

*The*  
ARRIVAL



SHAUN TAN

## **THE ARRIVAL – Shaun Tan**

*The Arrival* is a migrant story told as a series of wordless images that might seem to come from a long forgotten time. A man leaves his wife and child in an impoverished town, seeking better prospects in an unknown country on the other side of a vast ocean. He eventually finds himself in a bewildering city. With nothing more than a suitcase and a handful of currency, the immigrant must find a place to live, food to eat and some kind of gainful employment. He is helped along the way by sympathetic strangers, each carrying their own unspoken history: stories of struggle and survival in a world of incomprehensible violence, upheaval and hope.

...

In 'The Arrival', the absence of any written description also plants the reader more firmly in the shoes of an immigrant character. There is no guidance as to how the images might be interpreted, and we must ourselves search for meaning and seek familiarity in a world where such things are either scarce or concealed. Words have a remarkable magnetic pull on our attention, and how we interpret attendant images: in their absence, an image can often have more conceptual space around it, and invite a more lingering attention from a reader who might otherwise reach for the nearest convenient caption, and let that rule their imagination.

<http://www.shauntan.net/books/the-arrival.html>

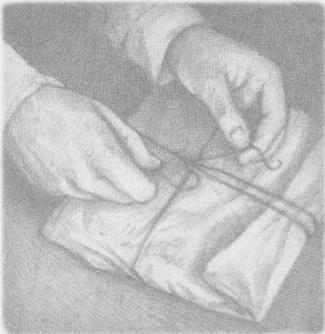
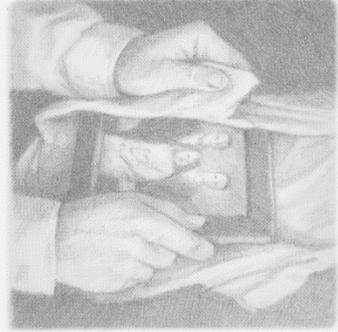
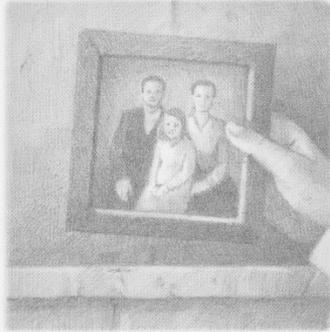
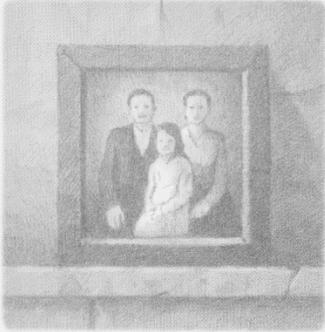
Note that the pages that are reproduced here are a selection of images from the book and that the page numbers do not correspond to those in the book.

Shaun Tan permits the use of his art for educational purposes.

