An Artist of the Floating World

English Advanced Module B, Critical Study of Literature, mEsh unit.

# Student resources

Ishiguro, Kazuo, An Artist of the Floating World, Faber and Faber, 2013, ISBN: 9780571283873

## Table of contents

[An Artist of the Floating World 1](#_Toc77516929)

[Student resources 1](#_Toc77516930)

[Table of contents 2](#_Toc77516931)

[Resource 1 – rubric for students 3](#_Toc77516932)

[Resource 2 – the art of Ukiyo-e 4](#_Toc77516933)

[Resource 3 – Ishiguro on his style 5](#_Toc77516934)

[Resource 4a – narrative voice 9](#_Toc77516935)

[Resource 4b – narrative voice (student version) 16](#_Toc77516936)

[Resource 5 – structure and characters 18](#_Toc77516937)

[Resource 6 – glossary 21](#_Toc77516938)

[Resource 7 – understanding characters 24](#_Toc77516939)

[Resource 8a – values part 1 26](#_Toc77516940)

[Resource 8b – values part 2 29](#_Toc77516941)

[Resource 8C – activities on changing values 32](#_Toc77516942)

[Resource 9 – themes 33](#_Toc77516943)

[Resource 10 – juxtaposition, comparison and binaries 35](#_Toc77516944)

[Resource 11 – language forms and features 36](#_Toc77516945)

### 

## Resource 1 – rubric for students

Here is the module description for Module B, Critical Study of Text, separated into rows and with space for students to respond to each section.

Table 1 – Module description for students

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Rubric – Module B: Critical Study of Literature | What are the key points? | Skills to develop |
| In this module, students develop detailed analytical and critical knowledge, understanding and appreciation of a substantial literary text. Through increasingly informed and personal responses to the text in its entirety, students understand the distinctive qualities of the text, notions of textual integrity and significance. |  |  |
| Students study one prescribed text. Central to this study is the close analysis of the text’s construction, content and language to develop students’ own rich interpretation of the text, basing their judgements on detailed evidence drawn from their research and reading. In doing so, they evaluate notions of context with regard to the text’s composition and reception; investigate and evaluate the perspectives of others; and explore the ideas in the text, further strengthening their informed personal perspective. |  |  |
| Students have opportunities to appreciate and express views about the aesthetic and imaginative aspects of the text by composing creative and critical texts of their own. Through reading, viewing or listening they critically analyse, evaluate and comment on the text’s specific language features and form. They express complex ideas precisely and cohesively using appropriate register, structure and modality. They draft, appraise and refine their own texts, applying the conventions of syntax, spelling and grammar appropriately. |  |  |
| Opportunities for students to engage deeply with the text as a responder and composer further develops personal and intellectual connections with the text, enabling them to express their considered perspective of its value and meaning. |  |  |

[English Advanced Stage 6 Syllabus](https://www.educationstandards.nsw.edu.au/wps/portal/nesa/11-12/stage-6-learning-areas/stage-6-english/english-advanced-2017)(2017) © NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA) for and on behalf of the Crown in right of the State of New South Wales, 2017

## Resource 2 – the art of Ukiyo-e

Sources used for this information and available for further research:

* background information from the [Asian Art Museum](https://education.asianart.org/)
* context and images through [The Art of Japan](https://www.theartofjapan.com/what-is-the-floating-world/), Fine Japanese Prints
* article called ‘Here Be Dragons’ by Anna Coppelman through the [Harvard Art Museum](https://www.harvardartmuseums.org/article/here-be-dragons)
* The [Floating World of Ukiyo-e exhibition](https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/ukiyo-e/intro.html) at the Library of Congress
* [Japanese woodblock prints](https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/japanese-woodblock-prints-ukiyo-e) at the V&A Museum

How did Ukiyo-e come about?

During Japan’s Edo period (1615–1868) the phrase "the floating world" (ukiyo) evoked an imagined universe of wit, stylishness, and extravagance—with overtones of naughtiness, hedonism, and transgression. Implicit was a contrast to the humdrum of everyday obligation.

The concept of the floating world began in the Japanese heartland, migrated eastward, and came to full flower in Edo (present-day Tokyo), where its main venues were popular Kabuki theaters and red-light districts. Each offered an array of rich sensory experiences to the fraction of the populace able to partake of them directly. The floating world also afforded vicarious pleasure to countless others throughout the Japanese islands, for whom it was experienced second-hand through theater, song, story, gossip, and pictures.

How were the images created?

The finished imaged was a culmination between the designer, the block cutter and the printer, and so showed great craftmanship.

Once the designer had finalised the image, it was placed faced down on a block of cherry blossom wood, where the block cutter carved directly through the paper to produce the ‘key-block’. This was then taken by the printer to produce copies of the design.

What kind of art is Ukiyo-e?

Ukiyo-e pictures of the floating world included as their subjects: beautiful women, both courtesans and geisha; kabuki actors and sumo wrestlers; history and legend; travel scenes and landscapes; flora and fauna; and, an incredible volume of Shunga, literally “spring picture” (Erotica).

Ukiyo-e did not originally burst forth as full colour pictures. The earliest prints, from the beginning of the 1600’s were impressions only in black ink. Occasionally colors might be added by hand using ground mineral pigments and expensive dyes that were painted in.

The images are not meant to portray reality but to offer a form of escapism.

Is Ukiyo-e “low art”?

Although Ukiyo-e was initially considered "low" art, by and for the non-elite classes, its artistic and technical calibre is consistently remarkable.

Reading the images demands an extremely high level of visual, textual, and cultural literacy

Ukiyo-e presented both the historical and all that was current, fashionable, chic, and popular. In the hands of the Ukiyo-e artist, the ordinary was transformed into the extraordinary.

## Resource 3 – Ishiguro on his style

The following article is © 2020 Guardian News & Media Limited or its affiliated companies. All rights reserved.

[Kazuo Ishiguro: Thatcher's London and the role of the artist in a time of political change](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/jun/24/kazuo-ishiguro-my-turning-point-reading-proust-on-my-sickbed)

I began An Artist of the Floating World in September 1981, in a basement flat in Shepherd’s Bush, London. I was twenty-six years old. My first novel, A Pale View of Hills, was being prepared for publication, but at that point I had no sensible reason to believe I had before me a life as a full-time novelist.

Lorna and I had returned to London that summer (we’d been living in Cardiff), having secured new jobs in the capital, but no accommodation. A few years earlier, we’d both been part of a loose network of young, left-leaning, alternative types who lived in short-life housing around Ladbroke Grove and Hammersmith, and worked for charitable projects or campaign groups. It seems odd now to recall the carefree way we just turned up in the city that summer confident we’d be able to stay in one shared house or another until we found a suitable place of our own. As it turned out, nothing came along to challenge our complacency, and before long we’d found a small basement to rent just off the bustling Goldhawk Road.

The flat adjoined the recording studios of the then cutting-edge Virgin Records, and we often glimpsed large hairy men heaving equipment in and out of the windowless, colourfully muralled building. But the sound-proofing was exemplary, and when I sat at our dining table, my back to our tiny rear garden, I had a more than adequate environment for writing.

Lorna had by far the longer commute to work. She’d got a job as a local authority social worker in Lewisham on the other side of the city. My job was only a stone’s throw away –I’d become the ‘resettlement worker’ for West London Cyrenians, a well-regarded organisation working with the homeless. To make things fairer, we came to an agreement: we’d getup at the same time each morning, and by the point Lorna was going out the door, I’d be installed at the table ready for my ninety minutes of early morning writing before I set off for my own job.

Many superb works have been produced by writers holding down demanding jobs. But I have always been pathetically, almost pathologically, unable to divide my attention, and those several weeks I attempted to write at the dining table as the sun rose steadily to fill the basement have been to date my only attempt to write‘ part-time’. It wasn’t an unqualified success. I found myself staring at blank sheets, battling the urge to go back to bed. (My day job soon grew intense, often obliging me to work late into the night.) Nor were things helped by Lorna’s insistence that I start each day with a bizarre breakfast made up of hideously coarse fibres sprinkled over with yeast and wheat germ –a recipe that would sometimes have me doubled up in my chair. All the same, it was during these sessions that the kernel –the story and central premise –of An Artist came to me more or less fully formed. I managed. to write it up as a fifteen-page story (later published in Granta as ‘The Summer after the War’), but even as I did so, I knew I’d need a much larger, more complex architecture to build the idea into the novel I could already see, tantalisingly, in my imagination. Then the demands of my job put an end to my morning sessions altogether.

I didn’t return to An Artist in earnest until the winter of 1982. By then, A PaleView of Hills had been published to what was, for a first novel, very reasonable noise. The book had found publishers in the US and in several foreign languages, and had got me on the inaugural Granta list of the Twenty Best of Young British Novelists due to be unveiled the following spring. My writing career still looked precarious, but I now had reasons to be bold, and I quit my job at the Cyrenians to become a full-time writer.

We moved to south-east London, to occupy the top floor of a tall Victorian house in a quiet neighbourhood of Upper Sydenham. Our kitchen lacked a sink, obliging us to load dirty dishes onto an old tea trolley and wheel it into the bathroom. But we were now closer to Lorna’s work, and we could set the alarm for much later. The hideous breakfasts ceased.

The house was owned by Michael and Lenore Marshall, a wonderful couple in their early sixties who lived downstairs, and we soon got into the routine of gathering in their kitchen (which had a sink) at the end of each working day to share tea, Mr Kipling cakes and rambling, often hilarious conversation about books, politics, cricket, the advertising industry, the eccentricities of the English. (A few years later, following Lenore’s sudden death, I dedicated The Remains of the Day to her memory.) Also around this time I was offered work by the soon-to-be-launched Channel 4, and it was my experience of working as a television screenwriter (I eventually had two single dramas broadcast on that channel) that was to have a significant, if contrary impact on the writing of An Artist.

