Eve at the shrine with Sachiko.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write out the phone call between Claudio and his mother (8–10 lines of dialogue), based on what is described in the chapter.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) reflecting on a significant year in your own life, using a chain of quick, specific memories in a single flowing passage, similar to the midnight bell scene.

CULTURAL NOTES

Ōmisoka and Oshōgatsu: Japanese New Year

Ōmisoka (New Year's Eve) and Oshōgatsu (New Year) together form the most significant holiday period in the Japanese calendar, when many people return to their hometowns to spend time with family, similar in social importance to Christmas in many Western countries. Cities can empty out noticeably during this period, as offices, many shops, and even some restaurants close for several days, and transport networks see some of their heaviest traffic of the year as people travel to be with relatives.

Joya no Kane: The 108 Bell Tolls

Joya no kane is the Buddhist tradition of ringing a temple bell 108 times around midnight on New Year's Eve, a number traditionally said to represent the 108 earthly desires or afflictions (bonnō) that trouble human beings in Buddhist teaching. Temples across Japan perform this ritual, with the final strike traditionally timed to land after midnight, symbolically leaving the desires and troubles of the old year behind.

Neighbourhood Shrines in Japan

Alongside Japan's famous, historically significant shrines, most neighbourhoods and even individual streets have small, local shrines that serve the immediate community rather than visitors, often unremarkable in appearance but woven into daily and seasonal life. A midnight visit to a local shrine at New Year, known as hatsumōde (the year's first shrine visit), is a common tradition, though many people choose a smaller, more personal shrine over a famous, crowded one.

CHAPTER 21: WHITE DAY

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. How is Valentine's Day usually celebrated where you're from? Who gives gifts to whom?
2. Have you ever needed to be briefed on a social custom before taking part in it for the first time? What did you need to know?
3. Have you ever chosen a gift for someone specifically because you knew a small detail about them that not everyone would notice?

2. Reciprocal Gift-Giving

This chapter describes a custom where a gift received on one occasion is expected to be returned, thoughtfully, on a later date.

1. Do you have any traditions in your own culture where gifts are expected to be reciprocated later?
2. Do you think a returned gift should try to match the value of the original, or is the thought what matters most?
3. If you had to choose gifts for five or six different people, all from the same small budget of thought and care, how would you approach it?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"January settled into Kyoto with the particular severity of a city that took its winters seriously. The temple roofs had frost on them in the mornings. The Kamogawa ran cold and clear."

1. What impression of the season does this opening create through specific, concrete details?
2. What does describing the city as "taking its winters seriously" suggest, given the personifying technique used throughout the book?
3. Based on the title "White Day," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

briefing *(noun)*

a short talk or explanation giving someone the necessary information before an event or task.

craft *(noun)*

here: skilled work in which something is made by hand, often using traditional techniques.

cue *(noun)*

a signal for someone to do something; "took his cue from him" = followed his example.

obligation *(noun)*

a duty or requirement to do something, often for social reasons.

readjustment *(noun)*

the process of adapting again to a situation after a change.

reciprocate *(verb)*

to respond to an action or gift with a similar one in return.

regards *(noun (plural))*

a polite greeting or expression of goodwill, often sent through another person.

roast *(noun)*

here: a particular way coffee beans have been roasted, which affects their flavour.

secondhand *(adjective)*

previously owned or used by someone else; not new.

severity *(noun)*

the quality of being serious, harsh, or intense.

unruffled *(adjective)*

calm and not upset or disturbed by anything.

waka *(noun (Japanese))*

a traditional form of Japanese poetry, typically with a fixed syllable pattern, dating back over a thousand years.

workshop *(noun)*

here: a place where things are made or repaired by hand, often by a skilled craftsman.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio stayed in Kyoto rather than travelling anywhere for the New Year break.	
2. Satoshi explains that giri choco is chocolate given only between romantic couples.	
3. On Valentine's Day, Claudio received gifts from four different neighbours.	
4. Shimo's gift came with a detailed handwritten card explaining her choice.	
5. White Day falls on March 14th.	
6. Claudio started planning his White Day gifts only a few days before the day itself.	
7. Claudio gave Shiori a modern bestselling novel for White Day.	
8. Aki confirmed that her aunt, Shirokama, also thanked Claudio for his gift.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does the building "reassemble itself" over the first days of January?
2. What does Satoshi explain to Claudio about giri choco before Valentine's Day?
3. List the four Valentine's Day gifts Claudio receives and who each one is from.
4. How does Claudio choose specific White Day gifts for Hana, Shimo, and Aki? What do his choices reveal about how well he knows them?
5. What does Shiori say to Claudio after receiving her White Day gift, and what does this reveal about their relationship?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Aki mentions her "great-grandmother's house," the text notes she describes it as "entirely true and also not quite the whole of what it was." What do you think this might mean, especially in light of the later message about "Aunt Shirokama"?
2. Sachiko signs her Valentine's card with her apartment number, "which she had never needed to include." Why might this small, formal detail actually read as warmth rather than distance?
3. The chapter ends with Claudio realising "that he had, without quite deciding to, understood something about how the building worked, and that the building had noticed." What do you think this mutual "noticing" suggests about his relationship with Casa Felice at this point?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Explaining a Custom Step by Step

Satoshi explains giri choco to Claudio in clear, structured stages: what it is, who gives it, what it means, and what's expected in return.

