



# TEACHERS' RESOURCES

## RECOMMENDED FOR

Secondary  
Ages 13+

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Learning areas:** English
- **General capabilities:** Language, Literature, Literacy, Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Understanding,

## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Analysing how language and writing evoke mood, tone, tension and characterisation
- Encouraging creative and imaginative writing
- To discuss resilience, perseverance and the power of human connection
- To discuss family breakdowns and the effects of prejudice

## THEMES

- Mateship
- Family ties
- Identity & culture
- Grief & loss

## PREPARED BY

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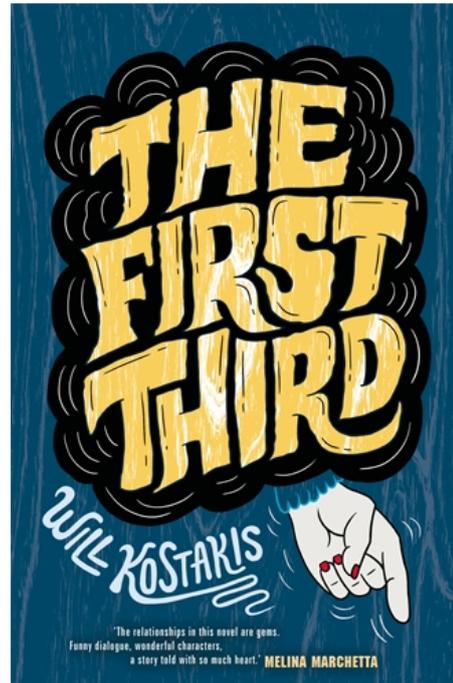
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## The First Third

Will Kostakis

## PLOT SUMMARY

Life is made up of three parts: in *The First Third*, you're embarrassed by your family; in the second, you make a family of your own; and in the end, you just embarrass the family you've made.

Billy Tsiolkas has just received his grandmother's bucket list, and he is terrified. He can't imagine his life without her, but she's preparing for it. Billy is seventeen years old and now tasked with being the glue that holds his family together. With his father out of the picture, he has been living with his mum and younger brother, Peter in Sydney. His older brother Simon lives in Brisbane and seems to be having the time of his life. Peter, on the other hand, is distant, angry and very private.

Billy's grandmother, Yiayia Filyo collapses during the Greek Easter service when Billy sneaks off to take a girl he likes on a date. When he returns to the church, after a disastrous kiss, he must accompany Yiayia to hospital. When the doctors reveal she has kidney stones, she sends Billy on an unexpected trip to Melbourne . . . and his father's doorstep. When he realises it, he flees. It is his grandmother's way of reminding him of the fragility of family, and it works.

Now it's up to Billy to repair his family forever or risk losing them. The only problem is that the bucket list is nearly impossible to complete, and the task is even more daunting with final exams, first kisses from girls and a future in stand-up comedy interrupting most of his plans.

It's a Greek tragedy waiting to happen.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Will Kostakis was only 19 when his first novel for young adults, *Loathing Lola*, was released. It went on to be shortlisted for the Sakura Medal in Japan and made the official selection for the Australian Government's 2010 Get Reading! programme.

In 2005, Will won the Sydney Morning Herald Young Writer of the Year for a collection of short stories.

His second YA novel, *The First Third*, was released in August 2013, and was shortlisted for the 2014 CBCA awards in the Older Readers category. In 2016 his third novel, *The Sidekicks*, was released.

Will spends his time working as a freelance journalist, writing and touring Australian secondary schools.

## CHARACTERS

### Billy Tsiolkas

Billy is seventeen years old and is trying to complete Year 12. He lives with his mum and younger brother, Peter, who is doing his very best to pretend that Billy doesn't exist. Being the good, Greek grandson that he is, Billy accompanies his grandmother to Greek Easter.

