

My time in Tottori

Teaching resources

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MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 1: After the Congress of Vienna

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

How this document is organised

This document contains all the support material for Chapter 1. It is designed to be self-contained — you choose what to use, when, and in what order. A suggested flow is outlined below, but treat it as a starting point, not a prescription.

Suggested lesson flow:

1. End of previous lesson: Pre-Reading Activities + Glossary preview → students read Chapter 1 before the next lesson.
2. Next lesson: Comprehension, Language Focus, Discussion, Role Play, and Writing Activities.
3. End of that lesson: Pre-Reading and Glossary for Chapter 2.

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 1 introduces Leonardo Martelli, a 19-year-old student in his final weeks at a technical secondary school (ITI) in what appears to be a historic Italian city. During a class discussion led by his history teacher, Professor Riva, Leonardo's classmates announce their post-school plans: university courses in engineering, computer science, literature, and business. Leonardo, more hesitant, admits he is considering a working holiday year in Tottori, Japan. His friends — the practical Giovanni, the teasing Matteo, and the quietly observant Antonio — each respond in character. After school, the four friends walk and talk through Leonardo's plans and anxieties. At home, Leonardo's younger brother Riccardo good-naturedly mocks the idea, before quietly revealing that he too is thinking of something similar — a working holiday in Australia — one day.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 1. They activate relevant knowledge and vocabulary without revealing anything about the story.

Activity 1 — The Last Days of School

Think about (or discuss with a partner):

- What are the last few weeks of school like? Describe the atmosphere.
- Have you ever been in a class where nobody was really listening? What were people doing instead?
- When someone asks "What are you going to do next year?", how does that question make you feel?

Note to teacher: This activity works well as a brief think-pair-share. No feedback required at this stage — just get students talking.

Activity 2 — Your Future, Right Now

Look at the list of options below. Which of these might a young person consider after finishing secondary school? Rank them from most to least likely in your country. Compare with a partner.

Options	My ranking (1 = most likely)
• University (immediately)	1. _____
• Gap year abroad	2. _____
• Apprenticeship or vocational training	3. _____
• Work in a family business	4. _____
• Travel without a specific plan	5. _____
• Language study abroad	6. _____
• Military service	7. _____
• Start own business	8. _____

Activity 3 — Japan: What Do You Know?

Before reading, make a quick list. Work alone, then compare with a partner.

Things I know about Japan	Things I'm curious about
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____
• _____	• _____

Can you locate Tottori on a map? What do you already know about it, if anything?

 GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 1. Review them before reading so you can focus on the story.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
the maturità	noun (proper)	The Italian school-leaving examination taken at the end of upper secondary school, usually around age 19. It is a comprehensive written and oral exam that qualifies students for university entry. <i>"Now there was nothing left to do, technically, except wait for the maturità exams that were still three weeks away."</i>
syllabus	noun	A detailed plan or outline of the topics to be covered in a course of study. <i>"Professor Riva had spent the last week carefully finishing the history syllabus."</i>
working holiday	noun phrase	A visa arrangement that allows a person from one country to live and work in another country for a limited period, typically one year. It is designed for young adults and combines travel with short-term work. <i>"I'm thinking about a working holiday. A year. To think."</i>
weeaboo	noun (informal, internet slang)	A slang term, often used humorously or as mild teasing, for a non-Japanese person who is excessively or uncritically obsessed with Japanese culture. The term is generally considered mildly offensive, though its register depends heavily on context. <i>"You know what they call people who are really into Japan, right?"</i>
functional (language)	adjective	Good enough to use for everyday purposes but not yet advanced or fluent. Used in the context of language skills to mean basic but workable. <i>"I'm fine as a tourist, I'll need help as a resident."</i>
to nudge	verb	To gently push or touch someone, usually with the elbow or a finger, to get their attention without speaking. <i>"Giovanni Burgassi, sitting directly behind Leonardo, nudged him with a pen."</i>
dread	noun / verb	A strong feeling of fear or anxiety about something that is going to happen or might happen. <i>"He had been waiting with the particular quality of waiting that is not quite dread but is not comfortable either."</i>
to imply	verb	To suggest something without saying it directly. <i>"I imply nothing. I am a simple man."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
practical	adjective	Sensible and focused on what actually works in real situations, rather than on ideas or theories. <i>"He was practical and cheerful about this, which Leonardo found both admirable and slightly exhausting."</i>
poised	adjective	Balanced on the edge of something; in a state of readiness or suspension, as if about to move in one direction or another. <i>"everything is, for a moment, perfectly poised."</i>
the Risorgimento	noun (proper)	The 19th-century political and social movement that led to the unification of Italy between 1815 and 1871. The word means 'resurgence' in Italian. <i>"the Risorgimento had unified Italy once again"</i>
the Congress of Vienna	noun (proper)	A major international conference held in 1814–1815 after the Napoleonic Wars, which reorganised the political map of Europe. It is a standard topic in Italian high school history curricula. <i>"The last thing Leonardo Martelli wanted to think about on a warm Tuesday in May was the Congress of Vienna."</i>

Quick Check

Use a word or phrase from the glossary to complete each sentence. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. My Japanese is only _____ — I can order food and ask for directions, but I can't have a deep conversation.
2. She sat in class, half-listening, half-_____ about whether to apply to art school.
3. He _____ me during the meeting to let me know the director had just walked in.
4. The atmosphere before the _____ exams was tense — everyone was revising but nobody admitted to being nervous.
5. "I'm not saying she's wrong," said Marco, "I'm just _____ that the plan has some risks."

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned in the chapter). For false statements, write the correction.

1. Leonardo is in his final year of a technical secondary school. T / F / NM
2. The chapter takes place in winter. T / F / NM
3. Giovanni Burgassi plans to study mechanical engineering. T / F / NM
4. Antonio wants to study literature, possibly at a prestigious university. T / F / NM
5. Leonardo has never studied any Japanese. T / F / NM
6. Leonardo has already applied for his working holiday visa. T / F / NM
7. Riccardo, Leonardo's younger brother, is supportive of the Japan idea. T / F / NM
8. At the end of the chapter, Riccardo reveals he is also thinking about going abroad one day. T / F / NM
9. Professor Riva discourages Leonardo from going to Japan. T / F / NM
10. The friends have been walking the same streets together for five years. T / F / NM

Activity 2 — Character Matching

Match each description to the character. Use each name once.

Descriptions	Characters
A. Seems to already know exactly what he wants and is cheerful about it.	Giovanni • Matteo • Antonio
B. Takes notes even during conversations. Asks direct, honest questions.	Professor Riva • Riccardo • Leonardo
C. Uses teasing as a way of showing interest and affection.	A → _____
D. Creates silences that don't feel awkward.	B → _____
E. Reveals a personal plan quietly, at the end of a conversation.	C → _____
F. Carries uncertainty about the future, but has been doing research.	D → _____
	E → _____
	F → _____

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. Why does Leonardo feel uncomfortable when Professor Riva calls on him?
2. How do his three friends (Giovanni, Matteo, Antonio) each react differently to Leonardo's plan?
3. What does Leonardo mean when he says he wants to go to Japan 'to think'?
4. At the end of the chapter, what does Riccardo tell Leonardo, and why is it significant?
5. The chapter ends with: 'Nine thousand kilometers. He was going to go.' What does this suggest about Leonardo's state of mind at this point?

abc LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Expressing Uncertainty and Hedging

Leonardo uses a lot of hedged, uncertain language. This is natural and common in English when someone is not sure or is thinking aloud. Look at these examples from the chapter:

"I'm not sure yet."

"Something. Maybe. I'm — I'm thinking."

"Almost."

"Probably."

"It's both. I think that's allowed."

Now complete these tasks:

1. Identify three more examples of hedging language from the chapter.
2. Rewrite these sentences using hedging language to make them sound less certain: a. 'I am going to university next year.' b. 'Japanese is very difficult.' c. 'My friends don't understand my plan.'
3. With a partner, talk about a decision you are thinking about. Use at least four hedging expressions.

B — Describing People Indirectly

The author describes characters through their behaviour rather than directly telling us what they are like. For example:

"Antonio had written something in the small notebook he carried everywhere and then put it away, which was as close as Antonio got to saying that a conversation had gone well."

This tells us something about Antonio without stating it outright.

1. What does each of these details tell us about the character? Write one sentence of interpretation for each.
2. a. Giovanni buys a bottle of water from a kiosk and drinks it 'in the unhurried way he did everything.'
3. b. Matteo 'was drawing something in the margin of his notes.'
4. c. Riccardo 'put down his phone. This was a sign that he had decided to be interested.'

C — The Language of Teasing Among Friends

Matteo and Riccardo both tease Leonardo about Japan, but neither is being unkind. Look at how the teasing works:

"He has books about it. In Japanese."

"You know what they call people who are really into Japan, right?"

"I imply nothing. I am a simple man."

Discuss with a partner:

- What is the difference between teasing that is friendly and teasing that is unkind? What makes the difference here?
- How does Leonardo respond to the teasing? Does he take it seriously?
- How would you tease a friend in your own language? Is there an equivalent way to do this in English?

CULTURAL NOTES

These notes provide context for cultural references in Chapter 1. They are not targeted at any particular student background — wherever you are from, some of this will be familiar and some will be new.

The Italian Technical Secondary School (ITI)

In Italy, secondary school splits at around age 14 into different types of schools with different educational focuses. The ITI (Istituto Tecnico Industriale) is a five-year technical school that combines general subjects like history, Italian, and maths with practical and technical disciplines such as engineering, IT, or electronics. Students graduate at around 18–19 with both the maturità certificate and a technical qualification.

Class 5B in the chapter is in its final year. The fact that Antonio — a student at a technical school — is applying to study literature, and possibly at the elite Scuola Normale Superiore, is noted in the chapter as surprising. In Italy, there is a cultural expectation that students at technical schools follow technical career paths. His choice quietly challenges that expectation.

For discussion: Does your educational system divide into different school types at secondary level? What expectations, if any, come with different types of school?

The Maturità

The maturità (full name: esame di Stato conclusivo del secondo ciclo di istruzione) is the Italian school-leaving exam taken at the end of upper secondary school. It typically includes written papers in Italian and other subjects specific to the school type, as well as a comprehensive oral examination. It is a high-stakes exam that can significantly affect university placement.

In the chapter, the exam is three weeks away. The class atmosphere — textbooks open but unread, Matteo drawing in his notebook — reflects the particular tension of this pre-exam period, which Italian students often describe as both anxious and oddly suspended.

Working Holiday Visas

Many countries have bilateral working holiday visa agreements that allow young people (typically aged 18–30) to live and work in another country for up to one year. Italy and Japan have such an agreement. The visa is designed to allow the holder to fund their travels through short-term work, rather than being tied to a single employer or sector.

Leonardo describes the visa accurately: you apply, you receive a year, you can work part-time. The scheme is popular among young Europeans as a way to experience living abroad before committing to a career or further study.

For discussion: Do you know of working holiday agreements involving your own country? Would you consider doing something like this? What would be the appeal — and the challenges?

Tottori Prefecture

Tottori is the least populous prefecture in Japan, located on the San'in coast of western Honshu, facing the Sea of Japan. It is known for the Tottori Sand Dunes (鳥取砂丘, Tottori Sakyū) — the largest sand dunes in Japan — as well as for being the birthplace of the manga artist Shigeru Mizuki, creator of Gegege no Kitarō. The prefecture is predominantly rural and agricultural, with a slower pace of life than Japan's major cities.

Leonardo's choice of Tottori over Tokyo is notable. He specifically says he chose a place that is "smaller than Tokyo" — suggesting he is drawn to a quieter, less internationally saturated version of Japan. This choice will presumably shape much of what he encounters.

For discussion: If you were going to spend a year somewhere new, would you choose a big city or a smaller, quieter place? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each?

The Via Cavour and Historic Italian Cities

The friends walk down the Via Cavour after school. Via Cavour is a common street name in Italian cities — named after Count Camillo di Cavour, the 19th-century statesman who played a central role in Italian unification. The name is so widespread that it tells us little about which specific city Leonardo lives in, but the presence of tourists, a kiosk, and ancient-looking rooftops suggests a historic city centre of the kind found throughout central and northern Italy.

The Via dei Servi — where Leonardo's apartment is — similarly sounds like a named street in a historic urban centre, possibly in Tuscany or Emilia-Romagna, though the text does not specify.

DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

These activities are suitable for pairs, small groups, or whole-class discussion. Choose the ones most appropriate for your class.

Discussion 1 — The Question That Won't Go Away

"What are you going to do next?"

- Why is this question so difficult for some people and easy for others?
- Leonardo describes it as a question that "kept finding him anyway, in quiet moments." What does this tell us about him?
- Giovanni says: "Nobody knows. I said engineering because I like how things work and my uncle has a company. That's the whole reasoning." Does this make Giovanni's plan better or worse than Leonardo's? Why?

Discussion 2 — Choosing Japan

- Leonardo has spent two years going to a Japanese cultural centre, studying the language, and reading about Tottori. Does this seem like an impulsive decision to you, or a considered one?
- Riccardo jokes about Leonardo being a "weeaboo." Leonardo responds seriously, listing his actual preparation. Who do you find more convincing in this exchange?
- Why do you think Leonardo chose Tottori specifically, rather than Tokyo or another major city?

Discussion 3 — The Four Friends

By the end of the chapter, we have a clear sense of four quite different personalities.

- Which of the four friends do you find most interesting? Why?
- Which of their approaches to the future do you find most relatable?
- Antonio asks Leonardo directly: "Are you nervous?" Leonardo says yes, and explains exactly what he is nervous about. Is it easy or difficult to be that honest about uncertainty? Does it depend on who is asking?

Discussion 4 — Riccardo's Moment

At the very end of the chapter, Riccardo — who has been teasing Leonardo — quietly mentions that he is thinking about Australia when he finishes school.

- Why do you think Riccardo tells Leonardo this? Why now, at the end of this conversation?
- Why does he say "Don't tell Mum yet"?
- What does this moment tell us about the relationship between the two brothers?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

These scenarios are based on situations and characters from Chapter 1. Students should aim to stay in character and use natural, conversational English.

Role Play 1 — The Class Discussion (Groups of 4–5)

Re-enact a version of Professor Riva's class discussion. Assign roles:

- One student plays Professor Riva
- Other students play classmates (they can use the names from the chapter or invent their own)

Professor Riva asks each student about their plans after school. Students playing classmates should decide on a plan before starting and answer in character. At least one student should play someone who is uncertain.

Language to use: 'I'm planning to...', 'I've been thinking about...', 'I'm not sure yet, but maybe...', 'I'm keeping my options open.'

Role Play 2 — The Walk After School (Pairs or Groups of 3)

It is after school. Two or three friends are walking. One of them has just admitted to a plan that the others find surprising (it doesn't have to be Japan — it could be anything: taking a year off to paint, applying to study abroad, working in a family business instead of going to university, etc.).

The others react. One is supportive and practical. One gently teases but is ultimately kind.

Focus on: showing interest without being intrusive, teasing without being unkind, asking honest questions.

Role Play 3 — Telling a Sibling (Pairs)

Student A has just come home with news of a big plan — something that is a bit unconventional or surprising. Student B is a younger sibling.

Student B's job is to: first react with mild teasing or scepticism, then gradually warm up, and finally — just before the conversation ends — mention a surprising plan of their own.

Debrief question: How did it feel to share something uncertain? Was the teasing helpful or unhelpful? Did the ending feel realistic?

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — A Character You Know

Antonio carries a notebook everywhere and writes in it after conversations. Giovanni drinks water slowly and answers questions without hesitation. Matteo draws in the margins of his notes.

Write a paragraph (80–120 words) describing a real or imagined person using only their habits and small actions — without ever directly telling the reader what kind of person they are. Let the details do the work.

Writing 2 — The Question

"What are you going to do next?"

Write a personal response (100–150 words) to this question, as if someone important to you — a teacher, a parent, an older friend — has just asked you directly. You can be honest, uncertain, optimistic, or evasive. Write in the first person.

Writing 3 — A Letter Not Sent

Imagine Leonardo writes a letter to himself to be opened in one year's time — after his year in Japan. In the letter, he describes what he hopes to have found out, what he is afraid of, and one thing he promises to do while he is there.

Write the letter (150–200 words). Use the first person. You do not need to know what actually happens in the story — this is about Leonardo's hopes and fears at this exact moment in the chapter.

Writing 4 — What Riccardo Didn't Say

The chapter ends with a very short conversation between Leonardo and Riccardo about Australia. We do not know why Riccardo wants to go, or what he is imagining.

Write Riccardo's version of that evening (100–150 words), from his point of view. What is he thinking? Why did he mention Australia at that moment? What does he hope Leonardo's reaction means?

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 2: Before Departure

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 2 covers the weeks between the end of school and Leonardo's departure for Japan. Three narrative threads run through it. First, at the Japanese Cultural Centre, Leonardo learns that his teacher Hosokawa is returning to Kyoto; he meets Tomoko Fujisawa, who gives him practical advice (get an international driving licence) and offers to write to her niece in Tottori, Yuzuka, who might help him settle in. Second, at home, Leonardo has a well-meaning but slightly suffocating conversation with his professor parents, who frame his trip in terms of self-development and transferable skills while he just wants to go somewhere and think. Third, the farewell: a group chat named 'Florence Idiots', and a last gathering at Giovanni's uncle's workshop — pizza, beer, and a quiet goodbye. The chapter ends with Leonardo packing his suitcase.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 2. They do not reveal the content of the chapter.

Activity 1 — Last Days

Think about or discuss:

- Have you ever finished something important — a school year, a project, a job — and felt a strange mix of relief and sadness? Describe the feeling.
- Is there a difference between the last day of something and the day after?
- What is the last thing you would want to do with close friends before a long separation?

Activity 2 — Giving Advice

Imagine a friend is about to spend a year living abroad in a country they don't know very well. You know that country.

What would be the most useful piece of practical advice you could give them? Think of three things. Compare with a partner.

My practical advice	My partner's advice
1. _____	1. _____
2. _____	2. _____
3. _____	3. _____

Follow-up: Which of these pieces of advice do you think would actually be most useful? Which would be least obvious?

Activity 3 — Supporters with Agendas

Sometimes people who want to support us also, without meaning to, make things about themselves — their own ideas, values, or ways of seeing the world.

- Can you think of an example of someone supporting you in a way that felt a little bit like they were also pushing their own view?
- What is the difference between giving support and giving advice? Between encouragement and analysis?
- Is it possible to be completely supportive without projecting your own values onto someone else's decision?

Note to teacher: This activity prepares students to understand the parents' scene in Chapter 2 without spoiling it. Keep discussion brief and open — don't resolve the question.

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 2.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
punctuality	noun	The habit or quality of arriving on time and doing things at the scheduled moment. <i>"Hosokawa had a flexible relationship with punctuality that seemed to be tied to his rehearsal schedule."</i>
to detour	verb	To take a longer or different route than planned, usually to stop somewhere on the way. <i>"Walking home, Leonardo detoured to the motorizzazione and spent ninety minutes in various queues."</i>
ikebana	noun	The Japanese art of flower arranging. The word means 'living flowers' in Japanese. It is considered a traditional art form with formal schools and techniques. <i>"The walls were covered with posters about Japanese film festivals, ikebana workshops, and upcoming lectures."</i>
logistics	noun (plural)	The practical planning and organisation of a complex activity — who does what, when, and how. <i>"The group chat had been Giovanni's idea, which made sense because Giovanni was the one who actually thought about logistics."</i>
pedagogical	adjective	Related to the methods and practice of teaching. <i>"Hosokawa explained them with great enthusiasm and questionable pedagogical structure."</i>
to default into	phrasal verb	To end up doing something not because of a deliberate choice, but because it was the easiest or most obvious option. <i>"Most people just default into whatever's expected."</i>
immersion	noun	A method of learning a language by being completely surrounded by it in daily life, rather than studying it in a classroom. Also used more generally to mean full involvement in an environment or experience. <i>"A year of language immersion, international experience, exposure to a completely different work culture."</i>
adaptability	noun	The ability to adjust easily to new conditions, environments, or circumstances. <i>"Language skills, cultural competency, adaptability. Those are transferable."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
transferable (skills)	adjective	Skills that are useful across many different jobs or situations, not just the specific one in which they were learned. <i>"Whatever field you choose, those matter."</i>
motorizzazione	noun (Italian)	The Italian government office responsible for vehicle registration, driving licences, and related documents. Full name: Motorizzazione Civile. <i>"Leonardo detoured to the motorizzazione and spent ninety minutes in various queues."</i>
Kantian ethics	noun phrase	A system of moral philosophy developed by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), based on the idea that moral rules should be universal and that people should be treated as ends in themselves, not as means to an end. <i>"His mother was talking about Kantian ethics or possibly conference scheduling."</i>
to absorb (news / information)	verb	To take in and process information, especially when it is unexpected. Implies a moment of quiet adjustment rather than a strong outward reaction. <i>"Leonardo absorbed this. It made a certain kind of sense."</i>

Quick Check — Word in Context

Choose the correct word or phrase to complete each sentence.

1. She didn't plan to become a teacher — she just _____ it after her other plans fell through. (defaulted into / detoured into / absorbed into)
2. He has excellent _____ skills: he can learn new tools and adjust to any team quickly. (punctuality / adaptability / logistics)
3. Working abroad for a year gave her a lot of _____ experience that looked impressive on her CV. (pedagogical / transferable / ikebana)
4. His _____ was a problem: the meeting started without him three times in one week. (immersion / logistics / punctuality)
5. She sat quietly and _____ the news before she said anything. (absorbed / detoured / defaulted)

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Sequence of Events

Put these events in the correct order (1–8) as they appear in the chapter.

- ___ Leonardo packs his suitcase.
- ___ Tomoko offers to contact her niece in Tottori.
- ___ Leonardo and his friends say goodbye at a workshop on the edge of the city.
- ___ The maturità oral examination takes place.
- ___ The 'Florence Idiots' group chat is created.
- ___ Hosokawa arrives late and apologises.
- ___ Leonardo's parents have a Serious Family Conversation with him.
- ___ Leonardo gets an international driving permit.

Activity 2 — Who Says It?

Match each quotation to the character who says it. Then explain, in one sentence, what the quote reveals about that character.

"You'd rather have it than not. Trust me." → _____ What it reveals:

"I was going to! I was—" → _____ What it reveals: _____

"Taking a year to think about what you want is brave." → _____ What it reveals:

"A year of language immersion... when you come back and apply to university, that's going to make you stand out." → _____ What it reveals: _____

"I just want to go to Japan." → _____ What it reveals: _____

"Not me, I'll be in Pisa." → _____ What it reveals: _____

Characters to choose from: Tomoko · Hosokawa · Sofia (mother) · Mario (father) · Leonardo · Antonio

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. Why is Hosokawa leaving, and how does Leonardo feel about it?
2. What two things does Tomoko offer Leonardo before he leaves? Why does she offer them?
3. What is the difference between what Mario says about the trip and what Sofia says? Do they contradict each other?
4. Why does Leonardo go upstairs in the middle of the family conversation? What does this tell us about him?
5. Describe the atmosphere at the farewell gathering in the workshop. What details create that atmosphere?

abc LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Talking About Feelings Without Naming Them

In Chapter 2, characters rarely name their emotions directly. Instead, feelings are shown through small details and indirect language. For example:

"They walked down the Via Cavour one last time in the direction of approximately nothing. Nobody said it was the last time. It didn't need saying."

This conveys feeling without once using the words 'sad', 'nostalgic', or 'bittersweet'.

1. Find two more examples from the chapter where a feeling is implied but not directly named.
2. What emotion is being suggested in each example you found?
3. Write two sentences of your own using the same technique — describe a moment or action that implies an emotion without naming it.

B — Different Kinds of Support

Leonardo's parents are both trying to be supportive, but they frame the trip differently. Read these two extracts:

Mario (father)

"A year of language immersion, international experience, exposure to a completely different work culture. When you come back and apply to university, that's going to make you stand out."

Sofia (mother)

"You're giving yourself space to discover who you are outside of structures and expectations. That's philosophically sound. Most people never do that."

1. What is each parent's underlying framework for understanding the trip? (What do they each think the year is really about?)
2. Leonardo says: 'I just want to go to Japan.' Why is his response so short compared to his parents' speeches? What is he really saying?
3. Have you ever had someone support you in a way that felt like they were also reinterpreting your decision? How did you handle it?

C — Understatement

The chapter uses understatement — saying less than you mean — to create dry humour and emotional distance. For example:

"The permit itself was unimpressive — a small folded booklet with his photograph and a list of vehicle categories he was licensed to drive. He put it in his wallet and forgot about it immediately."

"That's not a high bar." / "No. But she is actually good."

Find two more examples of understatement or dry humour in the chapter. For each one:

- Write the quotation.
- Explain what the speaker actually means.
- Why is understatement more effective than saying things directly in these moments?

CULTURAL NOTES

These notes provide context for cultural references in Chapter 2. They are written for any reader, regardless of background.

The Scuola Normale Superiore (mentioned from Chapter 1)

Antonio's plan to study literature in Pisa — and his ambition to get into the Scuola Normale Superiore — is confirmed in this chapter when he tells Leonardo he is going to Pisa. The Scuola Normale Superiore (SNS) in Pisa is one of the most prestigious universities in Italy and among the most selective in Europe. Entry is by competitive examination and is open to students from all kinds of secondary schools, including technical institutes.

For discussion: Does your country have universities or institutions that require a separate entrance examination? How does that system compare to a general application process?

Ikebana — Japanese Flower Arranging

Ikebana (生け花, literally 'living flowers') is a traditional Japanese art form with a history going back to the 15th century. Unlike Western flower arranging, which tends to focus on colour and abundance, ikebana emphasises line, form, and the relationship between the plant material and the space around it. Negative space — the emptiness — is considered as important as the flowers themselves. There are several major schools of ikebana with distinct philosophies and techniques.

The presence of ikebana workshops at the cultural centre is realistic: ikebana classes are one of the most common offerings at Japanese cultural centres around the world, alongside language courses, calligraphy, and tea ceremony.

For discussion: Are there traditional art forms from your own culture that are taught in cultural centres abroad? Do you think cultural centres serve an important function?

The Japanese Particle System

Hosokawa's lesson is 'about particles', which 'it always is'. This is a gentle joke for anyone who has studied Japanese. Japanese particles are small words (usually one or two characters) that indicate the grammatical function of the word or phrase they follow — subject, object, direction, location, topic, and so on. Because English uses word order to show these relationships, particles are genuinely one of the harder conceptual shifts for European learners of Japanese. Students often joke that particles are always what you're studying in Japanese, no matter how long you've been at it.

Common particles include: は (wa) — topic marker; が (ga) — subject marker; を (wo/o) — object marker; に (ni) — location or direction; で (de) — place of action or means.

For discussion: What aspect of a foreign language have you found most difficult to understand or remember? Do you think the difficulty depends on how different the language is from your own?

International Driving Permits

An International Driving Permit (IDP) is a document recognised in over 150 countries that translates your national driving licence into several languages, allowing you to drive legally in countries that accept it. It is not a standalone document — it must be used together with your national licence. In Japan, most EU driving licences are not directly recognised; you either need an IDP or must convert your licence to a Japanese one, which involves a process that can take months. An IDP is the quicker and easier solution for a short-to-medium stay.

Tomoko's advice to get one before leaving is practical and accurate. In Tottori and other rural parts of Japan, public transport exists but is much less frequent and comprehensive than in Tokyo or Osaka. Having the option to drive can make a significant difference to quality of life and mobility.

For discussion: Have you ever been somewhere where having a car (or not having one) made a significant difference to your experience? Would you be comfortable driving in a foreign country?

Rossini and Choral Music Culture

Hosokawa arrives late because a rehearsal of a piece by Rossini ran over. Gioachino Rossini (1792–1868) was an Italian opera composer — his most famous works include *The Barber of Seville* and *William Tell*. That a Japanese man living in Italy should be rehearsing Rossini is not unusual: choral and orchestral societies exist in virtually every Italian city, are open to amateur singers and musicians from anywhere, and are a significant part of local cultural life. This detail quietly reinforces the idea that Hosokawa is someone who has built a full life in Italy, making his decision to return to Kyoto for family reasons more poignant.



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — "Done"

When Giovanni asks how the exam went, Leonardo says: "Done." That's his only answer.

- Why do you think Leonardo gives this answer? What might 'done' mean beyond the literal meaning?
- Have you ever finished something important and felt that you couldn't really describe the experience? Why is it sometimes difficult to put these moments into words?
- Is there a word in your own language that captures the feeling of finishing something big? Can you explain it to the class?

Discussion 2 — The Parent Conversation

Mario and Sofia both want to support Leonardo, but their support comes through analysis and interpretation.

- Do you think Leonardo's frustration with his parents is fair? Are they doing something wrong, or just something unhelpful?
- Mario talks about practical benefits (skills, CV, university applications). Sofia talks about self-knowledge and philosophy. Which parent do you find more convincing? Does it matter?
- Leonardo says: 'I could not hear myself think over the sound of them being right.' What does this mean? Have you ever had this experience?

Discussion 3 — The Farewell That Isn't Named

Nobody at the workshop says 'this is our last time together for a year'. Nobody makes a formal speech.

- Why do you think the characters avoid naming what the gathering actually is?
- Is this realistic? Do people often avoid naming important emotional moments?
- What does Matteo mean when he says 'That's what friends do'? Is he being sincere, deflecting, or both?

Discussion 4 — "He was ready. Maybe."

The chapter ends with: 'He was ready. Maybe.'

- Why does the author add 'Maybe'? What effect does it have?
- Is it possible to be genuinely ready for something you have never done before?
- What is the difference between being ready and feeling ready?

ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Mentor's Advice (Pairs)

Student A is someone who knows a country well (they have lived or worked there). Student B is about to spend a year there.

Student A must give three pieces of practical advice — at least one of which is surprising or not obvious. Student B asks follow-up questions. The conversation should feel like genuine guidance between two people who respect each other.

Debrief: Was any of the advice surprising? Was any of it difficult to explain? Did Student B feel genuinely helped?

Role Play 2 — The Parents (Groups of 3)

Two students play parents; one plays the young person who is leaving. The young person has just announced a big, unconventional plan.

The parents both want to be supportive, but each has a different way of framing it — one is practical, one is philosophical. The young person has to navigate the conversation without losing their temper.

Focus on: How to express support without imposing. How to listen to support without feeling overwhelmed. How to say 'I just want to do this thing' politely but clearly.

Role Play 3 — The Goodbye That Avoids Being a Goodbye (Groups of 3-4)

A group of friends is spending one of their last evenings together before one of them leaves for a long time. They all know it's a goodbye. Nobody wants to name it.

The conversation should feel natural — talking about ordinary things, deflecting, making small jokes — while the emotional subtext (this is the last time for a while) is present but unspoken.

Debrief: Did the goodbye feel real? What techniques did you use to avoid naming what the moment was? Did anyone feel the urge to break the convention and say something direct?



WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Advice You Give

Tomoko gives Leonardo exactly one piece of practical advice, and then offers a personal connection. Both turn out to be significant.

Think of a place you know well. Write a paragraph (80–120 words) of advice for someone who is about to spend a year there — not a tourist guide, but the advice a local or long-term resident would actually give. Include at least one thing that would not be in any guidebook.

Writing 2 — The Group Chat

The 'Florence Idiots' group chat is described briefly in the chapter, including a few messages. Write a short exchange (8–12 messages) in the same group chat, set the day before Leonardo's departure. Each of the four characters (Leonardo, Giovanni, Matteo, Antonio) should send at least one message that sounds like them.

Tip: Think about what each person would actually say, based on how they're described in the novel. Giovanni is practical. Antonio is thoughtful. Matteo deflects with humour. Leonardo reads everything and contributes occasionally.

Writing 3 — What You Don't Say

Write a short scene (120–160 words) in which a character is feeling something strongly — excitement, sadness, anxiety, relief — but does not say so directly. Use only their actions, physical surroundings, and the things they do or don't say to show the emotion.

You can use Leonardo, one of his friends, or an entirely invented character.

Writing 4 — Two Kinds of Support

Imagine you are about to do something important and slightly unconventional — a decision that matters to you. Write two short letters of support you might receive (60–80 words each):

- One from someone who frames your decision in practical, outcome-focused terms.
- One from someone who frames it in terms of personal growth and self-discovery.