I found myself rather obsessively comparing pages from my screenplays –essentially dialogue plus directions –with pages from my published novel, and asking myself, ‘Is my fiction sufficiently different from a screenplay?’ Whole hunks of A Pale View looked to me awfully similar to a screenplay –dialogue followed by ‘direction’ followed by more dialogue. I began to feel deflated. Why bother to write a novel if it was going to offer more or less the same experience someone could have by turning on a television? How could the novel, as a form, hope to survive against the might of cinema and television if it couldn’t offer something unique, something the other forms couldn’t properly do? (In the early 1980s, I should point out, the contemporary novel seemed in much more fragile health than it does today.) I had a clear idea, from those morning efforts in Shepherd’s Bush, of the story I wanted to write. But in Sydenham I now entered an extended period of experimenting with different ways to tell it. I was determined that my new novel wouldn’t be a ‘prose screenplay’. But what then could it be?

It was at this time I came down with a virus and spent a few days in bed. Once I came out of the worst of it, and no longer felt like sleeping for hours on end, I discovered that the book I’d brought to bed, the object now rolling about inside my duvet, was the first volume of the recently published Kilmartin-Moncrieff translation of Marcel Proust’s Remembrance of Things Past. It’s possible my sick-bed circumstances provided a heightened context for this work (I was not then, nor am I now, an unqualified Proust fan: I find swathes of his writing crushingly boring), but I became completely riveted by the ‘Overture’ and ‘Combray’ sections. I went over them again and again. Quite aside from the sublime beauty of these passages, I was thrilled by what I then called in my mind (and later in my notes) Proust’s ‘methods of movement’ –the means by which he got one episode to lead into the next. The ordering of events and scenes didn’t follow the demands of chronology, nor those of an unfolding linear plot. Instead, tangential thought associations, or the vagaries of memory seemed to move the novel from one section to the next. Sometimes the very fact that the present episode had been triggered by the previous one raised the question ‘Why?’ For what reason had these two seemingly unrelated moments been placed side by side in the narrator’s mind? I could now see an exciting, freer way of composing my novel; one that could produce richness on the page and offer inner movements impossible to capture on a screen. If I could go from one passage to the next according to the narrator’s thought associations and drifting memories, I could compose almost in the way an abstract painter might choose to place shapes and colours around a canvas. I could put down a scene from two days ago right beside one from twenty years earlier, and ask the reader to ponder the relationship between the two. Often the narrator himself would not need to know fully the deeper reasons for a particular juxtaposition. I could see a way of writing that could properly suggest the many layers of self-deception and denial that shrouded any person’s view of their own self and past. Breakthrough moments for a novelist are often like this: scruffy, private little events. Looking back now, I can see that those three days recovering from a virus in a bedroom in Sydenham, going over the same twenty pages of Proust, were a key turning point in my writing life –one much more significant than, say, the receiving of a major award or walking down red carpets at film premiers. Everything I have subsequently written has been determined by the revelations that came to me during those days.

I should say something here about the Japanese aspect of An Artist. It is, in a literal sense, the most Japanese of my novels, being set entirely in Japan with only Japanese characters. The language in the novel –the first-person narration and the dialogue –is understood to be in Japanese, even though the novel is presented in English. In other words, you are supposed to imagine this book is some kind of translation: that behind the English sentences are Japanese ones. This strategy had implications for every word I wrote on the page. I wanted the language to flow and to feel natural, and yet it couldn’t become too colloquial –too ‘English’. At times I found myself translating Japanese phrases and pleasantries quite literally. But most of the time it was a case of finding an elegant yet slightly stilted register that would suggest the rhythms and stylised formality of the Japanese language running all the time behind the English.

Lastly, let me add a note here concerning the larger social context in which the novel was created. An Artist was written between 1981 and 1985, years of crucial, often fractious and bitter transition in Britain. The governments of Margaret Thatcher had brought an end to the post-war political consensus about the welfare state and the desirability of a ‘mixed’ economy (in which key assets and industries are owned publicly as well as privately). There was an overt and strident programme to transform the country from one based on manufacturing and heavy industries, with large organised workforces, into a predominantly service-based economy with a fragmented, flexible, non-unionised labour pool. It was the era of the miners’ strike, the Wapping dispute, CND marches, the Falklands War, IRA terrorism, an economic theory –‘monetarism’ –that characterised deep cuts to public services as the necessary medicine to heal a sick economy. I remember falling out badly with one of my oldest and closest friends over dinner as we took opposing views on the miners’ strike. This novel is set in Japan before and after the Second World War, but it was very much shaped by the Britain in which I was then living: the pressures on people in every walk of life to take political sides; the rigid certainties, shading into self-righteousness and sinister aggression, of ardent, often youthful factions; the agonising about the ‘role of the artist’ in a time of political change. And for me personally: the nagging sense of how difficult it is to see clearly above the dogmatic fervours of one’s day; and the fear that time and history would show that for all one’s good intentions, one had backed a wrong, shameful, even evil cause, and wasted one’s best years and talents to it.

Kazuo Ishiguro London, January 2016

## Resource 4a – narrative voice

A significant characteristic of this text is the narrative voice and the notion of the unreliable narrator. It is very important that you remain aware that the recount of events is written entirely from the perspective of Ono throughout the novel, and thus you need to pause regularly to consider how his viewpoint affects our understanding of the text.

An important consideration is the fact that Ono belongs to the generation from pre WW2 Japan. He struggles to reconcile the world of Japan after the bomb, leading him to filter the world of 1948-50 through reminiscences of his identity in the past. Through his narrative voice and his dialogue with other characters – both from his present and past, Ishiguro subtly exposes Ono’s flaws of pride and obstinacy, forcing us to question his views and interpretations of events and ideas before, during and after the war and also awakening our understanding of the vast differences in attitudes and reactions following such turmoil.

### Section 1 pp 7-96, October 1948

#### Engaging the reader with the protagonist

The novel immediately establishes the protagonist as an engaging character who is keen to share his life with the reader. He creates a rapport through inclusive language and a shared sense of place; “Of course, you may be new to this city” (p 7) He sustains this connection with the reader throughout the novel by placing us in the settings he describes;

“If you were to come out of Mrs Kawakami’s as the darkness was setting in, you might feel compelled to pause a moment and gaze at the wasted expanse before you.”(p 27)

“The Okada-Shingen Society no longer exists today – one of many such victims of the occupying forces – but quite possibly you will have heard of it’ or at least of the exhibition held in it each year.” (p 88)

#### Nostalgic journey – shifting historical contexts

Another early impression that we gain of this protagonist is that he often digresses to transport us on a nostalgic journey as he recounts experiences and speaks of people from his past. “I received a visit one afternoon from two haughty, grey haired ladies” (p 8); “It must have been in 1935 or 1936, a very routine matter as I recall” (p 20)

“This was the way things would go at the Migi-Hidari” (p 73)

#### Questioning Ono’s character

Ishiguro uses an appealing portrayal of Ono to subtly align us with his character and so initially accept his way of thinking. Whilst we accept these ways of thinking, quite early in the narrative we begin to question certain character traits and judgements that Ono makes. “It may be that if I chose to put it to the test, I would again be surprised by the extent of my influence” (p 21) Is he a man of great influence or is he just an old man with delusions of grandeur?

“These, of course, may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon at the Tamagawa temple; for I have had cause to recount this particular scene many times before, and it is inevitable that with repeated telling, such accounts begin to take on a life of their own” (p 72) How many other stories do we hear from Ono that have “a life of their own”? What does this make us ponder about ‘truth’ and Ono as a narrator?

#### Subjective evaluations

In addition, we are presented with very subjective evaluations of people, places and events both from Ono’s past; “ I remember looking around me with approval that first night, and today, for all the changes which have transformed the world around it, Mrs Kawakami’s remains as pleasing as ever.” (p 26) and from the present; “It is all very well a husband and wife occupying each other with ridiculous speculations, but they should keep such things to themselves” (p 51)

#### Gaps and silences

Another feature of the narrative are the gaps and silences that again force us to question and analyse Ono’s way of thinking. We become very conscious that we are only privy to limited information about people and situations. The Miyake negotiations are a clear example of this. We become increasingly aware that there are important parts of the story that we do not glean from Ono. “It seemed to me there was something unnaturally deliberate in the way my daughter uttered those words” (p 53); “It did occur to me his awkwardness was perhaps too extreme to be accounted for merely by our chance meeting” (p 53) but it is not until much later in the novel that we begin to unravel the pre-war history that has impacted so significantly on these post-war events.

#### Dialogue

Having created such a distinctive protagonist who clearly represents many views of an older generation of Japanese citizens from a very different era prior to WW2, Ishiguro not only forces us to ponder on these ways of thinking, but he also presents divergent ways of thinking both from others before and during WW2, as well as in this post-war era of 1948. He principally achieves this through dialogue.

“‘Setsuko tells me, Suchi, these ceremonies make you angry’

‘I suppose they do. I get angry thinking about things. About the waste.’ “(p 59)

Matsuda: “I realise there are now those who would condemn the likes of you and me for the very things we were once proud to achieve.” (p 94)

### Section 2 pp 99-127, April 1949

#### Engaging the reader with the protagonist

Having ended the previous section with questions about Ono’s past, he again engages us with him by returning to the original setting of the novel – ‘the Bridge of Hesitation’. He also engages us with the reconstruction of the city after the bomb, “And further along the riverbank, where a year ago there was only grass and mud, a city corporation is building apartment blocks for future employees.” We are encouraged anew to view the world through Ono’s eyes

#### Nostalgic journey – shifting historical perspectives

Again in this section Ono’s narrative is often non-linear as he drifts between past and present. A difference in this particular section of the novel is that most of the events recounted, both past and present, are post war. “It had been one evening last winter.” (p 100).This may occur because there is more of a focus on present events such as Noriko’s miai.