*The night-time Easter service was the social event of the Greek calendar. Recently widowed, my grandmother needed a date. Simon was too old to surrender a Saturday night and Peter was too young to be a useful chaperone, so the burden, and my grandfather's jacket had fallen onto my shoulders.* (p.19)

Many of the responsibilities of the family fall to Billy, and even though he is not the eldest son in his family, he takes them all on, even his Yiayia's bucket list. With the support, tenacity and elaborate plans of his best friend Sticks, Billy tries to "find mummy a husband, have Simon girlfriend in Sydney and fix Peter" (p.76) But, first he needs convincing and for this his grandmother devises a cunning plan. She sends him to Melbourne on an errand, and it is not until he gets there that he realises he is standing on the doorstep of his absent father. Yiayia uses this to demonstrate

the fragility of family, and that she is the glue holding what's left of the family together. Billy reluctantly accepts the bucket list.

In the midst of this challenge he is still trying to figure out how the opposite sex works. He is rejected by Maria after cleverly taking her on a date, only to reveal how much younger than her he is with a kiss. It ends disastrously. Again Sticks comes to the rescue and gives Billy advice in the lead up to his second first date, this time with Hayley. It doesn't matter, as she never arrives. So now Billy is faced with two rejections, trying to set his mother up on blind dates, get his ferociously angry brother Peter to engage with him and get his brother Simon to move back from Brisbane and obtain a girlfriend. Simon is gay and according to his social media status updates, he is living the life. The challenge seems insurmountable, and understandably, Billy gives up.

Kostakis allows the disasters to pile up on Billy and in the meantime reveals significant growth of his character. Billy finds a calling in stand-up comedy, interferes in his best friend's love life and resurrects a relationship Sticks thought was over. His mother's romantic woes continue, Billy discovers Hayley has a son and eventually his Yiayia passes away. It is the mateship and solidarity of Sticks, (who by now is back to being Lucas), that sustains Billy. Their honest, quirky banter and acknowledgement of what it really takes to be a best friend is authentic. However, it is the love he has for his grandmother that is the most endearing quality of Billy and has the resounding impact on the young man he has become.

### Discussion questions

- What are your first impressions of Billy? What surprises you about Billy in the first few chapters?
- "Spending Sticks 18th hiding in his bedroom with a bottle of sparkling water and stack of sausage rolls. I'm so cool it hurts." (p8) This is one of many Twitter status updates Billy includes. What does this reveal about Billy? Find another two updates included in the novel and then write two of your own.
- Who has the greatest influence on Billy – Yiayia or Sticks? Justify your answer.
- "My heart raged against my chest, half because I'd been caught with chocolate in my pocket during Lent and half because she'd chosen to sit with me." (p.19) This quote reveals two of the characteristics that define Billy at this stage of



the novel. What are they and how does this quote show that?

- Billy has such a strong relationship with his Yiayia as shown when he says; *“I don’t want to imagine a world without someone like her in it – I can’t.”* List five things that she teaches him throughout the novel.
- Billy is the middle child of three brothers. His relationship with Peter and Simon has changed dramatically in the past couple of years. Read pages 40 – 43 and find two quotes to describe each relationship. Why does the current status of each relationship make Yiayia’s request particularly difficult?
- *“I have to be the glue that keeps my family together.”* (p75) How does Billy cope with the pressure of fulfilling his grandmother’s dying wish? Map out the stages he goes through dealing with the bucket list.
- Billy is rejected twice by two very different girls. Create a Venn diagram that highlights the differences between Maria and Hayley and what Billy learns about himself from his relationship with each girl.
- *“There was applause. And my future filled itself.”* (p64) What moment does this refer to? What has led Billy to this experience and why is it so fulfilling? What is the irony of this future?
- *“It’s a dad’s job to teach you to ride,” he said. ‘Consider this a loan.’* (p134) Lending Billy his father is one of the many significant contributions Sticks makes to their friendship. Describe how the lesson goes and what this reveals about the relationship between Sticks and Billy? How does this contribute to the relationship Billy has with his absent father?
- *“And for one last time, Yiayia’s voice echoed through the house.”* (p249) What is so significant about the last time they sit in Yiayia’s kitchen? Why does Kostakis finish the novel in this way? And consider why Kostakis chose to open the novel with a flash-forward, and how the first and last chapters play off each other.