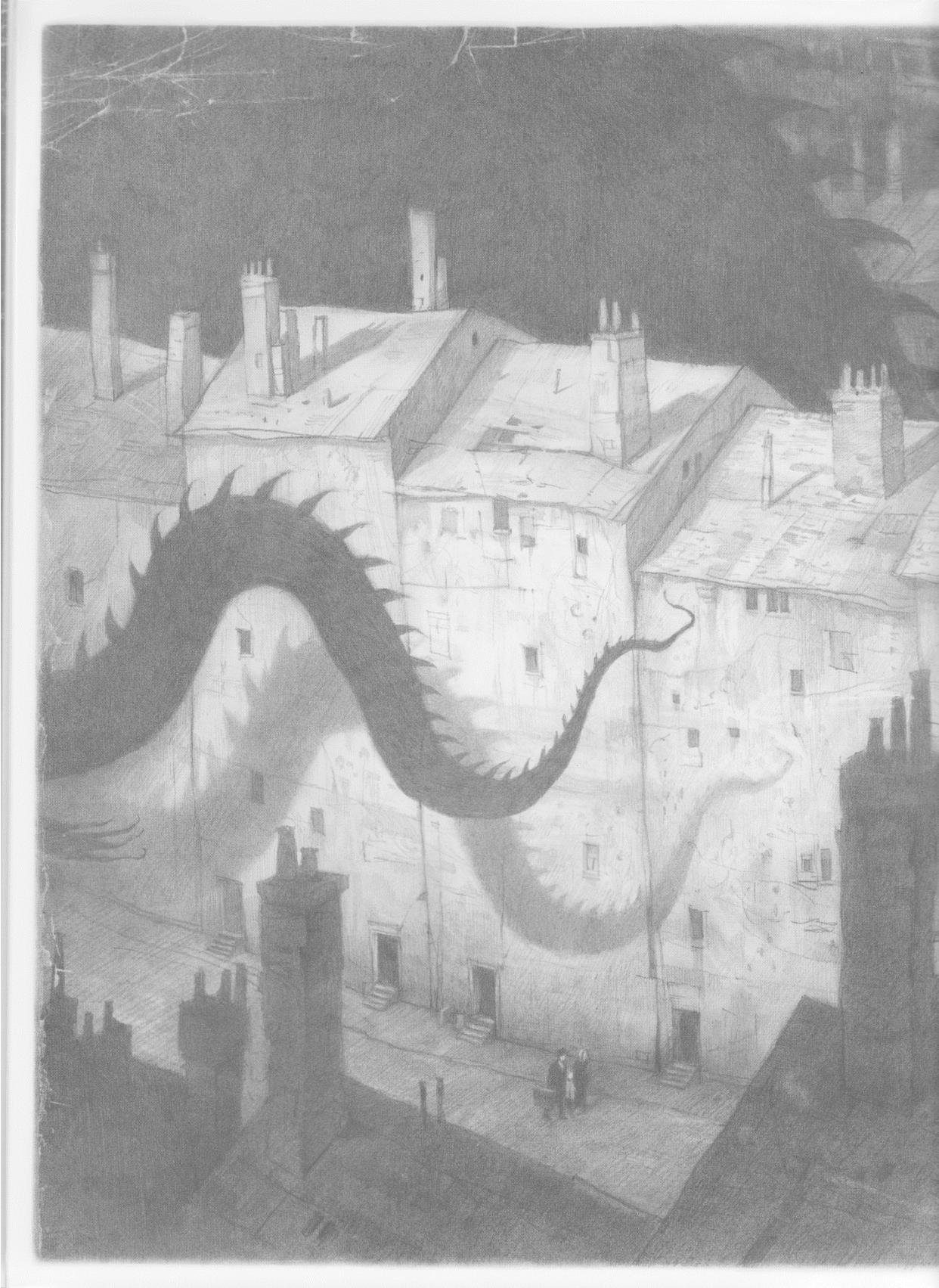
### **Departing from Home and Leaving**

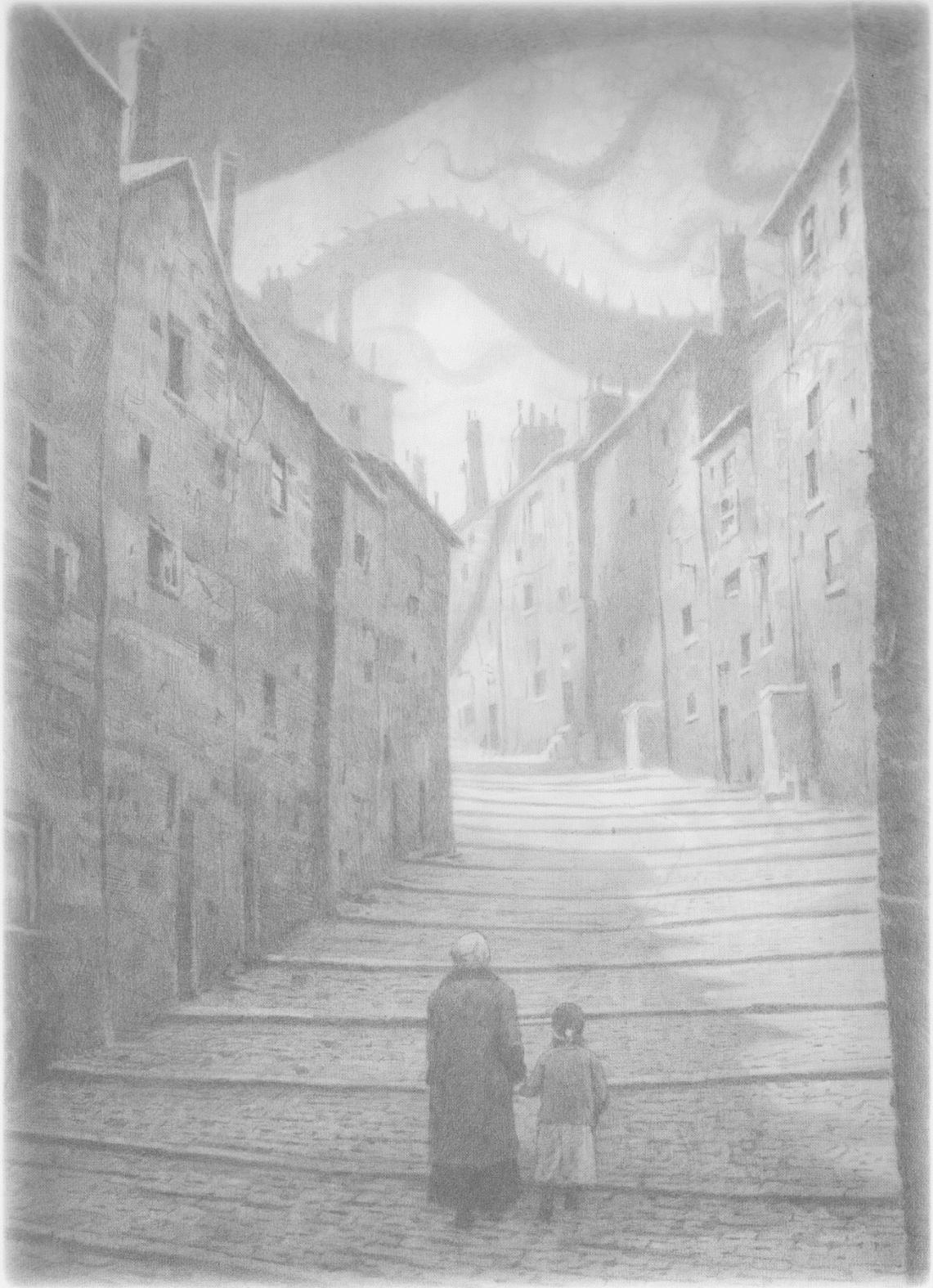
Study the following 4 pages.

- Write a diary, monologue, or dialogue capturing this event.
- What do you observe about the environment of this community from which the protagonist is fleeing?