#### Questioning Ono’s character

Increasingly we question Ono’s way of thinking as we respond to his interactions with others. His patronising response to Kuroda’s protégé, Enchi’s impassioned speech about his mentor surprises us with its ignorance and callousness. “‘Traitor. That’s what they called him. Traitor. Every minute of every day. But now we all know who the real traitors were.’ I finished lacing my shoes and started for the door. ‘You’re too young, Mr Enchi, to know about this world and its complications.’” (pp 113-4)

Ono’s ignorance about the implications of his past actions and associations is furthered in his naïve response to Kuroda’s letter following the encounter with Enchi; “The tone of my letter had been friendly and conciliatory, and so I was disappointed by the cold and offensively brief reply I received a few days later. “ (p 114)

He partially rekindles our respect and favourable judgement of his character in his confession to the Saito family: “I accept that much of what I did was ultimately harmful to our nation, that mine was part of an influence that resulted in untold suffering for our own people.” (p 123) However Ishiguro immediately invites us to question Ono’s motives for doing this. His following self-righteous comment, “But as you see, I am not now afraid to admit I was mistaken” (p 124) makes us wonder if this ‘confession’ is just a means of saving face. Does this attitude in fact trivialise the whole involvement he has had in the past?

#### Subjective evaluations

Ono continues to make comments about others but, as a reader, we are more wary of these judgements as the novel progresses and we question his ways of thinking in the light of the beliefs and values of other characters.

“Now that I think back on that evening, I am sure my suspicions about young Mitsuo were aroused as soon as I saw him.” This opinion, however does not seem to be substantiated by Mitsuo’s actions or the attitudes of any other characters towards him.

#### Gaps and silences

A notable situation where the things that are left unsaid are just as significant as what is said, is seen in Noriko’s behaviour during the miai; “As I watched my daughter’s distress, I was struck again by the contrast of the proceedings with the miai the previous year.” (p 121) Clearly, our unreliable narrator has no awareness of the reason behind this tension nor of the understanding of the past that Noriko has gained in the interim.

Another episode in this section is Shintaro’s visit to Ono. We are made aware of Shintaro’s difficult situation as he tries to reconcile past and present through this awkward encounter where he must defer to Ono but also contradict him. “There was a pause while, I suppose, he waited to see if I would turn and allow him to take his leave with some dignity. I went on gazing at my garden.” (p 104)

#### Dialogue

Ono’s lack of understanding and self-centredness increasingly becomes apparent even through encounters with his own family. Noriko’s sarcastic comment to him alerts us to his effect on others: “’If Father doesn’t want to make a fuss about something as trivial as my future, then that’s quite understandable. After all Father hasn’t even finished his newspaper yet.’” (p 115) and so we again confront flaws in Ono’s character, leading us to scrutinise his beliefs and values.

Shintaro also demonstrates a divergent way of thinking in the previously mentioned visit to Ono where he wishes to renounce his compliance in past activities: “’You may recall, for instance, that despite my eventually following your instructions over the China crisis posters, I had misgivings and indeed went so far as to make my views known to you.’” Ono responds to this with irritation, viewing it as Shintaro “shirking his responsibilities” showing us that Ono is not willing to accept the new ways of thinking and attitudes to the past in Japan after the bomb.

Again, during Noriko’s miai, new way of thinking are expressed through dialogue and present different views to Ono’s. Taro Saito represents a sentiment of the new Japan “Democracy is a fine thing but it doesn’t mean citizens have a right to run riot whenever they disagree with something” (p 120) whilst his father presents a more positive view through his simile; “‘At the moment our country is like a young boy learning to walk and run. But I say the underlying spirit is healthy.’” Interestingly, our narrator sees no difference in these viewpoints. Is this an indication of his reluctance to even consider the changes happening around him? After all, a large portion of the text is retrospective. What does this show us about Ono’s way of thinking?

### Section 3 pp 131-194, November 1949

#### Engaging the reader with the protagonist

Again Ono uses descriptions of the landscape to engage us. By assuming common knowledge of setting, we are once more invited into Ono’s world: “Perhaps you will agree with me that Kawabe Park is the most rewarding of the city parks. “ (p 132)

He also engages us with him personally in this section; “For it is possible you are acquainted with my painting” (p 168) so that we are reminded of his significance as an artist, again establishing a credibility and a point of contact.

#### Nostalgic journey – shifting historical contexts

At the start of this section, Ono transports us back to a city full of enterprise and hope in 1920, represented by his reminiscences about Sugimura “there was no mistaking the sweeping ambition of this scheme.”(p 133) We see the shift in ways of thinking when Ono follows this with the symbolic comment that “all that remain today of Sugimura’s schemes are those oddly empty patches of grass where his museums and theatres would have stood.”(p 134) Interestingly, this is immediately juxtaposed with Ono’s time with his grandson who embodies the new Japan, reflected in his ‘Americanised’ ways of thinking; “’Spinach! Spinach gives you strength!’” (p 136)

It is also in this section that we are given a poignant insight into the floating world. Ono takes us with him back to his time with Mori-san. This is portrayed as an idyllic period of Ono’s past. “Indeed, by and large, my memory of these exchanges sum up well enough the competitive yet family-like intimacy we enjoyed during those years at the villa.”(p 144) This is also significant because he meets Matsuda who influences his artistic and political path.

#### Questioning Ono’s character

“I would hope furthermore that in spite of any reassessments they may have come to make concerning those years under my supervision, most of them will have remained grateful for much of what they learnt.” (p 137) Having seen the response of Kuroda and Shintaro, we again wonder if Ono is living with a very rose-tinted, egocentric view of the past. Ono’s comparison of himself with Mr Naguchi; “’Oji just happened to suggest he had one or two things in common with people like Mr Naguchi’” (p 154) is questioned by those representing post-war thinking. We read Ono’s explanation to Ichiro of the comparison he made, but are aware of the view of the younger generation that a modern form of Harikari is almost acceptable as penance for what are now viewed as traitorous acts during the war. Once more we wonder if Ono is unaware of the impact of his past on the people of Japan after the bomb. Again his ignorance is emphasised through describing his most famous propaganda poster as now being “outdated” and “perhaps worthy of condemnation” (p 169).

#### Subjective evaluations

Ono tells us of the torture of Kuroda from a very detached viewpoint and his seemingly unwitting betrayal of Kuroda along with his unwillingness to implicate himself seems quite baffling to the reader. As Ono recounts to us the visit to Kuroda’s place, we start to believe that he feels some sense of responsibility for this crime against his former student. This is quickly negated by Ono’s switch to discussing his family. He seems to completely trivialise this occasion by the dismissive tone in the following text: “But this is all of limited relevance here.” (p 184)

#### Gaps and silences

The divergent thinking during the war and the impact of differing ideas after the bomb, can also be seen in the gaps and silences of Ono’s reminiscences. The disappearance of the ‘traitor’, Sasaki, from the villas is not fully explained, but is a mirror of Ono’s treatment of Shintaro in later years. These awkward silences allude to the hurt and alienation caused on an individual level by political turmoil and rapidly shifting paradigms. Similarly, The Tortoise’s response to Ono’s painting subtly presents a reaction to the political Imperialist propaganda that influenced Ono’s work during the war. Whilst Ishiguro does not obviously speak out against Ono’s past, the silence surrounding these pre-war views and actions indicates that these alliances are not represented as moments that should make Ono proud in the new Japan. Again shifts in ideologies and values are hinted at, but not overtly expressed, when Setsuko refuses to acknowledge any concerns about Ono’s past hindering Noriko’s marriage negotiations, as a matter of pride and reluctance to accept what she perceives to be her father’s shameful past; “’I am afraid I have no recollection of what Father refers to.’” (p 191)

#### Dialogue

In this section, the vast differences in ways of thinking are conveyed almost inadvertently though recounted dialogue. Opinions from Matsuda; “‘We simply ask that his Imperial Majesty the Emperor be restored to his rightful place as head of our state.’”(p 173) through to Taro who states “’The changes we made after the war are now beginning to bear fruit at all levels of the company. We feel very optimistic about the future.’”(p 184) alert the reader to major changes in ways of thinking from pre to post WW2 Japan. Between Ono and his son-in-law, very conflicting ways of thinking are also expressed through dialogue: Echoing ideas from the Saito miai, Ono states “Indeed, sometimes Japan has come to look like a small child learning from a strange adult.” In response, as a representative of the new Japan, Taro states: “But by and large, the Americans have an immense amount to teach us.”(p 185)

### Section 4 pp 197-206, June 1950

(Note: because this section is short, it is not broken into subheadings.)

Significantly, the end of the novel brings us back to the Bridge of Hesitation - a place of contemplation, and to Matsuda who introduced Ono to new ways of thinking that largely charted the course of his life during and following WW2. His recount of his final visit to Matsuda has a nostalgic and mellow tone. There appears to be none of the tension associated with many other encounters with people in Ono’s recent and distant past. There are no hidden agendas or masked hostilities. They talk of the past philosophically from the perspective of two elderly men who can seemingly objectively analyse their past. One senses that, in the light of facing your own mortality, actions of passionate youth can indeed be evaluated as just that and no more: “We at least acted on what we believed and did our utmost. It’s just that in the end, we turned out to be ordinary men. Ordinary men with no gifts of insight. It was simply our misfortune to have been ordinary men during such times.” (p 200) Is Ishiguro inviting us to adopt this perspective as passing time tempers post-war sentiments? Is Matsuda right in saying “No one cares now what the likes of you and me once did. They look at us and see only two old men with their sticks.” (p 201)

Ono’s narrative voice again causes us to question, immediately following this, though. He still maintains that their contributions during the war were not just actions of the past that should become history. His pride refuses to let him leave it all behind: “When one holds convictions deeply enough, there surely comes a point when it is despicable to prevaricate further.” (p 202) This egocentric pride is further conveyed by the memory of the “deep sense of triumph and satisfaction” (p 204) that he recalls feeling following an art award he received in 1938. Clearly Ono is not so ready to philosophically move on from his former glory.

