

Missing home

Teaching resources

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MISSING HOME

Chapter 1 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers — just think, or talk briefly with a partner.

- The title of the novel is Missing Home. What do you think this title means? Can you think of more than one meaning for the word "missing"?
- The story is about a fifteen-year-old boy who has grown up in Japan but is now moving to Italy, where he was born. What do you think will be the hardest part of this change for him?
- Imagine you had to move to a country you knew but had never really lived in. You speak the language, but you have never been to school there. What would you be most worried about?

2. Glossary — Chapter 1

apologetically (adv.)	in a way that shows you are sorry. <i>"Keita looked at it apologetically."</i>
cram school (n.)	a private school where students study intensively, often to prepare for exams. Common in Japan and other parts of Asia. <i>"Ryu can't come — he has cram school."</i>
generous (adj.)	here used to describe the feeling of warm air: open, giving, comfortable. <i>"The air felt generous."</i>
genkan (n., Japanese)	the entrance area of a Japanese home where shoes are removed before stepping inside. <i>"His father's shoes were in the genkan."</i>
habit (n.)	something you do regularly, often without thinking about it. <i>"A habit she had when she was being careful."</i>
lend / lent (v.)	to give something to someone for a short time, expecting it back. Past tense: lent. <i>"The manga Alessandro had lent him."</i>
manga (n., Japanese)	Japanese comic books or graphic novels, read from right to left. <i>"Keita was holding out a manga."</i>
onigiri (n., Japanese)	Japanese rice balls, usually triangular and wrapped in seaweed. A common convenience store snack.
pace (n.)	the speed at which something happens or moves. <i>"Things happened at the right pace."</i>
remote (work) (adj.)	done from home or another location, not from an office. <i>"The work was remote."</i>
ritual (n.)	something done regularly, often as a tradition or habit, that has a special meaning. <i>"The convenience store was a ritual that nobody had ever officially agreed to."</i>
senbei (n., Japanese)	Japanese rice crackers, usually savoury. A traditional everyday snack.
syllable (n.)	a unit of sound in a word. "Alessandro" has five syllables: A-les-san-dro. <i>"All five syllables."</i>
sympathise (v.)	to understand and share someone else's feelings. <i>"They sympathised."</i>
tadaima (phrase, Japanese)	said when returning home, meaning "I'm back" or "I'm home." The reply is okaeri, "welcome back."
timing (n.)	the moment when something happens; whether it happens at the right moment or not. <i>"It was good timing, in fact."</i>
unusual (adj.)	not normal; different from what usually happens. <i>"His father was sitting without his laptop, which was unusual."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Students can answer individually in writing, then compare with a partner. Encourage them to correct the false statements in their own words.*

1. Alessandro lent his manga to Keita, who returned it with a bent corner. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro walks home the short way because he is in a hurry. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro's father is at home earlier than usual when Alessandro arrives. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro knew nothing about the plan to move to Italy before this conversation. TRUE / FALSE
5. The family will move to Italy in September. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Short-answer questions. Remind students that full sentences are good practice. Accept reasonable paraphrases.*

1. Where does the story begin? Name the city and the country.
2. What do Alessandro and his friends do after school?
3. Why does Alessandro walk home the long way?
4. What language does Marcello use to start the serious conversation, and why is this significant?
5. How does Alessandro feel when he says "Okay"? Use evidence from the text.

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions draw attention to how the author uses small details and indirect language. Good for class discussion.*

1. Find the sentence that tells us Alessandro has been breathing the school's smell for a long time without noticing it. What does this tell us about how settled he is in Japan?
2. The chapter ends with Alessandro saying "Okay" twice. Why do you think he repeats it? What is he really saying?
3. The author writes: "Nothing had changed yet." Why does the word "yet" matter here?

4. Language Focus

A. Adverbs of Manner and Degree

 *Teacher's note: This chapter uses adverbs with precision. The exercises below help students notice how adverbs modify meaning, then practise using them.*

Look at these sentences from the chapter. What does each highlighted phrase tell us?

1. "Alessandro stepped aside **without looking**." — What does this tell us about Alessandro?
2. "His father **was still talking**." — What is the effect of the word "still" here?
3. "'Probably means no.' / 'Probably means **probably**.'" — What does this exchange tell us about the friendship?

Now complete these sentences using the adverbs in the box.

[quietly / immediately / usually / probably / carefully]

1. He _____ had his laptop open, so Alessandro noticed something was different.
2. She folded her hands on the table — a habit she had when she was being _____.
(note: "carefully" is an adverb and does not fit after "being" — see teacher's note)
3. He _____ put his phone away and pushed open the front gate.
4. Takuya _____ threw the wrapper at him.

 *Teacher's note: Question 2: "carefully" is an adverb and does not fit after "being" — a good opportunity to discuss adjectives vs. adverbs (she was being careful vs. she acted carefully). Worth a brief class clarification.*

B. Past Simple vs. Past Continuous

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is mostly in the past simple, but uses the past continuous at key emotional moments. Draw students' attention to the contrast.*

Look at these two sentences:

- A. "His father **was sitting** at the table with a cup of coffee, not doing anything."
- B. "His father **was still talking**."

The past continuous (-ing) describes an action that is ongoing or in the background. The past simple describes a completed action.

Choose the correct form to complete each sentence:

1. When Alessandro arrived home, his mother _____ (cook) something complicated.
2. He _____ (change) out of his school uniform and came downstairs.
3. Outside, a bicycle bell _____ (ring) twice.
4. The two women _____ (talk) outside the gate when he walked past.

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Warm-up discussion, pairs or small groups. No right answers — encourage students to speak in English and support each other.*

- Alessandro has known about the move to Italy his whole life. Does knowing something difficult is coming make it easier or harder when it actually happens? Have you ever waited for something difficult?
- Alessandro says "Okay" when his parents give him the news. Do you think he is really okay? What do you think he is feeling?
- The four friends go to the convenience store without ever officially deciding to. Do you have any rituals like this with your friends — things that "just happen" without anyone deciding?
- Alessandro thinks about the man with the dog and the two women at the gate after his parents tell him the news. Why do you think he imagines what they are doing now?

B. Role Play

 *Teacher's note: Students work in pairs. Give them a few minutes to prepare before acting out the scene. Remind them: all dialogue in the novel is in English, even when the characters would realistically be speaking Italian or Japanese.*

Imagine the evening after this conversation. Alessandro messages his friend Yui to say he cannot come to the study group.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You want to tell Yui the news, but you are not sure how.

Student B: You are Yui. You do not know yet. You are curious why he cannot come.

Act out the conversation. You do not have to reach a resolution — it is fine to end the scene before Alessandro says everything.

C. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: This section invites students to predict the story. Do not confirm or deny anything — these are the students' own ideas.*

Think about what might happen next. Discuss with a partner:

- Alessandro is moving from Japan to Italy. What problems do you think he might have? What might be easier than he expects?
- He has a friend called Yui. Do you think they will stay in contact? What do you think their friendship is like?
- His parents seem to have planned this for a long time. Do you think Alessandro is angry with them? Will he be?

6. Writing Task

Alessandro's Diary

 *Teacher's note: A short, personal writing task. Remind students that diary entries are informal and use the first person (I). They should focus on feelings, not just facts. Suggested length: 80–120 words. Can be set for homework or done in class.*

It is the evening of Chapter 1. Alessandro is in his room. He decides to write in his diary.

Write his diary entry. Include:

- How he heard the news and how he felt
- One thing he will miss about his life in Japan
- One thing he thinks (or hopes) might be good about Italy
- A sentence about what he said to his parents — and whether that was the whole truth

 *Teacher's note: For stronger students: encourage them to write in Alessandro's voice — careful, observant, not dramatic. Weaker students can use the bullet points as a framework sentence by sentence.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Japanese Convenience Store (Konbini)

In Japan, convenience stores are not just shops. They are a central part of daily life. You can find freshly made onigiri, hot food, stationery, pay bills, print documents, and buy event tickets — all at a 24-hour store on almost every corner. The most well-known chains are 7-Eleven, FamilyMart, and Lawson. Going to the konbini after school is a common social ritual for Japanese teenagers, and the food is genuinely good by international standards. Alessandro and his friends have this routine without having officially decided it — which is typical of how these small habits form in Japanese school life.

Senbei

Senbei are Japanese rice crackers, usually savoury. They come in many varieties — soy sauce, seaweed, sesame, or coated in sugar. They are a traditional Japanese snack with a long history, popular with all ages. Alessandro buys a small bag at the convenience store — a small, ordinary detail that places him firmly in his Japanese daily life.

Cram School (Juku)

Juku are private after-school tutoring centres, often called "cram schools" in English. Many students attend juku several evenings a week to prepare for high school or university entrance exams, which are highly competitive. Ryu cannot join his friends at the convenience store because his mother has enrolled him in juku — a detail many Japanese readers will immediately recognise as the start of the exam-preparation season.

Tadaima — Coming Home

Tadaima is the Japanese word said when returning home, meaning roughly "I'm back" or "I'm home." The standard response from inside is *okaeri*, meaning "welcome back." This exchange is a daily ritual in Japanese households. Alessandro says it automatically, like every other day — a small detail that shows how deeply Japanese daily life has become his own.

The Genkan

In Japanese homes, the *genkan* is the entrance area where shoes are removed before stepping up into the main house. Shoes are left facing the door; indoor slippers are worn inside. Alessandro notices his father's shoes in the genkan and immediately knows his father is home early — the shoes are a visible, reliable signal.

The Italian Family House

The chapter mentions the family house in Rufina, a small town in Tuscany. It has been sitting empty since Alessandro was four years old — the family left when they moved to Japan but never sold it. This is not unusual in Italy, where family property is often kept across generations, even when not actively used. The house represents both continuity (the family's Italian roots) and strangeness (Alessandro does not really remember it).

MISSING HOME

Chapter 2 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro is moving from Japan to Italy, a country he has visited every May but never actually lived in. What is the difference between visiting a place and living in it?
- He will be starting a new school in Italy, where he has not lived since he was four. What do you think will be the hardest part of the first day?
- Alessandro speaks Italian — his father made sure of it — but he has never gone to school in Italy. What is the difference between speaking a language and using it every day in a new environment?

2. Glossary — Chapter 2

assessment (n.)	a test or evaluation of someone's knowledge or skills. <i>"The school assessment took place the following week."</i>
bloom (v./n.)	when a flower opens. Also used as a noun: the bloom of a tree. <i>"He had never seen it in bloom."</i>
bureaucratic (adj.)	relating to the official rules and processes of an organisation or government, often felt as slow and complicated. <i>"The Italian bureaucratic system."</i>
casserole (n.)	a dish of meat or vegetables cooked slowly in liquid in the oven, also the name of the deep dish used. <i>"She came carrying a casserole dish covered in foil."</i>
competence (n.)	the ability to do something well. <i>"The resigned competence of a man who had done this before."</i>
courtyard (n.)	an enclosed outdoor area surrounded by walls or buildings. <i>"A room with a large window overlooking a courtyard."</i>
eloquent (adj.)	expressed clearly and effectively, using language well. <i>"It was not very eloquent, but Takuya would understand."</i>
foil (n.)	thin, shiny metal sheet used to wrap food. <i>"A casserole dish covered in foil."</i>
hanami (n., Japanese)	the Japanese tradition of viewing cherry blossoms in spring, usually by picnicking under the trees with friends or family.
indifference (n.)	a lack of interest or concern. <i>"The particular indifference of cats who have decided you are not interesting."</i>
liceo scientifico (n., Italian)	a type of Italian academic high school with a strong focus on mathematics, sciences, and humanities.
permesso di soggiorno (n., Italian)	the official permit of residency required for non-EU citizens living in Italy.
register (language register) (n.)	the level of formality in language. Formal register is used in official situations; informal register is used with friends. Alessandro's Italian is more formal than he would like.
resigned (adj.)	accepting something difficult without complaint. <i>"The resigned competence of a man who had done this before."</i>
Risorgimento (n., Italian)	the 19th-century movement that led to the unification of Italy as a single nation, completed in 1871. An important topic in Italian history lessons.
sakura (n., Japanese)	cherry blossom; also used to refer to the cherry tree itself. In Japan, the blooming of the sakura is a major annual event.
somei yoshino (n., Japanese)	the most common variety of Japanese cherry tree, producing white to pale pink flowers. The tree Marcello planted in the Rufina garden.
systematic (adj.)	done according to a plan, in an organised and thorough way. <i>"She had been systematic and efficient about everything."</i>
texture (of history) (n.)	here used figuratively: the particular feel or quality of something, beyond its surface facts.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Ask students to correct the false statements. This is also a good moment to practise the past simple — they will need it to rewrite the false ones.*

1. The family arrived in Rufina in spring so Alessandro could see the sakura bloom. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro has never seen the cherry tree in bloom in person. TRUE / FALSE
3. Marcello began working at his new job as soon as the family arrived. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro's grandmother brought food when she visited. TRUE / FALSE
5. The placement examiner told Alessandro he had no gaps in his knowledge. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends on the evening before Alessandro's first day at school. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Encourage full sentences. Accept reasonable paraphrases — precision of meaning matters more than identical wording.*

1. Why does Alessandro know the garden well, but not in every detail?
2. Why has Alessandro never seen the sakura bloom?
3. What does his mother do with the permesso di soggiorno folder? What does this tell us about her?
4. Why does Alessandro say the reply he sent to Keita's message felt "slightly late, slightly off"?
5. What does Alessandro plan to do in spring? Why is it significant?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions focus on how the author uses small details and deliberate word choices. Suitable for class discussion or pair work.*

1. The chapter describes Alessandro's grandmother as "smaller than he remembered and exactly the same as he expected." How can both things be true at the same time?
2. Alessandro says his Italian during the assessment was "correct and slightly formal in a way he couldn't fully control." What does this tell us about how he learned Italian?
3. Find the sentence that describes how Alessandro reads the situation with the permesso folder without anyone explaining it to him. What does this tell us about him?

4. Language Focus

A. Knowing a Place Without Living There

 *Teacher's note: This exercise focuses on the distinction between simple and continuous aspects, and between habitual and specific experience. The chapter's opening paragraph is a rich model.*

The chapter opens: "He *had been coming back* to this house every May since he could remember, and in that time he *had come to know* the garden the way you know a place you visit but do not live in."

This sentence uses two different past forms:

had been coming back — repeated action over a long period (past perfect continuous)

had come to know — result of that repeated action (past perfect simple)

Complete the sentences using the correct past perfect form of the verb in brackets:

1. By September, Alessandro _____ (live) in Japan for eleven years.
2. He _____ (see) the sakura only in photographs — never in person.
3. His mother _____ (organise) almost all the boxes before she stopped.
4. The group chat _____ (move) on by the time Alessandro replied.

B. Describing Character Through Action

 *Teacher's note: This exercise draws attention to how the author shows personality through behaviour rather than telling us directly. A useful technique for students' own writing.*

In this chapter, we learn things about characters without the author telling us directly. Match each action (1–4) to what it shows about the character (A–D).

Actions:

1. Haruko sets the permesso folder in front of Marcello without a word.
2. Marcello starts the paperwork "with the resigned competence of a man who had done this before."
3. Nana Susan has sent a photograph of the sakura every spring without fail.
4. Alessandro goes outside to look at the garden again rather than staying while his father does the paperwork.

What it shows:

- A. She is organised and efficient. She trusts him to handle it.
- B. He knows it is not his task. He gives himself space without making it a drama.
- C. He is reliable and quietly dedicated, understanding what the family needs across distance.
- D. He has done difficult administrative things before and accepts them without complaint.

C. Vocabulary in Context: Precise Adjectives

 *Teacher's note: The chapter uses adjectives carefully. These exercises help students notice and practise precise word choice.*

Choose the best word to complete each sentence:

1. The teacher noticed Alessandro's history gap _____.
 - a. nastily b. curiously c. not unkindly d. happily
2. The last few boxes remained in the corner. His mother had been _____ and efficient about everything except those.
 - a. quick b. systematic c. careless d. excited
3. After his grandmother left, the house felt _____ somehow.
 - a. louder b. bigger c. warmer d. quieter
4. Alessandro's Italian was correct but _____ in a way he couldn't fully control.
 - a. formal b. slow c. wrong d. quiet

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. These questions work well as a short warm-up before moving to the exercises, or as a wind-down after.*

- Alessandro knows this garden well, but has never actually lived in it. Can you think of a place you know well in this way — a place you visit but don't live in? How is that different from knowing your own home?
- His grandmother's visit makes the house feel warmer "somehow." Alessandro is not sure why. What do you think made the difference?
- Alessandro sends a thumbs up and three laughing faces in reply to Takuya's photo. Do you think that is the right response? What would you have sent?
- Haruko has one opinion about Italian bureaucracy. What do you think makes bureaucratic paperwork frustrating for people in a new country?

B. Role Play: The Assessment

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. Give students two minutes to read the scenario, then act it out for two to three minutes. Remind them: in this novel, all conversations are in English regardless of what language the characters are actually speaking.*

Alessandro is in his placement assessment. The teacher has just finished asking him history questions.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You know a lot, but your knowledge has gaps in Italian history specifically. Try to explain where you studied and what you covered.

Student B: You are the teacher. You are curious, not critical. Ask follow-up questions: What did you study? Where did you go to school?

After the role play: what was the hardest question to answer? What would you find difficult about explaining your education in another language?

C. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

Tomorrow is Alessandro's first day at school. Discuss with a partner:

- What do you think will be the most difficult moment of his first day?
- He knows one person from previous May visits. Do you think that will make things easier or harder?
- The chapter ends with him thinking about the sakura and Yui. What do you think their friendship is like?

6. Writing Task

A Message to Yui

 *Teacher's note: A short, guided writing task focusing on informal register and expressing mixed feelings. Suggested length: 80–120 words. Works well as homework after reading the chapter, or in class.*

In the chapter, Alessandro sees that a message from Yui has not arrived yet. She messages at specific times, in complete sentences.

It is later that evening. Yui has now sent a message asking: "How is Italy? Is the house how you remembered?"

Write Alessandro's reply. Include:

- Something true about the house or garden
- Something that surprised him (it can be big or small)
- One thing he is not sure how to explain
- Something about tomorrow (his first day) — but do not make it dramatic

 *Teacher's note: Remind students that Alessandro writes in complete sentences, like Yui does. He is not dramatic about his feelings, but he is honest. Weaker students can use the four bullet points as four short sentences. Stronger students should try to make the message sound like one continuous, natural piece of writing.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Permesso di Soggiorno

The permesso di soggiorno is the official permit of residency required for non-EU citizens living in Italy. It must be applied for shortly after arrival, renewed periodically, and involves a significant amount of paperwork — typically submitted through a post office, then followed up with appointments at the local police headquarters (questura). The process is notoriously slow and complex, even by Italian bureaucratic standards. Haruko, as a Japanese citizen, requires this permit to live legally in Italy. Marcello has done this before — he handled the paperwork when they first married. His "resigned competence" is a recognisable experience for anyone who has navigated Italian officialdom.

The Somei Yoshino

The *somei yoshino* (*Prunus × yedoensis*) is the most common variety of cherry tree in Japan and the one most associated with *hanami* — the tradition of gathering under cherry blossoms in spring. It produces white to pale pink flowers, blooms for only about two weeks, and is famously sensitive to weather. Almost all the cherry trees lining Japanese parks and riversides are somei yoshino. Marcello planting one in a Tuscan garden is both an act of love and a mild act of horticultural stubbornness — this variety does grow in Italy, but it is not at home there the way it is in Japan.

The Liceo Scientifico

Italy's secondary school system divides into different types of liceo (academic high school), each with a different focus. The liceo scientifico emphasises mathematics and the sciences alongside Italian literature, history, philosophy, Latin, and a foreign language. It is one of the most demanding and prestigious tracks in the Italian school system. Alessandro has been placed in a liceo scientifico — consistent with his academic background and his parents' plans for his education.

The Italian Bar

In Italian daily life, the bar is not a pub — it is a café that also serves alcohol, open from early morning. Italians typically stand at the counter for a quick espresso rather than sitting for a long time. A bar near the weekly market or supermarket is a natural social hub, especially in small towns. For Alessandro, the bar in Pontassieve is simultaneously familiar from past May visits and newly ordinary as part of daily life in Rufina.

Hanami and the Sakura

Hanami (花見, literally "flower viewing") is the Japanese custom of enjoying the beauty of cherry blossoms, usually by gathering with friends or family under the trees to eat and drink. It takes place every spring, usually late March to early April. Weather forecasters track the sakura front — the gradual northward bloom across Japan — as major news. Alessandro has grown up with hanami. The sakura in his Tuscan garden blooms on the same schedule as the trees in Japan, but no one in Rufina makes a festival of it.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 3 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro is about to start his first day at a new school in Italy, where everyone already knows each other. What do you think will be the hardest moment of that day?
- He knows one person from the May visits. Do you think having one familiar face will make things easier, or is it more complicated than that?
- Imagine arriving at a new school where everyone already knows each other. What would you do on the first day — would you wait for people to come to you, or would you approach others?

2. Glossary — Chapter 3

alphabetical order (n. phrase)	arranged from A to Z. <i>"The class went through the names in alphabetical order."</i>
authority (n.)	here: speaking with confidence, as if you know what you are talking about. <i>"Lorenzo talked about the teachers with the authority of someone in his second year."</i>
compact (adj.)	small but solid and well-organised in movement. <i>"She was compact and direct in her movements."</i>
concentration (n.)	the act of focusing your full attention on something. <i>"Looking at his phone with the concentration of a person who has not yet had enough sleep."</i>
cornetto (n., Italian)	an Italian breakfast pastry, similar to a croissant but softer and sweeter. Often filled with cream, jam, or chocolate.
ease (n.)	the quality of doing something naturally and without effort. <i>"He moved with the ease of someone who knew exactly where he was going."</i>
file away (to file something away) (phrasal v.)	to store a piece of information in your mind for later use. <i>"Alessandro filed it away."</i>
in particular (adv. phrase)	specifically; especially. <i>"Thought about nothing in particular."</i>
liceo (n., Italian)	a type of Italian academic secondary school. The Castelnuovo is a liceo scientifico, focused on maths and sciences.
neutral (adj.)	not expressing strong feelings; in the middle, not taking sides. <i>"Polite. Slightly tired. Completely neutral."</i>
recalibrate (v.)	to adjust your understanding of something after receiving new information. <i>"She was recalibrating — revising whatever category she had initially placed him in."</i>
register (the class register) (n.)	the official list of students in a class, called out at the start of a lesson.
rehearsal (n.)	a practice run; doing something in advance to prepare. <i>"He had done the journey the previous day as a rehearsal."</i>
San-kun (name, Japanese)	Alessandro's nickname among his Japanese friends. San comes from the first syllable of Alessandro. Kun is an informal suffix used for boys.
section (school section) (n.)	a subgroup of students within a year. In Italian schools, each class has a letter: 2A, 2B, etc. All students in 2B stay together all day.
sympathy (n.)	understanding and care for someone else's situation. <i>"Something between sympathy and amusement."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Ask students to correct false statements. A good test of close reading — several hinge on precise details.*

1. Alessandro had never taken the train from Rufina to Campo di Marte before his first day.
TRUE / FALSE
2. Lorenzo and Alessandro were in different school sections. TRUE / FALSE
3. When the teacher read Alessandro's name from the register, the class laughed loudly. TRUE / FALSE
4. Lorenzo introduced Wei to Alessandro in the corridor after the lesson. TRUE / FALSE
5. Wei immediately accepted Lorenzo's introduction without reacting. TRUE / FALSE
6. Alessandro noticed a girl with a decorated backpack during the lesson. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Encourage full sentences. For question 5, push students to find the actual words in the text — this trains close reading.*

1. Why did Alessandro do a practice run of the journey the day before school?
2. How did Lorenzo behave on the train? Use two details from the text.
3. What does Alessandro notice about the classroom when he and Lorenzo arrive?
4. How does Lorenzo introduce Wei — and why does Wei object?
5. What does Alessandro mean when he says "I know I don't look it"?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions work well as a short class discussion. Question 3 is the most subtle — it may need a little guidance for weaker groups.*

1. The text says the class's reaction to Alessandro's name was "not quite laughter, not quite not laughter." What does this double negative tell us about the reaction?
2. Alessandro "filed away" things twice in this chapter. What does this phrase tell us about him?
3. At the end of the chapter, Alessandro says "It had not been a disaster. He took it as a good start." Why does the author use such restrained language here?

4. Language Focus

A. Reported Speech

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 3 contains clear, simple reported speech alongside direct speech. This contrast makes it a good moment to introduce or revise the basics of reported speech at B1 level.*

Look at these two ways of reporting what Lorenzo said:

Direct speech: *"The history teacher is strict," Lorenzo said.*

Reported speech: *Lorenzo said that the history teacher was strict.*

Notice: the verb tense shifts back in time (is → was). This is called backshift.

Now rewrite these sentences from the chapter as reported speech:

1. "The maths teacher is fine. A bit boring, but fine." (Lorenzo)
2. "You're going to the Castelnuevo?" (Lorenzo to Alessandro)
3. "Cut it out. You're not funny." (Wei to Lorenzo)
4. "Yeah, I am. Well — half Japanese. I know I don't look it." (Alessandro)

 *Teacher's note: For question 4, accept varied but accurate versions. The dash and "well" are informal hedges — students may drop them, which is fine. The goal is tense backshift and the if/that clause.*

B. The Language of First Impressions

 *Teacher's note: This exercise focuses on the vocabulary of observation and assessment. It also prepares students for the speaking task.*

The chapter describes characters through the way they move, look, and behave. Match each description (1–5) to the character it refers to (A–E), then answer the follow-up question.

Descriptions:

1. "Looking at his phone with the concentration of a person who has not yet had enough sleep."
2. "Compact and direct in her movements."
3. "Polite. Slightly tired. Completely neutral."
4. "The ease of someone who knew exactly where he was going."
5. "The specific patience of someone choosing not to say what they were thinking."

Characters:

- A. Alessandro (his expression during the register)
- B. Wei (her reaction to Lorenzo's introduction)
- C. Lorenzo (on the train platform)
- D. Wei (entering the corridor)
- E. Lorenzo (entering the classroom)

Follow-up: which description tells you the most about a character? Why?

 *Teacher's note: Push students to explain their choice in English. Description 5 (Wei's patience) is particularly rich — it implies she has been in this situation before and has learned to manage it.*

C. Connecting Words: Adding and Contrasting

 *Teacher's note: A short, focused exercise on connectors. Chapter 3 uses these naturally; this exercise makes the pattern visible.*

Choose the best connector to complete each sentence:

1. Alessandro knew the route to school. _____, he had done the journey twice before.
 - a. However b. In fact c. Although d. Despite
2. Lorenzo seemed comfortable with the quiet. Alessandro appreciated this, _____ he found silence easier than forced conversation.
 - a. so b. but c. although d. since
3. Wei told Lorenzo he was not funny. _____, he insisted he was telling the truth.
 - a. Therefore b. However c. In addition d. As a result
4. It had not been a disaster. _____, Alessandro took it as a good start.
 - a. Despite this b. However c. In fact d. Although

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Small groups or pairs. Question 3 often generates the most discussion — the "I know I don't look it" moment is one students with mixed backgrounds may recognise personally.*

- Alessandro did a practice run of the journey the day before school. Do you think this was a good idea? Would you do the same? What else might you do to prepare for a first day somewhere new?
- Lorenzo and Alessandro sit together on the train and in the classroom without discussing it or deciding it. Have you ever ended up in a friendship that started without anyone making a deliberate choice?
- When Alessandro says "I know I don't look it," Wei has a reaction — "a fraction of a second, no more." Why do you think she reacts like that? What do they have in common?
- Alessandro ends the day saying "It had not been a disaster. He took it as a good start." Is this a low expectation or a realistic one?

B. Role Play: The Register

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups of three. The teacher role is deliberately light — the interesting dynamics are between the students. Two to three minutes, then debrief as a class.*

It is the first day of school. The teacher is reading the register. Alessandro's name comes up.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You are used to this moment. You have your expression ready: polite, slightly tired, completely neutral.

Student B: You are the teacher. You are not unkind, but you are genuinely surprised by the name. React naturally.

Student C (optional): You are a classmate. You can react — a small sound, a comment, or just a look.

After the role play: what was the hardest part to play? What does it feel like to be in Alessandro's position?

C. Discussion: Names and Identity

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to the wider themes of the novel. Works well as a class discussion or in groups.*

Alessandro's full name is Alessandro Masakazu Bevilacqua Kobayashi — long, double, not fitting neatly into one box.

- What does a name tell us about a person? What does it not tell us?
- Have you ever had your name mispronounced, shortened, or reacted to in a way you didn't like? How did it feel?
- In Japan, Alessandro's friends call him San-kun. In Italy, his name fills the entire register line. Which do you think feels more like him?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- The girl with the decorated backpack looked at Alessandro and then looked away. Who do you think she is? Why did she look?
- Wei's reaction to Lorenzo's introduction suggests she has been in a similar situation herself. What do you think her story is?
- Do you think Lorenzo and Alessandro will become real friends, or just two people who happen to go to the same school?

6. Writing Task

First Impressions

 *Teacher's note: A short descriptive writing task. The goal is to practise indirect characterisation — showing character through action and detail rather than direct description. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro is good at noticing people. In Chapter 3, he observes Lorenzo, Wei, and the girl with the decorated backpack — but he does not describe them directly. Instead, the author uses small details: how they move, what they do, what expression they have.

Write a short paragraph describing a person you know, without ever saying directly what they are like. Use only:

- What they are doing when you first see them
- How they move or hold themselves
- One small detail (an object, a habit, an expression)
- The impression this gives — written as what the observer notices, not as a statement about the person

Example (do not use this in your writing):

She was looking out of the window with the particular attention of someone who is not looking at anything. Her pen was turning slowly between her fingers. He had the impression she was waiting for something, though he could not have said what.

 *Teacher's note: Encourage students to avoid adjectives like kind, shy, friendly. The exercise works best when the character emerges from detail. For weaker students: allow them to describe a character from a book or film they know well.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Italian Liceo Class System

In Italian secondary schools, students are assigned to a class section (such as 2B) and stay with those same classmates for every subject, every day, for all five years of the liceo. The teacher moves between rooms; the students stay. This creates very tight class groups. For Alessandro, joining an already-established second-year class is particularly difficult: these students have been together since September of the previous year and already have their friendships, their dynamics, their in-jokes. He is not starting at the beginning with everyone else.

Campo di Marte Station

Campo di Marte is a real railway station in Florence, in the eastern part of the city near the Artemio Franchi football stadium. It serves regional lines including the line toward Pontassieve and Rufina in the Arno valley. For students commuting from towns east of Florence, Campo di Marte is a natural arrival point. In the novel, it becomes the daily meeting point for the group — they arrive by train and walk to school together, a twelve-minute walk.

The Italian Cornetto

A *cornetto* is the Italian version of a croissant — similar in shape but typically softer, slightly sweeter, and often filled with cream, jam, or chocolate. It is the standard Italian breakfast pastry, usually eaten standing at the bar counter with a cappuccino or caffè. Lorenzo's casual mention of the bar near school that does decent cornetti is a small act of welcome, even if he does not frame it that way.

Guido Castelnuovo

The school in the novel — Liceo Scientifico Statale Guido Castelnuovo — is named after a real Italian mathematician (1865–1952), one of the most important figures in algebraic geometry. He was also one of the Italian Jewish intellectuals who refused to leave Italy during the racial laws of the fascist period, continuing to teach unofficially in private homes. The school's name honours both his scientific contribution and his moral courage. Many Italian schools are named after historical figures, and the name often carries a quiet civic message.

Names and Recalibration

The moment when someone recalibrates their understanding of you — revising the category they had placed you in — is a recurring experience for people from mixed or migrant backgrounds. Alessandro is used to this. He notices it precisely: "She was recalibrating, he could see it." When someone says they are from a country that does not match their appearance, or has a name that does not match their nationality, people often pause — briefly, visibly — before adjusting. Alessandro has learned to wait patiently while this happens. Wei's recognition of this moment is what connects them.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 4 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- After a first day at a new school, how long does it usually take to really know whether you like a new place or group of people? A week? A month? Longer?
- Alessandro noticed the girl with the decorated backpack. He noticed Wei's reaction. He filed things away. What kind of person notices things like this — and is it a useful quality or an uncomfortable one?
- Think about how friendships start. Is it usually one big moment, or lots of small ones?

2. Glossary — Chapter 4

account (to keep one's own accounts) (expression)	to make careful note of things for yourself; to be self-sufficient in your observations. <i>"She had the quality of someone who kept their own accounts."</i>
accumulate (v.)	to collect or gather things gradually over time. <i>"Things accumulated through living"</i> — not chosen deliberately, just gathered naturally.
accurate (adj.)	correct; exactly right. <i>"It felt accurate."</i>
attentive (adj.)	paying close attention. <i>"She was attentive more than average."</i>
conclude / conclusion (v./n.)	to decide something based on evidence. <i>"Building a picture before drawing any conclusions."</i>
curated (adj.)	carefully chosen and arranged to create a particular impression. A curated collection is not random — it is selected.
deliberate (adj.)	done on purpose; carefully planned. <i>"The combination was too deliberate, too complete."</i>
economical (adj.)	using as little as necessary. Here used about language: Yui uses few words, but they carry a lot.
enthusiasm / enthusiastic (n./adj.)	showing strong interest and energy. <i>"The specific, well-meaning enthusiasm of people who loved Japan from a distance."</i>
faintly (adv.)	slightly; not strongly. <i>"Two girls who found most things faintly amusing."</i>
fixed point (n. phrase)	something that stays the same, that you can rely on. <i>"Campo di Marte was a fixed point in the day."</i>
flicker (n.)	a small, brief flash of something. <i>"The small flicker of: maybe this is someone who actually knows."</i>
identity (n.)	who you are; how you see yourself and how others see you. <i>"Japan arranged as an identity."</i>
impression (n.)	a feeling or opinion formed quickly, often from limited information. <i>"A vague sense, an impression."</i>
keychains (n.)	small decorative objects attached to a key ring. Often bought as souvenirs or merchandise.
map (to map a room / a class) (v., informal)	to build a mental picture of a space or group. <i>"Alessandro had a reasonable map of 2B."</i>
plush figure (n.)	a small soft toy, usually a character from a cartoon, game, or film.
proceed carefully (expression)	to continue, but slowly and with attention. <i>"He filed it under: proceed carefully."</i>
reasonable (adj.)	good enough; fairly complete, though perhaps not perfect. <i>"A reasonable map"</i> — sufficient, but not exhaustive.
structure (n.)	the way something is organised; the pattern of relationships within a group. <i>"The class had its obvious structures."</i>
torii gate (n., Japanese)	the distinctive gate marking the entrance to a Shinto shrine. Often painted red. One of the most recognised symbols of Japan.
vague (adj.)	not clear or definite. <i>"A vague sense of something slightly off."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Ask students to correct false statements in their own words. Encourage them to quote or paraphrase the text as evidence.*

1. Alessandro builds his map of the class by asking Lorenzo questions about everyone. TRUE / FALSE
2. Wei sits at the front of the class, which makes it hard for Alessandro to see her face. TRUE / FALSE
3. Lorenzo tells Alessandro that the girl with the backpack is called Elisa. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro is annoyed by Elisa's enthusiasm for Japan. TRUE / FALSE
5. Wei, Alessandro, and Lorenzo begin walking together from the station without anyone suggesting it. TRUE / FALSE
6. Yui's message to Alessandro is long and full of questions. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 4 is the most challenging — it asks students to interpret Alessandro's thinking. Allow time for discussion.*

1. How does Alessandro describe his approach to understanding a new classroom? Why does he approach it this way?
2. What does Alessandro notice about the boy who reads during lessons? Why does he respect this?
3. What specifically makes Alessandro feel that Elisa's backpack decorations are "slightly off"?
4. Alessandro decides: "This is not a reason not to know her." What does this tell us about him?
5. By the end of the chapter, what three things have quietly begun without anyone deciding they would?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: Question 2 is good for class discussion — the difference between "Japan as an identity" and "Japan as a thing you happened to know" is worth unpacking together.*

1. Alessandro thinks about Elisa: "The items were genuine, but they were an idea of Japan." What is the difference between an idea of a place and lived experience of it?
2. Alessandro tells himself to "proceed carefully" about Elisa. He does not say "avoid her" or "be friendly." Why is "proceed carefully" the right phrase for him?
3. Yui writes: "That sounds like you." Alessandro is not entirely sure what she means, but he feels it is accurate. What do you think she means?

4. Language Focus

A. Present Perfect for Recent and Ongoing Experience

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 4 is set after the first week of school. Alessandro uses the present perfect naturally to describe what has developed — things that started in the past and are still true now.*

Look at these two sentences:

"The station had started to feel like a place." (past perfect — a feeling that developed during the past week)

"He has a reasonable map of 2B." (present — the result of a week's observation)

Choose the correct form — present perfect (have/has + past participle) or past simple — to complete these sentences:

1. By Friday, Alessandro _____ (notice) that Wei arrived from the north side of the station.
2. He _____ (see) the backpack again on the second day and looked at it more carefully.
3. Alessandro and his Japanese friends _____ (stay) in contact since September.
4. Yui _____ (not / send) a long message. She wrote only three words.
5. The station _____ (become) a meeting point without anyone deciding it.

B. Expressing Degrees of Feeling

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro is careful with language — he rarely overstates. This exercise draws attention to the vocabulary of degrees and helps students practise a more nuanced range of expression.*

Alessandro uses precise, restrained language to describe his feelings. Look at these examples:

*"He was **not annoyed, exactly**."* — not a denial, but a qualification. Something less than annoyed.

*"It was **just tiring**."* — not upsetting, not a complaint. Simply an effort.

*"He had a **vague sense** of something slightly off."* — not certainty. An impression.

Now rewrite these overstated sentences using more careful, precise language. There is no single correct answer.

1. "Alessandro hated it when people made assumptions about him."
2. "He loved the valley view from the train."
3. "He was really happy when Yui messaged him."