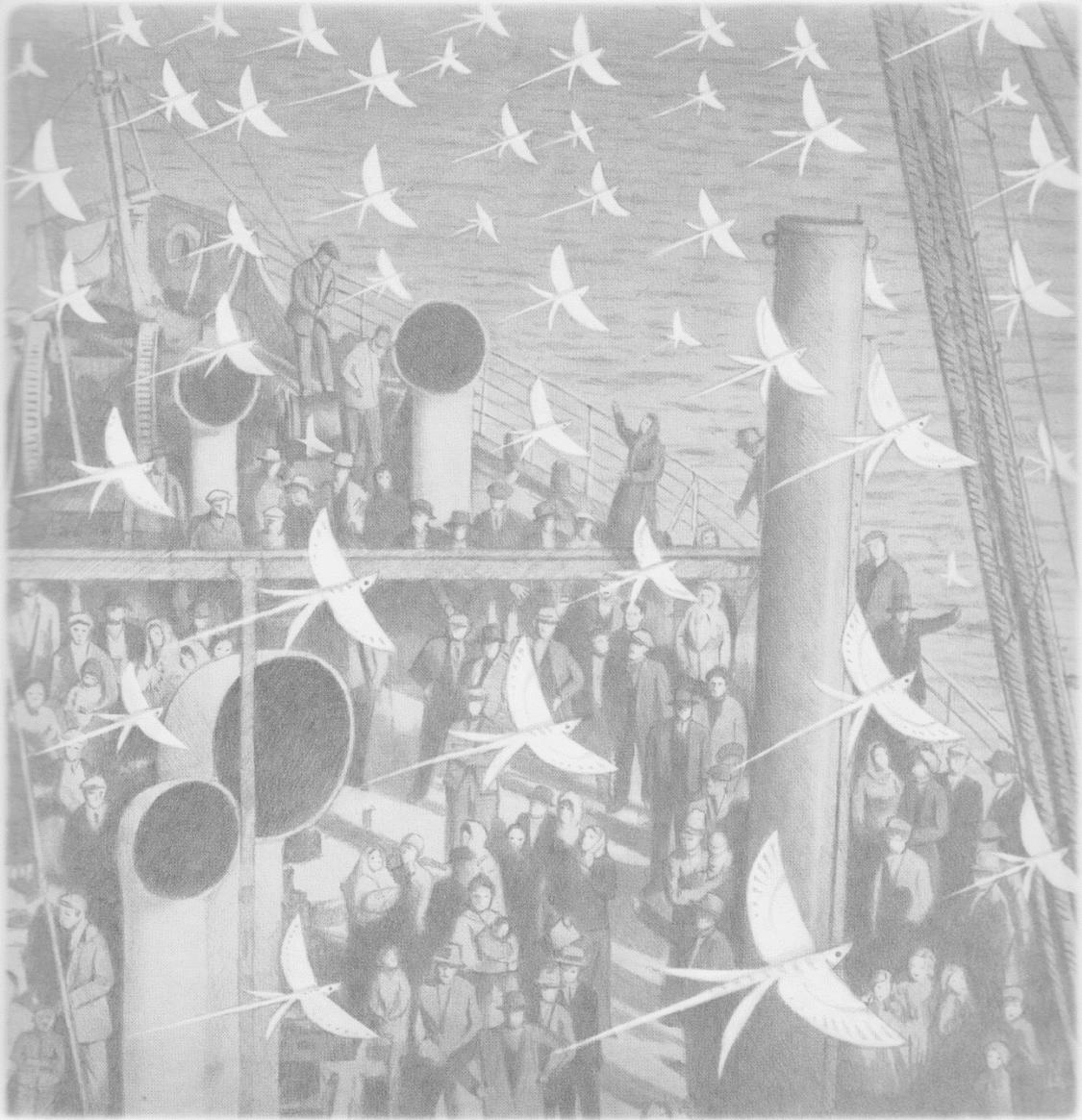






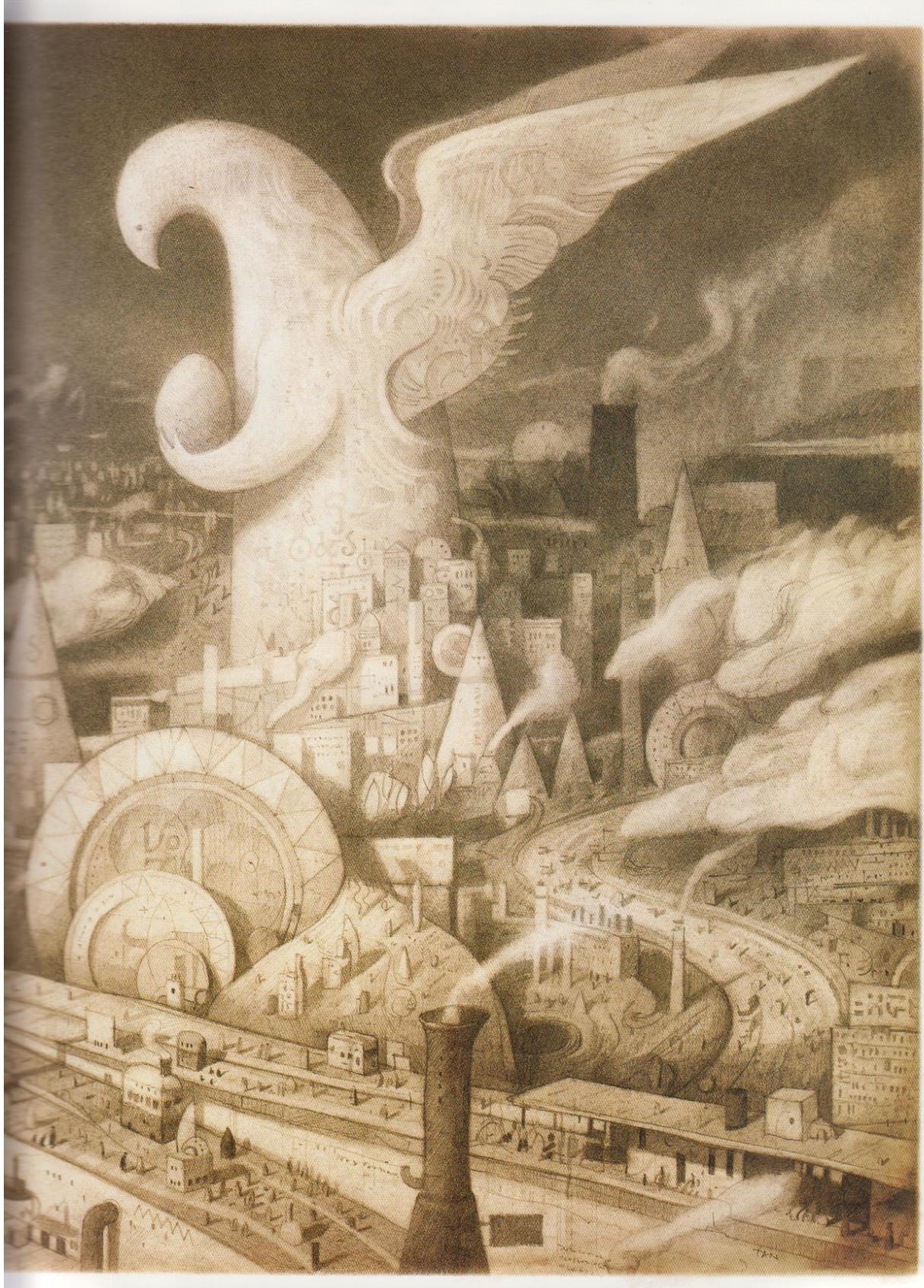
## **Arrival**

Study the next pages. Make a list of unusual features of the new community.







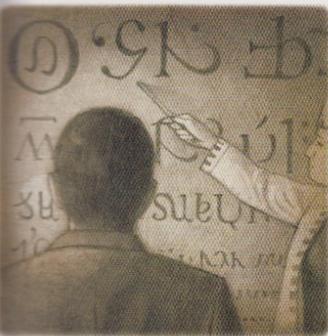
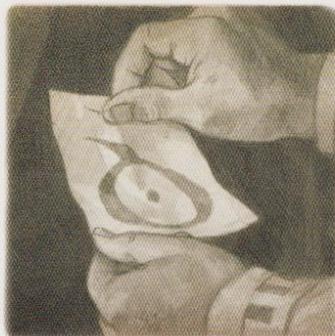
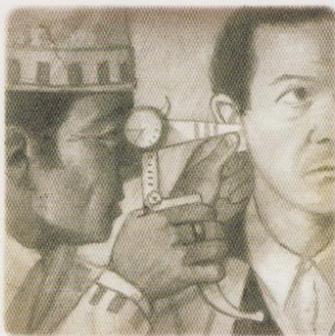