Symbolically, Ono speaks of the changes; “Yesterday morning, after standing on the Bridge of Hesitation for some moments thinking about Matsuda, I walked on to where our pleasure district used to be. The area has now been rebuilt and has become quite unrecognisable.” (p 205) This section points the reader forward to a new future and ultimately Ono leaves us with his sense of nostalgia but also with genuine optimism. His final words are heartfelt and positive. He seems ready to accept that the new Japan must embrace a brighter future after the bomb: “One can only wish these young people well.” (p 206)

## Resource 4b – narrative voice (student version)

A significant characteristic of this text is the narrative voice and the notion of the unreliable narrator. It is very important that you remain aware that the recount of events is written entirely from the perspective of Ono throughout the novel, and thus you need to pause regularly to consider how his viewpoint affects our understanding of the text.

An important consideration is the fact that Ono belongs to the generation from pre WW2 Japan. He struggles to reconcile the world of Japan after the bomb, leading him to filter the world of 1948-50 through reminiscences of his identity in the past. Through his narrative voice and his dialogue with other characters – both from his present and past, Ishiguro subtly exposes Ono’s flaws of pride and obstinacy, forcing us to question his views and interpretations of events and ideas before, during and after the war and also awakening our understanding of the vast differences in attitudes and reactions following such turmoil.

Table 2 – student version of narrative voice exercise

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Section | Quotes | Explanation |
| Section 1 pp 7-96  October, 1948  Engaging the reader with the protagonist | “Of course, you may be new to this city” (p 7). He sustains this connection with the reader throughout the novel by placing us in the settings he describes:  “If you were to come out of Mrs Kawakami’s as the darkness was setting in, you might feel compelled to pause a moment and gaze at the wasted expanse before you.”(p 27)  “The Okada-Shingen Society no longer exists today – one of many such victims of the occupying forces – but quite possibly you will have heard of it’ or at least of the exhibition held in it each year.” (p 88) | The novel immediately establishes the protagonist as an engaging character who is keen to share his life with the reader.  How does Ishiguro create a rapport with Ono through inclusive language and a shared sense of place in these quotes? |
| Nostalgic journey – shifting historical contexts | “I received a visit one afternoon from two haughty, grey haired ladies” (p 8)  “It must have been in 1935 or 1936, a very routine matter as I recall” (p 20)  “This was the way things would go at the Migi-Hidari” (p 73) | How do Ono’s digressions help engage readers in his nostalgic journey? Refer to the events these quotes refer too. |
| Questioning Ono’s character | “It may be that if I chose to put it to the test, I would again be surprised by the extent of my influence” (p 21)  “These, of course, may not have been the precise words I used that afternoon at the Tamagawa temple; for I have had cause to recount this particular scene many times before, and it is inevitable that with repeated telling, such accounts begin to take on a life of their own” (p 72) | Is Ono a man of great influence or is he just an old man with delusions of grandeur?  Which are some other stories we hear from Ono that have “a life of their own”?  What does this make us ponder about ‘truth’ and Ono as a narrator? |
| Gaps and silences | “It seemed to me there was something unnaturally deliberate in the way my daughter uttered those words” (p 53)  “It did occur to me his awkwardness was perhaps too extreme to be accounted for merely by our chance meeting” (p 53) | Gaps and silences that again force us to question and analyse Ono’s way of thinking. We become very conscious that we are only privy to limited information about people and situations. The Miyake negotiations are a good example of this.  It is not until much later in the novel that we begin to unravel the pre-war history that has impacted so significantly on these post-war events. Why does Ishiguro choose to do this? |
| Dialogue | “‘Setsuko tells me, Suchi, these ceremonies make you angry’  ‘I suppose they do. I get angry thinking about things. About the waste.’ “(p 59)  Matsuda: “I realise there are now those who would condemn the likes of you and me for the very things we were once proud to achieve.” (p 94) | Ono is a distinctive protagonist who clearly represents many views of an older generation of Japanese citizens from the era prior to WW2.  How does Ishiguro use dialogue to force us to ponder differing views and opinions about before and during WW2, as well as in this post-war era of 1948? |
| Section 2 pp 99-127  April, 1949  Engaging the reader with the protagonist | “And further along the riverbank, where a year ago there was only grass and mud, a city corporation is building apartment blocks for future employees.” (p 99) | Having ended the previous section with questions about Ono’s past, Ishiguro again engages us with him by returning to the original setting of the novel – ‘the Bridge of Hesitation’. He also engages us with the reconstruction of the city after the bomb.  How are we encouraged to view the world through Ono’s eyes? |
| Nostalgic journey – shifting historical contexts | “It had been one evening last winter.” (p 100) | Ono’s narrative is often non-linear as he drifts between past and present. A difference in this particular section of the novel is that most of the events recounted, both past and present, are post war. How may the focus on present events such as Noriko’s *miai* have influenced Ono’s thoughts in this section? |

## Resource 5 – structure and characters

Deconstructing the novel focusing on the shifting values of post WWII Japan.

The novel is structured in four main parts each of which has a separate time frame. There are seventeen smaller sections/episodes, which are separated by a more significant pause or extra spacing. A brief overview of each section has been included to help you with your answers.

### October 1948

pp 7-28 – purchase of the house; Setsuko’s first visit; Ichiro/1935-1936; Shintaro’s visit; pleasure district

1. What do we learn about Ono from the opening pages of the novel?

p 28-37 – Ichiro and Ono – Lone Ranger; “father says you had to finish (painting) because Japan lost the war”; going to the cinema: Setsuko – “Suichi believes it’s better he likes cowboys than that he idolises people like Miyamoto Musashi.”; visit to deer park.

1. What do Setsuko’s, Ichiro’s and Suichi’s thoughts and actions illustrate about the changing values in post war Japan? Why are they rejecting the old ways of thinking?

pp 37-40 – description of the dining room; Ichiro’s comments about “women”; deer park and visit to Mrs Watanabe’s; Setsuko stays home with Ono.

1. How important is the house in this particular section of the novel? What do you think it might symbolise?

pp 40-50 – description of the reception room; going back in time – Ono’s father’s business dealings in the “reception room“; Noriko’s marriage negotiations – “precautionary steps”; “misunderstandings about the past”

1. How reliable is Ono’s memory? What do you think Ishiguro is trying to achieve by these flashbacks?
2. Why are the “progressive” younger generations of the Japanese still keeping some of their traditions such as the marriage negotiations?

pp50-61 Ono’s musings about Suichi/ Setsuko and Noriko’s failed marriage negotiations; The Miyake affair; Noriko provokes Ono to say why negotiations with Miyake did not go ahead; Ono’s recount of his chance meeting with Jiro Miyake the previous year – the President of Jiro’s company commits suicide – apology to the company for what happened during the war – Ono’s surprise; Miyake – “we can forget our past transgressions and look to the future.”; “men leading the country astray”; “Did Miyake say all these things to me that afternoon?”; Hirayama Boy incident.

1. Compare and contrast Suichi’s and Ono’s views about Japan’s involvement in the war? Compare and contrast
2. What is the significance of Jiro’s company president’s suicide? Comment on Ono’s reaction, quoting from the page.
3. Why is the Hirayama Boy incident important in developing your understanding of the complexity of the Japanese psyche?

pp 61-77 – Trip to Arakawa district; Migi – Hidari; Takeda’s studio; the Tortoise and his nickname; “I cannot vouch that those were my exact words that morning”; Migi Hidari.

1. What is Ono telling us about his views of Imperial Japan, particularly as evident in the Arakawa district?

pp 77-85 – seeing Kuroda after the war (brief scene); takes Ichiro to the cinema; meets Dr Saito – mentioning of Kuroda again; Setsuko suggests Ono should pay a visit to Kuroda.

1. What do we learn about Kuroda in this episode? Why are the details held back by Ono (and Ishiguro)?

pp 85-96 – another trip to Arkawa district; Ono’s observations of the changing landscape of Japan (new buildings etc); first meeting with Matsuda; Okada Shingen society and Matsuda’s views; Matsuda’s condition now; Ono “I have much to be thankful for’; “we have things to be proud of ...”

1. Comment on the importance of Matsuda’s influence and his impact on Ono.
2. Do you agree that both Matsuda and Ono “have things to be proud of”?

### April 1949

pp 99-104 – “Bridge of Hesitation”; pleasure district; changing landscape of Japan again “new houses appeared”; Mrs Kawakami; Quarrel with Shintaro – Shintaro wanting Ono’s reference re: “the China crisis” – Ono “ Why don’t you just face up to the past?”

1. Do you think Ono is right in telling Shintaro that he must “face up to the past’? Is this what Ono is prepared to do himself?

pp 104-108 – The miai is to take place; Noriko and Ono argue about the garden; Ono mentions he has paid a visit to Kuroda

1. What is the significance of the disagreement between Noriko and Ono?

pp 108-116 – Ono goes to Kuroda’s apartment; meets Enchi (Kuroda’s pupil) – “He will not wish to see you... You are ignorant of the full details;” Ono’s thoughts and feelings; writes a letter to Kuroda; Kuroda’s response; Noriko – “father is too proud…”

1. What significant traits/aspects of Ono’s character are revealed during his visit to Kuroda?

pp 116-127 – The Miai at Kasuga Park Hotel – the significance of this place – Ono feels everyone is looking at him; Dr Saito and Taro’s views in this “new “and “modern” Japan; Ono’s confession/ admission of guilt (climax point); Mrs Kawakami to sell her place and move to another district.

1. Why is the place of miai significant? What does Ono’s description of the place tell us about his attitude?

### November 1949

pp 131-143 – Opens with Ono’s recollections of first meeting Dr Saito; Noriko now married; Kawabe Park walk with Setsuko (her second visit); Akira Sugimura plans for Kawabe Park; “a man who aspires to rise above the mediocre”; reminisces about his time at Mori-San’s villa; arguments about teacher’s work; “disloyalty”.