Then write two sentences saying which letter you would find more helpful, and why.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 3: Arrival

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 3 follows Leonardo's arrival in Japan in four stages. First: the long journey — Kansai Airport, immigration, a convenience store onigiri, and a train to Osaka that introduces the unfamiliarity of the new environment. Second: a sleepless night in Osaka — a late-night ramen meal, a walk to the Dotonbori district, and the tourist photograph of a mechanical crab. Third: the bus journey from Osaka to Tottori, with the landscape changing as the city gives way to rice fields and mountains. Leonardo arrives in Tottori and settles into a hostel, feeling tired, uncertain, and quietly aware that he has very little idea what he is doing. Fourth: that same afternoon, Yuzuka and her friend Hanako arrive at the hostel. Yuzuka — Tomoko's niece — is efficient, slightly guarded, and direct to the point of bluntness. Hanako is warmer. Together they give Leonardo a brisk orientation tour. The chapter ends with Leonardo realising he has made some kind of mistake regarding Yuzuka's name, though he is not sure what.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 3.

Activity 1 — Arriving Somewhere New

Think about a time you arrived somewhere unfamiliar — a new city, a new school, a new country. It doesn't have to be dramatic. It might be the first day of school, or a holiday in a place you didn't know.

- What were the first things you noticed?
- What felt strange or different?
- How long did it take before things started to feel more normal?

Now imagine arriving in a country where you don't speak the language well. Make a list of five things that might be difficult in the first 24 hours. Compare with a partner.

Activity 2 — Reading a City

Cities communicate a lot through their surfaces — smells, sounds, signs, how people move. Look at the two descriptions below (written for this activity, not from the novel). What kind of place does each one suggest?

Place A

The streets were narrow and warm, smelling of coffee and old stone. People stopped to talk at corners. A church bell rang and nobody hurried.

Place B

The streets were bright with signs in three scripts. Everyone moved with purpose. The air smelled of grilled meat and exhaust. No one looked up.

- What kind of city does each description suggest? What details give you those clues?
- Which one would you rather arrive in, alone, at night? Why?
- Write three sentences describing a city or place you know well using only sensory details — no place names.

Activity 3 — First Impressions of People

Imagine you have been asked by a relative to help a foreign student who has just arrived in your city. You don't really know this person, and you weren't given much choice about helping.

- How would you feel about this situation?
- What would you do? Would you be enthusiastic, reluctant, efficient, friendly?
- What would be the difference between helping because you want to and helping because someone asked you to?

 GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 3.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
onigiri	noun (Japanese)	A Japanese rice ball, usually triangular or round, often wrapped in nori (dried seaweed) and filled with ingredients such as pickled plum (umeboshi), tuna mayonnaise, or salmon. A common convenience store food in Japan, available at all hours. <i>"He bought a bottle of water and an onigiri that he ate standing up because sitting down felt like it might be permanent."</i>
salaryman	noun	A Japanese English term for a white-collar office worker, typically male, who works for a large company. Often associated with long working hours, dark suits, and train commutes. The word is used in English as a loanword from Japanese. <i>"Salarymen in dark suits. Students with bags covered in keychains."</i>
kanji	noun (Japanese)	The Chinese characters adopted into the Japanese writing system. Kanji represent words or parts of words and are one of three scripts used in written Japanese (alongside hiragana and katakana). Thousands of kanji exist; Japanese school students learn around 2,000 before graduating. <i>"Neon signs in kanji and katakana and occasionally English covered every available surface."</i>
katakana	noun (Japanese)	One of Japan's two phonetic alphabets (syllabaries), used mainly to write foreign loanwords, foreign names, and for certain stylistic effects. Each katakana character represents a syllable sound. There are 46 basic characters. <i>"Neon signs in kanji and katakana and occasionally English covered every available surface."</i>
pachinko	noun (Japanese)	A Japanese mechanical game similar to a vertical pinball machine, played in dedicated pachinko parlors. It is a major entertainment industry in Japan. Players buy steel balls and aim them through a machine to win more balls, which can be exchanged for prizes. <i>"Neon signs in kanji and katakana... Restaurants, pachinko parlors, convenience stores."</i>
Dotonbori	noun (proper)	A popular entertainment and shopping district in Osaka, built along the Dotonbori canal. Known for its bright neon signs, restaurants, and the iconic Glico Running Man sign. A major tourist destination and symbol of Osaka's lively street culture. <i>"Dotonbori was nearby—bright and loud and full of tourists taking photographs of a giant mechanical crab."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
residence card (zairyu card)	noun	An official identity card issued to foreign nationals living in Japan for periods of three months or more. It shows the holder's name, nationality, address, and visa status. Foreign residents are legally required to carry it and to update it when they move. <i>"You'll need to update your residence card first."</i>
city hall (市役所, shiyakusho)	noun	The local government office responsible for administrative services such as resident registration, family records, and issuing official documents. In Japan, new residents (including foreign nationals) are legally required to register their address at the local city hall within 14 days of arriving. <i>"City hall. You have to register your address within two weeks of arriving."</i>
real estate agent	noun	A person or company that arranges the buying, selling, or renting of properties on behalf of clients. In Japanese, this is often called 不動産屋 (fudōsan-ya). In Japan, the rental process typically involves fees, guarantors, and paperwork that can be challenging for foreigners. <i>"This is a real estate agent. They have cheap apartments for foreigners."</i>
brisk	adjective	Quick, efficient, and businesslike — often with a suggestion of not wasting time or being particularly warm about it. <i>"Yuzuka pointed at things and explained them in a brisk, efficient manner."</i>
surname-first naming order	noun phrase	In Japanese convention, a person's family name (surname) is stated before their given name. So 'Morita Yuzuka' means family name Morita, given name Yuzuka. When Japanese people introduce themselves in English, they sometimes reverse this order; in Japanese, they generally do not. <i>"I'm Morita Yuzuka."</i>
to evaluate	verb	To carefully assess or judge someone or something. <i>"She looked at him properly, evaluating."</i>

Quick Check — Definitions in Your Own Words

Without looking at the glossary, write a short definition (one sentence) for each of the following. Then check your definition against the glossary.

- onigiri
- pachinko
- residence card
- brisk
- salaryman

Now use three of the glossary words in sentences of your own. Your sentences should make the meaning clear from context.

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Journey Map

Chapter 3 follows Leonardo across several locations. Complete the journey map below with the correct information.

Location	How he gets there	What happens	How he feels
Kansai Airport	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Osaka (Namba)	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Dotonbori	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
OCAI Terminal	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Bus (Osaka → Tottori)	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____
Tottori Station / Hostel	_____	_____	_____
	_____	_____	_____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

- Leonardo sat in a window seat on the plane. T / F / NM
- He exchanged currency at the airport. T / F / NM
- The hostel in Osaka was on the ground floor of the building. T / F / NM
- Leonardo ate ramen at a restaurant near the hostel at midnight. T / F / NM
- The bus from Osaka to Tottori takes approximately two hours. T / F / NM
- Yuzuka is Tomoko's niece. T / F / NM
- Hanako and Yuzuka are wearing school uniforms when they arrive. T / F / NM
- Yuzuka tells Leonardo where to find a second-hand bicycle. T / F / NM
- Leonardo correctly uses Yuzuka's name throughout their meeting. T / F / NM
- The chapter ends with Leonardo going out to explore Tottori. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

6. Why does Leonardo not move when the businessman falls asleep on his shoulder? What does this tell us about him?
7. What is the difference between Osaka and Tottori as Leonardo experiences them? Use details from the chapter.
8. How does Yuzuka's help differ from what Leonardo might have expected? Is her help still useful despite her manner?
9. Hanako asks Leonardo if coming so far by himself is scary. He says 'a little', and adds 'But I wanted to.' What does this exchange tell us about both characters?
10. At the end of the chapter, Leonardo thinks he made a mistake with Yuzuka's name, but is not sure what. What do you think the mistake was? Use clues from the chapter.



LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Describing Unfamiliar Places

Leonardo arrives in Japan as an outsider. The chapter describes the country through his eyes — details noticed by someone for whom everything is new. This produces a particular kind of descriptive writing that relies on comparison, sensory detail, and acknowledged uncertainty.

Examples from the chapter:

"a landscape that was almost aggressively not Florence — flat and industrial and dense in a way that felt like it had been assembled rather than grown"

"The streets were narrower than he expected and brighter than seemed necessary."

"The air smelled of grilled meat and exhaust and something sweet he could not identify."

1. Each example uses a different technique. Identify the technique in each one (comparison with home, quantity/degree, sensory description with uncertainty).
2. Write three sentences describing an unfamiliar place you have visited, using one of the three techniques above in each sentence.
3. The phrase 'almost aggressively not Florence' is unusual. What does 'aggressively' add to the description? Could you replace it with a more ordinary word? What would be lost?

B — Names and Naming in Japanese

This chapter introduces an important aspect of Japanese social convention: how names work. In Japan, the family name (surname) comes first. So 'Morita Yuzuka' means Yuzuka is her given name, Morita is her family name.

There is also a system of honorific suffixes attached to names:

Suffix	When used	Example in chapter
-san (さん)	Polite, neutral. Used with surnames or given names. Safe in most situations.	"Martelli-san. You have visitors." / "Good luck, Martelli-san."
-chan (ちゃん)	Informal, affectionate. Used with children, close friends, or younger people one feels close to.	"Yuzu-chan! Be nice." (Hanako uses this to Yuzuka)
-kun (くん)	Often used for younger males, or by superiors to subordinates. Can also be used among close male friends.	(Not used in this chapter — included for reference)
-sensei (先生)	Used for teachers, doctors, and other respected professionals. Literally means 'person born before'.	"Hosokawa-sensei" (from Chapter 2)

At the end of the chapter, Leonardo suspects he has made a mistake with Yuzuka's name, though he is not sure what. Re-read the relevant section.

1. What do you think Leonardo did wrong? (Hint: think about the difference between 'Morita Yuzuka' and 'Yuzuka', and about what Hanako calls her.)
2. Why might using someone's given name without permission feel presumptuous or inappropriate in Japanese culture?
3. Are there similar conventions in your own language or culture around how you address people you have just met?

C — Reluctant Help and How It Sounds

Yuzuka helps Leonardo efficiently and completely, but makes it clear she is doing so because Tomoko asked — not because she particularly wants to. This creates an interesting dynamic in the dialogue.

"You're already a nuisance. But Aunt Tomoko asked, so here I am."

"It's fine. Aunt Tomoko asked. So I'm helping."

"Don't be sorry. Just don't waste our time."

1. Despite this language, Yuzuka's help is thorough and specific. What does this tell us about her character?
2. How is Yuzuka's way of helping different from Hanako's? Find examples of each from the chapter.
3. Write a short dialogue (6–8 lines) in which one person helps another, but makes it clear they're doing it reluctantly. The help should still be genuine.

CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 3. Written for any reader, regardless of background.

Kansai International Airport and the Kansai Region

Kansai International Airport (KIX) is located on an artificial island in Osaka Bay and serves the Kansai region of Japan, which includes Osaka, Kyoto, Kobe, and Nara. It is the main international gateway to western Japan and handles a large volume of flights from Europe and elsewhere. The airport is connected to Osaka's city centre by train (the Haruka limited express to Kyoto and Shin-Osaka, or the JR Kansai Airport line to Namba and Tennoji).

For discussion: Have you ever arrived at an airport in a country you didn't know? What was your first impression — of the airport, or of what you could see beyond it?

Japanese Convenience Stores (コンビニ, Konbini)

Convenience stores — primarily the chains 7-Eleven, FamilyMart, and Lawson — are a distinctive feature of daily life in Japan. Unlike convenience stores in many other countries, Japanese konbini are known for the quality and variety of their food: freshly made onigiri, sandwiches, hot foods, ready meals, and seasonal items that are frequently updated. They are typically open 24 hours, located on almost every street corner in cities and towns, and serve as combined food shop, ATM, postal service, bill payment point, and printing station.

The onigiri Leonardo buys at the airport is a typical first encounter: cheap, filling, and surprisingly good. Many visitors to Japan describe their first konbini onigiri as unexpectedly enjoyable.

For discussion: Does your country have a version of the convenience store? How does it compare to what is described here? Is there a food from your country that visitors are often surprised to enjoy?

Dotonbori and Osaka's Street Culture

Dotonbori (道頓堀) is one of Osaka's most famous districts — a canal-side entertainment area running through the Namba neighbourhood. It is known for its dense concentration of restaurants, bars, and enormous illuminated signs, including the famous Glico Running Man sign and the Kani Doraku mechanical crab (the one Leonardo photographs). Osaka has a strong reputation in Japan for food culture — Osakans use the expression kuidaore (食い倒れ), meaning 'eat until you drop', as a point of local pride.

The mechanical crab belongs to the Kani Doraku restaurant chain, which specialises in crab dishes. The sign is so well-known that photographing it has become a tourist ritual. Leonardo photographs it slightly against his own judgement, 'because it seemed like the thing to do' — a small, self-aware moment about how tourism shapes behaviour.

For discussion: Is there a landmark or image from your own city or country that tourists always photograph? Do you photograph it yourself? What does it mean to do something 'because it seemed like the thing to do'?

Japanese Naming Conventions

As noted in the Language Focus section, Japanese names are typically given in family-name-first order (surname first, given name second). In formal or polite contexts, people are addressed by their family name plus an honorific suffix. Using someone's given name without permission implies closeness or informality that may not yet be established — and in some contexts can feel presumptuous.

The chapter's ending — where Leonardo suspects he has made a mistake with Yuzuka's name — is likely about this. He has probably addressed her by her given name (Yuzuka) rather than her family name (Morita), which she has not invited. Hanako's use of 'Yuzu-chan' works because they are close friends; Leonardo using 'Yuzuka' with someone he has just met, who introduced herself by her full name in family-name-first order, is a different matter.

For discussion: What conventions exist in your language or culture around how you address people you have just met? Is there a formal/informal distinction (for example, using tu vs Lei in Italian, or あなた vs 君 in Japanese)?

Registering as a Foreign Resident in Japan

Foreign nationals who stay in Japan for more than three months are required to register their address at the local city hall (市役所, shiyakusho) within 14 days of establishing a residence. This registration is linked to the residence card (在留カード, zairyu kado), which must be kept up to date whenever the holder moves. The residence card is also required for many practical steps: opening a bank account, signing a phone contract, and renting an apartment.

Yuzuka's advice — city hall, update the card, bring your passport — is accurate and reflects the standard experience of foreign arrivals to Japan. The steps are manageable but require knowing they exist, which is exactly the kind of practical knowledge that a local contact can provide.

For discussion: If a foreign person arrived in your city and needed to register with local authorities, what would the process look like? Is it straightforward? Would most people know how to help?

Sand Dunes and Pears: What Tottori Is Known For

Leonardo reflects that Tottori is known for 'sand dunes and pears'. The Tottori Sand Dunes (鳥取砂丘, Tottori Sakyū) are the largest sand dunes in Japan, stretching approximately 16 kilometres along the San'in coast. They attract around two million visitors per year and are Tottori's most famous landmark. Tottori Prefecture is also Japan's leading producer of nashi (梨), the Japanese pear — a round, crisp, juicy fruit with a mild flavour. It is different in texture and taste from the European pear, and is a popular gift and seasonal food in Japan.

For discussion: What is your region or country particularly known for producing or growing? Is it something you are proud of, or something you take for granted?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — Comfort in Anonymity

On the train from the airport, Leonardo notices that nobody looks at him, and finds this 'oddly comforting'.

- Why might anonymity — not being noticed — feel like a relief to someone in a new place?
- Is this feeling different from being in your home city, where people might also not know you?
- Do you prefer to be noticed or not noticed when you arrive somewhere new?

Discussion 2 — The Tourist Photograph

Leonardo photographs the mechanical crab at Dotonbori 'because it seemed like the thing to do'.

- What does it mean to do something 'because it seemed like the thing to do'? Is this a good reason or a bad one?
- When you travel, do you photograph things you genuinely want to remember, things everyone photographs, or both?
- Is there such a thing as an 'authentic' way to experience a new place, or is every experience valid?

Discussion 3 — Yuzuka

Yuzuka is not unfriendly. She shows up. She gives accurate, useful information. She offers to help again next week. But she is not warm — at least not yet.

- Do you think Yuzuka's behaviour is rude, or just honest? Is there a difference?
- Why might she have agreed to help even though she is clearly not enthusiastic about it?
- By the end of the chapter she says 'Welcome to Tottori' in a way that 'sounded even slightly warm'. Why might that one moment be significant?

Discussion 4 — What 'Organised' Means

When Hanako asks what Italy is like, Leonardo says: 'Different. Not as organised as here.' Hanako laughs and says: 'Tottori isn't organised. You should see Tokyo.'

- What do you think Leonardo means by 'organised'? What has he observed that gives him that impression?
- What do you think Hanako means when she says Tottori isn't organised? What might she be comparing it to?
- Is 'organised' a compliment or a criticism? Does it depend on who is saying it and why?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Orientation Tour (Groups of 3)

One student plays the newly arrived foreigner. One plays a local who is helping efficiently but somewhat reluctantly. One plays a friendlier local who adds warmth and commentary.

The group walks through an imaginary neighbourhood (or your real school neighbourhood). The reluctant guide gives essential practical information. The friendly guide adds colour and personality.

Focus on: Giving directions and practical information clearly. Showing reluctance through tone and word choice without being unkind. Finding the balance between helpful and warm.

Role Play 2 — The First Night Phone Call (Pairs)

Student A is Leonardo, calling home from Osaka on his first night in Japan. Student B is his mother, father, or brother Riccardo.

Leonardo has to describe where he is and how he feels — without worrying his family. Student B asks questions and tries to gauge how he is really doing.

Debrief: What did you leave out? What did you choose to include? Was there a gap between how Leonardo actually feels and what he says?

Role Play 3 — The Cultural Misunderstanding (Pairs)

Student A is from a culture where people are addressed by given name immediately. Student B is from a culture where surnames and formal address are standard until specifically invited otherwise.

They have just met. Student A uses Student B's given name. Student B is uncomfortable but doesn't want to make a scene. How does the conversation unfold?

Debrief: How did it feel to be addressed informally before you were ready for it? How did it feel to realise you had made an error? Is there a polite way to correct this kind of mistake?

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — First Night Message

Write the message Leonardo sends to the Florence Idiots group chat after meeting Yuzuka and Hanako. It should be in his voice — honest but not overdramatic, probably slightly tired and uncertain.

Then write Matteo's reply, Giovanni's reply, and Antonio's reply — each in their own voice (80–120 words total for the exchange).

Writing 2 — A Place Through New Eyes

Describe a place you know well — a neighbourhood, a town, a market, a beach — as if through the eyes of someone who has never been there before and has just arrived after a long journey. They notice things you no longer notice. They find things strange that you find normal.

Write 100–130 words. Use sensory details: sight, sound, smell. Include at least one moment of uncertainty or unfamiliarity.

Writing 3 — Yuzuka's Point of View

Rewrite the scene where Yuzuka and Hanako meet Leonardo at the hostel — but from Yuzuka's point of view. What is she thinking as she gives him the tour? What does she notice about him? Does she change her mind about anything during the hour they spend together?

Write 130–170 words. Stay in her voice. She is not unkind — but she is honest.

Writing 4 — The Notebook

Antonio gave Leonardo a notebook for writing observations and thoughts. After his first full day in Tottori, Leonardo sits on his hostel bed and writes his first entry.

Write the entry (100–140 words). It should include: one thing he observed, one thing he found difficult, one thing that surprised him, and one question he doesn't know the answer to yet.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 4: The Konbini

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 4 covers Leonardo's first month of actual life in Tottori. Four narrative threads run through it. First, the konbini job: Leonardo has been working evening shifts at FamilyMart for three weeks. He is competent at the work but notices that his Japanese is not improving — it is narrowing into a set of stock phrases, while most of his actual communication happens in English with his coworkers Vivek (Indian, agricultural science PhD student) and Eva (American, here because of her boyfriend's research post). Second, a bank letter Leonardo cannot read leads to a meeting with Yuzuka at a café. She solves the practical problem quickly, then addresses the naming issue from Chapter 3 directly and without fuss — he should call her Morita-san. She also, unexpectedly, invites him into her friend group so he can practice Japanese. Third, Vivek invites Leonardo to see the Tottori coast and offers to give him a driving lesson first. Fourth, the driving lesson: in an empty parking lot, Leonardo's European reflex to use his left foot causes him to slam both feet on the brake. The resulting moment of shared laughter is the chapter's emotional centre — the feeling of beginning to belong somewhere.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 4.

Activity 1 — Getting a Job Abroad

Imagine you are spending a year in another country on a working holiday visa. You need to find a part-time job. Think about:

1. What kind of job would you look for? What would be your priorities — money, language practice, experience, flexible hours?
1. What challenges might you face that you would not face in your home country?
1. How would you feel at the end of your first week in a job where you barely spoke the local language?

Compare your answers with a partner. Are your priorities similar or different?

Activity 2 — Language Plateaus

Many language learners experience a 'plateau' — a period when they feel like they have stopped improving, even though they are still using the language every day.

1. Have you ever experienced this in English, or in any other language you have studied?
1. What do you think causes a plateau? Is it a problem with effort, or something else?
1. What strategies might help someone push through a plateau and start improving again?

Note to teacher: This activity directly prepares students for a key theme of Chapter 4 — the difference between using language and improving in it. Students may have strong personal examples from their own English learning.

Activity 3 — Manual vs Automatic

If you drive, or know someone who drives: what is the difference between a manual (stick shift) and an automatic car? If you don't drive yet, ask someone who does, or discuss what you know.

1. Which is more common in your country — manual or automatic cars?
1. What do you think would be strange or difficult about switching from one to the other?
1. Have you ever had to do something in a slightly different way than you were used to, and found your body doing the old thing automatically? What happened?

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 4.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
nikuman	noun (Japanese)	A steamed bun with a meat filling, typically pork, sold warm in Japanese convenience stores. The name combines niku (meat) and man (bun). A common hot snack, particularly popular in colder months. <i>"He had learned how to operate the steamer for nikuman."</i>
shift (work)	noun	A fixed period of time during which an employee works. A shift worker's hours rotate — for example, a morning shift, an afternoon shift, or an evening/night shift. <i>"He had been working the evening shift, four days a week, six to midnight."</i>
to narrow (language)	verb (used figuratively)	To become more limited in range or scope. In the context of language learning, to use fewer and fewer different structures, becoming more automatic but less flexible. <i>"His Japanese wasn't getting better. It was getting narrower."</i>
to restock	verb	To refill shelves or storage with fresh supplies of goods. <i>"Leonardo was restocking the refrigerated section when Vivek emerged from the stock room."</i>
onsen	noun (Japanese)	A Japanese hot spring bath, fed by geothermal water. Onsen towns (温泉街, onsen-gai) are resorts built around natural hot springs and are a significant part of Japanese leisure culture. Bathing in an onsen typically follows specific rules of etiquette. <i>"Mountains, coast, onsen towns. It's worth seeing."</i>
automatic (transmission)	adjective / noun	A type of car gearbox that changes gears automatically, without a clutch pedal or manual gear-changing by the driver. The opposite is a manual (or 'stick shift') car, which requires the driver to operate a clutch and change gears manually. <i>"Cars here are automatic. And if you learned on a manual, you're going to have a problem."</i>
clutch (pedal)	noun	In a manual-transmission car, the foot pedal on the left that must be pressed to change gears. There is no clutch pedal in an automatic car, which is the source of the joke in the chapter. <i>"Your left foot is going to look for a clutch that isn't there."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
existential	adjective	Relating to questions of existence, meaning, and purpose — particularly the kind of big questions about what life is for and what you should do with it. <i>"You show up, you do the job, you go home. No existential crisis required."</i>
to declare (something) good enough	verb phrase	To officially state — sometimes with authority, sometimes with mild irony — that a standard has been reached and further improvement is not necessary right now. <i>"By the end of it, he could drive an automatic without actively thinking about it, which Vivek declared good enough."</i>
jellyfish season	noun phrase	The period in summer — typically July to September in Japan — when jellyfish appear in significant numbers in coastal waters. In parts of the Sea of Japan, jellyfish blooms can make swimming unpleasant or mildly painful. It is a real and regularly discussed consideration in Japanese coastal leisure. <i>"Good for swimming, pity jellyfish season has started."</i>
to settle in	phrasal verb	To gradually become comfortable and at home in a new place — to stop feeling like a newcomer and start feeling like a resident. <i>"Leonardo thought: this is what it feels like to be settling in."</i>
lease	noun	A legal agreement to rent property for a fixed period. The document signed between a landlord and a tenant. In Japan, leases for apartments are formal documents and often require a guarantor. <i>"Bring your residence card and your lease."</i>

Quick Check — Sentence Completion

Complete each sentence with the correct word or phrase from the glossary. You may need to change the form.

- After three months in the new city, she had finally started to _____. She knew which café had the best coffee and which bus to avoid.
- The job involved _____ the shelves every morning before the store opened to customers.
 - He drove a manual car his whole life and found the _____ surprisingly difficult at first — his left foot kept reaching for something that wasn't there.
 - The apartment looked perfect, but she read the _____ carefully before signing — she had heard that some landlords added unexpected fees.
 - His vocabulary was expanding, but his spoken Italian was _____ — he used the same basic sentences in every situation.
 - It's not a perfect solution, the committee _____ it _____ for now.

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Character Profiles

Chapter 4 introduces two new characters. Complete the profile table using information from the chapter.

	Vivek Sethi	Eva Mills
Nationality	_____ _____	_____ _____
Why in Tottori	_____ _____	_____ _____
How long in Japan	_____ _____	_____ _____
Relationship to the job	_____ _____	_____ _____
Attitude to Tottori	_____ _____	_____ _____
One memorable quote	_____ _____	_____ _____

Activity 2 — Sequence and Cause

Put these events in the correct order (1–7), then for each event write one sentence explaining why it happens.

- ___ Leonardo and Vivek practice driving in an empty parking lot.
- ___ Yuzuka tells Leonardo he should call her Morita-san.
- ___ Leonardo notices his Japanese is getting narrower, not better.
- ___ Leonardo's left foot slams into the brake pedal.
- ___ Yuzuka invites Leonardo into her friend group.
- ___ A bank letter arrives that Leonardo cannot understand.
- ___ Vivek proposes a trip to Iwami beach.

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. What exactly does Leonardo mean when he says his Japanese is 'getting narrower'? Give examples from the chapter.
2. Why does speaking English with Vivek and Eva make Leonardo's Japanese problem worse, even though it is not their fault?
3. How does Yuzuka bring up the naming issue? What does her approach tell us about her character?
4. Vivek says about his job: 'You show up, you do the job, you go home. No existential crisis required.' What does he mean? Why might this be exactly what Leonardo needed to hear — or not what he needed?
5. The chapter ends: 'Slowly. One embarrassing mistake at a time.' What does this tell us about how Leonardo has changed since Chapter 1?

abc LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — The Language of Routine

The chapter opens with Leonardo describing what he has learned to do at work. The language is deliberately repetitive and list-like to mirror the repetitive nature of the job:

"He had learned how to operate the steamer for nikuman, how to arrange the onigiri so the labels all faced forward, and how to say 'Would you like a bag?' in a way that sounded natural even when he had said it two hundred times already that shift."

- How does the structure of this sentence reflect what it is describing? Look at the use of 'how to' and the parallel structure.
- The phrase 'even when he had said it two hundred times already that shift' — what does the word 'even' add here? Try removing it. What changes?
- Write three sentences in the same style, describing something you do repeatedly at school, at home, or at work. Use 'how to' at least once and create a sense of repetition through structure.

B — Describing Attitudes Without Judging

The chapter introduces Vivek and Eva very briefly but gives us a clear sense of both. Notice how each is described without the narrator judging their attitude:

Vivek

"He was patient, competent, and seemed to genuinely like working at a convenience store in a way Leonardo could not quite understand."

Eva

"She was simply very aware that she was in a small city on the Sea of Japan when she could have been in San Francisco."

- What is Vivek's attitude to the job? What is Eva's? Are either of them wrong?
- The phrase 'in a way Leonardo could not quite understand' (for Vivek) is interesting. It does not criticise Vivek — it locates the gap in Leonardo. Why is this a better choice than saying 'Leonardo found this strange'?
- Write two short character descriptions (3–4 sentences each) of people with contrasting attitudes to the same situation, without judging either of them. Let the reader form their own opinion.

C — Spoken vs Written English: The Phone and the Café

Chapter 4 contains two quite different kinds of dialogue: the text message exchange and the face-to-face café conversation with Yuzuka. Compare them:

Text messages	Face-to-face café
1. Short, functional. 1. No full sentences. 1. No punctuation or lowercase. 1. Topic only — no small talk. 1. Time and place arranged with minimum words.	1. Full sentences. 1. Pauses, hesitations, indirect approaches. 1. More complex ideas (naming, friendship, feeling foolish). 1. Tone shifts — efficient, then slightly warmer. 1. Things said and unsaid both matter.

- Look at Yuzuka's text messages. What do they tell us about her personality, even in three lines?
- In the café, Yuzuka says: 'I should have told you earlier. But you kept doing it and I didn't want to make it weird.' What does this reveal about her? Is it easier to say this face-to-face or in a message? Why?
- Write the bank letter scene as a text exchange instead of a café meeting. What information can be conveyed? What cannot? What changes about the relationship?



CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes relevant to Chapter 4, written for any reader regardless of background.

The International FamilyMart

FamilyMart is one of Japan's three major convenience store chains (alongside 7-Eleven and Lawson). Like other Japanese konbini, it is open 24 hours and offers a wide range of foods, services, and products. FamilyMart has historically employed a relatively high proportion of foreign part-time workers compared to some other sectors, partly because konbini work does not require advanced Japanese — a limited set of phrases, combined with a point-of-sale system, can be sufficient for basic customer interactions.

The 'FOREIGNERS WELCOME' sign in the chapter reflects a real phenomenon in some Japanese businesses, particularly in areas with universities that attract international students or in regions that have struggled with labour shortages. Tottori, as Japan's least populous prefecture, has faced demographic challenges that have made it more open to foreign workers in some sectors than larger, more competitive urban markets.

For discussion: Would a sign saying 'FOREIGNERS WELCOME' feel welcoming or slightly unusual to you? Does the intention matter more than the wording?

Onsen Culture in Japan

Onsen (温泉) — geothermal hot spring baths — are a central feature of Japanese leisure and travel culture. Japan sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire and has thousands of natural hot springs across the country. San'in (the region including Tottori) has several well-known onsen towns.

Bathing in an onsen typically involves specific etiquette: washing thoroughly before entering the communal bath, no swimwear in traditional onsen (bathers are unclothed), no tattoos in many establishments (though this is changing), and a general expectation of quiet and respect. Day-trip onsen (日帰り温泉, higaeri onsen) are also popular for those who want the experience without an overnight stay.

For discussion: Does your country have a tradition of communal bathing or hot spring bathing? What are the social rules or etiquette around it? How does the experience compare to what you know about onsen?

Manual vs Automatic Cars in Europe and Japan

The driving lesson scene rests on a genuine cultural difference: in most of continental Europe (including Italy), manual-transmission cars have historically been the norm, and most people learn to drive on a manual car. In Japan, the situation is reversed — automatic-transmission cars have become dominant, and many Japanese drivers have never driven a manual.

When a driver trained on a manual switches to an automatic, the left foot — which is habituated to pressing a clutch pedal — has nothing to do. The reflex to press it anyway is very common, and pressing the left side of the brake pedal with the left foot while the right foot is also on the brake produces exactly the sudden stop the chapter describes. This is a well-known experience among European drivers in Japan, and Vivek's anticipation of it is both friendly and accurate.

For discussion: Have you ever had your body do something automatically that was wrong in a new context? (For example: reaching for a light switch in the wrong place, or pressing the wrong button on an unfamiliar device.) How did it feel?

The Concept of 'Honest Work'

Vivek's attitude to his konbini job — 'It's honest work. You show up, you do the job, you go home. No existential crisis required.' — reflects a particular philosophy about the value of work that does not require you to find it meaningful or fulfilling. This is different from the more common idea in career discourse that work should be a source of identity, passion, and self-expression.

In many cultures, especially among young educated people, there is social pressure to be doing something that 'matters' — something that aligns with your identity or ambitions. A graduate student working a konbini shift might seem underdirected to some. Vivek's cheerful contentment with the job — his genuine liking of it — quietly challenges that assumption.

For discussion: Do you think work needs to be meaningful or fulfilling to be valuable? Is there something appealing about work that simply 'gets done'? Would you be happy doing a job you liked but that didn't feel important?