- Underline the different pieces of information Satoshi includes in his explanation, in the order he gives them.
- Explain a social custom or unwritten rule from your own culture to a partner, structuring your explanation in a similarly clear order.

2. Showing Personalisation Through Detail

Each White Day gift is explained through a specific reason connected to what Claudio has learned about that person: "This based on three months of conversations about food."

- Choose two of the White Day gifts and explain, in your own words, what personal detail each is based on.
- Describe a gift you might pick for someone you know well, explain the specific reason behind your choice.

3. Finding Warmth in Formality

Sachiko's inclusion of her apartment number on a Valentine's card, though unnecessary, is read by Claudio as a form of warmth rather than distance.

- Why might an unnecessary, formal detail sometimes communicate care more clearly than an openly emotional one?
- Describe a moment (real or imagined) where a small, formal gesture revealed more warmth than an obvious one would have.

4. Pauses in Text Messages

Aki's text exchange with Claudio uses deliberate pauses to control pacing: "A pause. Then: 'I do. Thank you.' Another pause. Then: 'Thank you from Aunt Shirotama too.'"

- What effect do these marked pauses have on how you read the emotional weight of the exchange?
- Write a short text exchange (4–6 messages) that uses similar pauses to build emotional significance.

1. Character

1. What does each of Claudio's White Day gift choices reveal about how well he has come to know his neighbours individually?
2. How does Satoshi's careful, over-detailed advice about giri choco reflect his character as we've come to know him?
3. What do you make of the ongoing, gentle mystery around Aki's family and "Aunt Shirotama"?

2. Themes

1. This chapter is built almost entirely around gift-giving. How does the story use gifts to show relationships deepening, rather than simply stating that they have?
2. By this point in the story, Claudio seems to fully understand and participate in the building's particular customs and rhythms. How does this compare to his uncertainty in the earlier chapters?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think the connection is between Aki and "Aunt Shirotama"? Why might the story keep this detail gentle and unexplained?
2. Which of Claudio's White Day gifts do you think was the most thoughtful, and why?
3. What do you think the coming months will bring for Claudio, now that he has settled so fully into life at Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What does each of Claudio's White Day gift choices reveal about how well he has come to know his neighbours individually?
2. How does Satoshi's careful, over-detailed advice about giri choco reflect his character as we've come to know him?
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3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. What do you think the connection is between Aki and "Aunt Shirotama"? Why might the story keep this detail gentle and unexplained?
2. Which of Claudio's White Day gifts do you think was the most thoughtful, and why?
3. What do you think the coming months will bring for Claudio, now that he has settled so fully into life at Casa Felice? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Explaining a Custom

Student A explains an unfamiliar social custom or tradition to Student B, step by step.

Student B asks clarifying questions to make sure they understand what's expected of them.

Scenario B: Choosing the Right Gift

Student A describes a friend or family member in detail (their interests, habits, personality) to Student B.

Student B suggests a specific, thoughtful gift based on what they've heard, explaining their reasoning.

Scenario C: Thanking Someone for a Thoughtful Gift

Student A gives Student B a small, well-chosen gift.

Student B reacts with genuine appreciation, asking how Student A knew to choose it.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "It doesn't mean anything beyond the social obligation."
- "Don't read anything into it." / "Don't overthink it."
- "I chose this because..."
- "Where did you find this?" / "How did you know?"
- "You've been paying attention."
- "Please give my regards to..."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing the gifts he received on Valentine's Day.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write Claudio's planning notes (100–130 words) for White Day, listing each person, the gift he chose, and a brief reason for each choice.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about choosing a gift for someone you know very well, focusing on the small, specific details of their life or personality that shaped your choice.

CULTURAL NOTES

Valentine's Day in Japan: Giri Choco and Honmei Choco

In Japan, Valentine's Day traditionally involves women giving chocolate to men, divided into two main categories: honmei choco ("true feeling chocolate"), given to a romantic partner or someone of romantic interest, and giri choco ("obligation chocolate"), given to colleagues, friends, or acquaintances as a polite social gesture with no romantic meaning. In recent years, the custom has diversified further, with chocolate also given between friends (tomo choco) or bought by individuals as a treat for themselves (jibun choco).