1. Why do you think Ono remembers Sugimura’s plans for the park?
2. What role does Mori-San play in the development of Ono as an artist and a political activist?

pp 143-155 – Teahouse “Water Lanterns” and the “Floating World”; store room conversation; Mr Naguchi’s suicide.

1. Why are the sections describing the floating world important in these closing sections of the novel?
2. How important are Mori-San’s words to Ono and why does he remember them at this point in time?
3. What is Ishiguro trying to say by mentioning Mr Naguchi’s suicide and Ichiro’s concern?

pp 155-184 – Izumimaci district described; Taro and Noriko’s apartment; every group has a Tortoise; “complacency” and first introduction to members of Okada-Shingen society; Ono’s art takes a new direction paintings; talk of revolutions; betrayal of Kuroda.

1. Think about the structure of the novel- why are so many important events revealed to the reader almost at the end of the novel?
2. Has your initial impression of Ono changed after reading this episode? Why?

pp 184-194 – supper at Noriko’s and Taro’s apartment; Taro’s company; Japanese economic rise; “Americans have a lot to teach us”; talk about the miai; argument with Setsuko

1. What are the various attitudes towards the “new” Japan as seen in this section? How do they differ from Ono’s?

### June 1950

pp 197-206 – Matsuda’s death; new Japan.

1. Should Ono’s words, which end the novel, be believed by the reader? Why/Why not? What do they reveal about the Cold War and the particular values of the “new” and “old” Japan?

## Resource 6 – glossary

Cherry blossoms – the significance of the cherry blossom tree in Japanese culture goes back hundreds of years. In Japan, the cherry blossom represents the fragility and the beauty of life. It's a reminder that life is almost overwhelmingly beautiful but that it is also tragically short. When the cherry blossom trees bloom for a short time each year in brilliant force, they serve as a visual reminder of how precious and how precarious life is. So, when Japanese people come together to view the cherry blossom trees and marvel at their beauty, they aren't just thinking about the flowers themselves, but also about the larger meaning and deep cultural tradition the cherry blossom tree.

Source [Huffpost](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/homaro-cantu/the-significance-of-the-c_1_b_3832895.html)

China crisis – This refers to the Japanese attack on China as they continued to try to control more of China in their quest to create a “United Asia”.

Source [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchukuo)

The following website report provides an interesting documentary summarising relations between China and Japan leading up to and during WW2

Source [The Age](http://www.theage.com.au/tv/Military/show/The-Road-to-World-War-II/Japan-Invades-China-Crisis-in-the-Far-East-4271902.html)

Geisha – Geishas were the courtesans (a prostitute or paramour, especially one associating with noblemen or men of wealth) of the pleasure quarters and were trained in various arts: music, dance and poetry as well as other forms of court entertainment.

Courtesan entertainment peaked in the mid-18th century and from then on the geisha would become the most skilled entertainers in the ‘floating world’ of the pleasure quarters.

Source [Kyoto sights and nights](http://www.kyotosightsandnights.com/geisha.html)

Godzilla – The monster movie that Ichiro and Ono see is most likely a film like “Godzilla”. Although this film was made in the 1950’s, Ishiguro uses the idea of such films to represent the changing times and paradigms in pot WW2 Japan.

Source Screen insults

Hari-kiri – ritual suicide by disembowelment with a sword, formerly practised in Japan by samurai as an honourable alternative to disgrace or execution.

Humphrey Bogart – Ono refers to Ichiro’s “swagger” as resembling Humphrey Bogart who was an iconic Hollywood actor in the 1930’s – 1950’s. He often played crime figures before becoming typecast with his portrayal of the smooth, cunning and honourable private eye, Sam Spade.

Source [Biography.com](http://www.biography.com/people/humphrey-bogart-9217486?page=2)

Kabuki – is a classical Japanese dance-drama. Kabuki theatre is known for the stylization of its drama and for the elaborate make-up worn by some of its performers. The immediate post–World War II era was a difficult time for kabuki. Besides the war's physical devastation, many rejected the styles and thoughts of the past, kabuki among them.

Source Kominz, Laurence (1997). The Stars Who Created Kabuki; Their Lives, Loves and Legacy. Tokyo, New York, London: Kodansha International. p 232. ISBN 4-7700-1868-1.

Migi-Hidari – literally means ‘right left’. It was an establishment in the pleasure district frequented by artists if the ‘floating world’. Ono indicates that it is called this name as it ‘stood at a point where three side streets intersected’ but the name can also symbolise the diversity of people that attended the establishment.

Lone Ranger and Tonto – the Lone Ranger was originally a USA radio series about a masked former Texas Ranger who has since become a popular icon of American “Wild West” fiction. He and his native American friend, Tonto, fight crime and seek justice then ride away on his trusty horse, “Silver” when their work is done. The radio series proved to be very popular, leading to a series of books, a television show that ran from 1949 to 1957, comic books, and movies. Interestingly, the character of Tonto has since become a controversial figure as he embodies strong racial stereotypes and his name is literally the Spanish word for ‘fool’.

Lord Yoshitsune – one of the most famous samurai fighters in the history of Japan who was considered one of the greatest and the most popular warriors of his era.

Manchuria – in 1931, the Japanese Army acted outside of government orders and seized control of much of the region of Manchuria on China’s eastern seaboard. The League of Nations ordered the army to withdraw and the Japanese government in Tokyo also agreed to this demand. However, the army did not listen and it launched a full-scale invasion of Manchuria and by the end of 1931, it had occupied the whole of the province.

Source [History Learning site](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/manchuria_1931.htm)

Miai – literally means ‘looking at each other’ and is the name given to traditional Japanese match-making. It originated in Japan in C16th and was a strong cultural practice for many years but is not common in the C21st. Parents often instigated miai introductions as they felt that their son or daughter had shown little sign of seeking a partner although they were a marriageable age - usually in the range of 22 to 30.

Obasan – aunt or older woman respectively.

Oji – grandfather

Pleasure district – during the Edo period (the period between 1603 and 1867), Japan was known for its conservative military government, which worked hard to provide the people with a place and time of peace. However, as a means of keeping the peace, the people were broken down into four distinct groups, which included in order of importance, warriors, farmers, artisans, and finally, merchants. In fact, cities were provided with walled-in areas specifically for running theatres, teahouses, and brothels, quite a mix.

This era also brought about some newly wealthy civilians, which were comprised primarily of artisans and merchants, better known in Japan as *Chonin*. Over time, this group of people began to gain strength economically, and soon was so powerful that they actually had power in the creation of “pleasure quarters” located within the various entertainment districts. It is the legacy of this era that formed Ono’s prewar social experiences.

Source [Asian Art Mall](http://www.asianartmall.com/YOSHIWARA-District.htm)

Popeye – Popeye is “a good-guy underdog with bulging forearms, a mean uppercut and a penchant for canned spinach. The only thing he loves more than spinach and the sea is his flighty, flirty girlfriend, Olive Oyl.” Popeye made his first public appearance on Jan 17, 1929, in Elzie Segar’s then nine-year-old comic strip, ‘Thimble Theatre’, which originally revolved around Olive Oyl’s family.

Source [Popeye.com](http://popeye.com/history/)

San – the title of respect added to a name

Sake – an [alcoholic beverage](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alcoholic_beverage) of [Japanese](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Japan) origin that is made from fermented [rice](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rice).

Sensei – literally means ‘person born before another’ but is used as a form of address to a teacher or mentor.

Tatami – a type of mat used as a flooring material in traditional Japanese-style rooms, traditionally made of rice straw.

Ukiyo – literally “Floating world”. The word ukiyo came to describe the lifestyle of meaningless pleasure-seeking. Participants in the ukiyo culture included kabuki theatre actors, artists, [geisha](http://asianhistory.about.com/od/japan/a/History-of-the-Geisha.htm), sumo wrestlers, prostitutes, and members of the increasingly wealthy merchant class. One of the most enduring art forms that arose from the Floating World is the ukiyo-e, literally "Floating World picture," the famed Japanese woodblock print.

Source [Asian History](http://asianhistory.about.com/od/Asian_History_Terms_U_to_Z/g/What-Was-Ukiyo.htm)

Utamaro – Kitagawa Utamaro (c. 1753 – 31 October 1806) was a renowned artist of the ukiyo-e genre of woodblock prints, especially recognised for his portraits of female beauties and also nature studies.

Source [Wikipedia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utamaro)

## Resource 7 – understanding characters

Table 3 – Understanding the characters in ‘An Artist of the Floating World’

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Character | Personality | Quotes to show this | Ono as a “filter” |
| Masuji Ono – the old artist, who rose to fame by painting propaganda posters in support of the militaristic regime, narrator (unreliable) |  |  | Remember Ono is the narrator and all events and perceptions we gain about other characters are filtered through his perceptions/biases/interpretations and sometimes the limitations of his memory.  In the column below, explain any reasons you can find to show that Ono’s point of view on each character may be flawed or biased in some way. You can add quotes here to support your points. |
| Setsuko – Ono’s elder daughter, married to Suichi |  |  |  |
| Noriko – Ono’s younger daughter |  |  |  |
| Kenji – Ono’s only son who is killed in the war |  |  |  |
| Kuroda – Ono’s most gifted student whom he betrays to the police |  |  |  |
| Takeda – runs a studio where Ono gains his first apprenticeship; his studio produces cheap depictions of Japanese subjects |  |  |  |
| Seiji Moriyama Mori-San – art master; with him Ono becomes an adherent to the [*Floating World*](https://www.theartofjapan.com/what-is-the-floating-world/) tradition of Japanese art |  |  |  |
| Dr Saito – prospective father-in-law to Noriko; Taro’s father |  |  |  |
| Miyake – suitor of Noriko’s who pulls out of marriage negotiations for unspecified reasons |  |  |  |
| Hirayama boy – a simpleton who under the old regime is praised for singing snatches of military songs but singing these following the defeat of Japan he is beaten up for his impudence |  |  |  |
| Matsuda – government official who recruits artists for the nationalist cause; he convinces Ono to give his paintings a political message |  |  |  |
| Shintaro – The Tortoise is Ono’s fellow artist, also employed by Mori-San |  |  |  |
| Ichiro – Ono’s grandson; son of Setsuko |  |  |  |
| Taro – son of Dr Saito; marries Noriko |  |  |  |
| Mrs Kawakami – owner of Migi-Hidari |  |  |  |
| Mr Kyo – the go-between in the marriage negotiations |  |  |  |

## Resource 8a – values part 1

This resource explores values embedded through the sections of the novel.