Jellyfish Season in the Sea of Japan

Japan's coastal waters, particularly the Sea of Japan coast, experience significant jellyfish blooms in summer — typically from July through September. The most commonly encountered species are not highly dangerous but can cause unpleasant stings. Nomura's jellyfish (エチゼンクラゲ, echizen kurage), one of the world's largest jellyfish species, occasionally appears in large numbers in the Sea of Japan and can disrupt fishing operations. For swimmers, the main concern is the moon jellyfish and other smaller species.

Vivek mentioning jellyfish season as a mild disappointment about the Iwami beach trip is a typical local-knowledge observation — the kind of thing a resident knows and a tourist would not.

For discussion: What seasonal factors affect outdoor activities in your region? Are there things that are only possible (or advisable) at certain times of year?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — Using a Language vs Learning It

Leonardo is using Japanese every day at work, but he is not improving. He is becoming more automatic, not more fluent.

1. Is this a realistic description of how language learning can go wrong? Have you experienced something similar?
1. What is the difference between using a language and learning it? Can you do one without the other?
1. Yuzuka's solution — bringing him into her friend group — is social, not academic. Do you think this is likely to help? Why or why not?

Discussion 2 — 'No Existential Crisis Required'

Vivek likes his konbini job. He is a graduate student in agricultural science. He is not confused about what he is doing with his life. The two things coexist comfortably.

1. Why might Leonardo find this hard to understand?
1. Is it possible to be genuinely content with work that is simple and repetitive? What would that contentment look like?
1. Is Leonardo's uncertainty about the future (from Chapter 1) compatible with Vivek's approach? Or are they opposites?

Discussion 3 — The Driving Lesson

The driving lesson is the chapter's lightest moment — but it is also described as the point when Leonardo feels he is 'settling in'.

1. Why would a moment of embarrassment and shared laughter feel like belonging?
1. What does Vivek's willingness to take Leonardo out for a practice run tell us about him?
1. Can you think of a moment in your own life when something going wrong actually helped you feel more at home somewhere?

Discussion 4 — Eva's 'It's Temporary. That Helps.'

Eva's attitude to Tottori is summed up in two short sentences: 'It's fine. It's temporary. That helps.'

1. What does this tell us about how Eva is experiencing her time in Japan?
1. Is 'it's temporary' a healthy attitude or a way of not engaging with where you are?
1. How is Eva's relationship to Tottori different from Leonardo's? Who is making better use of their time there, and by what measure?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Café Meeting (Pairs)

Student A plays Leonardo. Student B plays Yuzuka. Re-enact the café scene, but extend it: after the naming issue is resolved, Yuzuka asks Leonardo more questions about his life in Tottori — how the job is going, whether he has explored the city, what he misses about home.

Student A answers honestly, including uncertainties. Student B responds in character — efficient, occasionally dry, but genuinely interested underneath.

Focus on: Admitting a mistake gracefully. Asking questions that feel genuine rather than polite. Giving real answers rather than comfortable ones.

Role Play 2 — Teaching Something You Know (Pairs)

Student A has a skill or piece of local knowledge that Student B doesn't have. Student A's job is to teach or explain it — including the part where Student B will probably make a predictable mistake.

The catch: Student A must let Student B make the mistake before correcting it, like Vivek does.

Debrief: Was it hard to let someone make a mistake you could see coming? How did it feel on Student B's side? Was the laughter a good teaching moment or a bad one?

Role Play 3 — The Welcome That Wasn't Planned (Groups of 3-4)

One student (Student A) is a foreigner who has recently arrived in the group's city or school. The others are locals who have been asked by a mutual contact to include Student A in their group. They didn't particularly choose this.

Play out the first meeting — maybe a café, a study session, or a club meeting. The locals vary in their enthusiasm. Student A tries to be useful and interesting without being annoying.

Focus on: Making someone feel included without making it feel forced. Being a good guest. The difference between being tolerated and being welcomed.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Job in Six Phrases

Leonardo's konbini work is captured in a few key phrases: 'Irasshaimase', 'Would you like a bag?', 'Do you want it heated?' — the words that have become automatic.

Think of any job, real or imagined — your own, a parent's, a character's — and write a paragraph (80–100 words) describing it through the phrases, actions, and small routines that define it. Use the same technique as the chapter: let the repetition build in the structure.

Writing 2 — The Short Character

Eva gets only a paragraph in this chapter, but she is immediately distinct. Write a short character description (80–100 words) of someone in a similar situation: a person who is somewhere they didn't quite choose, for reasons connected to someone else, and who has made a quiet peace with it — or hasn't.

Do not judge the character. Just describe them.

Writing 3 — The Mistake That Helped

Write a short scene (120–160 words) in which a mistake — something going wrong, something embarrassing — turns out to be the moment when two people properly connect. The mistake should be specific and physical (something that happens, not just something said). The connection should feel earned, not forced.

You can use Leonardo and Vivek or invent your own characters.

Writing 4 — A Letter Home

Write the email or letter Leonardo sends home to his family after his first month in Tottori (130–170 words). He describes the job, the people he has met, and one thing that surprised him. He is honest but not dramatic. He does not want his parents to worry — but he also does not want to perform contentment he doesn't entirely feel.

Think about what he chooses to include and what he leaves out.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document • Chapter 5: Moving In

Level: B1+ / B2 • All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 5 is a chapter about belonging — or the beginning of it. Two things happen. First, Yuzuka meets Leonardo at the Aeon mall and offers him her brother Toma's empty room in the family house: cheaper, closer to work, and the kind of genuine immersion he came to Japan for. The offer is practical and slightly uncomfortable on both sides, but Leonardo accepts. At Mos Burger he meets the rest of Yuzuka's friend group properly: Ao (sharp, playful, immediately entertained by the situation) and Shio (Ao's cousin, calmer, amused). The teasing about Leonardo 'moving in with Yuzu-chan' is both funny and a little pointed, and Yuzuka's increasing exasperation is handled with dry comedy. Second, the move happens: Leonardo arrives at the Morita house, meets Yuzuka's parents (Mizuko, warm; Shoichi, politely formal), and settles into Toma's room. The chapter's final section describes the first week — the rhythms of a family home, the small adjustments of living with people rather than around them — and ends with Leonardo feeling, for the first time, like he has a place at the table. The chapter is the pivot point of the novel's first half: from visitor to resident.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 5.

Activity 1 — Living with a Family

Imagine you are going to spend a year in another country. You have two housing options:

Option A

A small apartment near the centre. Your own space. No house rules. More expensive. No built-in social contact.

Option B

A room in a local family's house. Cheaper. Rules about noise and mealtimes. Daily interaction with the family. Language practice every evening.

- Which would you choose? Why?
- What would be the hardest thing about Option B?
- What would be the most valuable thing about Option B?

Note to teacher: There is no right answer here. The goal is to get students thinking about trade-offs between comfort, independence, and immersion before they encounter Leonardo making exactly this choice.

Activity 2 — Being Introduced to a Friend Group

Think about a time you joined a group of people who already knew each other well — a new class, a new club, a new job. Or imagine this situation.

- What is it like to be the newcomer in an established group?
- What makes a group easy to join? What makes it difficult?
- Is there a difference between being accepted and being welcomed?

Now discuss: what are the signs that you are genuinely part of a group, rather than just being tolerated?

Activity 3 — The Language of the Home

In many cultures, home life has its own rituals and language — things said when you arrive, when you leave, when you eat. For example:

- In Japan, people say 'tadaima' when they arrive home and 'okaeri' in response.
- In many Italian families, Sunday lunch is a significant shared ritual with its own expectations.
- In some households, mealtimes are the main opportunity for family conversation.

Describe one ritual or habit from your home or family culture that a visitor would not immediately understand. Explain what it means and why it matters. Compare with a partner.

 GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 5.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
genkan (玄関)	noun (Japanese)	The entrance area of a Japanese home — typically a small tiled or stone-floored space just inside the front door where shoes are removed before stepping up into the living area. The genkan is an architectural and cultural feature of Japanese houses and many traditional buildings. <i>"Yuzuka took off her shoes in the genkan and gestured for Leonardo to do the same."</i>
tadaima / okaeri	phrase (Japanese)	Tadaima (ただいま) means 'I'm home' — the standard phrase said when returning home. Okaeri (おかえり), short for okaeri nasai, means 'welcome back' — the standard response. These exchanges are a deeply embedded daily ritual in Japanese households. <i>"'Tadaima.' A woman's voice answered from inside. 'Okaeri.'"</i>
to impose	verb	To place an unwanted or inconvenient burden on someone, usually by taking up their time, space, or resources without being clearly invited to. <i>"I don't want to impose." / "You're already imposing. This just makes it more efficient."</i>
immersive	adjective	Providing deep, total involvement in an environment or experience. In language learning, 'immersive' refers to being surrounded by the target language and culture in daily life, not just studying it in a classroom. <i>"The idea of living with a Japanese family was exactly the kind of immersive experience he had come to Japan for."</i>
prickly	adjective (informal)	Easily irritated or sensitive; likely to respond sharply if approached the wrong way. Not unfriendly in intention, but guarded or defensive in manner. <i>"She was still prickly. But she was less prickly than she had been."</i>
to navigate	verb (used figuratively)	To find your way through a complex or unclear situation — to manage competing expectations, social rules, or unfamiliar dynamics. <i>"He was not entirely sure how to navigate this."</i>
sentimental	adjective	Expressing or feeling more emotion about something than the situation might seem to require — often used critically to mean unnecessarily emotional or soft. <i>"Don't get sentimental. It's weird."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
Mos Burger	noun (proper)	A Japanese fast food chain founded in 1972. Mos Burger is known for using fresher, higher-quality ingredients than some global chains. Its name comes from 'Mountain, Ocean, Sun'. It has branches across Japan and several other Asian countries and is a popular meeting spot for students and young people. <i>"They walked through the mall and emerged into the food court. Mos Burger occupied one corner."</i>
to budget for	verb phrase	To plan and set aside a specific amount of money for a particular expense. If something is 'more than you budgeted for', it costs more than you anticipated. <i>"The rent on his current apartment was more than he had budgeted for."</i>
manga (漫画)	noun (Japanese)	Japanese comic books or graphic novels. Manga are read right-to-left and are published in a wide range of genres for all ages. They are a central part of Japanese popular culture and are widely read by children and adults alike. <i>"A bookshelf mostly empty except for a few manga volumes and a baseball trophy."</i>
miso soup (味噌汁, misoshiru)	noun	A traditional Japanese soup made from miso paste (fermented soybean paste) dissolved in dashi (a light stock, typically made from dried fish and kelp). It is served as part of most traditional Japanese meals and is especially common at breakfast and dinner. <i>"Rice and miso soup and whatever else she had made — grilled fish, simmered vegetables, occasionally curry."</i>
simmered	adjective / past participle	Cooked slowly in liquid at a low temperature, just below boiling. Simmering is a common technique in Japanese home cooking, used to prepare vegetables, fish, and tofu in a flavoured broth. <i>"Rice and miso soup and whatever else she had made — grilled fish, simmered vegetables."</i>

Quick Check — True Understanding

For each word or phrase, write one sentence showing you understand not just the definition but the context in which it is used. Your sentence should make the meaning clear without using the word itself.

1. genkan
2. tadaima / okaeri
3. to impose
4. prickly
5. sentimental

Extension: 'You're already imposing. This just makes it more efficient.' — explain the logic of this sentence. Why is Yuzuka's argument unusual, and why does it work?

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — The Friend Group: Who's Who

By the end of the Mos Burger scene, Leonardo has met Yuzuka's three friends. Complete the table.

Name	Relationship to Yuzuka	Personality (2-3 words)	One thing they say or do that shows this
Ao	_____ _____	_____ _____	_____
Shio	_____ _____	_____ _____	_____
Hanako	_____ _____	_____ _____	_____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

1. Tomoko wrote to Yuzuka's mother without telling Leonardo. T / F / NM
2. Toma is Yuzuka's younger brother. T / F / NM
3. Ao and Shio are sisters. T / F / NM
4. The Morita house is near Teramachi. T / F / NM
5. Shoichi Morita works at the same university as Vivek. T / F / NM
6. Leonardo brought very little luggage with him to Japan. T / F / NM
7. Yuzuka's room is on the same floor as Toma's room. T / F / NM
8. Mizuko cooks dinner most nights. T / F / NM
9. Shio teases Yuzuka more than Ao does. T / F / NM
10. By the end of the first week, Leonardo feels completely at home. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- Why does Yuzuka say the offer is a favour to her family, not just to Leonardo? Do you believe her? Does it matter?
2. What two things stop Leonardo from immediately agreeing to move in? Are these reasonable concerns?
 3. How does the teasing at Mos Burger make Leonardo feel? Find evidence in the text.
 4. The Morita house is described through smell, sound, and temperature before Leonardo meets anyone. What do these details suggest about the house and family?
 5. The chapter ends: 'He had a place at the table. It was strange. But it was starting to feel like his.' What does 'a place at the table' mean here — literally and figuratively?

A — The Rhythm of Dialogue: Teasing and Deflection

The Mos Burger scene is essentially a long comedy exchange in which Ao and Shio tease Yuzuka about Leonardo moving in. The dialogue has a very specific rhythm. Look at this pattern:

Ao: "Wait. You're moving in with Yuzu-chan?"

Yuzuka: "It's not like that."

Ao: "It sounds exactly like that."

Yuzuka: "He's moving into Toma's room. It's completely normal."

Ao: "Is it, though?"

1. Identify three techniques Ao uses to keep the teasing going without being openly rude. (Think about question tags, echoing someone's words, implying without stating.)
2. How does Yuzuka try to shut down the conversation? What techniques does she use? Why don't they work?
3. Write a short dialogue (8–10 lines) in a similar style: one character teasing another about something, with the second character trying to deflect. The teasing should be friendly but persistent.

B — Describing a Place Through Senses

When Leonardo arrives at the Morita house, it is described before any character speaks:

"The house smelled like cooking — something with soy sauce and ginger — and the interior was cool and dim after the bright August heat outside."

This sentence uses three senses: smell, temperature, and light. It also uses contrast (cool and dim / bright August heat) to make the interior feel like an arrival into something different.

1. What does this description tell us about the house and the family before we meet anyone?
2. Find another moment in the chapter where a place is described through sensory detail. What does the detail convey?
3. Write a 3–4 sentence description of a place you know well — a kitchen, a classroom, a market — using at least two senses and one contrast. Do not name the place or describe it directly. Let the details do the work.

C — 'It's just a room' vs 'It's more than that'

When Leonardo thanks Yuzuka for the room, this short exchange happens:

"Thank you," he said.

Yuzuka shrugged. "It's just a room."

"It's more than that."

"Don't get sentimental. It's weird."

1. Why does Yuzuka say 'It's just a room'? What is she protecting — herself, Leonardo, or something else?
2. What does Leonardo mean by 'It's more than that'? What is the room more than?
3. Yuzuka's response ('Don't get sentimental. It's weird.') closes the conversation. Why is this a more interesting way to end the exchange than simply agreeing with Leonardo? What does it tell us about her?
4. In English, we sometimes deflect genuine emotion with humour or dismissal. Write three examples of sentences that do this — where the surface meaning is casual but the underlying feeling is something warmer.



CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes relevant to Chapter 5, written for any reader regardless of background.

The Genkan: Where Inside Meets Outside

The genkan (玄関) is one of the most distinctive features of Japanese domestic architecture. It is an entryway — typically with a lower tiled or stone floor — where shoes are removed before stepping up into the main living area of the house. In Japanese culture, the distinction between inside and outside extends to the concept of clean (uchi, 内, inside) and unclean (soto, 外, outside): shoes carry the outside world into the home, and removing them is both practical hygiene and a symbolic transition.

Slippers are usually provided for guests at the genkan. Separate toilet slippers are typically kept in the bathroom. The rule is clear and automatic for Japanese residents; for foreign guests, the genkan is often the first cultural adjustment required.

For discussion: Is there an equivalent boundary or ritual in your own home or culture? What areas of your home would you consider 'inside' in a similar sense — places where outdoor shoes would not be appropriate?

Tadaima and Okaeri: The Language of Coming Home

The exchange of tadaima (ただいま, 'I'm home') and okaeri (おかえり, 'welcome back') is one of the most embedded daily rituals in Japanese family life. Both phrases are said to the house as much as to any particular person — calling out to whoever might be there. The response is almost automatic, and its absence can feel like something is missing.

For Leonardo, this small exchange on his first arrival is significant: it places him inside the household routine from the first moment. He is not a guest who knocks and waits; he is someone who enters and is answered.

For discussion: Are there fixed phrases in your language that function as daily rituals of arrival or departure? What happens when they are not said — does something feel incomplete?

Japanese Home Cooking and Meal Structure

A typical Japanese home-cooked dinner (and often breakfast) follows a traditional structure sometimes called ichiju sansai (一汁三菜): one soup and three sides, served with rice. The soup is usually miso soup. The sides might include grilled fish, simmered vegetables (nimono), tofu, pickles, or egg dishes. This is not a rigid rule — many modern Japanese families eat more casually — but it reflects an aesthetic and nutritional philosophy that has shaped Japanese food culture for centuries.

Mizuko's nightly cooking — rice, miso soup, grilled fish, simmered vegetables, occasionally curry — is a realistic and recognisable picture of Japanese home food. The 'occasionally curry' is a small realistic detail: Japanese curry (カレー, kare) is one of the most popular home dishes in Japan, quite different from South Asian curries, and completely standard weeknight fare.

For discussion: What does a typical home-cooked dinner look like in your culture? Is there an equivalent of the ichiju sansai structure — a standard meal 'template'? What dishes would be on the table most evenings?

Homestay Culture in Japan

Staying with a Japanese family as a foreign resident — whether as a language student, working holiday participant, or exchange student — is a recognised and common arrangement in Japan. For the family, hosting a foreign guest can bring rental income, a sense of contribution, and sometimes genuine cross-cultural exchange. For the guest, it typically provides the fastest path to functional Japanese and to understanding daily life rather than tourist life.

The arrangement in the chapter — Yuzuka's mother offering her absent son's room to a foreign young man she knows indirectly through family — is realistic and not unusual. The chain of connection (Leonardo → Tomoko Fujisawa → Mizuko Morita → the offer) reflects the importance of personal networks (人脈, jinmyaku) in Japanese social life: things often happen through introductions and relationships rather than formal channels.

For discussion: Would you be comfortable hosting a foreign student or young person in your home? What would make the arrangement work well? What might make it difficult?

Manga and Baseball in Japanese Youth Culture

Toma's room contains 'a few manga volumes and a baseball trophy' — a small but accurate portrait of a typical Japanese young man's room. Baseball (野球, yakyu) is Japan's most popular team sport and has deep roots in school culture: most secondary schools have baseball clubs, and the national high school baseball tournament (甲子園, Koshien) is one of Japan's most widely watched sporting events. A baseball trophy in a teenager's room is unremarkable and familiar.

Manga, similarly, are read across all ages and all social groups in Japan. A bookshelf with a few manga volumes — alongside schoolbooks, trophies, and other ordinary objects — is a completely natural detail of a young person's room.

For discussion: What objects would you expect to find in a typical teenager's room in your country? What would they tell a visitor about the culture?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — The Offer

Yuzuka's offer is practical, slightly reluctant, and ultimately generous. She frames it as a favour to her family ('It's weird having it empty'), as practical for Leonardo ('You're already a nuisance. This just makes it more efficient.'), and avoids framing it as kindness.

- Why do you think Yuzuka avoids framing it as kindness? What would change if she said 'I want to help you'?
- Is it easier to accept help when it is framed as practical rather than generous? Why might that be?
- Leonardo hesitates even though the offer is clearly beneficial. What does his hesitation reveal about him?

Discussion 2 — The Teasing

Ao immediately reads the situation as potentially romantic and teases Yuzuka relentlessly. Yuzuka denies everything and gets increasingly exasperated.

- Is Ao's teasing funny? Is it fair? Does the distinction matter?
- What is Ao actually doing — is she genuinely trying to embarrass Yuzuka, or is the teasing a form of affection?
- How does Leonardo handle being in the middle of a teasing conversation that is partly about him?

Discussion 3 — The First Week

The final section of the chapter describes Leonardo learning the rhythms of the Morita household: meals, schedules, bathroom timing, the television habits of Mizuko and Shoichi.

- What is the difference between learning facts about a place and learning its rhythms? Which takes longer?
- Leonardo feels both 'awkward' and 'warm' at the tea-table conversation with Yuzuka's parents. How can something be both of these at once?
- 'As someone who had a place at the table.' What does belonging feel like in this chapter? Is it a sudden realisation or a gradual one?

Discussion 4 — What Leonardo Brought with Him

When Yuzuka sees how little Leonardo has — two bags and a backpack — she is slightly surprised. He explains: 'I didn't bring my entire life.'

- What does it mean to bring your entire life somewhere? What would you bring if you were going for a year?
- Is travelling light a practical choice, a philosophy, or both?
- By the end of the chapter, does Leonardo seem to have the right amount of stuff, or not enough?

ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Offer (Pairs)

Student A is Yuzuka. Student B is Leonardo. Re-enact the conversation at the mall, but extend it: Leonardo asks more questions — about the house rules, about Yuzuka's parents, about what she actually thinks of the arrangement. Yuzuka answers honestly but in character.

Focus on: Asking questions that feel genuine. Giving answers that are useful without being over-generous. Negotiating an arrangement that is slightly awkward for both sides.

Role Play 2 — First Dinner (Groups of 3-4)

Students play the Morita family dinner on Leonardo's first evening: Mizuko, Shoichi, Yuzuka, and Leonardo. The conversation is in English (as in the chapter, a mixture of Japanese and careful English — but rendered here all in English for classroom purposes).

The parents ask questions. Yuzuka occasionally translates or steps in. Leonardo answers carefully. Everyone is trying to be polite. Some things get lost in translation.

Debrief: What was easy to talk about? What was harder? What do you do when a conversation stalls? Did anyone feel like an outsider — and if so, how did they manage it?

Role Play 3 — Meeting the Friends (Groups of 4-5)

Re-enact the Mos Burger scene with different characters: one student is the newcomer being introduced to a group of established friends. The others already know each other well.

One member of the group teases the person who brought the newcomer. The newcomer tries to make a good impression. The others react with different levels of warmth.

Focus on: What it feels like to be assessed by people who are close friends with someone you barely know. How to be welcoming without being overwhelming. How to include someone without making them feel like a project.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — A Room That Was Someone Else's

Toma's room is described through the objects left behind: a few manga volumes, a baseball trophy, an empty bookshelf, plain walls. These things tell us about Toma without him appearing in the chapter.

Write a description of a room that was previously someone else's (80–110 words). The previous occupant should be visible only through the objects left behind — you should be able to form an impression of them from the details. Do not describe the person directly.

Writing 2 — The House in Your Words

Rewrite the moment when Leonardo arrives at the Morita house for the first time (from 'The house smelled like cooking...' to '...and the interior was cool and dim') from a different point of view: Mizuko's. What does she notice about her new guest as he steps into the genkan? What is she hoping for? What is she uncertain about?

Write 100–130 words in the first or third person.

Writing 3 — The Weekly Message

It is the end of Leonardo's first week at the Morita house. He sends a longer message than usual to the Florence Idiots group chat, describing the week.

Write the message (120–160 words). Include: one moment that was unexpectedly good, one moment that was awkward or confusing, and one observation about the family that he couldn't explain to them but can explain to his friends.

Writing 4 — House Rules

Every household has its rules — some written, most unspoken. Yuzuka summarises the Morita house rules in one sentence: no noise after eleven, clean up after yourself, let Mizuko know if you're not eating at home.

Write the unspoken rules of a household you know (real or invented) — the things that everyone understands but nobody has ever said out loud. Then write a paragraph (80–100 words) explaining why these unspoken rules exist and what happens if they are broken.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 6: Autumn

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 6 is the novel's most lyrical chapter so far — it traces Leonardo's deepening integration through the autumn months (September, October, November), organised around three quietly significant moments. First: the ongoing texture of household life, language improvement, and the growing friendships with Ao's group and with Shota (Hanako's five-year-old brother, who has attached himself to Leonardo with the uncomplicated logic of small children). Second: a Sunday outing to a handmade soba restaurant in Wakasa, deep in the autumn mountains, during which Leonardo follows an entire family conversation in Japanese for the first time — and only notices after the fact. On the viewpoint above the valley, he thinks of his uncle's farm in Tuscany and feels something fall into place. Third: the opening of the snow crab season in November, a local event of genuine civic excitement, covered by NHK and taken seriously by everyone. Leonardo watches the broadcast with the Morita family and cannot understand why a crab matters this much — until he connects it to *olio nuovo*, the first pressing of olive oil on his uncle's farm in Tuscany, which is also an annual event with ceremonial weight. Mizuko says: 'That's exactly it, that's the same thing.' This is the chapter's emotional and thematic centre: Leonardo understanding Japan not through Japan, but through something he already carries from home.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 6.

Activity 1 — Seasonal Events That Matter

In many cultures, certain things happen once a year and are treated as genuinely significant — not just as occasions to buy things, but as events people look forward to, prepare for, and celebrate with real feeling. Think of an example from your own culture, family, or region — something seasonal that people treat with more seriousness or excitement than an outsider might expect.

- What is the event or thing?
- Why does it matter to people? What makes the 'first' of the year special?
- How would you explain its importance to someone who had never encountered it?

Share your example with a partner. Are there similarities between your examples, even if the events are very different?

Activity 2 — The Sound of Silence

Chapter 6 contains this moment: 'The temple bell rang at seven every evening. Leonardo had stopped hearing it — until one evening it didn't ring, and the silence where it should have been woke him up like a missing step on a staircase.'

Before reading the chapter, discuss:

- Have you ever noticed something only when it stopped? A sound, a smell, a routine, a person?
- What does it mean to 'stop hearing' something that is always there?
- What does this kind of noticing tell us about how well someone knows a place?

Activity 3 — Understanding Through Comparison

When we encounter something completely unfamiliar, we often understand it by connecting it to something we already know. For example:

- Explaining cricket to someone who knows baseball: 'It's like baseball but the batter stands in the middle...'
- Explaining a food: 'It's like a pancake, but savoury and filled with vegetables.'
- Explaining a cultural event: 'It's like Christmas, but in summer, and instead of gifts you set off fireworks.'

Think of something from your own culture — a food, a celebration, a tradition — that would be difficult to explain to someone from another country. How would you explain it by comparison? What would you compare it to?

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 6.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
Momijigari (紅葉狩り)	noun (Japanese)	Literally 'maple hunting' or 'leaf hunting' — the Japanese tradition of going out to appreciate the autumn foliage, particularly the red and gold of maple trees. A seasonal practice with deep cultural roots, similar in spirit to hanami (cherry blossom viewing) in spring. <i>"'Momijigari,' said Mizuko. 'Leaf viewing. Momiji is the maple leaf. Gari is more like... hunting, or gathering.'"</i>
noren (暖簾)	noun (Japanese)	A short split fabric curtain hung in the doorway of a Japanese shop or restaurant to indicate that the business is open. Noren typically display the name or symbol of the establishment. Entering through the noren is a signal that you are welcome. <i>"A small wooden building with a noren curtain in the doorway."</i>
soba (蕎麦)	noun (Japanese)	Japanese noodles made from buckwheat flour, served either in a hot broth or cold with a dipping sauce. Soba noodles are thinner than udon and have a distinctive earthy flavour. Handmade soba (teguchi soba / teuchi soba) is considered a craft and a delicacy. <i>"The soba arrived in lacquered bowls, clear broth, the noodles slightly thicker than Leonardo expected."</i>
lacquered	adjective	Coated with lacquer — a glossy, hard varnish used to finish and protect wooden objects. Japanese lacquerware (漆器, shikki) is a traditional craft with a long history. Lacquered bowls, chopsticks, and trays are common in Japanese dining. <i>"The soba arrived in lacquered bowls."</i>
snow crab (松葉ガニ, matsuba-gani)	noun	A species of large crab caught in the Sea of Japan, particularly off the Tottori and San'in coast. Known in Japanese as matsuba-gani (in the Tottori/San'in region). The snow crab season begins in November and runs through March. The opening of the season is a major event in coastal communities, celebrated with considerable ceremony. <i>"The snow crab arrived in November. Leonardo had noticed the posters in the supermarket windows the week before."</i>
NHK (日本放送協会)	noun (proper)	Japan Broadcasting Corporation — Japan's national public broadcaster, equivalent to the BBC in the UK or RAI in Italy. NHK operates television and radio channels and is funded primarily by a mandatory receiving fee paid by households with televisions. <i>"On the day the first crab of the season landed, a crew from NHK arrived."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
olio nuovo	noun (Italian)	Literally 'new oil' in Italian — the freshly pressed extra virgin olive oil produced at the first pressing of the autumn harvest. Olio nuovo is unfiltered and intensely flavoured, quite different from the olive oil sold in shops throughout the year. It is traditionally celebrated in olive-growing regions of Italy, particularly Tuscany and Umbria, with tasting events called frantoiate. <i>"Every November, when the oil is pressed for the first time — we call it olio nuovo, new oil — the whole family comes."</i>
stroke order	noun phrase	The correct sequence of strokes used to write a Chinese or Japanese character. Stroke order is standardised and considered important in Japanese writing education — characters written out of sequence may look similar but are considered incorrect, particularly in formal or educational contexts. <i>"Mizuko occasionally looking over his shoulder and correcting his stroke order without being asked."</i>
subtle	adjective	Not immediately obvious; delicate and understated rather than bold or loud. In the context of flavour, a subtle food does not overwhelm the palate but rewards careful attention. <i>"The flavor was quiet and deep, the kind of food that did not announce itself, subtle and satisfying."</i>
reverence	noun	Deep respect and admiration, often with a sense of something being sacred or precious. Treating something with reverence means approaching it with careful, almost ceremonial respect. <i>"Chef Saito held a snow crab with the reverence of someone holding something that had been worth waiting for."</i>
to settle (figurative)	verb	To move into a stable, comfortable position — used figuratively to describe a feeling, an understanding, or an idea becoming clear and fixed, like sediment falling to the bottom of water. <i>"That felt different. Better than different. Like something settling."</i>
fleet (fishing)	noun	A group of boats or ships operating together, especially commercially. A fishing fleet is the group of fishing vessels associated with a particular harbour or region. <i>"Conversations in the konbini about the fleet, the first catch, the harbour, the prices."</i>

Quick Check — Word Relationships

For each pair of words, explain the connection between them as they appear in the chapter. Write one or two sentences.

1. momijigari — maple trees
2. noren — soba restaurant
3. olio nuovo — snow crab
4. reverence — first catch of the season
5. stroke order — Mizuko

Extension: The word 'subtle' is used to describe the flavour of the soba. Find two other things in the chapter that could also be described as subtle — not necessarily food. Explain why.

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Three Moments of Autumn

Chapter 6 is structured around three significant moments across the autumn months. Complete the table.

Moment	What happens	What Leonardo learns or feels	One key detail or quote
The soba trip in October	_____	_____	_____
The viewpoint above the valley	_____	_____	_____
The snow crab season opening	_____	_____	_____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

1. The refrigerator incident happens on Leonardo's first morning at the Morita house. T / F / NM
2. Mizuko corrects Leonardo's kanji stroke order at the kitchen table. T / F / NM
3. The soba restaurant has been run by the same family for forty years. T / F / NM
4. Shota is Hanako's younger brother. T / F / NM
5. Shoichi is the one who suggests the trip to Wakasa. T / F / NM
6. The soba noodles are thinner than Leonardo expected. T / F / NM
7. The NHK film crew covers the crab season opening from the harbour. T / F / NM
8. Leonardo explains olio nuovo to Yuzuka during the crab broadcast. T / F / NM
9. Yuzuka agrees that the crab and the olive oil are exactly the same thing. T / F / NM
10. The chapter ends with Leonardo feeling he has completely understood Japan. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- What does the refrigerator incident reveal about how the Morita household works — and about how Mizuko communicates?
2. How does Leonardo know his Japanese has improved? What specific evidence does the chapter give?
 3. Why is the moment at the viewpoint significant? What does Leonardo mean when he says 'something fitted into place'?
 4. Why does Leonardo find it difficult to explain why the snow crab matters so much to people in Tottori? What is he missing?
 5. At the end of the chapter, Mizuko says 'That's exactly it, that's the same thing.' What does she mean? Do you agree with her?



LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Implied Rules: What Is Said and What Is Meant

The refrigerator incident is a small masterpiece of implied communication. Look at this exchange:

"Sorry," said Leonardo.