White Day: The Return Gift

White Day, celebrated on March 14th exactly one month after Valentine's Day, is the occasion on which men are traditionally expected to give a return gift to those who gave them chocolate, particularly for honmei choco. The custom, which originated in Japan in the late 1970s and has since spread to other parts of East Asia, often carries an informal expectation that the return gift be of comparable or greater value than the original, especially in the case of a genuine romantic gesture, reflecting thoughtfulness and reciprocity rather than a fixed, precise value.

Waka: Classical Japanese Poetry

Waka is a traditional form of Japanese poetry with a history spanning over a thousand years, most commonly taking the thirty-one-syllable tanka form (5-7-5-7-7). Waka poetry was central to Heian-period court culture, often exchanged between individuals as a form of communication, courtship, or reflection, and remains a significant subject of literary study today, with numerous scholarly editions of major historical collections still in print.

CHAPTER 22: TOKYO

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever travelled somewhere for work or study and stayed in a plain, functional hotel? What was that experience like?
2. Is there a difference for you between a place that is comfortable and a place that feels like home? Explain.
3. Have you ever realised how much a place meant to you only after being away from it for a while?

2. Two Kinds of Quiet

This chapter compares two different kinds of quiet: the quiet of a hotel room and the quiet of Claudio's usual home.

1. Do you think all silence feels the same, or can quiet have different qualities depending on the place?
2. What small, specific sounds or details make a place feel like yours, rather than just "fine"?
3. If you had to describe the difference between "adequate" and "right," how would you explain it?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"The Tokyo trip was in late March, four days in the Todai archives working through material that hadn't stayed in the Kansai region — central court records, correspondence between the capital administration and the provincial offices."

1. What does this opening tell you about the purpose of Claudio's trip?
2. What tone does this opening create — is it exciting, routine, uncertain? What creates that tone?
3. Based on the title "Tokyo," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

adequate (*adjective*)

satisfactory or acceptable, but not especially good.

archivist (*noun*)

a person responsible for organising and maintaining historical documents or records.

canteen (*noun*)

a place within a workplace, school, or institution where meals are served.

definitively (*adverb*)

in a way that is final and not open to doubt or further discussion.

donburi (*noun (Japanese)*)

a Japanese dish consisting of a bowl of rice topped with meat, fish, or vegetables.

dusk (*noun*)

the time of day just before darkness, when the light is fading.

forecourt (*noun*)

an open area in front of a large building, such as a station.

overhead rack (*noun (phrase)*)

a storage shelf above seats on a train or plane, used for luggage.

pitch (*noun*)

here: the exact correctness of a musical note's tone.

resolve (*verb*)

here: (of a musical note or tension) to settle into a stable, correct, or satisfying state.

shinkansen (*noun (Japanese)*)

Japan's high-speed railway network, commonly known in English as the "bullet train."

specificity (*noun*)

the quality of being precise and particular, rather than general.

vast (*adjective*)

extremely large in area, size, or extent.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Claudio travelled to Tokyo for four days of archive research.	
2. Claudio had never been to Tokyo before this trip.	
3. Claudio found the hotel room's quiet very similar to the quiet of Casa Felice.	
4. The Tokyo archive documents were central court records, complementing the provincial documents from Kasuga Taisha.	
5. Claudio felt exactly the same kind of homesickness in Tokyo as he had at Christmas for Ravenna.	
6. Claudio's shinkansen home was delayed.	
7. When Claudio returned to Casa Felice, Kuro was waiting in the courtyard.	
8. Claudio found nothing on his hook when he returned home.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. Why did Claudio go to Tokyo, and what kind of material did he work with there?
2. How does the chapter describe the quiet of Claudio's hotel room, compared to the quiet of Casa Felice?
3. What does Claudio think about during his evenings alone in Tokyo?
4. How does the feeling Claudio has in Tokyo differ from the homesickness he felt at Christmas?
5. Describe what happens when Claudio arrives back at the Casa Felice courtyard.

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. The chapter says something "resolved, quietly and completely" when Claudio steps back into the courtyard, comparing the feeling to "a note held at a fraction of the correct pitch." Why might the writer use a musical metaphor here, given Ryōen's biwa playing throughout the story?
2. Kuro's appearance is described ambiguously: "he had been there, or had arrived, it was impossible to say which." Why might the writer include this small uncertainty at such a warm, resolved moment?
3. The chapter ends with a list of ordinary actions (heating food, feeding the cat, writing notes) followed by "that was all there was to it." What effect does ending on such a plain, understated note have, after the emotional build-up of the homecoming?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Describing Something "Correct" but Unsatisfying

The writer describes the Tokyo hotel room entirely in terms of correctness, "The bed was decent. The bathroom was good. The wifi was good", without ever calling it wrong, even though something is clearly missing.

- How does the writer suggest something is missing, without ever directly criticising the room?
- Describe a place or situation that was completely fine on paper but still felt slightly wrong, using a similar list of correct, adequate details.

2. A Musical Metaphor for Feeling

The writer compares an unresolved feeling to "a note held at a fraction of the correct pitch," connecting back to the recurring image of music in the story.