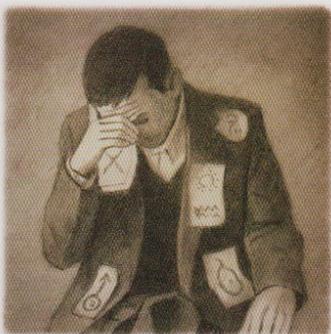
## **Processing**

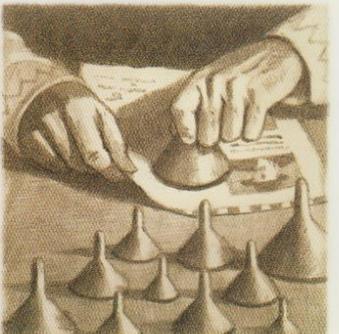
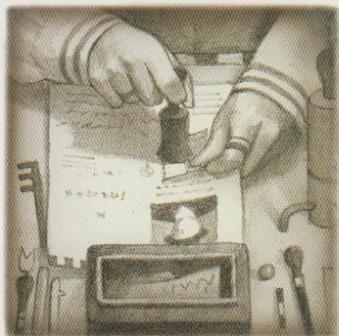
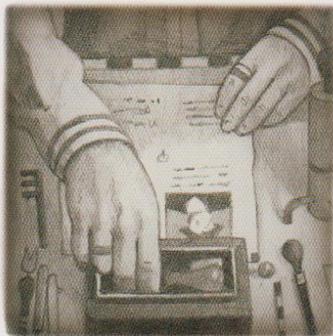
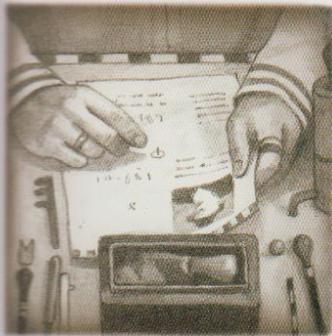
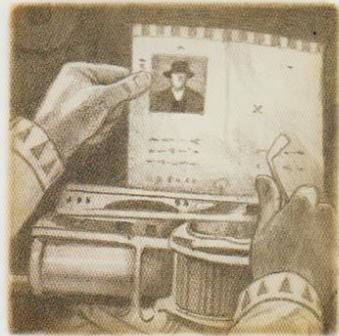
Study these 5 pages.

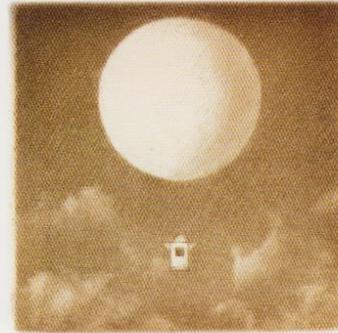
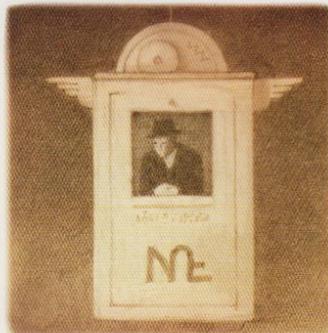
- List the stages that the newcomer must navigate in order to be processed as an immigrant.
- Write a monologue in which the man expresses his feelings.
- Write a dialogue in which the government employee interviews the man who doesn't speak the language
- What is the significance of the panels illustrating the government employee smoking and choosing among many stamps?







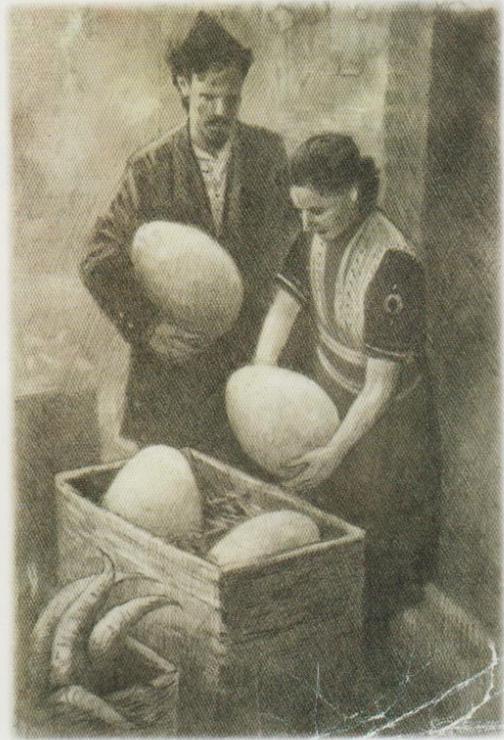
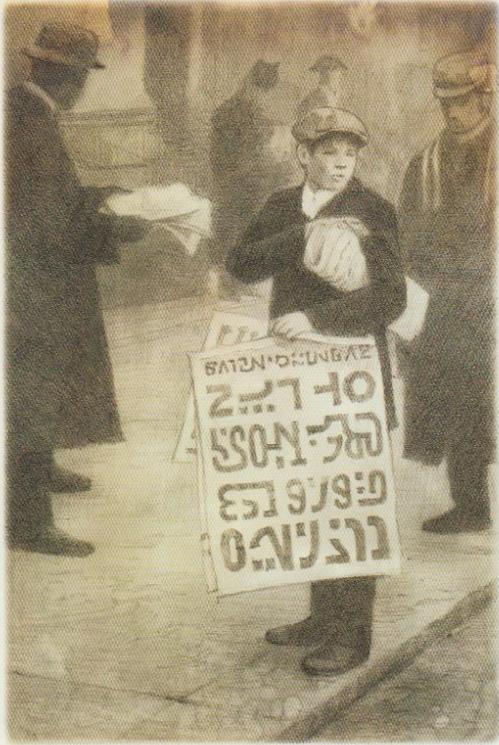


