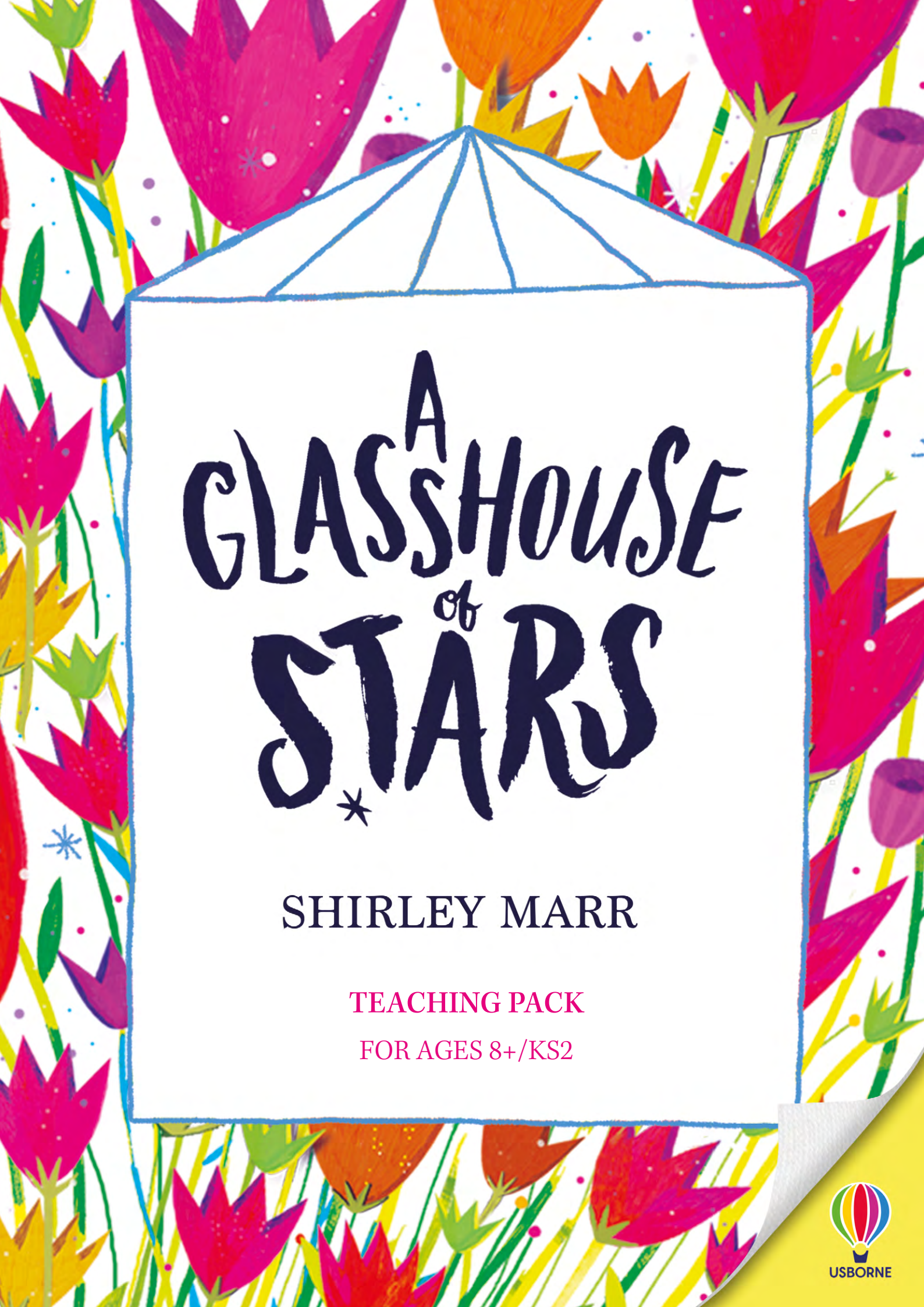




A GLASSHOUSE of STARS

SHIRLEY MARR

TEACHING PACK

FOR AGES 8+/KS2

***A Glasshouse of Stars* is a powerful story based on Shirley Marr's childhood experience of migration. This teaching pack explores some of the important themes within the book using spotlight extracts, discussion questions, cross-curricular activities and ideas aimed at 8+/KS2 readers.**



ABOUT THE BOOK

Meixing Lim and her family have arrived in the New Land to begin a New Life. Everything is scary and different. Their ever-changing house is confusing and she finds it hard to understand the other children at school. Yet in her magical glasshouse, with a strange black-and-white cat, Meixing finds a place to dream.