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct rewrite. Reward restraint and precision. Students who write in Alessandro's voice — understated, honest, not dramatic — are doing it well.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 tends to generate the most discussion — it touches on something many students will have feelings about.*

- Alessandro maps the class from the outside before drawing conclusions. Is this a smart approach or an overly cautious one? How do you usually approach a new group of people?
- Alessandro senses that Elisa's interest in Japan is "Japan arranged as an identity" rather than lived experience. Is it fair to judge someone's interest in a culture this way? When does enthusiasm become something else?
- The station walk happens three times without anyone deciding it will. Have you ever been part of a routine that formed without anyone planning it? How did you know it had become a routine?
- Yui writes only "How is it?" — three words. Alessandro writes back about the train and the seats. What is not being said in this exchange?

B. Role Play: The Train Conversation

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. This models the kind of conversation in the chapter — understated, informative, with something underneath that is not quite said. Encourage students to resist the urge to be dramatic.*

It is Thursday morning. Alessandro and Lorenzo are on the train. Lorenzo has just told Alessandro about Elisa.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You have a feeling about the backpack, but you are not sure how to explain it — or whether you should. Ask a few questions. Don't show too much.

Student B: You are Lorenzo. You are not particularly interested in the topic. You are giving information, not opinions. Keep it brief. You have your phone.

After the role play: What did you choose not to say? Was that the right choice?

C. Discussion: Enthusiasm and Authenticity

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects directly to one of the novel's central tensions. A good opportunity to practise the language of nuance: "it depends", "on the one hand", "not exactly", "it's more complicated than that".*

- Is it possible to love a culture you have never experienced in person? What are the limits of that love?
- Is there a difference between being enthusiastic about a culture and reducing it to its most recognisable parts?
- If someone from Japan knew you only through Italian food, football, and Renaissance art — would that feel like enough? What would be missing?
- Can you think of a culture or place you know mainly through films, books, or social media? How complete is that picture?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Alessandro has decided to "proceed carefully" with Elisa. Do you think they will become friends? What would need to happen for that to work?
- The station walk is forming into a daily habit. What do you think Campo di Marte will mean to the group by the end of the year?
- Yui's message is short but warm. Do you think their friendship will stay strong across the distance?

6. Writing Task

Mapping a Room

 *Teacher's note: A short observational writing task. Alessandro maps 2B in the opening of this chapter — students now do the same for a room they know. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro describes his classroom without naming feelings or making judgements. He observes: where people sit, how they move, what they do, what impression this makes.

Choose a room you know well — your classroom, your kitchen, a café, a place you visit regularly. Write a short description using Alessandro's method:

- Name the obvious structures or groups (who sits where, who arrives together)
- Pick two or three people and describe them through what they do, not what they are like
- Include one small detail that you cannot quite explain but that you notice
- End with a sentence about what the room feels like — without using the word "feel"

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: no adjectives like happy, friendly, boring, nice. Only what the observer can see. For weaker students, allow them to write about a fictional room from a book, film, or series they know. Stronger students should try to make the room recognisable from the description alone.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Torii Gate

A *torii* (鳥居) is the distinctive gate that marks the entrance to a Shinto shrine. It typically consists of two vertical posts connected by two horizontal bars, often painted vermilion red. Torii gates appear throughout Japan — at major shrines and at small neighbourhood sanctuaries alike — and are one of the most recognisable symbols of Japanese culture worldwide. They are also widely reproduced in souvenirs, accessories, and merchandise. Elisa's backpack has a torii pin: a genuine piece of Japanese cultural imagery, but part of a carefully assembled collection that signals a love of Japan.

Anime Merchandise and Fan Culture

Anime — Japanese animated series and films — has a global fanbase. Merchandise such as keychains, plush figures, pins, and stickers are collected by fans worldwide. In Japan itself, this merchandise is common, but it sits differently in its native context — it is part of an ordinary commercial landscape rather than a statement of cultural identity. Alessandro's discomfort with Elisa's backpack is not about the objects themselves. It is about the way they are arranged — too deliberately, too completely — which reads to him as Japan performed rather than Japan known.

Pokémon

Pokémon (short for Pocket Monsters) began as a video game in Japan in 1996 and became a global franchise covering games, animation, cards, and merchandise. It is one of the most successful Japanese cultural exports of all time. For Alessandro, Pokémon is simply part of the landscape he grew up in — not exotic, not a statement. For Elisa, it is one marker in her love of Japanese popular culture. The gap between these two relationships to the same thing is part of what Alessandro senses without fully articulating.

Japanese Messaging Culture

In the chapter, Yui sends Alessandro just three words: *"How is it?"* This brevity is not coldness — it is precision. Japanese communication culture, particularly in text messages between close friends, often values economy of words. Long messages can feel performative; a short, well-timed message can carry a great deal. Yui's style — economical until she has something specific to say — reflects a communicative register that Alessandro has grown up with and understands completely.

Fandom and Cultural Distance

The line between genuine appreciation of another culture and superficial enthusiasm for its most visible exports is one that many people navigate differently. Alessandro's sensitivity to this distinction comes from lived experience: he has spent his whole life in Japan and knows what it looks like from the inside. Elisa knows Japan from the outside — through anime, merchandise, and images — and her picture of it is sincere but incomplete. This is not a moral failing; it is simply a difference in access. The novel does not judge Elisa. Alessandro does not either. But he notices the gap, because he knows what is on the other side of it.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 5 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- In Chapter 4, Alessandro decided to "proceed carefully" about Elisa. What do you think that means in practice? What would careful look like?
- If someone wanted to get to know you but was nervous about approaching you directly, what do you think they might do first? Would you notice?
- Alessandro is good at observing people. But who in the novel has been observing him? What do you think they have seen?

2. Glossary — Chapter 5

alarmed (adj.)	worried or frightened by something unexpected. <i>"He was not alarmed."</i>
approximate (adj.)	close to correct but not exact. <i>"The vowels approximate"</i> — not quite right, but close.
aware (adj.)	knowing that something is there, even without actively looking. <i>"He was aware of her the way you are aware of something at the edge of your vision."</i>
borrowed (language) (adj.)	a word or phrase taken from another language and used in a different one. <i>"A word borrowed from subtitles."</i>
circling (v./adj.)	moving around something without going directly to it; approaching gradually and indirectly.
enthusiasm (n.)	strong interest and energy. <i>"The specific, well-meaning enthusiasm of people who loved Japan from a distance."</i>
ikou (exclamation, Japanese)	"let's go" or "come on". A casual, energetic expression used to suggest moving somewhere.
intonation (n.)	the rise and fall of the voice when speaking; the melody of speech. Elisa's intonation is cheerful rather than questioning.
intervene (v.)	to come between two things; to interrupt or prevent something. <i>"Something had intervened"</i> — something got in the way.
nani (question word, Japanese)	"what". Used dramatically in anime; more neutral in everyday Japanese.
positioning (n./v.)	placing yourself in a particular location, often deliberately. <i>"It started with positioning."</i>
precision (n.)	exactness; doing or saying exactly the right thing. <i>"A precision that told him she had heard it too."</i>
proximity (n.)	closeness; being physically near to someone. <i>"The increased proximity, the testing of whether an opening would appear."</i>
qualification / qualifier (n.)	a word or phrase that limits or softens a statement. "Mostly", "technically", "a bit" are all qualifiers.
reputation (n.)	what people generally think or say about something. <i>"Used in anime constantly and in actual Japanese conversation more carefully than its reputation suggested."</i>
sugoi (exclamation, Japanese)	"amazing", "incredible", "wow". Very common in anime; used more selectively in everyday Japanese.
subtitle (n.)	the written translation of dialogue that appears at the bottom of a screen. <i>"Worn smooth from use without weight"</i> — used so many times in subtitles that the word has lost its original texture.
technically (adv.)	strictly speaking; according to the rules or facts, though perhaps not in spirit. <i>"Technically within the normal range."</i>
tiring (adj.)	making you feel worn out, especially emotionally. <i>"It was just tiring."</i>
worn smooth (expression)	a metaphor for something used so many times it has lost its original texture or sharpness, like a stone smoothed by water.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is built on small, precise details — the True/False exercise trains students to read carefully rather than approximately.*

1. Elisa sits closer to Alessandro in the second week than she did in the first. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro is alarmed by Elisa's behaviour. TRUE / FALSE
3. The Japanese words Elisa uses are invented — they are not real Japanese words. TRUE / FALSE
4. Wei reacts to hearing the Japanese words by saying something to Alessandro. TRUE / FALSE
5. On Friday, Elisa follows Alessandro toward the stairs and then approaches him directly. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends with Alessandro expecting Elisa to try again the following week. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Questions 3 and 4 require students to interpret rather than retrieve — worth spending time on in class discussion.*

1. Alessandro says Elisa has been "positioning" herself during the week. What does he mean? Give two specific examples from the chapter.
2. What does Alessandro think of the Japanese words Elisa uses? Is his objection that the words are wrong?
3. When Wei glances at Alessandro after hearing the Japanese words, what is communicated between them? How?
4. Lorenzo says Elisa thinks she is "being friendly." Does Alessandro accept this? How do we know?
5. What happens on Friday at the stairs? Why do you think Elisa turns away?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is built on precision and understatement. These questions reward close reading.*

1. The narrator says the Japanese words Elisa uses were "worn smooth from use without weight." What does this image mean?
2. Alessandro says "I don't mind," and the narrator adds: "Which was mostly true." Why does the word "mostly" matter here?
3. The chapter ends: "On Monday, probably. She would try again." What does this tell us about how Alessandro sees the situation?

4. Language Focus

A. Adverbials of Manner: How Actions Are Done

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 5 uses adverbials precisely to show how characters move, speak, and behave. This exercise makes the pattern visible and gives students controlled practice.*

The chapter describes actions carefully — not just what happens, but how. Look at these examples:

*"He waited, **without particular feeling**, for the next stage."*

*"She glanced at him **once, briefly**, with a precision that told him she had heard it too."*

*"He did **not slow down**. Neither did he speed up."*

Complete these sentences by choosing the best adverbial from the box:

[carefully / without looking / mostly / briefly / naturally]

1. Alessandro put his jacket on and became aware of Elisa, _____, at the edge of his vision.
2. He came to stand beside Lorenzo _____, the way he had been doing for two weeks.
3. Wei glanced at him _____ and looked back at her notes.
4. Alessandro built his map of the class _____, from the outside.
5. "I don't mind," he said. Which was _____ true.

B. Expressing Uncertainty and Qualification

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro rarely states things absolutely. This exercise focuses on the language of hedging and qualification — essential for nuanced communication at B1 level and above.*

Alessandro uses careful language when he is not certain, or when the full truth is complicated:

- "which was technically within the normal range of things that happened"
- "which was also technically unremarkable"
- "which meant something" (understated — he does not say what)
- "mostly true"

Rewrite these sentences to add a qualifier or softener. Use words from the box or your own.

[*technically / mostly / a bit / probably / not exactly / in a way*]

1. "Alessandro was annoyed."
2. "Elisa knew what she was doing was strange."
3. "The moment was right for her to approach him."

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any rewrite that softens or qualifies the statement naturally. A good opportunity to discuss how hedging language works differently across Italian, Japanese, and English.*

C. Sugoi and Nani — Japanese Words in Context

 *Teacher's note: A short cultural and linguistic discussion. The goal is awareness, not translation.*

In the chapter, Elisa uses two Japanese words: *sugoi* and *nani*. Alessandro notes that the words are real, but the context and pronunciation are slightly off.

Sugoi (すごい) — an exclamation meaning "amazing", "wow", or "incredible". Very common in anime; used more selectively in everyday Japanese conversation.

Nani (何) — the Japanese word for "what". Used dramatically in anime as a reaction of surprise; more neutral in actual conversation.

Discuss with a partner:

- Can you think of words in Italian (or your own language) that have been borrowed by other languages but are used slightly differently? How does it feel to hear them used that way?
- Is Elisa wrong to use these words? Is it better to try and get it slightly wrong, or to say nothing?
- Alessandro recognises the words but does not react. Why do you think he makes that choice?

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 often produces the most debate — push students to think about intent vs. impact.*

- Alessandro has seen this pattern before, in Wakayama, where being the half-Italian boy attracted similar attention. What does this tell us about his experience growing up between two cultures?
- Elisa thinks she is being friendly. Alessandro finds it tiring but not unkind. Who is right? Can both things be true at the same time?
- Wei communicates something to Alessandro with a single glance that lasts less than a second. Have you ever shared a moment like this with someone — where you understood each other without speaking?
- The chapter ends just before contact is made. How do you feel about waiting? Do you find the suspense interesting, or frustrating?

B. Role Play: The Train Conversation

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. The challenge is to play this understated, the way the characters speak. Two to three minutes, then brief debrief.*

Alessandro and Lorenzo are on the train home on Thursday. Alessandro brings up Elisa.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You want to talk about what happened, but you are not making a big deal of it. You are curious what Lorenzo thinks. Keep it brief.

Student B: You are Lorenzo. You are not surprised. You have seen Elisa do this before. You give information without much opinion. You are mostly looking at your phone.

After the role play: What was left unsaid? Was there anything Alessandro wanted to say but didn't?

C. Discussion: Making Contact

 *Teacher's note: This discussion works well as a lead-in to the writing task.*

- Elisa is circling — she positions herself, drops words, creates proximity, but has not yet spoken directly to Alessandro. Is this a reasonable strategy, or unnecessarily complicated?
- Alessandro could take the first step and speak to her. He considers it on the train. Why do you think he does not?
- Think about the last time you approached someone new. How did you do it? Was it direct or gradual? Did it work?
- Is there such a thing as the right moment to make contact with someone? Or do you just have to go for it?

6. Writing Task

Elisa's Diary

 *Teacher's note: A perspective-switch task. Students have been inside Alessandro's head for five chapters — this asks them to imagine the same week from Elisa's point of view. Suggested length: 100–130 words. Remind students: Elisa does not know she is being observed. She believes she is being subtle and friendly. Her diary should reflect her own interpretation of the week.*

We have seen this week entirely through Alessandro's eyes. Now write Elisa's diary entry for Thursday evening — after the Japanese words, but before Friday.

Remember:

- Elisa does not know Alessandro noticed her positioning herself
- She thinks the Japanese words are a friendly, natural thing to say
- She has not spoken to him directly yet — and she knows it
- She is building up to something. She is not sure exactly how to do it.

Write in the first person (I). Use informal language — this is a diary, not a school essay. Try to make Elisa sound genuine, not silly.

 *Teacher's note: Stronger students: encourage them to give Elisa a voice that is enthusiastic but self-aware — she knows she is being a bit complicated about this. Weaker students: use the four bullet points as four short sentences or paragraphs.*

7. Cultural Notes

Sugoi and Nani: Japanese Words in Global Use

As Japanese anime and manga have become globally popular, certain Japanese words have spread into everyday use among fans worldwide. Words like *sugoi* (amazing), *nani* (what), *kawaii* (cute), and *senpai* (an older student or mentor) appear regularly in social media, fan communities, and casual conversation among young people in many countries. These words are real, and their meanings are understood. But they are often used with different frequency, in different situations, and with pronunciation shaped by subtitles rather than spoken Japanese. Alessandro's sensitivity to this is personal: these words are part of his first language, and hearing them used out of their original context is a particular kind of small strangeness.

Italian Literature as a School Subject

In Italian secondary schools, Italian literature (*letteratura italiana*) is a core subject studied throughout all five years of the *liceo*. Students read canonical works from Dante and Petrarch through to twentieth-century writers such as Calvino and Moravia, typically in chronological order. The subject involves close reading, written analysis, and oral discussion. The double lesson of Italian literature that ends Friday is part of this world Alessandro is still learning to navigate — a subject with a long canon he has not studied in the same way as his Italian classmates.

Proximity and Social Distance

The way people approach each other in social situations — how close they stand, how they signal interest, how they create opportunities for contact — varies across cultures. In many Italian social contexts, physical proximity is natural and unremarkable. Positioning yourself near someone, arriving at the same place, finding reasons to be in the same space: these are recognisable social moves. Alessandro, who has grown up between Italian and Japanese social norms, reads Elisa's behaviour with particular precision — he knows exactly what each step means because he has experienced both versions of this gradual approach.

Ikou — Let's Go

At the end of the chapter, Alessandro says "*Ikou!*" — a Japanese word meaning "let's go" or "come on." It slips out naturally as he and Lorenzo rush for the train. This is a small but significant moment: Alessandro is not performing his Japanese identity, and he is not hiding it. The word comes out because it is part of how he thinks — part of the language that runs underneath. Lorenzo does not react, probably not even registering it as unusual. The reader, however, has been given a glimpse of how the two languages coexist inside one person.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 6 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Elisa has been circling Alessandro for two weeks without speaking to him directly. The end of Chapter 5 suggested she would try again on Monday. What do you think will finally bring them into direct conversation?
- Alessandro now has a clearer sense of his place in the class. But teachers have mostly appeared in the background so far. What kind of teacher do you think would notice Alessandro — and what would they notice?
- Alessandro is good at managing. He absorbs things and continues. But something is accumulating. What do you think will happen when he cannot absorb anymore?

2. Glossary — Chapter 6

aimed (to aim a question) (v.)	to direct something at a specific person deliberately. <i>"She aimed questions like darts at people who had not yet answered."</i>
build on sand (idiom)	to construct something without a solid foundation, making it unstable. <i>"You're building on sand"</i> — your knowledge has gaps that will cause problems.
Cavour, Count (historical figure)	Camillo Benso, Count of Cavour (1810–1861). Prime minister of the Kingdom of Sardinia, the main political architect of Italian unification.
categorise (v.)	to put something or someone into a category or group. <i>"An expression Alessandro could not quite categorise."</i>
credibility (n.)	the quality of being trusted and believed. <i>"European credibility"</i> — being taken seriously by other European powers.
curriculum (n.)	the set of subjects and content taught at a school or in a school system.
dart (like a dart) (n./simile)	a small sharp object thrown at a target. Used as a simile: Ricci's questions are sharp and aimed precisely.
defeat (to defeat a problem) (v.)	here: to be too difficult for someone. <i>"A problem that had defeated most of the class."</i>
framework (n.)	a basic structure that supports and organises understanding. <i>"Receiving information they had no framework for."</i>
Garibaldi, Giuseppe (historical figure)	Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807–1882). Military leader of Italian unification, famous for leading the Mille (Thousand) in the south.
methodical (adj.)	done in a careful, organised, step-by-step way. <i>"The methodical precision of a person covering ground she knew thoroughly."</i>
Meiji Restoration (historical event)	the rapid modernisation of Japan following the restoration of imperial rule in 1868. A major turning point in Japanese history.
Piedmont (n., historical)	a region in northwest Italy, part of the Kingdom of Sardinia. The political centre of Italian unification under Cavour.
precision (n.)	exactness; doing or saying the right thing in exactly the right way.
protégé effect (n., education)	the phenomenon by which explaining something to another person deepens your own understanding of it.
Risorgimento (n., Italian)	the 19th-century movement for Italian unification, completed in 1871. Literally "resurgence." A central topic in the Italian school curriculum.
symmetry (n.)	a balanced correspondence between two things. <i>"An odd kind of symmetry"</i> both boys are in the same position, but with different knowledge.
systematic (adj.)	organised according to a plan or system. <i>"The same systematic approach he applied to everything."</i>
texture (of history) (n.)	here used figuratively: the feeling and depth of something, not just its surface facts. Alessandro knows the facts but not the texture — why the history matters emotionally.
timeline (n.)	a line showing events in the order they happened. <i>"He could place the events correctly on a timeline."</i>
unification (n.)	the process of joining separate parts into one whole. <i>"The unification of Italy."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on precise details — a good test of close reading. Ask students to find the relevant sentence when correcting false statements.*

1. The science teacher notices Alessandro because he answers a question in class. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro solved the maths problem using the same method taught in Italy. TRUE / FALSE
3. Professoressa Ricci asks Alessandro a question without warning. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro knows a great deal about Italian history because he has studied it his whole life.
TRUE / FALSE
5. On the train, Lorenzo helps Alessandro understand Italian history by explaining it properly.
TRUE / FALSE
6. At the end of the chapter, Alessandro tells Lorenzo that moving to Italy was easier than he expected.
TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 4 is the most complex — it asks students to track how the knowledge exchange works in both directions. Worth discussing as a class.*

1. What does Alessandro mean when he says he knows the "dates" but not the "texture" of Italian history?
2. What is significant about Professoressa Ricci's pause after Alessandro's answer? What does Lorenzo say about it?
3. How does Alessandro's question about Piedmont and France show a different kind of intelligence from memorising dates?
4. What happens on the train that is described as "an odd kind of symmetry"?
5. What does Alessandro mean by "I thought I did"?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions focus on some of the chapter's most carefully written moments. Question 3 is particularly rich — the last line does a great deal of work with very few words.*

1. The science teacher says: "You've done this before." She means the maths problem. But the phrase could mean something else. What?
2. Lorenzo says: "You're building on sand." What does this idiom mean? Why does he use it here?
3. The chapter ends with Lorenzo making a small note in the margin that Alessandro cannot read. Why does the author end on this detail?

4. Language Focus

A. Explaining and Giving Reasons

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 6 contains some of the clearest examples of causal reasoning in the novel — Alessandro explains historical logic, Lorenzo explains the exam version. This exercise focuses on the language used to give reasons and explanations.*

Look at how Alessandro explains his answer to Professoressa Ricci:

"Because it was the most politically organised, and because Cavour understood that unification needed a sponsor with European credibility. Without Piedmont's relationship with France, Garibaldi's campaigns in the south would have been more complicated."

He uses: because (reason), without + noun (condition), would have been (result of a different condition).

Complete these sentences using the correct structure:

1. Alessandro reads ahead during lessons _____ he finished his work early and wanted to keep busy.
2. _____ Cavour's diplomatic skill, the unification might not have succeeded.
3. If Alessandro had not done the maths in Japan, he _____ taken longer to solve the problem.
4. Lorenzo decided to explain the Risorgimento _____ Alessandro's question showed he needed the full picture.
5. _____ the train journey, they would not have had time for this conversation.

B. Indirect Questions and Cautious Language

 *Teacher's note: The most powerful moment in this chapter — Lorenzo asking if Alessandro knew what it would feel like — uses indirect, careful language. This exercise focuses on how to ask sensitive questions without being intrusive.*

Lorenzo asks his question very carefully: *"Did you know — I mean, before, when you were in Japan — what it would actually feel like? Moving here?"*

Notice: he starts, pauses, restarts, clarifies, and hedges with "I mean" and "actually". This is not bad English — it is careful, thoughtful English.

Rewrite these direct questions as more indirect, careful versions:

1. "Do you miss Japan?"
2. "Why did your family move back to Italy?"
3. "Are you happy here?"

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any version that softens the question with a hedge, a restart, or an acknowledgement that the question is personal.*

C. Historical Connectors

 *Teacher's note: A short focused exercise on the connectors used when explaining historical events — useful for history lessons and structured writing.*

Choose the best connector for each sentence:

1. Piedmont was politically organised. _____, it became the starting point for Italian unification.
 - a. However b. As a result c. Despite this d. In contrast
2. Garibaldi fought in the south. _____, Cavour managed diplomacy in the north.
 - a. Therefore b. Because c. Meanwhile d. In addition
3. The south had its own system. _____, some people resisted unification.
 - a. However b. As a result c. In contrast d. Despite
4. Alessandro knew the dates. _____, he did not know the texture of the history.
 - a. Therefore b. As a result c. However d. Meanwhile

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 3 often produces the most interesting discussion — push students to think about what it means to understand history from the inside.*

- Alessandro solved the maths problem using a different method from the one taught in Italy. His method is longer, but gives the same answer. Is one method better than the other? Does it matter how you get to a correct answer?
- Lorenzo says: "I've never thought about it that way." Alessandro's questions make Lorenzo curious about his own history. Have you ever had a conversation that made you see something familiar in a completely new way?
- Alessandro knows the facts of Italian history but not the texture — the feeling of why it matters. Can you think of something you know the facts about but not the feeling of? And something you know the feeling of but not the facts?
- Lorenzo asks Alessandro a personal question and understands, from the answer, that he should not ask more. How do you know when to stop asking? Is this something you learn, or something you instinctively feel?

B. Role Play: The History Question

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three. The dynamic is a classroom — Ricci is authoritative, the class is watching, Alessandro must answer carefully. Two to three minutes, then discuss.*

Professoressa Ricci has just asked Alessandro about Piedmont. The class is watching.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You know the answer — but you are aware that everyone is listening. Answer carefully. Do not show off.

Student B: You are Professoressa Ricci. You are strict, precise, and not easily impressed. Listen carefully. React — but do not react quickly.

Student C: You are a classmate. You are glad the question was not aimed at you. Watch the exchange. After the scene, say what you noticed.

After the role play: Student C reports back. What did they observe?

C. Discussion: What It Feels Like vs. What You Expect

 *Teacher's note: Handle with care — some students may have personal experience of moving countries or starting somewhere new. Treat contributions with respect.*

Alessandro says: "I thought I did" — meaning he thought he knew what it would feel like to move, but the reality was different from what he imagined.

- Have you ever prepared carefully for something and still been surprised by how it actually felt?
- Is it possible to really know in advance what a big change will feel like? Or is the feeling something you can only discover by living through it?
- Alessandro has visited Italy every May his whole life. He thought he was prepared. Why might visiting a place be very different from actually living there?
- Lorenzo asks the question and then understands that "I thought I did" is a complete answer. What does he understand that the answer is not saying directly?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Professoressa Ricci has noticed Alessandro. How do you think this will affect his experience in history lessons?
- Lorenzo now knows a little more about Alessandro — the question, the answer, the train conversation. How do you think their friendship will develop?
- Alessandro and Lorenzo have started exchanging knowledge — Italian history for Japanese history. What do you think each of them gets from this exchange that goes beyond the information itself?

6. Writing Task

The Train Conversation: Lorenzo's Perspective

 *Teacher's note: A perspective-switch task — Lorenzo is harder to write than Elisa because he is less expressive. The challenge is to write someone genuinely engaged but not dramatic. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

We see the train conversation through Alessandro's eyes. Now write a short account of the same conversation from Lorenzo's point of view — as if he were telling a friend about it later that evening.

Remember:

- Lorenzo is not a dramatic person. He does not make a big deal of things.
- But he is paying attention. He noticed something today — about Alessandro, about history, about himself.
- He made a note in the margin of his notebook. What did he write?
- He asked a personal question. He is not sure why he asked it.

Write in the first person (I), as if Lorenzo is speaking to a friend or writing in his own diary. Keep his voice casual and understated — like him.

 *Teacher's note: Stronger students: encourage them to have Lorenzo articulate — even partially — what he found unexpected about the conversation. Weaker students: use the four bullet points as a guide, writing one or two sentences for each.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Risorgimento

The Risorgimento (literally "resurgence") was the political and social movement that led to the unification of the Italian peninsula into a single nation state, completed in 1871. Before unification, the peninsula was divided into many separate states — the Kingdom of Sardinia (which included Piedmont), the Papal States, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies in the south, and others under Austrian influence. Key figures include Count Cavour, the pragmatic prime minister of Sardinia who managed the diplomacy; Giuseppe Garibaldi, the military leader who led the famous campaign in the south; and King Vittorio Emanuele II, the first king of united Italy. The Risorgimento is taught in Italian schools as a foundational national story.

The Meiji Restoration

Alessandro briefly mentions the Meiji Restoration as a parallel to Italian unification. The Meiji Restoration (1868) was a period of rapid and radical transformation in Japan, in which power was returned to the Emperor Meiji after centuries of rule by the Tokugawa shogunate. Japan rapidly modernised — adopting Western technology, military organisation, law, and education — while maintaining distinct Japanese cultural and political structures. Like the Risorgimento, it involved winners and losers: the samurai class lost their status and privileges, leading to rebellions such as the Satsuma Rebellion of 1877. Alessandro's comparison is historically precise, even if he states it briefly.

The Italian History Curriculum

In Italian secondary schools, history is studied across all five years of the liceo, typically moving chronologically. The Risorgimento appears in the middle years and is treated as a central event in Italian national identity. Professoressa Ricci's focused, methodical style — covering ground thoroughly, asking targeted questions — is recognisable to anyone who has studied history in an Italian school. For Alessandro, who has excellent general knowledge but gaps in Italian-specific content, her lessons are both a challenge and an opportunity.

Teaching and Learning Across Cultures

The train conversation between Alessandro and Lorenzo illustrates something that happens when people from different educational backgrounds talk honestly: they discover that what they know is shaped by what they were taught. Lorenzo has known the Risorgimento as dates and names since childhood; Alessandro hears it as a new story and asks questions Lorenzo has never been asked. The same happens in reverse with the Meiji Restoration. This kind of exchange — where teaching something to another person forces you to understand it more deeply yourself — is one of the most effective forms of learning. Educators call it the protégé effect.

"Building on Sand" — English Idioms

Lorenzo tells Alessandro he is "building on sand" — meaning that without the full historical framework, his isolated knowledge will not be stable. This is a common English idiom, with roots in the biblical parable of the wise and foolish builders. English is rich in idioms like this — phrases where the meaning cannot be deduced word by word but must be learned as a whole. Other examples: *"the tip of the iceberg"*, *"a storm in a teacup"*, *"the elephant in the room"*. Learning idioms is part of reaching a natural level of fluency in English.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 7 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has been at school for three weeks. He has Lorenzo, and a cautious beginning with Wei. Elisa has been circling for two weeks without speaking directly to him. What do you think it will take for her to finally make real contact?
- When someone approaches you about something they are very enthusiastic about, and you know more about it than they do, how do you respond? Is it possible to be honest without being unkind?
- We have been inside Alessandro's perspective for six chapters. He observes everyone carefully. But what do you think other people see when they look at him?

2. Glossary — Chapter 7

abstract (adj.)	not specific or concrete; existing as a general idea rather than a real thing. <i>"He was not describing Japan in the abstract."</i>
buffer (n.)	extra time left to allow for the unexpected. Haruko always planned with a buffer in case the walk took longer than expected.
deliberate (adj.)	done on purpose; planned. <i>"The deliberate calm of someone who has been building toward something."</i>
demonstration (n.)	here: a performance or display, done to show something to someone. The conversation begins as a demonstration — then becomes something more genuine.
executing (v.)	carrying out a plan precisely. <i>"Now executing it"</i> — she is doing what she planned.
illuminate / illuminated (v./adj.)	to light up. <i>"The castle illuminated at night."</i>
internally (adv.)	inside, in the mind. <i>"She revised something internally"</i> — she adjusted her understanding, privately.
layer (n.)	one of several levels of meaning or depth. <i>"The answer had more than one layer."</i>
momentum (n.)	the energy and direction of something moving forward. <i>"Elisa's momentum slowed"</i> — the conversation stopped going the way she expected.
nori (n., Japanese)	dried seaweed, used to wrap onigiri and other Japanese foods.
onigiri (n., Japanese)	a Japanese rice ball, usually triangular, wrapped in nori and filled with fish, pickled plum, or other ingredients. A very common everyday food.
particular (a particular shape) (adj.)	specific; belonging to one thing and not others. <i>"The kind of missing that had a particular shape."</i>
postcard (n./metaphor)	literally, a picture card sent as a souvenir. Here used as a metaphor for an idealised, simplified image of a place — not the full, complicated reality.
precision (n.)	exactness. <i>"In the most precise possible way."</i>
recalibrate (v.)	to adjust after receiving new information. Already seen in Chapter 3.
refrigerated section (n. phrase)	the chilled area of a shop or convenience store where cold drinks and fresh food are kept.
resentment (n.)	a feeling of frustration or anger about something unfair or inconvenient. Wei has "ongoing resentment" about the infrequent bus.
subtext (n.)	the meaning beneath what is literally said; what is implied rather than stated directly.
thread (to lose one's thread) (n./expression)	the direction or logic of a thought or conversation. To lose your thread is to lose track of what you were saying.
timetable (n.)	a schedule showing when buses or trains depart and arrive. <i>"My mother was very good at the timetable."</i>
Wakayama (n., place)	a real city in western Japan, south of Osaka, on the Pacific coast. Alessandro's home for eleven years. Population approximately 350,000.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on small but important details. Encourage students to find the exact sentence that proves their answer.*

1. Elisa sits down and immediately opens her lunch box. TRUE / FALSE
2. Elisa's first question to Alessandro is about public transport in Japan. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro is thinking about the Tokyo metro when Elisa mentions public transport. TRUE / FALSE
4. Elisa has heard of Wakayama before Alessandro mentions it. TRUE / FALSE
5. Wei interrupts the conversation between Alessandro and Elisa. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends with Alessandro refusing to talk about the castle. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the most important in this chapter — it is worth spending time on in class discussion.*

1. What does Alessandro think of when Elisa mentions Japan's public transport? Why is this significant?
2. How does Elisa's way of listening change during the conversation? Find evidence from the text.
3. What does Wei's comment — "Sounds like the 17 bus" — mean? Why is it so effective?
4. Alessandro says he "was not describing Japan in the abstract." What does this mean? What does he realise?
5. How does the conversation change after Wei's comment? What does "rearranged itself" mean?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These three questions address some of the most carefully written moments in the novel. Question 2 rewards careful attention to the grammar.*

1. The chapter describes Haruko's mental arithmetic: "departure time, walk time, buffer." Why does the author use this specific detail rather than just saying the bus came infrequently?
2. Elisa says "I've always wanted to go. I've been studying —" and then stops and says "I've been interested for a long time." Why does she correct herself mid-sentence?
3. At the end, Alessandro says the castle is "not that interesting, honestly" — and then tells her about it anyway. What does this moment say about how the conversation has changed?

4. Language Focus

A. Describing a Place: Specific vs. General

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is a masterclass in the difference between general description and specific detail. This exercise helps students practise moving between the two levels.*

Alessandro describes Wakayama in two ways. Compare:

General: *"The big cities have excellent public transport."* — True, but impersonal. A fact about Japan.

Specific: *"The bus in my neighbourhood passed every two hours. My mother memorised the timetable."* — True, and personal. A detail of a life.

Specific details do more work than general statements. They make the reader see and feel, not just understand.

Rewrite these general statements as specific, personal details. You can invent the details — the goal is to make them concrete and vivid.

1. General: "The summers were very hot."
2. General: "There was a local landmark nearby."
3. General: "The convenience store was useful."
4. General: "School was different there."

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct rewrite. Reward any answer that replaces the general with something specific, sensory, or personal.*

B. Present Perfect: Personal Experience

 *Teacher's note: Elisa's self-correction — "I've been studying — I've been interested" — is a natural example of the present perfect in use. This exercise practises the distinction between present perfect simple and continuous.*

Look at these two forms:

Present perfect simple: *"I've always wanted to go."* — a state or experience, from the past up to now.

Present perfect continuous: *"I've been studying Japanese."* — an ongoing activity, started in the past and continuing now.

Choose the correct form for each sentence:

1. Alessandro _____ (live) in Italy for almost a month now.
2. Elisa _____ (want) to visit Japan for a long time.
3. Wei _____ (read) for the whole lunch break.
4. Lorenzo _____ (help) Alessandro with Italian history on the train.
5. Alessandro _____ (not / speak) directly to Elisa until today.

C. Layers of Meaning: What Wei Said

 *Teacher's note: A short discussion exercise on subtext. The example in the chapter is clear enough for A2+/B1 students if guided carefully.*

Wei says: "Sounds like the 17 bus." She does not look up. She turns a page.

On the surface, this is a comment about an inconvenient bus. But it is also, "in the most precise possible way, making a point about Japan."

Discuss with a partner:

- What is the surface meaning of Wei's comment?
- What is the deeper meaning — what point is she making about Japan and about herself?
- Why does she not look up? Why does she turn a page immediately after?
- Could she have said the same thing directly? What would be lost if she had?

 *Teacher's note: Wei is saying: ordinary inconvenience is universal. My bus is the same as your bus. You do not need to go to Japan to find a bus that comes every two hours. And I am a Florentine even though I am Chinese, just as Alessandro is Italian even though he is Japanese. She says none of this. She says "the 17 bus." That is subtext.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most productive — it connects the specific detail of Haruko's bus planning to the wider experience of making a life in an ordinary place.*

- Elisa had prepared for this conversation. She had rehearsed it. How do you feel when a conversation goes differently from how you planned it? Is that always a bad thing?
- Alessandro describes Wakayama through small, specific details — the bus, the old man, the castle, the heat. What details would you use to describe a place you know well to someone who has never been there?
- Wei's comment changes the whole conversation with just five words, without looking up, and then she turns a page. Have you ever seen someone change the energy of a situation with a single, precise remark?
- Alessandro finds himself talking more than he intended and is surprised by this. What do you think made it easier to talk in this moment than in the previous three weeks?

B. Role Play: The Lunch Conversation

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three. This is the most dramatically rich scene in the novel so far. Two to three minutes. Encourage students not to rush to Wei's line — let the Alessandro/Elisa exchange develop first.*

It is Tuesday lunch. Alessandro is eating. Elisa sits down. Wei is already at a nearby table with a book.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You have been expecting this conversation. You are not unfriendly, but you are not going to confirm a postcard. Answer honestly, even when it is not what she expects.

Student B: You are Elisa. You have prepared. You are enthusiastic and genuine. But you are also willing to be surprised — when Alessandro says something unexpected, listen. Adjust.

Student C: You are Wei. You are at your table, eating and reading. You are not part of the conversation. At the right moment — when it feels natural — say your line. Then turn your page.

After the role play: What was it like to be Wei? Was it hard to find the right moment? What happened in the room when she spoke?

C. Discussion: Specific vs. Abstract

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to the language focus and to one of the novel's central ideas: the real version of something is always more specific than the idea of it.*

- What is the difference between missing a place in general and missing something specific about it? Have you ever missed something very particular — a smell, a sound, a routine?
- Elisa's Japan is an idea — beautiful, curated, specific in its own way. Alessandro's Japan is a city, a bus, a castle he barely noticed. Which sounds more real to you? Which sounds more interesting?
- The chapter suggests that Elisa's enthusiasm becomes less useful — and less interesting — once she drops it and just listens. Do you agree that listening is sometimes more interesting than enthusiasm?
- Wei's one sentence does more work than a long speech would. Can you think of a moment in a book, film, or conversation where a very small thing changed everything?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Elisa has now had a real conversation with Alessandro — not the one she planned, but a better one. Do you think their friendship will develop? What would it look like?
- Wei participated in the conversation without joining it. What do you think Alessandro and Wei understand about each other now that they did not before?
- Alessandro found himself talking about Wakayama in a way that surprised him. He realised he was missing it specifically. How do you think this realisation will affect him going forward?

