

## ***No Longer Human: Second Notebook***

*"The fear of human beings continued to rise... but my acting talents had unquestionably matured."*

After his childhood of self-imposed isolation, Yozo is able to use his 'clown persona' to manage his anxiety about other people and successfully complete high school. He has grown into a handsome young man and perfected his clownish disguise – yet one day an unintelligent classmate called Takeichi unexpectedly sees through his act. Fearing Takeichi will expose him as a fraud, Yozo cultivates a relationship with him. One day, Takeichi shows him a Van Gogh painting which inspires Yozo to make his own artwork.

In college, Yozo becomes friends with a young wastrel called Horiki who introduces him to drink and bar crawling for women. Through Horiki, Yozo meets Tsuneko, a hostess at a bar. They form a bond and have a short relationship, soon agreeing a suicide pact. Tsuneko drowns but Yozo survives. He is disgraced by this incident; his family estranges him and he is expelled from university. He has no choice but to live with Flatfish, one of his father's political fixers.

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### **Knowledge Check**

*Try to answer these questions from memory:*

**1. In his silly story about school, Yozo calls his geography teacher the...**

- (a) Hippo
- (b) Lion
- (c) Elephant
- (d) Walrus

**2. What does Yozo say will restore a woman's spirit?**

- (a) Give her something sweet
- (b) Tell her funny stories
- (c) Offer her a kiss
- (d) Draw her a comic

**3. What was the first prediction Takeichi makes about Yozo?**

- (a) That he'll always be a liar
- (b) That he'll be a great painter
- (c) Women will fall for him
- (d) He'll make lots of money

**4. From where did Horiki graduate?**

- (a) Waseda University
- (b) University of Tokyo
- (c) A private art school
- (d) He didn't graduate

**5. When Yozo wears glasses, who do the sisters say he looks like?**

- (a) Harold Lloyd
- (b) Soseki
- (c) Takuya Kimura
- (d) Kento Yamazaki

**6. What is a synonym of 'consternation'?**

- (a) Surprise
- (b) Satisfaction
- (c) Settlement
- (d) Stubbornness

**7. Who does Yozo show his best drawings to?**

- (a) Horiki
- (b) Takeichi
- (c) The sisters
- (d) Soseki

**8. Who is known as the 'lady-killer'?**

- (a) Tsuneko
- (b) Yozo
- (c) Horiki
- (d) Yuan

**9. When does Yozo say his 'wound of a guilty conscience' appeared?**

- (a) When he was an infant
- (b) As a child
- (c) In his adolescence
- (d) He doesn't believe he has one

**10. What word does Tsuneko pronounce as they fell into sleep?**

- (a) Happiness
- (b) Shame
- (c) Death
- (d) Muffins

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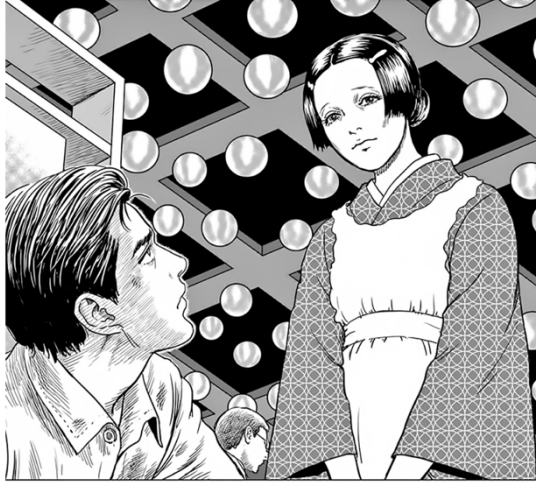
## Understanding and Interpretation

1. How does the Second Notebook develop the impression that, while learning to function as a human on the surface, internally Yozo suffers the same fears he did as a child?
2. How does his friendship with Takeichi impact Yozo? What does he hope to achieve by befriending Takeichi? What does this say about Yozo's view of humanity – and himself?
3. Yozo's relationship with Horiki is destructive and one-sided. His 'friendship' brings about negative changes in Yozo's life, yet he still tolerates Horiki. Why? What, if anything, does Yozo gain from Horiki?
4. Horiki takes Yozo to a meeting of the Communist party, which he finds ridiculous. Despite this, he likes the party's ideology. Can you explain this contradiction? Why does he respond so positively to the party's '*irrational*' ideology?
5. Despite the tragedy of his attempted suicide, and the death of Tsuneko, what moment in the fallout from all this actually has the biggest impact on Yozo?