'It's fine,' said Mizuko, which meant: it is fine now because now you know."

The narrator translates what Mizuko's words actually mean — not their surface meaning, but their real communicative intent.

1. Find one more example in the chapter where what someone says is different from what they mean. Write the sentence and then write what you think the speaker actually means.
2. In English, we often say 'It's fine' to mean several different things. List at least four things 'It's fine' can mean depending on context, tone, and situation.
3. Write a short dialogue (6–8 lines) in which every line means something slightly different from what it says on the surface. Include a note after each line explaining the real meaning.

B — The Simile as a Bridge

Chapter 6 is built around the idea of understanding something new through something already known. The chapter uses two extended comparisons: the missing temple bell, and the olio nuovo / snow crab parallel.

The bell: "...the silence where it should have been woke him up like a missing step on a staircase."

The crab / the oil: "He had not explained Japan to himself using Japan. He had found the shape of it in something he already carried."

1. What makes the 'missing step on a staircase' simile effective? Why is this comparison better than saying 'the silence surprised him'?
2. The olio nuovo explanation works because both things share the same structure: a first of the season, waited for, with ceremonial weight, irreducible to its ingredients alone. What other cultural events or foods share this structure? Give two examples from your own culture.
3. Write a simile or short comparison (3–5 sentences) that explains something from your own culture using something from a completely different culture. The comparison should reveal the logic of the thing, not just describe it.

C — The Language of Gradual Change

Chapter 6 describes slow, cumulative change — Leonardo improving without noticing, the seasons shifting, the family rhythms becoming familiar. The language reflects this:

"September passed in the shape of work and language study and the slow deepening of routines."

"His Japanese was improving. Not dramatically. But the phrases at work had started to feel like a floor rather than a ceiling, and he was beginning to build on top of them."

"He had not noticed, exactly, when that had started to be true."

1. 'The phrases at work had started to feel like a floor rather than a ceiling.' Explain this metaphor in your own words. What changed?
2. 'He had not noticed, exactly, when that had started to be true.' Why is the word 'exactly' important here? What would change if it were removed?
3. Write a short paragraph (60–80 words) describing a gradual change — in a person, a place, a relationship, or a skill — using the language of slow, cumulative shift. Avoid dramatic moments. Focus on the in-between.

 CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 6, written for any reader regardless of background.

Momijigari: Appreciating the Autumn Leaves

Momijigari (紅葉狩り) — the practice of going out to view and appreciate the autumn foliage — is one of Japan's most deeply embedded seasonal traditions. The word momiji refers specifically to the Japanese maple, whose leaves turn vivid red in autumn; gari derives from kari, meaning hunting or gathering (also used in hanami, cherry blossom viewing, and takenoko-gari, bamboo shoot gathering).

The tradition has roots in Heian-period court culture (794–1185), where aristocrats would compose poetry in response to the colours of autumn. Today, momijigari is a popular leisure activity for families, couples, and groups who travel to famous viewing spots — mountain temples, parks, river valleys — to walk among the coloured leaves. Weather services publish momiji forecasts (similar to cherry blossom forecasts) predicting peak colour by region.

The Wakasa area of Tottori Prefecture, in the mountains inland from the coast, has forests of maple, beech, and oak that produce particularly vivid colour in late October.

For discussion: Is there an equivalent seasonal practice in your own culture — a time when people specifically go out to experience the natural environment at a particular moment in the year? What is the mood associated with it?

Handmade Soba as Craft

Soba (蕎麦, buckwheat noodles) is one of Japan's oldest and most respected foods, with regional variations across the country. In mountain regions like Tottori's interior, buckwheat has been grown for centuries, and handmade (teuchi, 手打ち) soba is considered a skilled craft — some practitioners spend years perfecting the technique of kneading, rolling, and cutting the dough to an even thickness.

A soba restaurant run by an elderly couple who have been making noodles for forty years is not unusual in rural Japan. These establishments — often small, seasonal, and reservation-only — are highly regarded by food enthusiasts and are sometimes the primary reason for visiting an otherwise unremarkable location. The connection between the noodles, the water, the buckwheat variety, and the specific hands that made them is considered part of the flavour.

For discussion: Are there foods in your culture that are considered a craft — where the skill of the maker is as important as the ingredients? What makes a handmade food different from the same food made industrially?

The Snow Crab Season in Tottori

The snow crab (in the San'in region known as matsuba-gani, 松葉ガニ) is one of Tottori's most prized products. The season opens on November 6th each year and runs through March. The first day of the season — when the fishing fleet brings in the first catch — is a significant local event, covered by news media including NHK and attended by celebrity chefs, food critics, and enthusiasts from across Japan.

The crab is expensive: a top-grade matsuba-gani can sell for tens of thousands of yen. Premium specimens are tagged with a blue tag (青タグ, ao-tag) certifying their origin, and some are auctioned at the harbour. The reverence with which the first crab of the season is received reflects a broader Japanese cultural appreciation for seasonal food (旬, shun) — the idea that the best version of a food exists for a limited time and should be appreciated fully while it is available.

For discussion: Are there foods or agricultural products from your region that have a specific season, and that people treat as a genuine event? Do people travel or pay a premium for the first or best version of the season?

Olio Nuovo: The First Olive Oil of the Year

In the olive-growing regions of central Italy — particularly Tuscany, Umbria, and Lazio — the olive harvest typically takes place in October and November. The first cold pressing of the harvest produces olio nuovo (new oil): unfiltered, vivid green, intensely flavoured, and quite different from the olive oil available in shops throughout the year. It is traditionally eaten on bread — bruschetta — with nothing else added, because the oil itself is the thing to be tasted.

Harvests and tastings are community events in many villages and towns. Families who have olive groves press their own oil; neighbours and relatives come to taste it; local restaurants serve it on the day of pressing. The event is both agricultural and social, and the transition from olio nuovo to the ordinary olive oil of the rest of the year is genuinely felt.

Leonardo's explanation of olio nuovo to Yuzuka — and Mizuko's immediate recognition of the parallel — is the chapter's central moment: a point of genuine cross-cultural understanding reached not through explanation but through analogy.

For discussion: Have you ever understood something about another culture through something from your own? Or explained something from your culture by comparison to something from another? What made the comparison work?

NHK and Public Broadcasting in Japan

NHK (日本放送協会, Nippon Hōsō Kyōkai) is Japan's public broadcaster, established in 1925 and currently operating four television channels and multiple radio services. Like the BBC, it is funded by a receiving fee (受信料, jushinryō) rather than advertising, and is expected to provide impartial news, cultural programming, and public service content. NHK is widely respected in Japan for the quality and reliability of its journalism.

NHK regional bureaux cover local news and events with the same seriousness as national stories. A celebrity chef arriving for the crab season opening being covered by a local NHK crew is entirely realistic — regional food culture and seasonal events are important content for public broadcasting in Japan.

For discussion: Does your country have a national public broadcaster? What role does it play? Is there a difference between public broadcasting and commercial broadcasting in terms of what they cover and how?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — 'The Things Nobody Wrote Down in a Guidebook'

Leonardo learns the rhythms of the Morita household — the newspaper, the shower schedule, the temple bell — none of which appear in any guide to Japan.

- What is the difference between the Japan described in a guidebook and the Japan Leonardo is learning to live in?
- What are the 'things nobody wrote down in a guidebook' about your own home, city, or country? What would a foreigner need to know that no guide would tell them?
- Can you fully understand a culture without living inside it? What would you lose if you only read about it?

Discussion 2 — Shota

Shota, Hanako's five-year-old brother, attaches himself to Leonardo because he finds him interesting, and asks him: 'Why is your hair like that?'

- Why might a small child find Leonardo interesting in a way that adults do not express?
- Is there something valuable about the way children engage with people from different cultures, compared to how adults do?
- Leonardo says it's fine, and means it. Why might interactions with Shota be easier or more natural than interactions with adults?

Discussion 3 — Hunting vs Appreciating

When Leonardo says 'You hunt leaves,' Yuzuka corrects him: 'We appreciate them. It's different.' Leonardo asks how. Yuzuka explains: 'Hunting is about catching something. This is about looking.'

- Do you agree with Yuzuka's distinction? Is there a meaningful difference between hunting and appreciating?
- Leonardo then says: 'Catching the beauty with your eyes? And taking it back with you in your memories.' Yuzuka makes a face but says nothing. Why?
- Is there something in your culture that you 'appreciate' in this way — go somewhere specifically to look at something, without catching or taking anything?

Discussion 4 — The Bridge Between Cultures

The chapter's climax is the olio nuovo / snow crab connection. Yuzuka says: 'It's not the same thing though.' Leonardo replies: 'No, but it helped me understand.'

- Do you agree with Yuzuka that they are not the same thing? What is different about them?
- Does understanding something by comparison make the understanding incomplete, or is it better than no understanding at all?
- Mizuko says 'That's exactly it, that's the same thing.' Yuzuka says it's not. Who is right? Does it matter?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Soba Lunch (Groups of 4)

Play the lunch at the soba restaurant: Mizuko, Shoichi, Yuzuka, and Leonardo. The conversation covers volleyball, work, beaches, driving — ordinary things. But Leonardo is following all of it.

The challenge: Student A (Leonardo) must genuinely try to follow the conversation and contribute at the right moments. The others should speak at a natural pace and not slow down for him — but also not exclude him.

Debrief: What did it feel like to follow a conversation that wasn't designed for you? What helped? What made it harder?

Role Play 2 — Explaining the Inexplicable (Pairs)

Student A has to explain a seasonal event, food, or tradition from their own culture to Student B, who is from a completely different background. Student A cannot just describe it — they must find something in Student B's culture to compare it to.

Student B's job is to ask questions until they genuinely understand why the thing matters — not just what it is.

Focus on: The difference between describing and explaining. Finding the right comparison. Knowing when the comparison breaks down.

Role Play 3 — The Broadcast (Groups of 3–4)

The Morita family is watching the NHK snow crab coverage. Leonardo watches and understands about seventy percent. He asks why everyone is so excited.

Students play the family trying to explain the crab season to Leonardo — and Leonardo gradually building his understanding until he makes the olio nuovo connection.

The key moment: the connection should arise naturally from the conversation, not be delivered as a speech. Students should reach it together.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Thing That Matters Once a Year

Choose something from your own culture, region, or family that happens once a year and is treated with genuine importance — not a commercial holiday, but something rooted in the season, the land, or a community tradition.

Write a description (100–130 words) for someone who has never encountered it. Explain not just what it is but why it matters — what is lost when it is over, and what makes the first one of the year different from all the others.

Writing 2 — The Conversation at Dinner

Rewrite a section of the soba lunch scene from Shoichi's point of view. Shoichi is described as politely distant — but he asks Leonardo whether he has tried driving outside the city, which leads to a real conversation. What is Shoichi thinking as he watches Leonardo follow the family's Japanese? What does he notice that he doesn't say?

Write 100–130 words in the third person.

Writing 3 — Two Things That Are the Same and Not the Same

Choose two things from two different cultures — foods, traditions, events, objects — that share an underlying logic or feeling but are not the same thing.

Write a short essay (130–160 words) explaining both, making the comparison, and then acknowledging where the comparison breaks down. Model your writing on the olio nuovo / snow crab exchange: find the similarity, name it clearly, then be honest about what it does not capture.

Writing 4 — A Month in One Paragraph

'September passed in the shape of work and language study and the slow deepening of routines.' This single sentence covers an entire month.

Write a paragraph (80–110 words) that covers one month of your own recent life using the same technique: compress the month into its shape — its recurring activities, its small changes, its texture. Do not list events. Find the pattern.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 7: O-Shōgatsu

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 7 covers the period from mid-December to early January — Christmas season and the Japanese New Year. It contains four narrative threads. First: Eva's last shift at the konbini. She is unambiguously glad to be going home, and her parting observation to Leonardo — 'figure out whatever you're not figuring out before you run out of time' — is blunt and kindly meant. Second: Toma's return from Tokyo for New Year's. He is warm, expansive, and direct — and he takes Leonardo out to an izakaya specifically to ask about his intentions toward Yuzuka. The conversation is honest, slightly funny, and ends with Leonardo passing what Toma calls the 'brother test'. Third: New Year's Eve and New Year's Day — the full sequence of o-shōgatsu traditions: osechi preparation, the 108 temple bells (joya no kane), toshikoshi soba, hatsumōde at the shrine, otoshidama, card games and television. Leonardo participates in all of it and texts both his family and the Florence Idiots group chat. He is homesick but glad to be there. Fourth: Toma's departure and its aftermath — the revelation that Leonardo has passed the brother test, that Toma called him oblivious, and Yuzuka's decision not to explain what he means. The chapter ends with Leonardo deciding not to think about it too hard — not yet, with six months still to go.

Note on the chapter title

The title 'O-Shōgatsu' is the Japanese New Year — but it also functions as a kind of marker: this is the chapter where Leonardo stops being a temporary resident and starts being, in a quiet way, part of the household. He receives otoshidama. He is included in every tradition. He forgets to feel like a guest.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 7.

Activity 1 — New Year's Around the World

New Year's is celebrated in different ways in different cultures — and even in the same country, different families may have very different traditions.

Describe what New Year's looks like in your family or culture. Consider:

- When does the celebration begin and end?
- Are there specific foods? What do they mean or represent?
- Are there rituals — things you must do, or must not do?
- Is it more of a family occasion or a social/public one?

Compare with a partner. What surprises you about their tradition?

Activity 2 — The 'Last Day' Feeling

Eva's last day at the konbini is described as having 'a particular brightness that came from knowing that in four days she would be on a plane to California.'

- Have you ever experienced a 'last day' feeling — the specific mood of knowing something is about to end?
- Is it possible to fully enjoy a last day, or does knowing it's the last one change it?
- Eva says she has been 'fine' for six months and is ready to be home. What is the difference between fine and happy?

Activity 3 — The Brother (or Sister) Test

In many cultures, when someone important in your life starts spending significant time with a new person, siblings or close family members may feel they have a right — or a duty — to assess that person.

- Is the 'brother test' (or equivalent) something that exists in your culture? What does it look like?
- Is it a form of protection, a tradition, or something else?
- How would you feel if someone you cared about had their new friend or partner assessed by their sibling?

Note to teacher: This activity prepares students for the izakaya scene without revealing its content. The question of what Toma is really asking — and what Leonardo really answers — is rich ground for post-reading discussion.

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 7. Many of them are specific to the Japanese New Year.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
o-shōgatsu (お正月)	noun (Japanese)	The Japanese New Year celebration, traditionally the most important holiday of the year. O-shōgatsu encompasses the last days of December and the first days of January and involves specific foods, rituals, family gatherings, and shrine or temple visits. Many businesses and shops close for the first few days of January. <i>Chapter title — the chapter covers the New Year period from late December through early January.</i>
osechi ryōri (おせち料理)	noun (Japanese)	Traditional Japanese New Year's food, prepared in advance and served in stacked lacquered boxes (jūbako) over the first days of the New Year. Each dish carries symbolic meaning — black beans (kuromame) for health and hard work, herring roe (kazunoko) for fertility, shrimp (ebi) for long life, and so on. Osechi is associated with the idea of giving the cook a rest over the holiday. <i>"Mizuko spent most of the day preparing osechi ryōri — the traditional New Year's food that would be eaten over the next few days."</i>
toshikoshi soba (年越しそば)	noun (Japanese)	Buckwheat noodles eaten on New Year's Eve in Japan, traditionally to mark the crossing from the old year into the new. The long noodles symbolise longevity and the hope for a long life. The custom is to eat them before midnight on December 31st, though some families eat them after the temple bells. <i>"Mizuko brought out toshikoshi soba — buckwheat noodles eaten for long life — and they sat around the table and ate."</i>
joya no kane (除夜の鐘)	noun (Japanese)	The New Year's Eve temple bell ringing. At midnight on December 31st, Buddhist temples across Japan ring their bells 108 times. The number 108 corresponds to the 108 earthly desires (bonnō) that Buddhism teaches cause human suffering. Ringing the bell once for each is believed to purify the old year and bring a clean start to the new one. <i>"Temples would ring their bells one hundred and eight times — once for each of the earthly desires that Buddhists believed caused suffering."</i>
hatsumōde (初詣)	noun (Japanese)	The first shrine or temple visit of the New Year — traditionally made on January 1st, 2nd, or 3rd. Hatsumōde involves making an offering, praying for good fortune in the year ahead, buying lucky charms (omamori), and drawing fortune slips (omikuji). Major shrines attract millions of visitors over the first three days of January. <i>"New Year's Day was hatsumōde — the first shrine visit of the year. The whole family went."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
otoshidama (お年玉)	noun (Japanese)	New Year's gift money given to children by parents, grandparents, and relatives, traditionally in a small decorated envelope (pochibukuro). The custom is a significant part of the New Year's celebration for children and is considered one of the highlights of o-shōgatsu. <i>"Toma handed him a small envelope. 'Otoshidama. New Year's money. Traditionally for children, but you're close enough.'"</i>
izakaya (居酒屋)	noun (Japanese)	A type of Japanese pub or casual restaurant, serving alcoholic drinks alongside small dishes of food. The atmosphere is relaxed and sociable, similar to a British pub or a Spanish tapas bar. Izakaya are common meeting places for colleagues, friends, and family. <i>"They walked to a small izakaya near the art museum. It was warm inside, crowded and loud."</i>
yakitori (焼き鳥)	noun (Japanese)	Grilled chicken skewers — a staple of izakaya menus. Different parts of the chicken are used, each skewered separately: breast, thigh, skin, liver, and so on. The word means 'grilled bird'. Yakitori restaurants and stalls are ubiquitous in Japan. <i>"They sat at the counter and ordered beer and yakitori."</i>
kotatsu (炬燵)	noun (Japanese)	A low table with an electric heater built into the frame underneath, covered by a thick blanket (futon) that traps the warmth. Sitters tuck their legs under the blanket to keep warm. The kotatsu is a quintessential feature of Japanese winter domestic life and is associated with comfort, family, and not wanting to get up. <i>"When Yuzuka came back, she found him sitting at the kotatsu in the tatami room."</i>
tatami (畳)	noun (Japanese)	Traditional Japanese flooring made from woven rush grass (igusa) over a rice straw core. Tatami rooms are a common feature of traditional Japanese homes and are used for sitting, sleeping (on futon laid directly on the floor), and receiving guests. The size of rooms in Japan is sometimes measured in tatami mats. <i>"She found him sitting at the kotatsu in the tatami room."</i>
diplomatic	adjective	Tactful and careful in what one says, particularly when trying to avoid causing offence or conflict. A diplomatic answer acknowledges a difficult situation without saying anything that might make things worse. <i>"'Fair. That's diplomatic.' Toma laughed."</i>
hundred-yen shop	noun	A Japanese variety store where most items are sold for 100 yen (roughly equivalent to a euro or dollar store). The most well-known chains are Daiso and Seria. Hundred-yen shops sell an enormous range of products and are popular for their affordability and surprisingly good quality in many categories. <i>"She arrived wearing a Santa hat that she had bought from the hundred-yen shop."</i>

Quick Check — The New Year in Order

Using the glossary entries, put the following o-shōgatsu elements in the order they appear in the chapter (some may happen simultaneously).

- ___ Hatsumōde (first shrine visit)
- ___ Osechi ryōri preparation begins
- ___ Toshikoshi soba at the table
- ___ Otoshidama given to Leonardo
- ___ The 108 temple bells at midnight
- ___ Card games and television

Now choose three of the glossary terms and write a sentence for each one explaining what it means to the people in the chapter — not just what it is, but what it represents or why it matters.

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Eva, Toma, and the Chapter's Four Movements

Chapter 7 is structured around four distinct sections. Match each description to the correct section of the chapter.

Descriptions	Sections
A. A farewell in a convenience store, with cake and an honest parting word.	1. Eva's last shift → ____
B. Traditions, bells, food, text messages, and a card game.	2. The izakaya conversation → ____
C. A frank conversation at a counter, over beer and skewers.	3. New Year's Eve and Day → ____
D. Snow, departure, and a word left unexplained.	4. Toma's departure → ____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

- Eva's boyfriend's research project ends in December. T / F / NM
- Vivek organises a farewell party for Eva at the konbini. T / F / NM
- Toma is described as having Yuzuka's eyes and Shoichi's smile. T / F / NM
- The izakaya where Toma takes Leonardo is near the station. T / F / NM
- At the shrine, Leonardo bows and prays even though he is not religious. T / F / NM
- The 108 temple bells ring at midnight on December 31st. T / F / NM
- Toma gives both Yuzuka and Leonardo otoshidama. T / F / NM
- Leonardo texts his parents before texting the Florence Idiots group chat. T / F / NM
- Giovanni asks whether Leonardo is homesick. T / F / NM
- Yuzuka explains to Leonardo what Toma meant by 'oblivious'. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. Eva says she has been 'fine' for six months and is ready to be home. What does this tell us about her experience compared to Leonardo's?
2. Eva's parting words to Leonardo are: 'Figure out whatever you're not figuring out. Before you run out of time. It's easier.' What do you think she means? What does she think he is not figuring out?
3. In the izakaya, Toma says: 'I believe you. Or I believe that you believe it, which is close enough.' What is the difference between these two things?
4. Why does Leonardo participate in hatsumōde even though he is not Buddhist or Shinto? What does this tell us about how he is approaching his time in Japan?
5. At the end of the chapter, Leonardo decides 'not to think about it too hard. Not yet.' What is he avoiding thinking about? Why does he avoid it?



LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Parting Words: What People Say When They Leave

Chapter 7 contains two departures — Eva and Toma — each of which ends with a specific set of words. Compare them:

Eva's farewell

"You, make sure you leave when your visa is up. Don't stay and go illegal. And figure out whatever you're not figuring out. Before you run out of time. It's easier."

Toma's farewell

"Take care of my room. Take care of my sister. [...] See you next time."

1. What is the tone of each farewell? What does each person choose to say with their final words?
1. Eva uses commands: 'make sure', 'don't stay', 'figure out'. Toma uses requests: 'take care of'. What does this difference in grammar reflect about their relationships with Leonardo?
1. Write a farewell speech (60–80 words) from one of these characters to Leonardo — but in a situation where they are leaving for good and can say anything. What would they choose to say?

B — The Izakaya Dialogue: Directness and Deflection

Toma is direct in a way that is different from any other character in the novel. He asks what he wants to know and says what he thinks. But Leonardo's answers are careful.

Toma: "You like her."

Leonardo: "She's a good person."

Toma: "That's not what I asked."

Leonardo: "She's a good person. She's been more patient with me than she probably should have been. I'm grateful for that."

Toma: "But you like her."

Leonardo: "As a friend. Yes."

1. Leonardo answers the question 'do you like her?' three times. How does each answer differ? Which answer is the most honest?
1. Toma says: 'I believe you. Or I believe that you believe it, which is close enough.' What does Toma understand about Leonardo that Leonardo does not understand about himself?
1. Write a short dialogue (8–10 lines) in which one person asks a direct question and the other consistently deflects — not lying, but not answering directly either. The reader should be able to tell what the real answer is.

C — The Text Messages: Register and Relationship

The chapter contains two text exchanges — with Riccardo and with the Florence Idiots group. Compare them:

With Riccardo (brother)	With the Florence group
• Short sentences. • Personal — about where he is and who he is with. • Quiet warmth ('Sounds nice.' / 'Maybe I'll visit.'). • Ends with an open invitation.	• More performative — sharing the experience. • Matteo immediately deflects with a joke (chopsticks). • Antonio asks the real question (what's it like?). • Giovanni asks the emotional one (are you homesick?).

1. What is the difference in tone between the Riccardo exchange and the group chat? What does each reveal about those relationships?
1. Matteo asks about chopsticks. Antonio asks what it's like. Giovanni asks if Leonardo is homesick. Each question is characteristic of the person asking it — explain how.
1. Write the next three messages in the group chat after 'I'm glad I'm here.' Each of Giovanni, Matteo, and Antonio sends one message. Stay in their voices.

 CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 7, written for any reader regardless of background.

O-Shōgatsu: The Japanese New Year

O-shōgatsu (お正月) is the most important holiday in the Japanese calendar — comparable in family significance to Christmas in Italy or Eid in Muslim-majority countries. It is a time when families come together, when businesses close, and when daily life pauses for reflection and renewal.

The celebration traditionally runs from January 1st to 3rd (sanganichi, 三が日), though preparations begin in late December. Key elements include: year-end cleaning (ōsōji, 大掃除), sending New Year's greeting cards (nengajō, 年賀状), preparing and eating osechi ryōri, visiting shrines or temples (hatsumōde), and exchanging otoshidama. The full sequence of o-shōgatsu is one of the most culturally distinctive experiences Japan offers, and participating in it with a Japanese family — as Leonardo does — is rare and considered a privilege.

For discussion: What is the most important family holiday in your culture? What are its rituals, foods, and obligations? What happens if you miss it or celebrate it differently from tradition?

Joya no Kane: 108 Bells for 108 Desires

The New Year's Eve bell-ringing (除夜の鐘, joya no kane) is one of Japan's most recognised sonic traditions. At midnight on December 31st, Buddhist temples ring their bells 108 times. The number comes from Buddhist teaching: there are said to be 108 earthly desires or afflictions (煩悩, bonnō) — variously enumerated, but including things like greed, anger, jealousy, and attachment — that cause human suffering. By ringing the bell 108 times, the temple symbolically drives out these afflictions from the old year.

NHK broadcasts the bell-ringing from famous temples across Japan, and many people gather at local temples to hear the bells live. The sound of the bell — deep, resonant, carrying far in the cold winter air — is widely associated with the transition into the New Year.

For discussion: Are there sounds in your culture that are specifically associated with a time of year or a transition? What is the effect of a shared sound — bells, fireworks, music — on a community?

Osechi Ryōri: Food with Meaning

Osechi ryōri (おせち料理) is one of the most elaborate expressions of Japanese food culture. The dishes are prepared in advance — often over several days — and packed into stacked lacquered boxes (jūbako). Each dish carries symbolic meaning: kuromame (black soybeans, 黒豆) represent health and diligence; kazunoko (herring roe, 数の子) represent a large family and fertility; ebi (shrimp, 海老) represent longevity — the shrimp's curved back resembles a bent old person; datemaki (sweet rolled omelette, 伊達巻) represents learning; kohaku kamaboko (red and white fish cake) represents good luck.

The tradition of preparing food in advance reflects the idea of giving the cook a rest over the holiday — everything is ready, so no cooking is required for the first few days of January. This is why Mizuko declines Leonardo's offer to help: the preparation is hers, the system is hers, and the result will speak for itself.

For discussion: Are there foods in your culture that carry symbolic meaning — where what the food represents matters as much as how it tastes? Do these foods appear at specific times of year?

Hatsumōde: The First Prayer of the Year

Hatsumōde (初詣) — the first shrine or temple visit of the New Year — is one of the most universally observed Japanese customs, participated in by people of all religious backgrounds, including those who do not consider themselves religious. Major shrines such as Meiji Jingu in Tokyo or Naritasan Shinshoji in Chiba attract millions of visitors over the first three days of January.

The typical sequence involves: approaching the shrine, throwing a coin (usually a 5-yen coin, considered lucky), ringing a bell (if present), bowing twice, clapping twice, bowing once more, and then praying silently. Many people also buy omamori (charms) for health, study, or traffic safety, and draw omikuji fortune slips. Leonardo's participation — bowing and praying despite being non-religious — is typical of how many Japanese people experience hatsumōde: as a cultural and social event as much as a religious one.

For discussion: Have you ever participated in a religious or cultural ritual that was not part of your own tradition? What did it feel like? Is it possible to participate respectfully without believing?

Otoshidama: New Year's Money

Otoshidama (お年玉) is one of the most eagerly anticipated elements of o-shōgatsu for Japanese children. The amounts vary by age and relationship, but it is considered generous to give 3,000–10,000 yen or more. The money is always given in a special envelope (pochibukuro).

Toma giving Leonardo otoshidama is a humorous and genuinely warm gesture — it places Leonardo explicitly in the 'family child' category rather than the 'adult guest' category. His instruction not to make it weird echoes the chapter's recurring theme of kindness being offered with practical rather than sentimental framing.

For discussion: Is there an equivalent in your culture of giving children money at a particular time of year? What does the gesture communicate? Is it purely practical, or does it carry other meanings?

The Kotatsu: Winter Comfort

The kotatsu (炬燵) is one of the most distinctive features of Japanese winter domestic life. It consists of a low table with a heating element underneath, covered by a thick blanket or futon. Sitters place their legs under the blanket to stay warm, and the combination of warmth, low seating, and shared space makes the kotatsu a social focal point in winter.

Sitting at the kotatsu is associated in Japanese culture with comfort, laziness (in an affectionate sense), and family closeness. The expression 'kotatsu de mikan' (kotatsu and mandarin oranges) captures the quintessential winter image: sitting under the warm blanket, eating seasonal fruit, watching television. The final image of the chapter — Leonardo and Yuzuka sitting at the kotatsu, watching a show neither of them cares about — is a picture of quiet, comfortable belonging.

For discussion: What is the equivalent object or space in your culture that represents domestic warmth and comfort — a place or thing associated with winter evenings at home? What do people do there?

Capodanno in Italy: A Different New Year

Leonardo tells Toma: 'We have a big dinner, sometimes again at midnight. Sometimes we go out. There are fireworks. But it's not structured. Not like this.'

Capodanno (New Year's Eve and Day) in Italy is indeed less formally structured than o-shōgatsu. The evening of December 31st (San Silvestro) typically involves a large dinner (cenone, the big supper) with family or friends, followed by celebrations at midnight — fireworks, champagne, and the tradition of wearing red underwear for good luck in the New Year. The following day, January 1st (Capodanno), is a public holiday, but the ritual content is much lighter than o-shōgatsu. There is no equivalent of osechi, no prescribed shrine visit, no symbolic bell-count. The Italian New Year is more about celebration and less about renewal through tradition.

For discussion: Leonardo says the Italian New Year is 'not structured'. Is structure a good thing in a holiday? What is gained and lost when a holiday has a precise sequence of rituals?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — 'Fine' vs Present

Eva has been 'fine' in Tottori for six months. Leonardo is something else — not clearly happy, not unhappy, but engaged. Eva is already mentally in California.

- Is 'fine' a good way to spend a year abroad? Is it enough?
- What is the difference between enduring an experience and having it?
- Is Eva's decision to go home a failure, or just a different kind of success?

Discussion 2 — The Brother Test

Toma takes Leonardo to an izakaya to ask him directly about his relationship with Yuzuka. He is charming about it, but the purpose is clear.

- Is the 'brother test' fair? Does Toma have the right to ask?
- Toma says: 'I believe you. Or I believe that you believe it, which is close enough.' What does this tell us about Toma's emotional intelligence?
- By the end of the evening, Leonardo feels he has 'passed some kind of test he hadn't known he was taking.' What did he pass?

Discussion 3 — Participating Without Believing

At hatsumōde, Leonardo bows and prays even though he is not religious. He does it anyway and 'thought about the year to come.'

- Is it possible to participate honestly in a ritual you don't believe in? Or is it always performance?
- Does it matter whether the ritual is religious or cultural? Is there a difference?
- What did Leonardo actually pray for, or think about? What does that tell us about where he is emotionally at this point in the novel?

Discussion 4 — 'Oblivious'

The chapter ends with Yuzuka saying: 'He also said you're oblivious.' Leonardo asks about what. Yuzuka says: 'He didn't say.'

- What do you think Toma means by oblivious? What is Leonardo not seeing?
- Why doesn't Yuzuka explain it? What does her choice not to say tell us about her?
- Leonardo decides not to think about it too hard, 'not when things were comfortable'. Is this wisdom or avoidance?

ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Last Shift (Groups of 3)

It is Eva's last shift. Leonardo and Vivek are working with her. The konbini is quiet.

Play the last hour of the shift: small talk, the cake, the farewell. Eva has something honest she wants to say to each of them before she leaves — one piece of advice, one observation. The others respond.

Focus on: What do you actually say to someone you worked alongside for months but were never really close to? What is the honest version of 'safe flight'?

Role Play 2 — The Izakaya (Pairs)

Student A plays Toma. Student B plays Leonardo. Replay the izakaya conversation — but this time, Leonardo is more honest, or Toma is more persistent, or both.

The scene should arrive somewhere true. At the end, both characters should know something they didn't know at the beginning.

Debrief: Was it harder to be direct (Toma) or to be honest (Leonardo)? At what point did the conversation become real rather than polite?