6. Writing Task

A Place in Specific Details

 *Teacher's note: This task follows directly from the Language Focus exercise. Students describe a place using specific details only — no general statements, no abstract adjectives. Suggested length: 100–140 words.*

Alessandro describes Wakayama through specific, ordinary details: a bus that comes every two hours, an old man who always buys one onigiri, a castle he had almost stopped seeing.

Choose a place you know well — a neighbourhood, a town, a part of a city. Describe it to someone who has never been there, using only specific details. Do not say:

- "It is beautiful" / "It is busy" / "It is quiet" / "People are friendly"

Instead, show the reader one person, one object, one routine, one small thing that is specific to this place and could not be anywhere else.

 *Teacher's note: The goal is not to describe everything. Choose one or two details so specific that the reader can feel the place. The old man with the single onigiri is the model. For weaker students: allow them to describe a fictional place from a book or film. For stronger students: challenge them to write a description where the reader can tell what kind of place it is without being told directly.*

7. Cultural Notes

Wakayama City

Wakayama is a real city on the Pacific coast of the Kii Peninsula, south of Osaka in Wakayama Prefecture. It has a population of around 350,000 — large enough to be a city, small enough to be quiet by Japanese standards. It is known for Wakayama Castle, the Kii Peninsula's mountain pilgrimage routes (including Kumano Kodo, a UNESCO World Heritage Site), its coastline, and its proximity to Osaka. It is not a tourist destination in the way Kyoto or Tokyo are. It is an ordinary Japanese city — the kind of place where people live rather than visit. This is precisely what makes Alessandro's description of it significant: he is not describing a famous place. He is describing his home.

Japanese Castles

Japan has hundreds of castles, most rebuilt after destruction in the wars of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Wakayama Castle sits on a forested hill in the city centre and is illuminated at night. Like many Japanese castles, it has become such a familiar part of the local landscape that residents often barely notice it — the same way Romans pass the Colosseum without looking up. Alessandro's description of having "seen it so many times he had almost stopped seeing it" is a recognisable feeling for anyone who lives near a landmark.

Public Transport in Japan: City and Countryside

Japan is internationally famous for its public transport — the Shinkansen bullet train, the Tokyo metro, Osaka's efficient subway. This reputation is entirely deserved for the major cities. But outside the major urban centres, public transport can be infrequent and inconvenient. In smaller cities like Wakayama, and especially in suburban and rural areas, buses may run once or twice an hour — or less. Many residents rely on cars or bicycles. Alessandro's experience of the bus every two hours is not unusual for someone living in a quiet neighbourhood of a mid-sized Japanese city.

The Onigiri

An *onigiri* is a Japanese rice ball, typically triangular and wrapped in a sheet of nori (dried seaweed). It is one of the most common foods in Japan — sold in every convenience store, made at home, carried in lunchboxes. Fillings vary: salted salmon, pickled plum (umeboshi), tuna mayonnaise, and many others. The onigiri is everyday food — not special, not fancy. The old man in Alessandro's neighbourhood who buys a single onigiri every day at the same time is not a dramatic figure. He is ordinary. That is the point.

Subtext in Conversation

Wei's comment — "Sounds like the 17 bus" — is an example of subtext: saying something that means more than it literally says. Subtext is present in all languages and cultures, but the way it works varies. In many East Asian communicative contexts, indirectness and implication are valued — saying something obliquely rather than directly is not evasion but a form of precision. Wei makes her point about Japan, about Alessandro, and about herself, without stating any of it. This kind of oblique communication is also found in Italian culture — not everything important is said directly. Good readers learn to hear what is underneath.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 8 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has now had a real conversation with Elisa, and the beginning of something with Wei. He is building friendships in Italy — slowly. But he is also becoming more aware of what he is missing. Can both things be true at the same time — settling in and missing more?
- Alessandro has not spoken to anyone in Japan about how he is really feeling. Do you think he will? If he does, who do you think he would tell?
- Think about the people who have helped you through a difficult change. Did they say the right thing, or was it something else that helped — being present, sharing their own experience, saying nothing at all?

2. Glossary — Chapter 8

absorb (v.)	to take something in completely, so it becomes part of you. <i>"The moment absorbed, the rhythm intact."</i> Also: to process something difficult without showing it outwardly.
accumulate (v.)	to gather or collect gradually over time. <i>"Accumulate references and build shorthand."</i> Already seen in Chapter 4.
angle (n.)	the direction or position from which something is seen. <i>"He propped his phone against a book so the angle was right."</i>
arc (character arc) (n.)	the journey or development of a character through a story. <i>"The character has an arc, the arc concludes, the character leaves."</i>
curtains drawn (expression)	curtains pulled closed, blocking the light. <i>"He lay in the darkness with the curtains drawn."</i>
habitual (adj.)	done regularly, almost automatically, as a habit. <i>"A small, habitual movement."</i>
intact (adj.)	not damaged; complete and undisturbed. <i>"The rhythm intact."</i>
in particular / to no one in particular (expression)	not directed at a specific person; said into the air. <i>"Marcello said, to no one in particular."</i>
nightstand (n.)	a small table beside a bed, used to hold a lamp, phone, or book.
parallel (n./adj.)	something that runs alongside and resembles something else. Marcello offers Alessandro a parallel experience: I went through something similar.
reference (a shared reference) (n.)	something (an event, a joke, a moment) that is understood because both people were there for it. Alessandro misses a reference — an event he was not part of.
relevant (adj.)	connected to the subject; important in this context. <i>"I'll let you know when I have relevant information."</i>
rhythm (n.)	here: the natural pace and flow of a conversation or relationship. <i>"He matched the rhythm."</i>
salute (n./v.)	a gesture of greeting or acknowledgement. <i>"Raising whatever he was eating in a kind of salute."</i>
season (anime season) (n.)	a group of episodes in a serialised TV show or anime. A character who leaves in season two is no longer part of the ongoing story.
shorthand (n.)	a quick, abbreviated way of communicating that only works between people who share the same background. <i>"The kind of shorthand that comes from shared experience."</i>
substance (n.)	the actual content or meaning of something. <i>"The substance of it was missing."</i>
time zone (n.)	one of the world's 24 divisions, each with its own standard time. Italy and Japan are 7–8 hours apart depending on the season.
vivid (adj.)	very clear and strong; producing a sharp mental image. <i>"The kind of laugh that comes from an image that is vivid and specific."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on precise emotional details. Push students to quote the text when correcting false statements.*

1. The video call takes place in the afternoon in Italy and the morning in Japan. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro genuinely understands the joke about Ueda-sensei and the window. TRUE / FALSE
3. Takuya notices that Alessandro missed the reference. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro sends a message to Yui about the reference he missed. TRUE / FALSE
5. Marcello says he used to call his friends every Sunday when he first went to Japan. TRUE / FALSE
6. Alessandro goes to bed feeling heavier than he did before the conversation with his father.
TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Questions 2 and 4 are the most important — they address the two key emotional moments. Allow time for discussion, particularly on question 4.*

1. What does the anime metaphor mean — the character who leaves in season two? How does Alessandro apply it to himself?
2. Alessandro types a message to Yui and then deletes it. Why?
3. What does Nana Susan do when Marcello begins talking to Alessandro? Why?
4. Marcello says: "The coffee was the thing I could say out loud." What does this mean? What is he really telling Alessandro?
5. What does Alessandro mean when he thinks: "he is not asking me anything and I don't have to say anything, and this is still a conversation"?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address some of the most subtle writing in the novel so far. Question 3 is worth discussing as a class.*

1. The narrator says Alessandro "laughed at the shape of the joke rather than the joke itself." What does this distinction mean?
2. The call ends and Alessandro is "warm and easy again, the moment absorbed, the rhythm intact." But something has changed. What?
3. By the end of the chapter, Alessandro feels "slightly less heavy." The narrator says he was not sure what his father had given him — "something, though. Enough for tonight." Why is it enough that Alessandro cannot name what he was given?

4. Language Focus

A. Time Zones and Time Expressions

 *Teacher's note: The chapter opens with a specific time-zone detail: nine in the morning in Italy, five in the afternoon in Wakayama. A practical and globally relevant skill.*

The chapter tells us: the call starts at 9:00 AM in Italy, which is 5:00 PM in Wakayama. Japan is 8 hours ahead of Italy in winter (Central European Time).

Answer these questions using the correct time expressions:

1. If it is 7:00 PM in Italy, what time is it in Wakayama?
2. If Yui sends a message at noon in Wakayama, what time does Alessandro receive it in Italy?
3. Alessandro says the call started "at nine in the morning." Rewrite this using a time clause: "When the call started, it was..."
4. Why do time zones make it difficult for Alessandro to stay in contact with his friends in Japan? Use the information above to explain.

B. Past Perfect for Missed or Completed Events

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro missed something that happened in the past — and the grammar of this chapter reflects it. The past perfect is the natural tense for events that were already finished before the moment being described.*

Look at this sentence: "Whatever it was *had happened* in August, or September, on a day he was not there."

Had happened = past perfect. The event was already finished before Alessandro's present moment.

Complete these sentences using the past perfect (had + past participle):

1. By the time Alessandro joined the call, Takuya _____ (arrive) already.
2. Ryu _____ (move) his desk over the summer, so the room looked different.
3. Alessandro _____ (not / hear) the story about Ueda-sensei — it happened after he left.
4. Marcello said he _____ (call) his friends every Sunday when he first went to Japan.
5. When Alessandro went downstairs, his father _____ (already / start) talking to Nana Susan.

C. Things You Can and Cannot Say Out Loud

 *Teacher's note: This exercise builds on Marcello's key line and practises the language of partial or qualified expression.*

Marcello says: *"I missed other things too. But the coffee was the thing I could say out loud."*

Some feelings are easy to name. Others are not. Practise the language of the unsaid with these sentence frames:

"I missed _____, but that was the easy part to say."

"The thing I could say out loud was _____. The rest was harder."

"I wasn't sure how to explain _____, so I said _____ instead."

Complete at least two of these sentences — about yourself, or about a character in a book or film you know. Then share with a partner.

 *Teacher's note: This is a low-pressure expressive task. Students can use fictional characters if they prefer. What matters is practising the language of partial disclosure: how to say something true without saying everything.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most universally relatable — most students will have experienced a version of the missed reference. Handle question 3 with care.*

- Alessandro laughed one beat too late. Nobody noticed. Do you think it matters that nobody noticed? Does it change how Alessandro feels?
- Have you ever been in a situation where everyone around you understood a reference or a joke that you missed? How did it feel? What did you do?
- Marcello tells Alessandro that maintaining contact with friends gets harder — not because you have less in common, but because you are living different days. Do you think this is true?
- Alessandro feels better after the kitchen conversation without being able to say exactly why. Do you think it is possible to help someone without saying the right thing?

B. Role Play: The Kitchen

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. The challenge is to play a quiet, indirect conversation — not a dramatic one. Marcello does not ask questions. Alessandro does not explain. Two to three minutes.*

Alessandro comes downstairs for water. His father is at the table with tea. Nana Susan has just left.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You have just had the call. Something is sitting with you. You do not want to explain it. Stay at the counter — do not sit down.

Student B: You are Marcello. You can see something is not quite right. Do not ask what. Talk about your own experience — something real, something small. The coffee, or something like it. Let the parallel do the work.

After the role play: What did each character give the other? What was never said directly?

C. Discussion: The Anime Metaphor

 *Teacher's note: Worth spending time on — the metaphor is accessible, and students who know anime will have strong opinions. Students who don't know anime should still engage with the idea through other examples.*

Alessandro thinks of himself as a character who left in season two. The anime goes on without him.

- Do you think this is an accurate way to describe what happens when a close friend moves away? Or is it too pessimistic?
- In anime, characters who leave sometimes come back for a special episode. When they return, something is different — they are slightly outside. Have you ever experienced this, or seen it in a story?
- Alessandro does not use this metaphor to make himself feel worse. He uses it to name something — to make it understandable. Can giving something a name make it easier to carry?
- What would you say to Alessandro if you were Takuya, and you knew he had felt left out — even though he hid it perfectly?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Alessandro deleted the message to Yui. Do you think he will send something to her eventually? What do you think he would say?
- Marcello told Alessandro something personal — that maintaining contact gets harder, but also gets easier. Do you think Alessandro will remember this? Will it help?
- The chapter ends with "enough for tonight." What do you think the next morning will feel like for Alessandro?

6. Writing Task

The Message He Deleted

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro types a message to Yui and deletes it. This task asks students to write the message he did not send. Suggested length: 80–110 words. Remind students: Alessandro does not dramatise. He is honest, but restrained.*

Alessandro typed: "I missed a reference on the call today. Something about Ueda-sensei." Then he deleted it.

Write the full message he might have sent — the longer version he decided against. Include:

- What happened on the call (briefly — Alessandro would not over-explain)
- How it felt — but in Alessandro's voice: understated, not dramatic
- What he is not sure about — whether to say more, what he wants from her
- A reason he might stop or trail off before finishing

 *Teacher's note: Stronger students: encourage them to end the message mid-thought, or leave a sentence unfinished. The point is that he cannot quite complete it. Weaker students: write four short sentences, one for each bullet point. Remind them that Yui writes in complete sentences — Alessandro would match her register.*

7. Cultural Notes

Time Zones: Italy and Japan

Japan Standard Time (JST) is UTC+9. Italy uses Central European Time in winter (UTC+1) and Central European Summer Time in summer (UTC+2). This means Japan is typically 8 hours ahead of Italy in winter and 7 hours ahead in summer. For Alessandro, this means that evening calls with friends in Japan require either staying up late in Italy or calling very early in the morning — a practical constraint on maintaining contact. The nine o'clock Italian morning / five o'clock Japanese afternoon in this chapter is one of the few overlapping windows that works for both sides.

Video Calls and Long-Distance Friendship

Video calling has made long-distance communication far easier than it was for previous generations. However, it does not entirely resolve the problem Alessandro experiences: the accumulation of shared daily experience that makes close friendship close. References, in-jokes, and the shorthand of people who have lived through the same days together cannot be transmitted by a weekly call. Alessandro can see his friends' faces and hear their voices, but he is not there for the ordinary days that build the references he would need to understand their conversations fully.

Anime: Serialised Storytelling

Anime — Japanese animated series — typically follows a serialised format, with seasons of twelve to twenty-four episodes. Characters are introduced, develop arcs, and sometimes leave the main story. When a character departs, they often return briefly in a later season — and these returns are frequently emotional precisely because something has shifted. The character and the story have both moved, and the gap is visible. Alessandro uses this structure as a precise metaphor for his own situation: not gone, not forgotten, but no longer accumulating the same daily experience as the people he left behind.

Italian Coffee Culture

Coffee in Italy is not just a drink — it is a ritual. The standard Italian coffee is a short, intense espresso, drunk standing at a bar counter, often in less than two minutes. Cappuccino is acceptable in the morning only; ordering one after lunch signals that you are not Italian, or at least not paying attention. The coffee bar is a social institution — a place to start the day, to break a meeting, to pause. For Marcello, who lived in Japan for eleven years, the coffee was the concrete, nameable thing he missed. Japanese coffee culture has developed significantly in recent decades, but the espresso bar culture of Italy has no direct equivalent.

Saying the Easy Thing: Partial Expression

Marcello's line — "the coffee was the thing I could say out loud" — describes something many people recognise: when you miss something or feel something difficult, you often name the surface version because the deeper version is too large or too uncertain to put into words. This is not dishonesty; it is a form of precision. Naming everything exactly would require more certainty than you have. The coffee stands in for everything else. It is also a kind of protection — once you start naming the big things, they become more present and more demanding. The small, specific, sayable thing is enough to communicate something true, without opening everything up at once.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 9 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- The class is going on a school trip. School trips are different from normal school days — the structure is looser, people sit next to each other on the coach, there is free time, shared food. What makes a school trip a good opportunity for friendships to develop?
- Think about something you eat that comes from your family or your culture. If someone who did not know your background saw it, what might they think? How would you feel about that?
- Alessandro is half Italian and half Japanese. He has been in Italy for a month. If someone asked him now — "where are you from?" — what do you think he would say?

2. Glossary — Chapter 9

authority (easy authority) (n.)	here: speaking with natural confidence, as if you have known something for years. <i>"He said this with the easy authority of someone reciting something learned years ago."</i>
bento (n., Japanese)	a packed meal in a divided box, typically containing rice, protein, and vegetables. Common in Japan for school lunches and travel.
calculated (v./adj.)	here: to think quickly and arrive at an understanding. <i>"Something was calculated and understood."</i>
comparison (n.)	the act of looking at two things together to see how they are similar or different. <i>"The moment of comparison cross her face."</i>
cypress (n.)	a tall, narrow evergreen tree common in Tuscany and other Mediterranean regions, often seen lining roads and hillsides.
discoloured (adj.)	changed in colour, usually from age or use. <i>"Slightly discoloured at the edges."</i> Wei's container is old and well-used.
dynamic (n.)	the relationship or pattern of forces between two things or people. <i>"The dynamic reminded him of something in Japanese history."</i>
formation (loose formation) (n.)	the way a group of people is arranged in space. A loose formation is relaxed, not strict.
Ghibellines and Guelphs (n., historical)	two rival political factions in medieval Italy. The Guelphs supported the Pope; the Ghibellines supported the Holy Roman Emperor. Their conflict shaped Italian city-state politics for centuries.
humbled (to be humbled) (v.)	to be made to feel small or overwhelmed, often by something that is more powerful or intense than expected. <i>"Restaurants near Osaka that had humbled him both times."</i>
involuntarily (adv.)	without choosing to; automatically, without control. <i>"The moment of comparison cross her face — quickly, involuntarily."</i>
mabodofu (n., Japanese)	the Japanese version of mapo tofu. Adapted from the Sichuan original, it tends to be milder, slightly sweeter, and less spicy.
mapo tofu (n., Chinese)	a spicy Chinese dish of tofu in a sauce made with fermented bean paste, chilli oil, and Sichuan pepper. Known for its numbing heat.
Monte dei Paschi (n., historical)	Monte dei Paschi di Siena, founded in 1472, is one of the world's oldest banks. Based in Siena, it was a symbol of the city's financial power in the medieval period.
Piazza del Campo (n., Italian)	the main public square of Siena, famous for its distinctive shell shape and for hosting the Palio horse race twice a year.
pickled vegetables (n.)	vegetables preserved in vinegar or salt. In Japanese cuisine, pickles (tsukemono) are a common side dish in bento boxes.
resent / resentment (v./n.)	to feel bitter or angry about something, especially a situation that feels unfair. <i>"They needed each other and they resented needing each other."</i>
Sichuan (n./adj.)	a province in southwest China, known for its cuisine which is characterised by bold flavours, garlic, and the distinctive numbing heat of Sichuan pepper.
tamagoyaki (n., Japanese)	a Japanese rolled omelette, slightly sweet, cooked in layers. A common component of a bento box.
tower (Torre del Mangia) (n.)	the tall medieval tower at the edge of the Piazza del Campo in Siena, one of the tallest secular towers in medieval Italy.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter contains several moments that hinge on precise details and small gestures. Close reading is particularly important here.*

1. Alessandro, Lorenzo, Elisa, and Wei sit together on the coach without having discussed it. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro asks Lorenzo about Florence and Siena because it is on their history syllabus. TRUE / FALSE
3. Haruko packed Alessandro's bento quickly, without much thought. TRUE / FALSE
4. Elisa's bento is clearly homemade and imperfect. TRUE / FALSE
5. Alessandro tries Wei's mapo tofu to show he is not afraid of spicy food. TRUE / FALSE
6. Wei immediately apologises after Alessandro says "I'm Italian." TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Questions 3 and 4 are the most important in this chapter — both involve moments that require interpretation as much as retrieval. Allow time for discussion.*

1. Why does Alessandro ask Lorenzo about Florence and Siena? What makes his question different from a typical history question?
2. What does Alessandro understand about Elisa's bento that he does not say out loud?
3. Why does Alessandro say "I'm Italian" — and what makes this moment so significant for Wei?
4. Wei says "I'm Italian too" to her rice. Why does she say it that way — quietly, not looking up?
5. At the end of the chapter, what does Elisa's final comment — "Your mum makes a good bento" — really mean?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most precise moments of indirect communication. All three are worth discussing as a class.*

1. Lorenzo arrives at the answer about Florence and Siena — "they were too similar, they needed each other and they resented needing each other" — by himself, with Alessandro only asking questions. Why does the author write it this way?
2. Alessandro notes that Elisa "had gone quiet in a particular way" during the Florence-Siena discussion on the coach. What does "a particular way" suggest?
3. The chapter ends with two lines of dialogue: Alessandro says his mother "probably wasn't even thinking about it"; Elisa says "Yeah. I can imagine." What does this short exchange accomplish?

4. Language Focus

A. Questions That Go Deeper

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro's question about Florence and Siena is a model of how to move from surface facts to underlying causes. This exercise practises framing questions that go beyond the obvious.*

Alessandro does not ask: "When did Florence and Siena fight?" He asks: "Why that much hatred? Two cities that close — what were they actually fighting about?"

His question moves from what to why — from facts to causes, from dates to human logic.

Rewrite these surface questions as deeper, more interesting versions. The goal is to find the human logic underneath.

1. Surface: "When did Italian unification happen?"
2. Surface: "What is the Palio horse race?"
3. Surface: "Why did the Ghibellines and Guelphs fight?"
4. Surface: "Where is Alessandro from?"

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any question that moves from facts to causes, or from the surface to the human. This exercise also works well as a pair discussion.*

B. Contrast and Comparison: Showing Difference

 *Teacher's note: The bento comparison in this chapter is built on contrast — two lunches, two intentions, two histories. This exercise practises the language of comparison and contrast.*

The chapter contrasts Alessandro's bento with Elisa's without saying directly which is which. Look at these details:

Alessandro's bento: "slightly battered from the bag, the lid not perfectly aligned." — made quickly, out of long habit.

Elisa's bento: "carefully arranged sections, rice shaped into triangles, a small egg roll slightly more perfect than homemade things usually were." — made with intention and care.

Use these sentence frames to practise contrast:

While Alessandro's bento was _____, Elisa's was _____.

Unlike Alessandro, who _____, Elisa _____.

Both Alessandro and Elisa had bentos, but _____.

Now write one or two sentences comparing two things you know — two places, two people, two meals, two experiences. Use at least one contrast word (while, unlike, whereas, but, however).

C. Saying More With Less: Indirect Communication

 *Teacher's note: This chapter contains three moments of powerful indirect communication. This exercise helps students identify and practise the technique.*

Sometimes the most important things in a conversation are not said directly. They are implied — left for the other person to understand.

Look at these moments from the chapter. For each one, write what is really being communicated underneath the surface words.

1. Alessandro says: "I'm Italian." (after Wei says "you're Japanese")
2. Wei says: "I'm Italian too." (to her rice)
3. Elisa says: "Your mum makes a good bento." Alessandro says: "She probably wasn't even thinking about it."

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 3 is the most personally resonant — handle with care if any students in the group have experience of being assumed to be from a different background than their actual one.*

- Lorenzo reaches the insight about Florence and Siena — "they were too similar" — by himself, prompted only by Alessandro's question. Have you ever been asked a question that made you think differently about something you thought you already understood?
- Elisa prepared her bento carefully. Alessandro's was made quickly and without thought. The chapter treats this difference with respect — neither one is better, but they are different. Do you think Elisa sees it this way by the end?
- Wei assumes Alessandro is brave enough to eat spicy food because he is Japanese. Then she realises she has made exactly the assumption that is made about her every day. Have you ever made an assumption about someone that you later had to rethink?
- The chapter ends on the coach, quietly. Two significant things have happened — the Wei moment and the Elisa exchange. Alessandro is too tired to think about either properly. He files it away. Do you think this is a healthy way to process things, or is he avoiding something?

B. Role Play: The Piazza del Campo

 *Teacher's note: Groups of four. This is the most complex role play so far — four characters, multiple dynamics happening at once. Encourage students to play the silences as carefully as the words. Five minutes, then debrief.*

The class is sitting in the Piazza del Campo. The four of them are near each other with their lunches.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You are watching everyone. You notice the bento comparison. You will say "I'm Italian" when the moment comes — quietly, without edge.

Student B: You are Elisa. You have your bento. You are trying not to make it obvious that you are proud of it. When you see Alessandro's, something crosses your face before you can stop it.

Student C: You are Wei. You have your mapo dofu. You are not trying to impress anyone. You will offer it to Alessandro as a test. When he says "I'm Italian," take a moment before responding.

Student D: You are Lorenzo. You are genuinely curious and have no relevant prior experience with any of this food. You will eat the mapo dofu. Do not be dramatic about it.

After the role play: What was the hardest moment to play? What happened in the room during the silence after "I'm Italian"?

C. Discussion: Identity and Assumptions

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects directly to the chapter's central moment. It is worth spending time on — the issues it raises are real and may be personal for some students.*

- Wei makes an assumption about Alessandro based on his background. He makes her see it without accusation. Do you think this is the best way to handle this kind of moment? What are the alternatives?
- "I'm Italian too" — three words, said to the rice. Why do you think Wei says it the way she does? What would be lost if she said it directly to Alessandro?
- Both Alessandro and Wei are Italian citizens with backgrounds elsewhere. Do you think Italy (or any country) makes it easy or difficult to feel Italian if you do not look Italian? Is this different in other countries you know?
- Alessandro thinks: "that is the fastest anyone has ever got there." He means Wei understood in less than a second. What does this tell us about Wei? And what does it tell us about how often this kind of assumption is made about Alessandro?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Something shifted between Alessandro and Wei today. What do you think their friendship will look like from here?
- Elisa showed self-awareness at the end of the chapter — she understood something about herself and her bento. Do you think this will change how she relates to Alessandro?
- Alessandro has now had significant moments with all three: Lorenzo on the train, Elisa at lunch in school, Wei in the Piazza del Campo. What do you think the group will look like in a month?

6. Writing Task

Three Words Said to the Rice

 *Teacher's note: A short, focused writing task on voice and indirect expression. Students write a scene in which a character says something important in a small, quiet way — modelled on Wei's "I'm Italian too." Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Wei says "I'm Italian too" to her rice. Three words. Not to Alessandro, not dramatically, not as a speech. She says it quietly, to herself, in a way that Alessandro hears but does not need to respond to.

Write a short scene in which a character says something important in a similarly small way — not a big speech, not a dramatic moment. The important thing should be:

- Said quietly, or to the side, or not quite to the person they are talking to
- Understood by the person who hears it — but not answered directly
- More honest than a longer speech would be

You can use characters from the novel, or invent your own. The scene can be set anywhere.

 *Teacher's note: Stronger students: encourage them to write the surrounding context as carefully as the line itself — what happens immediately before and after matters. Weaker students: describe the situation in one or two sentences and then write the small thing that is said. The key is restraint — the moment should not be over-explained.*

7. Cultural Notes

Siena and the Piazza del Campo

Siena is a medieval city in the Tuscan hills, about 70 kilometres south of Florence. Its historic centre is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Piazza del Campo — the main public square — is one of the great medieval piazzas of Europe, distinctive for its shell shape and the brick paving that slopes gently toward the Gothic tower at one end (the Torre del Mangia). The square hosts the Palio di Siena twice a year, a bareback horse race between the city's contrade (districts), which has been run since at least the seventeenth century and is one of the most intense local traditions in Italy. For Alessandro, Siena is a beautiful place he knows nothing about from the inside — which is exactly the point of his question about Florence.

Florence and Siena: A Medieval Rivalry

The rivalry between Florence and Siena was one of the defining conflicts of medieval Tuscany. The cities were rivals in banking, trade, and political allegiance (Siena generally Ghibelline, Florence generally Guelph). The Battle of Montaperti (1260) was a famous Sienese victory over Florence, long remembered in local memory. But as Alessandro intuits — and as Lorenzo eventually articulates — the intensity of the rivalry was not only about politics or money. Two powerful cities within sight of each other's hilltop towers, competing for the same trade routes and the same prestige, each needed the other as a rival to define itself against. This dynamic — needing and resenting the thing you need — is not limited to medieval Tuscany.

The Bento Box

A *bento* (弁当) is a Japanese packed meal, typically in a divided box containing rice, a protein, and side dishes. Bento boxes are used for school lunches, work lunches, and travel. Convenience store bentos are bought daily by millions of people; homemade bentos can range from the simple and functional to the elaborately decorated (kyaraben, or character bentos, designed to look like animals, characters, or scenes). The key distinction in this chapter is between Haruko's bento — made quickly, out of long habit, slightly battered by lunchtime — and Elisa's, which has been carefully assembled as a deliberate act. One is the result of years; the other is an effort. Both are sincere. But they are not the same thing.

Mapo Dofu and Mabodofu

Mapo dofu (麻婆豆腐) is a classic dish from Sichuan province in China: tofu in a sauce of fermented black beans, chilli bean paste, and Sichuan pepper, which produces a distinctive "mala" (numbing and spicy) sensation. It is famous for its intensity. *Mabodofu* (麻婆豆腐, same characters) is the Japanese adaptation, introduced in the 1970s and now extremely popular throughout Japan. The Japanese version is typically milder and slightly sweeter, with the Sichuan pepper reduced or omitted. Alessandro knows both — he has eaten the Japanese version his whole life and has encountered the original near Osaka. His refusal to try Wei's version is not timidity; it is experience. Wei's offer is a small test, and his answer — "That doesn't mean I'm an idiot" — is the right one.

Identity and Appearance in Italy

Italy has a complex and evolving relationship with racial and ethnic identity. The country has historically been relatively ethnically homogeneous, but migration over the past three decades has changed this significantly. Children born in Italy to non-Italian parents are not automatically Italian citizens under current law — citizenship by birth (*jus soli*) does not apply; citizenship is transmitted by parentage (*jus sanguinis*). This means that a child like Wei — born or raised in Italy, speaking Italian, attending Italian schools — may not be a legal Italian citizen, even if she has lived her whole life there. The phrase "I'm Italian too" carries legal, social, and personal weight. Alessandro's situation is different: born in Italy to an Italian father, he has Italian citizenship automatically. But the experience of being read as foreign is something they share.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 10 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- After the school trip, something shifted between the four of them. They have shared food, a piazza, a conversation that changed things. How do you think the group will behave on the next ordinary school morning?
- There is a friend Alessandro has thought about but not mentioned much — Yui. We know she messages in complete sentences and that she is important to him. What kind of person do you imagine her to be?
- Alessandro is good at noticing things about other people. Is there anyone in the novel who has been noticing him — not as a curiosity, but as a person they are genuinely interested in?

2. Glossary — Chapter 10

absorb (to absorb information) (v.)	to take in and process. <i>"Lorenzo absorbed this with the expression of someone receiving a piece of information that doesn't connect to anything else."</i>
alignment (n.)	when things line up or come together at the same point. <i>"Their timing had aligned most mornings."</i>
by arrangement (expression)	planned or agreed in advance. <i>"Not by arrangement"</i> — nothing had been organised, it just happened.
deploy (to deploy something) (v.)	to use something, often strategically. <i>"Someone who has deployed a grandmother's wisdom in a conversation with a girl."</i> Used here with gentle irony.
drift (v.)	to move slowly and without clear direction. <i>"Wei and Lorenzo had drifted slightly behind."</i>
emerge (v.)	to come out or appear. <i>"Something useful occasionally emerged"</i> from the conversations between Alessandro and Elisa.
exact / exactly (adj./adv.)	precise; perfectly accurate. <i>"He could hear it exactly."</i> Alessandro hears Yui's imagined response with complete clarity.
grandmother's wisdom (expression)	a piece of traditional advice or saying passed down through a family. Lorenzo quotes one: <i>"things are to be used, and if they're used they might get broken."</i>
irony (n.)	a gap between what is said or done and what is actually meant or felt. The narrator's description of Lorenzo deploying grandmother's wisdom is lightly ironic.
momentum (n.)	the energy or force of something moving. <i>"Slightly too much momentum"</i> — Elisa arrives in a rush, still moving fast.
opening (to create an opening) (n.)	an opportunity or gap in a conversation where you can enter or say something. <i>"Waiting for the conversation to create an opening."</i>
peripheral vision (n.)	what you can see at the edges of your sight, without looking directly. <i>"Somewhere in his peripheral vision."</i>
precise / precisely (adj./adv.)	exact; clear and accurate. <i>"He thought, immediately and precisely."</i>
redirect (v.)	to change direction and head toward something else. <i>"She saw Alessandro and redirected toward him."</i>
rejoining (v.)	returning to a group after a brief absence. <i>"The unremarkable manner of someone rejoining a group."</i>
skewer (to skewer someone) (v., informal)	to make a sharp, precise, witty remark that exposes something. <i>"Yui would have skewered you for that."</i>
terracotta (n./adj.)	an earthy brownish-orange colour, also the name of the fired clay material used in pottery and tiles. Siena gives its name to the colour "burnt sienna".
timing (n.)	here: the moment when something is said or done, and whether that moment is right. <i>"The timing, the particular quality of her sharpness."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is quieter than Chapter 9 — the events are subtle and the True/False exercise rewards careful reading.*

1. Wei, Alessandro, and Lorenzo have been arriving at the station at roughly the same time for several weeks. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro notices that Wei is walking closer to Lorenzo than usual and mentions it to him. TRUE / FALSE
3. Elisa has been researching Siena since the school trip. TRUE / FALSE
4. Lorenzo tells Alessandro directly what Wei said to him that morning. TRUE / FALSE
5. Alessandro says Yui's name out loud to Lorenzo. TRUE / FALSE
6. Alessandro knows exactly when the right moment to tell Lorenzo about Yui will be. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 4 is the most emotionally complex — it asks students to interpret what Alessandro imagines Yui saying and what that tells us. Allow time for discussion.*

1. How has the group's morning routine changed since the school trip? How does the author signal that this change happened without anyone planning it?
2. What does Alessandro notice about Wei at the station — and what does he do with that observation?
3. Alessandro says that Elisa, "when she was not performing, was genuinely interesting." What is the difference between Elisa performing and Elisa not performing?
4. When Lorenzo tells Alessandro about the rained-on book and his grandmother's saying, why does Alessandro immediately think of Yui? What does this tell us about Yui?
5. Why does Alessandro stop himself from saying Yui's name? What does he mean when he says this was not "the right moment"?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's quieter but equally precise moments of observation and restraint.*

1. The chapter describes Elisa arriving with "slightly too much momentum." What does this phrase tell us about her?
2. "Whatever had been said had been said." This is all Alessandro tells us about the conversation between Lorenzo and Wei. Why does the author not tell us what was said?
3. Alessandro thinks: "He had no way of knowing there was anything more to it." What is the "more" that Lorenzo cannot know?

4. Language Focus

A. Things That Happen Without Being Decided

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 10 is full of events that happen without anyone choosing them — the group forms, the routine establishes itself, Wei talks to Lorenzo. This exercise focuses on the grammatical patterns used to describe unplanned events.*

Look at how the author describes things that happen without anyone deciding them:

"Nobody proposed it. Nobody agreed to it. It was just the shape of the day now."

"Not by arrangement — just because they finished at the same time and the direction was the same."

"Their timing had aligned most mornings for several weeks now."

These sentences use passive constructions, negatives, and words like "just" and "simply" to suggest that agency — the deliberate choice — is absent. Things happen; nobody makes them happen.

Rewrite these sentences to remove the sense of deliberate choice. Use words like: just, simply, somehow, without, nobody, it happened that.

1. "They decided to walk to school together."
2. "Lorenzo and Wei planned to talk about the book."
3. "The four of them agreed to leave together after school."

B. Imagined Speech: What Someone Would Have Said

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro imagines exactly how Yui would have responded to Lorenzo's grandmother quote. This exercise focuses on the conditional structure used to describe imagined or hypothetical speech.*

Alessandro thinks: "Yui would have skewered you for that." He can hear it exactly — the timing, the sharpness. The structure here is: would have + past participle. This describes something that did not happen, but that Alessandro is confident would have happened.

Complete these sentences using would have + the verb in brackets:

1. Yui _____ (find) the right word immediately. She always did.
2. If Takuya had been there, he _____ (make) a joke about it.
3. In Japan, Alessandro _____ (not / hesitate) to say it. Here, he stopped.
4. A different conversation on a different day _____ (be) the right moment. This one was not.

Now write one sentence of your own: describe something someone you know would have said or done in a specific situation — something they did not actually say or do.

C. Describing People Through Their Effect on Others

 *Teacher's note: The chapter introduces Yui not through direct description but through her effect on Alessandro — the way he can hear her imagined response. This is a powerful technique: showing a character through the impression they leave on someone else.*

We learn the following about Yui from this chapter without meeting her:

- She would have found the funny or awkward thing immediately
- Her remarks are "brief and accurate"
- She is sharp but not cruel
- Alessandro can hear her voice precisely — the timing, the quality

This is character revealed through impression, not description.

Think of someone you know well. Describe them using only the effect they would have on a situation — what would they notice? What would they say? How would other people feel? Do not describe their appearance or give their name.

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any description that reveals character through effect rather than direct description. Weaker students: give them two or three sentence starters ("If she had been there, she would have...", "The first thing he would have noticed was..."). Stronger students: challenge them to describe the person so clearly that a reader would feel they know them.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 3 tends to generate the most personal responses — give students space to think before speaking.*

- The group's morning routine formed itself without anyone deciding it. Have you ever been part of a friendship or a group that formed this way — gradually, without anyone proposing it? What did it feel like when you realised it had happened?
- Alessandro says Elisa "when she was not performing, was genuinely interesting." Can you think of a time when you or someone you know was performing rather than being genuine? What made the performance necessary?
- Alessandro almost says Yui's name. He stops. He is not sure why. Have you ever stopped yourself from saying something because the moment didn't feel right — even though you couldn't explain why? Did the right moment eventually come?
- Lorenzo uses his grandmother's wisdom in a conversation with Wei and then notices how it sounds. Have you ever said something and immediately heard how it sounded from the outside?