- Why might a musical metaphor be especially fitting in this story, given what music has represented in earlier chapters?
- Write two sentences describing an emotional resolution using a metaphor drawn from a different sense (touch, taste, or sight).

3. A Cumulative List of Home

Claudio's thoughts of home are built from a list of small, specific details: "the smell of the moka coffee... Kuro on the desk chair... Bunta's door and Ryōen's biwa."

- Why might a list of small, specific details communicate "home" more effectively than a general statement like "he missed his apartment"?
- Write a similar list (4–6 items) of small, specific details that represent home for you.

4. Ending on Understatement

After the emotional return home, the chapter ends very plainly: "that was all there was to it."

- What effect does this plain, almost dismissive ending have, immediately after such a significant emotional moment?
- Rewrite the ending of a favourite story or film scene you know, adding a short, understated final line in this style.

1. Character

1. What does this chapter reveal about how completely Claudio's sense of self has become tied to Casa Felice?
2. How does Claudio's professional competence in the archive contrast with his private feelings during the evenings in Tokyo?
3. What does the phone call with his mother suggest about their relationship, given how little she understands of the academic content?

2. Themes

1. This chapter explores the difference between a place that is comfortable and a place that is home. How does the story define this difference?
2. By the end of the chapter, in what way has the meaning of "home" changed for Claudio since Chapter One?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Has there ever been a place that felt like this for you — fine to be away from, but somehow not fully right until you returned? Describe it.
2. What do you think Claudio found in the Tokyo archive that "confirmed what he had suspected since November"?
3. With only a few chapters left in the story, what do you think still needs to happen for Claudio's year at Casa Felice to feel complete? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. What does this chapter reveal about how completely Claudio's sense of self has become tied to Casa Felice?
2. How does Claudio's professional competence in the archive contrast with his private feelings during the evenings in Tokyo?
3. What does the phone call with his mother suggest about their relationship, given how little she understands of the academic content?

2. Themes

1. This chapter explores the difference between a place that is comfortable and a place that is home. How does the story define this difference?
2. By the end of this chapter, in what ways has the meaning of "home" changed for Claudio since Chapter One?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — the story hasn't told us yet!

1. Has there ever been a place that felt like this for you — fine to be away from, but somehow not fully right until you returned? Describe it.
2. What do you think Claudio found in the Tokyo archive that "confirmed what he had suspected since November"?
3. With only a few chapters left in the story, what do you think still needs to happen for Claudio's year at Casa Felice to feel complete? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: A Call From a Work Trip

Student A is away on a work or study trip and calls home (Student B).

Student B asks caring, practical questions; Student A describes the trip honestly, including a sense that something is missing.

Scenario B: Comparing Two Places

Student A describes a comfortable but impersonal place they've stayed (a hotel, a temporary flat).

Student B asks questions that draw out the difference between "fine" and "home."

Scenario C: The Moment of Return

Student A describes arriving back somewhere after time away, focusing on the specific small details that made them feel they were home.

Student B asks follow-up questions about what changed in that moment.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "The room/place is fine. Everything is fine."
- "It's just not quite..."
- "I kept thinking about..."
- "Something settled, quietly."
- "It was exactly what it had been."
- "That was all there was to it."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing one evening alone in his Tokyo hotel room.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a postcard or short message (100–130 words) from Claudio to one of his neighbours, describing Tokyo and mentioning that he's looking forward to coming home.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) about the specific moment of returning somewhere after time away and realising it is truly home, using a list of small, concrete details rather than general statements of feeling.

CULTURAL NOTES

Business Hotels in Japan

Business hotels (bijinesu hoteru) are a common and practical accommodation category across Japan, offering small, efficiently designed rooms at reasonable prices, aimed primarily at travelling workers rather than tourists seeking a memorable stay. They are typically located near stations or business districts, prioritising convenience and reliability, such as consistent wifi and nearby food options, over character or atmosphere.

The Shinkansen: Japan's Bullet Train

The shinkansen network, in operation since 1964, connects major Japanese cities at speeds of up to around 320 kilometres per hour, and is renowned internationally for its punctuality, comfort, and safety record. The journey between Tokyo and Kyoto, covering roughly 500 kilometres, typically takes just over two hours, making same-day or short return trips between the two cities entirely practical for work or research purposes.

Tokyo and Kyoto: Two Capitals, Two Characters

Tokyo has served as Japan's political and administrative capital since 1868, while Kyoto held that role for over a thousand years beforehand and remains closely associated with traditional culture, historical architecture, and a slower, more established pace of life. Japanese people and long-term residents often describe a distinct difference in atmosphere between the two cities, with Tokyo generally regarded as fast-paced and modern, and Kyoto as historically layered and comparatively unhurried, reflecting their very different roles across Japanese history.