But then Meixing's life comes crashing down in unimaginable ways. Only her two new and unexpected friends can help. By being brave together, they will learn how to make the stars shine brighter.

A powerful story of kindness, resilience and imagination, based on the author's childhood experience of migration.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shirley Marr is a first-generation Chinese-Australian author living in sunny Perth. Shirley describes herself as having a Western mind and an Eastern heart and likes to write in the space in the middle where both collide, basing her stories on her own personal experiences of migration and growing up. Arriving in mainland Australia from Christmas Island as a seven-year-old in the 1980s and experiencing the good, the bad and the wonder that comes with culture shock, Shirley has been in love with reading and writing from that early age.





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SPOTLIGHT EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER SIX: 'CHICKEN'

🌸 Out in the backyard, with the long grass flattened over your scrunched-down body like a green cocoon, you worry for everyone. You worry that your father is being bullied. You worry that your mother is finding it hard to cope. You worry that when your baby brother or sister is born they will not know the happiness that you had known when you lived on your island.

Big Scary has nothing to say to you. She has gone dark and it's possible that she's fallen asleep. Maybe she can't help you when you're out here. But you don't want to go back inside because you want to be free.

A scraping sound comes from the fence and you think maybe Kevin is back again. It turns out to be the black and white cat, looking very formal in her tuxedo, having a second think about the long grass.

To show her that it isn't scary at all, you gently lift her off the fence and down onto the path that you have flattened from the back steps to the middle of the garden. The cat winks at you, jumps out of your arms and is gone – through a broken pane in the glasshouse.

That's when you make the decision to follow her. *Be brave*, you tell yourself, as you twist the handle of the door. It opens, you step inside, and your world changes. 🌸



SPOTLIGHT 1 P62–63

VOCABULARY

1. What does the phrase 'scrunched-down body' mean? What do you imagine it looks like?
2. What is a 'tuxedo'? Why is this a good way of describing the cat's appearance?
3. Find a phrase that shows Meixing feels anxious.
4. Define 'cocoon'. What image does this word give you of Meixing?

INFER

1. What sort of character do you think Meixing is, judging from the extract?
2. Why do you think Meixing's body is described as looking like 'a green cocoon'? What does this suggest about how Meixing feels?
3. How can you tell that Meixing has a very strong imagination?
4. What are Meixing's worries and anxieties? How do you think Meixing tries to feel better?
5. Why do you think Meixing tells herself to 'be brave' before following the cat into the glasshouse?

RETRIEVE

1. Where is Meixing? What is she doing?
2. How is Meixing lying or sitting on the grass?
3. What three worries does Meixing have?
4. Why doesn't Meixing want to go back inside?
5. What sort of sound comes from the fence? Who does Meixing think has made the sound?
6. What does Meixing do to the cat? Why?
7. What decision does Meixing make at the end of the passage?