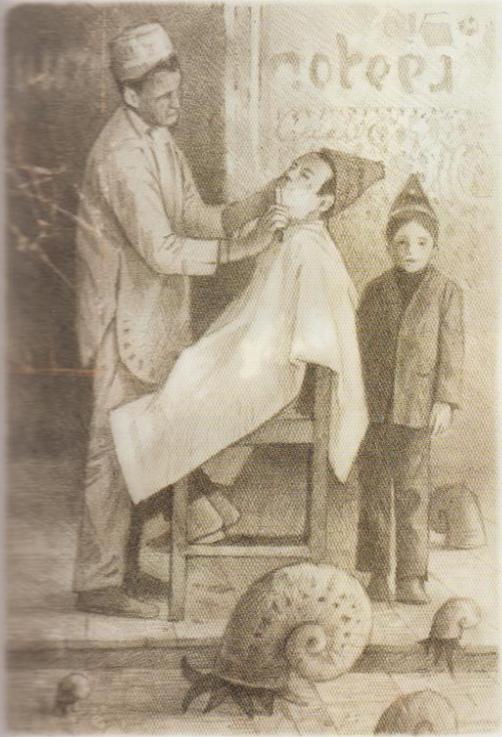


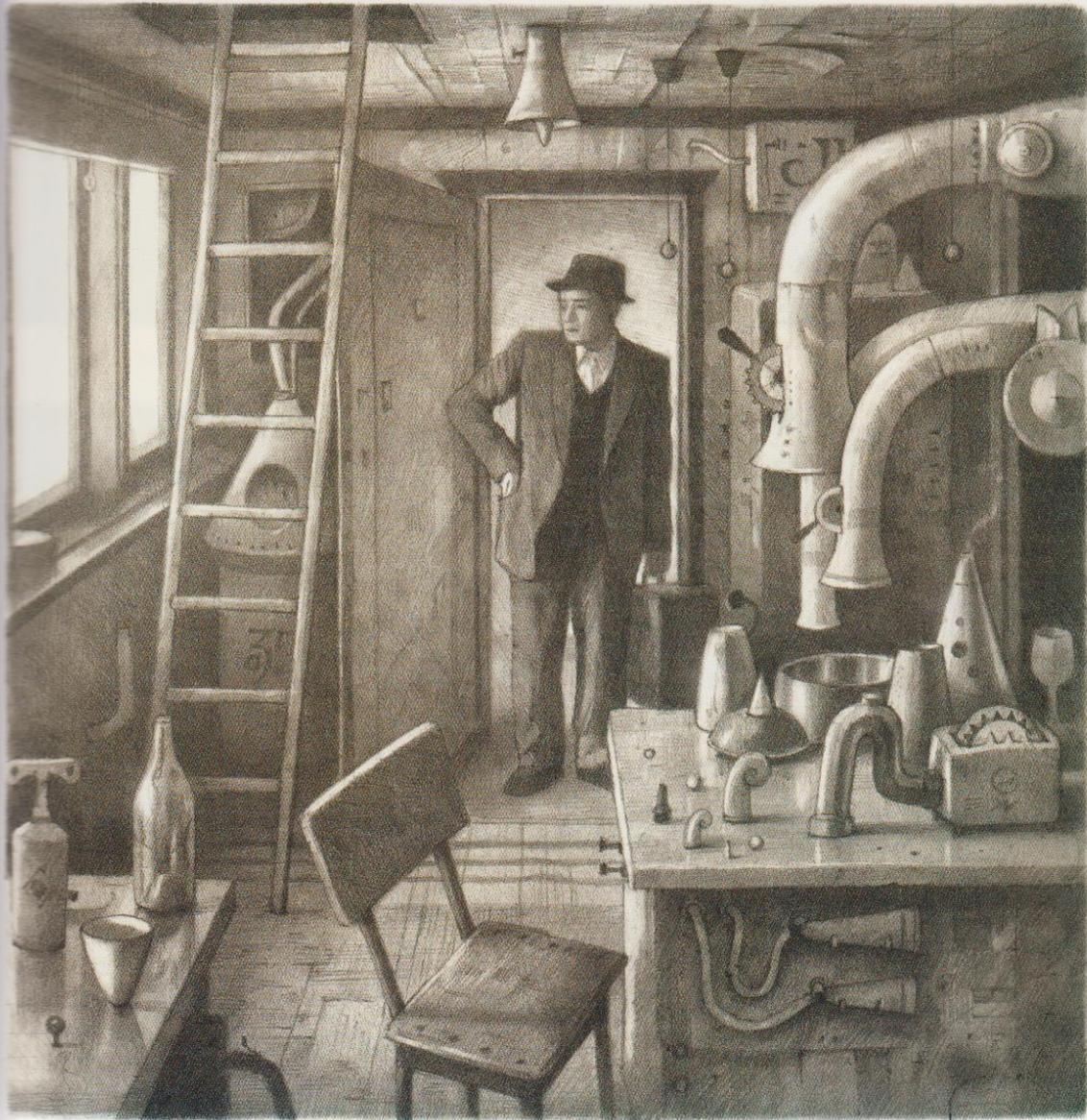
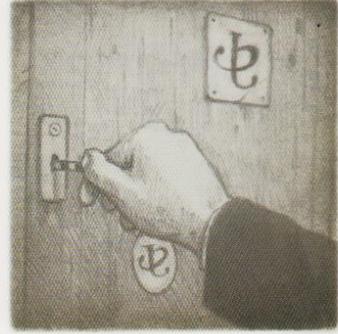
## **New Community, New Home and New Friends**

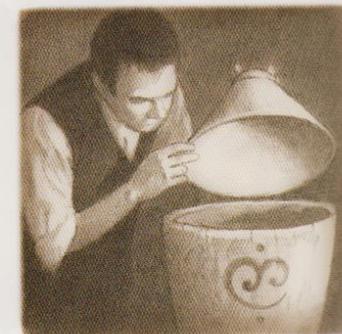
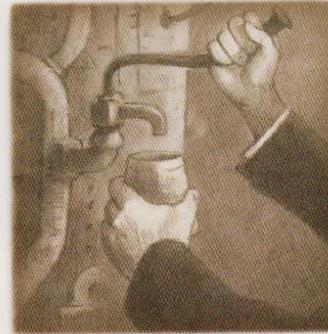
Study the following pages.

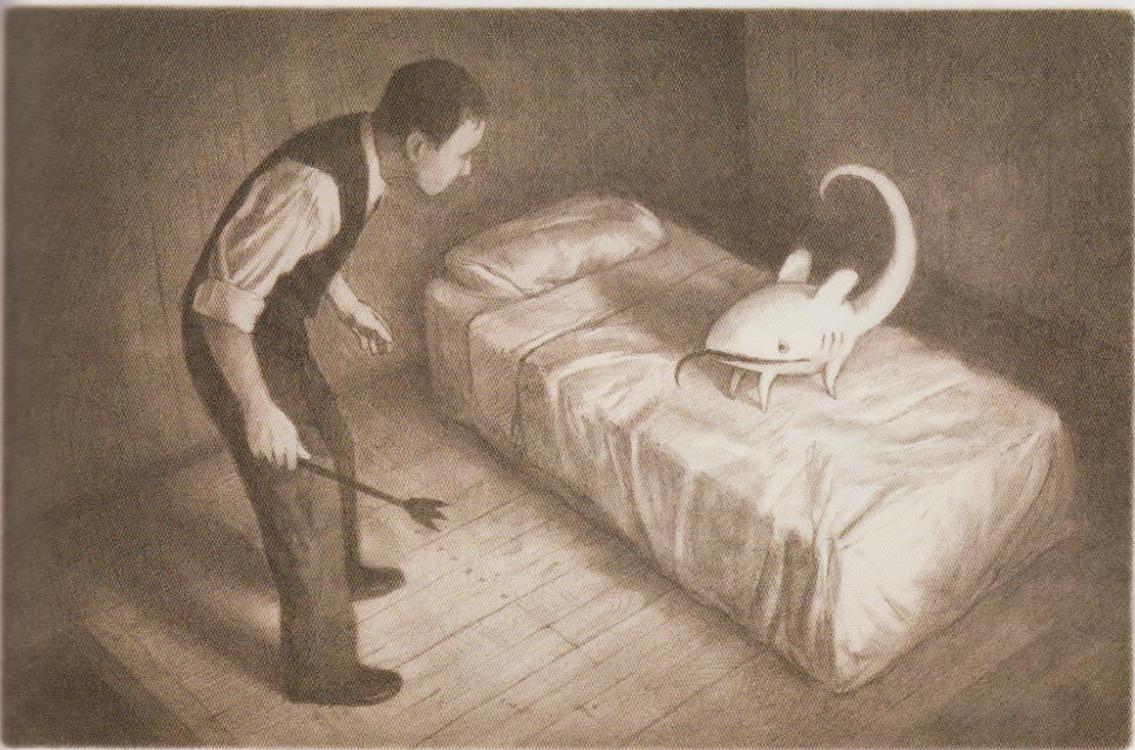
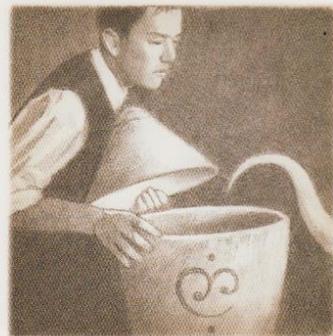
- Have a discussion about details in these pages that are important to observe and understand.
- What is familiar?
- What is strange?