CHAPTER 23: SECOND HANAMI

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Think of a place you've lived in or visited many times. What do you know about it now that you didn't know the first time?
2. Have you ever returned to a season or event (a festival, a holiday) for the second time and noticed how differently you experienced it?
3. If someone had important, delicate news to share with you, would you rather they say it directly and quickly, or lead up to it carefully?

2. Old Records as Evidence

In this chapter, a centuries-old diary becomes an important piece of evidence in Claudio's research.

1. Why might a personal diary from many centuries ago be a valuable historical source?
2. What kinds of things do you think people recorded in diaries in the past that they might not have thought to explain in more official documents?
3. If you kept a diary, what small details about your daily life might one day be historically interesting, without you realising it now?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"April came and the city began again. He recognised it this time — not the disorientation of arrival, not the slightly unreal quality of a place doing something overwhelming in front of a person who had just got there."

1. What does "he recognised it this time" suggest about how Claudio's relationship with the city has changed?
2. This chapter echoes the cherry blossom season from Chapter Three. What effect does returning to the same seasonal event have at this point in the story?
3. Based on the title "Chōshūki," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

advisory (*noun*)

an official notice giving warning or guidance about a situation.

attribute (*verb*)

to say or believe that something is caused by a particular thing.

bibliography (*noun*)

a list of sources (books, articles, documents) referred to in academic work.

defensible (*adjective*)

able to be argued for or justified successfully, especially in an academic context.

disorientation (*noun*)

a feeling of confusion about where one is or what is happening.

disrupt (*verb*)

to interrupt the normal flow or operation of something.

immersion (*noun*)

deep, sustained involvement in a particular activity or environment.

lay a card on the table (*idiom*)

to reveal an important piece of information deliberately, especially at a decisive moment.

navigable (*adjective*)

possible to move through or travel along without excessive difficulty.

precinct (*noun*)

here: the grounds or enclosed area surrounding a shrine or temple.

steadily (*adverb*)

in a calm, controlled, unwavering way.

thin (*verb*)

here: (of a crowd) to become gradually less dense or numerous.

uncap (*verb*)

to remove the cap or cover from something.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. The university sent an advisory email warning about transport disruption during hanami season.	
2. Bunta was annoyed by the crowds the advisory warned about.	
3. Claudio visited a small, quiet shrine with a cherry tree that blooms later than the famous ones.	
4. Isamu told Claudio he seemed exactly the same as when he had arrived.	
5. Hattori-sensei said Claudio's revised argument was still not defensible.	
6. Hattori-sensei mentioned finding a reference to Casa Felice's property in a twelfth-century diary.	
7. The diary Hattori-sensei found was written by Miyamoto, the archivist from Nara.	
8. Hattori-sensei told Claudio explicitly and in detail what kind of beings live at Casa Felice.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. What does the university's advisory email warn about, and how does Bunta react to it?
2. Describe the small shrine and cherry tree Claudio visits, and how it differs from the famous cherry blossom spots.
3. What does Isamu say to Claudio about how he has changed over the past year?
4. What does Hattori-sensei say about the Tokyo material and Claudio's overall argument?
5. What does Hattori-sensei reveal about the Chōshūki diary, and how does Claudio respond?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Claudio asks Hattori-sensei directly, "What are you telling me?", she answers by carefully listing several separate things, ending with "which you already knew." Why might the writer have her answer this way rather than giving one direct explanation?
2. The diary describes the property as the residence of "certain parties whose nature is not specified." Why might the writer have even a centuries-old historical source use the same careful, undefined language found throughout the whole book?
3. The chapter ends with Claudio no longer being "the person who had stood outside this building thirteen months ago." What specific details in the final paragraph show this change, rather than simply stating it?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. "Laying a Card on the Table"

Hattori-sensei reveals the diary reference "in the tone of someone laying a card on a table" — an idiom for deliberately revealing important information at a decisive moment.

- What does this idiom suggest about how carefully Hattori-sensei has planned this conversation?
- Write two sentences using "lay a card on the table" to describe someone sharing important information deliberately.

2. Careful, Structured Disclosure

When asked directly what she means, Hattori-sensei answers by listing several separate, precise points rather than giving one simple explanation.

- Identify the separate points Hattori-sensei makes in her answer. Why might she organise her answer this way?
- Practise this technique: answer a difficult question by listing three separate, precise points rather than one direct statement.

3. Measuring Change Against a Past Self

The final paragraph measures how much Claudio has changed by contrasting him with who he was "thirteen months ago," echoing the very first chapter of the book.

- Find two specific details in the final paragraph that show change, rather than simply stating that Claudio has changed.
- Write a short paragraph contrasting a past version of yourself with who you are now, using specific details rather than general statements.

4. A Pause That Carries Weight

After Claudio confirms the date "Ōtoku 2... 1085," the chapter includes a single-line paragraph: "A silence."

- What effect does this extremely short paragraph have on the pace of the scene?
- Write a short exchange of dialogue that ends with a single-word or single-line paragraph to mark a significant pause.

