

STUDENT ACTIVITY 1: Analysing Thoughts and Feelings

In this story, the writer takes on a third-person limited narrative perspective that follows Mr Li as he recalls his interactions with his mother prior to her passing. This allows us access to his inner thoughts and feelings, and at the same time, also observe the thoughts and feelings of other characters as observed from what Mr. Li himself sees.

From Chapter 1:

Even though Mr Li was apparently “not upset by his mother’s funeral”, he was still “disconcerted” and feeling uneasy while standing and looking out from his office window over Shenton Way.

After Mr Li reached for the binoculars and counted the ships out at the harbour, he arrived at a few specific numbers and began to feel differently. The narrator then says:

“Seventy-eight – that was the number for today. He repeated it to himself with satisfaction. Numbers were strong, numbers he could hold on to. Seventy-eight ships, 18th floor, 63 years old.

Like the co-ordinates of some private graph, these numbers anchored him in space and time.”

Question 1: Re-read Chapter 1. Based on the narrator’s description above, what feelings do you think Mr Li experiences from the act of counting? Why do you think he feels this way?

From Chapter 3:

Just before leaving the house to go to Mr Li's office for the binocular viewing, his mother takes her time to pray to his late father about the visit. While Mr Li himself grew impatient, his daughter Ying tried to hurry his mother up but to no avail.

Question 2: Re-read Chapter 3. What thoughts and feelings do you think Ying and Mr Li's mother experience over the act of praying at the altar? Why do you think they each feel that way? Give at least two points per character with supporting evidence.

From Chapter 5:

Back in the present, Mr Li returned to use the binoculars and looked out towards Tanjong Rhu from his office once more. Mr Li wondered about what his mother could see that morning. He begins to question different fragments of his childhood memories of growing up in Tanjong Rhu that his mother could see that he struggles to recall himself.

Question 3: Re-read Chapter 5. What thoughts and feelings do you think Mr Li was experiencing as he tried to recall the memories of Tanjong Rhu? Why do you think he feels that way? Give at least two points with supporting evidence.

From Chapter 6:

At the hospital, Ying explains to Mr Li about her argument with her aunt over her grandmother's burial clothes. Ying encourages Mr Li to speak to his mother, carefully pulling up her grandmother's eyelids in order for Mr Li to have a conversation with her, as he tries to ask her about their memories of Tanjong Rhu. When she did not reply, he snapped at Ying, asking her to close them. Shortly after this tense exchange between Mr Li and Ying, Mr Li's mother began to stir. She began to speak about the keys to the altar, but Ying and Mr Li would ask her not to worry. After this moment, the writer implies that she passes on.

Question 4: Re-read Chapter 6. What thoughts and feelings do you think Ying and Mr Li have towards Mr Li's mother in her last moments? Why do you think they each feel that way? Give at least two points per character with supporting evidence.