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## Important Character: *Tsuneko*

*"They say that love flies out the window when poverty comes in the door."*



Yozo meets Tsuneko in a bar during one of his binges with Horiki in Tokyo's Ginza district. She makes an impression on him immediately. Two years older than Yozo, Tsuneko's husband is in prison and the two of them have a one-night stand. After she tells him *'I am so unhappy'* Yozo discovers an unfamiliar sensation: sympathy. He is drawn to her melancholy. He is able to perceive her sadness as a tactile substance flowing over the surface of her body so when he lies with her he becomes a *'withered leaf settling to rest on the stones at the bottom of a pool.'* While this feeling

lasts only one night, and Yozo quickly retreats back into his clownish persona, the fact that he was able to experience happiness at all can be interpreted as a sign of hope that those who are most withdrawn from society are not necessarily condemned to lifelong loneliness.

In addition to her melancholia, Tsuneko is also poor. Even as Horiki expresses disgust – while simultaneously leching on her! – Yoko finds himself unexpectedly experiencing a *'feeling of comradeship for this fellow-sufferer from poverty.'* Yozo has long had a preoccupation with poverty. When he visits Horiki and eats tasteless food prepared by Horiki's mother, he comments: *'It is true I dread poverty.'* Despite growing up in an affluent family, his estrangement meant that as an adult he has never had much money. True, his father gives him a small monthly allowance, but he spends most of this on drink and prostitutes. Fear of running out of cash is one of the only things to drive him out of his passivity when he makes up excuses to beg more from his father. And his inability to sustain his relationship with Tsuneko is inextricably bound to his money issues, revealed when he fixates on the expression *'love flies out the window when poverty comes in the door.'* Yozo may be half-joking when he explains how most people get the meaning of this aphorism backwards, but it's ironic that he always tries to escape from the women in his life, even if they offer a glimpse of contentment that he can't find elsewhere.

Later, when he sees Tsuneko again and he realizes he doesn't even have enough to pay for a glass of milk from a lunch stand, Yozo is overwhelmed with horror. The image of his empty lodgings, his empty wallet, and the innocence of Tsuneko's voice as she asks him *'Is that all you have?'* cut Yozo to the bone, and he resolves to take his own life.

### Activity

At certain times, *No Longer Human* has been published under the alternative title of *A Shameful Life*. Research the economic and social context of Japan in the pre-war and post-war years around the time Ozamu Dezai was writing *No Longer Human*. How does your understanding of these contexts

regarding shame help you appreciate aspects of Yozo's character (such as his descent into alcohol-fuelled hedonism during the Second Notebook)?

You can start by reading Huffman's 'Japanese Society in the Twentieth Century' and Abe's '... Study of Poverty and Social Exclusion in Japan' available at links in the Second Notebook section of the class blog. You can also conduct your own research and find your own sources. Share your findings with your classmates.

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## Important Symbolism: *Ghost Paintings*

*"The pictures I drew were so heart-rending as to stupefy even myself."*

Yozo goes to great lengths to conceal his true nature from others, yet he still demonstrates the human tendency towards self-expression. During the Second Notebook (corresponding to his time as a teenager), he discovers painting. He has always been a talented artist, sketching cartoons to please his classmates (as he does with clowning, he always panders to their preferences when producing these little sketches). Yet Yozo has something of an epiphany when Takeichi shows him a Van Gogh self-portrait, believing it to be a painting of a ghost. Yozo is astonished – rather than pointing out Takeichi's mistake, he internalises this misconception and realises that art doesn't always have to be beautiful, entertaining, or real. He can use art to create frightening, disturbing, abstract, and expressive images. With this in mind he uses his artistic talent to reveal *'the true self so desperately hidden.'* Although he only shows the paintings to Takeichi, even this small act of 'reaching out' suggests Yozo has the capacity to express himself. Therefore, his art can be interpreted as evidence that he yearns for some kind of expressive outlet despite the fact that he works so hard to hide his emotional self in every other way. Like famous painters such as Van Gogh, Yozo uses art to grapple with his dark feelings and displays himself honestly, rather than constantly hiding everything away.



### Activity

Are you secretly funny, creative, shy, anxious? Are you serious at school, but like to have fun outside? Do you dress conservatively, but would like to be more expressive? Do you put up a kind of shield between your true self and the outside world? Experiment with using art to express a hidden side of yourself. Take selfies or, if you are able, sketch a self-portrait that reveals a side you normally keep hidden. Present your portrait alongside quotations from the Second Notebook that convey the idea that art has the power to express one's 'true self'.