## Yiayia Filyo Ionnidou

The maternal grandmother of Simon, Billy and Peter is introduced to readers from her hospital bed. With piles of Greek food spread across laps and the bed, Bill reminds his family they may be perpetuating some dangerous stereotypes, but they are all too

busy enjoying the food to really care. Through her broken English, punctuated with Greek phrases, the love for her family is made abundantly clear. Yiayia is pretty tough. Tough enough to tolerate a pain in her side for almost so long that it kills her.

After collapsing during the Greek Easter service she is now recovering in hospital and facing having her kidney stones removed. The family has rushed to her side. While she seems like she is acting like herself, she sends Billy on an urgent trip to visit someone. The ‘someone’ turns out to be his father who now lives in Melbourne with other children that neither Billy, nor his brothers know about. Yiayia’s plan works out. Billy agrees to go and do what his sick grandmother asks, and she wants Billy to realise that she’s the glue holding this family together. It is purely preparation for her next request, to reunite his family.

While Yiayia’s intentions are admirable, her requests are almost impossible, or so it seems to Billy. Kostakis creates a lovable character in Filyo Ionnidou, and even though she doesn’t know that Simon will never have a girlfriend, or understand why Peter is so unhappy or why her daughter has not remarried, the challenge she sets Billy teaches him the most important lesson of all, that you never give up on those you love.

### Discussion questions

- *“You want moussaka?”* she asked. When I made it clear that I didn’t, she made it clear that it wasn’t a question. *‘You want moussaka.’* (p3) How does Kostakis use Yiayia’s limitations with the English language to create humour without making fun of her? Give three examples of this.
- *“She must have been in an imparting-wisdom kind of mood. It was obviously important, because she switched to English, not trusting my Greek. ‘In first part,’ she said, ‘your family embarrass you. Then – pff – they die’... ‘In number two, you find agape, you find love, you make baby, you want to have family like before’... ‘Then one day, you old. You try to give, and your family,’ Yiayia shrugged, ‘they embarrassed. And then – pff – you die.’ It was the circle of Greek life.”* (p203/4)

This is one of many lessons Yiayia teaches Billy. Create a Greek recipe book. Give it a title. Include three recipes and alongside each recipe write a story that Billy would include of a lesson his yiayia taught him. E.g. ‘Moussaka and Marriage – Lessons from my Yiayia’. An extension on this activity is to then add three of their own recipes



and lessons from their own grandmother/grandfather / mother / father etc.

- “And for one last time, Yiayia’s voice echoed through the house.” (p249) Explain how this quote shows that Yiayia really has been the glue that has kept this family together. Why was the bucket list so important? Was Yiayia right in asking Billy to complete it for her?

### ‘Sticks’ / Lucas

Kostakis humour is perhaps at its keenest with the character Lucas ‘Sticks’. For most of the novel Billy refers to his best friend by the nickname he gave himself. Billy explains;

*He was called Lucas until high school. But by then he’d caught on to the fact that cerebral palsy made people uncomfortable, so he rebranded himself like a shamed corporation after a PR crisis. When people asked what he had, he called it CP. When they asked his name, he called himself Sticks. (p11)*

They have been friends since kindergarten and by now, in their last year at high school they were inseparable. They have caught each other’s bad habits, and Billy frequently carries home whatever piece of memorabilia of the occasion that Sticks has commandeered. Whether it be condiment bottles or letterboxes, they all represent moments of their friendship and “when you put all the moments together...you [get] a sense of how chaotically awesome it was to have Sticks as a best friend”(p10). So when Billy is sent on a mission by his grandmother to Melbourne, it is considered essential that Sticks join him.