### April 1949 – Spring (pp 99-127)

#### Context

Ono stands on the Bridge of Hesitation. He claims “I enjoy…surveying my surroundings and the changes taking place around me” (p 99). The transformations have only been occurring over the last year and Ono struggles to change his lifestyle with the same swiftness and enthusiasm as he did before the war. Throughout this section divergent ways of thinking, and responses to the personal and political ramifications, are represented. Mr Saito encapsulates the discussion when he states, “Our country is like a young boy learning to walk and run…running and grazing his knee” (p 120). The experiences and recreation of Ono’s family is representative of the nation, looking for guidance and trying to negotiate through rapid changes.

#### Obligation – loyalty and betrayal

Ono reveals that he has not visited Kuroda since his release from prison, whereas others “had made a point of welcoming and seeing to his needs” (p 108), although he is proud of Kuroda’s success. Kuroda’s protégé is “amazed at his nerve. To come here…” (p 113). Similarly Mitsuo, Noriko’s future brother in law, is equally hostile to Ono at the miai (p 117). The violent demonstrations in the city centre indicate the tumultuous ferment the nation is undergoing through the process of redefining itself (p 119).

Quotes:

p 114 “We all know who the real traitors were. And many of them are still walking free.”

p 120 “…people feel the need to express their views openly and strongly – now that’s a healthy thing…”

#### Obligation – legacy

Shintaro applies for a job at Higashimachi High School and requests Ono clarify the extent of his involvement in creating propaganda during the war, “I had strong reservations about the direction our school was taking…(over) the China Crisis posters…serious misgivings” (p.103). Ono is “unsympathetic towards his efforts to shirk his responsibilities” (p 104). Ono accuses Shintaro, “While others were losing so much, Shintaro just went on working in that little studio of his as though nothing was happening” (p 124). The concept of ownership and inheritance of previous values is thrown into question.

Quotes:

p 103 ‘“Shintaro”, I said, “why don’t you simply face up to the past? The world may now have a different opinion of your work, but there’s no need to lie about yourself. ”’

p 123 “There are some…who believe my career to have been a negative influence…now best erased and forgotten.”

#### Shifting positions in society – family values

Noriko infers Ono has been instrumental in diminishing her, and by implication others’, future prospects (p 115); ‘“You should have left things as they were”’ (p 107). Ono childishly retaliates her disrespect, rejecting her worth as an inheritor of the family profession “you never did have an artistic instinct. Neither you nor Setsuko” (p 107), Noriko continues to reject traditional daughterly behaviour, “Is father such an authority…? I’m sure it’s all a matter of opinion” (p 107). A more harmonious negotiation of old and new ways of thinking is offered by Mr Saito, “it’s the father who’s far more liberal than the son” (p 120)

Quotes:

p 106 “Father tends to meddle too much. I think he’s going to ruin that bush too.”

#### Shifting positions in society – gender roles

Taro indicates a gracious willingness in implying Noriko’s opinion could help him develop better taste in classical music (p. 118). However, he refers to Western classical pieces, not Japanese (p.118), implying that in order to develop, Japan needs to adopt Western values, rather than continuing with traditional functions. Again, Ono and Mr Saito are used as foils to explore ways of thinking pre- and post-war Japan.

Quotes:

p 105 “…my daughter - already twenty six – could hardly pass over lightly a prospect like Taro Saito.”

p 119 “…the Saitos were not the old-fashioned sort of family who preferred their female members to be silent and demure.”

#### Shifting positions in society – erosion of traditional values and culture

Mrs Kawakami decides to sell her business to the corporation modernising the area; as Ono points out, “that little world has passed away and will not be returning” (p 126). Ono’s anxiety negotiating the changes in lifestyle and tradition are reflected in his continual comparison of crumbling pre-war buildings, replaced by small apartments, “like many of these modern affairs” (p 109). Equally, Taro Saito is hesitant in praising the freedoms and ways of thinking American colonisation has brought the country; “Democracy is a fine thing, but it doesn’t mean citizens have a right to run riot” (p 120).

Quotes:

p 102 “After all, there are the American authorities to satisfy…”

p 116 “…decorating the rooms in a somewhat vulgar manner – intended, no doubt, to strike the American clientele …as being charmingly ‘Japanese’.”

#### The purpose of art

The role of art in affirming a hierarchical social structure and lifelong obligations, “even if circumstances have caused teacher and student to become estranged”, are challenged (p 109). Kuroda’s approach reflects the new form of relationship between teacher and student; he regards Mr Enichi as a “protégé”, despite creating works in his master’s unmistakeable style (p 110). Noriko provides the ultimate insult to Ono’s self-perception, questioning his aesthetic, “Perhaps it’s just poor taste” (p 107).

Quotes:

p 111 “Mr Kuroda is always telling me I should try and paint in a style more distinctly my own.”

#### Redemption and reconciliation

“Where only a year ago there was only grass and mud, a city corporation is building apartment blocks… (but one) might even mistake them for the bombed ruins still to be found” (p 99). While the physical, public appearance of the landscape is healing, it hides the deeply felt resentment and unformed modern identities of the populace. While Ono’s letter to Kuroda is ‘friendly and conciliatory” (p 114) his overtures are not welcomed with the warmth and generosity of his past. Through various interactions Ono finds his relevance, and subsequently his authority, has waned and been thrown into question, prompting his admission at the miai, that he “made many mistakes…(but) I acted in good faith” (p 123).

Quotes:

p 113 “Most things are far more complicated than they appear, Mr Enichi. Young men of your generation tend to see things far too simply.”

p 124 “I must say I find it hard to understand how any man who values his self-respect would wish for long to avoid responsibility.”

## Resource 8b – values part 2

This resource continues the exploration of values through the sections of the novel.

#### November, 1949 – Autumn (pp 131-194)

p 183 “I had no idea…something like this would happen.”

Ono reminisces about the ambitious dreams of Akira Sugimura for transforming Kawabe Park, particularly Sugimura’s eclectic collection of Japanese and Western, high and low culture (p 133). Despite his failure, Ono feels “a certain admiration for the man…to be something more than ordinary, surely deserves admiration, even if in the end he fails”. The park is now controlled by city authorities, superimposing Sugimura’s ambitions with trees, eradicating evidence of his hubris (p 134). While the action of the novel takes place increasingly in the past, Ono’s focus on selected events not only reflects his search for place and meaning in the post-war world he finds himself in, but emphasises the ramifications of historical events, and his childlike naivety, in contributing to post-war paradigms. Consequently, his issues and anxieties are still present and in the process of re/negotiation.

#### Obligation: loyalty and betrayal

“…long after one has come to re-evaluate, perhaps even reject, the bulk of that man’s teachings, certain traits will tend to survive, like some shadow…” (p 136). Ono fondly recalls Mori-san’s home and The Floating World, “the nightime world of pleasure” (p 145), which are now autumnally “in a state of considerable dilapidation…the smell off damp wood and mouldering leaves” p 137. Art as a representation of humanity’s higher selves, and its betrayal to personal and political ambitions, is presented in a number of examples from Ono’s past; for example the betrayals, to and of, of Mori-san’s “work full of European influences” (p 141), Sasaki (p 142), and Ono.

Quotes:

p 165 “Ono-san, you are a traitor.”

p 181 Mori rejecting Ono; “…it is perhaps understandable, if not entirely excusable, that the teacher lose for a moment his sense of proportion and react in ways he may later regret…such arrogance and possessiveness on the part of a teacher – however renowned he may be...”

#### Obligation – legacy

Ono begins to compose the various ‘shadows’ of his life into some order, like one of his paintings, deciding “…it is easy with hindsight – once the shortcomings of an influence have become obvious – to be critical…” (p 144). The shadows of his memories gain increasing focus and attention.

It is equally significant to examine the parallel regarding legacies the Americans are embedding in Japan’s post-war culture. Taro enthuses “The changes we made after the war are now beginning to bear fruit at all levels of the company. We feel very optimistic about the future.” (p 184)

Quotes:

p 136 “it is not only when we are children that we are open to these small inheritances: a teacher or mentor whom one admires greatly…will leave his mark.”

p 168 “…but the young are ready to fight for their dignity.”

#### Shifting positions in society – family values

Ono regrets that “because her visit this year was so brief, and because she spent it staying at Noriko and Taro’s new home…my walk with Setsuko…was really my only chance to speak properly with her” (p 132). This is an early indication of shifting cultural paradigms, and the subtle breakdown of paternal and familial authority – Ono is increasingly displaced as the patriarch of the Japanese extended family, while Suichi symbolises the head of the Western model of the insular nuclear family. Similarly, American Individuism and self- assertion is reflected in the daughters’ refusal, “Suichi would not wish Ichiro to drink sake.” (p 158)

Quotes:

p 135 “It seems when a daughter leaves home, she immediately begins to get unrecognisable.”

p 135 “there’s no need for a woman to dress drably simply because she marries.”