1. Character

1. How does Isamu's brief comment by the cherry tree ("Good different") fit with everything you know about him from earlier chapters?
2. How would you describe Hattori-sensei's manner in this supervision meeting — is it cold, warm, careful, something else? Support your answer with evidence.
3. How has Claudio's relationship with Kyoto itself (not just Casa Felice) changed since Chapter One, based on how he moves through the city in this chapter?

2. Themes

1. This chapter deliberately echoes Chapter Three (cherry blossom season) and Chapter One (arriving at the building). What is the effect of this kind of structural echo near the end of a story?
2. Even at its most revealing moment, the story avoids naming exactly what Casa Felice's residents are. Why might a writer maintain this restraint all the way to the end?

3. Personal Response and Prediction

Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — this is the second-to-last chapter, and the story hasn't told us everything yet!

1. How did it feel to read Hattori-sensei's revelation about the Chōshūki? Did it change how you think about the story so far?
2. Why do you think Hattori-sensei chose this particular moment — after a year of small observations — to finally say something so direct?
3. This is the second-to-last chapter of the book. What do you think still needs to happen in the final chapter? Share your predictions with the class.

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How does Isamu's brief comment by the cherry tree ("Good different") fit with everything you know about him from earlier chapters?
2. How would you describe Hattori-sensei's manner in this supervision meeting — is it cold, warm, careful, something else? Support your answer with evidence.
3. How has Claudio's relationship with Kyoto itself (not just Casa Felice) changed since Chapter One, based on how he moves through the city in this chapter?

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Remember: these are your own ideas. There are no right or wrong answers here — this is the second-to-last chapter, and the story hasn't told us everything yet!

1. How did it feel to read Hattori-sensei's revelation about the Chōshūki? Did it change how you think about the story so far?
2. Why do you think Hattori-sensei chose this particular moment — after a year of small observations — to finally say something so direct?
3. This is the second-to-last chapter of the book. What do you think still needs to happen in the final chapter? Share your predictions with the class.

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Sharing Significant News Carefully

Student A (a mentor or senior colleague) has important, delicate information to share with Student B. Student A leads up to it carefully, choosing words precisely, before finally stating it clearly.

Scenario B: A Year Later

Two students play old friends or colleagues meeting after exactly one year. They discuss what has changed for each of them, using specific details rather than general statements.

Scenario C: Presenting Research Findings

Student A presents an important finding from their (imaginary) research to Student B, a supervisor. Student B asks precise follow-up questions and offers careful, measured feedback.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "I have been thinking about..."
- "How far back had you found?"
- "What are you telling me?"
- "I'm telling you that... I'm also telling you that..."
- "Which you already knew."
- "That is not a small thing."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing his supervision meeting with Hattori-sensei.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a letter (100–130 words) from Claudio to himself thirteen months ago, on the day he first arrived at Casa Felice, telling his past self what the year ahead will bring — without giving away too much.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a descriptive paragraph (130–160 words) that returns to an image or place from the very beginning of a story or period in your life, showing through specific details how much has changed since then.

CULTURAL NOTES

The Chōshūki: A Real Heian-Period Diary

The Chōshūki is an actual historical diary kept by the Heian-period court noble Minamoto no Morotoki (1077–1136), covering several decades and providing valuable, detailed insight into court life, ceremony, and administrative affairs of the period. Historians value such diaries precisely because they often record everyday observations and passing details that more formal court records omit, sometimes preserving information found nowhere else.

Nikki: The Japanese Diary Tradition

Japan has an unusually long and rich tradition of nikki (diary) literature, stretching back to the Heian period, including both factual court diaries kept by officials and more literary personal diaries, some of the most celebrated of which were written by women of the Heian court. This sustained tradition of personal record-keeping is one reason Japanese historians have access to such a detailed, continuous documentary record stretching back over a thousand years.

Hanami Season: Managing the Crowds

The popularity of cherry blossom viewing in cities like Kyoto creates significant, predictable strain on public transport and popular sites each spring, prompting universities, local governments, and transport operators to issue practical advisories about expected disruption. Long-term residents typically develop informal local knowledge, quieter routes, less crowded timings, lesser-known spots, that allow them to enjoy the season while avoiding its most intense pressure points.

CHAPTER 24: ROOM 305

Level: B1+ – B2

PRE-READING

1. Warm-Up Discussion

Before you read, discuss these questions with a partner.

1. Have you ever been invited to meet an important family member of a close friend for the first time? How did you feel beforehand?
2. Do you have an elderly relative or family friend who has a particular authority or presence in your family? Describe them.
3. What does a really good, calm morning routine look like for you?

2. Reaching the End of a Long Story

This is the final chapter of Casa Felice. Claudio has now lived in the building for over a year.

1. When a long story is coming to an end, what kind of ending do you find most satisfying — one that explains everything, or one that leaves some things open?
2. Thinking back over the story so far, what is one small detail from an earlier chapter that you'd like to see come back in the final chapter?
3. What do you hope happens to Claudio by the end of the story?