EXPLAIN

1. Explain the impression you get of Meixing's character.
2. Explain the different worries that Meixing has in her life.

PREDICT

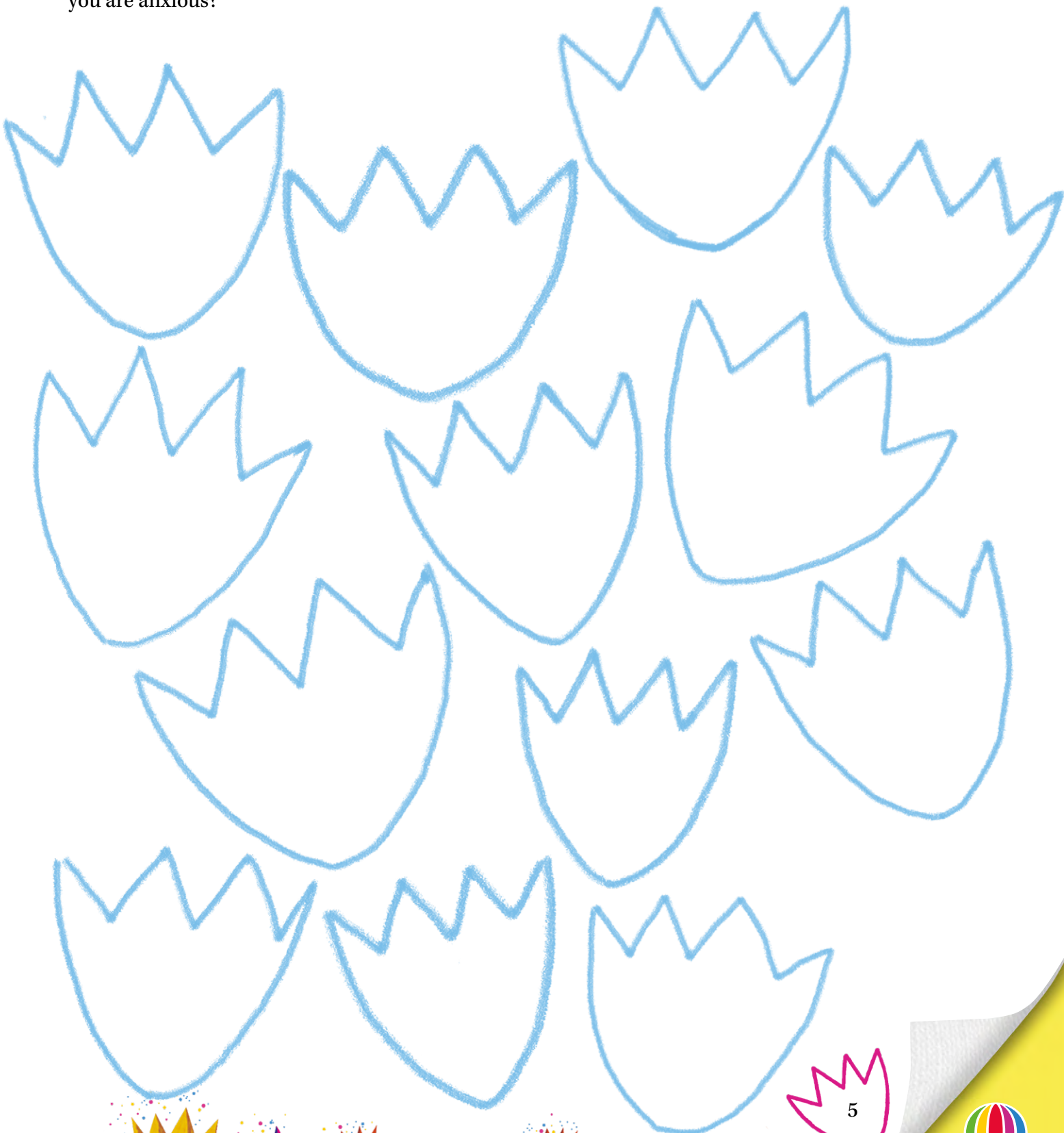
1. Predict why Meixing might be on her own in this passage.
2. Predict what sort of skills Meixing will show in the story.
3. Predict what Meixing sees when she walks into the glasshouse.

SUMMARISE

Summarise Meixing's feelings in the extract in 50 words.

ACTIVITY

Draw or write down each of Meixing's worries. Then, think about your own worries. How many do you have? How do they make you feel? For each of your worries, write down a way that you can make yourself feel better. For example, Meixing likes to be outside to 'be free'. What do you like to do when you are anxious?



SPOTLIGHT 2 P109–110

CHAPTER ELEVEN: PAPERCLIP

SPOTLIGHT EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER ELEVEN: ‘PAPERCLIP’

 It is your turn, and you wonder about showing Ms Jardine the last picture book you drew. The one you thought about throwing away along with the mangy old eraser and stubs of coloured pencils in your ziplock bag, because you are still downhearted that it wasn’t what Miss Cicely wanted from you. But you couldn’t do it. It is a piece of you.

You slide the little book out and across the desk to Ms Jardine. She opens it and looks through the pages. You might not be ready to talk in this class, even though it is just your teacher and the two boys, but you’re ready to show her a bit of your heart.

Ms Jardine smiles as she carefully looks at all the pages.

She turns to the last page and sees the drawing that you did completely in blue pencil. She points to the blue girl. You pat the spot over your heart.

“Is everything okay at home?” Ms Jardine asks, searching your face with her eyes.

You nod even before you think about the question properly.

“You know you can always talk to me, all right?”

You nod quickly again.

