

The Map Beneath the Floor

PASSAGE · FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Inference

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 20 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about six minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

Tita Esing's shop stands halfway down a cobbled street in Vigan, between a place that sells woven blankets and a place that sells nothing much at all. She keeps tall clay jars by the door, the dark heavy kind fired in the old kilns at the edge of town, and in the afternoons she sits behind the counter listening to horse carts go past on the stones.

The upstairs floor is laid in narra, a reddish wood that has gone almost black with two centuries of feet. One board near the window had always rocked when you stepped on it. That August I finally lifted it, mostly to stop the noise.

Underneath, in the gap between the board and the beam, lay a flat tin box with a hinged lid.

Inside was a map, drawn in ink on cloth-backed paper and folded into eight. The folds had worn through at the corners. It showed our town — the grid of streets was unmistakable, and so was the river bending away at the top — but half the names were wrong. Our own street carried a different name altogether, in a careful sloping hand.

Tita Esing put on her glasses and held it at arm's length for a long time. “That was what they called it before,” she said at last, and would not be drawn further.

The mapmaker had used symbols. Squares with a small cross on top were churches. Little open circles turned out to be wells, and there were more of them than I expected, nine inside the old town alone. A short dashed line ran where the sea wall now runs. And behind our own building, where the back room is, somebody had shaded in a rectangle and written a single word: *hornos*.

Neither of us knew it. The woman at the heritage office did. It is Spanish, she said, and it means ovens.

We went home and counted paces from the front door the way the map suggested, which brought us to the middle of the back room, where the floor is tiled rather than boarded. Tita Esing knelt and knocked along the tiles with the handle of a spoon. For most of the

room the sound was flat and dull. Across one patch, about the size of a dining table, it came back hollow.

We lifted four tiles. Below them, packed round with sand and broken jar fragments, was the curve of a brick dome, soot-black on the inside where we could see through a gap. A bread oven, filled in and floored over, with nobody alive remembering it was there.

Tita Esing sat back on her heels. Her grandmother, she said, had always claimed the family sold bread before they sold anything else, and nobody had ever quite believed her.

We put the tiles back. The map is framed now, behind the counter, and visitors ask about it more than they ask about the jars. What I had not expected is the way it rearranged my own town for me: I still walk to school down the street I have always used, and I still think of it, every single morning, by the other name.

Cover the passage before you start.

Looking back turns this into a copying exercise. Getting it slightly wrong from memory is what makes it work.

PART A Tell it back

Write down everything you can remember about the map and what the narrator and Tita Esing found by following it. Order does not matter. Keep writing until you run out.

PART B 6 questions

1 Where was the map found, and what single word was written on it behind the narrator's building?

2 Why did Tita Esing knock along the tiles with a spoon handle instead of simply lifting them?

3 What does the detail about the grandmother and the bread suggest about family stories?

4 The narrator says the map “rearranged” the town. What does that word tell you about the change, given that nothing physical moved?

- 5 Why does the writer end with the narrator walking to school and using the old street name, rather than with the discovery of the oven?

- 6 Tita Esing and the narrator put the tiles back and framed the map instead. Weigh up whether that was the better choice, using details from the story.

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 • Under a loose narra floorboard upstairs, in a flat tin box with a hinged lid. The word written there was hornos.
- ☐ 2 • To find out where to dig before damaging the floor. A hollow sound means empty space beneath, so tapping let her locate the buried oven — about the size of a dining table — and lift only four tiles.
- ☐ 3 • That they can be accurate even when they sound like boasting. Nobody had quite believed her claim that the family sold bread first, and the oven under the floor turns out to confirm it — the story outlasted the evidence rather than replacing it.
- ☐ 4 • Rearranging means putting the same pieces in a different order, so the change is in how the narrator sees the town rather than in the town itself. The streets and buildings are unchanged, but their old names and hidden uses now sit alongside the familiar ones.
- ☐ 5 • Because the lasting effect is on the narrator, not on the floor. Ending on an ordinary daily walk shows the find has quietly changed how she sees a route she has always taken, which is a smaller and more convincing conclusion than the drama of the brick dome.
- ☐ 6 • In favour: the oven survives untouched, the shop keeps working, and the map — which is what let them find it at all — is now visible to everyone who comes in, so the knowledge is shared without the object being disturbed. Against: covering it again hides the only proof of the grandmother's story, and the heritage office, which identified hornos in the first place, might have recorded or opened it properly. A good answer weighs preserving the oven in place against making it known, and takes a position.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 6

DATE

THE STRATEGY Teach it without notes

Find somebody who has not read this and explain it to them with the sheet shut — the map, the word, the hollow sound, the oven. Teaching forces you to retrieve the parts in an order that makes sense, and the moment you stumble you have located a gap you did not know was there. Look it up only after you have hit the gap, not before.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

Think of the last time you explained something to someone and realised halfway through that you did not understand it as well as you thought. What did you do next?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains delayed recall, not reading speed. Let your teenager read the passage once, then cover it completely before Part A — no glancing back and no prompting, because the effort of hauling a half-remembered fact out of memory is what fixes it there. At this level mark the thinking rather than the wording: the answers given for the inference, purpose and analysis questions are one good response each, not the only one.