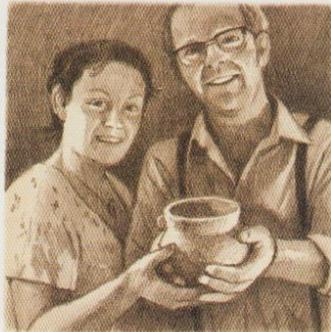












## **War**

The main character meets other immigrants and hears their stories about what brought them to this new country. One man tells him about fleeing a war.

Study these 4 images and have a discussion to explore what is occurring on each page.





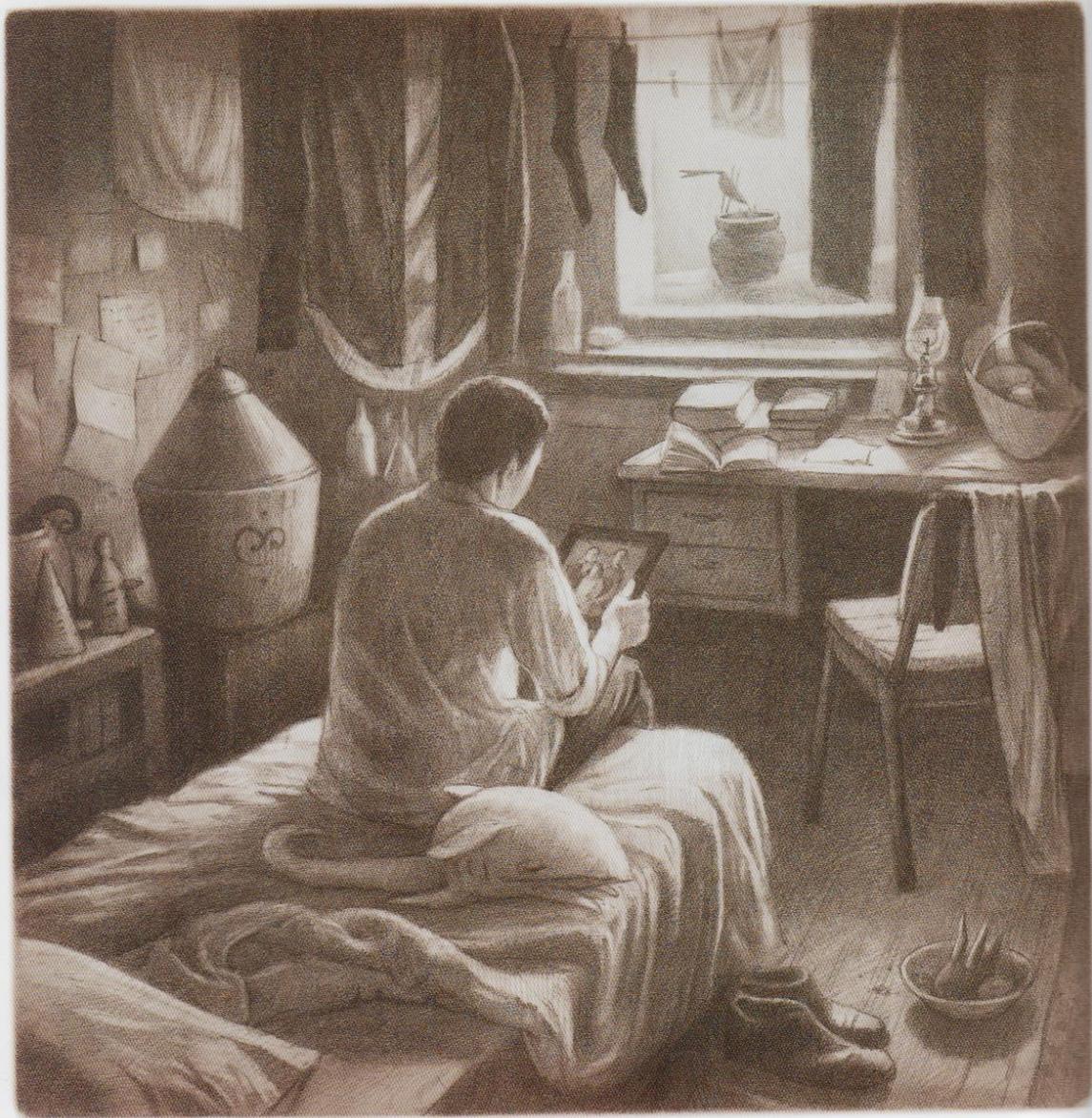


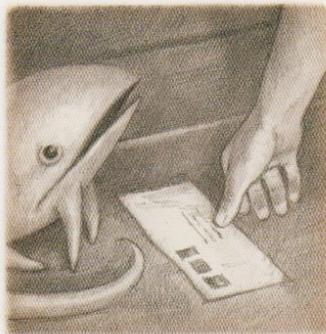
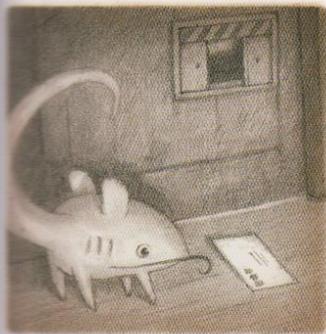


## **Reunion**

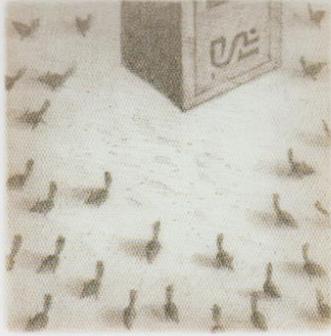
Study the 5 images in this set.