In fact, there are few events of Billy’s life that Sticks does not mastermind himself. He organises the surprise date with Maria at the restaurant his brother works at. He sets up Billy’s mum’s online dating profile and conceives the plan to engage Peter in conversation. He even lends Billy his dad when he realises that by now he should have been taught to ride a bike, and Billy’s dad is nowhere on the scene to do that. Billy realises “if there was one thing the last couple of weeks had taught (him), it was that no matter how heavy and weird life got, Sticks was a constant” (p152).

As with every other part of his life, Sticks uses humour and candor to discuss his sexuality. It is not being gay that seems to be the hurdle to finding someone of his own, but rather his disability. And this is finally where Billy can concoct a plan of his own to help out his best mate Lucas.

### Discussion questions

- Read Chapter 2. List all of the similarities and differences between Billy and Sticks. Find two quotes that describe their relationship. What is significant about the way Lucas responds to Billy leaving his eighteenth birthday party to go to church with his grandmother?
- The irony of the friendship between these two is that while Billy is able bodied, he seems unable to function effectively in the real world without the help of Sticks. Read page 172 and list, in detail, all of the challenges Sticks helps Billy with. What happens to make Billy finally give something back?
- On page 170 Billy describes Sticks as being “like baking paper, nothing ever stuck to him”. What happens to suddenly change this? What does Sticks confession do to the relationship between the two of them? How do you feel toward Sticks at this point of the novel?”
- Write an extended version of the conversation that Billy could have with Joel describing the kind of person Sticks is. Give some examples of some of the stories he might share with him.
- By the end of the novel Billy calls Sticks Lucas at his request. What does this name change signify?

### Kath Tsiolkas

As the single mother of three teenage sons, Kath Tsiolkas knows they each love her dearly and respect her no-nonsense approach to life. She has been on her own for many years and as her sons have started to grow and leave home she has decided to enter the dating game, only she has absolutely no idea how to do it. Her first venture is a speed dating night that yields some positive results. However, the follow up dates become a disaster.

Kath is the only daughter of Yiayia and has a very close relationship with her mother. She is absolutely devastated at the loss of her mother, but she is still able to fulfill the Greek tradition of providing far too much food for her mother’s funeral. By the end of the novel, Billy’s plan has worked and it seems she has found someone with whom a long-term relationship might be possible, despite her reservations that it is Lucas’ uncle. Kath is a warm and funny character that has a very open relationship with Billy. She leans on him for a little support when her date disappoints her, but she is strong enough to move on fairly quickly. While she is totally oblivious to the ‘bucket list’ Billy is fulfilling, she certainly benefits from it.



**Discussion questions**

- Imagine Billy's Mum discovers he has been to Melbourne to visit his father. What would she say to Billy? What would she say to Yiayia?
- What makes Kath finally decide to go to the speed dating night?
- How do you think Kath would feel if she discovered that her mother had written a bucket list and given it to Billy to complete?
- Yiayia describes life being in three thirds. Which third is Kath in and how would the death of her mother affect the way she fits into her world now?
- With her failed texting attempts, technology is depicted as a barrier keeping her from forging a relationship. In what ways does technology (positively and negatively) impact the personal relationships in the book?

**Peter Tsiolkas**

*"If Simon was a bushfire, then Peter was a lit cigarette – all smoke and no pleasant."* (p3)

Peter is the youngest of the Tsiolkas boys and at this stage, he seems the unhappiest. He is angry with Billy, he refuses to talk to him, run with him, and even spend time at the gym with him, all of which are part of Billy's plan to fulfill the bucket list for Yiayia. He has a secret that none of his brother's know, he has started a comedy group at school and he is working on being a stand-up comic. Obsessed with calories, working out at the gym and running, Peter has little time for his brother Billy. He also loves his grandmother dearly and does whatever she asks of him. He stays at her house, and even allows Billy to stay there if he believes it is at Yiayia's request.