B. Role Play: The Train

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. This is a quiet, understated scene — the challenge is to play the gap between what is said and what is meant. Two to three minutes.*

Lorenzo tells Alessandro about the rained-on book. Alessandro starts to say something about Yui. Then stops.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You hear Lorenzo's story and immediately think of Yui. You start to say her name. Then something stops you. You say "nothing" and look back at the window.

Student B: You are Lorenzo. You told a story and something happened — Alessandro started to say something and stopped. You notice, but you do not push. You go back to your phone.

After the role play: What did it feel like to be Alessandro in that moment — the one who stopped? What did Lorenzo understand without being told?

C. Discussion: The Right Moment

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to the chapter's final image and to one of the novel's central concerns: timing, readiness, and what it means to share something important with someone new.*

- Alessandro says he does not know what the right moment looks like — only that he will recognise it when it arrives. Do you think this is true? Can you always recognise the right moment, or do you sometimes miss it?
- Why might Alessandro be reluctant to introduce Yui into his Italian life by saying her name? What changes when you name something?
- Lorenzo is Alessandro's closest friend in Italy so far. But he has no way of knowing there is "anything more to it." Is it possible to be close to someone while keeping something important from them?
- Elisa, not performing, is genuinely interesting. Wei, apparently talking about a book, is actually saying something else. Lorenzo, quoting his grandmother, is trying. Alessandro is watching all of it. What kind of friend is Alessandro to this group — and what kind of friend does he need?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Alessandro has been holding Yui apart from his Italian life. Do you think he will eventually say her name to Lorenzo? What would change if he did?
- We know Wei talked to Lorenzo about the book. There is something forming between them. What do you think will happen there?
- The group has formed. What do you think the next challenge will be — for Alessandro, or for the group as a whole?

6. Writing Task

The Voice You Can Hear

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task that asks students to describe someone through their imagined speech — the technique used for Yui in this chapter. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro can hear exactly how Yui would have responded to Lorenzo's grandmother story — "the timing, the particular quality of her sharpness, the way she could find the one point worth touching and touch it without cruelty."

We know Yui through the impression she leaves in Alessandro's mind, not through description.

Write a short passage describing someone you know through their voice — what they would say in a specific situation. Do not describe their appearance. Use only:

- A situation or moment (real or imagined)
- What they would notice first
- What they would say — or not say
- Why it would be right

 *Teacher's note: Students can use a real person, a fictional character, or someone from the novel. The key is that the description should make the reader feel they know the person — through effect, not through adjectives. Weaker students: give them a sentence starter such as "If [name] had been there, the first thing they would have..." Stronger students: challenge them to write it without using the words kind, funny, smart, or nice.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Palio di Siena

The Palio is a bareback horse race held twice a year (2 July and 16 August) in the Piazza del Campo in Siena. Seventeen of the city's districts (contrade) compete, ten riding each time. The race itself lasts about ninety seconds but is surrounded by days of ceremony, processions in medieval costume, and intense local rivalry. Each contrada has its own colours, symbol, and identity; Sienese people identify with their contrada as strongly as with the city itself. The Palio has been run in its current form since at least the seventeenth century, though the tradition is older. It is not a tourist attraction — it is a living civic ritual that many Sienese take extremely seriously. Elisa researching the Palio is a sign of genuine curiosity rather than surface-level interest.

"Burnt Sienna" and the Colour Terracotta

Siena gives its name to the colour "burnt sienna" — a deep, warm brownish-orange used in art since the Renaissance. The pigment was originally made from earth found near Siena and used by painters including Raphael and Michelangelo. The general family of colours — warm, earthy, reddish-oranges — is called terracotta (Italian for "baked earth"), from the fired clay used in tiles, pots, and roofing across the Mediterranean. Elisa's research into "the particular shade of terracotta that Siena had apparently given its name to" is a specific and accurate observation: she is not just looking at photographs, she is looking carefully.

Grandmother's Wisdom and Italian Family Culture

In Italy, as in many cultures, sayings and proverbs passed down within families are a common part of everyday conversation. The saying Lorenzo quotes — "things are to be used, and if they're used they might get broken" — reflects a pragmatic attitude toward objects: using something fully is more respectful than preserving it unused. This kind of wisdom tends to be passed through families rather than books, and is often associated with older female relatives. Lorenzo's slight embarrassment at having quoted it to Wei is a recognisable social moment: the collision between something authentic from your family life and the self-consciousness of being seen using it by someone you want to impress.

Wit and Social Intelligence

Alessandro's certainty that Yui would have "skewered" Lorenzo for the grandmother quote — and his admiration for how she would have done it — tells us something important about the kind of intelligence he values. The ability to find the precise, accurate, brief thing to say — without cruelty, but without softening either — is a specific social skill. In Japanese, this kind of wit is sometimes associated with the concept of tsukkomi, the sharp responder in a comedy duo who punctures the other's foolishness. Whether or not Yui's wit is formal tsukkomi, the quality Alessandro describes is the same: she sees clearly and speaks accurately, and he finds this beautiful. This is also what we see in Wei's comment about the 17 bus in Chapter 9 — precision without cruelty.

The Right Moment

Alessandro's sense that there is a right moment to introduce Yui into his Italian life — that he will recognise it when it arrives — reflects something true about how emotionally important things are managed. Introducing a person by name is a small act with significant implications: it makes them real in a new context, subject to questions and interpretations from people who do not know them. Alessandro is not hiding Yui; he is protecting the space around her until he is ready to share it. This kind of timing is not strategic — it is instinctive, and it is a form of care both for himself and for her.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 11 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- In Chapter 10, the group formed a daily routine without anyone deciding it. Now they have free time together on a Tuesday afternoon. What do you think they will do with it?
- We have learned that Wei's family runs a takeaway. Have you ever been to a friend's home or workplace and seen them in a completely different context? What is that like?
- Think about a time when you changed the way you spoke, moved, or behaved because of who was around you. Was it a choice, or did it happen automatically?

2. Glossary — Chapter 11

appetite (n.)	the desire to eat. <i>"The uncomplicated appetite of someone who runs several kilometres every day."</i>
calibrated (adj.)	adjusted or adapted for a particular purpose or audience. <i>"Calibrated for a different palate."</i> The spring rolls have been adjusted to suit Italian tastes.
cataloguing (v.)	recording or examining something carefully, as if making a list. <i>"With the particular attention of someone cataloguing a new experience."</i>
code-switching (n.)	changing the way you speak, behave, or present yourself depending on who you are with or what context you are in. Related to Wei's behaviour at the till.
contained (adj.)	controlled; keeping things held in, not showing much outwardly. <i>"Her posture had changed slightly. More contained."</i>
decent (adj.)	reasonably good; acceptable. Not excellent, but fine. <i>"It was decent."</i>
efficient (adj.)	doing things quickly and without waste. <i>"Small, efficient, her dark hair pulled back."</i>
faded (adj.)	having lost colour or brightness over time. <i>"The handwritten menu, slightly faded from the sun."</i>
fuel (n.)	here used metaphorically: something that gives energy. <i>"Processes food as fuel rather than experience."</i>
glance (n./v.)	a quick, brief look. <i>"Alessandro glanced at her."</i> An involuntary movement — he did not plan it.
involuntary / involuntarily (adj./adv.)	done without intending to; automatic. <i>"A small, involuntary movement."</i>
La Dina (name, Italian)	a local elderly woman who visits the shop every day. Her friendship with Wei's mother is a detail that reveals the roots the family has put down in the neighbourhood.
leftovers (n.)	food that has not been sold or eaten, left over from a previous service. <i>"There are leftovers at the shop."</i>
navigation (n.)	here used figuratively: the daily work of managing a complicated social or cultural situation. <i>"Wei's daily navigation."</i>
palate (n.)	a person's sense of taste; the flavours they are used to and enjoy. <i>"Calibrated for a different palate."</i>
proximity (n.)	closeness. <i>"The understanding arriving not through explanation but through proximity."</i> Elisa understands because she is close to the situation, not because it was explained.
recalibration (n.)	a quick adjustment of understanding. <i>"The slight pause, the recalibration, the understanding arriving."</i>
spring roll (n.)	a Chinese snack: a thin pastry wrapper filled with vegetables and sometimes meat, then fried until crisp. Common in Chinese restaurants across the world.
tobacconist (n.)	a shop that sells tobacco, cigarettes, newspapers, and other small items. Common in Italian neighbourhoods, often called a tabaccheria.
tram (n.)	an electric vehicle that runs on rails set into the street, used for public transport in many European cities including Florence.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on careful reading of the food descriptions and the window scene. Push students to find the exact sentence.*

1. Wei invites the group to the shop because her parents asked her to bring friends. TRUE / FALSE
2. Lorenzo eats the spring rolls without much thought about the flavour. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro thinks the spring rolls are the same as the Chinese food he has eaten near Osaka. TRUE / FALSE
4. La Dina is a customer who buys food at the shop every day. TRUE / FALSE
5. Alessandro notices Wei's posture change at the till before Lorenzo tells him about it. TRUE / FALSE
6. Elisa reacts to what she sees through the window by asking Wei about it directly. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the emotional core of this chapter. Take time with it — the Elisa moment is subtle and important.*

1. What does the detail about La Dina tell us about Wei's family in this neighbourhood?
2. What does Wei mean when she says the food at the shop is "for Italians"? Is this a criticism?
3. What does Alessandro understand when he sees Wei's changed posture at the till? What does Elisa's reaction tell us about how she has changed since the early chapters?
4. When Elisa says it "feels unfair," Alessandro glances at her involuntarily. What does this glance communicate?
5. What is the effect of ending the chapter on "nobody had anywhere particular to be until the trains home"?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's precise observations. Question 2 is particularly worth spending time on in class.*

1. The chapter describes Lorenzo as having "the uncomplicated appetite of someone who runs several kilometres every day and processes food as fuel rather than experience." What does this tell us about Lorenzo beyond how he eats?
2. The narrative describes Elisa's understanding of Alessandro's situation as arriving "not through explanation but through proximity." What does this mean? Why does it matter that she did not need it explained?
3. Wei says "Don't tell her" about her father's spring rolls. This is the last line of spoken dialogue in the chapter. What makes it the right note to end on?

4. Language Focus

A. Code-Switching: Language and Identity

 *Teacher's note: This chapter introduces code-switching explicitly through Wei's behaviour at the till. This exercise connects the concept to language learning more broadly — a relevant topic for ESL students.*

Code-switching is the act of changing how you speak, behave, or present yourself depending on who you are with. It can involve:

- Switching between two languages (e.g. speaking Italian at school, Chinese at home)
- Changing register within one language (e.g. formal with teachers, informal with friends)
- Changing accent, tone, or manner to match what others expect

Look at these examples from the chapter. For each one, decide what kind of code-switching is happening and why.

1. Wei adopts a Chinese accent at the till when serving Italian customers.
2. Alessandro, in Wakayama, would sometimes let people have "the version they wanted" of him.
3. Alessandro speaks Italian at school and Japanese (and English) in messages to his friends in Wakayama.

Discussion question: is code-switching always a choice? Or can it happen automatically, without deciding to?

 *Teacher's note: This question connects to students' own experience of language learning and adaptation. Encourage them to think about how they speak differently in different contexts — even within one language. There is no single correct answer; the goal is reflection.*

B. Describing What You See Through a Window

 *Teacher's note: This chapter contains two significant moments of seeing through a window — Alessandro watching La Dina and Wei's mother, then watching Wei at the till. This exercise practises the specific language of visual observation.*

Look at how the author describes the scene through the window:

"Through the window he could see a woman behind the counter — small, efficient, her dark hair pulled back. She was talking to someone at a table near the door: an elderly woman in a coat, sitting with nothing in front of her, apparently with nowhere to be."

Notice: the description uses *could see*, *was talking*, *sitting* — past continuous for ongoing actions. It uses *apparently* for things inferred rather than known directly.

Write three sentences describing something you can see right now, using these structures:

"Through the window I could see _____."

"She/He was _____, apparently _____."

"There was a _____, sitting / standing / _____ with _____."

 *Teacher's note: This works well as a brief in-class writing activity — students look out the window or at a photograph. The goal is to practise describing ongoing actions and inferred states. Weaker students: give them a photograph to describe. Stronger students: ask them to write the paragraph without using any adjectives like nice, beautiful, interesting.*

C. Understanding: Seeing vs. Being Told

 *Teacher's note: Elisa reaches understanding through observation rather than explanation. This exercise focuses on the language of inference — how we express what we conclude from what we see.*

Compare these two ways of arriving at the same conclusion:

Being told: Alessandro explained that he also had to perform a version of himself for others. Elisa understood.

Seeing and inferring: Elisa watched what was happening through the window. She said something true about it. Alessandro glanced at her. She connected the two without needing the connection drawn for her.

The second version is more powerful. The understanding is earned, not given.

Practise the language of inference. Complete these sentences:

1. Looking through the window, Alessandro could see that Wei _____. He understood this because _____.
2. Without anyone saying anything, Elisa realised that _____.
3. The glance was involuntary. It told Elisa _____ without _____ having to explain.

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most universally resonant — almost everyone has some experience of adjusting themselves for a different audience.*

- Wei invites the group to the shop with the reason "there are leftovers." Do you think this is the only reason? What else might she be offering them?
- Wei adopts a slightly different manner at the till. Lorenzo says she has been doing it since she started helping there. Do you think this is wrong, understandable, or both? Is there a difference between adjusting yourself and pretending to be something you are not?
- Elisa's reaction — "I understand why. But it looks like a lot of effort, and it feels unfair" — is quiet and honest. She does not perform sympathy. Is this a better reaction than a longer, more emotional response would have been?
- La Dina comes to the shop every day, buys nothing, and talks to Wei's mother. Wei's mother worries if she does not come. What kind of friendship is this? Can you think of friendships in your own life — or in stories — that look like this?

B. Role Play: The Bench Outside the Shop

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three or four. The challenge is to play a scene where something significant is happening quietly in the background — through the window — while the conversation on the bench is ordinary. Encourage students to pay attention to what their characters see and do not see. Three to four minutes.*

The four of them are sitting on the bench outside Wei's family shop. Wei is inside at the till.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You are watching through the window. You notice Wei's posture change. You say nothing. When Elisa speaks, something shifts in your face before you can stop it.

Student B: You are Elisa. You are watching too. When you have something to say, say it — simply, without performance. Then stop.

Student C: You are Lorenzo. You notice what the others are looking at. You add a quiet fact (Wei does this since she started helping here) and leave it at that.

Student D (optional): You are Wei. You come back out after nine minutes. You look at what is left. You ask "Well?" Do not address what happened through the window.

After the role play: What happened in the silence? What did each character notice?

C. Discussion: The Work of Belonging

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to the novel's central themes. It asks students to think about the cost of adapting to different environments — a topic relevant to anyone who has lived between cultures, languages, or communities.*

- Wei's Chinese accent at the till is described as making things easier for customers. But Elisa says it "looks like a lot of effort." Why might something that makes things easier for others be an effort for you?
- Alessandro recognises what Wei is doing because he has done a version of it himself — letting people have the version of him they expect. Do you think this is a survival skill, a form of dishonesty, or something else entirely?
- La Dina cannot say Liu Fang's name correctly and calls her Lufa instead. Liu Fang does not correct her. Is this a small thing or a significant one? Does it matter that it has gone on so long that it is "part of the furniture"?
- By the end of the chapter, the four of them are simply sitting in the afternoon with nowhere to be. After everything the chapter has shown about performance and effort and code-switching, what makes this image feel like a relief?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Elisa caught Alessandro's involuntary glance and understood what it meant. How do you think this will change things between them?
- The group has now spent time in Wei's world — her shop, her mother, La Dina. What do you think Wei got from this afternoon?
- It is October or November. Alessandro has been in Italy for about two months. He has friends, a routine, a clearer sense of what he is missing. What do you think is coming?

6. Writing Task

Two Versions

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task on code-switching and identity. Students write two short descriptions of the same person in two different contexts — showing how someone can be themselves in two different ways. Suggested length: 100–140 words total (two short paragraphs).*

Wei at the till is slightly more contained than Wei on the bench outside. She is not pretending — she is adapting. Both versions are her. But they are not the same.

Write two short paragraphs describing the same person in two different contexts. The person should be recognisably the same — but different in some way that makes sense given where they are.

You can use:

- A character from the novel
- Someone you know
- Yourself

Choose two contexts, for example: at school and at home / with old friends and with new ones / in a formal situation and a relaxed one.

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: this is not about showing that one version is fake and the other is real. Both versions are true. The goal is to show how context shapes how we present ourselves — through posture, language, what we say and what we leave out. Weaker students: give them the two contexts and ask them to write one sentence for each about posture, one about voice, and one about what the person talks about. Stronger students: ask them to capture the difference without ever stating it directly.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Chinese-Italian Community

Italy has one of Europe's significant Chinese immigrant communities, with a history going back to the early twentieth century. Large concentrations live in cities including Milan, Rome, Florence, and Prato (which has one of the largest Chinese communities in Europe, working in the textile industry). Many Chinese-Italian families run restaurants, takeaways, and shops. Children born or raised in Italy often grow up bilingual — Chinese at home, Italian at school and with friends — and navigate between two cultures daily. Like Alessandro and Wei, they may be Italian in every practical sense while still being read as foreign by the people around them.

The Italian Tabaccheria

The *tabaccheria* (tobacconist) is a fixture of Italian neighbourhoods. Licensed by the state, it sells tobacco products but also newspapers, stamps, public transport tickets, and various other items. Many also sell lottery tickets (gratta e vinci) and act as informal bill-payment points. The tabaccheria is one of the small connective tissues of Italian daily life — the place you stop on the way to somewhere else. Its presence in the description of Wei's neighbourhood helps locate the shop in a specific, recognisably Italian urban world.

Code-Switching

Code-switching is a term from sociolinguistics describing the practice of moving between languages, dialects, accents, or registers depending on context. Everyone does it to some degree — we speak differently to our grandparents than to our friends, differently in a job interview than at home. For people from minority backgrounds, code-switching often involves more deliberate adaptation: adjusting how you speak or present yourself to make others more comfortable, or to avoid being misread. Wei's use of a Chinese accent with Italian customers is a form of code-switching — she gives customers the version of her they expect, because correcting their expectations would take more effort than the interaction is worth. Alessandro recognises this because he has done his own version of it: letting people have the half-Japanese or half-Italian version of him that was easier for the situation.

Food, Adaptation, and Home

The distinction Wei makes between the food at the shop and "proper food" is a common one for families from immigrant backgrounds. Food served to customers is adapted to local tastes — milder, more familiar, calibrated to what will sell. Food made at home is different: more specific, more complex, made with ingredients that may need to be sourced specially, and carrying the memory of a place and a cooking tradition that was not imported for sale. This distinction — between food as business and food as home — appears across many immigrant communities. Alessandro tastes it immediately: the spring rolls are good, but they are not the same as the Chinese food he has eaten near Osaka. Wei knows this, which is why she says her mother's home cooking is "different."

Names and Pronunciation

La Dina cannot say Liu Fang's name correctly and has settled on Lufa. Liu Fang accepts this — at this point it is, as Wei says, "part of the furniture." This is a small detail with wider resonance. Across many immigrant communities, names are regularly mispronounced, shortened, or replaced with simpler alternatives for the convenience of people from the majority culture. Some immigrants adopt alternative names entirely; others adapt their names; others accept the simplified version as Liu Fang does. Alessandro's own name — Bevilacqua Kobayashi — is long, double, and does not fit neatly into one box. Names carry identity. What happens to them, and how people respond, says something about the relationship between cultures.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 12 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has been in Italy for about two months. He has friends, a routine, a sense of comfort he did not expect. What do you think it would feel like to realise — suddenly — that you have settled somewhere?
- When you are living in a new place, when does it start to feel like home? Is it a moment, or something that happens slowly?
- Alessandro and Yui have not messaged each other in several weeks. What do you think has happened in that gap? What might bring them back into contact?

2. Glossary — Chapter 12

accumulation (n.)	the gradual building up of many small things. <i>"Not as a single moment but as the accumulation of many small ones."</i>
appraising (adj.)	examining carefully to form a judgement. <i>"The appraising attention of someone who had last seen him aged thirteen."</i>
architecture (thin architecture) (n.)	here used figuratively: the structure or shape of something. <i>"A thin dark architecture of branches."</i> The bare branches of the sakura make a structural pattern against the wall.
belt (checkout belt) (n.)	the moving surface at a supermarket checkout that carries items to the cashier.
brief / briefly (adj./adv.)	short; for a short time only. Used several times in this chapter to describe small moments that mean more than their length.
countdown (n.)	a count backwards toward a specific moment or event. <i>"The thing that required planning and tickets and a countdown."</i>
departure date (n. phrase)	the date when you leave. <i>"Japan has a departure date."</i> Not Italy — Italy is where he lives. Japan is where he is going.
efficiency / efficient (n./adj.)	doing things quickly and without waste. <i>"The clean efficiency of two people who had been doing this for years."</i>
logistics (n.)	the practical details of organising something — times, dates, arrangements. <i>"The conversation moved into logistics."</i>
o-shogatsu (n., Japanese)	the Japanese New Year celebration, typically from 1 to 3 January. One of the most important holidays in Japan, traditionally spent with family.
ojisan (n., Japanese)	grandfather (informal). Alessandro's maternal grandfather in Japan, who is old and whose New Year visits are treated as precious.
pharmacy (n.)	a shop where medicines and health products are sold. Also called a chemist. Common in Italian neighbourhoods, identifiable by a green cross sign.
resume / resumed (v.)	to start again after a pause. <i>"It had simply resumed."</i> The Saturday bar ritual started again without anyone deciding to restart it.
thread (message thread) (n.)	a sequence of connected messages in a chat or messaging app.
trolley (n.)	the wheeled cart used for carrying shopping in a supermarket.
withdrawn (adj.)	pulled back; retreated. <i>"Everything withdrawn for winter."</i> The sakura tree has lost its leaves and gone quiet.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on the chapter's careful distinctions — particularly around what Italy is and what Japan is for Alessandro now.*

1. Alessandro's parents chose to start going to the Saturday bar again as a deliberate decision to resume old routines. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro notices that he is comfortable in Italy in a single clear moment. TRUE / FALSE
3. Haruko is booking flights for a holiday in Japan at New Year. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro had forgotten to message Yui and feels guilty about the gap. TRUE / FALSE
5. Yui already knew that Alessandro was going to Japan for the holidays. TRUE / FALSE
6. Elisa's reaction to the news of Alessandro's Japan trip is immediate and enthusiastic. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the most important in this chapter — the Japan/Italy reversal is the emotional core. Allow plenty of time.*

1. What does Alessandro mean when he says "Italy had been happening to him" and "he had, without deciding to, been happening to Italy"?
2. Why does the moment at the supermarket checkout feel significant? What has changed in how Alessandro thinks about Japan and Italy?
3. Why does Alessandro send Yui the message about the flights — and why does he describe it as "slightly beside the point"?
4. Yui says "I know." What does this tell us about her and about her relationship with Alessandro?
5. What does Elisa's one-second stillness tell us when Alessandro announces the Japan trip?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most precise observations about time, reversal, and the gap between what is said and what is felt.*

1. The chapter says Alessandro noticed his comfort in Italy "the way you notice something that has been happening gradually — not as a single moment but as the accumulation of many small ones that had suddenly become visible." What does this tell us about how settling happens?
2. "Japan has a departure date. Not Italy. Japan." Why does the author repeat "Japan" and use short sentences here?
3. Alessandro says the gap with Yui had closed — "or enough of it had." Why the qualifier? What remains?

4. Language Focus

A. Gradual Change: Expressing What Happens Slowly

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 12 is structured around gradual change becoming suddenly visible. This exercise focuses on the language used to describe slow, accumulative processes.*

The chapter uses specific language to describe things that happen gradually:

"It had simply resumed." — no agent, no decision. It just happened.

"Italy had been happening to him." — past continuous: an ongoing process, not a moment.

"The accumulation of many small ones that had suddenly become visible." — past perfect: the result of a process now completed.

Complete these sentences about gradual change, using the correct verb form:

1. He _____ (become) comfortable without noticing it. One Saturday morning, he simply was.
2. The group _____ (form) over the weeks. Nobody had proposed it.
3. The Saturday bar routine _____ (resume) without any discussion. It was just there again.
4. He had been in Italy for two months and Italy _____ (happen) to him the whole time.

B. Eighteen Days: Time and Gaps in Relationships

 *Teacher's note: The eighteen-day gap with Yui is the emotional centre of the chapter's second section. This exercise practises the language of time gaps and their significance.*

Alessandro had to scroll to find Yui's last message. It was eighteen days ago. He checked the date twice because it seemed wrong.

These sentences describe the gap. Notice the verb forms and the words that show significance:

"Eighteen days of nothing specific." — A noun phrase, not a full sentence. The brevity mirrors the blankness.

"He had been replying to the group chat... but Yui was not the group chat." — A contrast. He had been active; with Yui specifically, he had not.

Now practise expressing gaps. Complete these sentences:

1. It had been _____ since Alessandro last messaged Yui directly. He checked the date because it seemed _____.
2. He had been busy with the group chat, but Yui was _____. She messaged _____, when she had something _____ to say.
3. When Yui replied "I know," the conversation moved into _____ with the _____ efficiency of two people who had been doing this for _____.

Discussion question: Alessandro says the gap had closed "or enough of it had." What is the difference between a gap closing completely and a gap closing enough?

 *Teacher's note: Push students to think about what "enough" means in relationships. There is no single correct answer — the question is about degrees of resolution and the honesty of Alessandro's self-assessment.*

C. The Moment of Realisation: Short Sentences

 *Teacher's note: The chapter uses short sentences and repetition at the checkout to show a realisation landing in real time. This exercise practises using sentence length and rhythm as expressive tools.*

Look at this passage:

"Japan has a departure date. Not Italy. Japan. Italy was where he was standing. Japan was the trip, the destination, the thing that required planning and tickets and a countdown."

The short sentences and the repetition of "Japan" and "Italy" create the feeling of a thought arriving piece by piece. This is very different from a single long sentence.

Try it yourself. Write a short passage (four to six sentences) describing a realisation arriving — something that becomes clear gradually, in pieces. Use short sentences where the thought is arriving, longer ones where it has settled.

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Examples of suitable topics: realising you have been away for a long time; realising you have forgotten something important; realising a friendship has changed. Weaker students: give them a situation and ask them to write the moment it becomes clear. Stronger students: challenge them to make the reader feel the realisation arrive, not just be told it happened.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 tends to generate the most discussion — the Japan/Italy reversal is emotionally precise and students often have versions of this experience.*

- Alessandro notices his comfort in Italy gradually, as an accumulation. Have you ever noticed that you had settled into something — a place, a group, a routine — without realising it was happening? What made you notice?
- At the checkout, Alessandro realises that Japan now has a departure date — it is the destination, not home. Italy is where he is standing. Do you think this shift is a good thing, a sad thing, or both?
- The gap between Alessandro and Yui was eighteen days. He is surprised by this. Have you ever lost track of how long it had been since you talked to someone important? What happens to friendships when the gap grows?
- Elisa goes still for exactly one second when she hears Alessandro is going to Japan, then arranges her expression. Alessandro notices and says nothing. Is this the right response? What would you do?

B. Role Play: The Station

 *Teacher's note: Groups of four. A quiet scene — the announcement, the responses, the one second. The challenge is to play the gap in Elisa's reaction as naturally as possible. Two to three minutes.*

Monday morning at the station. The four of them are walking to school. Alessandro mentions the Japan trip.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You mention it simply, without drama. You are watching for reactions — but quietly, the way you always watch.

Student B: You are Lorenzo. You nod. You have nothing particularly strong to say about Japan trips. This is not unusual for you.

Student C: You are Wei. You nod. You think about it for a moment — a trip home, a different home — but you say nothing.

Student D: You are Elisa. Something crosses your face before you can stop it. Then you arrange yourself. Say "That sounds nice." Make it sound fine.

After the role play: Could you feel the one second? What was happening for each character in that moment?

C. Discussion: Home

 *Teacher's note: This discussion goes to the heart of the novel. Handle it thoughtfully — some students may have direct personal experience of the questions it raises.*

Alessandro realises at the supermarket checkout that Italy is now where he stands — and Japan is where he is going. This is a reversal.

- At what point does a new place become home? Is it about time, about people, about routine — or something else?
- Can you have two homes? Or does the word home always refer to one specific place?
- Alessandro still calls the o-shogatsu trip "Japan" — not "home" and not "the trip to Japan." What do you think that means?
- The novel is called Missing Home. At this point in the story, which home do you think Alessandro is missing — or is he missing both?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Alessandro is going to Japan for New Year. He will see Yui, his grandfather, his friends. What do you think will happen? Will Japan feel different now that Italy has become where he stands?
- Elisa had a reaction she could not quite hide. Alessandro noticed and left it alone. What do you think is happening for her?
- The novel is about two-thirds of the way through. What do you think the remaining chapters will bring — for Alessandro, and for the group?

6. Writing Task

Comfort, Gradually

 *Teacher's note: A short reflective writing task, modelled on Alessandro's realisation. Students describe a gradual change they have noticed in themselves — settling into something, changing slowly, becoming different without deciding to. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro notices his comfort in Italy not as a single moment but as the accumulation of many small ones. The walk to school. The train. The group at the station. The Tuesday afternoons. The evenings in the garden. The Saturday bar.

Think of a time when you gradually felt more comfortable, more at home, or more yourself in a new situation. Write a short passage describing how you noticed it — not the process, but the moment when the accumulation became visible.

- What were the small things that had been building up?
- When did you notice?
- What was the specific moment — or the detail — that made it clear?

You can write about yourself, a fictional character, or Alessandro.

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: the goal is not to describe the whole process. It is to describe the moment of noticing — when the accumulation suddenly became visible. Alessandro does this in one paragraph; so can the students. Weaker students: give them the sentence frame "I had been ____ for weeks. One day, I noticed _____. It had been happening all along." Stronger students: ask them to list three or four small things first, then write the noticing.*

7. Cultural Notes

O-shogatsu: Japanese New Year

O-shogatsu (お正月) is the Japanese New Year celebration, observed from 1 to 3 January and one of the most important holidays in the Japanese calendar. Unlike the Western Christmas which centres on Christmas Eve and Day, New Year in Japan is a time for family gatherings, visits to shrines (*hatsumode* — the first shrine visit of the year), special food (*osechi ryōri*, elaborately prepared dishes in lacquered boxes), and cards (*nengajō*). Families often travel to be together. The first three days of January are national holidays. For Alessandro's family, the *o-shogatsu* trip to Japan is a fixed annual commitment tied to his grandfather — a promise made to be there while he still can be.

Ojisan: Grandfather

In Japanese, *ojisan* (お祖父さん) means grandfather (and, in different contexts, can also mean an elderly man). Alessandro's maternal grandfather — Haruko's father — is old, and the annual New Year visit is framed explicitly as precious: "every New Year could be the last one." This framing is understated but important. The trip is not just a holiday; it is a commitment to being present for someone whose time is limited. Alessandro's mother, described as not the kind of person who regretted things she could have done, has built this into the family's calendar accordingly.

The Coop Supermarket

Coop (short for Cooperativa) is Italy's largest supermarket chain, run as a consumer cooperative — meaning that members own shares and receive dividends rather than a corporation taking the profit. It is a fixture of Italian towns and cities. The Coop in Pontassieve is where Alessandro's family shops, part of the Saturday routine that has resumed without discussion. Shopping at the Coop after the Saturday bar is an ordinary Italian domestic ritual — and its ordinariness is the point. Alessandro is now inside that ordinariness.

The Sakura in November

By November, the *somei yoshino* cherry tree in the garden has lost its leaves and is bare — "a thin dark architecture of branches against the wall, everything withdrawn for winter." Alessandro notes that he will see it bloom in spring. This is a promise he has been making to himself since September, and the chapter confirms it is still intact. The tree, planted by his Italian father as a piece of Japan in Tuscany, has been a recurring image: the photograph Alessandro's grandmother sent every spring, the September arrival when the tree was green and ordinary, and now this winter version — skeletal, patient, waiting. The reader has been tracking this tree as a kind of clock.

Two Homes

The question of what counts as home is one that many people — particularly those who have moved between countries, grown up bilingual, or spent significant time away from where they were born — navigate throughout their lives. Home is not always a single fixed place. For some people, home is a person or a group of people. For others, it is a language, a smell, a routine. Alessandro's realisation at the checkout — that Italy is now where he stands, and Japan is where he is going — does not resolve the question. It marks a shift. He is not abandoning Japan; he is noticing that Italy has become something. These two things can be true simultaneously, even if they are uncomfortable together.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 13 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- In Chapter 12, Elisa reacted to the news of Alessandro's Japan trip with one second of stillness before arranging her expression. Alessandro noticed and said nothing. Do you think she will say something eventually? What might she do with that feeling?
- Alessandro has been building a life in Italy. Now he is going back to Japan — temporarily. How do you think he feels about that? Excited? Nervous? Both?
- Yui is coming into focus. We know she is important to Alessandro, that she writes in complete sentences, and that she understood immediately in the Piazza del Campo. What do you think she will think when Alessandro tells her he is bringing a friend to Japan?

2. Glossary — Chapter 13

assumptions (n.)	things you believe to be true without evidence. <i>"Recalibrating a large number of assumptions at once."</i> Lorenzo assumed jiji was an Italian name.
breathe (can now breathe) (expression)	to relax after tension. <i>"The particular release of a person who has said the difficult thing and can now breathe."</i>
classmate (n.)	a person in the same class at school.
contained (adj.)	controlled; not showing much outwardly. Already seen in Chapter 11.
courtesy (n.)	polite behaviour or words. <i>"He said it with perfect courtesy."</i>
disciplined (adj.)	showing self-control; able to wait without showing impatience. <i>"More disciplined than he had expected."</i>
edging toward (expression)	gradually moving closer to. <i>"November edging toward December."</i>
jiji (n., Japanese, informal)	grandfather. Alessandro's informal word for his maternal grandfather. Distinct from the formal ojisan.
logistics (n.)	the practical details of organising something. Already seen in Chapter 12.
misunderstanding (n.)	a situation where someone has understood something incorrectly. The jiji/Gigi exchange is a comic misunderstanding.
preamble (n.)	introductory words before getting to the main point. <i>"Without preamble — she has decided the preamble would only make things worse."</i>
precision (n.)	exactness; choosing the right word carefully. <i>"Choosing the words with the precision his grandfather's manner invited."</i>
reassuring / reassurance (adj./n.)	making someone feel less worried. <i>"Your mum is very reassuring."</i>
recalibrating (v.)	adjusting your understanding after new information. Seen also in Chapter 3.
release (a particular release) (n.)	a letting go of tension. <i>"The particular release of a person who has said the difficult thing."</i>
respectful (adj.)	showing care and consideration for others. <i>"She would be respectful."</i>
shift (n./v.)	a change. <i>"Something in her posture had changed — the particular release."</i> Also: Wei's shift at the till (a work period).
sleeping situation (n. phrase)	the arrangements for where guests will sleep. Elisa's mother asked about this before agreeing.
thorough / thoroughly (adj./adv.)	complete and careful; not leaving anything out. <i>"Honestly quite thorough."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on what is said and what is left unsaid. Push students to find the exact text.*

1. Elisa asks Alessandro about Japan impulsively, without having thought about it first. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro immediately agrees to take Elisa to Japan. TRUE / FALSE
3. Lorenzo initially thinks "jiji" is the name of an Italian person Alessandro knows. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro's grandfather agrees to have Elisa to stay without any conditions. TRUE / FALSE
5. Elisa's parents agreed immediately and without questions. TRUE / FALSE
6. Alessandro waits for Yui's reply before going inside for the evening. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the most emotionally complex — it requires reading between the lines of what Alessandro's grandfather says. Allow time for discussion.*

1. Why does Elisa make her request "without preamble"? What does this tell us about how she prepared for this conversation?
2. Alessandro thinks: "she genuinely believes the last part" — referring to Elisa's claim that she would not be any trouble. What does this tell us about how he sees her?
1. Alessandro's grandfather says "she is welcome" with perfect courtesy. But Alessandro "heard, underneath the courtesy, exactly what the old man thought." What do you think his grandfather actually thought?
3. What does the message "We're coming for New Year. I'm bringing a friend." contain that is more than it says on the surface?
4. Why does Alessandro describe the sakura as "something waiting" rather than "something missing"?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most delicate moments of indirect communication and wit.*

1. The jiji / Gigi misunderstanding is comic. But underneath the comedy, what does it reveal about Lorenzo — and about how little the others know of Alessandro's Japanese life?
2. Elisa describes the conversation between their mothers as "honestly quite thorough." What does this phrase tell us about the conversation — and about Elisa's feelings about it?
3. The chapter ends with Alessandro being "prepared to wait" for Yui's reply. This mirrors the sakura. What is the connection?

4. Language Focus

A. Making a Request: Direct and Indirect

 *Teacher's note: Elisa's request is a model of direct but considerate communication. This exercise focuses on the language of requests — how to ask for something significant without being either aggressive or so tentative that the request disappears.*

Elisa says: "I want to come to Japan. I know it's a lot to ask. I know it's your family's New Year and not a tourist thing. But I've been — I might never get another chance. I would pay my own way. I wouldn't be any trouble."

Notice: she states the request clearly first. Then she acknowledges the difficulty. Then she offers reassurances. She does not apologise excessively, but she does not pretend the request is small.

Put these parts of the request in the correct order (1 = first, 5 = last):

- a. Offer a reassurance ("I would pay my own way.")
- b. Acknowledge the difficulty ("I know it's a lot to ask.")
- c. State the request clearly ("I want to come to Japan.")
- d. Give a reason ("I might never get another chance.")
- e. Acknowledge the context ("I know it's your family's New Year and not a tourist thing.")