Role Play 3 — O-Shōgatsu Explained (Pairs or Groups of 3)

Student A has just returned from spending New Year's with a Japanese family. Student B (or B and C) has never experienced o-shōgatsu and wants to understand it.

Student A must explain: the osechi, the bells, the shrine visit, the otoshidama — and what each one felt like, not just what it was.

Focus on: The difference between describing a tradition and conveying why it matters. Student B should ask questions that push past 'what' toward 'why'.



WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Honest Farewell

Eva's parting words to Leonardo are unusually direct: 'Figure out whatever you're not figuring out. Before you run out of time. It's easier.'

Write the farewell Leonardo did not give Eva (80–110 words) — the thing he might have said if he had known it was the last time and had the words ready. It should be honest but kind. It should say something true about what she was like to work with and what he learned from her presence.

Writing 2 — Two New Years

Write a comparison (110–140 words) between how New Year's is celebrated in two different cultures — one of which should be your own. Focus not just on what happens but on the feeling and meaning of each: what does each tradition say about how that culture understands time, family, and renewal?

Use specific details. Avoid generalisations.

Writing 3 — The Group Chat: Three Voices

The chapter includes a group chat exchange after the New Year's bells. Continue the conversation: write 10–14 messages in which Giovanni, Matteo, and Antonio each respond to what Leonardo has said. Each character should sound like themselves.

Then add one final message from Leonardo — something he almost doesn't send, but does.

Writing 4 — The Kotatsu Scene

Rewrite the final scene of the chapter — Leonardo and Yuzuka sitting at the kotatsu, watching a show neither of them cares about — from Yuzuka's point of view.

What is she thinking? What has Toma's visit changed, if anything? What does she notice about Leonardo sitting across from her? (100–130 words)

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 8: Valentine's Day

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 8 is structured as a comedy of interpretation. Its subject — Valentine's Day in Japan — is also its method: a situation whose meaning depends entirely on cultural knowledge that Leonardo does not fully have, and which the people around him either cannot or will not clarify. Vivek gives Leonardo the framework (giri-choco vs honmei-choco) three days before the event. On the evening of the 13th, Leonardo comes home to find the kitchen smelling of chocolate and Yuzuka nowhere to be seen. On the 14th, Yuzuka gives him a carefully wrapped homemade box, quietly and privately, then retreats before he can respond. At the konbini, Vivek confirms the box is homemade but refuses to interpret further. The following day at the café, Ao and Shio conduct a gentle interrogation of Yuzuka, who deflects; they then tell Leonardo — in front of him — that she likes him, and immediately retract it. At dinner, Mizuko's use of 'the girls' sends Leonardo into further interpretive spiralling. The chapter ends in his room, looking at the box, unable to decide what it means, finding consolation only in the predictability of the temple bell. The chapter earns its comedy by taking Leonardo's overthinking seriously — the reader understands more than he does, and the gap between what is obvious and what he can bring himself to conclude is where all the humour lives.

Note to teacher: This chapter contains a romantic subplot that is handled with complete restraint — nothing is stated, everything is implied. The comedy comes from dramatic irony: the reader and most of the characters can see what Leonardo cannot. Students may want to 'solve' the mystery immediately; it is worth encouraging them to sit with the ambiguity, as the novel is doing the same thing deliberately.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 8.

Activity 1 — Valentine's Day: What It Means

Valentine's Day is celebrated in many countries, but not always in the same way. Before reading the chapter, discuss:

- How is Valentine's Day celebrated in your country? Who gives what to whom?
- Is it considered a romantic occasion, a commercial one, or both?
- Are there different levels of Valentine's gift — things that mean more or less depending on how they are chosen or made?

If you are familiar with Valentine's Day in Japan, briefly describe what you know. If not, what would you predict?

Activity 2 — Gifts and What They Mean

A gift can communicate something beyond its material value — care, thought, effort, affection. Think about:

- What is the difference between a store-bought gift and a handmade one, in terms of what the giver is communicating?
- Are there situations where a store-bought gift is more appropriate than a handmade one? Why?
- Have you ever given or received a gift whose meaning was ambiguous — where you weren't sure what it meant, or where you weren't sure your meaning was understood?

Activity 3 — When You Know and They Don't

In some stories — and in life — the reader (or the audience, or the friend group) knows something that the main character doesn't. This situation is called dramatic irony.

- Can you think of an example from a film, book, or real life where one person was the last to understand something that was obvious to everyone else?
- What does it feel like to be in that position — to know something someone else doesn't? Is it comfortable? Frustrating? Funny?
- Is it ever kind to not tell someone what you can see clearly?

Note to teacher: This activity prepares students for the dramatic irony structure of Chapter 8 — where Ao, Shio, Vivek, and the reader all understand the situation before Leonardo does. The question of whether to tell him is also part of the chapter.

 GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 8.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
Giri-choco (義理チョコ)	noun (Japanese)	Obligation chocolate — chocolate given on Valentine's Day out of social duty rather than romantic feeling. Typically store-bought and given to male colleagues, classmates, or friends. The word giri (義理) means duty or obligation; choco is short for chocolate. Giri-choco carries no romantic meaning and is considered a social courtesy. <i>"Most of it will be giri-choco. Obligation chocolate. It's just politeness. Store-bought, simple, means nothing."</i>
Honmei-choco (本命チョコ)	noun (Japanese)	Genuine chocolate — chocolate given on Valentine's Day to someone the giver has real romantic feelings for. Typically homemade, or at least carefully chosen and expensively bought. The word honmei (本命) means the real thing, or the favourite. Honmei-choco is a clear romantic signal. <i>"If it's not store-bought, it might be honmei-choco. Real chocolate. Homemade. That means something."</i>
White Day	noun (proper)	March 14th — one month after Valentine's Day. In Japan (and some other East Asian countries), White Day is the day when those who received chocolate on Valentine's Day give something back to the givers. Traditionally, the return gift should be worth roughly three times the value of what was received. Common gifts include white chocolate, marshmallows, or other sweets. <i>"White Day. March fourteenth. You give something back. Three times the value, traditionally."</i>
to corner someone	phrasal verb (informal)	To find or approach someone in a situation where they cannot easily avoid a conversation — to trap them, metaphorically, in order to say something important. <i>"Three days before Valentine's Day, Vivek cornered Leonardo in the stock room."</i>
to parse	verb (used figuratively)	Originally a grammar term meaning to analyse the structure of a sentence. Used figuratively to mean carefully analysing a situation or a piece of information, trying to work out its meaning or implications. <i>"Leonardo tried to parse this. The girls. Plural."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
obligation	noun	Something you feel you must do because of a social rule, a relationship, or a sense of duty — not because you particularly want to. An obligation is different from a choice. <i>"Obligation chocolate. It's just politeness. Store-bought, simple, means nothing."</i>
framework	noun	A set of rules, conventions, or cultural assumptions through which a situation is understood. A 'cultural framework' refers to the shared knowledge, values, and expectations of a particular group or society. <i>"I'm Punjabi. This isn't my cultural framework."</i>
to overthink	verb (informal)	To think about something too much, to the point where it becomes counterproductive — analysing a situation from every angle rather than simply responding to it. <i>"Don't overthink it." / "You're overthinking it." / "which was completely useless when you were already overthinking it."</i>
to dismiss (an idea)	verb	To decide not to consider or pursue a thought or option, usually quickly. To put it aside without further examination. <i>"He thought about asking Yuzuka directly, then immediately dismissed the idea. That would make it weird."</i>
plural	adjective / noun (grammar)	Referring to more than one person or thing. In grammar, the plural form of a noun is used for more than one (e.g. 'girls' rather than 'girl'). In the chapter, Leonardo focuses on the word 'girls' because the plural might — or might not — include him. <i>"The girls. Plural. Which meant Yuzuka had made chocolate for her friends."</i>
predictable	adjective	Behaving or happening in a way that is expected and consistent — the same way every time. Something predictable offers comfort or certainty because it does not surprise you. <i>"Outside, the temple bell rang, marking seven o'clock like it always did. Some things, at least, were predictable."</i>

Quick Check — Matching Meanings

Match each word or phrase on the left to the correct explanation on the right.

Words	Definitions
1. giri-choco	A. To analyse something carefully for meaning.
2. honmei-choco	B. Chocolate with real romantic intent, usually homemade.
3. to parse	C. The day when men give gifts back, one month later.
4. to overthink	D. The cultural rules and assumptions through which a situation is understood.
5. framework	E. To spend too much mental energy on a problem.
6. White Day	F. Chocolate given as a social courtesy, not romantic feeling.

Extension: The chapter uses the word 'predictable' in its final lines as a source of comfort. Why might predictability feel like a relief in this chapter specifically? What has been unpredictable?

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — What Does Each Person Know?

By the end of the chapter, different characters have different pieces of information. Fill in the table.

Character	What they know or suspect	Evidence from the chapter
Vivek	_____ —	_____ —
Ao & Shio	_____ —	_____ —
Mizuko	_____ —	_____ —
Hanako	_____ —	_____ —
Leonardo	_____ —	_____ —

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

1. Vivek explains the difference between giri-choco and honmei-choco before Valentine's Day. T / F / NM
2. Leonardo had already researched Valentine's Day in Japan before Vivek spoke to him. T / F / NM
3. Yuzuka gives Leonardo his chocolate in front of her mother. T / F / NM
4. Vivek says the box is definitely homemade. T / F / NM
5. Ao asks Yuzuka directly how long she spent making the chocolate. T / F / NM
6. Shota receives chocolate from all of Hanako's friends. T / F / NM
7. Ao and Shio tell Leonardo that Yuzuka likes him, then say they were joking. T / F / NM
8. At dinner, Mizuko refers to 'the girls', which Leonardo finds ambiguous. T / F / NM
9. Leonardo decides to ask Yuzuka directly what the chocolate means. T / F / NM
10. The chapter ends with Leonardo eating the chocolate. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

1. Why does Leonardo think Yuzuka's chocolate might not be giri-choco? List at least three pieces of evidence he uses.
2. Why does Vivek refuse to interpret the chocolate for Leonardo? Is this a reasonable position?
3. In the café scene, Hanako says 'It's just Valentine's Day. Everyone gives chocolate.' Ao and Shio clearly disagree — but they don't say why in front of Hanako. Why not?
4. At the end of the chapter, Leonardo goes through a list of people he could ask for advice and dismisses each one. What does this tell us about where he is emotionally?
5. The chapter ends with the temple bell. Why is this a satisfying ending for this particular chapter? What does the bell represent here?

abc LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Dramatic Irony: What the Reader Knows

Dramatic irony occurs when the reader (or audience) understands something that a character does not. Chapter 8 is built almost entirely on this device. The reader, like Ao and Shio, can see what Leonardo cannot.

Signs the reader can interpret that Leonardo cannot (or will not):

- The chocolate was homemade and carefully wrapped.
- Yuzuka gave it to him quietly, away from her mother.
- She left before he could respond.
- Ao and Shio exchanged glances during the café conversation.
- Yuzuka avoided answering how long it took.
- Mizuko said Yuzuka 'worked hard'.

1. What is the effect on the reader of knowing more than Leonardo? Does it create sympathy, frustration, amusement, or something else?
2. Find one moment in the chapter where Leonardo almost understands — where he gets close but pulls back. What stops him?
3. Write a short paragraph (60–80 words) describing a situation from the point of view of someone who can see the full picture, while the main character remains unaware. The gap between what the narrator sees and what the character understands is where the tension lives.

B — Indirect Communication: What Is Not Said

Chapter 8 is a masterclass in what characters do not say directly. Almost every important exchange involves information being communicated without being stated. For example:

What is said:

"This is for you. It's nothing special. Just accept it. Don't make it weird."

What is communicated:

I made this carefully. I am nervous about giving it to you. I do not want to be asked what it means.

1. Find two more examples from the chapter where what is said and what is communicated are significantly different. For each, write (a) the exact words used and (b) what you think the speaker is actually communicating.
2. Why do characters communicate indirectly? Is it about politeness, self-protection, or something else? Consider at least two different characters.
3. Write a short scene (8–10 lines of dialogue) in which two characters have an entire conversation about something important without ever naming the subject directly. A reader should be able to understand what the conversation is really about.

C — The Comedy of Overthinking

Leonardo's internal reasoning in this chapter is comic because it is both logical and completely useless. Follow his argument in the final section:

The chocolate might be giri-choco.
Except: Vivek said giri-choco is store-bought.
And: this is homemade.
And: Mizuko said Yuzuka worked hard.
And: Ao and Shio looked at each other like they knew something.
Therefore: it means something.
But: he doesn't know what.
Conclusion: give up and go to sleep.

1. The logic is correct, but Leonardo still cannot reach a conclusion. Why? What is he really afraid of concluding?
2. The word 'probably' appears several times in the chapter (and the novel). Find two instances and explain what function 'probably' serves in each case — what is it protecting Leonardo from?
3. Write Leonardo's internal monologue for the next morning — the first thing he thinks when he wakes up. Does he feel clearer, or is he exactly where he was the night before?



CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 8, written for any reader regardless of background.

Valentine's Day in Japan: A Different Tradition

Valentine's Day arrived in Japan in the 1950s primarily through the marketing efforts of confectionery companies, and it developed into something distinctively Japanese. In the standard Japanese tradition, it is women who give chocolate to men — not the reverse. The chocolate falls into recognised categories, of which giri-choco and honmei-choco are the most well-known.

Giri-choco (義理チョコ, obligation chocolate) is given to male colleagues, classmates, teachers, and friends as a social courtesy. It is typically bought rather than made, and its meaning is understood to be nil in terms of romantic feeling — it is simply good manners. Honmei-choco (本命チョコ, genuine-feeling chocolate) is given to someone the giver has real affection for. It is often homemade — the time and effort involved being part of the message — or at least very carefully chosen.

A third category sometimes mentioned is tomo-choco (友チョコ, friend chocolate) — chocolate given between female friends, which has become increasingly popular and blurs the category lines somewhat. Ao, Shio, and Hanako exchanging chocolate with each other is an example of tomo-choco.

For discussion: How is Valentine's Day celebrated in your country? Who gives what to whom? Is there a distinction between different kinds of gifts that carry different levels of meaning?

White Day: The Response

White Day (ホワイトデー) is celebrated on March 14th — exactly one month after Valentine's Day. On White Day, men who received chocolate on Valentine's Day are expected to give something back to the women who gave to them. The traditional gift is white chocolate, marshmallows, or other sweets, and the expected value is roughly three times what was received (sanbai gaeshi, 三倍返し — 'triple the return').

White Day originated in Japan in the late 1970s (reportedly invented by a confectionery company) and is also observed in Taiwan, South Korea, and parts of China. It does not exist in Europe or the Americas, where Valentine's Day is already a mutual exchange. The chapter mentions White Day as something Vivek will explain later — it remains relevant as the story moves into March.

For discussion: Does the expectation of a return gift (White Day) change the meaning of receiving something on Valentine's Day? Does knowing you will need to respond affect how you interpret the original gift?

Homemade vs Store-bought: Effort as Communication

Across many cultures, a homemade gift carries a different meaning from a purchased one — the investment of time and skill communicates something that money alone cannot. In the context of Japanese Valentine's Day, the homemade / store-bought distinction is codified and understood: honmei-choco is associated with making by hand, and the effort is part of the message.

This means that the wrapping, the care, and the visible labour are all part of the communication — not just what is inside the box. Vivek's certainty that the box is homemade, and his refusal to say more, reflects how clearly legible this signal is to anyone familiar with the convention.

For discussion: In your culture, is there a similar distinction between gifts that communicate effort and those that communicate simply having spent money? What kinds of gifts fall into each category?

Valentine's Day in Italy

In Italy, Valentine's Day (San Valentino) follows the more common European pattern: it is a romantic occasion celebrated between couples, with exchanges of gifts, flowers, and dinners. It is not traditionally a day for giving chocolate to colleagues or friends, and the giri-choco / honmei-choco distinction does not exist. For Leonardo, the framework Vivek explains would be genuinely foreign: in Italy, receiving chocolate on Valentine's Day from a woman would have a straightforward romantic reading, which is precisely why the Japanese version is so confusing to him.

The gap between the Italian cultural framework (Valentine's chocolate = romantic interest) and the Japanese one (Valentine's chocolate = probably just politeness, but possibly not) is the source of Leonardo's paralysis. He knows enough to know the Japanese system is different, but not enough to be confident about what Yuzuka's chocolate means within it.

For discussion: Have you ever been in a situation where the cultural rules were different from what you were used to, and you were unsure how to interpret something? How did you resolve it?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — 'Don't Overthink It'

Vivek tells Leonardo three times not to overthink it. Leonardo immediately begins overthinking it.

- Is Vivek's advice actually useful? What would 'not overthinking it' actually look like in this situation?
- Why is it so difficult to simply 'wait and see'? What is at risk if you wait and see?
- Is overthinking a character flaw, or is it how some people process uncertainty? Is there a difference?

Discussion 2 — What Hanako Doesn't See

Hanako is the only person in the café scene who genuinely does not understand what Ao and Shio are implying.

- Why does Hanako miss what everyone else can see? Is it innocence, or is she paying attention to different things?
- Ao and Shio do not explain to Hanako. Why not? Would it be right to?
- Is there a kind of obliviousness that is comfortable to be around — and a kind that is frustrating? Which is Hanako's?

Discussion 3 — 'Obviously'

After Yuzuka leaves the café, Ao says 'She likes him.' Shio replies: 'Obviously.'

- What evidence in the chapter supports this reading? What evidence might complicate it?
- Why do Ao and Shio tell Leonardo ('She likes him') and then immediately retract it ('Forget we said anything')? What are they doing?
- Is it kind to tell someone something they are clearly not ready to hear? Or is it kinder to let them work it out themselves?

Discussion 4 — 'Some Things, At Least, Were Predictable'

The chapter ends with Leonardo finding comfort in the predictability of the temple bell — something that rings at seven every evening, regardless of what else is happening.

- Why does predictability feel important at this specific moment in the chapter?
- What does the temple bell represent to Leonardo by this point in the novel? (Think back to Chapter 6, when he noticed it only when it didn't ring.)
- Is there a difference between predictability and certainty? Can something be predictable but still surprising?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Briefing (Pairs)

Student A plays Vivek. Student B plays Leonardo. Re-enact the stock room conversation about Valentine's Day — but extend it. Leonardo asks more questions: What if she already knew I'd be confused? What if she wants me to ask? What if she doesn't?

Vivek must answer each question honestly — or admit that he doesn't know.

Focus on: The limits of cultural knowledge. How to give advice when you genuinely don't know the answer. How to accept advice that isn't quite enough.

Role Play 2 — The Café Interrogation (Groups of 4–5)

Re-enact the café scene with Ao, Shio, Hanako, Yuzuka, and Leonardo. Ao and Shio try to get Yuzuka to admit something. Yuzuka deflects. Hanako is genuinely confused. Leonardo tries to follow the conversation.

The scene should play as a comedy — nobody says anything direct, everyone knows what is happening except one person.

Debrief: What techniques did Yuzuka use to deflect? What made Ao and Shio's questions so effective? How did it feel to be Leonardo — the person the conversation was partly about, but not quite included in?

Role Play 3 — Advice from Far Away (Pairs)

Leonardo finally decides to call someone about the chocolate situation. He calls his brother Riccardo.

Student A is Leonardo. Student B is Riccardo. Leonardo has to explain the entire Japanese Valentine's Day system, the chocolate, Yuzuka, and his confusion — while Riccardo reacts with a combination of teasing, genuine interest, and the occasional useful observation.

Focus on: Explaining a cultural situation to someone who has no context. Asking for advice from someone who doesn't have the full picture. Riccardo's response should feel like a younger brother's — not entirely helpful, but not entirely unhelpful either.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Manual

Write a short guide (100–130 words) explaining an aspect of your own culture's romantic or social conventions to someone from a completely different background. Choose something that has rules — explicit or unspoken — that an outsider would not automatically understand.

Write it the way Vivek explains Valentine's Day to Leonardo: clearly, practically, and with an honest acknowledgement of what you do and don't know.

Writing 2 — Yuzuka's Evening

Write the scene from Yuzuka's point of view: she makes the chocolate, wraps it, gives it to Leonardo, and goes back upstairs (100–130 words). What is she thinking? What does she hope? What does she do when she gets back to her room?

Stay in her voice. She is not sentimental. But she feels things.

Writing 3 — The List of People Not to Ask

At the end of the chapter, Leonardo mentally goes through a list of people he could ask for advice and dismisses each one.

Write an extended version of this internal monologue (100–130 words): he considers five or six people, each time finding a specific reason why asking them would be impossible or would make things worse. The comedy comes from the logic being both sound and completely unhelpful.

Writing 4 — White Day

It is now March 14th. Leonardo has decided what to give Yuzuka for White Day — but he is not entirely sure it is the right decision. Write the scene (120–150 words): the moment he gives it to her, her reaction, and what (if anything) is said.

Nothing should be stated directly. The meaning should live in the details: what he chose, how he gives it, how she responds.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document · Chapter 9: Osaka

Level: B1+ / B2 · All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 9 is the novel's emotional pivot — the chapter where things that have been implicit throughout become, if not spoken, then at least acknowledged. It unfolds over a weekend in Osaka. Yuzuka and Leonardo travel together by bus (Yuzuka wants to visit Kasuga Taisha in Nara for a study omamori; she is applying to Nara Women's University). On the bus, they have their first genuinely honest conversation: Leonardo explains why he really came to Japan — to escape the noise of his parents' certainty and find his own voice. Yuzuka says she understands. In Osaka, they visit the shrine, have lunch, and meet Matteo. Matteo is immediately charming, immediately reads the situation, and — because this is Matteo — immediately starts poking at it. He flirts with Yuzuka in front of Leonardo; switches to Italian to tell Leonardo he is a terrible liar; and at the station, tells him to 'figure that out'. On the bus home, after a long silence, Leonardo admits for the first time that Matteo's flirting bothered him, without being able to say why. Yuzuka tells him she wasn't interested. The silence that follows is comfortable in a new way. The chapter ends with Leonardo in his room, looking at the model kit for Riccardo, hearing the temple bell, and thinking — for the first time with something like clarity — that he does not want to leave.

Note to teacher: Chapter 9 is the chapter where the novel's emotional content becomes most visible. The conversation on the bus home is the closest the novel comes to a direct confrontation with what Leonardo and Yuzuka feel. The chapter handles this with characteristic restraint — nothing is named, but the meaning is clear. The final line ('I don't want to leave. Not yet. Not when there was still so much he hadn't figured out.') marks the shift from the novel's first half (arriving, settling, learning) to its second half (what do I actually want, and what will I do about it).

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 9.

Activity 1 — A Place That Feels Like Yours

Leonardo tells Yuzuka he didn't invite Matteo to Tottori because he didn't want to share it yet. 'Tottori feels like mine,' he says.

- Have you ever felt that a place — a city, a neighbourhood, a café, a route — was 'yours'? What made it feel that way?
- Is it possible to possess a place in this sense? What does 'mine' mean when it refers to a place?
- What changes when you bring someone from your old life into a place that belongs to your new life?

Activity 2 — When Someone Reads the Situation Before You Do

Think about a time when a friend, sibling, or outsider understood something about your feelings before you understood it yourself — and pointed it out, directly or indirectly.

- How did it feel to have someone else name something you hadn't named yet?
- Was their reading correct? Did it help?
- Is there a difference between being told what you feel and being shown what you feel (by, for example, watching your own reaction)?

Activity 3 — Osaka vs Tottori vs Florence

The novel moves between three cities in this chapter: Tottori (home base), Osaka (the weekend destination), and Florence (Matteo's origin and Leonardo's past). Before reading, discuss:

- What do you imagine the difference between Tottori and Osaka might feel like for Leonardo?
- What does it mean to visit a city rather than live in it?
- When someone from your old life visits your new life, what do they see that you no longer see? What might they miss?

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 9.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
Omamori (お守り)	noun (Japanese)	A charm or amulet sold at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples. Omamori come in many types: for good health, safe driving, academic success (gakugyō jōju), love, and so on. They are typically small fabric pouches, often containing a prayer or sacred text inside. It is considered bad luck to open one. They are associated with the shrine or temple where they were purchased. <i>"I need a study omamori. If I'm going to Nara Women's University, I should get the omamori from Nara."</i>
Kasuga Taisha (春日大社)	noun (proper)	One of the most important Shinto shrines in Japan, located in Nara Park, Nara. Founded in 768 CE, it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and is closely associated with learning and scholarship. It is famous for its hundreds of bronze and stone lanterns and for the sacred deer that roam freely in the surrounding park. <i>"Kasuga Taisha. I need a study omamori."</i>
superstitious	adjective	Believing in the power of supernatural or magical things — charms, rituals, omens — to influence outcomes, without a rational basis for that belief. In the chapter, Ao calls Yuzuka superstitious; Yuzuka agrees but says she will do it anyway. <i>"'That's superstitious,' said Ao. 'I know. I'm doing it anyway.'"</i>
Okonomiyaki (お好み焼き)	noun (Japanese)	A Japanese savoury pancake made from a batter of flour, grated yam, dashi, eggs, and shredded cabbage, mixed with various ingredients (seafood, pork, cheese, etc.) and cooked on a griddle. The name means 'cook what you like'. Osaka-style okonomiyaki is particularly well-known. Often served with okonomiyaki sauce, mayonnaise, dried bonito flakes, and dried seaweed. <i>"Okonomiyaki at a small place Yuzuka knew from a previous visit."</i>
DenDen Town	noun (proper)	An area of Osaka known for electronics shops, anime, manga, and gaming goods — similar in function to Akihabara in Tokyo. Located in the Nipponbashi neighbourhood, it has become a significant destination for fans of Japanese pop culture. <i>"They walked through DenDen Town, through the bright streets and the weekend crowds."</i>
Gundam	noun (proper)	A long-running Japanese anime and media franchise begun in 1979, centred on giant mechanical suits called Mobile Suits (mecha). Gundam model kits (Gunpla, short for Gundam Plastic Models) are a hugely popular hobby in Japan and internationally, ranging from simple beginner kits to highly detailed, complex models requiring hundreds of hours to build. <i>"A Gundam model that was complicated enough to be interesting but not so complicated that Riccardo would give up halfway through."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
to poke at something	phrasal verb (informal)	To deliberately provoke or test a reaction by repeatedly returning to a sensitive point. The metaphor is of poking something with a stick to see if it moves. <i>"He finds the thing that will annoy you and he pokes at it until you react."</i>
settled	adjective	Comfortable and established in a place or situation — no longer new or uncertain, but at home. In the chapter, Matteo says Leonardo looks 'more settled', meaning he seems to have found his place. <i>"You look different. More settled. It's weird."</i>
to get a reaction	verb phrase	To deliberately say or do something in order to provoke an emotional or behavioural response from someone — to see how they respond, especially to something that makes them uncomfortable. <i>"He was trying to get a reaction out of me. By flirting with you. That's what he does."</i>
entrance exam	noun	A competitive examination that candidates must pass in order to be admitted to a school or university. In Japan, university entrance examinations are highly significant events — students prepare for months or years, and the results determine which universities they can attend. <i>"For the entrance exam? Yes."</i>
to drift (into sleep / conversation)	verb	To move slowly and naturally into a state — falling asleep, moving into conversation — without a definite moment of transition. Suggests something gradual and unforced. <i>(Implied in the bus scene, where Yuzuka falls asleep against the window and conversation fades naturally into silence.)</i>
clarity	noun	The quality of being clear and certain — understanding something without confusion or ambiguity. In the chapter, Leonardo experiences 'something like clarity' for the first time about what he wants. <i>"He thought, for the first time with something like clarity: I don't want to leave."</i>

Quick Check — Context Sentences

For each of the following words or phrases, write a sentence of your own that demonstrates its meaning in context. Your sentence should make the meaning clear without using the word itself.

1. superstitious
2. settled
3. to poke at something
4. clarity
5. entrance exam

Extension: Yuzuka says she is 'superstitious' about the omamori but does it anyway. Is there a difference between believing something and doing it anyway? Can you think of an example from your own life?

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — The Weekend in Order

Chapter 9 spans approximately 36 hours. Put the events in the correct order (1–10).

- ___ Matteo and Leonardo have a conversation in Italian at the izakaya.
- ___ Leonardo and Yuzuka board the return bus to Tottori.
- ___ The group meets Matteo at five o'clock.
- ___ Yuzuka buys her study omamori at Kasuga Taisha.
- ___ Matteo gets on the train to Kyoto.
- ___ The friend group discusses the Osaka weekend at the café.
- ___ Leonardo admits on the bus that Matteo's flirting bothered him.
- ___ They eat okonomiyaki near Namba.
- ___ They find a Gundam model for Riccardo in DenDen Town.
- ___ The three of them browse a used bookstore in Osaka.

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

1. Yuzuka wants to visit Kasuga Taisha specifically because it is associated with academic success. T / F / NM
2. Leonardo has already told Matteo about Yuzuka before the trip. T / F / NM
3. The deer at Nara are described as behaving like animals who know they are sacred. T / F / NM
4. Matteo's Japanese is technically correct but sounds unnatural. T / F / NM
5. Leonardo buys an omamori for himself at Kasuga Taisha. T / F / NM
6. Shota is present at the café meeting at the beginning of the chapter. T / F / NM
7. The return bus from Osaka to Tottori takes approximately three and a half hours. T / F / NM
8. At the station, Matteo tells Leonardo in Italian to bring Yuzuka next time. T / F / NM
9. Yuzuka tells Leonardo she was not interested in Matteo. T / F / NM
10. The chapter ends with Leonardo deciding to extend his visa. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- Why does Leonardo not want Matteo to visit Tottori? What does this tell us about how Leonardo has come to feel about the city?
- 2. On the bus to Osaka, Leonardo explains why he really came to Japan. How is this explanation different from what he has said in earlier chapters?
- 3. Matteo says Leonardo 'looks more settled'. What evidence from the novel would support this observation?
- 4. What does Matteo do at the izakaya, and why? How does Leonardo respond?
- 5. On the bus home, Leonardo says: 'I don't know. But it did.' (bother him). Why is this a significant moment? What has changed since Chapter 7, when he decided 'not to think about it too hard'?



LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — What Is Said in Two Languages

The izakaya scene contains a brief exchange in Italian between Leonardo and Matteo. Yuzuka cannot understand it. This creates an interesting structural moment: the reader understands both, but Yuzuka understands only the English.

In Italian (understood by reader and Leonardo):

Matteo: *"She's nice." / "Pretty, too."*

Leonardo: *"I hadn't noticed."*

Matteo: *"You're a terrible liar."*

In English (understood by all three):

Yuzuka: *"What are you talking about?"*

Matteo: *"Nothing important. Just catching up."*

1. What effect does switching languages have on the dynamic between the three characters? Who has power in this moment, and who doesn't?
2. Matteo says 'Nothing important. Just catching up.' What has actually just happened? Why is his answer technically true but deeply misleading?
3. Have you ever been excluded from a conversation because of language? Or been part of excluding someone in this way? Write 3–4 sentences describing the experience and how it felt from both sides.

B — The Honest Conversation: How It Arrives

The conversation on the bus to Osaka — where Leonardo explains why he really came to Japan — is the most honest exchange in the novel so far. Notice how it arrives: gradually, sideways, without being directly requested.

Yuzuka's sequence of questions:

'Tell me about your friend Matteo.'

'Why is he visiting?'

'And he's not visiting Tottori?'

'Why?'

'Why did you come to Japan?'

'No. I mean why did you really come.'

1. How does Yuzuka move the conversation from small talk to something more honest? What technique does she use?
2. Leonardo answers more fully than he has in previous conversations about his reasons for coming to Japan. What has changed that allows him to be more honest now?
3. Yuzuka says: 'I'm going to Nara because I know exactly who I am. I just need to get in first.' How does this contrast with where Leonardo is? Is her certainty enviable or does it come with its own pressures?

C — The Almost-Conversation: 'Later'

At the train station, Yuzuka hears her name in the Italian conversation and asks what was said. Leonardo cannot explain it — or will not. He says 'Later. On the bus. I need to think about it.'

Yuzuka: *'What did he say?'*

Leonardo: *'Nothing important.'*

Yuzuka: *'He said something about me. I heard my name.'*

Leonardo: *'He said you were nice.'*

Yuzuka: *'That's not all he said.'*

Leonardo: *'...Later. On the bus. I need to think about it.'*

1. 'Later' is a promise to have a conversation that hasn't happened yet. What makes this moment significant?
2. Yuzuka accepts 'later'. What does this tell us about her? About their relationship at this point in the novel?
3. The conversation on the bus is the 'later' — but it doesn't fully deliver on the promise either. What is still left unsaid by the end of the bus journey? Write the conversation they haven't had yet (8–12 lines of dialogue).

CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan relevant to Chapter 9, written for any reader regardless of background.

Kasuga Taisha and the Sacred Deer of Nara

Kasuga Taisha (春日大社) is one of the most celebrated Shinto shrines in Japan and a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Founded in 768 CE, it was built by the Fujiwara clan — one of Japan's most powerful aristocratic families — to protect the new capital at Nara. The shrine is famous for its hundreds of bronze and stone lanterns, lit twice a year during festivals, and for the ancient Japanese cedar forest surrounding it.

The deer of Nara (shika, 鹿) have been considered sacred messengers of the gods since the shrine's founding. Today, over 1,000 semi-wild deer roam freely through Nara Park, approaching visitors with practised confidence. They can be fed with special deer crackers (shika-senbei) sold by vendors in the park. The deer are legally protected as national treasures, and harming one carries a serious penalty.

For discussion: Are there sacred animals in your culture or religion — animals that carry a special status or are treated differently from ordinary animals? What gives them that status?

Omamori and Japanese Shrine Culture

Omamori (お守り) are small protective charms sold at Shinto shrines and Buddhist temples throughout Japan. Each type is associated with a specific blessing: gakugyō jōju (学業成就) omamori are for academic success; kōtsū anzen (交通安全) are for traffic safety; en-musubi (縁結び) are for love and relationships. They are usually made of silk or brocade fabric in the shape of a small pouch, with the name of the shrine printed on them.

It is traditional to treat omamori respectfully and not to open them — the power is said to reside in the sealed prayer inside. Many people keep them in their school bag, wallet, or car. After one year, or when their purpose has been fulfilled, they are typically returned to the shrine to be ritually disposed of.

Yuzuka's decision to get her study omamori specifically from Kasuga Taisha — because she is applying to Nara Women's University — reflects a logic that is simultaneously superstitious and geographically specific: the charm's meaning is enhanced by the connection between its origin and its purpose.

For discussion: Do you have a lucky object, a ritual, or a habit that you follow before something important? Do you believe it actually works? Does believing matter?

Nara Women's University

Nara Women's University (奈良女子大学, Nara Joshi Daigaku) is one of only two national women's universities in Japan (the other being Ochanomizu University in Tokyo). Founded in 1908, it has a strong reputation particularly in science, engineering, and the humanities. Admission is by competitive entrance examination. Being one of the national universities, it is considered highly prestigious.

Yuzuka's ambition to attend Nara Women's University tells us something about her: she has a specific goal, she has researched it, she is treating the omamori as part of a comprehensive preparation strategy rather than as a substitute for it. Her matter-of-fact 'I know exactly who I am. I just need to get in first' is consistent with this.

For discussion: Does your country have prestigious universities that require specific competitive examinations? What does the pressure of university entrance look like for students your age?

DenDen Town and Gunpla Culture

DenDen Town (でんでんタウン), in Osaka's Nipponbashi district, is one of Japan's major centres for electronics and otaku (fan) culture — comparable to Tokyo's Akihabara. The area contains numerous shops selling manga, anime merchandise, games, figurines, and model kits.

Gunpla (ガンプラ, Gundam Plastic Models) is a model kit hobby based on the Gundam anime franchise. Kits are graded from HG (High Grade, simpler) to MG (Master Grade) and PG (Perfect Grade, extremely complex and expensive). The hobby has a global following and is considered a respected craft — some collectors display finished models as art objects. Leonardo's choice of a Gundam model for Riccardo — someone who has probably never encountered the franchise — as a 'Japanese souvenir' is both practical and slightly comic.

For discussion: Have you ever given someone a gift that was really about your own interests or experience rather than theirs? What happened? Is this a good or bad impulse in gift-giving?

Nara — a Day Trip from Osaka

Nara is approximately 45–50 minutes by express train from Osaka (Kintetsu Namba line), making it one of the most popular day trips from both Osaka and Kyoto. In addition to the deer and Kasuga Taisha, Nara is home to Tōdai-ji (東大寺), one of the world's largest wooden buildings, which houses a 15-metre bronze Buddha statue. The area around Tōdai-ji and Kasuga Taisha forms a large park which is itself a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

For discussion: Have you ever made a day trip to somewhere specifically for one thing — a shrine, a museum, a food? What made it worth the journey?

Okonomiyaki: Osaka's Famous Pancake

Okonomiyaki (お好み焼き) is one of Osaka's most emblematic dishes, and Osaka-style okonomiyaki (as opposed to the Hiroshima style, which layers ingredients differently) is considered the standard by many. The name means 'cook what you like', reflecting the dish's versatility. It is typically cooked on a flat griddle, topped with a sweet-savoury sauce (similar to Worcestershire sauce), Japanese mayonnaise, dried bonito flakes that wave in the heat, and aonori (dried green seaweed).

Osaka has a strong identity around food — the city's unofficial motto is kuidaore ('eat until you drop') — and visiting an okonomiyaki restaurant is a natural choice for a local showing a visitor around the city. Yuzuka knowing 'a small place from a previous visit' is characteristic: she is not a tourist in Osaka, just someone who has been there before.

For discussion: Is there a dish that is particularly associated with your city, region, or country — something that people specifically seek out when they visit? What makes it feel representative?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — 'Tottori Feels Like Mine'

Leonardo tells Yuzuka he didn't want Matteo to visit Tottori because it feels like his. 'I wanted to meet him somewhere else.'

- Do you think it is possible to 'own' a city or a place in this sense? What does it mean to feel that a place is yours?
- Is there something protective about this feeling — is Leonardo protecting Tottori from Matteo, or protecting himself?
- Yuzuka says: 'I understand that.' What does this tell us about her relationship to Tottori — and possibly to Leonardo?

Discussion 2 — Yuzuka's Certainty vs Leonardo's Uncertainty

Yuzuka says: 'I'm going to Nara because I know exactly who I am. I just need to get in first.' Leonardo, at this point in the novel, still does not know what he wants.

- Is Yuzuka's certainty a strength or a constraint? What might she be missing by being so sure?
- Leonardo says he envies Yuzuka's certainty. Is certainty about the future actually something to envy?
- By the end of the chapter, Leonardo has a moment of clarity: 'I don't want to leave.' Is this a form of certainty? How is it different from Yuzuka's?

Discussion 3 — Matteo as Catalyst

Matteo does not stay long, but he changes things. He reads the situation immediately and — characteristically — pokes at it.

- Is Matteo being helpful or intrusive? Does his directness do good or harm?
- He says to Yuzuka: 'Tell him to stay. He listens to you.' Is he right?
- What would have happened if Matteo had not visited? Would Leonardo have arrived at the same realisation without the catalyst?

Discussion 4 — The Bus Home

The conversation on the return bus is the most emotionally honest exchange between Leonardo and Yuzuka in the novel.

- Leonardo says: 'I don't know. But it did.' (bother him, that Matteo was flirting with Yuzuka.) Why is this admission significant? What has changed?
- Yuzuka says: 'For what it's worth, I wasn't interested.' 'I know.' 'Do you?' Why does Yuzuka ask 'Do you?' What is she really asking?
- The chapter ends without anything being fully resolved. Is this satisfying or frustrating as a reader? What would it mean for the novel if they had been more direct?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Bus Conversation (Pairs)

Re-enact the conversation on the bus to Osaka — the one where Leonardo explains why he really came to Japan. Student A plays Yuzuka: she starts with small talk, then gradually steers toward the real question. Student B plays Leonardo: he resists, then opens up.

Focus on: How to ask a personal question without making it feel like an interrogation. How to answer honestly when you haven't quite worked out the answer yourself. The difference between the first answer and the real answer.

Role Play 2 — Matteo at Dinner (Groups of 3)

Re-enact the izakaya dinner scene: Matteo, Yuzuka, and Leonardo. Matteo is charming and slightly chaotic. He notices things and can't help commenting on them. Yuzuka is polite but watching. Leonardo is uncomfortable but trying not to show it.

The Italian exchange happens in the middle: Matteo and Leonardo switch to Italian for a moment, Yuzuka notices, the conversation returns to English. Play all three perspectives.

Debrief: What did it feel like to be excluded by language? What did it feel like to be the one doing the excluding? Did Matteo handle it well?

Role Play 3 — The Station Goodbye (Groups of 3)

Play the moment at the station when Matteo says goodbye. He has one last thing to say to Leonardo, in Italian, at the platform. Yuzuka is standing nearby.

After Matteo leaves, Yuzuka and Leonardo have a short exchange about what was said. Student C (Yuzuka) knows something was said about her. Student A (Leonardo) has to decide how much to reveal. Student B (Matteo) has just left.

Focus on: What you owe someone in terms of honesty after a private conversation about them. How much to reveal. Whether 'later' is a fair answer.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — Why I Really Came

Leonardo's explanation of why he really came to Japan — to escape the noise of his parents' certainty and find his own voice — is honest and specific.

Write a short piece (100–130 words) in which a character explains, for the first time and to someone they trust, the real reason they did something important. The character should have given a simpler, less honest reason before. The real reason should be more vulnerable.

Writing 2 — What Matteo Sees

Matteo arrives in Osaka and within a few hours reads the entire situation between Leonardo and Yuzuka. He is an outsider who sees clearly because he doesn't have to manage the feelings involved.

Write Matteo's version of the weekend (120–150 words) — a message home to Giovanni or Antonio describing what he observed. Stay in his voice: amused, affectionate, direct. He should say what he thinks Leonardo and Yuzuka are both failing to admit.

Writing 3 — The Conversation They Almost Had

At the end of the bus journey, Leonardo and Yuzuka have exchanged something true and important — but the most important thing remains unsaid.

Write the conversation they didn't have (120–160 lines of dialogue). It can be on the bus, at the house, later that evening — whenever feels right. Neither character should be completely direct, but both should move closer to honesty than they have before.

Writing 4 — A Letter to Riccardo

Along with the Gundam model, Leonardo decides to include a letter for Riccardo. He has just had a weekend that changed something in him.

Write the letter (120–150 words). Leonardo doesn't explain everything — but he says something real about where he is and what he is beginning to understand. He remembers that Riccardo once said 'Maybe I'll visit someday.' He responds to that now.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document • Chapter 10: Spring

Level: B1+ / B2 • All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 10 is titled 'Spring' and is structured around three distinct scenes, each contributing to the chapter's central theme: time running out, and the question of what Leonardo is going to do about it. First: White Day (March 14th). Leonardo has made homemade chocolate — dark, uneven, clearly amateur — for Yuzuka. He gives it to her at the café in front of Ao, Shio, and Hanako. The moment is funny and tender: he insists it's not good, she insists it 'tastes like you tried very hard', Ao and Shio watch with undisguised interest. Second: a birthday video call with Riccardo, who receives his Gundam model and — across eight months and nine thousand kilometres — sees what Leonardo cannot quite admit: 'You don't look happy about that.' ('Going back in June.') Riccardo's parting words are warm and precise: 'I miss you. But I'm glad you went.' Third: the bathroom incident. Leonardo comes home late from a shift, forgets about the broken lock, walks in on Yuzuka bathing. The scene is simultaneously mortifying (for Leonardo) and genuinely funny — and the morning after is the emotional heart of the chapter: 'If this had happened two months ago, I would have killed you. Now I'm just annoyed. Which is progress, I suppose.' The chapter ends with the arrival of spring and the counting down of time: three months left.

Note to teacher: The bathroom scene is handled with complete discretion — it is comedic, not exploitative. The important element is not the incident itself but the morning after: the way Yuzuka handles it tells us as much about the relationship as any conversation. The phrase 'progress, I suppose' is the emotional pay-off. Teachers may wish to note that this kind of misunderstanding is a common comedy device in anime and Japanese popular culture, which is what makes Leonardo's involuntary exclamation ('I thought this only happened in anime') land as it does.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 10.

Activity 1 — The Gift That Shows Effort

The chapter begins with Leonardo looking at something he has made — knowing it is imperfect — and deciding to give it anyway.

- Have you ever made something for someone that you knew was not very good, but gave it anyway? Why did you give it?
- Is a handmade gift that is imperfect better or worse than a perfect store-bought one? Does it depend on the relationship?
- What does giving an imperfect handmade thing communicate that a perfect purchased thing cannot?

Activity 2 — Time Running Out

Chapter 10 takes place in mid-March. Leonardo's visa expires in June. He has roughly three months left.

- Think of a time when you knew an experience was ending — a holiday, a school year, a project, a relationship. How did knowing it was ending change how you experienced the time that remained?
- Is it better to know when something will end, or to not know?
- What would you do differently if you knew you had only three months left somewhere?

Activity 3 — After the Awkward Moment

Sometimes something embarrassing or awkward happens between people who know each other. The question is how to deal with it afterwards.

- Have you ever had an embarrassing incident with someone you lived with or spent a lot of time with? How did you handle it the next day?
- What is the best way to acknowledge something awkward — directly, indirectly, or by pretending it didn't happen?
- What does the way someone handles an awkward situation tell you about them as a person?

Note to teacher: This pre-reading activity prepares students for the bathroom scene and its aftermath, which is the emotional centre of the chapter. The focus should be on the morning-after dynamic, not the incident itself.

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 10.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
amateurish	adjective	Done without professional skill or polish; showing the signs of someone who is learning or attempting something they are not yet good at. Not always negative — can imply honest effort. <i>"The chocolate... looked amateurish in the morning light."</i>
impending	adjective	About to happen; imminent. Usually used of something unwelcome — an 'impending disaster' is a disaster that feels very close. <i>"Leonardo woke up on the fourteenth of March with a sense of impending disaster."</i>
evidence of effort	noun phrase	Something that shows work was done, even if the result is not impressive. Effort as the visible content of a thing rather than its quality. <i>"What Leonardo had made was neither elegant nor ambitious. It was evidence of effort and very little else."</i>
to stifle (a laugh)	verb	To suppress or hold back — in this case, to try not to laugh, usually unsuccessfully. A stifled laugh is one that escapes despite an attempt to stop it. <i>"It was a short laugh, quickly stifled, but it was real."</i>
mortification	noun	Intense embarrassment or humiliation — a feeling of wanting to disappear. Stronger than embarrassment; implies a sense of shame. <i>"Despite the mortification and the horror — she laughed."</i>
to be the judge of that	idiomatic expression	A phrase used to assert one's right to evaluate something for oneself, often pushing back against someone's self-deprecation. 'I'll be the judge of that' means: don't tell me what to think — let me decide. <i>"'And it's not very good.' 'I'll be the judge of that.'"</i>
idol music	noun phrase	A genre of Japanese pop music associated with carefully managed groups of young performers (idol groups), typically featuring upbeat, heavily produced songs. J-pop idol music is a major industry in Japan with a large and dedicated fanbase. Famous examples include AKB48 and Morning Musume. <i>"The same playlist she always listened to when she studied. Idol music he still didn't quite understand but had grown used to."</i>
violation	noun	The act of breaking a rule, boundary, or expectation — especially one relating to someone's privacy, safety, or dignity. In the chapter, Leonardo uses it to describe his accidental intrusion into Yuzuka's private space. <i>"Not with some grand farewell but with the worst possible cultural violation."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
cultural violation	noun phrase	The breaking of a cultural rule or taboo — something that is considered deeply wrong or offensive within a particular culture's norms. Privacy and bathing etiquette are taken seriously in Japan. <i>"This was how his time in Japan ended. Not with some grand farewell but with the worst possible cultural violation."</i>
to press (for information)	verb	To push someone to say more than they have offered — to ask follow-up questions when someone has given a minimal answer. <i>"Mizuko did not look convinced but did not press."</i>
to process	verb (informal/psychological)	To work through and make sense of something emotionally or mentally. Often used when a situation is strange or difficult and the person needs time to understand how they feel about it. <i>"Leonardo sat at the table and tried to process what had just happened."</i>
anime	noun (Japanese loanword)	Japanese animated film and television, encompassing a huge range of genres and styles. In popular Western usage, 'anime' refers specifically to animation produced in Japan or in the Japanese style. In Japan, the word (アニメ) is used for animation more broadly. The bathroom scene is a common comedic scenario in anime — the 'accidental walk-in' — which is why Leonardo's exclamation 'I thought this only happened in anime' is funny. <i>"I can't believe it. I thought this only happened in anime."</i>

Quick Check — Usage in Sentences

Use the correct word or phrase from the glossary to complete each sentence. You may need to change the form.

1. She handed him the painting she had made — slightly crooked, the paint uneven — and said 'I know it's _____, but I wanted to make it myself.'
2. He tried to explain calmly, but she could see from his face that the _____ of the situation hadn't quite left him yet.
3. 'I know the recipe is complicated.' 'I'll _____ that — you worry about the ingredients.'
4. The mistake was unintentional, but it still felt like a serious _____ of trust.
5. She could tell from his face that he was still trying to _____ what she had just told him.

Extension: 'It tastes like you tried very hard.' Leonardo says this is not a flavour. Yuzuka says it is now. Who is right? Can effort be a quality you can taste, see, or feel in a thing? Write two or three sentences with an example.

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — Three Scenes, Three Moments

Chapter 10 contains three distinct scenes. For each one, complete the table.

Scene	What happens	The key emotional moment	What it tells us about the characters
White Day at the café	_____	_____	_____
Birthday call with Riccardo	_____	_____	_____
The bathroom incident & morning after	_____	_____	_____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

- Leonardo's White Day chocolate is white, as tradition requires. T / F / NM
- The café where Leonardo gives Yuzuka the chocolate is the usual one near the station. T / F / NM
- Ao, Shio, and Hanako are at the café when Leonardo gives Yuzuka her White Day gift. T / F / NM
- Riccardo opens the Gundam model on his actual birthday, having waited for the video call. T / F / NM
- Leonardo plans to stay in Japan after his visa expires. T / F / NM
- The lock on the bathroom door had been broken for two weeks. T / F / NM
- Shoichi fixes the lock the morning after the incident. T / F / NM
- Yuzuka does not laugh at all during or after the bathroom incident. T / F / NM
- The next morning, Yuzuka pretends the incident did not happen. T / F / NM
- The chapter ends in June, when Leonardo's visa expires. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- Why does Leonardo give Yuzuka handmade chocolate even though he knows it's not very good? What is he trying to communicate?
- 2. Riccardo says: 'You don't look happy about that.' ('That' being going back in June.) What does this observation, made through a screen by his younger brother, tell us about Leonardo's state of mind?
- 3. Yuzuka says: 'If this had happened two months ago, I would have killed you. Now I'm just annoyed. Which is progress, I suppose.' What does she mean by 'progress'?
- 4. After the bathroom incident, Leonardo's mind immediately goes to the worst possible interpretation ('This was how his time in Japan ended...'). What does this catastrophising tell us about how he is feeling about his time in Tottori?
- 5. The chapter ends: 'Spring had arrived. And Leonardo only had three months left.' Why does the arrival of spring feel like a countdown? How does the season contribute to the mood of the ending?



LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — Degrees of 'Fine': How Characters Understate

Chapter 10 makes heavy use of 'fine' — a word that means different things depending on who is saying it and when. Compare these moments:

What is said	What it actually means
"Fine." (Yuzuka, to Mizuko, when asked if everything is all right)	We are not going to discuss this. Move on.
"Completely fine." (Leonardo, same scene)	I am in agony but I will agree with Yuzuka.
"It's fine." (Yuzuka, about the bathroom lock the next morning)	It was an accident. I've decided not to be angry.
"Still nothing. It happened. It's over. We're not going to be weird about it."	I am drawing a line. This conversation ends here. Trust me.

1. Find two more uses of 'fine' or similar understating language in the novel (from any chapter). What is the speaker really communicating in each case?
2. Yuzuka is particularly skilled at using minimal language to communicate complex things. Find three examples from Chapter 10 where a short sentence does a lot of work. Explain what each one really means.
3. Write a short conversation (6–8 lines) in which two characters discuss something important using only understatement — 'fine', 'not bad', 'it happened', 'I suppose'. The reader should understand the real emotional content despite the minimal language.

B — Comedy Through Interiority

The bathroom scene works as comedy because we have access to Leonardo's internal monologue — his spiralling, catastrophising thoughts after he closes the door. This is a specific literary technique: first-person-style interiority in a third-person narrative.

"He should pack. He should leave. He should apologize to Mizuko and Shoichi and move back to the hostel and never make eye contact with Yuzuka again."

"Except she had laughed."

"That had to mean something."

"Probably."

1. Why is the word 'probably' funny in this context? What has it meant every other time it has appeared in the novel?
2. The internal monologue moves from catastrophe ('He should leave') to a single new piece of information ('Except she had laughed') to a tentative conclusion ('That had to mean something. Probably.'). Describe this movement in your own words. How does the structure create comedy?
3. Write a short internal monologue (80–100 words) for a character who has just done something embarrassing in front of someone they care about. The monologue should move from catastrophe to a small hopeful detail. Use 'probably' or 'maybe' at the end.

C — Progress

The word 'progress' appears once in the chapter, in one of Yuzuka's most significant lines:

"If this had happened two months ago, I would have killed you. Now I'm just annoyed. Which is progress, I suppose."

1. What is the timeline implied by this sentence? What has changed in the last two months?
2. Yuzuka says 'I suppose' after 'progress' — hedging her own statement. What does 'I suppose' add? What is she not quite ready to say without the hedge?
3. Find three other moments across Chapters 1–10 that could also be described as 'progress' — in Leonardo's Japanese, in his relationship with the Morita family, in his understanding of himself. For each, write one sentence explaining what changed and why it matters.



CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 10, written for any reader regardless of background.

White Day: The Response to Valentine's Day

White Day (ホワイトデー) falls on March 14th — one month after Valentine's Day. As noted in Chapter 8's cultural notes, it is the day when those who received chocolate give something back. The expected return gift is roughly three times the value of what was received (sanbai gaeshi, 三倍返し). Traditional White Day gifts are white: white chocolate, marshmallows, white cookies, or white clothing accessories.

Leonardo's decision to make homemade chocolate — dark rather than white, imperfect, clearly effortful — is both a technical failure and a social success. The convention is for the return gift to be store-bought or at least polished; choosing to make something by hand is an escalation that matches the escalation Yuzuka made on Valentine's Day. The imperfection makes it more, not less, meaningful — as Yuzuka's 'it tastes like you tried very hard' recognises.

For discussion: Is there an equivalent in your culture of a 'return gift' — a social expectation that receiving a gift creates an obligation to give something back? How does this expectation affect the experience of giving and receiving?

Japanese Bathroom Culture and Privacy

Japanese homes traditionally separate the wet and dry areas of the bathroom: there is typically a changing/dressing area (datsui-jo, 脱衣所) and a separate wet area with the bath (ofuro, お風呂) and shower. The toilet is often in a completely separate room. This layout is designed to keep the bathing area separate from other functions.

Bathing in Japan is generally an evening activity — a full soak in the bath (nyūyoku, 入浴) is common before bed, rather than a morning shower. Water is often shared across family members in the same bath (topped up to stay hot), making the bathroom a shared but carefully scheduled family space. Privacy in the bathroom is taken seriously.

The broken lock, the late-night return from work, and the missed warning combine to create the accident in the chapter. Leonardo's use of the word 'cultural violation' reflects a genuine understanding that this is not just a personal embarrassment but a breach of a household norm.

For discussion: How is bathroom use structured in your household or culture? Are there unspoken rules about scheduling, privacy, or how the space is shared? Would a situation like Leonardo's be funny, serious, or both in your cultural context?

Anime Tropes and Self-Awareness

The 'accidental walk-in' scenario — typically a male character accidentally walking in on a female character in the bath — is a well-established comedy trope in anime and manga. It is so common that it has its own vocabulary: 'service scene' (ファンサービス, fan-service) is the broader term for these moments of inadvertent exposure. The trope typically results in the female character becoming furious, the male character being apologetic and embarrassed, and the situation being quickly defused.

Leonardo's involuntary exclamation — 'I thought this only happened in anime' — is significant on two levels. First, it is funny because it is true: he recognises the situation from a cultural reference point, even in his state of mortification. Second, it shows how thoroughly Japanese pop culture has become part of his mental furniture over the course of his year. He is no longer simply a student of Japan — Japan is now part of how he understands the world.

For discussion: Have you ever recognised a real situation from fiction — where something happened and you thought 'this is just like a scene from a film/book/show'? What is the effect of that recognition?

Spring in Japan: Hanami Season

The chapter is titled 'Spring', and spring in Japan is closely associated with hanami (花見, cherry blossom viewing) — the tradition of gathering under flowering cherry trees to eat, drink, and celebrate the season. Cherry blossoms (sakura, 桜) typically bloom in late March to early April across most of Japan, with Tottori's peak usually in early April.

Spring is also the season of beginnings in Japan: the school year, the fiscal year, and the employment year all start in April. For university students, spring means entrance ceremonies; for new employees, it means the first day at work. This temporal association of spring with new beginnings makes the chapter's final image — 'Spring had arrived. And Leonardo only had three months left.' — particularly resonant: the season of beginnings is arriving just as Leonardo's time is running out.

For discussion: Is there a season in your culture that is strongly associated with new beginnings or endings? What cultural events or changes mark that season?

Idol Music in Japan

J-pop idol music (アイドル, aidoru) is a major strand of Japanese popular culture. Idol groups — typically managed groups of young performers who release music, appear on television, and cultivate dedicated fan communities — have been a feature of the Japanese entertainment industry since the 1970s. Contemporary idol groups range from large-scale national acts like AKB48 and its sister groups to smaller local or regional idols (ご当地アイドル, gotōchi aidoru).

The music is typically bright, high-energy, and heavily produced. It is not universally liked — it has a reputation for being formulaic — but it has an enormous and loyal fanbase in Japan across all age groups. Yuzuka listening to idol music while studying is a small but realistic character detail. Leonardo 'still didn't quite understand' it but 'had grown used to' it is an accurate description of the kind of cultural adjustment that happens without conscious effort over the course of a year.

For discussion: Is there a genre of music from another culture that you find difficult to appreciate? Has your relationship to any kind of music changed over time — something you disliked that you grew used to, or something you loved that lost its appeal?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — 'It Tastes Like You Tried Very Hard'

When Leonardo insists his White Day chocolate isn't good, Yuzuka says: 'It tastes like you tried very hard.' He says that isn't a flavour. She says: 'It is now.'

- Do you think Yuzuka is being kind, honest, or both? Is there a difference?
- Can you actually taste effort in food — or in any handmade thing? Or is it something you understand rather than experience directly?
- Why does making something imperfectly by hand sometimes communicate more than making something perfectly by buying it?

Discussion 2 — Riccardo Sees It

Riccardo, through a video call, sees what Leonardo has not quite admitted: 'You don't look happy about that.' He then says: 'I miss you. But I'm glad you went.'

- Why can Riccardo see this when Leonardo cannot fully admit it himself?
- 'I miss you. But I'm glad you went.' What does this sentence contain that makes it such a good thing to say? What would be lost if Riccardo had said only 'I miss you'? Or only 'I'm glad you went'?
- What has Riccardo understood about Leonardo's year — and perhaps about himself — in this brief exchange?

Discussion 3 — 'Progress, I Suppose'

Yuzuka's handling of the bathroom incident the next morning is calm, matter-of-fact, and quietly warm. She ends the conversation with: 'Which is progress, I suppose.'

- What does 'progress' mean in this context? What has progressed?
- Why does she say 'I suppose' rather than just 'progress'? What does the hedge protect?
- Is this a moment of friendship, trust, or something else? How would you describe what has developed between Leonardo and Yuzuka by this point in the novel?

Discussion 4 — The Countdown

The chapter ends with Leonardo counting: three months. The temple bell rings. Spring has arrived.

- What do you think Leonardo is going to do with his three remaining months?
- The chapter says he is 'running out of time to figure out what that meant' (living so close to Yuzuka, being part of each other's lives). What does he need to figure out? Is it one thing or several?
- Is three months enough time to resolve everything that is unresolved — his feelings, his future plans, his decision about whether to stay or go? What would you need to decide in his position?

ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — White Day at the Café (Groups of 4–5)

Re-enact the café scene: Leonardo arrives, sees Ao, Shio, and Hanako, and decides to give Yuzuka the chocolate anyway. Play the full scene including the reactions of the friends.

Focus on: the moment Leonardo takes the chocolate out of his bag — what happens to the energy in the room. Ao and Shio watching. Hanako's genuine warmth. Yuzuka's response, which is real but private.

Debrief: What was the most difficult moment to play? What did the presence of the friends add to the scene? Would it have been better or worse if they had been alone?

Role Play 2 — The Birthday Call (Pairs)

Student A is Leonardo. Student B is Riccardo (on a video call). Play the birthday conversation: the model kit, the news from Florence, the question about June.

Riccardo should do what he does in the chapter — see something Leonardo hasn't admitted, and say the right thing at the end. Student A should play someone who is trying not to admit how he feels.

Focus on: What siblings can see that others can't. How to say the right thing without making it into a speech. The difference between 'I miss you' and 'I miss you, but I'm glad you went'.

Role Play 3 — The Morning After (Pairs)

Play the breakfast table scene the morning after the bathroom incident: Leonardo, Yuzuka, and then Mizuko arriving. The scene should be played with a great deal of care about what is said and what is not said.

After Mizuko leaves, Leonardo apologises. Yuzuka closes the conversation. The scene should end with Yuzuka's 'progress, I suppose' moment.

Focus on: How to apologise properly and briefly. How to accept an apology without making it bigger than it needs to be. The difference between resolving something and putting it behind you.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Imperfect Gift

Write a short scene (100–130 words) in which a character gives someone a handmade thing that is imperfect. The scene should make clear what the gift communicates beyond its quality. The response of the person receiving it should be small but real.

You can use Leonardo and Yuzuka, or invent your own characters.

Writing 2 — Riccardo's Perspective

Riccardo has watched his brother on a video call for twenty minutes. Write what Riccardo thinks after he hangs up (100–130 words) — what he noticed, what he didn't say, and what he thinks is going to happen in Leonardo's last three months in Japan.

Riccardo is fifteen. He is perceptive but not sentimental. He teases his brother but pays attention.

Writing 3 — The Internal Monologue

The chapter gives us Leonardo's catastrophising thoughts after the bathroom incident: 'He should pack. He should leave...' Write the equivalent internal monologue from Yuzuka's side (80–110 words) — from the moment she hears the door close until she decides how she is going to handle the morning.

She is furious. She is also not quite as furious as she expected to be. That is interesting to her.

Writing 4 — A Letter at the End of March

It is late March. Spring is arriving. Leonardo has three months left. He writes a letter to Professor Riva — his history teacher from Chapter 1, who asked 'What are you going to do next?' a year ago.

Write the letter (130–160 words). Leonardo answers the question now — not with a plan, but with an honest account of what he has found out and what he still doesn't know. He should sound like himself: direct but thoughtful, certain about some things, uncertain about others.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document • Chapter 11: Golden Week

Level: B1+ / B2 • All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 11 is the penultimate chapter and the one where the two central questions of the novel — what will Leonardo do with his life, and what is happening between him and Yuzuka — come closest to being answered without being resolved. Toma returns for Golden Week and immediately reads the changed dynamic between Leonardo and Yuzuka (they are sitting closer, they have a comfortable shared routine). He takes Leonardo for a walk and delivers the chapter's practical pivot: a realistic path back to Japan via an IT degree and a work visa. He has researched this since New Year's. The advice is both pragmatic and caring. The next day, after Toma leaves for Daisen, Leonardo and Yuzuka walk through the quietened city. The ice cream scene is the chapter's emotional centre: they buy ice cream and sit on a curb, and Leonardo tells Yuzuka about Toma's plan — that he intends to come back. She asks why. He says 'because I like it here' and then lists reasons that stop short of the most important one. When she asks specifically why Tottori, he says 'everything'. She hears what he means, says 'I'm glad', and they sit until there is nothing more they are willing to say. The chapter ends with Leonardo lying in bed, 'always one room away', hearing her music through the wall, thinking about everything he hasn't said and whether six weeks is enough time to say it.

Note to teacher: This chapter is the novel's most emotionally advanced — and also its most restrained. The ice cream scene is a masterclass in saying the important thing by saying something slightly adjacent to it. 'Everything' is the most specific word Leonardo could have chosen, precisely because it is not specific at all. Yuzuka's 'I'm glad' is similarly compressed. Students may find it frustrating that neither character says anything direct; this is a good discussion point — why do they not say the obvious thing? What would change if they did? The ending — 'always one room away' — is the novel's defining image of the relationship: present, close, and separated by exactly one door.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 11.