3. Opening Lines

Read the opening lines of the chapter below, then answer the questions.

"It was Aki who suggested it, on an evening in late May when the air had the quality of a Kyoto spring tipping into summer, the particular threshold between one season and the next that lasted perhaps two weeks and was worth paying attention to."

1. What mood does this careful description of a seasonal threshold create at the start of the final chapter?
2. Aki says simply "Come and meet my aunt." What do you predict this visit might involve, based on everything you know so far?
3. Based on the title "305," what kind of chapter do you expect this to be?

GLOSSARY

Key vocabulary from this chapter, in alphabetical order.

adjacent (*adjective*)

next to, or very close to, something; here, close to a feeling without quite being it.

deflate (*verb*)

here: to make someone suddenly feel less important or confident, often gently or humorously.

domain (*noun*)

an area over which someone has control, responsibility, or ownership.

fishmonger (*noun*)

a person or shop that sells fish.

kitsune (*noun (Japanese)*)

a fox spirit in Japanese folklore, often depicted as intelligent, magical, and capable of taking human form.

nine-tailed fox (*noun (phrase)*)

a particularly powerful and ancient type of fox spirit in East Asian folklore, said to grow additional tails as it ages and gains wisdom.

recalibrate (*verb*)

to adjust one's thinking or understanding, especially after new information.

regard (*verb*)

here: to look at steadily and thoughtfully.

senbei (*noun (Japanese)*)

Japanese rice crackers, often savoury, commonly served with tea.

shogi (*noun (Japanese)*)

a traditional Japanese strategy board game, similar in some ways to chess.

tanuki (*noun (Japanese)*)

a raccoon dog, a real animal native to Japan, which also appears in folklore as a shape-shifting, mischievous spirit.

threshold (*noun*)

here: a point of transition between one state or period and another.

unrestrained (*adjective*)

not held back or controlled; free and open.

COMPREHENSION

1. True, False, or Not Mentioned

Read each statement. Write T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned) in the space provided.

Statement	T / F / NM
1. Aki invited Claudio to meet her aunt on an evening in late May.	
2. Claudio had already been inside an apartment on the third floor before this chapter.	
3. Shirotama appeared to Claudio in human form for the whole visit.	
4. Ayame was playing shogi with Shirotama when Claudio arrived.	
5. Aki already knew for certain that Claudio was human before this evening.	
6. Shirotama said she had been certain Claudio was human since Christmas.	
7. The next morning, Claudio helped Bunta open his market stall.	
8. At the end of the chapter, Kuro speaks to Claudio for the first time.	

2. Short Answer Questions

Answer in your own words, using full sentences.

1. How does Aki invite Claudio to meet her aunt, and how does he respond?
2. Describe Shirotama's appearance and manner when Claudio first sees her in 305.
3. What does Aki realise during the visit, and how does she react to it?
4. How does Shirotama say she figured out that Claudio was human?
5. Describe Claudio's early morning walk the next day: who does he meet, and what happens with Kuro at the end?

3. Reading Between the Lines

These questions ask you to think beyond what is directly stated in the text. There is no single correct answer — focus on how the writing makes you feel as a reader.

1. When Claudio asks "What else would I be?", the narrator says the question "arrived completely naturally" because it had been "sitting in the place where he kept things for fourteen months." What does this suggest about how Claudio has been living with unresolved questions all along?
2. Bunta says at the very end, "Still don't know what you are, by the way... We'll figure it out," even though the reader now understands the situation clearly. What effect does this create, and what does it suggest about Bunta specifically?
3. The final scene ends with the line "Nothing had changed. Everything was exactly what it was." Why might the author choose to end the whole book on this particular idea?

LANGUAGE FOCUS

1. Calm Language for an Extraordinary Moment

The writer describes something extraordinary in completely calm, matter-of-fact language: "Shirotama was on the floor near the low table, in her fox form. He understood this immediately and completely."

- What effect does this calm tone have on how you experience this reveal, compared to a more dramatic or shocked description?
- Rewrite this moment in a more dramatic, shocked style, then discuss which version you find more effective and why.

2. Comic Deflation

At a significant emotional moment, Shirotama undercuts the tension with dry humour: "Don't stand there like a dead fish. Get the senbei."

- Find one more example in the chapter of a serious or significant moment being undercut with humour.
- Write a short exchange in which a character deflates a tense or emotional moment with a dry, practical comment.

3. Structural Echoes and Callbacks

This final chapter revisits several settings and characters from earlier in the book: the market with Bunta, the river with Isamu, the courtyard with Kuro.

- Choose one of these callback scenes and compare it to an earlier chapter it echoes. What has changed, and what has stayed the same?
- Write a short final scene for a story of your own that revisits a location or character from its beginning.