Now write a short request of your own, following a similar structure. Choose a situation where you are asking for something significant — not a small thing.

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any request that is direct, acknowledges the difficulty, gives a reason, and offers something in return. This exercise is useful for real communication situations — job applications, asking for favours, making proposals.*

B. Hearing What Is Not Said

 *Teacher's note: This chapter contains several moments where characters hear what is underneath what is said. This exercise focuses on the difference between the surface meaning and the real meaning.*

Alessandro's grandfather says: "She is welcome." Alessandro hears something underneath this.

Elisa describes her mother's conversation with Haruko as "honestly quite thorough." Underneath this is something she does not say directly.

Alessandro writes to Yui: "I'm bringing a friend." Yui will read more than those words.

For each of these, write:

- What is literally said
- What is really meant or understood

1. Grandfather: "She is welcome."
2. Elisa: "Honestly quite thorough."
3. Alessandro: "I'm bringing a friend."

C. Register: Formal and Informal Japanese

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro adjusts his language when speaking to his grandfather — choosing words carefully. This is an opportunity to discuss register in a language learning context.*

Alessandro calls his grandfather in Japanese and chooses his words carefully: "A classmate. A friend from school. She had not been to Japan before. She would be respectful. There was room, he thought, but that was ojisan's house and not his decision to make."

This is formal, respectful language. Compare it to how he speaks to Lorenzo on the train — short, quick, direct.

Think about these two registers — formal and informal. For each situation below, decide which register is more appropriate and explain why:

1. Asking a teacher for permission to leave class early.
2. Texting a friend to say you are running late.
3. Writing to explain an absence from school to the office.
4. Asking your grandfather if a friend can visit for New Year.

 *Teacher's note: Discuss with students: when they are learning a second language, which register do they tend to use? Most learners default to formal because it is what is taught. But informal register — slang, shortcuts, humour — is often what makes a language feel truly yours. Both matter.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most nuanced — it asks students to read the grandfather's courtesy precisely.*

- Elisa asked directly, without preamble. Is this a brave thing to do? Would you have done the same, or would you have built up to it more slowly?
- Alessandro hears what his grandfather really thinks underneath the courtesy. Do you think his grandfather approves, disapproves, or simply understands? Is there a difference between approving and understanding?
- The jiji/Gigi misunderstanding is funny. But it also shows how little Alessandro's Italian friends know about his Japanese life. Is this a problem, or just how things are at this stage of a friendship?
- Alessandro sends Yui the message and waits. He does not push for a reply. The message shows as read. What do you think Yui is thinking?

B. Role Play: The Lunch Table

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. Elisa makes her request. The challenge is to play Elisa as someone who has prepared — direct, no preamble, aware of what she is asking — and Alessandro as someone who is neither surprised nor dismissive. Two to three minutes.*

It is Thursday lunch. Lorenzo and Wei have left. Alessandro is eating alone. Elisa sits down.

Student A: You are Elisa. You have been thinking about this since Monday. Say it directly. Then wait.

Student B: You are Alessandro. You are not surprised. You take the request seriously. You give an honest answer — not yes, not no, but what is actually true.

After the role play: How did it feel to make a direct request? How did it feel to receive one?

C. Discussion: Bringing Worlds Together

 *Teacher's note: This discussion addresses what happens when two different parts of someone's life are brought into contact for the first time. It connects to the novel's central tension.*

- Alessandro is bringing Elisa to Japan. He is bringing his Italian world into his Japanese one. Why might this feel both exciting and complicated?
- Alessandro says the message to Yui is "simple and it contains several things at once." What are those several things? How would you feel, in Yui's place, receiving that message?
- Alessandro has been careful, throughout the novel, to keep his Italian and Japanese worlds somewhat separate. Now they are about to meet. What do you think will change?
- The sakura is "something waiting" rather than "something missing." Has Alessandro's relationship to Italy changed over the course of the novel so far? What is he waiting for now?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Yui's message has been read. She is thinking. What do you think she will say?
- Elisa is going to Japan for New Year. She has been building an idea of Japan for years. What do you think will happen when the idea meets the reality?
- Alessandro's grandfather has said Elisa is welcome. But he also understood more than he was told. How do you think he will receive Elisa when she arrives?

6. Writing Task

The Difficult Ask

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task focused on making a significant request clearly and honestly. Students write a request they have wanted to make — or one a character in the novel might make. Suggested length: 80–120 words.*

Elisa asks without preamble. She states the request, acknowledges the difficulty, gives a reason, and offers reassurance. She does not apologise excessively. She does not pretend the request is small.

Write a short piece in which a character (real or fictional, including yourself) makes a significant request to someone. Follow Elisa's structure:

- State the request clearly, at the beginning
- Acknowledge why it is a lot to ask
- Give a genuine reason
- Offer something in return, or a reassurance

The request can be for anything — as long as it matters to the person asking.

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: the goal is honesty without excessive apology. Elisa does not shrink from the request; she owns it. Weaker students: give them a situation (asking a parent for permission to travel alone; asking a teacher for extra time on an assignment) and have them follow the structure sentence by sentence. Stronger students: challenge them to make the reader feel both the significance of the request and the self-awareness of the person making it.*

7. Cultural Notes

Japanese Hospitality: Omotenashi

Japanese hospitality has a specific cultural concept: *omotenashi* (おもてなし), which describes a wholehearted, anticipatory form of welcoming guests — attending to their needs before they are expressed, without expecting anything in return. When Alessandro's grandfather says "she is welcome" with perfect courtesy, he is operating within this tradition: the guest will be received properly, regardless of the circumstances. This does not mean he has no opinions about the situation; it means he separates his opinions from his hospitality. Alessandro hears both layers at once — the welcome and what lies underneath it — and understands both.

Jiji and Ojisan: Grandfather in Japanese

In Japanese, there are several ways to refer to a grandfather. *Ojisan* (お祖父さん) is the standard, formal term, used when speaking about or to an elder with respect. *Jiji* (じい) is an informal, affectionate term — closer to "grandpa" than "grandfather." Alessandro calls his grandfather jiji, which signals warmth and familiarity. When he tells Lorenzo "jiji means grandfather," he is explaining one of the pieces of his Japanese life that his Italian friends have never had to know before. Lorenzo's mishearing of jiji as the Italian name Gigi (common in Italy, often short for Luigi or Virgilio) is a genuine and amusing collision of two sound systems.

Italian Parental Due Diligence

Elisa's parents' thorough questioning before agreeing to let her travel to Japan with a classmate's family is recognisable Italian parenting. Italian families tend to be closely involved in their children's social lives and travel plans, particularly for something as significant as an international trip over a major holiday. The father's questions about the area and safety, and the mother's questions about the sleeping situation, are typical of a family doing their due diligence before entrusting their child to another household. Haruko's careful answers and the photograph of the neighbourhood are equally characteristic of her: organised, precise, leaving nothing to chance.

New Year in Japan: Being a Guest

O-shogatsu (New Year) is one of the most domestic, family-centred holidays in Japan. Homes are cleaned before the New Year, special foods prepared, and the holiday is spent almost entirely with family. Inviting an outside guest into this space — particularly a foreign one — is a significant act of inclusion. For Elisa, arriving at Alessandro's grandfather's house in Wakayama for New Year is not a tourist experience. She will be inside a family's most private ritual. This is what Alessandro means when he tells her it is "not a tourist thing." His grandfather's hospitality, offered with perfect courtesy, makes room for this — but the weight of it is real.

The Sakura as Symbol

The bare sakura tree in the garden has been a recurring presence throughout the novel. Alessandro arrived in September when it was green; he watched it go bare through autumn; now in late November it is completely bare — "a thin dark architecture of branches." His shift in thinking from "something missing" to "something waiting" is small but significant. A tree that is waiting is not empty; it is conserving itself, preparing. Alessandro has made the same shift in himself: he is not missing Italy when he is there and Japan when he is here. He is waiting — for spring, for Yui, for whatever the trip will bring. The sakura, which he has never seen in bloom, remains the novel's longest promise.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 14 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro is returning to Japan after four months in Italy. What do you think it will feel like to arrive somewhere that used to be home but that you have been away from? Do you think it will feel the same?
- Elisa has been building her idea of Japan for years — through anime, research, the conversations with Alessandro. What do you think will happen when she actually arrives?
- Yui is about to appear in person for the first time. We have heard a great deal about her. What do you expect from this meeting?

2. Glossary — Chapter 14

accumulate / accumulated (v.)	to build up over time. <i>"Something accumulated in it that was simply the weight of months and distance."</i>
Ale (name, Japanese pronunciation)	Yui's shortening of Alessandro. In Japanese, long foreign names are often shortened or adapted. Ale (pronounced AH-leh) is her form of his name.
composed (adj.)	calm and in control of your feelings. <i>"The composed warmth of a man who had been looking forward to this."</i>
dare (question word, Japanese)	"who". <i>"Ale, dare?"</i> — "Ale, who is this?" or "Ale, who's that?"
deploy (v.)	to use something, often strategically. Already seen in Chapter 10. <i>"The breathless enthusiasm she had deployed in class."</i>
due (adj.)	expected or appropriate for a situation. <i>"Slightly more put together than the occasion required."</i> Yui has made more effort than a casual visit would normally need.
exclusively (adv.)	only; limited to one thing. <i>"Clearly visible to anyone who knew how to read him — which excluded exactly one person present."</i> That person is Elisa.
filed away (phrasal v.)	stored mentally for later consideration. <i>"He noticed this... quickly, filed away, not examined."</i>
flat (flat light) (adj.)	here: even, grey, without strong shadows. <i>"The flat December light."</i>
ne (particle, Japanese)	a sentence-ending particle used for affirmation, agreement, or gentle emphasis. Used here as a greeting between old friends — an acknowledgement that they are finally in the same place.
okaeri (phrase, Japanese)	"welcome back" — the standard response to tadaima ("I'm home"). Alessandro's grandfather says it to all of them, including Elisa.
outskirts (n.)	the outer edges of a city or town. <i>"Through the outskirts of Osaka."</i>
plaque (n.)	a small flat sign, usually attached to a wall or door. In Japan, many homes have a nameplate (hyōsatsu) by the entrance showing the family name.
processing (v.)	taking in and making sense of information or experience. <i>"She was processing. There would be plenty to say later."</i>
put together (more put together) (expression)	neat, well-dressed, carefully presented. <i>"Slightly more put together than the occasion required."</i>
residential (adj.)	relating to a neighbourhood where people live, as opposed to commercial or industrial areas.
terminal (n.)	the building at an airport where passengers arrive and depart.
vending machine (n.)	a machine that sells drinks, snacks, or other items automatically, without a shopkeeper. Japan is famous for its density of vending machines on almost every street corner.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on very specific details. Question 4 in particular requires careful reading of the Yui section.*

1. Alessandro had been aware, on the plane, that he was waiting to smell the air of Japan. TRUE / FALSE
2. Elisa talks constantly on the train, asking questions about everything she sees. TRUE / FALSE
3. Elisa sees a vending machine and allows herself to make the reference she thinks of. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro's grandfather greets Elisa warmly and shows no reaction to her presence. TRUE / FALSE
5. Yui goes to the wrong house first because she has not been to Alessandro's grandfather's address before. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends with Yui and Elisa meeting and having a conversation. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Questions 2 and 4 are the most important. Question 2 is about Elisa's genuine effort; question 4 is about what Yui's wrong house reveals. Allow time for both.*

1. What does Alessandro notice about Elisa on the train, and what does he recognise in her behaviour?
2. Elisa sees the vending machine and closes the reference she almost makes. What does this moment tell us about how she has changed?
1. Alessandro's grandfather says "okaeri" to all of them, including Elisa. What is the significance of using this word?
3. Yui walks to the wrong house. Nobody sees this. Why does the author include this moment — and why does nobody see it?
4. What do we learn about Yui from the last page of the chapter, before she speaks?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most carefully constructed moments. Question 3 on the final line is worth significant class time.*

1. The chapter begins: "The air at Kansai International Airport was the first thing." Why does the author begin with air — and with an incomplete sentence?
2. Alessandro and Yui exchange "ne" as a greeting. What does this single word communicate that a longer greeting could not?
3. The chapter ends: "Ale, dare?" — three words in Japanese. Translate them, then explain why the author ends on these words.

4. Language Focus

A. The Language of Arrival: Sensory Description

 *Teacher's note: The chapter opens with Alessandro arriving in Japan through his senses — smell, temperature, sound, sight. This exercise focuses on using sensory detail to describe a place from the perspective of someone arriving there.*

Alessandro arrives in Japan and the first thing is the air. Then he notices specific things on the train — the residential streets, the power lines, the bicycles, the convenience store. He does not name his feelings; he describes what he senses.

Look at these two sentences:

Telling: *"He was happy to be back in Japan."*

Showing: *"Something in him settled without making a sound."*

The second sentence shows the feeling through a physical sensation rather than naming it. This is more powerful — the reader feels it rather than being told it.

Write three sentences describing a place you know well from the perspective of someone who has been away and is returning. Use sensory details — what you smell, hear, see, or feel — rather than naming your emotions directly.

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any description that replaces "I felt happy / sad / relieved" with a physical or sensory observation. Weaker students: give them three sentence starters: "The first thing was...", "I noticed...", "Something in me...". Stronger students: challenge them to write without using any emotion word at all.*

B. Seeing the Actual Thing

 *Teacher's note: Elisa's vending machine moment is a model of deliberate perception — choosing to see what is there rather than what you expect. This exercise connects to the language of observation.*

Elisa sees the vending machine and catches herself beginning a comparison. Then she closes it. She looks at the actual vending machine.

This is the difference between two ways of seeing:

Seeing through expectation: comparing what you see to what you already know or imagine.

Seeing the actual thing: letting what is there arrive on its own terms, without pre-existing comparison.

Practise the language of deliberate observation. Complete these sentences using only what can be observed, not what can be inferred or compared:

1. The vending machine was _____. It had _____. The light from it _____.
2. The street was _____. There were _____. The air _____.

Now write two sentences describing something in your immediate environment using only observation — no comparison, no inference, no emotion words.

C. Ne and Dare: Japanese in Context

 *Teacher's note: This chapter introduces two Japanese words that carry significant meaning without translation. This is an opportunity to discuss how particles and question words function differently from English equivalents.*

The chapter uses two Japanese words in key moments:

Ne (ね) — a sentence-ending particle. In greeting context here, it functions as a word of mutual acknowledgement: "I see you, you see me, we are here." It requires nothing more.

Dare (誰) — "who". "Ale, dare?" — Yui's shorthand question: who is this person?

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- Why do you think Alessandro and Yui greet each other with "ne" rather than with a longer phrase? What does the choice of this word tell us about their friendship?
- "Ale, dare?" is three words. Yui could have asked many different things. Why do you think she asks who Elisa is, rather than saying something else?
- The chapter ends in Japanese. Why do you think the author chose to end this chapter in a language that most readers of the English text cannot fully understand?

 *Teacher's note: The third question is worth significant class discussion. The chapter has been entirely in English — but ends in Japanese. This places the reader in Elisa's position: present, but not fully inside. The reader does not need to understand the word "dare" to feel the weight of the question. The author uses language itself as a structural device here.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most universally accessible — most students will have experienced a version of returning somewhere they once knew.*

- Alessandro breathes the air of Japan and something settles in him without making a sound. Have you ever arrived somewhere — after a long absence, or for the first time — and felt something settle? What does it feel like when a place recognises you?
- Elisa closes the anime reference when she sees the vending machine. This is a deliberate choice. Have you ever caught yourself experiencing something through a lens of what you already knew — and tried to stop? Is it possible to see something completely fresh?
- Yui walks to the wrong house first. Nobody sees this. Why do you think the author chose to show us this moment — and to show it privately, to the reader alone?
- The grandfather says "okaeri" to all of them, including Elisa. What kind of person says "welcome back" to someone who has never been there before?

B. Role Play: The Doorway

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three. This is a threshold scene — everything is about to begin. The challenge is to play the last moment before a conversation starts: the weight of it, the not-yet. Two to three minutes.*

Alessandro opens the door. Yui is there. Elisa appears at his shoulder.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You open the door. You see Yui. You say "ne." You are aware of Elisa at your shoulder before she speaks.

Student B: You are Yui. You have decided how you are going to be. You say "ne." Then Elisa appears. You look at Alessandro. You ask your question.

Student C: You are Elisa. You heard the knock and came to see. You appear at Alessandro's shoulder with curiosity. You do not yet know who this is.

After the role play: What was in the half-second between the two "ne"s? What did Yui's face do when she saw Elisa?

C. Discussion: Two Worlds Meeting

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to the novel's structural turning point — the two worlds finally in the same place. It is worth taking time here.*

- Alessandro has been keeping his Italian and Japanese worlds somewhat separate. Now they are in the same hallway. What do you think will be gained — and what might be lost — when two worlds meet?
- Elisa has built a very detailed idea of Japan. She is now standing inside the real thing. What do you think she is feeling at this moment?
- Yui does not know Elisa, but she knows Alessandro. What do you think she understands immediately — and what will she need to discover?
- The chapter ends on Yui's question. The reader does not find out the answer. What do you think Alessandro says?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Yui has asked "who is this?" What do you think happens next — in the next few minutes, and in the next few days?
- Elisa is inside real Japan for the first time. The vending machine moment suggested she is trying to see clearly. What do you think the biggest surprise will be for her?
- Alessandro is back in Wakayama. He has been away for four months. What do you think will be different — and what will be exactly the same?

6. Writing Task

Arriving

 *Teacher's note: A short sensory writing task modelled on the chapter's opening. Students describe arriving somewhere after an absence, using only physical and sensory detail. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

The chapter opens with Alessandro arriving in Japan and the first thing is the air. He does not name his feelings. He describes what he senses — the temperature, the smell, the specific quality of the light, the particular things he notices through the train window.

Write a short passage describing your own arrival somewhere — a place you know well, a place you have missed, or a place you are visiting for the first time. Use only sensory observation:

- What is the first thing? (a smell, a sound, the quality of light or air)
- What specific details do you notice? (things that are particular to this place)
- What happens inside you — described as a physical sensation, not an emotion word

Do not write: "I was happy to be back." Write instead what "happy to be back" feels like in your body, or what your eyes land on, or what smell arrives before you have time to prepare for it.

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: the goal is showing, not telling. A sensation, a detail, a physical response — these do more work than "I felt." Weaker students: give them the three bullet points as three separate sentences. Stronger students: ask them to write a single paragraph in which the emotion is never named but is unmistakable.*

7. Cultural Notes

Kansai International Airport

Kansai International Airport is a large international airport built on an artificial island in Osaka Bay. It serves the Kansai region of Japan — including Osaka, Kyoto, Nara, and Kobe — and is about an hour from Wakayama by train. It was opened in 1994 and is notable for its dramatic architecture, designed by Renzo Piano, with a long curved terminal building. For Alessandro, Kansai is the airport of home — the one he has used his whole life for the May visits and now for the return.

Japanese Residential Streets

The residential streets Alessandro and Elisa pass through on the train are characteristic of mid-sized Japanese cities: closely packed two-storey houses with small front gardens or car spaces, bicycles locked against walls, vending machines at corners, power lines crossing above the street (most Japanese cities have above-ground power lines rather than underground cabling). These are ordinary streets — not the temple-and-lantern imagery of tourism, and not the neon-and-skyscraper imagery of Tokyo. This is the Japan Alessandro grew up in, and it is what Elisa is now trying to see clearly.

Vending Machines in Japan

Japan has approximately one vending machine for every twenty-three people — one of the highest densities in the world. They are on street corners, outside convenience stores, in train stations, beside shrines, in the middle of residential neighbourhoods. They sell hot and cold drinks, canned coffee, teas, juices, and in some areas much more. Their steady glow is a characteristic feature of Japanese streets at night and in winter. For Elisa, the vending machine is a point of transition: she almost reaches for the anime reference she has stored, then pulls back and looks at the actual machine in front of her. This is her most significant moment of genuine seeing in the novel.

Hyōsatsu: The Japanese Name Plate

Most Japanese homes have a *hyōsatsu* (表札) — a nameplate fixed beside the front door showing the family name. It is how visitors know they have the right house. Yui goes to Alessandro's old house by habit and sees a different name on the *hyōsatsu* — a new family living there. This small detail tells us the house has been sold or rented out, and that Yui's body still remembers the old address. The *hyōsatsu* is a marker of domestic identity: who lives here, whose home this is.

Ne: A Japanese Particle

Japanese uses sentence-ending particles — small words attached to the end of a sentence that modulate its meaning, tone, or social function. *Ne* (ね) is one of the most common: it can seek confirmation ("right?"), share a feeling, or, as here, simply acknowledge a shared moment. Alessandro and Yui greet each other with "ne" — a word that requires no translation but expresses everything: we are here, we are the same, the months are acknowledged, we do not need a longer greeting. It is a word that belongs to intimacy. Using it with someone who does not know Japanese is impossible; using it with someone who does is a form of recognition.

Okaeri: Welcome Back

When Alessandro's grandfather says "*okaeri*" to the whole group, including Elisa, he is performing a generous act of inclusion. *Okaeri* is the response to *tadaima* — "I'm home" / "welcome back." It is said to family members returning, to familiar guests, to people who belong. Saying it to Elisa — who has never been to this house, who is a guest, who is Italian — is the grandfather's way of making her welcome in the fullest sense. It is also, quietly, a statement about what kind of home this is.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 15 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Yui has just asked "who is this?" — the first thing she says when she sees Elisa. How do you think the introduction between Yui and Elisa will go? What might make it easy, and what might make it difficult?
- Elisa has arrived in the real Japan — not the one from anime, but an ordinary residential neighbourhood, an old man's house, a quiet December street. What do you think will be the biggest surprise for her?
- Alessandro is returning to a place that was his home for eleven years. He has been in Italy for four months. How do you think it will feel to be back — and how might it be different from what he expected?

2. Glossary — Chapter 15

alcove (n.)	a small recessed area in a wall, often used to display decorative objects. In Japanese houses, this is the tokonoma.
atmosphere (n.)	the feeling or mood of a place. <i>"She received the atmosphere the way you receive something that has no equivalent."</i>
baffling (adj.)	very confusing; impossible to understand. <i>"Technically functional and occasionally baffling."</i> The English between Yui and Elisa works, but not always.
chestnut paste (n.)	kurikinton in Japanese: a sweet paste made from chestnuts, one of the traditional New Year foods.
content (n.)	here: material posted online — videos, images, articles. <i>"The Japan that does not appear in the content she had been collecting."</i>
equivalent (n.)	something that is equal or corresponds to something else in a different context. <i>"Something that has no equivalent in your experience."</i>
filing (v.)	storing information mentally for later. <i>"Yui looked at her... filing it."</i>
genuinely (adv.)	truly; in a real and sincere way. <i>"She laughed — genuinely, unexpectedly."</i>
hatsumode (n., Japanese)	the first shrine or temple visit of the New Year. A major tradition in Japan, typically on 1 January.
herring roe (n.)	kazunoko in Japanese: salted herring eggs, a traditional New Year food symbolising prosperity and many children. Strong in flavour.
incense (n.)	a substance that produces a fragrant smell when burned, often used in religious or ceremonial contexts. <i>"The smell of incense and cold air together."</i>
internal clock (n. phrase)	the body's natural sense of time, controlling when you feel awake or sleepy. <i>"Some internal clock that had set itself years ago and never updated."</i>
lacquered (adj.)	coated with lacquer, a hard shiny finish. Traditional Japanese lacquerware is black or red and very smooth.
measured (adj.)	careful and controlled; not impulsive. <i>"In the careful, measured way of someone who has prepared for this."</i>
osechi ryōri (n., Japanese)	the traditional Japanese New Year food, served in layered lacquered boxes. Each dish has a specific symbolic meaning.
permanent (adj.)	lasting forever; not changing. <i>"The most permanent thing he knew."</i>
texture (n.)	here used figuratively: the particular quality or feel of a period of time. <i>"The days before New Year had their own texture."</i>
tokonoma (n., Japanese)	a recessed alcove in a traditional Japanese room, used to display a hanging scroll (kakejiku), a flower arrangement, or a ceramic object. It is considered the spiritual focal point of the room.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on precise emotional details. Push students to quote the text when correcting false statements.*

1. Alessandro introduces Elisa to Yui warmly, using affectionate language. TRUE / FALSE
2. Yui has called Alessandro "Ale" many times before this visit. TRUE / FALSE
3. Elisa impresses Yui by knowing a great deal about the Kansai anime she mentions. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro has eaten the osechi ryōri foods every year of his life and enjoys them all. TRUE / FALSE
5. Elisa eats the herring roe because she finds it delicious. TRUE / FALSE
6. Alessandro wakes early in Japan because he planned to watch the New Year sunrise. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 5 is the emotional core of the chapter. Allow significant time for it — it addresses the most complex realisation in the novel so far.*

1. What does Alessandro notice about how he introduces Elisa — and what does this tell us?
2. Yui calls Alessandro "Ale" in the hallway. He has never heard this from her before. What does he do with this observation?
3. Alessandro describes Elisa's experience at hatsumode as receiving something "that has no equivalent in your experience." What does he mean?
4. What happens when Elisa laughs at the herring roe exchange? Why is this laugh different?
5. In the kitchen on New Year's morning, Alessandro understands something important. What is it — and how does he describe the difference between ojisan's kitchen not being his and the Rufina kitchen not being his yet?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most careful moments of characterisation and emotional precision.*

1. Alessandro says "the friend from school I mentioned" rather than anything warmer. He hears the distance in it. What does this moment tell us about where Alessandro is — emotionally — with Elisa at this point in the story?
2. Yui's response to Elisa's anime mention — "I know it. I didn't watch it much. My brother liked it" — is short and flat. What does Yui's response do to Elisa's approach?
3. The chapter ends: "Japan waking up on the first morning of a new year, the same way it had always woken up, without him." What does the phrase "without him" mean here?

4. Language Focus

A. Effortful English: Communication Across Languages

 *Teacher's note: The English between Yui and Elisa is described as "technically functional and occasionally baffling." This is a real and recognisable experience for ESL learners. This exercise connects the novel's observation to students' own language experience.*

The chapter describes the English between Yui and Elisa as:

"Effortful for both of them — Elisa's shaped by her native Italian, Yui's shaped by her native Japanese, the result technically functional and occasionally baffling."

Both speak English as a foreign language. Both have been shaped by a different first language. The result works — but not perfectly, and not always.

Discuss these questions with a partner:

- When you speak English, what from your first language "shapes" the way you speak? (Think about word order, typical phrases, the sounds you find easier or harder.)
- Have you ever had a conversation in English where the other person also spoke English as a foreign language? Was it easier or harder than speaking with a native English speaker?
- Alessandro translates when it matters and lets them work through it when it doesn't. Is this the right approach? When should you help and when should you let people struggle a little?

 *Teacher's note: This discussion is directly relevant to students' own experience and should generate genuine engagement. There are no correct answers — the goal is reflection on what it means to communicate across language backgrounds. If students are from multiple language backgrounds, encourage them to share specific examples.*

B. Both Things True: Holding Contradictions

 *Teacher's note: The emotional core of this chapter is Alessandro sitting with two contradictory truths at once. This exercise focuses on the language used to express contradiction and complexity.*

Alessandro understands something difficult in the kitchen: ojīsan's kitchen is completely familiar AND it is not his. Both things are true. He does not resolve the contradiction — he sits with it.

Look at how the author writes this:

"Both things were true. He sat with both of them."

This is very simple language for a very complex feeling. The simplicity is deliberate — it matches Alessandro's quiet, accepting manner.

Practise the language of holding contradictions. Complete these sentences:

1. He was happy to be back in Japan. He also _____. Both things _____.
2. Italy was still new and not yet fully his. But it was also _____. He could feel _____.
3. Ojīsan's kitchen felt like the most permanent thing he knew. And yet _____.

Now write two sentences of your own, using "both things were true" or a similar construction, about something in your own experience that contains a contradiction.

C. Not the Moment: Timing in Conversation

 *Teacher's note: This chapter has two instances of Alessandro deciding it is "not the moment" — for the name Ale, and for the hallway exchange with Yui. This exercise focuses on how we express timing in language.*

Alessandro notices several things — the name, the hair, the expression — and files them away. He says each time: "It was not the moment."

This phrase implies: there will be a moment. I am waiting for it. I will know it when it comes.

Match each situation (1–4) with the most appropriate response (A–D):

Situations:

1. A friend seems upset but you are surrounded by other people.
2. You want to say something important but the other person is distracted.
3. Someone says something that hurts you, but you are not sure they meant it.
4. You want to ask a personal question but the conversation has just started.

Responses:

- A. Wait. Let the conversation settle first. There will be a better opening.
- B. File it away. Consider whether it was deliberate before responding.
- C. Say nothing now. Find a quieter moment later.
- D. Wait until you have their full attention. The message needs to land properly.

Discussion: Is waiting for the right moment always a good strategy? Or can waiting too long cause its own problems?

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 4 is the most important — it goes to the heart of the chapter's realisation about home.*

- Alessandro introduces Elisa as "the friend from school" — and hears the distance in his own words. Have you ever had to introduce two people who belong to different parts of your life? How did it feel?
- Yui deflects the anime opening without hostility. Elisa adjusts and asks about the brother. Who handles the conversation better — Yui or Elisa? Or are they both doing something right?
- Elisa receives hatsumode without a reference frame — without mapping it onto anime or anything she knows. Alessandro describes this as the right way to experience something with no equivalent. Do you think this is something that can be learned, or does it happen naturally?
- Alessandro sits in the kitchen and understands that ojīsan's kitchen is completely familiar but not his — not in the way the Rufina kitchen is not-his-yet. This is one of the most honest moments in the novel. What has changed for Alessandro? Is this a loss, a gain, or something else?

B. Role Play: The Hallway Introduction

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three. The challenge is to play the introduction with all its layers — Alessandro's careful language, Yui's composed measurement, Elisa's also-prepared hello. Two to three minutes.*

Alessandro, Yui, and Elisa are in the hallway. Alessandro introduces them.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You say "the friend from school I mentioned. From Italy." You hear your own words and notice something. You introduce them properly in English. You stand between them.

Student B: You are Yui. You have prepared for this. You say hello carefully, in measured English. You are composed. You look at Elisa and then at Alessandro.

Student C: You are Elisa. You have also prepared. You say hello carefully. You are trying very hard to be appropriate. You can feel the weight of the situation.

After the role play: What was in the room that was not said? What did each character leave out?

C. Discussion: The Kitchen Realisation

 *Teacher's note: This discussion focuses on the chapter's emotional conclusion — one of the most complex moments in the novel. Handle it thoughtfully.*

Alessandro sits in the kitchen and understands two things:

- The Rufina kitchen is not his yet — but it will become his with time.
- Ojisan's kitchen is completely familiar — but it is not his. It is part of what he returns to, not what he lives inside.
- Is it possible to know a place completely and not belong to it? What is the difference between knowing and belonging?
- Alessandro has been in Italy for four months. He has friends, a routine, a walk to school, a group chat, a bar on Saturdays. Is that enough to make somewhere home?
- The novel is called Missing Home. At this point in the story, what home is Alessandro missing — if any?
- Alessandro does not resolve the contradiction in the kitchen. He sits with both things. Is this wisdom, or is it avoidance?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Yui has called Alessandro "Ale." She has never done this before. Alessandro has noticed and filed it away. What do you think this means? Will he say something about it?
- Elisa has had the herring roe moment — a genuine laugh, a real connection with the ordinary. How do you think her relationship with Japan — and with Alessandro — will develop during the rest of the visit?
- Alessandro is going back to Italy after the New Year trip. How do you think he will feel about leaving Japan this time — compared to how he felt leaving in September?

6. Writing Task

Both Things True

 *Teacher's note: A short reflective writing task on holding contradictions. Students write about something in their own experience that contains two true things that do not resolve each other. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro sits in the kitchen and holds two contradictory truths at once: the kitchen is completely familiar AND it is not his. He does not resolve this. He does not choose one over the other. He simply sits with both.

Think of something in your own experience — or in the experience of a character you know — that contains two true things that cannot both be fully right at the same time.

Write a short passage in which someone holds both of these truths without resolving them. Include:

- What the two truths are
- Why each one is true
- What it feels like to hold both
- What the person does — even if it is nothing more than making more tea

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: the goal is not to resolve the contradiction. The best writing here holds both things and stays with them. Weaker students: give them a specific situation (e.g. loving a place you are leaving; being glad and sad at the same time) and have them write one sentence for each truth, then one sentence about holding both. Stronger students: challenge them to write without ever using the words "but" or "however" — the two truths should simply coexist, as they do in the chapter.*

7. Cultural Notes

Osechi Ryōri: New Year Food

Osechi ryōri (おせち料理) is the traditional Japanese New Year food, served in tiered lacquered boxes called *jūbako*. Each dish has a symbolic meaning connected to wishes for the coming year: *kazunoko* (herring roe) symbolises prosperity and many children; *kurikinton* (chestnut paste) represents wealth; *kamaboko* (fish cake) is decorative and celebratory; black soybeans (*kuromame*) represent health and hard work. Osechi is prepared before New Year so that the household does not need to cook during the first days of January. The food is rich with meaning — and, as Alessandro notes, not always to everyone's taste.

Hatsumode: The First Shrine Visit

Hatsumode (初詣) is the Japanese tradition of visiting a shrine or temple in the first days of the New Year — ideally on 1 January. People pray for health, happiness, and good fortune in the coming year. Major shrines in cities like Tokyo and Kyoto attract millions of visitors; local neighbourhood shrines like the one in Alessandro's chapter are quieter, more intimate affairs. The experience Alessandro and Elisa have — darkness, incense, cold air, the bell, the specific quality of the atmosphere — is the real hatsumode: not a tourist spectacle, but a neighbourhood ritual, people from the surrounding streets doing what they have done every year. For Elisa, arriving here with no reference frame is exactly right.

The Tokonoma

The *tokonoma* (床の間) is a recessed alcove in the main room of a traditional Japanese home, considered the spiritual and aesthetic focal point of the space. It typically displays a *kakejiku* (hanging scroll with calligraphy or painting, changed seasonally), a flower arrangement, or a carefully chosen ceramic or object. The tokonoma is not decorative in a casual Western sense — it is a curated space for contemplation. Elisa looks at it "with an expression of genuine attention." This is one of the first moments in Japan where she simply looks, without reaching for a reference.

Knowing and Belonging

Alessandro's realisation in the kitchen articulates something that many people who have moved between places understand: you can know a place completely — know where everything is, know its rhythms, have a body that moves through it automatically — and still not belong to it in the same way you once did. Belonging is not just knowledge; it is dailiness, the ongoing accumulation of ordinary days. Alessandro knows Wakayama in his body. But he is no longer accumulating ordinary days there. He is a visitor who knows the house extremely well. This is different from being a stranger — and it is different from being at home. It is its own category, with no simple name.

Anime and the Real Japan

Elisa's experience in this chapter — the anime deflection, hatsumode, the herring roe — marks a significant shift. The Japan she has been building for years, through content and research and imagination, is real in its way. The anime she loves is genuinely Japanese. The things she has researched are accurate. But there is a gap between a curated, exported version of Japan and the ordinary, domestic, sometimes difficult, sometimes boring reality of Japanese daily life. Alessandro has been living inside the reality all his life. Elisa is beginning to encounter it — not through disappointment (the chapter is warm throughout), but through contact. The herring roe she eats out of politeness is the most Japanese moment in the chapter: ordinary, a little bit unpleasant, eaten by everyone because it is New Year.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 16 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro and Yui have not had time alone since he arrived. What do you think they need to say to each other that cannot be said in front of others?
- Yui called Alessandro "Ale" — something she had never done before. He noticed and filed it away. Do you think he will say anything about it?
- Elisa has been in Japan for a few days now. She has eaten the herring roe, received hatsumode, and begun to see things more clearly. How do you think she is changing?

2. Glossary — Chapter 16

accusation / accusatory (n./adj.)	blaming someone for something. <i>"The question arrived quietly, without accusation."</i> Alessandro's question about the wrong house carries no blame.
back-and-forth (n.)	a conversation that flows easily in both directions. <i>"The easy back-and-forth of people who have been talking since they were five years old."</i>
catalogue / compiling a catalogue (n./expression)	an organised, detailed list. Elisa describes the supermarket systematically, as if making a comprehensive record.
confirm (v.)	to say or show that something is true. <i>"He had not needed her to confirm it."</i>
conviction (n.)	strong certainty. <i>"With conviction"</i> — Elisa found everything she was looking for, and she means it.
forecast (n.)	a prediction, especially about the weather. <i>"He had checked the weather forecast and was satisfied with it."</i>
half-approval (n., informal)	partial support or agreement; not fully committed. <i>"His father's half-approval of Todai."</i>
insufficient (adj.)	not enough. <i>"Even the ones he'd thought were insufficient."</i> Alessandro underestimated how carefully Yui read his messages.
occupied (adj.)	being used; having people in it. <i>"The particular stillness of a house that was usually occupied."</i>
precise / precision (adj./n.)	exact; very accurate. <i>"The precise placement of the stones."</i> Also: Yui's verdict on Elisa — precise and not unkind.
surface-level (adj.)	not going deep; staying on the outside of things. <i>"No particular reason to keep things surface-level."</i>
systematic (adj.)	done in an organised, thorough way. <i>"The systematic thoroughness of someone who has been compiling a catalogue."</i>
Todai (n., informal Japanese)	short for Tokyo Daigaku (Tokyo University), the most prestigious university in Japan, equivalent in status to Oxford or Harvard.
verdict (n.)	an official decision or judgement; here used figuratively for Yui's conclusion about Elisa. <i>"This was Yui's verdict on Elisa."</i>
warm (not warm exactly) (adj.)	here as a qualifier: Yui's conclusion about Elisa is not enthusiastic, but it is fair. The precision matters: "not warm exactly but precise and not unkind."