With her neat hand, on a new sheet of paper, she writes: *Glasshouse. Sun. Moon. Sky. Seed. Serpent. Orange trees. Blue. Grow. Learn. Thrive.* 



VOCABULARY

1. What is a synonym for 'mangy'?
2. What is a 'ziplock bag'? Why is the ziplock bag important in the passage and in the story?
3. Find a phrase that shows Ms Jardine is kind to Meixing.
4. Define 'thrive'. Why is the word 'thrive' important in relation to Meixing?

INFER

1. What sort of character is Ms Jardine? How do you know?
2. How does Meixing feel at the start of the extract compared to the end? Why?
3. What sort of connection does Meixing feel with her 'picture book'? Why do you think this is?
4. Why do you think Meixing's drawing was completely done in blue pencil? Who is 'the blue girl'?
5. Why do you think Meixing 'nods' when Ms Jardine asks her if everything is okay?
6. For each word Ms Jardine writes on the sheet of paper, reflect on why it is important for Meixing.

RETRIEVE

1. Where is Meixing? Who else is with Meixing?
2. Why does Meixing feel downhearted?
3. Find a phrase that shows Meixing is nervous about sharing her 'picture book'.
4. What does Ms Jardine do to help Meixing feel at ease?
5. What does Ms Jardine find on the 'last page' of Meixing's picture book?
6. What hasn't Meixing 'thought about properly'?
7. What does Ms Jardine see in Meixing's drawing?

EXPLAIN

1. Explain the relationship between Meixing and Ms Jardine.
2. Explain how Meixing's feelings change from the beginning to the end of the extract.