#### Shifting positions in society – gender roles

Ono decides Ichiro should have sake (p 153). They share a continuing joke about women getting drunk, revealing a continued dismissal of women’s capabilities, despite modernisation. Later, Ono imagines Ichiro’s “disappointment and…irritation at Setsuko for not being a little more understanding” (p 187) He relentlessly looks for Ichiro’s non-existent support, pursuing him to his bedroom “Ichiro, there’s no need to be upset about the sake tonight” (p 188). Ono’s insistence reveals that while he verbally recants his previous ways of thinking, he defiantly clings to traditional paradigms. In contrast, Setsuko‘s view is that, “Mother may have in fact have had the more correct ideas”. (p 158)

Quotes:

p 188 “Sometimes at home…Father wants to do something and Mother tells him it’s not allowed. Sometimes, even Father’s no match for Mother.”

p 157 “You women just don’t understand about pride.”

#### Shifting positions in society – erosion of traditional values and culture

Again architecture symbolises the nation and post war paradigms being constructed. While the younger generation embrace “a small two room affair one the third floor…of Western design…”(p 156) Ono observes “Indeed, sometimes Japan has come to look like a small child learning from a strange adult” (p 185). Traditional entertainers such as Gisaburo and Maki are supplanted by “Popeye Sailorman!” (p 152) Mori-san advised Ono “One can become like one who travels too much” (p 178). Yet Ono, in his artistic hubris, has been willing to accept any philosophies that empower him as a representative of the Japanese world view; “I am Masuji Ono, the artist and…official advisor to the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities”(p 182) Cultural fascism, present previously in the hegemonic masters’ teachings, are initially replaced by the Imperial Japanese Agenda and, subsequently, post war economic and political colonisation by the U.S.. The global commercial empire Japan will become during the post war period is foreshadowed by Matsuda; “It’s time for us to forge an empire as powerful and wealthy as those of the British and French. We must use our strength to expand abroad. The time is now well due for Japan to take her rightful place amongst the world powers.” (p 174)

#### The purpose of art

Ono confuses whether Mori or he previously declared to his student/s, “As the new generation of Japanese artists, you have a great responsibility towards the culture of this nation” (p 151). The line between traditional handing down of skills and a more brutal culture merge; “abandoned had been the school’s collective endeavour to capture the fragile lantern light …my technique made use of the hard outline…” (p 174) Ono’s painting of Complacency (p 168) emphasises the subtlety with which impressions can be both communicated and distorted, demonstrated by its transformation into “Eyes to the Horizon”; whatever its artistic merit…those same sentiments are worthy of condemnation” (p 169) There ensues a philosophical discussion about the purpose of art in the world and divergent views about the function of the artist in recording what he sees (p 167-170). Cold war anxieties about the delicacy and grace of the worlds that have been lost are reflected in the lanterns of Takami pavilion not being lit, when Ono’s new purpose is rejected by Mori-san (p 176).

Quotes:

p 170 “You are on the whole an astonishingly decadent crowd. Often with no more than a child’s knowledge of the affairs of this world.”

p 180 “Sensei, it is my belief that in such troubled times as these, artists must learn to value something more tangible than the pleasurable things that disappear by morning light.”

#### Redemption and reconciliation

Ono clearly recalls his meeting, 16 years previously, with Dr Saito. Ono’s recollection raises questions regarding whether Dr Saito has chosen not to remember who Ono was, in order to reconcile the events pre and during WWII (p 132). Taro suggests “One always has so many neighbours” but Ono insists the connection was more personal (p 189). This conversely questions if Ono might be inflating the influence and power he had before the war, and therefore his culpability and need to redeem himself, “…I’m quite prepared now to acknowledge there are certain aspects to my career I have no cause to be proud of.” (p 191). Setsuko counters “No one was at all sure what father meant by it all… But Father is wrong to even begin thinking in such terms about himself” (p 191), referring to his comments at Noriko’s Miai. It becomes apparent that Ono is in fact taking offence at Setsuko because she has diminished his imagined prominence in the events of the nation’s past, not for admonishing him for his sins.

Quotes:

p 154-155 “…why did Mr Naguchi kill himself?...Mr Naguchi thought his songs had been – well – a sort of mistake…and he felt he should apologise. To everyone who was left.”…He was brave to admit the mistakes he made. He was very brave and honourable.”

For class discussion:

“(My boss) is not only a kindly man, he is someone of the greatest ability and vision…to work for an incompetent superior, however kindly, can be a demoralising experience” (p 184-5)

Explain how this quote interrelates a number of key values discussed in the novel.

For example:

American paternalist colonisation – erosion of traditional values, cognitive dissonance of integrating the country responsible for detonating the H-bombs with their political persona of cultural benefactor, the purpose of art, legacy, Ono’s previous, flawed leadership as member of the Committee of Unpatriotic Activities etcetera.

## Resource 8C – activities on changing values

A useful summative quote:

I'm not denying that there are evil individuals who do horrible things, but the view that you can explain from this observation why awful things happen on a large scale in the world is not adequate. I think this is one of the lessons that we learned from this century we just had, as Joan [Acocella] pointed out. I think it is tempting to think of the Professor Moriarty type figure that you have in Sherlock Holmes, to try to identify a model for where bad things come from. I think there's a natural tendency for us to always seek a culprit, a human culprit, rather than to take some kind of collective responsibility for failures on the part of civilization as a whole. My feeling is that a lot of bad things happen because you have these larger things, and because individuals who aren't morally extraordinary, but who aren't morally bad either, become agents in these larger tides, whether it's imperialism or whatever. And most people are helpless but to go along with the sway or the tide, and that this is one of the painful things, it seems to me, we learn by looking at the 20th century.

Kazuo Ishiguro - Source: Asiasociety.org

## Resource 9 – themes

Table 4 – themes in ‘An Artist of the Floating World’

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Themes (hyperlinked to readings) | Summary of readings | How does this add to your personal response to the text? |
| [Memory/self- perception/self-deception](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/memory-self-perception-and-self-deception)  from LitCharts online resource  Levine, Yael. "An Artist of the Floating World Themes: Memory, Self-Perception, and Self-Deception." *LitCharts.* LitCharts LLC, 30 Jul 2018. Web. 7 Apr 2020.  [litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/memory-self-perception-and-self-deception](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/memory-self-perception-and-self-deception) |  |  |
| [Importance of the Artist to society](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/the-relevance-of-the-artist)  from LitCharts online resource  Levine, Yael. "An Artist of the Floating World Themes: Memory, Self-Perception, and Self-Deception." *LitCharts.* LitCharts LLC, 30 Jul 2018. Web. 7 Apr 2020.  [litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/the-relevance-of-the-artist](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/the-relevance-of-the-artist) |  |  |
| [Family reputation/secrets/loss](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/family-reputation-family-secrets-and-familial-loss)  from LitCharts online resource  Levine, Yael. "An Artist of the Floating World Themes: Memory, Self-Perception, and Self-Deception." *LitCharts.* LitCharts LLC, 30 Jul 2018. Web. 7 Apr 2020.  [litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/family-reputation-family-secrets-and-familial-loss](http://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/family-reputation-family-secrets-and-familial-loss) |  |  |
| [Intergenerational conflict](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/intergenerational-conflict)  from LitCharts online resource  Levine, Yael. "An Artist of the Floating World Themes: Memory, Self-Perception, and Self-Deception." *LitCharts.* LitCharts LLC, 30 Jul 2018. Web. 7 Apr 2020.  [litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/intergenerational-conflict](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/intergenerational-conflict) |  |  |
| [Patriotism and culture](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/city-nation-history)  from LitCharts online resource  Levine, Yael. "An Artist of the Floating World Themes: Memory, Self-Perception, and Self-Deception." *LitCharts.* LitCharts LLC, 30 Jul 2018. Web. 7 Apr 2020.  [litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/city-nation-history](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/an-artist-of-the-floating-world/themes/city-nation-history) |  |  |

## Resource 10 – juxtaposition, comparison and binaries

Table 5 – juxtaposition, comparison and binaries

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Juxtaposition | Quotes and techniques used | What is highlighted by comparing these events? |
| Marriage negotiation at Sugimura house versus  Review of character | “How so much more honourable is such a contest, in which one’s moral conduct and achievement are brought as witnesses rather than the size of one’s purse.” (p 10)  Techniques: |  |
| Ono meets Dr Saito versus  Ono reflects on meeting Kuroda in the pleasure district | (pp 77-8) |  |
| Japanese versus  American culture and values | “Still,” I said, with a sigh, “only a few years ago, Ichiro wouldn't have been allowed to see such a thing as a cowboy film.”  Setsuko, without turning from the garden, said: “Suichi believes it's better he likes cowboys than that he idolize people like Miyamoto Musashi. Suichi thinks the American heroes are the better models for children now.”  Techniques:  Find another quote from pp 29-31 or p 152 |  |
| The treatment of the Hirayama boy before and after the war | (pp 59-61) |  |
| Suichi or Jiro’s views versus  Ono’s  (younger generation versus old Japanese values) | Suichi: “Half of my high school graduation year have died courageous deaths. They were all for stupid causes, though they were never to know that.”  Ono wonders why Suichi harbours “such bitterness toward his elders”?  Techniques:  Find an example from Jiro: |  |
| Noriko’s 1st versus  2nd marriage negotiations |  |  |
| Student versus  teacher relationship (and how this changes) |  |  |

## Resource 11 – language forms and features

‘An Artist of the Floating World’ reflects and challenges traditional and shifting social and cultural perspectives in Japanese society in the post-war period. It is important to appreciate how Kazuo Ishiguro explores the thought processes and inconsistencies of the central protagonist Ono and those around him, subtly conveying these perspectives through a strategic use of language forms and narrative features. The novel charts the changing attitudes in the era after the dropping of the atomic bombs on Nagasaki and Hiroshima in 1945, evoking a climate of anxiety in occupied Japan through such elements as choice of diction, contrast, tone and dialogue. The narrative is centrally focussed on the personal and political ramifications of the era, especially the ways in which individuals either tried to justify or began to question formerly entrenched social and political values such as subjugation to authority, the need for modesty and humility in social relations and the insistence on the rigid hierarchical nature of traditional society.