Activity 1 — Making a Plan

By this point in the novel, Leonardo needs to make a decision about what to do when his visa expires.

Consider:

- If you wanted to return to a country you had lived in for a year, what would be the realistic options? What would you need in terms of qualifications, money, or paperwork?
- Is it better to make a plan before you know exactly what you want, or to wait until you are sure? What are the risks of each approach?
- Toma has researched the possibilities and presents them to Leonardo. Why might it be easier for Toma to see the path clearly than it is for Leonardo?

Activity 2 — Saying 'Everything' When You Mean Something Specific

Sometimes the word that covers the most ground — 'everything', 'all of it', 'I don't know' — is the one that says the least and the most at the same time.

- Think of a time when you tried to explain why you liked something — a place, a person, an experience — and ended up saying 'everything' or 'I don't know'. What were you actually trying to say?
- Is it possible to be fully honest and still not name the specific thing? Is 'everything' a form of truth or a form of evasion?
- When someone says 'everything', what does the listener hear? Does it depend on who they are to you?

Activity 3 — Plans and Futures

In the chapter, Yuzuka describes her future: nutrition degree, school meal programmes, and someday a family. Leonardo thinks: 'She had a plan for education, for career, for professional life. But the personal part was vague.'

- Do you think it is realistic to plan one part of your future and leave the rest 'to happen when the time is right'? What are the risks?
- Is there a part of your future that you have planned carefully, and a part that you are leaving to chance?
- What does it tell us about Yuzuka that she can describe her professional future in precise detail but describes her personal future as something that will 'just happen'?

 GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 11.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
Golden Week	noun (proper)	A cluster of Japanese national holidays in late April and early May, typically spanning from April 29th to May 5th. It is one of Japan's three major holiday periods (the others being New Year and Obon in August). Many people travel during Golden Week, leaving cities quieter than usual and tourist destinations busier. <i>"Golden Week had emptied the city — everyone gone somewhere else, leaving Tottori quieter than usual."</i>
Mt Daisen (大山)	noun (proper)	The highest peak in the Chugoku region of western Japan, located in Tottori Prefecture. Known as the 'Fuji of the Chugoku region', it is a popular destination for hiking, skiing, and mountain scenery. The mountain is considered sacred and is home to several shrines and temples. Daisen is approximately an hour from Tottori city. <i>"I'm going hiking at Daisen with Toki-kun and Ryo-kun."</i>
dearth	noun	A scarcity or shortage — a lack of something needed or wanted. The opposite of abundance. <i>"Right now, there's a dearth of IT professionals in Japan. The demand is way higher than the supply."</i>
shoo-in	noun (informal)	A person who is considered certain to succeed or win in a given situation; someone whose selection or success seems almost inevitable. <i>"If you come back with a degree in computer science and you can speak Japanese at your level — you'd be a shoo-in."</i>
sponsor (a visa)	verb	For an employer or organisation to formally support a person's visa application, guaranteeing employment and taking on responsibility for the visa holder's status. In Japan, most work visas require employer sponsorship. <i>"Most companies wanted graduates, wanted specific skills, wanted people who could commit long-term — and someone to sponsor them."</i>
to enrol	verb	To officially register as a student at a school or university. In British English: 'enrol'; in American English: 'enroll'. <i>"Go back to Florence. Enrol in university. Get a degree."</i>
nutrition	noun	The study of food and how it affects the body — including what people need to eat to stay healthy, how different nutrients function, and how diet relates to health outcomes. <i>"Study nutrition. Get my degree. Work with schools. Help design meal programs for children."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
abstract	adjective	Existing as an idea rather than a concrete reality; not specific or detailed. An 'abstract plan' is one that exists in principle but has not been worked out in practice. <i>"The personal part was vague. Abstract. A family would appear when it was supposed to."</i>
pointed	adjective (of language or tone)	Deliberately significant or loaded — a comment that is 'pointed' says something beyond its surface meaning, drawing attention to something the speaker has noticed or wants to highlight. <i>"Leonardo couldn't tell if Toma was being observant or pointed, but something in his tone suggested the former."</i>
to be observant	adjective / verb phrase	To notice things carefully; to pay close attention to what is happening around you. To be 'merely observant' is to notice without implying; to be 'pointed' is to notice with intent. <i>"Leonardo couldn't tell if Toma was being observant or pointed."</i>
spouse visa	noun	A visa issued to the spouse (husband or wife) of a foreign national who is a legal resident or citizen of that country. In Japan, a spouse visa allows the holder to live and work in Japan as the partner of a Japanese citizen or permanent resident. <i>"Or — you could get a spouse visa." [Toma joking]</i>
to coordinate (schedules)	verb	To arrange and align plans or activities so that different people can participate at the same time. <i>"A group of five who had all gone to the same high school and still managed to coordinate schedules once or twice a year."</i>

Quick Check — Using the Words

For each sentence, choose the word from the glossary that best completes it. You may need to change the form.

1. The job market for qualified nurses in that region was in a state of _____ — hospitals were competing fiercely for candidates.
2. His response about his weekend was deliberately _____ — it sounded casual, but everyone at the table understood what he was referring to.
3. She had an _____ plan to travel someday — no dates, no destination, no budget. Just someday.
4. The company agreed to _____ his visa application, which meant he could start work immediately.
5. With her qualifications and the department chair's recommendation, she was a _____ for the position.

Extension: Toma mentions a 'spouse visa' as a joke, then clarifies he is joking and offers serious advice instead. What is the effect of making the joke first, then being serious? How does the joke change how the serious advice lands?

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — What Toma Knows

Toma returns for Golden Week and immediately begins assessing the situation. Complete the table with evidence from the chapter.

What Toma observes	How he responds	What this tells us about Toma
Leonardo and Yuzuka sitting closer at the kitchen table	_____	_____
At dinner, Leonardo not knowing what to do after the visa expires	_____	_____
Since New Year's, he has researched the IT visa path	_____	_____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

1. Toma arrives during cherry blossom season. T / F / NM
2. He plans to stay for all of Golden Week. T / F / NM
3. At dinner, Yuzuka says she is waiting to hear back about her university application. T / F / NM
4. Toma's advice is that Leonardo should apply for a work visa immediately. T / F / NM
5. Toma says he researched the IT path after New Year's because he thought Leonardo might want to return.
T / F / NM
6. Yuzuka has already received her acceptance letter from Nara Women's University. T / F / NM
7. The ice cream scene takes place the day after Toma leaves for Daisen. T / F / NM
8. Yuzuka says she wants to work in hospital nutrition. T / F / NM
9. Leonardo tells Yuzuka that Toma suggested the IT degree as a path back to Japan. T / F / NM
10. At the end of the chapter, Leonardo and Yuzuka tell each other how they feel. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- What does Toma notice about Leonardo and Yuzuka at dinner? What evidence in the chapter supports this reading?
- 2. Why has Toma researched the IT visa path? What does this tell us about him as a character?
- 3. Yuzuka describes her future in detail: nutrition degree, school meal programmes, 'a family someday'. What does Leonardo notice about the gap between her professional plan and her personal one?
- 4. When Yuzuka asks why Leonardo wants to come back to Japan, he says 'because I like it here' and then lists several reasons before stopping at 'everything'. What is he not saying? What does Yuzuka hear?
- 5. The chapter ends: 'Always one room away.' What does this phrase mean literally? What does it mean in the context of the novel as a whole?

A — 'Everything': The Most Specific Vague Word

The chapter's most important exchange is one of the shortest:

Yuzuka: 'Why come back? You'll have finished university. You could work anywhere. Why here?'

Leonardo: 'Because I like it here. Tottori. Japan. The way things work. The quiet. The—' He stopped.
'The what?'

'I don't know. Everything.'

Yuzuka didn't say anything for a long time. Then she said, 'I'm glad.'

1. What does 'everything' mean here? Is it vague, or is it specific in a way that a list of reasons could not be?
2. Yuzuka's response is 'I'm glad.' Two words. What does she understand that Leonardo has not said? What is she glad about — Japan? Tottori? Something more specific?
3. Later, Leonardo thinks: 'He said everything when he meant something much more specific.' Write the more specific thing he meant. How would the conversation have changed if he had said it?

B — Plans as Character: What People Want and Why

Chapter 11 contains two extended descriptions of future plans: Toma's IT path for Leonardo, and Yuzuka's nutrition degree and eventual family. Each plan reveals something about who the character is.

Toma's plan for Leonardo

- Practical and researched.
- Specific: IT degree, work visa, timeline.
- Based on market demand, not passion.
- Gives Leonardo a door, not a destination.
- Framed as: 'I looked into what it would actually take.'

Yuzuka's plan for herself

- Specific for career: nutrition, schools, children's health.
- Vague for personal life: 'a family someday'.
- The personal part is left to 'happen when the time is right'.
- She knows what she wants professionally but not personally.
- She says: 'It'll just happen, I guess.'

1. What does the contrast between Yuzuka's professional precision and personal vagueness suggest about her? Is this a strength or a blind spot?
2. Leonardo thinks about Yuzuka's plan: 'He heard what she wasn't saying — or maybe what she wasn't seeing.' What does he think she is not seeing?
3. Write a short paragraph (60–80 words) in the style of the chapter, describing a character through their plans — what they have planned in detail and what they have left vague. What the precision and the vagueness reveal should be clear without stating it directly.

C — The Walk as a Structural Device

Several of the novel's most important conversations happen during walks: Chapter 1 (Via Cavour after school), Chapter 4 (Toma's izakaya walk), Chapter 9 (the Osaka trip), and now this one. Walking allows characters to talk without looking directly at each other.

From Chapter 11:

"They walked through the neighborhood, past the temple and the park and the small shops that Leonardo had come to know over ten months. The weather was warm enough that they didn't need jackets."

1. Why do difficult conversations often happen more easily during walks than sitting face-to-face? What does movement or physical activity do to a conversation?
2. The ice cream scene — sitting on a curb — is different from a walk: they are stationary, but outside, in public. How does this setting affect the conversation? What could they say there that they could not say at home?
3. Choose a conversation from earlier in the novel and rewrite it as happening in a different setting. How does the setting change what can be said? Write 6–8 lines of dialogue.

 CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 11, written for any reader regardless of background.

Golden Week

Golden Week (ゴールデンウィーク) is Japan's longest national holiday period, running from late April to early May. It clusters several public holidays: Shōwa Day (April 29th), Constitution Memorial Day (May 3rd), Greenery Day (May 4th), and Children's Day (May 5th). Many Japanese companies close entirely for the week, and a significant portion of the population travels domestically or abroad.

The period is characterised by a particular kind of national movement: tourist attractions become extremely crowded, transport systems operate at near capacity, and smaller cities and rural areas become either busier (with visitors) or quieter (as locals leave). Tottori, not a major tourist destination, empties somewhat as residents travel to larger cities or resorts. The chapter uses this emptying to create the particular atmosphere of the ice cream scene: the city unusually quiet, the streets theirs, the day unhurried.

For discussion: Does your country have an equivalent national holiday period where most people travel or take time off simultaneously? What is the atmosphere like? Is there something you like or dislike about everyone being on holiday at the same time?

Mt Daisen: Tottori's Sacred Peak

Daisen (大山, literally 'Great Mountain') is the highest peak in western Japan's Chugoku region, rising to 1,729 metres. It is located in western Tottori Prefecture, roughly 40 kilometres from Tottori city. The mountain is a dormant stratovolcano with a distinctive, slightly irregular silhouette, sometimes called the 'Fuji of the San'in region'.

Daisen has been a site of Shinto and Buddhist worship for over 1,300 years. The main temple complex at its base, Daisen-ji, and the Ogamiyama Shrine are significant religious sites. Today the mountain is also a popular outdoor recreation destination: hiking to the summit takes approximately 2–3 hours from the main trail head. In winter, the slopes have ski runs. The surrounding Daisen-Okii National Park includes forests, coastal areas, and the volcanic landscape of the mountain itself.

For discussion: Is there a mountain, peak, or natural landmark near your home that has cultural or spiritual significance, as well as being a place for recreation? How do the two uses — sacred site and leisure destination — coexist?

Japan's IT Labour Market

Toma's advice to Leonardo is grounded in a real situation. Japan faces a significant and well-documented shortage of IT professionals. The Digital Agency (デジタル庁, Dejitaru-chō), established in 2021, was created partly in response to the country's recognition that it needed to modernise its technology infrastructure — and that it lacked the domestic workforce to do so quickly.

The shortage has several causes: an ageing domestic workforce, historically slow adoption of IT in certain sectors (particularly government and SMEs), and educational pipelines that have not kept pace with demand. As a result, Japan has become significantly more open to foreign IT workers than in previous decades, offering simplified pathways for qualified overseas applicants. Toma's assessment — 'If you come back with a degree in computer science and you can speak Japanese at your level, you'd be a shoo-in' — is a reasonable summary of the current landscape.

For discussion: Are there sectors in your country that have significant labour shortages? How does a country decide whether to fill those shortages with domestic workers, foreign workers, or technology? What are the social implications of each approach?

Working Holiday to Work Visa: The Realistic Path

The working holiday visa (ワーキングホリデービザ) is, as Toma says, a one-time arrangement. It cannot be renewed, and a person who has used it cannot apply again. To return to Japan for long-term residency after a working holiday, the most common paths are: marriage to a Japanese national or permanent resident (the 'spouse visa' Toma jokes about), obtaining a student visa to study at a Japanese university, or securing employment with a Japanese company willing to sponsor a work visa.

The most common work visa categories for skilled foreign workers include the Technical Internship programme (which has its own controversies), the Highly Skilled Professional visa (for those with high education and salary levels), and the standard Engineer/Specialist in Humanities visa, which requires a degree. Toma's advice — get a relevant degree and apply for jobs in Japan — is the most straightforward path for someone in Leonardo's position.

For discussion: Did you know that working holiday visas are typically a one-time arrangement? Does this change how you think about the way people use them? What would it mean to 'plan' a working holiday as a stepping stone to something else, rather than as an end in itself?

Nutrition Science and School Food in Japan

School lunch (給食, kyūshoku) is a significant part of Japanese school culture. Almost all Japanese public elementary and middle schools provide daily hot school lunches, managed by trained nutritionists (栄養士, ei-yōshi) who plan menus to meet specific dietary guidelines. The lunches are considered part of the educational programme — teaching food culture, nutrition, and communal eating.

The school nutritionist profession (学校栄養職員, gakkō ei-yō shokuin) is a distinct and regulated career track in Japan, requiring a specific qualification. Yuzuka's plan to 'study nutrition, work with schools, help design meal programs for children' is realistic and specific — and reflects genuine awareness of how this profession works in Japan. Her goal is not abstract; it is a defined career that exists within a well-established institutional framework.

For discussion: What is school lunch like in your country? Is it provided by the school, brought from home, or purchased? Who decides what students eat? Is this something people think about as part of education, or just as a practical necessity?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — Toma as Planner

Toma returns, assesses the situation, and delivers a practical plan that he has researched specifically for Leonardo. He has done this since New Year's, without being asked.

- Why does Toma do this? What does it tell us about who he is?
- Is unsolicited practical help always welcome? Does it depend on the quality of the help, or the relationship?
- Toma frames his reason simply: 'You're not terrible. And my sister likes having you around.' Do you believe this is the full reason? What else might be motivating him?

Discussion 2 — The Curb Scene

Leonardo and Yuzuka buy ice cream and sit on a curb in a quiet city. They talk about futures.

- Why is this the right setting for this conversation? What does the informality of the setting allow?
- Yuzuka's plan is specific professionally and vague personally. Leonardo hears what she 'isn't saying — or maybe what she isn't seeing'. What does he hear? What isn't she seeing?
- When Leonardo says 'everything', Yuzuka says 'I'm glad.' What exactly is she glad about? Is she responding to Japan, to Tottori, or to something Leonardo didn't say but meant?

Discussion 3 — 'A Family Someday'

Yuzuka says she wants a family someday — after university, after work, when it's time. Leonardo does not comment.

- Why doesn't he comment? What might he be thinking?
- Is Yuzuka's approach — planning her professional life carefully and leaving the personal to 'happen when it's supposed to' — realistic? Healthy? Both?
- What is the risk of leaving the personal part of life to 'just happen'? Is there something Yuzuka hasn't considered, or is she simply being practical?

Discussion 4 — 'Always One Room Away'

The chapter ends with this phrase. It has appeared before in the novel — at the end of Chapter 5, at the end of Chapter 10.

- What does 'one room away' mean physically? What does it mean emotionally?
- Why is 'one room away' both close and far? What kind of distance is a door?
- If the novel ended here, would this be a satisfying ending? What is still unresolved? What needs to happen in the final chapters?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — Toma's Walk (Pairs)

Re-enact the walk between Toma and Leonardo: Toma asks directly whether Leonardo wants to go back. Leonardo says yes. Toma presents the IT plan. The spouse visa joke happens in the middle.

The scene should feel like advice from an older brother who has actually thought about it — not lecturing, but offering something real.

Focus on: How to give someone a realistic path without making it feel like a demand. How to receive good advice from someone who has put in effort for you. The right moment to make a joke, and when to be serious.

Role Play 2 — The Curb (Pairs)

Play the ice cream scene: buy imaginary ice cream, sit somewhere uncomfortable (floor, edge of desk), and have the conversation. Yuzuka describes her future. Leonardo listens. Then she asks him: 'Why here?'

The key moment: Leonardo says 'everything'. What does Yuzuka do with that? How long is the silence before 'I'm glad'?

Debrief: What did it feel like to say 'everything' and know it was both not enough and exactly right? What did it feel like to hear it? Did Yuzuka's 'I'm glad' feel like enough of a response?

Role Play 3 — The Dinner Table (Groups of 4)

Re-enact the family dinner: Toma, Yuzuka, Leonardo, and either Shoichi or Mizuko. Toma asks his direct questions ('And you? What's the plan when your visa runs out?'). Leonardo gives his honest answer. The family dynamics of each person reacting in their own way.

Focus on: How to ask a direct question in a family setting without making it feel like an interrogation. How to answer honestly under mild pressure. What Shoichi and Mizuko's silence communicates.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Specific Thing

Leonardo says 'everything' when he means 'something much more specific'. Write the paragraph he does not say — what he would have said if he had found the words (100–130 words). It should feel like Leonardo: honest, slightly hesitant, finally clear. It should not be a speech. It should be what he would actually say.

Writing 2 — Yuzuka's Plan

Yuzuka describes her future: nutrition, schools, children's health, a family someday. Write a journal entry from Yuzuka's point of view (100–130 words) in which she thinks about her future after the ice cream scene — what she has said to Leonardo, what she has not said, and whether 'a family someday' is as vague to her as it sounded.

She knows what she wants. She may also know something she has not told him.

Writing 3 — Toma's Research

Toma has been researching how Leonardo could return to Japan since New Year's. Write the message or notes Toma compiled — the information he gathered about IT degrees, work visas, and Japan's labour market — as if it were a summary document he prepared to share (120–150 words). It should be practical, specific, and feel like something Toma actually wrote.

Writing 4 — Six Weeks

It is late April. Leonardo has six weeks left. Write his notebook entry for this evening — after the ice cream, after everything he hasn't said, after hearing Yuzuka's music through the wall (120–160 words).

This is Antonio's notebook — the one given to him in Chapter 2 to write down observations and things he wants to remember. It should sound like someone who has been writing in it for ten months and knows it is almost time to stop.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document • Chapter 12: Departure

Level: B1+ / B2 • All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 12 is the penultimate chapter and contains the novel's closest approach to a direct conversation between Leonardo and Yuzuka — and the farewell. Four movements. First: the winding down. Leonardo's last konbini shift. Vivek's quiet revelation that he always planned to leave. The strange weight of too much free time before departure. Second: the car scene. Yuzuka asks Leonardo to pick her up; he drives Shoichi's car (itself a significant moment of trust). In the car on the way home, Yuzuka tells him what Shio said — 'your boyfriend is leaving soon'. She said he was not her boyfriend. But she noticed that his face looked disappointed. This is the most direct conversation they have had, and the closest Leonardo comes to admitting what he feels — though the word 'disappointed' does the work rather than any direct declaration. Neither of them says what they mean. They arrive home, and Yuzuka gets out without resolution. Third: the last week. Careful. Polite. Two almost-moments that come to nothing. The silence between them changes quality. Fourth: the farewell at Tottori Airport. The whole send-off group — Morita family, Vivek, Hanako, Ao, Shio — are there. Yuzuka stands slightly apart. Leonardo says goodbye to everyone and then to her: 'thank you for everything / come back / I promise.' She stays. He goes through the gate, turns back, waves. She waves. He goes. On the plane, he looks at the observation terrace and likes to think the single figure there is her. The final section — home — is the novel's emotional climax: Leonardo realises that home has split. Florence is home. Tottori is also home. 'Home was one room away from someone he hadn't quite figured out how to say goodbye to.' The novel ends with 'one room away / always one room away / even now / especially now.'

Note to teacher: Chapter 12 is the novel's emotional conclusion. The car scene is the most direct confrontation between Leonardo and Yuzuka in the book — and it ends without resolution, which is entirely consistent with how the novel has handled this relationship throughout. The 'home' passage at the end is the thematic heart of the book: home is not a single place. The ending ('one room away / always one room away / even now / especially now') is an intentional echo of Chapter 10 and 11's endings. The repetition is designed to close the loop. Chapter 13 (the final chapter) offers a genuine resolution; it will be important to discuss what kind of resolution students expect and what they feel they need before reading it.

PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 12.

Activity 1 — Endings and Lasts

The chapter opens: 'The last two weeks arrived the way endings do — not suddenly, but with the slow accumulation of final times that Leonardo only recognized in retrospect.'

- Have you ever experienced the 'slow accumulation of final times' — a series of lasts you only recognised after they had passed?
- Is it better to know when something is the last time — to say goodbye consciously — or to only understand it afterwards?
- What is the difference between an ending you plan and an ending that simply arrives?

Activity 2 — What Home Means

By this point in the novel, Leonardo has been in Tottori for almost a year. He has also lived his whole life in Florence. Think about:

- Can a person have more than one home? What makes a place home — familiarity, relationships, memory, choice?
- If you spent a year somewhere else, would you still think of your current home as home when you got back? Would anything have changed?
- What does it feel like to leave a place that has become home? Is it different from leaving a place you are just visiting?

Activity 3 — The Almost-Conversation

In relationships, there are often things that are almost said and never quite are. Sometimes this is because the moment passes. Sometimes because neither person is ready. Sometimes because the consequences of saying it feel too uncertain.

- Have you ever had an almost-conversation — something important you nearly said but didn't? What stopped you?
- Is there a right time to say something important? Or is any time better than never?
- What happens to a relationship when important things remain unsaid — does it freeze, continue, or change?

Note to teacher: This activity prepares students emotionally for the car scene and the last week. The question of what Leonardo and Yuzuka do and don't say — and whether this is satisfying or frustrating — is central to the discussion of Chapter 12.

 GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 12.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
<i>in retrospect</i>	adverb phrase	Looking back; understanding something now that was not clear at the time it happened. Retrospect is hindsight — seeing the past clearly from a later position. <i>"The last two weeks arrived the way endings do — not suddenly, but with the slow accumulation of final times that Leonardo only recognized in retrospect."</i>
<i>accumulation</i>	noun	A gradual build-up of things over time — the process of collecting or increasing slowly. An 'accumulation of final times' means a series of lasts (last shift, last walk, last meal) that adds up to an ending. <i>"...the slow accumulation of final times that Leonardo only recognized in retrospect."</i>
<i>Ganbatte</i> (頑張って)	expression (Japanese)	A versatile Japanese expression of encouragement, roughly equivalent to 'good luck', 'do your best', 'hang in there', or 'keep going'. It is one of the most commonly used supportive phrases in Japanese and can be appropriate in almost any situation of challenge or transition. <i>"Shio just smiled and said 'Ganbatte' that could mean either 'Good luck' or 'Do your best' or both."</i>
<i>observation terrace</i>	noun	A viewing platform at an airport from which people can watch planes take off and land. Common at Japanese regional airports where the scale allows proximity to the runway. In Japan, rooftop observation decks (展望台, tenbōdai) are common at airports. <i>"The airport was small enough that he could see the observation terrace from here. There was only one person there."</i>
<i>to pinpoint</i>	verb	To identify precisely; to find or locate the exact moment, cause, or location of something. <i>"Leonardo couldn't pinpoint when [things had shifted]. Just that the air between them felt different."</i>
<i>Disappointing</i> (as a reaction)	adjective	In the chapter, used to describe Leonardo's visible reaction to hearing Yuzuka say she had told Shio he was not her boyfriend. 'Disappointing' suggests his face showed something he did not intend — a flicker of what he actually felt, despite his denial. <i>"Why are you reacting like that?" / "Like what?" / "Like it's disappointing."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
to shift	verb	To move or change — used here to describe something intangible: the quality of the atmosphere or relationship between two people. A shift is a gradual change of position rather than a sudden break. <i>"Something had shifted since Golden Week — or maybe since the bath incident, or maybe since February."</i>
Haneda (羽田空港)	noun (proper)	Tokyo International Airport, commonly known as Haneda Airport. Located in Tokyo, it is one of Japan's two major international airports (the other being Narita). Haneda handles domestic flights as well as international routes. A flight from Tottori Airport to Haneda is approximately 1–1.5 hours. <i>"Leonardo's flight to Haneda left at around two in the afternoon."</i>
via de' Servi / Via Cavour	noun (proper)	Street names from Leonardo's home city in Italy, used throughout the novel as anchors of his Italian life. In the final chapter, Leonardo lists them as part of his definition of home — real streets, known since childhood. <i>"Home was via Cavour that he walked with his friends. Home was the apartment in via de Servi."</i>
departing from vs returning to	conceptual distinction	The distinction Leonardo makes between 'going back to something' (returning) and 'leaving something behind' (departing). He expected to feel like he was returning to Florence; instead he feels like he is departing from Japan. The direction of his emotional orientation has reversed. <i>"It didn't feel like going back. It felt like leaving. Like departing from something rather than returning to something."</i>
irasshaimase (いらっしゃいませ)	expression (Japanese)	A formal greeting used in Japanese shops, restaurants, and businesses to welcome customers. It means something like 'Welcome, honoured customer' and is said automatically to anyone who enters. It is often the first phrase foreigners learn when working in retail in Japan. <i>"Home was also a konbini where he had learned to say irasshaimase without thinking."</i>
without permission	adverb phrase	Without being asked or invited; without one's consent. Used here to describe how Leonardo's sense of home changed: it happened to him, not by decision. <i>"Home had shifted somewhere along the way. Without him noticing. Without permission."</i>

Quick Check — Meaning in Context

For each phrase below, write one sentence explaining what it means in the context of the chapter — not just the definition, but what it communicates about the situation or the character.

1. 'the slow accumulation of final times'
2. 'Home had shifted somewhere along the way. Without him noticing. Without permission.'
3. 'Like it's disappointing'
4. 'ganbatte'
5. 'Departing from something rather than returning to something'

Extension: The word *irasshaimase* appears in the final 'home' passage. This is the first time it has appeared since Chapter 4. What effect does its return have here? What does including it in a list of things that feel like home tell us about how Leonardo's year has changed him?

COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — What Gets Said and What Doesn't

Chapter 12 is full of conversations that approach something important without reaching it. Complete the table.

Scene	What is said	What is not said (but present)
The car scene	_____	_____
The knock on the door (Leonardo and tea)	_____	_____
Late-night television	_____	_____
The airport farewell	_____	_____

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

- Leonardo's last shift at the konbini takes place in early May. T / F / NM
- Vivek tells Leonardo he had always planned to return to Punjab eventually. T / F / NM
- Yuzuka asks Leonardo to pick her up because her mother is busy. T / F / NM
- Shio told Yuzuka that her boyfriend was leaving soon. T / F / NM
- Yuzuka tells Leonardo she also finds the situation confusing. T / F / NM
- The Morita family, Vivek, and Yuzuka's friends all come to the airport. T / F / NM
- Toma comes to the airport in person to say goodbye. T / F / NM
- Shio says 'ganbatte' to Leonardo at the airport. T / F / NM
- On the plane, Leonardo sees the observation terrace and knows for certain it is Yuzuka. T / F / NM
- The chapter ends with Leonardo landing in Rome. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- Vivek says: 'I was never going to stay... at some point, time comes to go home.' How is Vivek's relationship to Tottori different from Leonardo's? What does this contrast reveal about Leonardo?
- 2. In the car, Yuzuka tells Leonardo what Shio said. Why does she tell him? What does she want to know?
- 3. Leonardo says: 'I don't know what you want me to say.' Yuzuka says: 'Nothing. I don't want you to say anything.' Then asks why he brought it up. Why does this exchange feel circular? What is each of them actually trying to say?
- 4. At the airport, Yuzuka says: 'Come back.' 'Promise.' What makes this exchange significant, given everything that has and hasn't been said?
- 5. In the final passage, Leonardo lists two kinds of home: Florence (via Cavour, via de' Servi) and Tottori (the temple bell, the konbini, the house in Teramachi). What does he include last, and why?

A — The 'Home' Passage: Parallelism and Repetition

The chapter's final passage is the most formally crafted writing in the novel. Read it closely:

Home was via Cavour that he walked with his friends.

Home was the apartment in via de Servi...

Home was the bus on route 28...

But...

Home was also a house in Teramachi with a temple bell that rang at seven.

Home was also a konbini where he had learned to say irasshaimase without thinking.

Home was also a city small enough to know and quiet enough to hear yourself think.

Home was one room away from someone he hadn't quite figured out how to say goodbye to.

1. The passage uses the structure 'Home was...' / 'But...' / 'Home was also...' What does the 'But' do? Why is it a single word on its own line?
2. The final line breaks the pattern slightly — 'Home was one room away from someone...' is different from the others. How is it different? Why is it last?
3. Write a passage of your own in the same style — 'Home was...' — for a real or imagined character. List three or four things that make a first home, the 'But', and then two or three things from a second home. End with the most personal one.

B — The Car Scene: Two People Not Saying the Thing

The car scene is the novel's most sustained direct conversation about the relationship. And yet neither character says what they mean. Trace the exchange:

Yuzuka: *'She said your boyfriend is leaving soon.'*
Leonardo: *'Oh.'*
Yuzuka: *'I told her you're not my boyfriend.'*
Leonardo: *'Right. Good.'*
Yuzuka: *'...Why are you reacting like that?' / 'Like it's disappointing.'*
Leonardo: *'I'm not.' / 'I'm just surprised.'* [fails to adjust his face]
Yuzuka: *'Do you not like me?'*
Leonardo: *'Of course I like you. You've been — you're my friend...'*
Yuzuka: *'That's not what I asked.'*

1. 'That's not what I asked' appears twice in this exchange. What question is Yuzuka actually asking, and why does Leonardo keep not answering it?
2. Leonardo's face shows what he cannot say — he 'fails to adjust it'. What does his face reveal that his words deny? What is he afraid of saying?
3. Yuzuka says: 'Forget it.' Then goes inside. Leonardo is 'trying to understand what had just happened.' Write Leonardo's internal processing (80–100 words): what does he think was said, what does he now understand, and what does he still not know?

C — Ganbatte: Meaning Without Translation

Shio says 'ganbatte' to Leonardo at the airport and the narrator notes it 'could mean either Good luck or Do your best or both.'

Some things resist translation — not because there is no equivalent, but because the equivalent in the target language carries different associations, different weight, different social contexts. Ganbatte is one of these: it is encouragement, solidarity, and acknowledgement of difficulty all at once, in a word so common and so culturally embedded that any English translation feels slightly wrong.

1. Is there a word or expression in your own language that does not translate well into English? Describe it and explain what is lost in translation.
2. In the context of Leonardo's departure, what does Shio specifically mean by ganbatte? Is she wishing him luck for the journey, the degree, the plan to come back, or something else entirely?
3. Write the equivalent farewell sentence in English that captures what Shio means — not a direct translation, but the right English expression for this specific moment, this specific person, this specific goodbye.

CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes on Japan and Italy relevant to Chapter 12, written for any reader regardless of background.

Tottori Airport: Small Places and What They Mean

Tottori Airport (鳥取砂丘コナン空港, also known as Tottori Sand Dunes Conan Airport, named after the anime character Detective Conan whose creator was born in Tottori Prefecture) is a small regional airport with a limited number of flights per day, primarily to Tokyo's Haneda Airport and Osaka's Itami Airport. It is a single-runway airport with minimal facilities — exactly the kind of airport the chapter describes: two gates, visible runway, observation terrace.