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on the precise quality of what characters say and do not say.*

1. Elisa pretends she does not particularly want to go to the supermarket. TRUE / FALSE
2. Yui visits because she has been specifically invited each day. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro plans to ask Yui about the wrong house from the beginning of their conversation. TRUE / FALSE
4. Yui's verdict on Elisa is that she is a good person. TRUE / FALSE
5. Elisa is enthusiastic about the supermarket in a general way. TRUE / FALSE
6. Yui suggests that the onigiri near the station is better, and Elisa immediately wants to go. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 (the wrong house exchange) is the most important in this chapter — it demonstrates how much Alessandro and Yui can communicate without words. Give it significant time.*

1. Yui has been paying attention to every message Alessandro sent from Italy, even the ones he considered insufficient. What does this tell us about her?
2. Alessandro describes Elisa to Yui as "not what she appeared to be at first" and says she is "actually listening now." What has changed about Elisa from Alessandro's perspective?
3. Alessandro asks Yui about the wrong house. He did not plan to. What does the exchange — "The name on the plaque was different." / "Yes." / (silence) — communicate?
4. Yui's verdict on Elisa is delivered in two sentences: "She ate the herring roe" / "That's not nothing." What does this tell us about how Yui judges people?
5. At the end of the chapter, Yui tells Elisa there are better onigiri near the station. Why is this moment significant?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most precise moments of indirect communication — particularly the conversation about the wrong house.*

1. Alessandro and Yui discuss the wrong house in six words total and one silence. What makes this exchange work — and what would be lost if one of them had said more?
2. Yui says "I know" about Elisa eating the herring roe out of politeness. Then she adds: "That's not nothing." What does the pause between these two sentences accomplish?
3. The narrator says Yui's English is "careful and shaped by Japanese — the vowels long, the consonants precise." Why does the author describe Yui's English through its Japanese roots?

4. Language Focus

A. Verdicts: How to Say What You Actually Think

 *Teacher's note: Yui's verdict on Elisa — "That's not nothing" — is a model of precision. This exercise focuses on how to express measured, honest assessments without either warmth or harshness.*

Yui does not say "Elisa is great" or "Elisa is okay." She says:

"She ate the herring roe. That's not nothing."

This is a verdict. It is based on evidence. It is not warm, but it is not unkind. It says: I noticed what she did, and it counts.

Practise giving honest, evidence-based assessments. Rewrite these vague statements as verdicts — specific, based on something observable, neither too warm nor too critical.

1. "Lorenzo is a good friend."
2. "Elisa has changed."
3. "Wei is a good person."

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any assessment that is specific (based on something the character did), measured (not overclaiming), and honest. "That's not nothing" is the model: it gives credit without enthusiasm.*

B. Questions That Arrive Without Being Planned

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro did not plan to ask about the wrong house. The question arrived anyway. This exercise focuses on the language of unplanned moments and how they are described.*

Look at how the narrator describes Alessandro's question:

"He had not planned to ask. He had decided not to ask. The question arrived anyway, quietly, without accusation."

This structure — had not planned / had decided not to / arrived anyway — gives the question its own agency. Alessandro did not ask it; it asked itself.

Complete these sentences using the same structure:

1. He had not planned to _____. He had decided not to _____. But he _____ anyway.
2. She had not meant to _____. She had told herself she wouldn't. But _____.

Now write a sentence or two of your own describing something you said or did that you had not planned — that "arrived anyway."

C. What Counts: The Language of Minimum Endorsement

 Teacher's note: "That's not nothing" is a precise phrase — it is English at its most understated. This exercise practises the specific vocabulary of restrained acknowledgement.

English has several ways of giving someone the minimum required credit without enthusiasm:

"That's not nothing." — It counts. Not a lot, but it counts.

"It's something." — Better than nothing. Not necessarily good.

"Fair enough." — I accept this. I'm not thrilled, but I accept it.

"I suppose." — Reluctant agreement.

"You could say that." — Partially true. Not how I would put it, but I won't argue.

Choose the best phrase for each situation:

3. Someone asks: "Was the film good?" You thought it was average — not bad, but not remarkable.

Answer: "It's something" / "Fair enough" / "You could say that" — all acceptable. Avoid "That's not nothing" which implies more effort than watching a film.

4. Someone apologises for being late. They had a good reason, but you were inconvenienced.

Answer: "Fair enough" — you accept the apology without making it nothing.

5. A friend worked very hard on something that did not quite succeed.

Answer: "That's not nothing" / "It's something" — acknowledges the effort without overclaiming the result.

6. Someone asks if Elisa is a good friend to Alessandro. You think she is trying, and trying counts.

Answer: "That's not nothing" — Yui's exact phrasing. The effort is real even if the destination is not yet reached.

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most important — it is about Yui's method of assessment and what it reveals about her.*

- Alessandro goes to the kitchen and makes tea when the house empties. He has not been alone in it since they arrived. What does being alone in a familiar place feel like — especially one you know well but no longer live in?
- Yui judges Elisa by what she does — eating the herring roe — rather than by what she says or what she intends. Do you think this is a fair way to judge people? What are the limits of judging by action?
- Alessandro asks about the wrong house even though he had decided not to. Have you ever asked something you had decided not to ask — and been glad you did? Or not glad?
- Elisa catalogues the supermarket with systematic thoroughness and takes photographs of the onigiri. Yui responds by telling her where the better onigiri is. Is this a moment of connection, of tolerance, or something else?

B. Role Play: The Verdict

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. Alessandro and Yui discuss Elisa. The challenge is to play Yui's side with precision — not warmth, not coldness, but measurement. Two to three minutes.*

Alessandro and Yui are alone in the main room. He has been asked about Elisa.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You answer Yui's question about Elisa honestly: she had a fixed idea, she is actually listening now. You tell her about the herring roe.

Student B: You are Yui. You listen. You ask something specific that shows you have been paying attention. Then you give your verdict — in two sentences, without warmth and without cruelty. Pause before the second sentence.

After the role play: How did it feel to deliver a verdict in Yui's style? How did it feel to receive it?

C. Discussion: The Question That Arrived

 *Teacher's note: This discussion focuses on the wrong house exchange — the most compressed and effective moment of communication in the novel so far.*

- Alessandro and Yui say six words about the wrong house and then stop. Is this enough? What do you think they each needed from this exchange?
- The chapter says: "the conversation moved on, the way it moved when something had been acknowledged without being named." Is it possible to acknowledge something fully without naming it? What does naming something add — or change?
- Yui has been coming to ojisan's house every day since Alessandro arrived. She has small reasons or no particular reason. What do you think she is looking for?
- At the end of the chapter, Yui tells Elisa where to find better onigiri. It is a small thing. But it is the first thing Yui has offered Elisa directly. What does this suggest about where their relationship is going?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Alessandro, Yui, and Elisa are going to the onigiri place near the station together after lunch. What do you think that will be like?
- Yui and Alessandro still have not addressed certain things between them — the name "Ale", the slightly more careful hair, the coming every day. Do you think they will say something before he leaves?
- Alessandro has to go back to Italy. How do you think leaving Wakayama will feel this time?

6. Writing Task

The Verdict

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task modelled on Yui's assessment of Elisa. Students write a fair, evidence-based verdict about a character from the novel or someone they know. Suggested length: 80–110 words.*

Yui's verdict on Elisa is two sentences and a pause. It is based on one specific action. It is not warm, but it is not unkind. It says: I noticed, and it counts.

Write a short verdict about one of the characters in the novel — or about someone you know. Your verdict should:

- Be based on something specific they did — one action, one moment
- Be honest rather than either enthusiastic or critical
- Use restrained language ("that's not nothing", "it counts", "it's something")
- Not try to explain everything about the person — just assess one thing

You are allowed to be fair without being warm. You are not allowed to be cruel.

 *Teacher's note: This task practises the language of measured, honest assessment — a genuine communication skill. Weaker students: choose a character and write three sentences: what they did, why it matters, and a verdict phrase. Stronger students: challenge them to write a verdict so precise that the reader could identify the character from it alone.*

7. Cultural Notes

Tokyo University (Todai)

Tokyo Daigaku, commonly shortened to *Todai* (東大), is the most prestigious university in Japan, often compared to Oxford, Cambridge, or Harvard in terms of status and selectivity. It was founded in 1877 and is consistently ranked among the top universities in Asia. Admission requires passing extremely competitive entrance examinations. For Japanese families, getting into Todai is a significant aspiration, and the path to it typically involves years of intensive preparation. Alessandro's father has expressed "half-approval" of the idea — he is not opposed, but not fully committed. The question of where Alessandro will study for university is unresolved and carries weight.

Golf in Japan

Golf is a popular sport among older Japanese businessmen and professionals, and has been since the post-war economic boom when it became associated with status and leisure. Many Japanese men of ojīsan's generation play regularly, often at early morning times to avoid the heat or, in winter, before snow makes courses unusable. Alessandro's grandfather checking the weather forecast and going out with his golf bag is a recognisable image of a certain generation of Japanese men — organised, independent, and particular about their routines.

The Japanese Supermarket

Japanese supermarkets are notable for the variety and quality of their prepared food sections — bento boxes, onigiri, sushi, hot foods, pickled vegetables, tempura, and much more, typically prepared fresh each day. The fish section of a well-stocked Japanese supermarket is often spectacular by international standards, with a wide variety of fish and seafood, many of which have no direct equivalent in European shops. Elisa's systematic cataloguing of the supermarket — from the fish section to the pickled vegetables to the onigiri — reflects genuine curiosity. Her photographs of the onigiri section are the kind of documentation a genuinely interested visitor would make.

Onigiri Near the Station

Yui's remark that there are "better ones near the station" is characteristic: she knows the neighbourhood at the level of detail that comes from daily use. For Yui, the supermarket onigiri are the generic option; the better place is specific, local knowledge. This kind of knowledge — which bus is better, which bakery opens earliest, which street to avoid — is part of what it means to live inside a place rather than visit it. By sharing it with Elisa, Yui is offering a small piece of the inside. It is not a grand gesture. But it is the beginning of one.

"That's Not Nothing": Understatement in English

English — particularly British English — makes extensive use of understatement: saying less than you mean in order to communicate more precisely. "That's not nothing" is a double negative that works through understatement: it does not say "that's something good" or "that matters." It says the minimum: it is not the absence of anything. This is a culturally specific way of giving credit — restrained, private, requiring the listener to hear the weight inside the smallness. It is also, notably, how Yui speaks in English: careful, precise, not effusive. Japanese communication culture also values economy and restraint. Yui's English may be shaped by Japanese, but its emotional register is compatible with the understatement she is using.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 17 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

 *Teacher's note: Use these questions at the END of the lesson before students take Chapter 17 home to read. Do not hint at what happens.*

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro is returning to Italy after the Japan trip. In Chapter 12, he realised that Italy was now where he stood and Japan was where he went. Do you think returning to Italy after actually being in Japan will feel the same — or different?
- Elisa has experienced real Japan — not the idea of it, but ordinary streets, herring roe, a supermarket, hatsumode. How do you think this will change what she talks about and how she talks?
- Alessandro said of Yui that she was "careful" and "disclosed herself in specific quantities to specific people." He did not give Elisa the real explanation. Do you think he will ever tell Elisa more about Yui?

2. Glossary — Chapter 17

 *Teacher's note: Go through the glossary before students take the chapter home. Note that several entries this chapter are about understated emotional observation.*

articulate (v.)	to express something clearly in words. <i>"A difference she was still trying to articulate."</i> Elisa has the feeling but not yet the words.
bare (adj.)	without leaves or covering. The sakura and the valley trees are bare in January.
comfort (a private comfort) (n.)	something that makes you feel better. <i>"A private comfort, the kind that did not require naming."</i>
compiling (v.)	gathering and organising information or items. <i>"She had been compiling the list for weeks."</i>
cross-referencing (v.)	comparing information from different sources to find connections. Elisa is comparing what she saw in Japan with what she finds in Florence.
dashi (n., Japanese)	a Japanese cooking stock, typically made from kelp (kombu) and dried bonito flakes (katsuobushi). The foundation of many Japanese soups and dishes.
disclose / disclosed (v.)	to reveal information about yourself, usually selectively. <i>"Someone who disclosed herself in specific quantities to specific people."</i>
empirically (adv.)	based on direct experience or observation rather than theory. <i>"Better than the supermarket ones, she confirmed, empirically."</i> She has now tested both.
essentials (n.)	the basic, most important elements; stripped of anything extra. <i>"The valley stripped back to its essentials."</i>
faintly (adv.)	slightly; not strongly. <i>"Faintly reassuring."</i>
loosened up (phrasal v., informal)	to become more relaxed and open; to stop being stiff or guarded. Elisa's interpretation of Yui.
neutral (carefully neutral) (adj.)	not showing strong feeling. <i>"Wei's expression was carefully neutral in the way that meant she was paying attention."</i>
private (adj.)	not shared with others; kept to oneself. <i>"A private comfort, the kind that did not require naming."</i>
reassuring (adj.)	making you feel less worried. <i>"Faintly reassuring."</i>
restful (adj.)	relaxing; providing a sense of ease. <i>"Which Alessandro found genuinely restful."</i> Lorenzo's unremarkable manner about the golf is a relief.
shy (adj.)	nervous or uncomfortable around other people. Elisa's (incorrect) interpretation of Yui's careful behaviour.
syllable (n.)	a unit of sound in a word. <i>"Approximately three syllables of unspoken conversation."</i> Wei and Lorenzo's nod communicates volumes in almost no words.
thread (n.)	here: a line of conversation or thought. <i>"Picking up a thread she had left earlier."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is quieter than the Japan chapters — the True/False exercise rewards close reading of small details.*

1. When Alessandro returns to the Rufina house, it feels completely unfamiliar — like a hotel. TRUE / FALSE
2. Haruko brought mostly clothes in her suitcases from Japan. TRUE / FALSE
3. Elisa arrives at the station earlier than her train requires on the first day back. TRUE / FALSE
4. Elisa says she liked the herring roe once she had thought about it more. TRUE / FALSE
5. Alessandro tells Elisa that Yui was not actually shy, and explains the real reason for her careful behaviour. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends with the sakura waiting for March, unmoved. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 on the Haruko groceries is often overlooked — it is quietly one of the most emotionally significant moments in the chapter. Give it attention.*

1. What does Alessandro mean when he says the Rufina house feels like somewhere he has "come back to" rather than somewhere he is "still arriving at"? Why is this a meaningful shift?
2. Why does Elisa describe Yui as having been "cold" and then "loosened up"? Is this an accurate reading?
3. Haruko's groceries — the dashi, the soy sauce, the miso — appear in dinners without announcement and "settle something in Alessandro that he had not known needed settling." What does this tell us about the role of food in feeling at home?
4. Why does Alessandro say "something like that" instead of correcting Elisa's reading of Yui?
5. How does Wei behave while Elisa talks about Yui? What does Alessandro notice?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's quietest but most significant moments of observation and restraint.*

1. "Italy in January was grey and cold and entirely itself." What does "entirely itself" mean here — and why does it matter?
2. The narrator says Wei's expression was "carefully neutral in the way that meant she was paying attention to more than the surface of the conversation." What is Wei paying attention to?
3. The chapter ends with the sakura "unmoved by any of it, waiting for March." What has the sakura waited through — and what is it still waiting for?

4. Language Focus

A. Something Like That: Partial Answers

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro answers Elisa with "something like that" — a carefully incomplete response. This exercise focuses on the language of partial truth: how to be honest without saying everything.*

When Elisa says Yui must have been very shy, Alessandro says: "Something like that."

This is not a lie. Yui is guarded, cautious, careful about disclosure. Shyness is one word for that. But it is not the full picture. "Something like that" is honest about the approximation: it signals that the answer is close but not exact, without explaining why.

Look at these other ways of giving a partial answer:

"Something like that." — Close, but not quite. I'm not going to explain the difference.

"In a way." — Partly true. There is another way to see it.

"Not exactly." — It is not quite right, but I am not going to correct it fully.

"You could say that." — Your version is acceptable. It is not mine, but I accept it.

Choose the most appropriate partial answer for each situation:

1. A friend asks: "Were you upset about the move to Italy?" Alessandro might say:
2. Someone says: "Yui seemed quiet — was she nervous?" Alessandro might say:
3. A teacher asks: "Did you find Italy hard to adjust to at first?" Alessandro might say:
4. Elisa says: "The trip changed me, I think." Alessandro might say:

B. Food and Memory: Sensory Language

 *Teacher's note: Haruko's groceries settle something in Alessandro without naming it. This exercise focuses on how food can carry memory and emotion, and how to write about this precisely.*

The chapter describes what happens when Japanese food appears at the Rufina dinner table:

"A soup that tasted exactly like Wakayama, rice prepared a particular way, small things that arrived on the table and settled something in Alessandro that he had not known needed settling."

Notice: the chapter does not say he felt happy, or sad, or nostalgic. It says something settled in him — a physical image for an emotional effect.

Think of a food that carries a place, a person, or a memory for you. Write three or four sentences describing:

- What the food is and when you eat it
- What it tastes, smells, or looks like — specifically
- What it does when you eat it — described as a physical sensation, not an emotion

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: do not write "it makes me happy" or "I miss home when I eat it." Write what the food does to the body or the room or the moment. The emotion should be present in the description without being named. For weaker students: give them three sentence starters. For stronger students: challenge them to describe the food so specifically that someone who has never eaten it could almost taste it.*

C. Returning: The Language of Coming Back

 *Teacher's note: This chapter is about the experience of returning — to Italy, to school, to routine. This exercise focuses on the language of return and what it implies about belonging.*

The chapter uses a specific phrase:

"Somewhere he had come back to rather than somewhere he was still arriving at."

"Coming back to" implies: you left, it waited, you returned. You belong there enough to return.

"Still arriving at" implies: you are in the process of becoming part of it. You have not yet fully landed.

Think about the difference between these two kinds of relationship with a place. Complete these sentences:

1. When I go home after a trip, I feel like I am _____ rather than _____.
2. Alessandro used to feel like he was still _____ at the Rufina house. Now it feels like somewhere he has _____.
3. A place you _____ is one you have already made your own. A place you are _____ is one still in the process of becoming yours.

Discussion: Can a place become yours before you have left it and come back? Or does returning always change the relationship?

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 3 is the most significant — it connects to the novel's central concern and to Alessandro's decision not to explain Yui.*

- The Rufina house feels, for the first time, like somewhere Alessandro has come back to. Have you ever returned somewhere after being away and found that the return changed how you felt about the place? What changed?
- Haruko's groceries appear in dinners without announcement and settle something in Alessandro that he had not known needed settling. Have you ever had a food, a smell, or a sound do something like this — reach something you did not know needed reaching?
- Alessandro does not correct Elisa's reading of Yui. He says "something like that" and lets it stand. Is this the right choice? What would he lose by explaining more? What does Elisa lose by not knowing?
- Elisa talks about Japan for the entire walk to school — empirically, systematically, with opinions and cross-references. Is this a good sign? What is different about how she talks about Japan now, compared to how she talked about it in September?

B. Role Play: The Walk to School

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three. Elisa talks; Alessandro answers; Wei listens and says nothing. The challenge is to play all three registers simultaneously — Elisa's enthusiasm (changed but still energetic), Alessandro's patience, and Wei's silent, accurate attention. Three to four minutes.*

It is the first day back at school. The three of them are walking from the station.

Student A: You are Elisa. You have been waiting to say all of this for two weeks. You describe Japan with energy and detail — but the detail is now real: the cold, the osechi, the herring roe. When you bring up Yui, you say she seemed shy at first.

Student B: You are Alessandro. You listen, answer when asked, correct gently when necessary. When Yui comes up, say "something like that" and don't elaborate. You are patient, not distant.

Student C: You are Wei. You walk and listen. You say nothing about Yui. Your expression is carefully neutral — but you are paying attention to more than the surface. Do not catch Alessandro's eye.

After the role play: What did Wei's silence say? What did Alessandro leave out — and did Elisa notice?

C. Discussion: Private Comfort

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to how people carry places with them — and the role of small, unnamed things in feeling at home.*

Alessandro describes the Japanese food his mother cooks as "a private comfort, the kind that did not require naming."

- Why might a comfort be more powerful if it is not named? What changes when you put something into words?
- Haruko brought groceries across twelve time zones because she knows what Alessandro and her family need, without being asked. What does this tell us about her?
- Can you think of something in your own life that provides this kind of unnamed comfort — a smell, a sound, a food, a routine?
- Alessandro has been in Italy for five months. He has friends, a routine, a home he comes back to, and food that tastes like Japan in the evenings. Is he happy? Is that even the right question?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- The sakura is waiting for March. Alessandro has promised himself he will see it bloom. The novel is drawing toward its end. What do you think the final chapters will bring?
- Alessandro said "something like that" when Elisa called Yui shy. He did not explain. Do you think he will ever explain? And does Elisa need to know?
- The group — Alessandro, Lorenzo, Wei, Elisa — has grown into something real. What do you think their friendship looks like by the time spring arrives?

6. Writing Task

Coming Back

 *Teacher's note: A short reflective writing task about the experience of returning somewhere. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro returns to the Rufina house and finds it is the first time it has felt like somewhere he has come back to, rather than somewhere he is still arriving at. This is a small distinction and also not a small distinction.

Write a short passage about returning somewhere — after a holiday, after a long absence, or after a short one. Describe:

- The place — one or two specific details that tell you it waited for you
- What it felt like to be back — shown through physical observation, not emotion words
- What has changed in how you see the place — or in how it sees you

You can write about yourself, about Alessandro, or about a character from a book or film you know.

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: the goal is to capture the feeling of return — which is different from the feeling of arrival. A return means something is already yours. You are not discovering it; you are recognising it. Weaker students: use the three bullet points as three short sentences. Stronger students: challenge them to write a passage where the reader can feel the difference between "coming back to" and "still arriving at" without those words being used.*

7. Cultural Notes

Japanese Cooking Essentials

Haruko's suitcase contains the foundations of Japanese cooking: *dashi* (the cooking stock made from kelp and bonito, which underpins the taste of most Japanese soups and sauces), specific soy sauce, and *miso* paste. These ingredients are increasingly available in Italian supermarkets and Asian grocers, but the specific brands and varieties matter — different soy sauces and misos have distinct characters, and a Japanese cook knows which one is right for a given dish. Haruko has been compiling this list for weeks because she knows what the family needs. This is a form of care that does not require words.

The Taste of Home

For many people from immigrant or expatriate backgrounds, particular foods carry a place in a way that nothing else does. The specific flavour of a cooking stock, a particular brand of fermented paste, the way rice is prepared — these are not simply tastes, they are the sensory record of a life lived in a particular place. When Haruko's Japanese cooking appears at the Rufina dinner table, it is not just food. It is Wakayama, served quietly in January in Tuscany. Alessandro does not mention this because naming it would make it conscious, and making it conscious would change it from comfort into something more complicated. Some things work best when they are left unnamed.

What Changed for Elisa

Elisa's description of Japan on the walk to school — empirical, systematic, specific — is measurably different from the Japan-enthusiasm of the early chapters. She is not performing. She is reporting. She says she still does not know if she liked the herring roe. She describes the cold as different from Italian cold in a way she has not yet found words for. She cross-references what she saw in Wakayama with what she finds in Florence. This is curiosity that has been through contact with reality and come out more precise. It is not less enthusiastic — it is more honest. The trip did not disappoint her because she was not looking for confirmation. She was looking at what was actually there.

Privacy and Unnamed Things

Alessandro describes his mother's Japanese cooking as "a private comfort, the kind that did not require naming." This distinction — between things that are named and things that are kept unnamed — appears throughout the novel. Alessandro files things away rather than examining them. He says "something like that" rather than explaining. He does not mention the food to anyone. These choices are not avoidance: they are a form of care for the things that matter most. Naming something brings it into the open, subject to questions and commentary. Keeping it unnamed protects its quality. Alessandro has learned, over the course of this year, when to speak and when to hold something close. Both are important.

January in Tuscany

The Arno valley in January is bare and grey — the vines cut back, the olive trees silver-leafed but still, the hills present without drama. This is Tuscany stripped to its essentials, without the golden light of summer or the soft green of spring. It is not beautiful in the postcard sense. It is simply itself — enduring, patient, making no particular claim on the visitor. For Alessandro, returning to find Italy exactly as he left it is reassuring. A place that waits for you, unchanged, is a place that already considers you part of its pattern. The sakura, bare in the garden, is waiting with the same quiet patience.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 18 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has been in Italy for about five months. He called himself "settled" in Chapter 17. What do you think settled feels like from the inside — and how is it different from happy?
- The annual family trip to Italy used to happen every May. Now they live here. What do you think it will be like to have a May in Italy without the pressure of a departure date?
- Alessandro has two passports — Italian and Japanese. Have you ever thought about what a passport means — not as a document, but as a statement about who you are?

2. Glossary — Chapter 18

acknowledged (privately acknowledged) (v.)

to admit or accept something, even if only to yourself. *"He acknowledged privately that he was settled."*

administer / administrative (v./adj.)

to manage official processes and documents. *"Various administrative things that arose from living between countries."*

consulate (n.)

an official office representing a country in a foreign city, handling documents and services for citizens abroad.

countdown (n.)

a count backwards toward a departure or deadline. Already seen in Chapter 12. Here: the countdown is no longer running.

dual citizenship (n.)

the status of being a legal citizen of two countries at the same time.

efficiently (adv.)

done quickly and without waste. *"The conversation moved efficiently into logistics."*

errand (n.)

a short task or job that needs doing. *"It's just an errand."* Alessandro is reducing the passport renewal to something ordinary.

Golden Week (n., Japanese)

a cluster of Japanese national holidays at the end of April and beginning of May, creating a week-long holiday period. One of Japan's busiest travel weeks.

half-absent (adj.)

only partly paying attention; thinking of something else at the same time. *"In the half-absent way of someone thinking out loud."*

issue (issued by) (v.)

to officially provide or produce a document. *"Which government had issued the document."*

logistics (n.)

the practical organisation of something. Already seen. Here: Yui moves the conversation into logistics because she has already decided to come.

mildly (adv.)

slightly; not strongly. *"An interest he found mildly amusing."*

post (n., British English)

mail; letters and packages received at home. *"Going through post-holiday paperwork."*

reassert (v.)

to establish itself again after a pause. *"The school routine had reasserted itself completely."*

renewal (n.)

the process of officially extending the validity of a document such as a passport.

settled (to be settled) (adj.)

comfortable and established in a place or situation. *"He was, he acknowledged privately, settled."* Not happy in a named way — just settled.

sodden (adj.)

very wet; soaked through. *"The hills were grey-green and sodden."*

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on the careful distinction between being settled and being happy, and between what is said and what is meant.*

1. Alessandro describes himself in February as happy and content. TRUE / FALSE
2. Haruko mentions looking at flights because she has forgotten that the family already lives in Italy. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro invites Yui's family to Italy without first asking his mother. TRUE / FALSE
4. Yui agrees to come to Italy because of her father's interest in something in Florence. TRUE / FALSE
5. Alessandro has one passport. TRUE / FALSE
6. Alessandro tells Elisa that he will have to choose between his passports eventually and that he has already thought about which one he would keep. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the most important in the chapter — it goes to the heart of Alessandro's identity. Allow significant time.*

1. Alessandro thinks: "The house is free." What does he mean by this?
2. Yui immediately asks if they can come a bit earlier, because her father has something in Florence he's been meaning to see. What does Alessandro think about this reason?
3. When Elisa asks about the passports, Alessandro says: "It's just an errand." What is he really saying — and what is he not saying?
4. The chapter ends: "the city was beginning its day the way it always did, without consulting anyone about it." What does this image suggest about Alessandro's relationship to Florence by this point?
5. What does Haruko's slip — almost booking flights before remembering they live in Italy — reveal about how quickly life can change, and how slowly the body and habit catch up?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most precise moments of characterisation and indirect meaning.*

1. Alessandro says he is settled — "not happy in any particular way that required naming. Just — settled." What is the distinction between happy and settled?
2. Alessandro knows that Shirai-san's reason for coming to Florence is probably not the main reason. He does not say this to anyone. Why?
3. Elisa says: "And you don't know which one you'd choose." Alessandro does not directly answer. What does his non-answer say?

4. Language Focus

A. Being vs. Feeling: Settled, Not Happy

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro's distinction between settled and happy is linguistically and emotionally precise. This exercise explores the difference between states of being and states of feeling.*

Alessandro says he is settled — not happy in any particular way that required naming. Just settled.

There is a difference between:

Feeling words: happy, sad, excited, lonely, proud — emotions that point at something, that have an object or a cause.

State words: settled, comfortable, at ease, present, grounded — conditions of being, quieter and less directional.

Look at these sentences. For each one, decide whether it describes a feeling or a state:

1. "He was happy to be back."
2. "Something in him settled without making a sound."
3. "He felt excited about Golden Week."
4. "He was, he acknowledged privately, settled."
5. "She laughed — genuinely, unexpectedly."

Now write two sentences about yourself or a character: one using a feeling word, one using a state word for the same general experience.

B. The Passport Conversation: Framing and Reframing

 *Teacher's note: Elisa frames the passport question in a particular way. Alessandro reframes it. This exercise practises the language of reframing — responding to a question without accepting its premise.*

Elisa's frame: You have two passports. At some point you'll have to choose. Which would you choose?

Alessandro's implicit reframe: The passport is paperwork. What I actually am does not depend on which government issued the document. It's just an errand.

Alessandro does not argue with Elisa's frame — he simply does not accept it. He responds from a different starting point.

Practise reframing. For each question below, write a response that does not answer the question as it was asked, but instead repositions the premise:

1. "Which country do you like better — Italy or Japan?"
2. "Do you feel more Italian or more Japanese?"
3. "Which language do you think in?"

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any response that declines to accept the binary or the either/or premise, and replaces it with something more accurate to Alessandro's experience. This is also a good real-world communication skill: knowing when to reframe a question rather than answer it as given.*

C. Golden Week and Japanese National Holidays

 *Teacher's note: A short factual and cultural exercise connected to the chapter's Golden Week reference.*

Golden Week is a cluster of Japanese national holidays at the end of April and beginning of May. It creates one of Japan's longest holiday periods of the year. Read the information below and answer the questions:

Golden Week holidays (approximate):

- 29 April — Shōwa Day (昭和の日): commemorates Emperor Shōwa
 - 3 May — Constitution Day (憲法記念日): celebrates Japan's postwar constitution
 - 4 May — Greenery Day (みどりの日): nature and the environment
 - 5 May — Children's Day (こどもの日): traditionally a celebration of boys, now all children
1. How many days does Golden Week typically create as a holiday period?
 2. The Bevilacqua Kobayashi family used to travel to Italy every Golden Week. Why does this timing make sense?
 3. This year, Alessandro's family is already in Italy. He thinks: "Golden Week was not a departure. It was just a week in early May." Why is this significant?

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 3 on the passport is the most philosophically rich — push students to think about what a passport actually represents.*

- Alessandro is settled, not happy in any particular named way. Is settled a good thing? Is it enough? Or does it suggest something is missing?
- Haruko almost books flights before remembering they live in Italy. Have you ever caught yourself reaching for an old habit that no longer applies? What does it feel like when your habits have not caught up with your life?
- Elisa asks which passport Alessandro would choose. Alessandro says "it's just an errand." Do you think he is right that the passport is just paperwork? Or does the passport represent something more than a document?
- Alessandro is reasonably certain that Yui's father's reason for visiting Florence is not the main reason. He says nothing about this. Is it dishonest to not say what you know? Or is it sometimes kinder — or more sensible — to let the fiction stand?

B. Role Play: The Passport Conversation

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. The challenge is to play Alessandro's reframe without making it into an argument. He does not correct Elisa; he simply speaks from a different starting point. Two to three minutes.*

Alessandro and Elisa are walking to school. He has mentioned the passport renewal.

Student A: You are Elisa. You are genuinely curious about the logistics of Alessandro's existence. You ask about the two passports. You ask which one he would choose. You are not trying to upset him — you are interested.

Student B: You are Alessandro. You are patient. You answer the factual questions. When she asks which you would choose, do not argue — just reframe. "It's just an errand." Let her understand that the question does not quite fit.

After the role play: Did Elisa understand the reframe? How did it feel, as Alessandro, to not argue but simply to speak from a different place?

C. Discussion: Identity and Documents

 *Teacher's note: This discussion goes to one of the novel's deepest themes. It is worth taking significant time — the questions here are real and complex.*

- Alessandro says: "What I actually am does not depend on which government issued the document." Do you agree? Is identity something governments can document — or is it something else entirely?
- He has two passports — Italian and Japanese. Japan technically requires citizens to choose one upon adulthood (though this is inconsistently enforced). Italy allows dual citizenship. What do you think about a law that requires someone to choose one national identity over another?
- Alessandro has always been both Italian and Japanese. He did not choose this. Do you think being both is an advantage, a complication, or just a fact?
- If you could have citizenship of any country, would you choose the one you already have? Would you want more than one?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas.*

- Yui's family is coming to Italy for Golden Week — in May, when the sakura blooms. Alessandro has been promising himself he will see the sakura bloom since September. What do you think that moment will be like?
- Yui will be in Italy — in Alessandro's garden, in his neighbourhood, in his Italian life. How do you think she will experience it?
- The novel is in its final chapters. What do you think the last pages of Missing Home will give us?

6. Writing Task

It's Just an Errand

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task on reducing something complicated to something simple — and what that reduction reveals. Suggested length: 80–120 words.*

Alessandro calls the passport renewal "just an errand." By reducing it to an errand, he is refusing to let the question of identity become a crisis. The errand is real — it needs doing. But it is also a strategy: keeping the complicated thing inside a manageable container.

Think of something in your own experience — or a character's — that is complicated but has been reduced to a simple, practical description. Write a short passage in which:

- Something complicated is named in a simple, practical way
- The reader can feel what is underneath the simple name — without it being stated
- The person whose voice it is remains calm, practical, not dramatic

Example: Alessandro does not say "I have to decide which country I am." He says "I need to renew my passport. I'll deal with it."

 *Teacher's note: This task practises the technique of understatement as a form of emotional management — putting a big thing inside a small container. Weaker students: give them a situation and have them write the simple sentence first, then one sentence about what is underneath. Stronger students: challenge them to write the whole passage without the reader ever being told directly what the big thing is.*

7. Cultural Notes

Golden Week

Golden Week (ゴールデンウィーク) is a cluster of four Japanese national holidays occurring at the end of April and beginning of May, creating one of the longest holiday periods in the Japanese calendar. Most Japanese workers take the full week off, making it one of the three peak travel periods of the year (alongside New Year and the mid-August Obon holiday). Transport and tourist destinations in Japan become extremely crowded. For the Bevilacqua Kobayashi family, Golden Week was for eleven years the window for the annual May trip to Italy. Now that they live in Italy, the week has lost its directional meaning — it is simply a holiday. Alessandro notices this with quiet satisfaction.

Dual Citizenship: Italy and Japan

Italy permits dual citizenship — Italian citizens can hold the citizenship of another country simultaneously. Japan's official position is different: the Japanese Nationality Act requires Japanese nationals who acquire a foreign nationality to renounce one or the other upon reaching adulthood (typically by age twenty-two). In practice, this rule is inconsistently enforced, and many people with dual Japanese nationality quietly retain both. Alessandro is still a minor, so for now the question is theoretical. But it is real — he will eventually need to address it. His response to Elisa ("it's just an errand") is not evasion; it is precision. The paperwork is not the identity. What he actually is cannot be resolved by a form.

The Japanese Consulate

Japan maintains consulates in major Italian cities, including Rome and Milan. The Japanese Consulate General in Florence handles cases for the Tuscany region. For Japanese citizens living abroad, the consulate provides services including passport renewal, birth registration, and other civil documentation. Renewing a Japanese passport abroad requires visiting the consulate in person with the appropriate forms and photographs. For a family like the Bevilacqua Kobayashis — who are now permanently resident in Italy rather than visiting — establishing a relationship with the consulate in Florence is part of the administrative reality of their new life.

Settled

The distinction Alessandro makes — settled, not happy in any particular named way — reflects something real about how people adapt to new places. Happiness is often associated with events: something good happened, you feel happy. Settling is different: it is a gradual accumulation of ordinary days until the new place stops feeling like an imposition. You are not performing contentment. You are simply no longer performing effort. Alessandro has reached this point quietly, without announcement, in February in a grey valley in Tuscany. It is not the ending of the story. But it is a kind of resolution — the particular one that comes before spring.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 19 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has been promising himself since September that he will see the sakura bloom in the garden. Spring is coming. Do you think it will be what he expected?
- The group of four now spends Tuesday afternoons together regularly. Think about how far they have all come since September — Elisa, Wei, Lorenzo, Alessandro. What has each of them changed, learned, or discovered?
- Alessandro's Italian has been described as correct but formal. After seven months in Italy — at school, walking to school, spending afternoons together — do you think it has changed? What would change?