Ishiguro explicates through his language choices how traditional values such as the importance of status and outward signs of power and prestige were being eroded in the new Japan, which had set out to reinvent itself as a modern state. The emergence of a new society is shown to be characterised by an intense questioning of personal, familial, economic and social relations. Japan was not only trying to rebuild its infrastructure along modern lines, it was also revising and hybridising former beliefs and values to adapt to the post-war era, a period of rapid change. In particular, former beliefs in nationalist ways of thinking, conformity and the necessity for blind obedience to authority came to be viewed critically by many Japanese in the light of the country’s transition from an authoritarian, imperialist state to a democratic capitalistic economy dominated by the American presence. At the same time, many of these traditional ways of thinking re-emerged or were absorbed into the new commercial context of corporate and bureaucratic Japan.

### Section 1 – October 1948, pp 7-96

#### The valuing of traditional hierarchical ways of thinking about status and wealth in Japanese culture.

#### Masuji Ono values high class and status, the display of power and prestige, and conventional demarcations between people in Japanese society. Through the use of the inclusive second person voice and a speculative tone, the composer reveals both Ono’s perspective and those of others which he imagines to be impressed by his imposing house, for example p 7 ”as you come up the path, you may find yourself wondering what sort of wealthy man owns it”. This is further reinforced by the name-dropping assertion that the house used to belong to Akira Sugimura, as though Ono takes on further status through association with his famous predecessor: “you will learn that ... Sugimura was unquestionably amongst the city’s most respected and influential men”, and “in keeping with our status” p 8.

#### Emotive and status laden words such as p 7 “commanding position on the hill”, “stand out from others nearby”, large” and “none other like” all emphasise the status of the house and the influence of the traditional Sugimora family, who are described by Ono in terms of high respect and approbation to reflect positively on his own status for example “a family of such high distinction” p 8. In his description of the house from Ono’s perspective, p 7, Ishiguro uses superlative adjectives and a tone of admiration to describe the beauty and stylishness of the house, for example, “fine cedar gateway” elegant tiles” and “may well wonder”, thus evoking Ono’s traditional ways of thinking about status despite the shift to more modern and democratic values in post-war Japan.

#### The continuing belief in his own status and that of his former colleagues as artists loyal to the nation in the past is contrasted with his claim to be humble.

#### Ono’s valuing of status is contrasted with his equally conventional attitudes, such as his show of humility in the novel (“being as I claim a man of only moderate means” on p 7), and his assertions that he is really of humble status. He is characterised through repetition as a man who constantly asserts his humility, in keeping with traditional Japanese values in relation to others. He reassures himself in a conspicuously modest tone of “the exaggerated respect my pupils always hold for me” (p 8).

#### Through irony and the assertion of modesty and humility, as well as the choice of humble diction such as “exaggerated”, Ishiguro emphasises the unreliability of the narrator, as he is in fact elitist and awed by traditional status. Moreover, the novel reveals the protagonist’s anxiety about his own status and the status and image of the artist generally in post-war Japanese society. Ono increasingly finds, though he does not want to admit it, that his society is now more inclined to question the value of his generation’s artistic achievement, and to criticise his outdated and even reprehensible ways of thinking in the past. The effect of these language features is to undermine the reliability of the narrator’s perspectives, suggesting that he is clinging to former ways of thinking as a way of distancing himself from his pre-war activities, which are increasingly being seen as destructive, embarrassing or even criminal by younger Japanese people in the period after the bomb.

#### Personal ramifications of the era after the bomb: the values represented by Mrs Kawakami’s bar in the floating world of the former pleasure district epitomise the often nostalgic, backward looking way of thinking of the older generation.

#### On p 26 Mrs Kawakami’s bar is described by Ono as “cosy, intimate” and as largely unchanged, yet outside the landscape has changed forever for example. He notes in a despondent tone that “the bulldozers had pulled down everything”, and it now resembles “a graveyard”, as conveyed by images of mortality and desolation. The solitary position of the bar in an urban wasteland symbolises the desire of some not to compromise their traditional ways of thinking in the face of radical external changes in society. Mrs Kawakami’s wistful and nostalgic tone and dialogue, and the genteel traditional imagery of the lighting in the bar reinforce the sense of the reluctance of many people in post-war Japan to change and adapt to the new priorities of modern Japan. The new regime is shown as dedicated to destroying and replacing the old districts in an effort to rebuild Japan along western lines. For example, the government has a plan for the area, not yet fulfilled, and Ishiguro evokes Ono’s perception of the former pleasure district as now outdated, a relic of the past for example: “the remains of our old pleasure district” p 27. This is reinforced when Ono further evokes the scene in negative terms, using gloomy diction and imagery for example p 27, “more heaps of rubble”, “wasted expanse”.

### Section 2 – April 1949, pp 99-127

#### Revision and hybridisation of former ways of thinking and lifestyles of the inhabitants of the city to adapt to the dominant values of the new commercial and bureaucratic age.

#### Ono is characterised as a contradictory character who is beginning to revise his nostalgia for the past in the occupation period following the war, as represented by his more realistic and negative description of the interior of Mrs Kawakami’s bar in the pleasure district pp 125-127; for example: “making the room look more dusty and older than it does once darkness had set in”. This is further reinforced by the impact of the reconstruction and demolition going on around them, symbolic of the fragility and irrelevance of the nationalist and artistic values and beliefs which the bar represents in their post-war world for example: p 126, “a truck starting or a burst of drilling which would frequently cause the whole place to shake”. Mrs Kawakami’s resistance to change is contrasted with the changing landscape outside her door.

#### Ishiguro uses first person narration and interior monologue to emphasise that Ono’s own ways of thinking are gradually adapting with changing circumstances to the new order of corporate Japan, despite his adherence to past values for example p 126, “I was struck by the thought of how small, shabby and out of place her little bar would seem amidst the large concrete buildings the city corporation was even at that moment erecting around us.” The use of a catalogue of adjectives here draws attention to the insignificance of the bar, which is contrasted to the streetscape, which symbolises the city’s agenda of sweeping away the remnants of the old Japan. Ishiguro also employs a modal verb (would seem) and a speculative and tentative tone, which causes us to speculate too about the newer modern and commercial values which are driving reconstruction in both the private and public sectors in the period epitomised by “After the Bomb”.

#### A tone of uncertainty about formerly held perspectives has crept into Ono’s essentialist attitude to the past for example p 127, “perhaps that same spirit had not been for the best… It is perhaps as well that that little world has passed away and will not be returning.” The repetition of the word ‘little’ in this passage further reinforces the elegiac tone, and underlines the notion that Ono is also re-evaluating his former beliefs and attitudes as frivolous, fragile and irrelevant in the light of inevitable change and the passing away of the old order. He is beginning to negotiate a more balanced view of his world and to adapt a strong sense of cultural identity to the concerns of an emerging new Japan. This causes the reader to question some of his other attitudes, as he appears to be conservative in character, but clearly his values and ways of thinking are also in flux, paralleling those of many individuals and organisations in an anxiety-ridden society after the war.

### Section 3 – November, 1949, pp 131- 194

#### Impact of Western ways of thinking on Japanese culture, particularly American consumerist values and popular culture among the younger generation.

#### Ishiguro evokes the eager adoption of western values by Ichiro when they are in the department store, and his absorption of the values of “Popeye Sailorman”, for example p 136 and p 151, as shown through Ichiro’s excited exclamation, “Spinach! Spinach gives you strength!” This also symbolises the desire of the younger generation to renew their self-image and dispel their deep sense of shame and national humiliation through a renewed vision of national and individual strength and heroism, just as Japan is beginning to remake itself into the image of a global economic powerhouse. Ichiro is characterised as filling his mouth to bursting with spinach and punching the air, thus enacting through a recount of his actions and description, as well as dialogue with his grandfather, a somewhat manic impulse towards self-empowerment and redemption. Through his obsession with acquiring strength, Ishiguro represents a way of thinking which strives for a re-visioning of the self, the society and the nation (p 152). At the same time, Ichiro’s anxiety about acquiring strength reveals the younger generation’s veiled negative view of the older generation - that they were to blame and should bear the responsibility for Japan’s defeat in the war.

#### A reversion to patriarchal views on the role and nature of women despite a rapidly modernising world.

#### Furthermore, Ichiro’s attitude towards the women in his family symbolises a stereotypical re-assertion of masculine superiority in the modern world, despite a rapidly changing society. Ishiguro reveals through Ono’s dialogue with his grandson that he passively condones such attitudes, reinforcing the boy’s fixed assumptions about the inferiority of women, for example “women never understand about us men drinking” and “Men are stronger, so we can drink more.” p 153 This exchange exemplifies through generalisation and the inclusive use of the personal pronoun ‘us’ how Ono condones patriarchal ways of relating to the intelligent and capable women of the family, women who are ironically more in touch with what is going on in their world than Ichiro’s stereotyped views would suggest.

### Section 4 – J une 1950, pp 197-206

#### A more balanced questioning by some individuals among the older generation of their former certainties and absolutes goes hand in hand with a self-justifying mindset that still makes excuses for their past actions.

#### Ishiguro conveys through the dialogue between the two artists, Ono and Matsuda, in the novel’s denouement, that even those who have formed their ways of thinking by events and circumstances in the past in a very different world can adapt and change, for example. The wistful, humourous tone of the conversation between Matsuda and Ono (pp 198-9) emphasises the contrast between their past attitudes about art and politics and their present more relaxed, quizzical and self-ironising way of thinking (“I find it hard to think of the world extending much beyond my garden. So perhaps you’re the one with the wider perspective now, Ono.”) The use of a somewhat complacent and self-excusing tone in the lines, “we have the satisfaction of knowing that whatever we did, we did at the time in the best of faith” (p 202) contrasts markedly with the views of those who, like Suichi, are critical of the older generation for not taking responsibility for Japan’s defeat by the west.