It seems Yiayia is only one who can really see the sadness in Peter and makes Billy try and bring him back to the family as she knows her time is limited. Luckily for Peter, and the rest of his family, Yiayia is right and Billy is eventually successful.

**Discussion questions**

- *"My younger brother smelt like a lost sweat towel and, apparently, the sound of my breathing aggravated him."* (p100) This sums up the relationship between Billy and Peter. Find five quotes that describe Peter according to Billy. What kind of a person does this make him out to be?

- There is at least three times that we see Peter happy in the novel. What is he doing during these times and how does Billy try and use these to get Peter to open up about what is wrong?
- What makes Billy give up on Peter? What makes him try again?
- Read the final chapter of the novel. What is so significant about this moment between the two brothers?

**Simon Tsiolkas**

*"My older brother was a bushfire – vibrant, unrestrained, unfunny."* (p2)

Simon has moved to Brisbane. Billy hasn't had much to do with him lately but it seemed that Brisbane was treating him fantastically. According to his status updates he was living the life. He doesn't seem to have a lot of time to talk to Billy. Now that Yiayia is sick, he has returned to visit her and is staying with the family while in Sydney, and Yiayia has made the impossible request to have Simon find a girlfriend in Sydney. The problem is not only the appeal of Brisbane, but that unbeknownst to his grandmother, Simon is gay.

Yiayia's belief that they should all be together if they are to remain a family is paramount to the bucket list. It seems that while getting him a girlfriend may be an impossibility she will never be aware of, Yiayia did know more about Simon's life than anyone else. By the end of the novel, Billy has gently suggested that he live back in Sydney. With the help of Hayley revealing the truth about his life in Brisbane, Billy was able to complete another of Yiayia's request, and again, like all the other requests, this one made the recipient much happier than Yiayia herself.

**Discussion questions**

- How does Hayley figure out the truth about Simon's status updates?
- *"You and Peter are my siblings, but we don't really know each other much anymore."* (p244) Why does Billy decide to tell Simon about finding out that their dad has other children? What impact is he trying to have? Does it work?
- What excuse does Simon use for not wanting to live in Sydney? Why doesn't Billy believe him and what does he suggest as an alternative?

**Hayley**

After the disastrous date with Maria, a girl much older than Billy who runs from him when he kisses her, Billy is delighted to meet Hayley. She gives Billy



the bucket list that his Yiayia had Hayley write out for her. They get along really well and agree to meet later on. But when Hayley doesn't show up for the date and doesn't bother to let Billy know he is understandably disappointed.

It is not until much later, when he discovers for himself, that Hayley has a young son, that he understands why she couldn't come to meet him. It poses a difficult dilemma for Billy, as going out with someone his age who is already a mother makes for a much more complicated relationship than usual. They become good friends and her advice about how to get his mum on another date and what Simon's life in Brisbane is really like, enables him to complete the bucket list after all.

### Discussion questions

- Did you guess what Hayley's secret was? What was the clue for you? How do think Billy felt when he realized?
- *"The dickhead," Hayley snapped. "What sort of heartless monster stands someone up?"* (p164) What does this quote refer to and how does Billy react? What does it reveal about Hayley?
- Hayley has some plans of her own for making the bucket list a reality. Describe how her plans differ from Sticks?
- Why does Billy feel as though he is betraying Sticks by following Hayley's plans?
- What makes it possible for Hayley to see the truth in Simon?
- Do you think that Billy and Hayley remain friends? Why or Why not?

### General character understanding

#### Activities

- Have four medium sized boxes placed at the front of the class with a hole cut in the top of each one. Name the front of the box with either; Hayley, Sticks, Mum, Peter. Each student is to write a status update for a social media site like Facebook or Twitter for each character and put it in the box. You might need to divide the class to beginning, middle and end of the text. Then divide the class into four groups and give each one a box. They need to use the status updates within the box to create a Facebook page or Twitter Feed. Try and order the status updates, add photos or other information to reflect this character and their development through the text as accurately as possible.