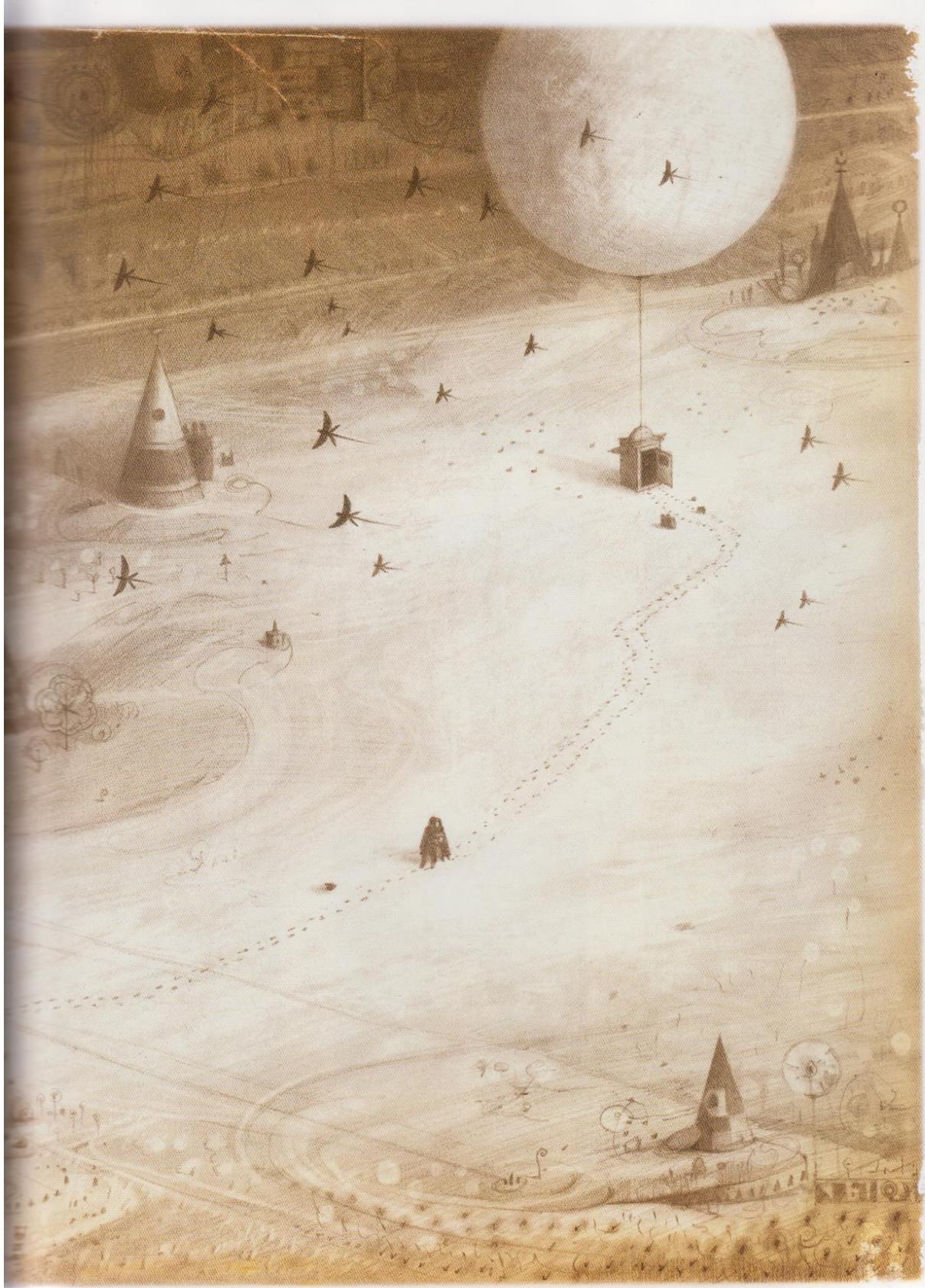
- Write the letter that the man receives from his wife and daughter and a letter that he might write to explain this new country to his family.