PREDICT

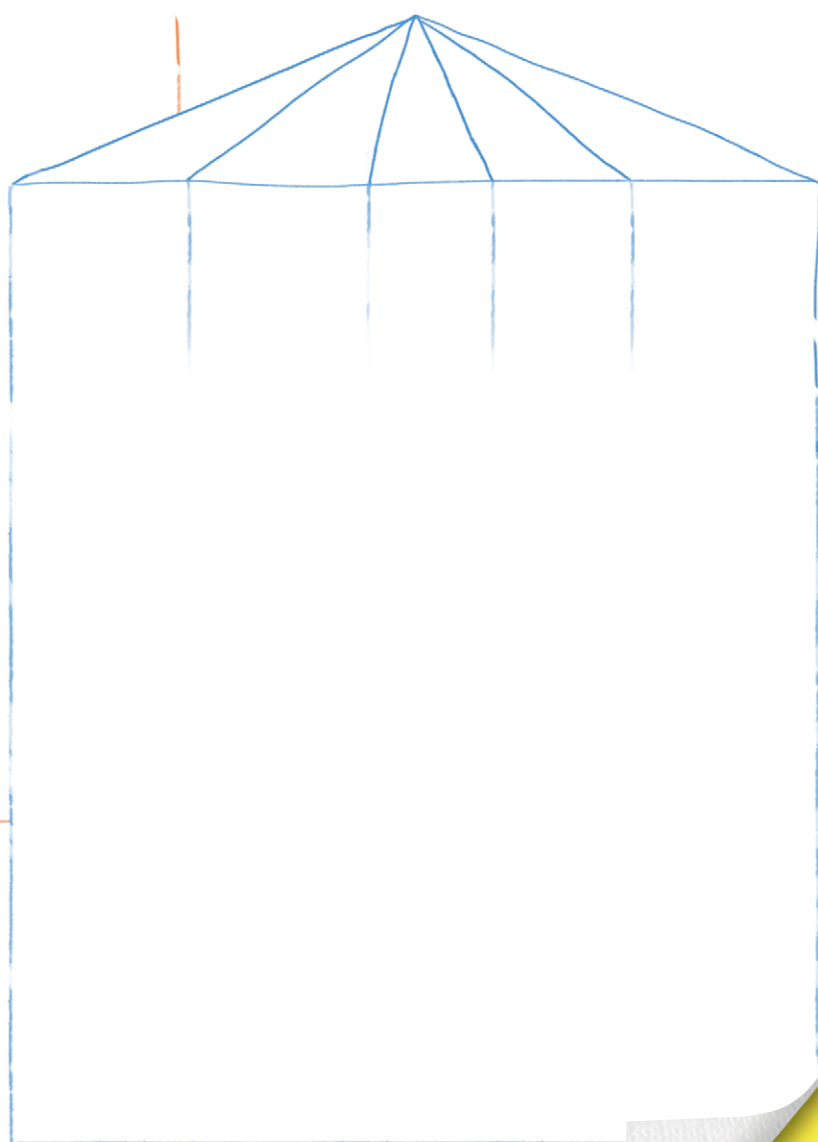
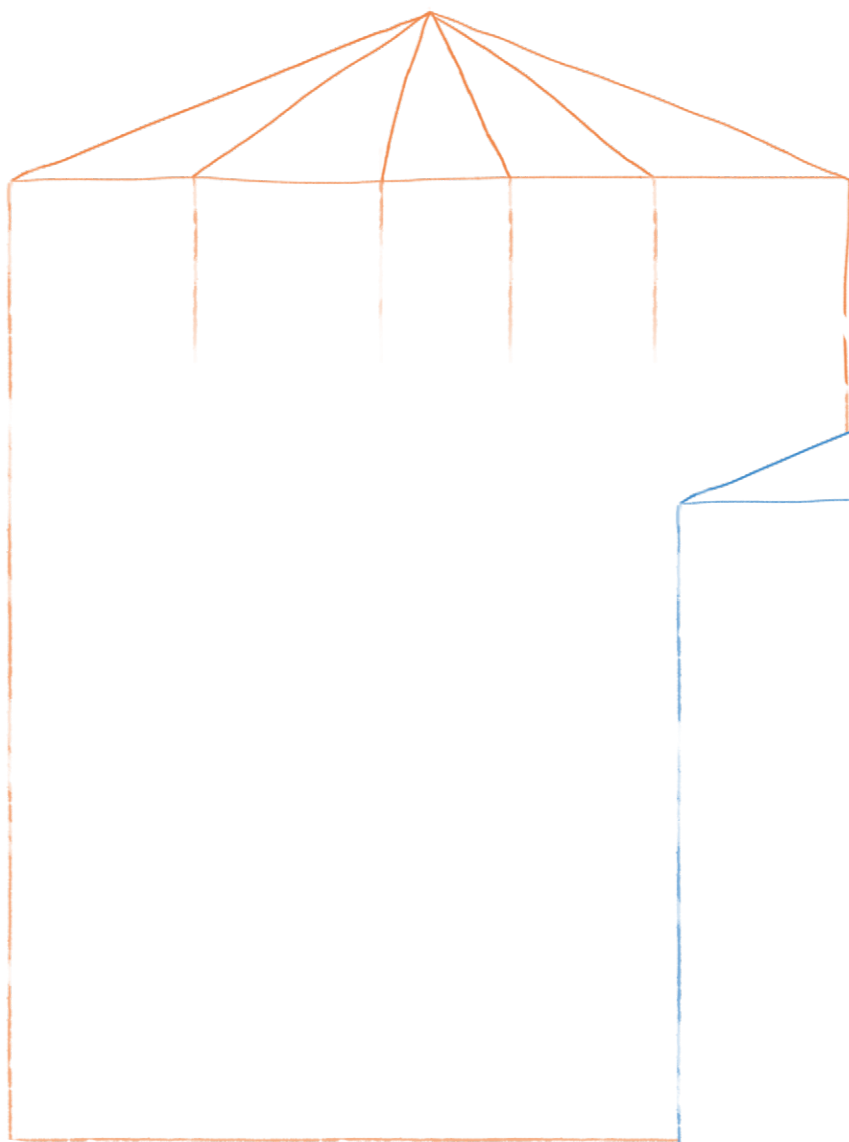
1. Predict what happened with Miss Cicely.
2. Predict what Meixing has drawn in blue pencil and draw it.
3. Predict how Ms Jardine will help Meixing.

SUMMARISE

Summarise what happens here by creating a picture book version of the extract.

ACTIVITY

Draw your own 'picture book' or scene showing how you feel. Consider what objects or people you might include in your drawings. What colours can you use to show different emotions? Challenge yourself to create two separate scenes: one in one colour, and one in another. Reflect on why drawing is an important tool for communication of feelings. Why does Meixing express herself this way?



SPOTLIGHT 3 P174–175

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: BACKPACK

SPOTLIGHT EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER EIGHTEEN: 'BACKPACK'



There will always be something else about you to pick on.

So you might as well be yourself.

“Her bag makes it seem like she’s trying to be part of the cool kids,” you hear your former friend whisper to the others as you sit down at your desk when you get to school that morning.

“And those shoes! Her parents must have spent all their money on the bag and are too broke to afford decent shoes!”