- Give each student a ball of Playdough. Ask them to create a symbol for one character. Ask them to place it on their table and invite them to embark on a gallery walk where they look at each other's creations. Invite three or four students to share their creation with the class, justifying their answer. Complete this for a few characters.
- Divide the class into 6 groups. Give each one a character; Billy, Peter, Simon, Sticks, Hayley, Yiayia. Each group must select one person to take the 'hot seat' for their character. Then they write 2 questions to ask each of the other characters. As each character takes the 'hot seat', they must answer as authentically as they can as other groups ask them questions.
- Write a conversation that we are not privy to, but we know occurs. For example; Yiayia asking Hayley to write her bucket list, Sticks explaining to Joel why he left things the way he did, Peter telling his mate about Billy giving up his spot at Flippant for him, Mum talking to Shaun about how she thinks her sons will cope with Yiayia's death.

### THEMES

#### Mateship

While they can't pull off the word, Billy and Sticks have been best mates since the day they met. They are inseparable. While they have many things in common, they are more different than they are alike. And yet they provide each other unconditional support and friendship in every aspect of their lives.

While they joke and tease each other as mates do, they are honest, interested in each other's lives and fill in the gaps that each have. Sticks lends Billy his dad to teach him how to ride a bike, he accompanies him to Melbourne on the surprise discovery of Billy's father and his new life. Billy is understanding of Sticks disability without making him feel uncomfortable about it. They each interfere in the lives of the other to set them up on dates or repair relationships that started poorly. They both do exactly what is needed of them at the key moments.

The bucket list that Billy is given would not have been completed without the planning, tenacity and determination of Sticks. It is his conniving ideas and persistence that initiates many of the actions that are needed for Billy to meet his grandmother's dying wish. Even though it is Hayley who has the more successful ideas, without the support of Sticks, Billy would not have seen it through to the end.



### Activities

- Before Billy leaves Sticks eighteenth birthday party he uses his humour to make an embarrassing, but very funny speech about his best mate. Write this speech.
- Create a series of photos that might appear on an application like Instagram recording all of the memorabilia that Sticks has stolen over the years. Write a caption explaining each one. You must include three that are mentioned in the novel.

### Family ties

Kostakis presents readers with a range of family models. Billy's family has three boys and only their Mum to take care of them. Their dad had left many years before and they have not had any contact with him. The relationship that each member of the Tsiolkas family has with their Yiayia is significant and not only sustains the drama of the novel, but also connects these boys together in a way that surmounts the insurmountable distance that has developed.

This is contrasted starkly with the busy, warm, noisy family of Sticks. They are the more traditional family of two sons and both parents still together and all living under the same roof. Like Billy's family, Sticks' mum takes no nonsense and has an open, understanding and firm relationship with her boys.

The alternative to both of these is the life of Hayley. Still living at home with her parents, and not much older than Billy, she has a son of her own. She no longer is in contact with Rory's father and has the support of her parents to help bring up her son.

Each of these teenagers are defined by the needs of their family and also by their connections to them. Even though the relationship Billy now has with both of his brothers has fractured, he desperately wants them back as part of his life.

Of all of the relationships in the novel, the most endearing and influential one is that of Billy and Yiayia. Her language and cultural traditions define how he spends his time and even fuel his comedy routine. His love for her is proclaimed frequently and unashamedly. He even leaves his best friend's eighteenth to accompany her to Greek Easter. It is her request that reunites the family in a way Billy never thought possible, but becomes so out of the necessity to please his grandmother and her dying wish.

### Activities

- Imagine Billy's Mum is talking to Shaun about her sons. Write how she would describe each of them and their relationship over the last year.
- Consider what might happen if Billy's dad makes contact with him. What would their conversation sound like. Would they communicate in person or via email. Write this conversation.