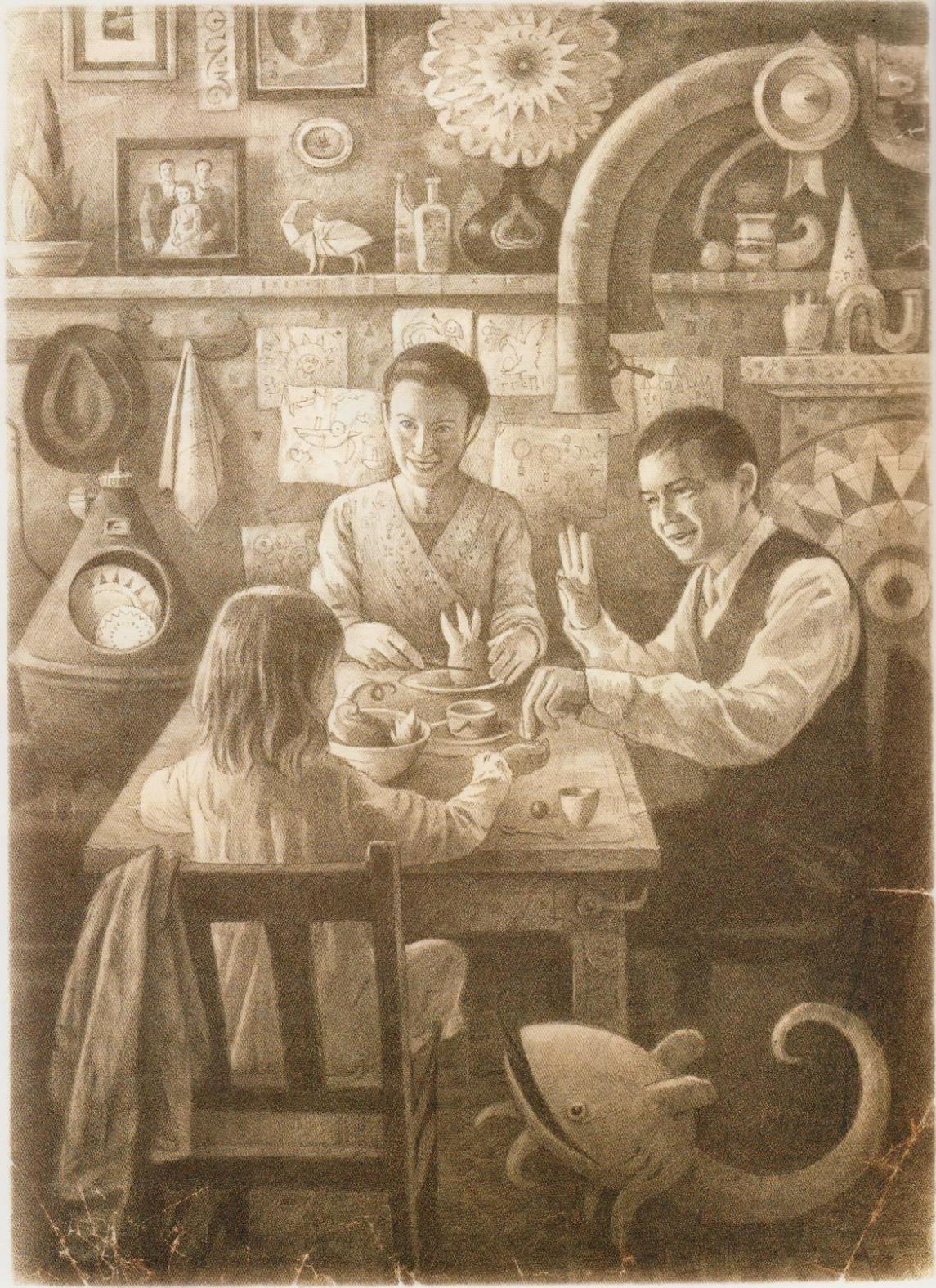


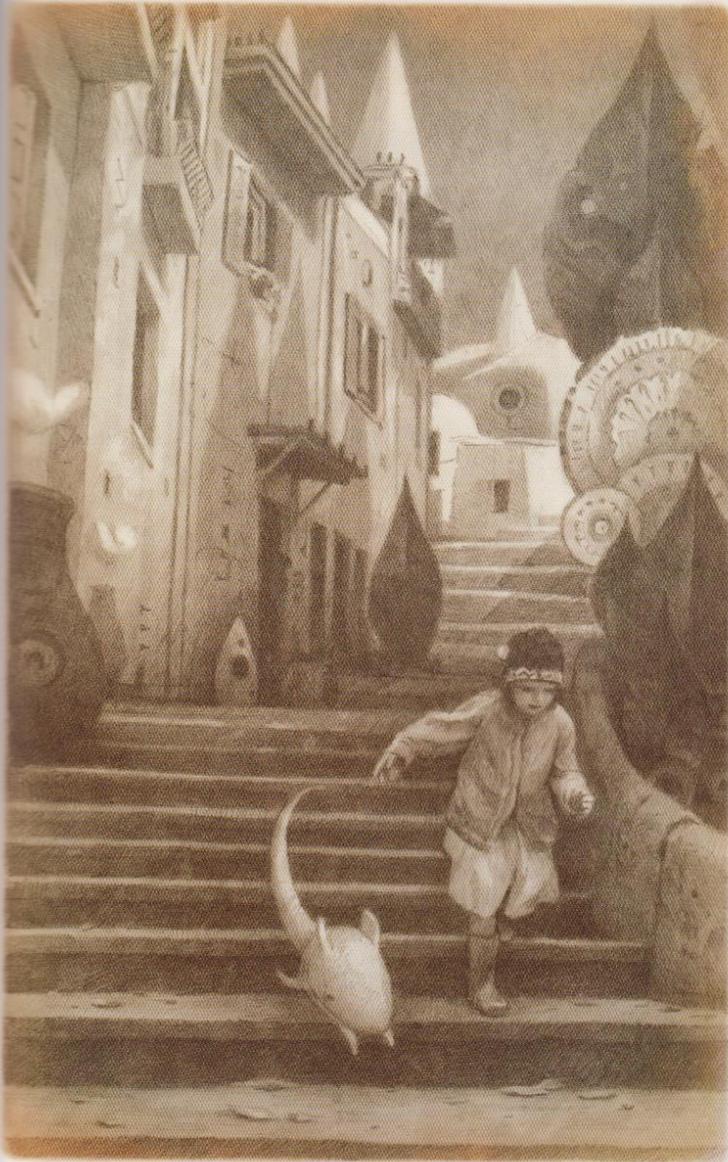


**Integration:**

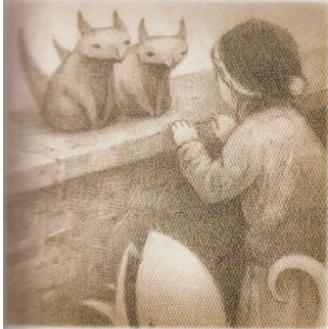
Study the next 5 pages.

- Look closely at the first page. What evidence is there that the family has integrated into the new culture?
- What is happening on the second page?
- Review the definitive aspects of this culture that are revealed on page 3.
- Describe what is going on in each frame on page 4.
- Explain the conclusion that is revealed on page 5.











## Portraits of Refugees

The frontispiece and endpages of *The Arrival* contain portraits of refugees and immigrants.

Pick 3 of these sketches, ensuring that at least one is a child. Create a scenario in which they are linked to each other.

- Create 3 pages of a graphic novel illustrating their stories.
- Create 3 diary entries describing their stories.

**Write a poem** capturing the emotions of the main character in *The Arrival* when he comes to his new home.

**Idea #1:** Follow the model of "Disembarking at Quebec" by Margaret Atwood from *The Journals of Susanna Moodie*.

Moodie was a woman who left England and came to Canada in the 1830s to become a pioneer. Moodie found the whole experience of immigration and assimilation into the vast, desolate Canadian landscape an isolating one. She felt lonely and lost and during that period, and her only son died.

**Disembarking at Quebec** by *Margaret Atwood*

Is it my clothes, my way of walking,  
the things I carry in my hand  
- a book, a bag with knitting-  
the incongruous pink of my shawl

this space cannot hear

or is it my own lack  
of conviction which makes  
these vistas of desolation,  
long hills, the swamps, the barren sand, the glare  
of sun on the bone-white  
driftlogs, omens of winter,  
the moon alien in day-  
time a thin refusal

The others leap, shout

Freedom!

The moving water will not show me  
my reflection.

The rocks ignore.

I am a word  
in a foreign language.

**Idea #2:** Write a poem from the point of view of a refugee modeled on *Thoughts on Silence*.

*Thoughts on Silence*

What am I doing here  
Among these strange people  
Sitting in these funny desks  
Staring at this paper!  
Oh yes, I am in school.  
These people are my classmates.  
Though they chatter all the time  
They are silent now.  
Now I can think.  
I see a bird flying high in the air.  
Maybe it is flying south.  
My heart leaps with the bird  
Taking a message to my mother.  
My mind is heavy, thinking something sad has  
Happened at home.  
But the birds are singing  
Everything is all right.  
The breeze has whispered something in my ear.  
I hope it whispers the same joyous words to my people.  
I get lonely for my family and I especially miss my mother.  
But I shall see them all soon.  
When we meet we won't even touch hands  
But our hearts will leap for joy  
And in our minds we will be glad.

**Source:** *Steerling, Mary Jane*. Published in Hogan, Homer. (1972) *Listen! Songs and Poems of Canada*. Agincourt: Methuen.

**Concluding discussion:**

How effective in conveying the immigrant experience is this wordless graphic story? Make a list of positives, minuses and interesting points. (Interesting points are those which are neither positive nor negative, but worth talking about.)

Has this book increased your sympathy for immigrants and refugees? Why or why not?

Using your 10 fingers in the air, rate *The Arrival* out of 10. Listen to the reasons of those who gave it a low rating and those who rated it highly.