2. Glossary — Chapter 19

blossom (n.)	the flowers of a tree, especially a fruit tree or cherry tree. <i>"A pale froth of blossom against the stone wall."</i>
bud (n.)	a small growth on a plant that develops into a leaf or flower. <i>"The buds tightening, the branches filling out."</i>
committed (the season had finally committed) (v.)	here: fully arrived; decided. The warmth is no longer uncertain — spring has committed to being spring.
considerable (adj.)	large or significant. <i>"The word carried considerable weight."</i> Elisa's "dubbed" carries strong feeling.
dubbed / dubbing (adj./v.)	when a film or TV show has its dialogue replaced by voices speaking a different language. The opposite is subtitles (subbed).
evasion (n.)	avoiding giving a direct answer. <i>"The expression she wore when she suspected evasion."</i>
froth (n.)	a light, airy mass of bubbles or foam. Used here to describe the appearance of cherry blossom — pale, light, almost weightless.
incoming (adj.)	about to arrive. <i>"A sign that a position was incoming."</i> Elisa is about to make an argument.
pragmatic (adj.)	practical; focused on what works rather than on principles. <i>"The pragmatic attention of someone who doesn't understand why they changed the version but is content to go along with it."</i>
profound (adj.)	very deep; felt strongly. <i>"A sound of profound agreement."</i> Used here with slight irony — Lorenzo's agreement is total but unexamined.
register (n.)	here used figuratively: the particular mode, tone, or way something arrives. <i>"Something familiar arriving in a register you didn't expect."</i>
remnants (n.)	what is left over after something has been used or finished. <i>"The remnants of whatever Wei's father had sent out."</i>
subbed / subtitles (adj./n.)	when a film or TV show keeps the original audio and adds written translations at the bottom of the screen. Elisa strongly prefers this.
translated / translation (v./n.)	here used figuratively: Alessandro felt like he was experiencing Italy through translation when he first arrived — accurate, but missing something.
unmistakable (adj.)	impossible to mistake for anything else; clearly recognisable. <i>"Unmistakable."</i> The sakura blossom is unlike anything else.
vindicated (adj.)	proved right after being challenged or doubted. <i>"The satisfaction of someone being vindicated."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on precise details — particularly in the dubbing debate section.*

1. Alessandro had expected the sakura to bloom on a particular day that he had been watching for.
TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro's first reaction to the blossom is to go outside immediately and photograph it.
TRUE / FALSE
3. Elisa prefers dubbed versions of anime because the Italian voice actors are better performers.
TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro's reason for finding dubbed versions wrong is the same as Elisa's. TRUE / FALSE
5. Wei and Lorenzo both take Elisa's side in the dubbing debate. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends with Alessandro concluding that Florence is a bad place to be. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the most important — the dubbed/original distinction as a metaphor for Alessandro's Italian. Allow significant time.*

1. Why does Alessandro go outside in his socks? What does this detail tell us?
2. Alessandro sends the photograph to Yui with no message attached. Why?
3. Alessandro explains his position in the dubbing debate: the dubbed voices are wrong "in a specific way that's hard to explain." What is the thing he almost says — and why does he stop?
4. What does Alessandro mean by the metaphor of knowing a song "from the other side of a wall"?
5. The chapter ends: "He decided it was not a bad place to be." What makes this the right way to end this particular chapter?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most carefully constructed moments of indirect meaning.*

1. Alessandro says his Italian was like knowing a song "heard only from the other side of a wall — accurate in the notes, missing something in the room." What is he describing?
2. The chapter says the dubbing debate connects to "something else" that Alessandro does not name. What is that something else?
3. "He decided it was not a bad place to be." What is the cumulative weight of this sentence at this point in the novel?

4. Language Focus

A. Knowing Something vs. Understanding It

 *Teacher's note: The sakura moment — "I had thought, for years, that I understood what it looked like. I had not understood." — introduces a key distinction between secondhand knowledge and direct experience. This connects to the novel's central themes and to language learning.*

Alessandro says:

"He had thought, for years, that he understood what it looked like. He had not understood."

There is a difference between knowing something through description, photograph, or second-hand account — and understanding it through direct experience.

Look at these pairs. For each one, decide what the person knows (second-hand) and what they would need to do to truly understand:

1. Elisa knows a great deal about Japan through anime, research, and photographs.
2. Alessandro knows Italian accurately — grammar, vocabulary, how to form sentences.
3. Lorenzo knows about the Meiji Restoration from Alessandro's explanation on the train.

Now write one sentence about something you know but do not fully understand — and one sentence about how you might come to understand it.

B. Metaphor: Content vs. Music

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro's metaphor — the content is the same, the music is wrong — is one of the most precise in the novel. This exercise practises using metaphor to express complex ideas simply.*

Alessandro thinks about the dubbed voices and finds the right metaphor:

"It's what happens when something familiar arrives in a register you didn't expect. The content is the same. The music is wrong."

A metaphor takes a complicated idea and expresses it through a simpler, more familiar comparison.

Alessandro's metaphor works because:

- Content = the words, the meaning, the story (what you know)
- Music = the tone, the feeling, the acoustic quality (what you are inside)

Try using the same structure. Complete these sentences with a metaphor of your own:

1. Speaking a foreign language perfectly but not naturally is like _____.
2. Reading about a place in books and then arriving there is like _____.
3. Alessandro's Italian in September was like _____.

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any metaphor that captures the gap between knowing and understanding, between correctness and naturalness. The best metaphors here will be concrete, specific, and slightly surprising.*

C. Dubbed vs. Subbed: Opinions and Evidence

 *Teacher's note: The dubbing debate is a genuine and lively controversy with real arguments on both sides — it also connects to language learning. This exercise practises giving opinions with reasons and evidence.*

Elisa, Alessandro, Wei, and Lorenzo all have different positions on dubbed vs. subtitled content. Look at their positions:

Elisa: Subtitles are essential. The original voice actors are part of the performance. Dubbing is wrong in the way a slightly wrong redrawing of the art is wrong.

Alessandro: Both positions are complicated. The dubbed voices are wrong, but for a different reason — he knows the originals from the inside.

Wei: She watches whatever is available. Chinese if possible, Italian if not. It is a television programme.

Lorenzo: He grew up with dubbed content. It is simply how things arrived. He is content to watch the subbed version without understanding why they changed it.

Choose one position and write a short paragraph (four to six sentences) defending it. Give at least two reasons. You can use your own opinion.

 *Teacher's note: This is a real debate that language learners often have strong feelings about. Encourage students to give reasons rather than just state preferences. The language of opinion — "I think", "one reason is", "for example", "on the other hand" — should appear naturally here.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most universally accessible — the dubbed vs. subbed debate touches every language learner. Question 4 is the most personal and important.*

- Alessandro goes outside in his socks to stand under the sakura. He has been waiting for this since September. It happened on an ordinary Thursday. Was the ordinary timing right — or would you have wanted it to be on a special day?
- The dubbing debate is real. Do you watch things dubbed or subtitled? Why? Does it change your experience of the story or the performance?
- Alessandro stopped one sentence short of explaining himself fully in the dubbing debate. He recognised the connection to his own experience but did not name it. Why do you think he held back? Was that the right choice?
- The chapter ends: "He decided it was not a bad place to be." This is Alessandro's most positive statement about Italy in the whole novel. Why do you think it is expressed as an understatement? What would be lost if he had said "Florence is wonderful"?

B. Role Play: The Dubbing Debate

 *Teacher's note: Groups of four. This scene is the liveliest in the novel — it should feel like a real argument among friends, with four distinct positions. Three to four minutes. Encourage students to have genuine opinions.*

It is a Tuesday afternoon at the bench outside Wei's shop. Someone is watching a dubbed show on their phone.

Student A: You are Elisa. You have a strong position. The original is the original. Make your case. You are not shy about this.

Student B: You are Alessandro. Your position is more complicated. You agree with Elisa for different reasons. But you stop before you explain why. Say "somewhat" and hold your ground.

Student C: You are Wei. You are pragmatic. You watch whatever is available. It is a television programme. You are not going to fight about this.

Student D: You are Lorenzo. You have always watched dubbed content. You do not understand the problem. You go along with switching to subbed, but you are not sure why.

After the role play: Did Elisa win the argument? Was there an argument to win? And what was Alessandro not saying?

C. Discussion: Less Translated

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to one of the novel's most significant moments of self-understanding. It is also directly relevant to students' own experience of learning English.*

Alessandro thinks: Italy is less like that now. Less translated and more simply present.

- What does "less translated" mean? Can you think of a time when you were using a language and it felt like translation — and a time when it felt natural and direct?
- Alessandro arrived in Italy knowing Italian correctly but slightly formally. After seven months of daily life in the language, something has changed. What do you think changed — and how?
- The dubbing metaphor — same content, wrong music — describes a gap between knowing a language and being inside it. Do you recognise this gap in your own experience of English? Where are you on this spectrum?
- Alessandro says he is "not sure exactly when" his Italian changed. Do you think you notice when a language stops being translated? Or does it just quietly become present?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. These are the students' own ideas. Only one or two chapters remain.*

- The sakura has bloomed. Yui's family is coming in May for Golden Week. What do you think the final chapters of Missing Home will show us?
- Alessandro has decided Florence is "not a bad place to be." Do you think he will ever say something stronger than that — to himself, or to someone else?
- The novel began with Alessandro hearing about the move to Italy and saying "Okay" twice. How has he changed since that moment?

6. Writing Task

The Thing I Almost Said

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task about the sentence that was not said — what Alessandro held back in the dubbing debate, and what the stopping reveals. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Alessandro stopped one sentence short of explaining himself. He thought: it's what happens when something familiar arrives in a register you didn't expect. The content is the same. The music is wrong.

He did not say this because it was too close to something else.

Write a short passage about a moment when you (or a character) did not say the most honest thing — not because it was untrue, but because it was too personal, too complicated, or not the right moment.

- What was the thing you almost said?
- Why did you stop?
- What did you say instead?
- What did holding it back feel like — and was it the right choice?

You can write about yourself, about Alessandro, or about any character in the novel.

 *Teacher's note: Remind students: the unsaid thing should be true. The stopping should be for a real reason — not cowardice, but timing, context, or protection. Weaker students: give them a situation and have them write one sentence for each bullet point. Stronger students: challenge them to write the passage without ever stating the unsaid thing directly — let the reader feel it through what is said instead.*

7. Cultural Notes

Hanami: The Sakura in Bloom

Alessandro's tree blooms in March — roughly the right time for a somei yoshino in Tuscany (the bloom varies by latitude and weather). In Japan, the sakura front moves northward through the country each spring, and forecasters track it closely. The tradition of *hanami* — gathering under the cherry blossoms — is one of Japan's most beloved seasonal rituals. Alessandro's private moment under his tree is not a group hanami; it is something more solitary and personal. He has been waiting since September. He came out in his socks. He took photographs. He sent one to Yui without a message. This is his version of hanami — small, unsentimental, entirely his.

Dubbing in Italy

Italy has one of the strongest dubbing traditions in Europe. Italian cinema and television have dubbed foreign content since the 1930s, and the profession of dubbing actor (*doppiatore*) is prestigious and well-established. Italians generally grow up watching dubbed versions of everything — American films, anime, British television — voiced by actors who have sometimes dubbed the same foreign star for decades. For many Italian viewers, the dubbed voice is inseparable from the character: a famous American actor has an Italian voice that is simply their voice. Elisa's position — that the original voice actors are part of the performance — is the more internationally prevalent one in recent years, particularly among younger viewers who use streaming services with subtitle options.

Subtitles and Language Learning

For language learners, the dubbed vs. subtitled question is practically significant. Subtitled content exposes viewers to the original spoken language — pronunciation, rhythm, intonation, idiomatic expression — while allowing them to follow the story through the written text. Many language learners use subtitled content as a learning tool. Dubbed content removes this exposure entirely. Alessandro's position is interesting: he has been watching things in the original Japanese his whole life, so dubbed versions displace something he knows from the inside. His experience is the reverse of a typical Italian viewer: for him, the Italian dub of a Japanese anime is the version that sounds wrong.

Language as Music

Alessandro's metaphor — the content is the same, the music is wrong — is an unusually precise description of what linguists call language pragmatics: the contextual, cultural, and acoustic qualities of language that go beyond the words themselves. When he arrived in Italy his Italian was grammatically and lexically correct — the notes were right. But the register, the rhythm, the social intuitions that make speech feel natural rather than constructed — these took time. Seven months of daily life in the language, hearing it from the inside, has changed something. Italy is less translated. This is one of the most honest descriptions in the novel of what it feels like to move from knowing a language to living inside one.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 20 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has noticed that something is off with Lorenzo for two weeks. He has decided to wait rather than ask. Do you think waiting is the right approach? When is waiting better than asking?
- Wei has also noticed Lorenzo, and she is "building a picture" and deciding something. What do you think she might do?
- The group has been meeting on Tuesday afternoons at the bench outside Wei's shop. Think about what this bench has meant to the group over the past few months. What has happened there?

2. Glossary — Chapter 20

accumulate weight (expression)	to become increasingly significant or heavy over time. <i>"The kind of moments that accumulate weight while appearing very still."</i>
adequately (adv.)	sufficiently; enough. <i>"The sentence was adequately communicated without the ending."</i> Lorenzo feels he has said enough without finishing.
application (straightforward application) (n.)	here: the act of doing something directly and without fuss. <i>"The straightforward application of someone eating lunch."</i>
building a picture (expression)	gradually gathering information and forming an understanding. <i>"Watching things when she was building a picture."</i>
incident (n.)	an event, especially an unexpected one. <i>"Without particular incident."</i> Lorenzo eats the Lazi Ji with no drama whatsoever.
Lazi Ji (n., Chinese, Sichuan)	a Sichuan dish of fried chicken pieces cooked with a large quantity of dried chillies and Sichuan pepper. The chillies are often more than the chicken in volume. Famous for its intense heat.
middle distance (n. phrase)	the space between close-up and far away; a vague point that someone looks at when they are thinking or trying not to be noticed looking at something specific. <i>"Elisa was apparently fascinated by something in the middle distance."</i>
portion (n.)	a serving of food; the amount given to one person. <i>"A portion that was not small."</i>
privately (adv.)	to oneself; not shared with others. <i>"He was pleased, privately, for both of them."</i>
resume (v.)	to begin again after a pause. <i>"The ordinary had resumed."</i>
Sichuan (adj.)	relating to the cuisine of Sichuan province in southwest China, known for bold, spicy flavours and the numbing heat of Sichuan pepper. Already seen in Chapter 9.
sorted out (sort itself out) (expression)	to resolve itself without intervention. <i>"Some things sorted themselves out in their own time, without requiring anyone to manage them."</i>
tolerance (n.)	the ability to endure something without being overwhelmed by it. <i>"Building up tolerance."</i> Lorenzo has been systematically increasing his ability to eat spicy food.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter requires very careful reading of what is said and what is not said. Push students to find the exact text for each answer.*

1. Alessandro asks Lorenzo directly what is wrong with him. TRUE / FALSE
2. Wei notices Lorenzo carrying something, but does not discuss this with Alessandro. TRUE / FALSE
3. The Lazi Ji from Wei's father is the same as the Lazi Ji on the menu. TRUE / FALSE
4. Lorenzo serves himself a small, cautious portion of the Lazi Ji. TRUE / FALSE
5. Lorenzo reaches for water after eating the Lazi Ji. TRUE / FALSE
6. After Lorenzo explains himself, Wei immediately expresses how she feels about what he said.
TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the emotional centre of the chapter. Allow significant time — it is asking students to interpret an act of care that is expressed entirely through food.*

1. How does Alessandro know something is wrong with Lorenzo — and why does he choose not to ask?
2. How does Wei notice Lorenzo, and what does Alessandro observe about the way she does it?
3. Lorenzo says: "I wanted to be able to eat your food. Eat together. Without making a thing of it." What does this mean — and what does it cost him to say it?
4. Wei's response is to serve Lorenzo more food. What does this communicate — and what would be different if she had said something?
5. Alessandro and Elisa look at each other after the exchange. Neither says a word. What does this shared silence communicate?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most precisely written moments of indirect action and restraint.*

1. Lorenzo says "The yogurt in Siena was —" and does not finish the sentence. He seems to feel it is "adequately communicated without the ending." What is the unfinished sentence saying?
2. The chapter says the ten minutes remain "present in the air, the way certain things remain present after they have passed, but nobody was going to name it." What is the effect of not naming it?
3. The final sentence: "He kept this to himself." Why does the chapter end on this particular phrase?

4. Language Focus

A. Showing Care Without Saying It

 *Teacher's note: Wei's response — serving Lorenzo more food — is the most eloquent act of care in the novel. This exercise focuses on how characters in the novel show rather than tell.*

Wei does not say "I'm glad you did that" or "that means a lot to me." She picks up the serving spoon and gives Lorenzo more food.

Throughout this novel, characters show care through action rather than stating it. Look at these examples and identify what each action communicates:

1. Haruko packs suitcases full of Japanese groceries and they appear in dinners without announcement. (Chapter 17)
2. Alessandro sends the sakura photograph to Yui with no message attached. (Chapter 19)
3. Elisa sits very still and finds her water bottle label fascinating while Lorenzo and Wei have their moment. (Chapter 20)
4. Wei refills Lorenzo's portion without comment when it is empty, a second time. (Chapter 20)

Now write one or two sentences describing an act of care — something a person could do, without speaking, to show they understand and value another person. Use a concrete action, not a statement.

B. Sentence Fragments and Unfinished Thoughts

 *Teacher's note: Lorenzo's unfinished sentence — "The yogurt in Siena was —" — is a deliberate fragment. This exercise focuses on when and why writers leave sentences incomplete.*

A sentence fragment is an incomplete sentence — it starts but does not finish. Writers use them deliberately to show:

- That the speaker ran out of words
- That the listener already understands without the ending
- That the feeling is too large or too complicated to complete
- That stopping is itself meaningful

Look at these fragments from the novel. For each one, explain what the unfinished part communicates:

1. "The yogurt in Siena was —" (Lorenzo)
2. "He had always known this was the plan — that he would finish his education in Italy, that they would go back when the time was right. He had grown up with this information the way you grow up knowing eventually you will have to do something difficult. You carry it for years. You think you are ready." (Chapter 1 — the sentence trails into implication)
3. "He wasn't sure what his father had given him exactly. Something, though. Enough for tonight." (Chapter 8 — incomplete accounting)

Now write a short passage (three to five sentences) in which a character says something and stops before finishing it. The reader should understand what the unfinished part means without being told.

C. The Group: A Character Study

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 20 shows the group as it has become. This exercise asks students to trace the arc of each character across the novel — a synthesis exercise suitable toward the end of the book.*

Think about where each character started at the beginning of the novel and where they are now. For each one, write one sentence describing what they were like in September and one sentence describing what they are like now.

Alessandro September: _____ | Now: _____

Elisa September: _____ | Now: _____

Wei September: _____ | Now: _____

Lorenzo September: _____ | Now: _____

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Reward any description that is specific and evidence-based — connected to something that actually happened in the novel. Some examples: Alessandro in September — careful, mapping from the outside, carrying Japan without naming it. Now — settled, fluent in the group, still careful but less alone with things. Elisa in September — performing Japan, curated, rehearsed. Now — listening, empirical, able to eat the herring roe out of politeness and laugh about it.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. All four questions here are emotionally rich. Question 2 is the most important — Lorenzo's six months of preparation is the most romantic act in the novel.*

- Alessandro notices Lorenzo is carrying something, and decides to wait rather than ask. Wei notices and decides to do something. Alessandro waits to see what she decides. Is this the right approach — leaving it to Wei? What would you have done?
- Lorenzo has been building up his tolerance to spicy food since October — six months of quiet preparation — so he could eat with Wei without making a drama. Do you think this is the most romantic gesture in the novel? Or is it just a practical one? Can something be both?
- Wei's response is to serve Lorenzo more food, without making a thing of it. She says nothing. Alessandro and Elisa look at each other and say nothing. Is silence sometimes more eloquent than words?
- Alessandro ends the chapter pleased, privately, for both of them — and keeps this to himself. Is private pleasure — happiness for someone else that you do not perform — a mark of genuine care? Or is it better to express it?

B. Role Play: The Bench

 *Teacher's note: Groups of four. This scene needs to be played with extreme care — the comedy of Alessandro and Elisa going very still must not overwhelm the gravity of the Lorenzo/Wei exchange. Two different registers happening simultaneously. Four to five minutes.*

It is Tuesday afternoon. They are eating on the bench. The Lazi Ji has arrived.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You serve yourself rice, leave the chicken, and watch carefully. When Lorenzo and Wei's exchange happens, you become extremely interested in your rice. You do not catch Elisa's eye until it is over.

Student B: You are Elisa. You try the Lazi Ji. Your face goes through stages. When Lorenzo and Wei's exchange happens, you go very still and find your water bottle label fascinating.

Student C: You are Wei. You present the food. You watch Lorenzo eat it. When you ask "you just ate that", be precise, not excited. When he explains, take time. Then serve him more. Say nothing about what he said.

Student D: You are Lorenzo. You give yourself a portion that is not small. You eat it. When Wei asks, you answer honestly — more than you planned. Leave the yogurt sentence unfinished.

After the role play: What happened in the moment when Wei served Lorenzo more? How did it feel to be in that scene?

C. Discussion: Without Making a Thing of It

 *Teacher's note: This discussion focuses on how the chapter handles something significant with extreme lightness. It connects to how care and affection can be expressed and received.*

- Lorenzo wanted to be able to eat Wei's food without making a thing of it. Why is "without making a thing of it" so important here? What would have been lost if he had been dramatic about the Lazi Ji?
- Wei gave Lorenzo more food without making a thing of it. She did not name what he had done. Is this a more meaningful response than saying something would have been?
- Alessandro and Elisa both made themselves invisible during the exchange. Is making yourself invisible — choosing not to witness something, giving two people space — a form of care?
- The novel often describes things that happen without anyone deciding them, without anyone managing them, that "sort themselves out in their own time." Do you agree that some things should be left alone to sort themselves out? Or is it sometimes better to manage?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. Only a few chapters remain.*

- Yui's family is coming to Italy for Golden Week. What do you think will happen when Yui arrives in Alessandro's world — in his garden, at his school, with his friends?
- The group has now grown into something real and full. What do you think the final chapters will bring — for the group, and for Alessandro individually?
- The novel is called Missing Home. At this point, what do you think Alessandro is missing? And does he have something now that he did not have in September?

6. Writing Task

Without Making a Thing of It

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task about expressing something important without naming it. Students write a scene in which a significant act of care or feeling is shown through action alone — no speeches, no declarations. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Wei serves Lorenzo more food without making a thing of it. That is her entire response to what he said.

Write a short scene in which a character does something that shows care, affection, or understanding — but does not say it directly. The feeling should be unmistakable to the reader, even though it is never named.

- Choose a specific action (food, an object, a gesture, a small practical thing)
- Make sure the action is the response to something that has just happened or been said
- The other character should receive the action without speaking about it
- The reader should understand what it means

You can use characters from the novel or invent your own situation.

 *Teacher's note: The goal is restraint. The reader should feel the warmth without anyone naming it. Weaker students: give them the situation (two characters, one does something for the other after a difficult conversation) and have them describe the action in three sentences. Stronger students: challenge them to write a scene where the most important thing is never stated, but the reader is in no doubt about what it means.*

7. Cultural Notes

Lazi Ji: Sichuan Chilli Chicken

Lazi Ji (辣子鸡) — literally "chilli chicken" — is a classic Sichuan dish in which pieces of fried chicken are cooked in an enormous quantity of dried red chillies and Sichuan pepper. The ratio of chillies to chicken is famously high: in many versions, you have to search for the chicken among the chillies. The dish is intensely hot and numbing, with the distinctive "mala" (麻辣, numbing-spicy) sensation characteristic of Sichuan cooking. Wei's father has made it "stronger than usual" — and it is already from the back of the kitchen, not the adapted menu version. For Lorenzo to eat it without reaching for water is a genuine achievement.

Building Up Spice Tolerance

Lorenzo's plan — building up his tolerance to spicy food since October so he could eat with Wei without making a drama — is physically real. Capsaicin tolerance does build with repeated exposure: the receptors that respond to heat become less sensitive over time, and what was once overwhelming gradually becomes manageable. This process typically takes weeks to months of consistent practice. Lorenzo has been doing this quietly and alone, without telling anyone, for six months. It is both a practical strategy and an act of sustained, private intention. The preparation itself is the expression of the feeling.

Food as Communication

Food has appeared throughout this novel as a medium of communication and connection. Haruko's groceries carry Japan to Italy without a word. Elisa's bento showed effort and intention. Wei's mapo tofu in the Piazza del Campo was a test and a self-introduction. The herring roe was a shared ritual of eating the same difficult thing. Now *Lazi Ji* is the culmination: Lorenzo has prepared himself, over six months, to eat at Wei's table. Wei's response — serving him more — closes the loop. The food is the conversation. Everything important has been said through what has been eaten and offered and received.

Romantic Gestures: Quiet and Sustained

Lorenzo's preparation is not a grand gesture. It is the opposite: quiet, sustained, practical, and private. He did not announce his plan. He did not make it a story. He built up tolerance, one meal at a time, over six months, until he could be present at Wei's table without cost to either of them. This kind of quiet, sustained effort — directed at being genuinely present with another person — is one of the most honest expressions of care in the novel. It does not ask for credit. It just shows up, ready. Alessandro, who has spent the year being carefully patient about what matters, recognises it immediately and is pleased privately. That is the right response to this kind of thing.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 21 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Yui's family is arriving in Italy. For Yui, this is the first time she will be inside Alessandro's Italian world — meeting his friends, seeing his city, walking his streets. How do you think she will experience it?
- Alessandro has kept his Italian and Japanese worlds somewhat separate throughout the novel. Now they are in the same place. What do you think will change — for him, for the group, and for Yui?
- Elisa has changed enormously since September. She went to Japan and saw real Japan. She is now coming to meet Yui on equal terms. How do you think their relationship will be now, compared to the beginning?

2. Glossary — Chapter 21

assessing (v.)	examining carefully in order to make a judgement. <i>"Assessing construction."</i> Kenji-san is a craftsman — he looks at things professionally.
barrier (arrivals barrier) (n.)	the barrier or gate at an airport through which arriving passengers pass.
briefed (v.)	given instructions or information before an event. <i>"He had been briefed on the walk over to the other side of the garden."</i> Wei told Lorenzo what to do.
cascade (n.)	a flow of something hanging down in long, loose streams. <i>"Long fragrant cascades"</i> of wisteria.
conviction (n.)	strong certainty or force. <i>"She elbowed him, with conviction."</i>
correspondent / corresponding (v.)	to exchange letters or messages with someone over time. <i>"Goldsmith workshops he had been corresponding with."</i>
drift (v.)	to move slowly and without urgency. <i>"They drifted."</i> The three friends quietly move away.
explicitly (adv.)	clearly and directly stated. <i>"Without anyone saying so explicitly."</i> The arrangement was understood without being said.
fuji (n., Japanese)	wisteria. The Japanese name for the plant, which also carries associations of beauty, grace, and melancholy. Yui says the word quietly to herself when she sees the wisteria tunnel.
geometry (n.)	here: the precise shape and structure of something. <i>"The specific geometry of his settings."</i> Kenji-san's jewellery settings have a recognisable mathematical precision.
manoeuvre (n.)	a deliberate, skillful movement or operation. <i>"Elisa's manoeuvre."</i> Her decision to not take the photograph and to steer the others away.
Museo degli Argenti (n., Italian)	the Museum of Silver, housed in the Palazzo Pitti in Florence. Contains a collection of goldsmith work, cameos, gems, and decorative arts.
Oltrarno (n., Italian)	literally "beyond the Arno": the neighbourhood on the south side of the River Arno in Florence, historically associated with craftsmen, workshops, and artisans.
pendant (n.)	a piece of jewellery that hangs from a chain or necklace.
tat (tourist tat) (n., British informal)	cheap, low-quality goods, especially souvenirs sold to tourists. <i>"Being disappointed by the tourist tat on Ponte Vecchio."</i>
Villa Bardini (n., Italian)	a historic villa and garden in Florence, on a hillside above the Oltrarno, with views of the city and famous for its flowering plants including wisteria.
wisteria (n.)	a climbing plant that produces long hanging clusters of fragrant purple, white, or pink flowers in spring. In Japanese it is called fuji (藤).

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: Several of these hinge on very precise details — particularly around the necklace and the manoeuvre in the garden.*

1. Kenji-san is visiting Florence primarily to relax and enjoy a holiday with his family. TRUE / FALSE
2. Elisa notices the necklace Yui is wearing immediately. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro asks Kenji-san about the necklace to confirm that he made it. TRUE / FALSE
4. Elisa takes a photograph of Alessandro and Yui in the wisteria tunnel. TRUE / FALSE
5. Lorenzo understood why Wei steered him to the other side of the garden. TRUE / FALSE
6. Yui understood what Elisa had done in the garden. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 on the necklace and question 4 on Yui's conclusion are the most important. Allow significant time for both.*

1. Alessandro recognises the necklace without examining it. What does this tell us about his relationship with Kenji-san?
2. Yui says "It's real" when she sees the view of Florence from Villa Bardini. Alessandro says he understood — he had felt something similar in September. What is the connection?
3. Alessandro says nothing when he sees the necklace. What does his silence say?
4. Yui's final thought is: "He found good people. It was not a small thing." What has she understood about Alessandro from this chapter?
5. What does the exchange "What do you want for lunch?" communicate at the end of the wisteria tunnel scene?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most precisely written moments.*

1. Yui says one word in Japanese — fuji — "quietly, that Alessandro did not repeat." Why does the author tell us he does not repeat it?
2. The chapter gives us Yui's final thought from her perspective — "He found good people. It was not a small thing." This is the only moment in the novel told from Yui's perspective. Why here?
3. Alessandro assembles the truth about the garden manoeuvre "in approximately four seconds." What does this speed of understanding tell us?

4. Language Focus

A. Things That Are Made vs. Things That Are Bought

 *Teacher's note: The necklace Kenji-san made for Yui is described as "made rather than bought" — something that rewards a second look. This exercise focuses on the language of craft and care.*

Elisa notices Yui's necklace immediately. The narrator describes it:

"Small and precise — a pendant on a fine chain, understated in the way of things that are made rather than bought, the kind of work that rewarded a second look."

There is a distinction here between things made with intention for a specific person and things purchased from a shop. The difference is often visible — in the precision of the craft, in the specificity of the object.

Think about these pairs. For each one, describe what might be different between the made version and the bought version:

1. A birthday cake made at home vs. a cake bought from a bakery.
2. A letter written by hand vs. a message sent on a phone.
3. A meal cooked specifically for one person vs. a meal ordered at a restaurant.

Now write two or three sentences describing something you have received (or given) that was made rather than bought. What made it feel different?

B. The Right Question at the Right Moment

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro asks "What do you want for lunch?" after the wisteria tunnel. This is the perfect question for this moment — ordinary, forward-moving, requiring no comment on what just happened. This exercise focuses on the art of the right question.*

Alessandro and Yui walk through the wisteria tunnel in silence. They come out the other side. He asks: "What do you want for lunch?"

This question does several things at once:

- It moves the moment forward without dismissing it
- It returns to the ordinary without pretending nothing happened
- It requires a practical answer, not an emotional one
- It signals: we continue

For each situation below, write the right question — the one that moves things forward without naming what just happened:

1. Two people have just had a difficult but honest conversation. It is over. They are sitting in silence.
2. A friend has just cried, but has stopped. They are composed again.
3. Someone has just done something brave or difficult. It has succeeded. The moment is passing.

C. Wisteria: A Word That Means More Than One Thing

 *Teacher's note: Fuji — the Japanese word for wisteria — carries layered meaning. This exercise connects the word to the novel's themes.*

Yui says one word when she sees the wisteria: fuji (藤). Alessandro knows the word. He does not repeat it.

Fuji (藤) — the Japanese word for wisteria, the plant with hanging purple or white flowers.

Fuji (富士) — Mount Fuji, Japan's highest and most famous mountain (different characters, same pronunciation).

Fujiwara — a major historical Japanese clan, whose name contains fuji.

Wisteria — fuji — has been significant in Japanese art, poetry, and family crests for centuries. It is associated with grace, longing, and the beauty of things that do not last. The wisteria tunnel at Villa Bardini, in a Florentine garden, is both itself and an echo of Japan.

Discuss with a partner:

- Why does Yui say the Japanese word, rather than the Italian or English one?
- Alessandro knows the word but does not repeat it. What is he choosing to leave with her?
- Wisteria in Japanese culture is associated with longing and beauty. Do you think this is part of what the tunnel moment means for Yui?

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. Question 2 is the most significant — Elisa's decision not to take the photograph is the most important moment of her character arc.*

- Alessandro recognises Kenji-san's work in the necklace without being told. He says nothing. Is saying nothing the right response here? What would be wrong with saying something?
- Elisa had her phone in her hand. The photograph would have been beautiful. She did not take it. This is the most important thing Elisa does in the novel. Why do you think she did not take it — and what does her decision tell us about who she has become?
- Wei steered Lorenzo to the other side of the garden without explaining why. Lorenzo followed without understanding why. Yui understood immediately. What does each person's role here tell us about them?
- Yui's final thought is: "He found good people. It was not a small thing." Why is it important that this verdict comes from Yui — and not from Alessandro, or the narrator?

B. Role Play: After the Garden

 *Teacher's note: Groups of three. The scene on the walk back down the hill — Elisa demanding credit, Alessandro speechless, Lorenzo not quite following. Two to three minutes. The comedy here is real; allow students to enjoy it.*

They are walking back down the hill from Villa Bardini. Yui and Wei are slightly ahead.

Student A: You are Elisa. You want credit. You are not embarrassed; you are proud of yourself. Explain what you did and why. Make your case.

Student B: You are Alessandro. You have just put together what happened in approximately four seconds. You do not know what to say. You are not angry. You are not grateful yet. You are speechless.

Student C: You are Lorenzo. You are still not entirely sure what just happened or why Wei moved you across the garden. You are catching up. "Let it go" is your best contribution.

After the role play: What would you have done in Elisa's position? What would you have done in Alessandro's?

C. Discussion: Elisa's Decision

 *Teacher's note: This discussion focuses on Elisa's arc — from the anime keychains in September to the decision not to take the photograph in May. It is worth taking significant time.*

In September, Elisa had a decorated backpack, said Japanese words in class, and prepared a carefully curated bento. She was performing.

In May, she sees a moment that would have made a perfect photograph. She has her phone in her hand. She does not take it.

- What has changed in Elisa between September and May? What journey has she made?
- The photograph would have been beautiful. Was it right not to take it? What would have been wrong about taking it?
- Elisa says "I want credit" — which is funny but also honest. Is wanting credit for doing the right thing a good or bad quality?
- Yui files Elisa under "good people" based on this decision. Does Elisa deserve this? Has she earned it?

D. Prediction (Student Speculation)

 *Teacher's note: Do not confirm or deny. Only one chapter remains.*

- Yui is now inside Alessandro's Italian world. She has seen his friends, his city, the garden. What do you think she thinks of Italy — and of who Alessandro has become here?
- The novel has one chapter remaining. What do you think the final chapter will give us?
- The novel began with Alessandro saying "Okay" twice when he learned he was moving to Italy. What do you think the last sentence of the novel will be?

6. Writing Task

He Found Good People

 *Teacher's note: A short writing task asking students to assess the group — all four characters — through Yui's eyes, or their own. Suggested length: 100–130 words.*

Yui looks at what has just happened — Elisa's decision, Wei's steering, Lorenzo's following — and thinks: "He found good people. It was not a small thing."

Write a short passage from Yui's perspective, or from your own as a reader, describing what she has understood about each of the three friends and why she reaches the conclusion she does.

Or: write a passage from Alessandro's perspective, in which he reflects on his own good fortune in finding this particular group.

- What has each person done that tells you who they are?
- Why is finding good people "not a small thing"?
- What does having these friends make possible for Alessandro — or for anyone?

 *Teacher's note: This task is a synthesis exercise: it asks students to look back at the whole novel and identify the evidence that supports Yui's verdict. There is no single correct answer. Reward any passage that is specific (rooted in things that actually happened), honest (not sentimental), and precise (the way Yui would be).*

7. Cultural Notes

The Oltrarno and Florentine Goldsmithing

The Oltrarno ("beyond the Arno") is the neighbourhood on the south bank of the River Arno in Florence, historically associated with artisans, craftsmen, and workshops. The area has been home to goldsmiths, leather workers, restorers, and makers for centuries — a working quarter in a city famous for art and manufacture. The Museo degli Argenti (Museum of Silver) in the Palazzo Pitti contains one of the world's finest collections of goldsmith work, cameos, and decorative arts. For Kenji-san — a Japanese goldsmith visiting Florence — the Oltrarno workshops and the Museo degli Argenti are the real reasons for the trip. The rest is logistics.

Ponte Vecchio and the Goldsmith Tradition

Ponte Vecchio (Old Bridge) is Florence's oldest surviving bridge, famous for the small shops that line both sides. These shops were originally occupied by butchers and other traders; in 1593, Ferdinand I de' Medici ordered them replaced with goldsmiths and jewellers, who have occupied the bridge ever since. Today Ponte Vecchio is a major tourist attraction and the shops sell jewellery ranging from fine work to mass-produced tourist souvenirs. Kenji-san is described as "being disappointed by the tourist tat" — which is the response of a professional goldsmith to the gap between the bridge's history and its current commercial reality.

Villa Bardini and the Wisteria

Villa Bardini is a historic villa and garden on the hillside above the Oltrarno, with panoramic views of Florence. In spring — particularly late April and early May — the garden is famous for its wisteria, which hangs in long, heavily scented cascades along a tunnel section of the garden. The wisteria typically blooms around the same time as cherry blossoms in Japan, making the timing of the Shirai visit precisely right. For Yui, encountering wisteria in full bloom in a Florentine garden is a collision of two worlds: the flower that is called fuji in Japan, hanging in a European garden in exactly the way it hangs in gardens at home.

Fuji: Wisteria in Japanese Culture

In Japanese, wisteria is called *fuji* (藤). It is one of the most traditionally significant flowers in Japanese art and culture — appearing in the Heian-period Tale of Genji (the Fujiwara clan takes its name from it), in poetry, in screen paintings, and in family crests. Wisteria is associated with grace, longing, and the kind of beauty that is poignant because it passes quickly. The hanging clusters of bloom — drooping, fragrant, filling the air — are a distinct sensory experience. Yui says the word quietly to herself. Alessandro knows it. He does not repeat it. Both of them know what the word carries.

Elisa's Arc

Elisa's decision not to photograph the wisteria tunnel moment is the culmination of her character's journey. She arrived in September performing Japan — keychains, curated bento, rehearsed Japanese words. She went to Japan and encountered the real thing: the herring roe, hatsumode, the ordinary residential street. She came back able to eat and describe and cross-reference. And now, in May, she sees a perfect moment — visually striking, emotionally significant, exactly the kind of image she would have photographed without thinking in September — and she does not take it. She recognises that the moment belongs to the people inside it. The change from performing to witnessing, from documenting to respecting, is the fullest measure of how far she has come.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 22 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- Alessandro has been in Italy for almost a full year. He has been through a lot: the adjustment, the group, Japan for New Year, the sakura blooming. What do you think still needs to happen before the novel can end?
- Throughout the novel, Alessandro has waited patiently for the right moment in many situations — to tell Lorenzo about Yui, to address what was off with Lorenzo in Chapter 20, to say things that needed saying. Do you think there are any conversations he still needs to start?
- The novel is called Missing Home. By the end, what do you think Alessandro will be missing — and what will he have found?