The smallness of the airport is significant in the chapter. It is small enough that Leonardo can see the observation terrace from the plane window. Small enough that the figure standing there might be Yuzuka. A departure from Tottori Airport is different from a departure from an international hub — it is personal in scale, unhurried, close enough to feel individual.

For discussion: Have you ever experienced a departure from a small, local airport or transport hub? How was it different from a large international one? What does the scale of a departure point do to the emotional experience of leaving?

Ganbatte: Encouragement as a Cultural Value

Ganbatte (頑張って, also ganbatte ne, ganbatte kudasai) is one of the most used expressions in Japanese — equivalent in frequency of use to 'good luck' but with a wider range of meaning. Its core is the verb ganbaru (頑張る), which means to persist, to do one's best, to push through difficulty. Saying ganbatte is an acknowledgement that something is hard, combined with encouragement to persist.

The expression is used in enormously varied contexts: before an exam, before a sports match, at the end of a difficult conversation, when saying goodbye to someone embarking on something uncertain. It carries the sense that the speaker sees the challenge and believes in the person facing it. Unlike 'good luck', it does not rely on fortune — it is an affirmation of effort and will.

In the context of Leonardo's departure, Shio's ganbatte is perfectly chosen: it acknowledges that what he is doing (leaving, planning to come back, having unresolved feelings, facing an uncertain future) is difficult, and that she believes he will manage it.

For discussion: Is there an equivalent of ganbatte in your language — an expression of encouragement that acknowledges difficulty rather than just wishing for luck? If not, what would be the closest equivalent? What would be lost in translation?

Home as a Concept: Belonging to Multiple Places

The novel's final 'home' passage engages with a question that has become more relevant as global migration, study abroad, and working holidays have become more common: can a person belong to more than one place? And if so, what happens to the concept of home?

Research on cultural identity and belonging suggests that people who have lived significantly in more than one country often develop what is sometimes called a 'third culture' — a perspective that belongs fully to neither original culture nor adopted culture, but to the experience of navigating between the two. This is not loss; it is addition. But it comes with a specific kind of homesickness: being in one place and missing the other, or missing both simultaneously.

Leonardo's realisation — 'home had shifted somewhere along the way, without him noticing, without permission' — captures this experience accurately. He did not choose to feel at home in Tottori. It happened. And now Florence and Tottori are both home, in different and overlapping ways.

For discussion: Do you think it is possible to have more than one home? Have you ever felt this — belonging to two places, or belonging fully to neither? What does belonging to a place actually feel like, and how do you know when it has happened?

The Konbini as Home: Belonging Through Labour

One of the most striking elements of the 'home' passage is this line: 'Home was also a konbini where he had learned to say irasshaimase without thinking.' The workplace — and specifically the moment when a learnt phrase became automatic — is included in a list of things that feel like home alongside a street in Florence and a temple bell.

This reflects something true about how belonging develops through repeated small acts: not through grand moments but through the accumulation of routine. Learning to say irasshaimase automatically means Leonardo's body has adapted to Japan in a way that his conscious mind could not have forced. It is the same kind of knowing as the temple bell — noticing only when it stopped — or as the refrigerator system in Chapter 6. Belonging happens in the body before it happens in the head.

For discussion: Think of something you can do automatically now that you had to learn consciously. When did it stop requiring effort? Does anything about that moment of automaticity feel like belonging?

Departures in Italian Culture

Italian culture, particularly in family-oriented communities and smaller cities, often places significant ceremonial weight on arrivals and departures — airport send-offs and welcomes with the extended family present are not unusual. Leonardo's goodbye at Tottori Airport, surrounded by his entire social world in that city, has an Italian quality to it even in Japan: the group, the hugs, the specific farewell from each person.

By contrast, his departure from Florence at the beginning of the novel was dawn, a flight connection, quiet. The scale of the Tottori send-off — Mizuko's packed snacks, Shoichi's handshake, Vivek taking the afternoon off, Hanako's hug, Ao's prediction, Shio's ganbatte — is a measure of what ten months have built.

For discussion: What is farewell culture like in your country or family? Are goodbyes marked with ceremony, or are they usually brief? What does the size and nature of a farewell communicate about the relationship?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — Vivek's Philosophy

Vivek says: 'I was never going to stay... at some point, time comes to go home.' He likes Tottori. He has spent two years there. But home, for him, is elsewhere.

- What is the difference between Vivek's relationship to Tottori and Leonardo's?
- Is Vivek's philosophy ('at some point, time comes to go home') healthy and realistic, or does it limit how fully he can inhabit the places he lives in?
- Has Vivek missed something by always knowing he would leave? Or is knowing you will leave a kind of freedom?

Discussion 2 — The Car Scene

The car scene is the closest the novel comes to a direct declaration. Yuzuka notices Leonardo's face. She asks: 'Do you not like me?' He cannot answer properly.

- Why can Leonardo not answer the question? Is it fear, confusion, timing, or something else?
- Yuzuka says 'Forget it' and goes inside. Is this frustration? Self-protection? An invitation? Something else?
- They arrive home without resolving anything. Is this realistic? Is it satisfying as a narrative choice? What do you think should have happened in the car?

Discussion 3 — 'Come Back. Promise.'

At the airport, Yuzuka says two things: 'Come back.' And then: 'Promise.'

- What is the difference between 'Come back' and 'Promise'? Why does she need the promise?
- What does the promise mean to each of them — to Leonardo, who is making it, and to Yuzuka, who is asking for it?
- Is a promise to come back in three or four years a realistic thing to ask for or give? What are they both trusting?

Discussion 4 — Two Homes

The 'home' passage ends: 'Home was one room away from someone he hadn't quite figured out how to say goodbye to.'

- What does this sentence mean? Who is 'one room away' now, in the context of the plane?
- The novel ends (in Chapter 12) with 'One room away. Always one room away. Even now. Especially now.' What does 'especially now' add? What has changed about the meaning of 'one room away'?
- Is the novel's ending satisfying? What remains unresolved? What does the novel's restraint — its refusal to give Leonardo and Yuzuka a conventional romantic conclusion — say about the story it is telling?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Car Scene (Pairs)

Play the car scene. Student A is Yuzuka — she has just told him what Shio said, and she needs to know if it was stupid. Student B is Leonardo — driving, trying to keep his eyes on the road, failing to hide what his face is doing.

Play it as written first. Then play an alternate version: what if Leonardo had answered the question directly? What would he have said? How would Yuzuka have responded?

Debrief: Which version felt more realistic? More satisfying? Is saying the true thing always better than the indirect approach? What was the cost of saying or not saying it?

Role Play 2 — The Airport Farewell (Groups of 5-7)

Play the full airport farewell. Each student takes a character: Mizuko, Shoichi, Vivek, Hanako, Ao, Shio, Yuzuka. Leonardo (one student) says goodbye to each person in turn.

Each character's farewell should sound like them — Mizuko's warmth, Shoichi's formality, Vivek's directness, Ao's humour, Shio's ganbatte, and finally Yuzuka's 'Come back. Promise.'

Debrief: What was the hardest farewell to play? Which character's words felt most significant? What does each person's goodbye tell us about their relationship with Leonardo?

Role Play 3 — Twelve Hours (Solo or Pairs)

Leonardo is on a twelve-hour flight from Tokyo to Rome. He has time to think. Student A plays Leonardo in conversation with himself — or with an imaginary Yuzuka, or with Antonio's notebook.

He has to work out: what does he actually want? What is he going back to? What is he leaving? What is the promise he just made, and does he fully understand it?

This role play can be done as a written internal monologue or as a spoken exercise. The goal is clarity — not resolution, but a clearer understanding of what the character is feeling and why.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — The Observation Terrace

On the plane, Leonardo looks at the observation terrace and sees one person standing there. He 'liked to think it was Yuzuka.'

Write the scene from the observation terrace (100–130 words): one person, watching the plane taxi and take off. We do not confirm who it is. But their thoughts and feelings should be clear.

Writing 2 — Two Homes

Write your own 'home' passage (100–130 words) in the style of the chapter's final section. You can write from your own experience or from an invented character's. The passage should name two different places that both feel like home, list specific things from each, include the 'But...' transition, and end with the most personal thing.

What you include in each list should reveal something about who the character is and what they have experienced.

Writing 3 — The Week Between

Between the car scene and the airport, there is a week of careful politeness: two almost-moments, polite meals, passing in the hallway. Write a scene from this week (120–150 words) — one of the almost-moments. Something starts to be said. Then isn't.

The scene should feel like the rest of the novel: specific, restrained, with meaning in what is not said as much as what is.

Writing 4 — The Message Not Sent

On the twelve-hour flight, Leonardo opens his phone to write a message to Yuzuka. He types it. Then deletes it. Then types it again. Then decides not to send it.

Write the message he types and deletes (80–100 words). Then write two sentences explaining why he doesn't send it — and one sentence explaining what he does instead.

MY TIME IN TOTTORI

Teacher Resource Document • Chapter 13: Return

Level: B1+ / B2 • All material in English



TEACHER NOTES

Chapter Summary (for teacher reference)

Chapter 13 covers approximately a full year in Florence — and ends with Leonardo packing his bag to return to Japan for two weeks. It is structured as a series of episodes: returning to Florence and finding it strange (Riccardo's observation: 'you feel like a guest'); reuniting with Giovanni, Antonio, and Matteo in the workshop, where Matteo reveals he looked up Yuzuka's name and its meaning (yuzu — citrus), and the friends extract everything Leonardo is willing to say; enrolling at university in computer science with no ceremony but a feeling of something settling; his parents offering their characteristic forms of support (Mario: practical; Sofia: philosophical), and Leonardo hearing them differently now — as parents, not noise; returning to the Japanese Cultural Centre and helping with beginner courses, keeping his Japanese active, talking to Kyoko; three months in, receiving a message from Ao saying Yuzuka is 'unbearable' and missing him; the year passing ('autumn into winter into spring'); finishing his first-year exams and immediately booking a flight to Osaka for two weeks; and the group chat exchange in which, after Hanako, Ao, and Shio respond with enthusiasm, Yuzuka sends six words — 'Let me know when you arrive' — and then a private message: 'I missed you.' The novel ends with Leonardo packing, Riccardo in the doorway, and Leonardo starting to count the hours.

Note to teacher — on the ending: The novel resolves its central questions with characteristic restraint. We do not see the reunion. We do not see the conversation Leonardo has been unable to have. We end with 'I missed you' — three words in a private message — and Leonardo counting the hours. This is the right ending for this novel: the promise of something rather than its fulfilment. For discussion: is this a satisfying ending? What does the novel leave open, and what has it resolved? The workshop scene with the friends, Matteo's yuzu revelation, and the parents' dinner are each worth significant discussion time alongside the final message.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Use these activities before students read Chapter 13.

Activity 1 — Coming Home After a Long Time Away

Leonardo arrives back in Florence after ten months in Japan. He finds his city familiar and strange at the same time.

- Have you ever returned to somewhere after a long absence — a family home, a school, a town — and found it both the same and different? Describe the experience.
- Riccardo says Leonardo 'feels like a guest'. What does it mean to feel like a guest somewhere you grew up?
- Do you think people change more when they go away, or does the place change in their absence? Or both?

Activity 2 — What Friends See

Giovanni describes Leonardo as 'steady', Antonio says Japan changes a person, and Matteo has been doing his own research. Each friend notices something different.

- Which of your friends sees you most clearly? What do they see that others miss?
- Is it possible to change without noticing it yourself? What are the signs that someone has changed — in how they seem, how they speak, how they move?
- What does it mean to know what you're doing? Is this the same as knowing what you want?

Activity 3 — Three Words

The novel is approaching its ending. Yuzuka sends Leonardo a private message: 'I missed you.' Three words. After twelve chapters of restraint, indirect communication, and unsaid things.

- What do these three words change? What do they still not resolve?
- Is 'I missed you' a declaration? An opening? Something in between?
- What do you expect to happen when Leonardo arrives in Japan for his two-week visit? What do you hope will happen?

Note to teacher: This pre-reading activity can be done as a brief discussion after completing Chapter 12, rather than immediately before Chapter 13. It creates the right anticipatory space for the final chapter. Students should be encouraged to speculate and compare expectations — which the chapter will then satisfy or redirect.

GLOSSARY

These words and expressions appear in Chapter 13.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
LINE	noun (proper)	A free messaging and voice-calling application developed in Japan and widely used across East and Southeast Asia. LINE functions similarly to WhatsApp but has additional features including sticker sets and group chats. It is the dominant messaging platform in Japan and is widely used for both personal and professional communication. <i>"Three months into his first year, Leonardo's phone buzzed with a LINE notification."</i>
yuzu (柚子)	noun (Japanese)	A citrus fruit native to East Asia, used widely in Japanese cooking and cosmetics. It has a distinctive, aromatic scent — somewhere between lemon, grapefruit, and mandarin. In the chapter, Matteo reveals that Yuzuka's name contains the kanji for yuzu, meaning her name is associated with this scent. <i>"Yuzu scent. I looked it up after Osaka."</i>
bureaucracy	noun	The administrative system and processes of an organisation, typically involving a great deal of paperwork, official procedures, and forms. Often used with a sense of frustration at its impersonal nature. <i>"That was it. No ceremony. No moment of clarity. Just bureaucracy and a student ID card."</i>
algorithm	noun (computing)	A step-by-step set of instructions or rules for solving a problem or completing a task, used particularly in computing and mathematics. Algorithm design is a core subject in computer science degrees. <i>"Leonardo put his phone down and went back to studying algorithm design."</i>
to settle back in	phrasal verb	To return to a previous environment and become comfortable in it again — to re-establish routines and feel at home after an absence. <i>"'I'll settle back in.' Riccardo nodded, but he didn't look convinced."</i>
gleeful	adjective	Showing great delight or pleasure, often with a slightly mischievous quality — delighted in a way that is fun to witness. <i>"All three of them looked at him with identical expressions of gleeful understanding."</i>
enrollment / enrolment	noun	The process of officially registering as a student at a school or university. 'University enrollment' is the administrative moment of becoming a student. <i>"University enrollment happened in early September."</i>

Term	Part of Speech	Definition & Example
steady	adjective	Settled, stable, and self-possessed — not easily moved or unsettled. A person who appears 'steady' has a sense of groundedness and direction. Used here to describe how Leonardo seems after his year in Japan. <i>"Steady. Like you know what you're doing."</i>
to extract (information)	verb	To draw out or obtain information from someone, usually by asking persistent questions. Extracting information implies the person did not give it freely — some effort was required. <i>"They spent the next hour extracting every detail Leonardo was willing to give them."</i>
to count the hours	idiomatic expression	To wait eagerly and impatiently for something to happen, tracking the time remaining until an anticipated event. The novel's final line. <i>"And started counting the hours."</i>
valid (for a document)	adjective	Officially recognised and current — still legally effective and not expired. A 'valid' document can still be used for its intended purpose. <i>"The international driving permit that was still valid for one more year."</i>
unbearable	adjective	So difficult or unpleasant as to be impossible to tolerate. Used here with comic affection — Ao means Yuzuka is being extremely focused and serious, and won't talk about anything else. <i>"Don't forget to come back. Yuzuka is becoming unbearable!"</i>

Quick Check — Connections

Several glossary terms from Chapter 13 connect to earlier chapters. For each one, explain the connection.

1. 'yuzu' — how does this connect to Yuzuka's name, and why does Matteo find it significant? (Chapter 13 and Chapters 3–11)
2. 'LINE' — why does Leonardo still have LINE when his Florence friends use WhatsApp? (Chapter 12)
3. 'steady' — how does Giovanni's description of Leonardo connect to who Leonardo was in Chapter 1? What has changed?
4. 'to count the hours' — what was Leonardo doing at the end of Chapter 1? What is he doing at the end of Chapter 13? What has changed about the direction of his anticipation?
5. 'unbearable' — how does Ao's use of this word tell us about Yuzuka's state of mind in Leonardo's absence?

✓ COMPREHENSION ACTIVITIES

Activity 1 — The Year in Florence: Key Moments

Chapter 13 covers approximately a year in Florence. Complete the timeline.

When	What happens	What it means for Leonardo
Late June (arrival)		
Late July		
Early September (university)		
September dinner		
September onwards (cultural centre)		
Three months in (autumn/winter)		
The following May		
Late July (planned return)		

Activity 2 — True, False, or Not Mentioned?

Mark each statement T (True), F (False), or NM (Not Mentioned). Correct any false statements.

- Riccardo notices Leonardo has changed on his first day back. T / F / NM
- The friends meet at the same workshop as in Chapter 2. T / F / NM
- Matteo reveals that 'Yuzuka' contains the kanji for a citrus fruit. T / F / NM
- Leonardo enrolls in a mechanical engineering degree. T / F / NM
- At university enrollment, the clerk asks why Leonardo chose his field. T / F / NM
- Leonardo's father thinks computer science was a better choice than engineering. T / F / NM
- Leonardo begins helping at the Japanese Cultural Centre with beginner classes. T / F / NM
- Ao sends a LINE message saying Yuzuka is annoying and asks Leonardo to come back. T / F / NM
- Leonardo plans to visit Japan for two weeks in July, the summer after his first year. T / F / NM
- The novel ends with Leonardo and Yuzuka meeting at Tottori Station. T / F / NM

Activity 3 — Short Answer Questions

Answer in full sentences.

- Riccardo says Leonardo 'feels like a guest' in his own home. What does he mean? Why can't Leonardo 'settle back in'?
- 2. At the workshop, the friends extract 'every detail Leonardo was willing to give'. What is the significance of the phrase 'willing to give'? What does he give them, and what does he keep?
- 3. Leonardo says computer science 'might not be what he would have chosen in a perfect world' but 'it was a path' and 'a door'. What does this tell us about how he is approaching the future?
- 4. At the dinner table, Leonardo hears his parents' voices differently than in Chapter 2. What has changed? Has his parents changed, or has he?
- 5. Yuzuka's final message is 'I missed you'. What does this change about how the novel ends? What does it still not resolve?



LANGUAGE FOCUS

A — The Name: Yuzu

Matteo tells Leonardo that Yuzuka's name contains the kanji for yuzu — a citrus fruit known for its distinctive, delicate scent. He says this is a 'certain citrus scent'. The novel has been building to this moment, though the reader did not know it.

Yuzuka (柚子香) — a name that can be read as 'yuzu scent' or 'fragrance of yuzu'. Like many Japanese names, it is composed of kanji with specific meanings: 柚子 (yuzu, the citrus fruit) + 香 (ka, fragrance or scent). Matteo looked this up 'after Osaka' — meaning the significance of the name is something he thought about on his own, without being prompted.

1. Why does Matteo bring this up? What is he suggesting about Leonardo and Yuzuka?
2. Leonardo 'felt heat rise in his face' when Matteo reveals this. What does this reaction reveal?
3. Japanese names often carry meaning through their kanji. This is different from most European naming traditions, where names have historical or family significance but not necessarily a literal meaning. Look at the names in the novel: Yuzuka (yuzu scent), Toma, Mizuko (水子), Shoichi, Hanako (花子, flower child). What does naming a person with a meaningful kanji communicate about how the culture thinks about identity?

B — The Workshop Scene: What Friends Do

The workshop scene is a return to Chapter 2's farewell — same place, same people, same beer. But the dynamic has shifted. Compare the two scenes:

Chapter 2 — Farewell	Chapter 13 — Return
• The four of them know each other completely. • Leonardo is about to go somewhere unknown. • The others offer support for something they don't fully understand. • The mood is warm but slightly anxious. • The friends are all about to separate — different universities, different paths.	• They know Leonardo but he has a year they don't fully know. • He is now someone with a path and a plan. • The others understand more than he intended to give them. • The mood is warm and affectionately chaotic. • Each of them has gone somewhere and done something — they are different too.

1. What does Giovanni mean by 'steady'? Is this the word you would use to describe Leonardo now? What word would you choose?
2. The friends 'extract every detail Leonardo was willing to give'. What does this kind of extraction by people who know you well feel like — intrusive, or a relief? What does it tell us about these friendships?
3. Giovanni's final line is: 'Good things don't happen often.' What does he mean by this? What is he encouraging Leonardo to do — or not to miss?

C — 'I Missed You': Six Words and What They Do

The novel ends with a sequence of messages in the group chat, then a private message from Yuzuka:

Group chat: 'Let me know when you arrive.' (Six words. Nothing more.)

Private: 'I missed you.' (Three words.)

1. Why does Yuzuka send two separate messages — one in the group chat and one private? What is the significance of that separation?
2. 'I missed you' has appeared in the novel before — Leonardo says it to Riccardo in Chapter 7 ('I miss you too'). How is Yuzuka's use different? What does it mean coming from her, at this moment, after this year?
3. The novel ends without showing us what Leonardo writes back. Write his reply — and then write two alternatives: one that says more than she expected, one that says less. Which would he actually send?



CULTURAL NOTES

Cultural notes relevant to Chapter 13, written for any reader regardless of background.

Yuzu: The Fruit and Its Name

Yuzu (柚子) is a citrus fruit native to East Asia, believed to have originated in central China and cultivated in Japan and Korea for centuries. It is roughly the size of a tangerine, with a thick, bumpy yellow-green skin and tart, fragrant juice. Unlike most citrus, yuzu is rarely eaten as a fruit — it is used almost entirely for its zest and juice, which have a distinctive aroma that combines notes of lemon, grapefruit, and mandarin with something more floral.

In Japan, yuzu is used in cooking (yuzu kosho, a chilli condiment; ponzu sauce; desserts and drinks), in baths (yuzu-buro, the winter tradition of floating yuzu in the bath on the winter solstice), and in perfumery. The scent is considered refined and elegant.

As a name element, 柚子 or 柚 appears in Japanese female names to convey freshness, fragrance, and a certain brightness. The character 香 (ka/ko, fragrance) added to a name like Yuzuka suggests the scent of yuzu — a subtle, distinctive presence. Matteo's discovery that this is what her name means adds a layer of meaning that has been quietly present throughout the novel.

For discussion: Does the meaning of a person's name affect how you think about them? Do you know what your own name means? Is meaning in a name something your culture considers important?

LINE and Digital Relationships Across Distances

LINE (ライン) is a messaging and social platform developed in Japan by a subsidiary of the Korean company Naver, released in 2011. It quickly became the dominant messaging app in Japan (and is also widely used in Taiwan, Thailand, and Indonesia) with over 90 million users in Japan alone. LINE's design includes animated stickers, group chat features, official accounts for businesses and celebrities, and a variety of games and services.

For Japanese users, LINE is often the primary means of personal communication — the equivalent of WhatsApp in Europe or WeChat in China. The fact that Leonardo has kept LINE (rather than converting to WhatsApp for Japan-connected contacts) and that the Tottori group chat lives there is realistic: Japanese friends would naturally communicate through LINE, and switching platforms would mean losing the history of those conversations.

For discussion: Do different apps and platforms carry different social meanings or associations for you? Is there a platform you use for certain kinds of relationships or conversations that you would not use for others?

The Japanese Cultural Centre and Language Maintenance

Leonardo's return to the Japanese Cultural Centre in via Starnina — now as a helper rather than a student — is a realistic and well-observed detail about language maintenance. One of the most common challenges for people who have lived in a country and then left is maintaining the language level they achieved while there. Without active use, language skills can erode quickly.

Helping with beginner classes is one of the most effective ways to maintain advanced vocabulary while reinforcing basic structures — teaching something requires understanding it at a different level from using it. Leonardo's role — 'answering questions about actually living in Japan, the practical things the textbooks didn't cover' — is valuable precisely because it draws on knowledge the textbooks cannot provide: the lived experience of konbini, trains, address registration, and daily life.

For discussion: If you stopped using English after finishing school, how long do you think it would take before you noticed a significant decline? What strategies would you use to keep it active?

Computer Science as a Career Path to Japan

Toma's advice in Chapter 11 — that an IT degree would give Leonardo the best chance of returning to Japan on a work visa — is grounded in a real situation. Japan's digital transformation has been a national policy priority since the early 2020s, with the government acknowledging significant gaps in its IT workforce compared to other developed economies. The establishment of the Digital Agency in 2021 was partly a recognition of this.

For foreign nationals with IT qualifications, Japan offers several pathways including the Highly Skilled Professional visa (高度専門職, *kōdo senmonshoku*) which awards points for education, salary, research achievement, and Japanese language ability. A computer science degree from a European university, combined with demonstrated Japanese language proficiency (JLPT N2 or above would be expected), would make Leonardo a competitive candidate by the time he finishes his degree.

The chapter's description of enrollment — no ceremony, a stamped form, a student ID — is deliberately anticlimactic. The significance is not in the moment but in what it represents: the first step on a path that Toma showed him and that Leonardo has chosen as his own.

For discussion: Is it satisfying or unsatisfying to make a practical decision about your future — choosing a path because it is useful rather than because it is what you love? Is there a way to reconcile the two?

Nara in Summer

The chapter contains a quiet but significant line: 'Nara was supposed to be very nice in summer.' This is Leonardo thinking about a possible summer visit between academic years — and Nara, of course, is where Yuzuka has gone to study at Nara Women's University. The mention of Nara is not coincidental.

Nara in summer (June–September) is warm and busy. The deer remain, the shrines remain, the city's ancient atmosphere remains. Kasuga Taisha, where Yuzuka obtained her omamori in Chapter 9, is beautiful in summer light. The suggestion that Leonardo is already planning a route that takes him through Nara — or at least is noting that it is 'nice in summer' — is the novel's last piece of quiet comedy: he is planning the visit around where she is, without quite admitting it.

For discussion: Have you ever planned a trip around a person without acknowledging that was the real reason? What made you frame it differently in your own mind?



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Discussion 1 — 'You Feel Like a Guest'

Riccardo tells Leonardo he 'feels like a guest' in his own home. Leonardo tries to settle back in and partially fails. A year has changed the shape of where he belongs.

- Is this a problem to be solved, or a natural consequence of having lived somewhere else?
- Is it possible to fully return to a place you have left? Or does a significant absence permanently change your relationship to it?
- Riccardo is fifteen. He says this clearly because he can — he is observant, he is honest, and he has not been away. What does his position as the one who stayed tell us about what he sees that Leonardo cannot?

Discussion 2 — Hearing His Parents Differently

At the dinner table, Leonardo hears his parents' voices differently — 'as parents, not noise'. He even laughs with his father about the engineering debate.

- What changed? Did his parents change, or did Leonardo?
- He says: 'maybe he had just learned to hear himself over them'. What does it mean to hear yourself over other people's voices? Is this maturity, or distance?
- The exchange with Mario ('Even if mechanical engineering would have been better' / 'Dad, please, let it go, you almost won!') is the warmest and funniest the relationship has been. What enabled this shift?

Discussion 3 — 'Good Things Don't Happen Often'

Giovanni's farewell to Leonardo at the workshop — 'Good things don't happen often' — is the most emotionally direct thing any of the Florence friends says in the chapter.

- What is Giovanni saying? What 'good thing' is he referring to?
- Giovanni is the most practical of the four friends. What does it mean for him to say something this open?
- Is this good advice? Is it the kind of advice you can act on, or just the kind that is true?

Discussion 4 — The Ending

'I missed you.' Three words. And then Leonardo counting the hours.

- Is this a satisfying ending for the novel? What has been resolved? What has not been?
- The novel began with Leonardo not knowing what he wanted. Does he know now? What does he know?
- The novel is called *My Time in Tottori*. It ends with him leaving Tottori behind but planning to return. What is the 'time in Tottori', in retrospect? Was it the year, or something else?



ROLE PLAY ACTIVITIES

Role Play 1 — The Workshop (Groups of 4)

Re-enact the workshop scene. The four friends are back where they started — same place, same beer. Matteo reveals the yuzu discovery. Giovanni, Antonio, and Matteo extract everything they can from Leonardo about Yuzuka.

Each character should sound exactly like themselves: Giovanni direct and supportive, Antonio observant and honest, Matteo gleefully mischievous. Leonardo resistant, then gradually giving a little more than he intended.

Debrief: What does it feel like to have people who know you well see something you have not quite admitted? Is it a relief, or uncomfortable? Is it helpful to be seen clearly by people who care about you?

Role Play 2 — The Dinner (Groups of 3-4)

Play the dinner scene where Leonardo's parents give their characteristic forms of support and Leonardo hears them differently than before. Mario makes his engineering comment. Leonardo laughs. Sofia says 'you obviously needed it.'

Extend the scene: Leonardo tells them his plan to go back to Japan after university. Both parents react. In character.

Focus on: What has changed in the relationship since Chapter 2's 'Serious Family Conversation'. How does distance — even after you've returned — change how you hear people who love you?

Role Play 3 — The Group Chat (Pairs or Groups of 4)

Play the group chat exchange in real time: Leonardo posts his message ('I'm coming back for two weeks in July. Who wants to meet up?'). Each of the Tottori friends responds in character.

Then play the private message exchange between Leonardo and Yuzuka — just the two of them, no audience. What does he say after 'I missed you'? What happens next?

Focus on: The difference between group-chat communication and private communication — what can be said in each space. The weight of three words after twelve chapters of indirection.

WRITING ACTIVITIES

Writing 1 — His Reply

Yuzuka sends: 'I missed you.' Write Leonardo's reply (40–60 words maximum). It should be honest. It should be him. It should not say too much or too little.

Then write two alternatives: one that he might have sent six months ago, and one that he might send two years from now. What changes over time?

Writing 2 — Giovanni's Line

Giovanni says: 'Good things don't happen often.' Write the rest of the conversation — what comes after this line (8–12 lines of dialogue). Giovanni, Matteo, Antonio, and Leonardo. Each person responds in their own voice.

The conversation should move from this moment toward something settled — what the year has meant, what comes next, what friendship across distance and time looks like.

Writing 3 — The Full Circle

Chapter 1 opens with Professor Riva asking the class: 'What happens next?' Chapter 13 ends with Leonardo knowing — at least partly — what happens next.

Write a short reflective piece (130–160 words) from Leonardo's point of view: what he would say if Professor Riva asked him the same question now. It can be a speech, a letter, a journal entry, or simply a paragraph of thought. It should be honest about both what he knows and what he still doesn't.

Writing 4 — The Suitcase

Leonardo packs his suitcase at the end of Chapter 13: clothes, the notebook (now half-full), a book, sunscreen, the driving permit. Compare this to what he packed at the end of Chapter 2.

Write a paragraph (80–110 words) comparing the two packings — what is the same, what is different, what the additions and absences tell us about what has changed. Then write the final line of Antonio's notebook — the last thing Leonardo writes before he leaves.

WHOLE-NOVEL ACTIVITIES

These activities are designed for use after completing the full novel and are intended to help students reflect on the book as a whole.

The Novel's Arc: Leonardo's Journey

Look back at Chapter 1 and compare Leonardo then to Leonardo at the end of Chapter 13. Complete the table.

Theme	Chapter 1: How Leonardo begins	Chapter 13: How Leonardo ends
What he wants from life		
His relationship to his parents		
His Japanese language ability		
His sense of home		
His relationship to uncertainty		
What he understands about Yuzuka		

The Novel's Recurring Motifs

Several images and phrases return throughout the novel, building meaning over time. For each one, describe how its meaning evolves across the chapters.

1. The temple bell at seven o'clock — trace its appearances from Chapter 5 to Chapter 13.
2. 'Probably' and 'maybe' — how does Leonardo use these words, and what do they protect him from?
3. 'One room away' — when does this phrase first appear? What does it mean when it first appears, and what does it mean at the novel's end?
4. 'Nine thousand kilometres' — first used in Chapter 1. What has this distance become by Chapter 13?
5. The notebook Antonio gave Leonardo — it appears in Chapter 2, is referenced throughout, and is half-full by Chapter 13. What does it represent?

Character Discussion: Who Changed Most?

Think about the main characters across the novel. Rank them from 'changed most' to 'changed least' and explain your reasoning.

Characters to consider	My ranking and reasoning
Leonardo	_____
Yuzuka	_____
Toma	_____
Vivek	_____
Riccardo	_____
Matteo	_____
Giovanni	
Antonio	
Mizuko	
Shoichi	

A Final Writing Task: Your Time in Tottori

The novel's title is My Time in Tottori. Its theme is what a year in a new place can do to a person.

Write a short piece (150–180 words) imagining your own 'time in Tottori' — or in any place that is not your home. What would you learn? What would you miss about home? What would you want to keep from the experience? What might you find, that you didn't expect to find?

This can be realistic (somewhere you have actually visited or would visit) or imagined. What matters is that it is genuinely yours.