It hurts. Especially the bit about your parents, without knowing anything about your family, but you tell yourself not to care. You don’t want her fake type of friendship anyway, especially when Ah Ma’s ring is now back on her finger. Thank goodness you found out what she was really like, even though you learned the hard way. You want to become a real and true version of yourself, like Ailing and the glasshouse think you can. 



VOCABULARY

1. What is a synonym for 'broke'?
2. Why do you think the children use the slang word: 'broke'?
3. Define 'fake'. What does the phrase 'fake friendship' mean in this context?
4. What does the phrase 'real version' mean?

INFER

1. What characteristics do you think Meixing shows in the extract?
2. Why do you think the other children bully Meixing? What makes her different?
3. What 'hurts' the most about the bullying for Meixing? Why? What does this tell you about her?
4. How does Meixing feel about her 'former friend'? Why is she a 'fake' friend?
5. What has Meixing decided about herself and her friendships?
6. How is the glasshouse an important motivation for Meixing? What does it represent for her?

RETRIEVE

1. What examples of bullying behaviour do you see in the extract?
2. Who is responsible for the bullying?
3. Why does Meixing come to the conclusion that 'you might as well be yourself'?
4. Which two objects belonging to Meixing do the bullies focus on?
5. What type of friendship does Meixing want to avoid?
6. Who is wearing Ah Ma's ring?
7. Who thinks Meixing can become 'a real and true version' of herself?

EXPLAIN

1. Explain the bullying behaviour in this extract.
2. Explain how Meixing deals with the bullying behaviour.

PREDICT

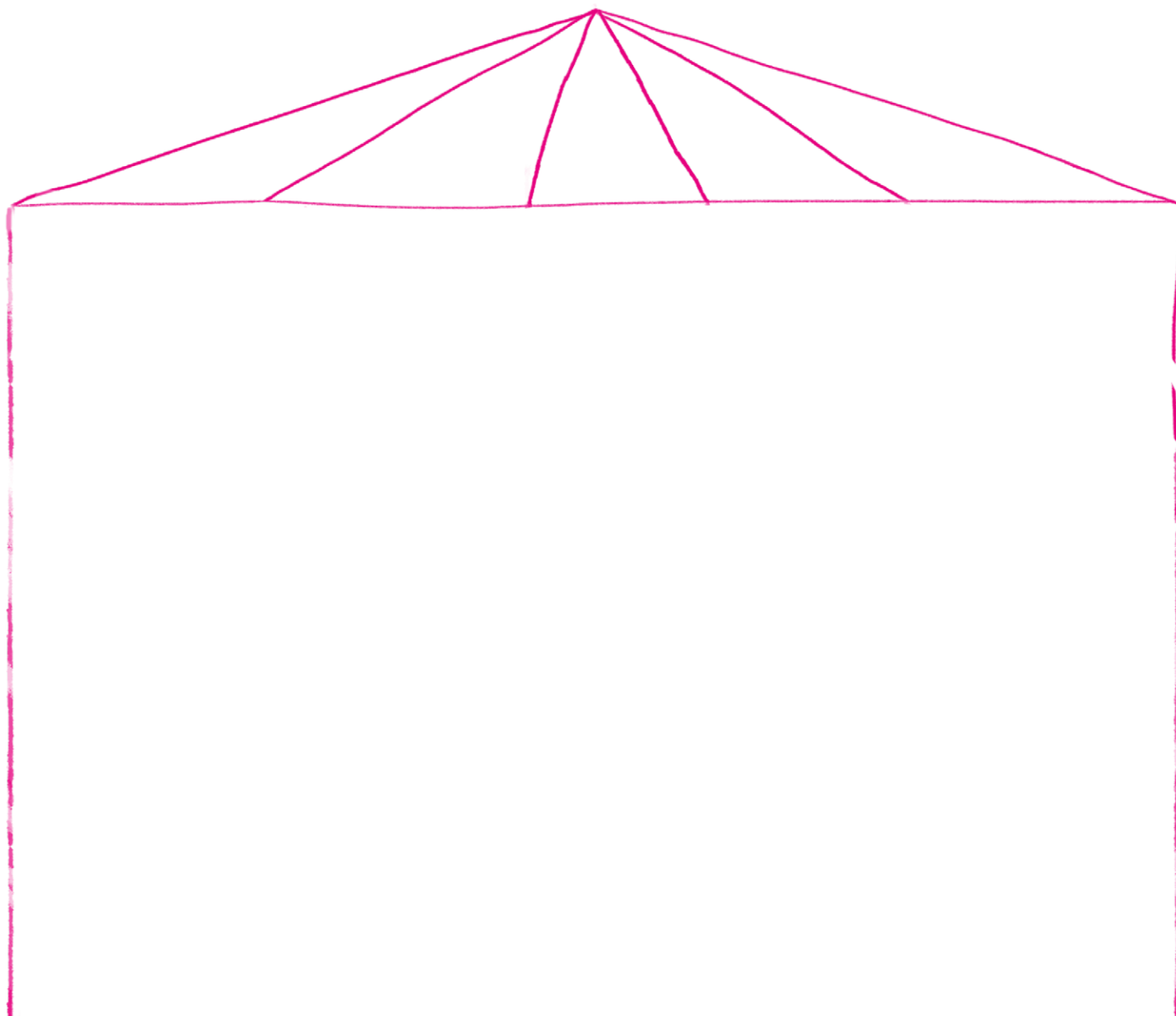
1. Predict how Meixing has 'learned the hard way'.
2. Predict what Meixing looks for in a 'real' friendship – not a 'fake' friendship.
3. Predict how Meixing's attitude towards the bullying behaviour will help her in the long run.