4. Minimal Dialogue, Maximum Weight

The chapter ends major exchanges with very short dialogue: "Good." "That was all. It was enough. It was exactly enough."

- Why might such short dialogue carry more emotional weight here than a longer, more explicit exchange would?
- Write a short closing exchange (2–3 lines) for a scene of your own, using minimal dialogue to suggest a deep, unstated understanding between two characters.

1. Character

1. How would you describe Shirotama, based on her first appearance? Consider her manner, her humour, and how she treats both Aki and Claudio.
2. This is the first time we see Aki genuinely surprised. What does her reaction reveal about her character that we hadn't seen before?
3. Bunta ends the book still joking that he doesn't know what Claudio is. What does this final touch suggest about Bunta's role in the story as a whole?

2. Themes

1. The final line of the book is "Nothing had changed. Everything was exactly what it was." How does this idea connect to the story's exploration of home and belonging across all twenty-four chapters?
2. Throughout the book, characters have used careful, indirect language to avoid naming what Casa Felice's residents are. Even in this final chapter, terms like kitsune and tanuki are used casually rather than explained in detail. Why might the author trust the reader to have arrived at this understanding gradually, rather than explaining everything at the end?

3. Personal Response and Reflecting on the Whole Story

This is the final chapter. These questions look back across the whole book, not just this chapter.

1. How did it feel to finally see the full reveal in this chapter, after so many chapters of careful hints? Did the story earn this moment, in your view?
2. Looking back over the whole year of the story, which small detail or moment from an earlier chapter do you now understand differently?
3. If you could ask Claudio one question about his year at Casa Felice, what would it be?

DISCUSSION

1. Character

1. How would you describe Shirotama, based on her first appearance? Consider her manner, her humour, and how she treats both Aki and Claudio.
2. This is the first time we see Aki genuinely surprised. What does her reaction reveal about her character that we hadn't seen before?
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1. How did it feel to finally see the full reveal in this chapter, after so many chapters of careful hints? Did the story earn this moment, in your view?
2. Looking back over the whole year of the story, which small detail or moment from an earlier chapter do you now understand differently?
3. If you could ask Claudio one question about his year at Casa Felice, what would it be?

ROLE PLAY

Choose one of the following scenarios to act out in pairs or small groups.

Scenario A: Meeting an Important Relative

Student A brings Student B to meet an important elderly relative (Student C, or played by Student A). The relative is warm but has a sharp, dry sense of humour, gently teasing the visitor.

Scenario B: A Calm Reaction to Big News

Student A shares something genuinely surprising with Student B.

Student B reacts with complete calm, explaining that they had already worked it out or accepted it some time ago.

Scenario C: A Quiet Morning Routine

Student A describes their ideal quiet morning routine to Student B, including small, specific rituals. Student B asks questions about why these small details matter so much.

Useful Language

Useful phrases for these role plays:

- "Come and meet my..."
- "So this is the [person] everyone has been talking about."
- "Of course. What else would I be?"
- "Don't stand there like a dead fish." (a humorous, deflating instruction)
- "You look different." / "Different how?" / "I don't know. More... something?"
- "That was all. It was enough."

WRITING TASKS

Task 1 (B1+)

Write a short diary entry (80–100 words) from Claudio's point of view, describing meeting Shirotama for the first time.

Task 2 (B1+ – B2)

Write a short scene (100–130 words) from Aki's point of view, describing the moment she realises Claudio is human, and how she feels about it.

Task 3 (B2)

Write a reflective paragraph (130–160 words) as Claudio, one year after the events of Chapter One, looking back on everything that has changed since he first stood outside Casa Felice.

CULTURAL NOTES

Kitsune: Fox Spirits in Japanese Folklore

Kitsune (foxes) hold a significant place in Japanese folklore, often portrayed as highly intelligent, long-lived spirits capable of shapeshifting, frequently taking human form. The most powerful kitsune are said to grow additional tails as they age and gain wisdom and power, with the legendary nine-tailed fox representing the pinnacle of this development. Kitsune are also closely associated with Inari, the Shinto deity of rice, fertility, and prosperity, and fox statues are a common sight at Inari shrines across Japan.

Tanuki: The Shape-Shifting Raccoon Dog

The tanuki is both a real animal, the Japanese raccoon dog, and a well-known figure in Japanese folklore, where it is portrayed as a jovial, mischievous shapeshifter, often depicted with an oversized belly and a fondness for playful trickery. Statues of tanuki, often shown in a straw hat holding a sake bottle, are commonly placed outside shops and restaurants in Japan as a symbol of good fortune and prosperity.

Shogi: Japanese Chess

Shogi is a traditional two-player strategy board game in Japan, sharing a common ancestor with Western chess but differing in several key ways, including its board size and the unique rule that captured pieces can be returned to the board under the capturing player's control. Shogi remains widely played in Japan today, with professional players holding significant public status, and matches sometimes lasting many hours given the game's strategic depth.