

THE WEIGHT OF SECRETS

TEACHER'S GUIDE | EVERYDAY ENGLISH READERS | INTERMEDIATE B1+/B2

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About the reader

A family drama set principally in Madrid and the Spanish countryside. A troubling incident involving Rafa and his sister-in-law Ana fractures the extended family. As Juan, Ana and Maria struggle with loyalty and trust, Rafa's concealed drug involvement puts his children at risk. The story explores responsibility, denial, boundaries, truth and the difficult possibility of rebuilding family relationships.

Level and teaching suitability

B1+/B2 is the published designation. Strong B1+ readers may benefit from vocabulary preparation and guided discussion; B2 readers can work more independently with inference, viewpoint and ethical complexity. The book contains nine chapters and its own substantial learner section.

Sensitive-content guidance

The story includes unwanted physical contact, coercive behaviour, drug dealing and drug use, a firearm in a family home, family conflict and children experiencing distress. Recommend it for mature groups; preview content, allow students to opt out of personal disclosure, and frame discussion around fictional choices rather than classmates' experiences.

Learning outcomes

- Trace how the same events are interpreted differently by Ana, Juan, Maria and Rafa.
- Distinguish an explanation for harmful behaviour from an excuse for it.
- Support interpretations with specific scenes, actions and dialogue.
- Discuss boundaries, responsibility and the meaning of loyalty.
- Use conditional structures and evaluative language to develop literary criticism.

SUGGESTED TEACHING SEQUENCE

Four adaptable sessions; assign reading between lessons according to group pace.

Session 1 • First impressions and boundaries (Chapters 1-2)

- Before reading: discuss how humour can influence what a family considers acceptable.
- During reading: identify the shift in tone between Rafa's behaviour at breakfast and the patio confrontation.
- After reading: compare Juan's first response with Ana's. Which details make Ana's interpretation clear?

Session 2 • Competing loyalties (Chapters 3-4)

- Track Maria's changing explanations for Rafa's actions and the family's response.
- Explore why Sara and Javier's behaviour changes, and what the garage discovery reveals.
- Ask students to separate what each character knows from what they believe.

Session 3 • Consequences and accountability (Chapters 5-7)

- Trace the consequences of secrecy for the children and the wider family.
- Compare private decisions with the more formal conversations around treatment and the family meeting.
- Debate whether acknowledging wrongdoing is the same as repairing harm.

Session 4 • Silence, change and resolution (Chapters 8-9)

- Contrast damaging silence earlier in the story with the quietness of the closing scene.
- Discuss the significance of ordinary family routines and the image of falling stars.
- Complete the optional literary-critic activity on the final page.

TEACHING NOTES & DISCUSSION

Questions below complement rather than repeat the book's learner exercises.

Reading between the lines

1. The repeated excuse: Why does "Rafa being Rafa" become more troubling each time it is repeated? Invite students to find moments when language normalises behaviour.
2. Maria's dilemma: What does Maria believe she is protecting at different stages? How does that understanding change once her children's safety is at stake?
3. Ana's agency: How does Ana set boundaries? What is the difference between describing her feelings and allowing Rafa to define them?
4. The family circle: Why does the story resist an instant, uncomplicated reconciliation?
5. The ending: What is the effect of the quiet, everyday details in "Starfall" after the earlier confrontations?

Language focus

- Reporting viewpoints: Maria insists that... / Ana rejects the suggestion that... / Juan realises that...
- Concession: Although Maria..., she... / While Rafa claims..., the evidence...
- Evaluation: His explanation is unconvincing because... / The scene suggests that...
- Hypotheticals: If I were in Juan's position, I would... / If the author had..., the ending might have...

Teacher facilitation

Avoid asking students to disclose personal experiences of coercion, substance use or family trauma. Accept differing literary interpretations while maintaining a clear distinction between a character's feelings and responsibility for their actions.

DIFFERENTIATION & ASSESSMENT

Practical additions to the exercises already printed in the book.

For B1+ learners

- Provide a character relationship chart: Juan–Ana; Juan–Maria; Maria–Rafa; Rafa–Javier and Sara.
- Pre-teach a small set of useful words: boundary, loyalty, denial, consequence, responsibility, reconciliation.
- Use structured prompts: “At first Maria believes... Later she discovers... This changes...”
- Allow pair preparation before whole-class debate.

For B2 learners

- Ask students to defend an interpretation using two contrasting scenes.
- Analyse how repeated phrases and changes in silence shape the reader’s judgement.
- Compare the responsibilities of Juan, Maria and Rafa without treating their actions as equivalent.
- Write a short critical paragraph on whether the ending offers forgiveness, accountability, or both.

Using the existing learner material

The published reader already includes 30 reading-comprehension questions, 18 vocabulary-and-language items, 10 vocabulary-in-context sentences, speaking/discussion prompts and three 150–200-word writing options. Use these for checking understanding and language practice; reserve this guide for sequencing, interpretation and assessment.

Quick formative assessment

Exit ticket: “Choose one decision in the story. Explain what the character knew, what they chose, and one consequence.” Assess clarity of explanation, textual support and appropriate language, not agreement with a particular opinion.

BEYOND THE STORY

BECOME A LITERARY CRITIC | OPTIONAL POST-READING ACTIVITY

Students may discuss in pairs or groups, then develop one response in writing. Encourage specific examples from the story and respectful disagreement.

1. What did you like most about *The Weight of Secrets*?

Think about the characters, the family relationships, the dialogue, the tension or the ending. Explain your reasons.

2. What didn't you like about *The Weight of Secrets*?

Was anything confusing, unconvincing, disappointing or less interesting? Give examples to support your opinion.

3. What would you have done differently if you were the author?

Would you change a character's decision, develop a scene further, alter the pacing or write a different ending? Explain how your choice might affect the story.

Suggested language support

B1+: "I liked... because..." / "I wasn't convinced by... because..." / "If I were the author, I would..."

B2: "One of the story's strongest features is..." / "The portrayal of... could have been more..." / "Had the author chosen to..., the reader might have..."

Teacher note

There are no single correct opinions. Encourage students to justify their judgements with evidence and to distinguish literary criticism from personal criticism of the author.

Companion resource for *The Weight of Secrets* · Marshall Appoh · Everyday English Readers