2. Glossary — Chapter 22

absence (n.)	the state of being without something. <i>"The absence of something he had been carrying without quite knowing its weight."</i>
accumulated (v.)	gathered gradually over time. <i>"Accumulating the ordinary references of a life."</i> Already seen — here used to describe what Takuya, Keita, and Ryu continue to do in Japan.
anxiety (n.)	a feeling of worry or unease, often without a specific cause. <i>"The anxiety had stopped."</i>
attend to (phrasal v.)	to give proper attention to something; to address it directly. <i>"Now he attended to it."</i>
ceiling (n., figurative)	an upper limit that cannot be exceeded. <i>"Hitting the same ceiling, week after week."</i>
diminished (adj.)	made smaller or less valuable. <i>"The tree was not diminished by being ordinary now."</i>
evaluate (v.)	to assess the value or quality of something carefully. <i>"He could not evaluate technique or positioning."</i>
informed judgement (n. phrase)	a judgement based on proper knowledge and evidence. Alessandro lacks the expertise for an informed judgement about football, but he can see what he can see.
peripherally (adv.)	at the edge of one's attention or vision; not directly. <i>"He had been watching him peripherally for months."</i>
protecting (not protecting Japan) (v.)	here: guarding something from loss or change. Alessandro had been trying to protect his sense of Japan; he has stopped needing to.
resignation (n.)	calm acceptance of something difficult that cannot be changed. <i>"The specific resignation of someone who can see the ceiling and cannot get above it."</i>
surviving (v.)	managing to get through something difficult. <i>"Italy was not something he was surviving anymore."</i>
unguarded (adj.)	not defensive; relaxed and honest. <i>"In the unguarded way of someone who is going somewhere rather than sitting still."</i>
unremarkable (adj.)	not special or distinctive; ordinary. <i>"Full and unremarkable in the way of things that have done what they came to do."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: The final chapter rewards careful reading — several of these hinge on distinctions between how Alessandro understands things now vs. how he understood them earlier.*

1. Alessandro feels sad that the sakura has lost its blossom and become ordinary again. TRUE / FALSE
2. Alessandro can identify the exact day the anxiety stopped. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro thinks that Japan has faded from his life since moving to Italy. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro has watched Lorenzo play football twice over the year. TRUE / FALSE
5. Alessandro is confident he understands the technical reasons why Lorenzo is struggling.
TRUE / FALSE
6. The novel ends with the conversation between Alessandro and Lorenzo having already taken place.
TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 is the most important — it goes to the heart of Alessandro's resolution. Allow significant time. Question 5 asks students to reflect on the whole novel.*

1. Alessandro notices that "the anxiety had stopped" in the same way he noticed his comfort in February. What does this comparison tell us?
2. Alessandro says Japan is "not in the room" but is still present in him. What does this distinction mean?
3. Alessandro says: "He had spent most of the year trying to keep Japan from fading. He had not noticed the moment he stopped trying. He had just — stopped, at some point, and started simply having it instead." What has changed?
4. What does Alessandro see when he watches Lorenzo at football — and what does he decide to do about it?
5. Alessandro's arc ends before the conversation with Lorenzo happens. Why is this the right place to end?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These are the final language questions of the novel. All three connect to its deepest themes.*

1. "His sakura was just a tree again." This is the first sentence. "Just a tree" — what does the word "just" do here?
2. Alessandro thinks: "The anime goes on. He was in a different season now." This returns to the metaphor from Chapter 8. What does it mean differently here?
3. The novel's final word is "it" — in the sentence "by the time Rufina appeared he had most of it." What is the "it" he has most of?

4. Language Focus

A. The End of Trying: Language of Release

 *Teacher's note: The chapter's central realisation — stopping trying to keep Japan from fading and starting simply having it — is expressed through a precise shift in verb forms. This exercise examines that shift.*

Alessandro describes his change in two phases:

Phase 1: *"He had spent most of the year trying to keep Japan from fading."* (past perfect continuous — active, effortful, sustained)

Phase 2: *"He had just stopped, at some point, and started simply having it instead."* (past perfect — the effort ended; a different state began)

The shift from trying to keep to simply having marks a change from active work to passive possession. Look at these other pairs from the novel. For each one, identify the shift:

1. "He had been arriving at the Rufina house" → "he had come back to it." (Chapter 17)
2. "He had been surviving Italy" → "Italy was not something he was surviving anymore." (Chapter 22)
3. "He had been watching Lorenzo peripherally" → "Now he attended to it." (Chapter 22)

Now write a sentence describing your own shift — from actively trying to do something to simply having or being it. Use verb forms that show the change.

B. The Right Moment, Made

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro has spent the whole year waiting for right moments. In this chapter he decides that some right moments need to be made rather than waited for. This exercise traces his relationship to timing across the novel.*

Alessandro thinks about timing throughout the novel:

- Chapter 10: he almost says Yui's name. "It was not the moment."
- Chapter 16: he files away the "Ale" and the careful hair. "It was not the moment."
- Chapter 20: he waits for Lorenzo to arrive at it himself.
- Chapter 22: he decides the right moment needs to be made rather than waited for.

Discussion questions:

- Has Alessandro's relationship to timing changed over the year? What made him willing to make a moment rather than wait?
- Are there conversations in the novel that should have been started earlier? Are there any that were started at exactly the right time?
- When is waiting the right approach — and when does it become avoidance?

 *Teacher's note: This discussion connects to Alessandro's growth as a person across the year. He has always been patient and observant; what is new is the willingness to act rather than observe. Something has shifted in him — possibly the settled confidence that comes from having gotten through the year. Push students to find specific moments where timing mattered.*

C. The Final Sentence

 *Teacher's note: "By the time Rufina appeared he had most of it." This sentence ends the novel. This exercise asks students to examine it carefully and reflect on what it means as an ending.*

The final sentence of Missing Home is:

"By the time Rufina appeared he had most of it."

This sentence ends the novel before the conversation with Lorenzo has happened. The reader does not know what Alessandro says. The novel ends on a threshold — something is about to begin.

Discuss with a partner:

- Why does the novel end here — before the conversation, before the next chapter of Alessandro's life?
- What does "most of it" mean? What might the "it" include beyond just what he wants to say to Lorenzo?
- The novel began with Alessandro saying "Okay" twice — a quiet acceptance of something difficult. Does the ending feel like a resolution of that opening? How has Alessandro changed between "Okay" and "most of it"?

Now write the sentence you think should come after the final sentence — not what Alessandro says to Lorenzo, but one more sentence from the narrator that would close the novel. It should match the tone of the book: understated, honest, not sentimental.

 *Teacher's note: There is no correct answer. The goal is for students to absorb the tone and manner of the novel and try to continue it for one sentence. The best answers will be restrained, quiet, and specific. Weaker students: give them the sentence starters "He looked at the valley and thought:" or "The train slowed for Rufina." Stronger students: challenge them to write the sentence without using any emotion word and without summarising — just one small, true thing.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Final discussion questions for the novel as a whole. Take time — these are the questions the book has been building toward.*

- The sakura is just a tree again, and Alessandro is glad he saw it bloom. Have you ever waited for something all year, seen it happen, and then felt at peace with it becoming ordinary again?
- Alessandro says Japan is not in the room but it is part of him and goes where he goes. Do you think this is a healthy way to carry a place you have left? Is it possible to have two places inside you without one fading?
- Alessandro decides to start the conversation with Lorenzo — to make the right moment rather than wait for it. Why do you think he chose this particular conversation to start, rather than others that are still unspoken in the novel?
- "Italy was not something he was surviving anymore." When does something stop being survived and start being lived? How do you know when you have crossed that line?

B. The Conversation Alessandro is Planning

 *Teacher's note: A short creative exercise. Students work in pairs to imagine the conversation Alessandro has planned to start on the train. They do not know what he will say — they have to construct it from everything they know about him and Lorenzo.*

Alessandro has been watching Lorenzo hit a ceiling at football. He has decided to start a conversation tomorrow morning, on the train. He wants to say something without saying more than is useful.

In pairs, write and then role-play this conversation. Use everything you know about how Alessandro and Lorenzo talk on the train:

- Alessandro starts. He does not open with the big point.
- Lorenzo responds as himself — honest, slightly guarded, a man of few words unless there is something worth saying.
- Something gets said that could not have been said in September — because they did not know each other well enough then.

After the role play: What did Alessandro say? And was this conversation possible in September?

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct conversation. Reward any exchange that uses the characters' established voices, that is understated and specific, and that arrives at something true without over-explaining. The best conversations will start with something small and arrive at something larger — the way Alessandro's conversations always work.*

C. Discussion: The Novel as a Whole

 *Teacher's note: Final discussion — a reflection on the whole book. Encourage students to look back through their notes and think about the arc of the year.*

The novel covers approximately one school year in Alessandro's life — September to late May.

- What is the most important thing that happened to Alessandro this year — not an event, but an internal change?
- Which character changed the most over the course of the novel? Is it Alessandro, Elisa, or someone else?
- The novel is called Missing Home. By the end, does Alessandro know what home is? Is it one place, two places, a person, a feeling?
- The novel ends before several things are resolved — the conversation with Lorenzo, Alessandro and Yui, what happens next year. Why do you think the author chose to end here rather than resolving more?

D. Looking Back: Discussion and Reflection

 *Teacher's note: A final open discussion inviting students to reflect on the experience of reading the novel. This is appropriate for the last lesson of the course.*

- What moment in the novel stayed with you most? Why?
- Is there a character you understand better now than you did at the beginning? What changed your understanding?
- The novel is for ESL learners — but it is also a literary novel. Did reading it feel like language learning, like reading for pleasure, or both?
- If you could give Alessandro one piece of advice at the beginning of the novel, what would it be? And would it have helped?

6. Writing Task

A Letter from September

 *Teacher's note: The final writing task of the novel. Students write a letter from the Alessandro of May to the Alessandro of September — or from themselves to their earlier self. Suggested length: 130–160 words. This task asks for genuine reflection and honest writing.*

Alessandro in May is a different person from Alessandro in September. He is settled, not just surviving. Japan is part of him, not something he is protecting. He has friends, a group, a conversation to start tomorrow.

Write a short letter from the Alessandro of May to the Alessandro of September. Tell him:

- What Italy will actually be like (honestly — not a promise, but a truth)
- What will be harder than he expects
- What will be easier than he expects
- One specific thing he should do, or notice, or not miss
- What home will mean by May

Or: if you prefer, write this letter from yourself to yourself at the beginning of your own experience of learning English — or of beginning something new.

 *Teacher's note: This is a reflective synthesis task: students look back at the whole novel and assemble Alessandro's year into a letter. The best letters will be honest without being sentimental, specific without listing events, and will match Alessandro's restrained, precise voice. Remind students: Alessandro does not dramatise. He tells the truth simply. The letter should sound like him. Weaker students: give them the five bullet points and ask them to write two or three sentences for each. Stronger students: ask them to write the letter without using the words happy, sad, or home — force them to find more precise words.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Sakura After Bloom

The somei yoshino cherry tree blooms for approximately two weeks in spring, then loses its blossom and develops its leaves. After the bloom, it becomes an ordinary-looking tree — green, unremarkable, not particularly distinctive. In Japan, the brevity of the bloom is part of its significance: it is beautiful precisely because it passes. The period after the bloom — when the tree is just a tree again — is understood as the natural continuation of the cycle, not a loss. Alessandro's acceptance of this mirrors his acceptance of everything he has learned over the year: things do what they come to do, and then they are simply present.

Carrying a Place

One of the oldest questions in literature about migration and displacement is whether it is possible to carry a place with you — to have it present inside you without needing to protect it from the new place you are in. The answer that Alessandro arrives at in this chapter is yes: Japan is part of him and goes where he goes. This is not a consolation prize for leaving Japan; it is the recognition that who we are is not defined by where we currently stand. Language, memory, family, friendship, the taste of particular food, the weight of particular music — these are portable. They travel. They do not require the physical place to remain present.

Football and Ceilings in Italian Youth Sport

Italian football (calcio) has a highly developed youth academy system. Boys are identified young, trained through club academies, and progression is competitive. Most young players hit a ceiling at some point — a level beyond which, for various reasons, they cannot advance. This is not always about talent; it can be about size, injury, timing, or the specific demands of professional academies. Lorenzo's situation — genuinely good, hitting a ceiling — is common. Alessandro sees it with clarity because he is not inside the system. He has no investment in a particular story about where Lorenzo should end up. He simply sees what he sees.

The Year's Arc

Missing Home covers September to late May — approximately one school year. It is a year in which Alessandro moved from surviving Italy to living in it; from protecting Japan to simply having it; from being careful and alone to having friends who care about him. He arrived saying "Okay" twice and not knowing what he felt. He ends with most of what he wants to say ready, on a train heading toward school, in a valley that is green and full in late May. The year has been, as he might say, not a bad one. The novel trusts the reader to hear how much that means.

Conversations That Need to Be Started

Alessandro's final decision — to make the right moment rather than wait for it — is the novel's last piece of character growth. He has always been patient, observant, careful. What is new is the willingness to act: to decide that a conversation needs to happen and to plan how to start it. This is not impulsiveness; it is still planned, still careful. But the motivation has shifted from waiting for the world to offer the right moment to deciding that the right moment can be created. This is what a year of settling, of friendship, of learning how things work in Italy has given him: the confidence to begin.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 23 — Teacher Resource Pack

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- In Chapter 22, Alessandro decided to start the conversation with Lorenzo on the train. He planned it carefully for three days. What do you think he will say — and how do you think Lorenzo will respond?
- The hardest thing about a difficult conversation is often not the topic itself, but the moment of starting. What do you think makes it easier or harder to begin a conversation you have been putting off?
- Alessandro observed that Lorenzo was hitting a ceiling at football. He is not a football expert. He has "no stake in the answer." Why might this make him the right person to have this conversation?

2. Glossary — Chapter 23

carriage (n.)	a compartment or section of a train. <i>"He had sat in the same carriage and listened."</i>
confirm (v.)	to say that something is true. <i>"The particular tone of someone confirming something they have already known for a while."</i>
defeat (n.)	the feeling of having lost or failed. <i>"It was not defeat."</i> Lorenzo's "I know" is acceptance, not surrender.
geography (familiar geography) (n.)	here: the physical layout of a known area. <i>"The familiar geography of the commute."</i>
gift (n.)	here: a natural talent or ability. <i>"He had no gift for knowing what people needed to hear."</i>
involve (v.)	to include someone in something. <i>"No need to involve the girls."</i> Lorenzo keeps this between them.
naming (v., used as noun)	the act of saying something aloud for the first time; giving a name to something that has been unspoken. <i>"The naming was the first thing."</i>
ordinary (adj.)	normal; not special. Used repeatedly in this chapter to describe the unremarkable texture of what surrounds a significant conversation.
outskirts (n.)	the outer edges of a city. Already seen in Chapter 14.
reasonable (adj.)	sensible; fair and understandable. <i>"That's reasonable."</i> Alessandro validates Lorenzo's feeling without enlarging it.
release (n.)	a letting go of tension. <i>"The particular release of a person who has been told that a problem does not need to be solved immediately."</i>
resolve (v.)	to find a solution to a problem. <i>"Not resolved. Not answered. Just set down."</i>
Serie A (n., Italian)	the top division of Italian professional football, the highest level in the Italian league system.
stake (n.)	an interest in the outcome of something. <i>"The particular advantage of having no stake in the answer."</i> Alessandro does not want Lorenzo to be anything in particular. He just sees what is true.

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter rewards careful reading of what is said, what is left unsaid, and what changes as a result.*

1. Alessandro begins the conversation by immediately telling Lorenzo what he has observed about his football. TRUE / FALSE
2. Lorenzo has been unaware that something is off with his football. TRUE / FALSE
3. Alessandro tells Lorenzo directly that he will not reach Serie A level. TRUE / FALSE
4. Lorenzo's reaction to Alessandro's words is anger or denial. TRUE / FALSE
5. By the end of the chapter, Lorenzo knows what he wants to do instead of football. TRUE / FALSE
6. The chapter ends with them having resolved everything. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

1. Why does Alessandro start with "How was training on Saturday?" rather than with the thing he actually wants to say?
2. Lorenzo says "I know" after Alessandro says he will not be Serie A good. The chapter says this is "not defeat." What is it instead?
3. Alessandro says: "We don't have to sort that out on this train." What does this do for Lorenzo — and why is it the right thing to say?
4. Alessandro says he had "no gift for knowing what people needed to hear" but only "careful attention and the particular advantage of having no stake in the answer." What does this mean?
5. "Same time tomorrow?" / "Same time tomorrow." What does this exchange do?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These questions address the chapter's most carefully constructed moments of language and relationship.*

1. Alessandro's words — "You are good... But that doesn't mean you'll be Serie A good" — are direct but not cruel. What makes the difference?
2. Lorenzo's sentence: "The thing is — " starts twice before it completes. What does the repetition tell us?
3. Alessandro does not "remember every word" of the return journey. He knows only that "something had been said that was useful." Why does the author not give us the content of that conversation?

4. Language Focus

A. Starting a Difficult Conversation

 *Teacher's note: Chapter 23 models how to begin a difficult conversation — indirectly, carefully, giving the other person a way in before arriving at the real subject. This exercise focuses on the technique.*

Alessandro does not begin: "Lorenzo, I've noticed you're struggling with football and I think you need to hear something."

He begins: "How was training on Saturday?"

This is an indirect opening — a question about something ordinary that invites the other person to speak first. It gives Lorenzo room to arrive at the subject himself, or to open a door that Alessandro can then walk through.

For each difficult conversation below, write a gentle, indirect opening question — something that invites without forcing:

1. You want to ask a friend if they are okay after something hard happened to them.
2. You want to tell someone that you think they are overworking themselves.
3. You want to check in with someone who has been quieter than usual.
4. You want to tell a classmate that a project they are working on is not going well.

 *Teacher's note: The goal is to give the other person an opening rather than cornering them. Alessandro's technique — starting with something small and genuine before arriving at the big thing — is a real-world communication skill. Push students to notice how the opening question connects to the subject without naming it directly.*

B. What You Say and What You Don't

 *Teacher's note: Alessandro does not tell Lorenzo what to want instead of Serie A. This is a significant choice. This exercise focuses on the ethics of advice-giving.*

Alessandro says he "had not told Lorenzo what to want instead of Serie A. He would not know how."

Some things in a conversation are yours to say. Some things are not.

Look at what Alessandro does and does not do in this conversation:

He says: You are good. But that doesn't mean you'll be Serie A good.

He says: We don't have to sort that out on this train.

He does not say: You should become a coach / study sport / give it up / try harder.

He does not say: What you should want instead is...

For each situation below, decide what you would say and what you would not say:

1. A friend says they hate their job but don't know what else to do.
2. A classmate has worked hard on a project but it has not come out well.
3. Someone you care about is making a decision you think is wrong.

C. Tenses: The Journey of a Conversation

 *Teacher's note: This chapter uses verb tenses precisely to show the different stages of a conversation and its effects. This exercise traces how tenses mark emotional change.*

Look at how the chapter uses different tenses to describe what happened:

Past continuous: *"He had been carrying this alone."* — the ongoing state before the conversation.

Past simple: *"He was not carrying it alone now."* — the change, the new state.

Past perfect: *"Something had been set down."* — the result of the conversation, at a point in the past.

Complete these sentences using the correct tense, showing the before and after of a change:

1. Before the conversation, Lorenzo _____ (carry) the question about football alone for months. After it, he _____ (not / carry) it alone anymore.
2. The problem _____ (not / resolve), but something _____ (set down) long enough for him to breathe.
3. Alessandro _____ (plan) what to say for three days. On the train, he _____ (say) it.

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. Think and Share

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. All four questions are worth spending time on. Question 3 is the most important for connecting to students' own experience.*

- Alessandro has "no gift for knowing what people needed to hear" — only careful attention and no stake in the answer. Is this actually a gift? What makes someone a useful person to talk to?
- Lorenzo says "I know" — confirming something he has already known for a while. Have you ever said something out loud and felt the particular relief of hearing yourself say it? What changes when a thought becomes a spoken word?
- Alessandro tells Lorenzo: "We don't have to sort that out on this train." This removes the pressure of the moment. Have you ever been told something similar — or said it to someone else? What does it feel like to be given more time?
- The chapter ends: "Same time tomorrow?" / "Same time tomorrow." — a joke and a real promise at once. Is this a good ending for a difficult conversation? What does the ordinary routine provide after something significant has been said?

B. Role Play: The Train Conversation

 *Teacher's note: Pairs. This is the conversation the novel has been building toward since Chapter 20. The challenge is to play it with care — Alessandro gentle and direct, Lorenzo honest and exposed. Three to four minutes.*

Alessandro and Lorenzo are on the morning train to Florence. They are twenty minutes out of Rufina.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You have planned this for three days. Start gently. Ask about training. When the door opens, walk through it. Say what you see — directly, but not cruelly. Know when to stop.

Student B: You are Lorenzo. You have been holding this alone. When Alessandro names it, you already know. You say so. When he asks about what you want instead, you don't know. Let that be okay. Let him tell you that it does not need to be sorted out on this train.

After the role play: What was the hardest moment to play — for each character? What made Alessandro's approach effective?

C. Discussion: What a Good Conversation Does

 *Teacher's note: This discussion focuses on what the conversation between Alessandro and Lorenzo actually achieves — and why not resolving everything is sometimes the point.*

- By the end of the chapter, Lorenzo's situation has not changed: he still does not know what he wants instead of football. But something has changed. What?
- Alessandro says something has been "set down, briefly, long enough to breathe." Is setting something down — even temporarily — a form of progress? Or does it just delay the resolution?
- Alessandro had no stake in the answer. Why is this useful? Can someone care about a person without being invested in a specific outcome for them?
- "Same time tomorrow" is a joke. But it is also the truest thing in the chapter. Why?

D. Final Discussion: The Novel as a Whole

 *Teacher's note: With Chapter 23 complete, pause for a final reflection on the whole novel. This is particularly appropriate if this is the last chapter in the school edition being used.*

This is one of the final chapters of Missing Home. Look back at the full year Alessandro has spent in Italy.

- What is the most important thing Alessandro learned this year — not an event, but something internal?
- Which relationship in the novel changed the most? Alessandro and Elisa? Alessandro and Yui? Alessandro and Lorenzo? Or something else?
- The novel is called Missing Home. By this chapter, do you know what Alessandro is missing? And what has he found?
- Has reading this novel changed the way you think about anything — language, belonging, friendship, home?

6. Writing Task

The Conversation on the Way Home

 *Teacher's note: A creative writing task: students write the conversation on the return train that the novel leaves in whitespace. They must use everything they know about both characters' voices. Suggested length: 130–160 words.*

The novel tells us that on the train home, Alessandro and Lorenzo talked, and that "by the time Rufina appeared, something had been said that was useful."

The novel does not show us this conversation.

Write it.

You know how these two people speak to each other. You know what Lorenzo is carrying. You know that Alessandro listens carefully, asks without pushing, and has no stake in the answer. You know that Lorenzo does not have many words when the subject is large.

Write the conversation from the moment the train leaves Florence until Rufina appears. Do not resolve everything. Do not give Lorenzo the answer. But have something be said that is useful.

 *Teacher's note: This is a demanding synthesis task — it requires students to have absorbed the voices of both characters and to write in their register. The best conversations will be understated, with long pauses, with questions that do not demand answers, and with something small and true arriving by the end. Weaker students: give them a starting line (e.g. "Lorenzo looked out the window for a while") and ask them to write three exchanges from there. Stronger students: challenge them to write the conversation without either character saying anything explicitly about football — let the subject be present without being named.*

7. Cultural Notes

Serie A and Italian Football

Serie A is the top division of Italian professional football — the highest level a player can reach in the Italian league system. Italian football has one of the most developed youth academy systems in Europe, with major clubs (Inter Milan, AC Milan, Juventus, Roma, and others) scouting and training young players from an early age. The path from youth football to professional football is extremely narrow: of thousands of talented young players, only a very small number reach Serie A level. Most hit a ceiling at some point — not because of lack of ability, but because the competition is intense, the physical demands specific, and the margin between good and professional is very small. Lorenzo is good. Alessandro's honesty — that this may not be enough — is not cruelty. It is the truth that Lorenzo has already sensed.

Naming Something Aloud

There is a psychological phenomenon sometimes called "labelling" or "naming" — the act of putting a word to something you have been feeling or knowing without articulating it. Research in psychology suggests that naming an emotion or a situation reduces its intensity, because the act of labelling engages the rational part of the brain alongside the emotional one. Lorenzo has been carrying the knowledge that he will not make Serie A. He has not named it. When Alessandro names it — and Lorenzo confirms it — something changes. Not the situation, but the weight of it. It has been shared. It has been spoken. It is now a fact they both hold, rather than something Lorenzo is carrying alone.

The Friendship of Different Advantages

Alessandro is useful to Lorenzo in this conversation precisely because he is not inside the system — not a coach, not a football parent, not someone invested in a particular outcome for Lorenzo's athletic future. He sees what he sees, and what he sees is neither inflated by hope nor distorted by personal investment. This is a kind of friendship that is particularly valuable in difficult moments: the person who can tell you the truth because they love you but have no stake in the answer. Alessandro has developed this capacity over the year — the ability to attend carefully to other people without needing them to be any particular thing.

"Not resolved. Just set down."

Alessandro's observation — that something has been set down rather than resolved — reflects something true about how difficult conversations actually work. Most hard things do not resolve in a single conversation. What a good conversation can do is take the thing out of the internal space where it has been held alone, place it in the shared space between two people, and leave it there for a while. The problem is the same. The weight is different. Lorenzo does not know what he wants instead of football. He now knows that he does not know this, that someone else knows he does not know this, and that this is acceptable — that there is time, and company, and the next train is the same as this one. That is enough to continue.

MISSING HOME

Chapter 24 — Teacher Resource Pack — Final Chapter

A2+ / B1 · Age 13–16 · First language support: all

1. Pre-Reading

Think about these questions before you read. You do not need to write your answers.

- It is the last day of the school year. Alessandro has been in Italy for almost exactly a year. Think about how different this September will be from last September. What has changed — for him, and for the group?
- The year is ending, not with a dramatic climax but with ordinary things: a last walk to school, a last day, a last walk home. Do you think this is the right kind of ending for this novel?
- There are things still unresolved: Lorenzo and Wei, Alessandro and Yui, what Lorenzo wants to do instead of football. Do you think a novel should resolve everything, or is it enough to show a moment in time?

2. Glossary — Chapter 24

backpack strap (n.)	the shoulder strap of a backpack. Lorenzo's hand is hooked into his, which is why Wei's reaching hand finds nothing.
coincidence (n.)	something that happens by chance rather than design. <i>"When the coincidence had become a habit and the habit had become a choice."</i>
committed (adj.)	here: having decided and followed through. <i>"Not quite committed"</i> — Wei's hand movement is tentative, not yet fully decided.
dispersal (n.)	the act of spreading out in different directions. <i>"The afternoon dispersal was gradual."</i>
elbow (to elbow someone) (v.)	to nudge someone with your elbow, usually to draw attention. <i>"Elisa elbowed him."</i>
end-of-year energy (n. phrase)	the particular mood of the end of the school year — slightly chaotic, slightly nostalgic, forward-looking.
giggle (v.)	to laugh quietly, often involuntarily. <i>"She giggled a bit."</i> Elisa's response to the moment.
gradient (going gold) (n.)	here: the hills changing colour as the evening light falls on them.
grip (v.)	to hold firmly. <i>"His right hand, gripping his backpack strap."</i> The strap is what Wei's hand finds instead of his hand.
lighter (adj.)	here: less heavy; with less weight being carried. <i>"Lorenzo's voice had a quality it had not had in February. Not resolved. Just lighter."</i>
parallel (comfortable parallel) (n.)	here: two people walking alongside each other in easy companionship.
pause (v./n.)	to stop briefly. <i>"The daily rhythm was pausing, and they all knew it."</i>
reliably (adv.)	consistently; in a way you can depend on. <i>"The end-of-year energy that the city produced reliably every June."</i>
tentative (adj.)	not fully committed; careful and uncertain. <i>"Tentative, not quite committed."</i> Wei's hand movement.
texture (n.)	the particular quality or feel of something. <i>"The last day of school had a particular texture."</i>

3. Comprehension

A. True or False

 *Teacher's note: This chapter rewards reading the small details carefully. Push students to find the exact text.*

1. Elisa's bag is larger than usual because she has brought extra things for the last day. TRUE / FALSE
2. The group explicitly says goodbye to each other at the end of the year. TRUE / FALSE
3. Professoressa Ricci tells Alessandro his Italian history is now excellent. TRUE / FALSE
4. Alessandro realises on the last walk to school that it is the last one and says something to the group. TRUE / FALSE
5. Wei successfully takes Lorenzo's hand on the walk home. TRUE / FALSE
6. The novel ends with Alessandro and Elisa discussing what they saw. TRUE / FALSE

B. Comprehension Questions

 *Teacher's note: Question 3 on the backpack strap is the funniest and most precise moment. Question 5 is the most important for the whole-novel reflection.*

1. How does the chapter describe the group's morning walk as something that changed over the year?
2. What does Professoressa Ricci's brief exchange with Alessandro in the corridor tell us about her — and about Alessandro?
3. Alessandro notices Lorenzo's voice is lighter. "Not resolved. Just lighter." What does this mean — and what caused it?
4. Wei's hand moves toward Lorenzo's. It finds his backpack strap. Describe what happens — and what makes this moment both funny and true.
5. What does Alessandro think about on the walk home? And what does this tell us about where he is now?

C. Understanding Language Use

 *Teacher's note: These are the final language questions of the novel. All three matter.*

1. "The coincidence had become a habit and the habit had become a choice." What arc does this sentence describe?
2. "Lorenzo was still talking." This is the last sentence of the novel. Why end on Lorenzo?
3. "The summer continued, warm and unhurried, around all four of them." What is the effect of "around" in this sentence?

4. Language Focus

A. The Arc of the Year in Three Phrases

 *Teacher's note: The sentence "the coincidence had become a habit and the habit had become a choice" describes the group's whole year in three stages. This exercise practises this kind of compressed narrative arc.*

One sentence tells the whole story of the group's morning walk:

"The coincidence had become a habit and the habit had become a choice."

Each stage is a transformation:

Coincidence → Habit → Choice

Now practise writing compressed arcs. Complete these sentences:

1. What had started as _____ had become _____ and was now simply _____.
2. The fear had _____. What had replaced it was _____.
3. She had _____ Japan for years. Now she _____ it.

Now write your own three-stage arc — about a person, a relationship, a feeling, or a place — in one or two sentences.

B. What the Backpack Strap Means

 *Teacher's note: The backpack strap moment is the funniest scene in the novel. It is also deeply true. This exercise looks at how comedy and truth often arrive in the same moment.*

Wei's hand moves toward Lorenzo's. It finds his backpack strap. He does not notice. Her hand returns to her side.

This moment is both funny and sad and hopeful at once. Look at what each element contributes:

The movement: Wei has decided, finally, to do something. The feeling is real and the timing is right.

The strap: Pure accident. Not rejection, not hesitation — just an obstacle of logistics.

Lorenzo's obliviousness: He has no idea. He is still talking.

Elisa's giggle: The release of witnessing this exactly.

The street continuing: Nothing stops. The moment passes into the next moment.

Discuss with a partner:

- Why is it funnier that Lorenzo's hand is gripping the backpack strap rather than in his pocket or at his side?
- Does Wei's hand returning to her side mean the moment is over — or just postponed?
- Elisa sees it. Alessandro sees it. Neither says a word. What does their silence give Wei?
- How does this moment connect to everything else that has happened between Wei and Lorenzo over the year?

C. Endings: Open vs. Closed

 *Teacher's note: This exercise asks students to think about different kinds of endings and what they do. It connects to the novel's final chapter as a deliberate choice.*

A closed ending resolves the main questions — characters find answers, relationships are settled, the future is clear.

An open ending leaves some things unresolved — the reader sees a moment in time, things continue, the future is ahead.

Missing Home has an open ending. Look at what is unresolved at the end of Chapter 24:

- Wei and Lorenzo — the backpack strap, not yet
- Alessandro and Yui — real and present, but unnamed
- What Lorenzo wants to do instead of football — still open
- Where Alessandro will study for university — still open

And what is resolved:

- Alessandro is settled in Italy and carries Japan without protecting it
- The group is real — a choice, not just a coincidence
- Elisa sees without performing; Wei gave Lorenzo more food; Lorenzo is lighter

Discussion: Is this the right balance? What would be lost if the novel had resolved more? What would be gained?

 *Teacher's note: There is no single correct answer. Push students to think about what kind of ending matches the kind of novel this is — a novel about quiet, accumulative change, not dramatic resolution. The open ending is consistent with the novel's whole manner. But some students may feel they want more. Both responses are valid and worth discussing.*

5. Discussion & Speaking

A. The Last Day

 *Teacher's note: Pairs or small groups. These questions reflect on the chapter itself.*

- "The fact of it being the last walk was present without being named." This is how the whole novel handles things. Do you think this is a satisfying way to end a year — or do you want more acknowledgement of what has happened?
- Professoressa Ricci says: "You still have catching up to do in Italian history. But less than before." Is this a kind thing to say? What does the "but less than before" add?
- The backpack strap. Wei tries and it doesn't happen. Alessandro and Elisa see it and say nothing. Elisa giggles. Is this a good ending for that particular story — or frustrating?
- "Lorenzo was still talking." The novel ends in the middle of something ordinary. How do you feel about this as a final sentence?

B. Discussion: The Whole Novel

 *Teacher's note: A full-novel discussion for the final lesson. Take as much time as you need.*

Look back at the whole year Alessandro has spent in Italy.

- What is the most important internal change Alessandro went through this year?
- Which moment in the novel stayed with you most? Why?
- Which character changed the most? Who are they at the end compared to who they were in September?
- The novel is called Missing Home. By Chapter 24, what home is Alessandro missing — and what home has he found?
- If the novel continued into the second year, what do you think would happen?

C. Role Play: Same Station in September

 *Teacher's note: Groups of four. One final role play — the first morning of the new school year, September again. The four of them arrive at Campo di Marte. This is the same station. But they are different people. Three to four minutes.*

It is September. A new school year. The four of them arrive at the station.

Student A: You are Alessandro. You have been here for over a year. You know the route. You know the train. You know these people. Think about who you were last September.

Student B: You are Elisa. You went to Japan. You came back. You have opinions about things now that you did not know to have opinions about before.

Student C: You are Wei. Summer happened. Something almost happened on a street in June. You are back at the station.

Student D: You are Lorenzo. You had a conversation on a train. You are lighter. The question of what next is still open. The football is still there, but differently.

Walk to school together. Talk about whatever would be talked about. Just: be a year further on.

After the role play: What was different? What was the same?

6. Writing Task — Final Task of the Novel

A Letter to the Reader

 *Teacher's note: The final writing task of the novel. Students write a short letter to a future reader of Missing Home — someone who is about to start reading it. They tell them what to expect, what to pay attention to, what the novel gave them. Suggested length: 130–160 words.*

You have now read Missing Home.

Write a short letter to someone who is about to read it for the first time. Tell them:

- What kind of novel it is — but without giving the plot away
- What to pay attention to as they read
- What surprised you
- What the novel gave you — a thought, a feeling, a question, a phrase you will remember
- One thing you wish you had known before you started

Write it as yourself — your own voice, your own honest response to the novel. Not what you think you should say, but what you actually found.

 *Teacher's note: This final task asks students to reflect on the whole experience of reading the novel and to synthesise their response. It is also a genuine communication task — a letter to a real future reader. Encourage honesty over formality. The best letters will be specific (naming particular moments or phrases), honest (saying what actually landed, not just what seems correct), and direct. There is no single correct letter. Weaker students: use the five bullet points as five short sentences. Stronger students: write the letter without using any of the words interesting, good, nice, beautiful, or sad — force more precise language.*

7. Cultural Notes

The Italian School Year

The Italian school year typically runs from mid-September to early June, with various regional variations. The final day involves returning textbooks, receiving report cards, and a gradual dispersal as classes finish their last exams or activities. There is no single ceremonial graduation event at the end of a school year the way some other countries have — the end arrives as a series of practical tasks rather than a ceremony. For students heading into their final year (quinto anno), the year ends with anticipation of the maturità — the final state examination. For Alessandro and his class, who are completing their second year, the end is simpler: books returned, lockers emptied, summer begun.

Campo di Marte: A Year Later

Alessandro arrives at Campo di Marte in September not knowing where anything is. He arrives in June having walked to school from this station every morning for nine months. The station has become a fixed point in his daily geography — the place where the commute ends, where the group forms, where the ordinary accumulates into something real. That it is "the same as it always was" at the end of the novel is both literally true and quietly meaningful: he is the one who has changed, not the station. This is how belonging works: the world stays the same; you become someone who is inside it.

The Backpack Strap: Things That Almost Happen

The backpack strap moment is the novel's lightest scene and one of its truest. Things between people often almost happen before they actually happen — a hand almost reaches, a word almost forms, a moment is almost right. What makes the backpack strap funny rather than sad is that there is no tragedy in it: the feeling is real, the timing was right, and the obstacle is purely mechanical. The moment will come again. Wei knows this. Alessandro and Elisa know this. The novel ends before it does, which is exactly right: the story is not about what happens between Wei and Lorenzo, but about the world in which it might.

Home

The novel ends with Alessandro thinking about the future: Wakayama in January, the sakura in March, possibly a summer visit. He is considering asking his parents for a ticket. This is what has changed over the year: in September he was protecting Japan from fading; now he is planning a trip back because he misses it and is settled enough in Italy to do so without anxiety. He carries Japan the same way now — as part of him. He is walking through Florence in June, thinking about Wakayama in January, in a group of friends who are real, in a city that has become real, in a life that is his. The novel is called Missing Home. By the end, Alessandro is not missing home. He has it.