SUMMARISE

Summarise Meixing's approach to bullies and bullying behaviour.

ACTIVITY

Consider Meixing's promise to become 'a real and true version' of herself. This means embracing her unique identity. Create a collage to show your unique identity. Include images to show where you are from, your culture, your family, your interests and personality traits. Then, write a pledge. Begin with the line: 'I will be a real and true version of myself by



I will be a real and true version of myself by

SPOTLIGHT 4 P194–195
CHAPTER TWENTY: LETTER

SPOTLIGHT EXTRACT FROM CHAPTER TWENTY: 'LETTER'

 You turn it in your hands, trying to find the opening to the letter inside, but to your surprise, there isn't one. The letter has never been opened. You look at the words on the front, Old Language that you cannot read, and you think of the New Language you struggle with. And you mourn. You mourn for something you never had, because you cannot yet celebrate what you have not yet gained.

"Is this your letter, Ma Ma?"

"No. It belongs to your grandmother."

"And she didn't open it before she left?"

Ah Ma left the world a long time ago. Now she is only the face of the sad bride on the worst day of her life hanging on the wall, a frozen frame in time.

"No. It's because Ah Ma couldn't read."

"Then why would someone write her a letter?"

Ma Ma's eyes take on a fierce look and her lips turn up at the corners even though it isn't a smile.

"Your Ah Ma was smart, you know. She was very good at figuring out how things worked. She could look at how someone cooked a dish or sewed a piece of clothing and she would come home and do the same thing completely by memory. She even fixed an old radio by herself once. She just never had a chance to get an education." 



VOCABULARY

1. What does it mean to 'mourn' something?
2. Find a phrase that shows Ah Mah was unhappy to get married.
3. What is a synonym for 'fierce'? Can you do an impression of Ma Ma's 'fierce look'?
4. What does it mean if someone is described as 'smart'?

INFER

1. How important are words and language in the extract? Why are they important?
2. What were the barriers for Ah Mah? How are these similar to the barriers that Meixing faces?
3. Do you think the fact that Ah Mah was a woman changed her destiny? Why?
4. What does Meixing 'mourn' for in the extract? Why?
5. Why can't Meixing read the Old Language? How does she feel about the New Language?
6. How important is the theme of 'education' in the book as a whole?

RETRIEVE

1. Who is Meixing speaking to? What are they speaking about?
2. What is Meixing trying to open? Why can't she open it?
3. Who does the letter belong to?
4. Where is Ah Ma now?
5. What is the 'frozen frame in time' referring to?
6. What could Ah Ma do 'completely by memory'?
7. What did Ah Ma 'never have a chance' to do?

EXPLAIN

1. Explain what happened to Ah Ma.
2. Explain how either Ma Ma or Meixing feels about Ah Ma.

PREDICT

1. Predict what might've been in the letter.
2. Predict what happened on Ah Ma's wedding day.
3. Predict Ah Ma's life if she had had a good education.

SUMMARISE

Summarise the different barriers that Ah Ma, Ma Ma or Meixing have faced in their lives.

ACTIVITY

Draw Meixing's family tree. Focus in particular on the female side. For each of the female characters in Meixing's life, note down how they've each faced similar struggles – either in the Old Land or the New Land. What opportunities does Meixing have that her grandmother didn't have? Why do you think this is?