### Identity and culture

One of the defining features of Billy's identity is his Greek heritage. He attends cultural celebrations, eats traditional food and understands a little of the language. Even his comedy routine was going to be based on the quirks of his adorable Greek grandmother. There are many things about Billy, and his brothers, that are determined by his culture.

Simon is accepted by his mother and brothers as gay, but he must agree not to tell Yiayia. This is indicative of an older generation who can unfortunately still be dismissive and critical of someone's sexuality. While there are some suspicions that Yiayia knows, no one explicitly tells her.

Billy learns many life lessons from his grandmother, some are told to him in Greek, some are translated into English, but all are influenced by her past and cultural beliefs. The food they cook, eat and share as a family is Greek, the television station she watches is in Greek, her accent is undoubtedly Greek and her limited understanding of some of the slang of the English language is affected by it being her second language.

What is particularly notable about this text, is where others reference their heritage in embarrassment or shame, this is totally absent from Billy. He adores his grandmother, is aware of the stereotypes they might be perpetuating with all the food at the hospital and appreciates the sadness of Maria's grandmother dying without teaching her how to make moussaka. In the midst of their grief, they find solace in the sound of her voice and the smell of her voice, both of which are unmistakably Greek.

### Activities

- Consider all of the Greek traditions that Billy refers to; the language, food, tradition, expectation. Try and write some of the stand up comedy routine that he may have presented at Flippant.
- Billy speaks candidly about Greek Easter. The way the older women act, the expectations people



have of him etc. Choose your own funny or sad anecdote of a family tradition and write about it. Include the necessary humour or disappointment or embarrassment and bring the experience to life for your readers.

### Grief and Loss

Even though Yiayia is ill from the opening pages of the novel, it takes Billy a long time to come to terms with the fact that she may die. Sticks reassures him that she will be fine as “Easter is all about amazing comebacks”, and this seems to sustain the hope in Billy that indeed she will recover. It is only when Hayley describes the list he has been given as a bucket list that the thought enters his mind that she may not be around forever.

When he meets up with Maria after a date manipulated by Sticks, and discovers her grandmother had recently passed away, panic rises within him. He does the best thing he can, he lends Maria his Yiayia to teach her how to make moussaka.

This is significant as it represents how much he values the legacy he hopes will continue in his generation. Billy fully appreciates the significance of her grandmother dying before she could pass on the recipe, and so by continuing this tradition he is showing great respect for the culture he belongs to.

The emptiness the loss of Yiayia brings is palpable and overwhelming for Billy. But it enables his brothers to finally come back together in a way they haven't experienced for many years. Yiayia was perceptive enough to know that these relationships were very damaged and that without her they may not survive. But she also knew, that in their grief, they would desperately need one another.

It is her death that really allows the bucket list to be completed, and she obviously knew this all along. It is not only the support of his brother's that alleviates his grief, but also Sticks, and Hayley. Their presence, humour, understanding and perception allow him to grieve openly and finalise his grandmother's final request.

- Peter, Simon and Billy would have all accompanied their mother to the burial of their dear Yiayia. Billy gives the Eulogy at this private service, write what he might say at this very special occasion.
- Many students may still have grandparents in their lives, or may have experienced a similar loss as Billy. Consider one grandparent and write the lessons they passed on. They may be based in funny anecdotes, family rituals, or reflected in the personality of their chosen grandparent.

### ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. 'The impact of Billy's Greek culture is the most defining factor in his identity'. Do you agree?
2. Hayley, Sticks and Yiayia all teach Billy critical lessons. Who is the most influential on him? Justify your answer.
3. *"I had to repair my family or face losing it forever. It was my grandmother's dying wish."* Explore the difficulties Billy faces completing Yiayia's list. What makes him ultimately successful?
4. 'Family and culture is essential to one's identity.' To what extent do you agree?



## WORKSHEET 1: Close reading

Make the following table into an A3 sheet for the class and divide them into groups according to the key passages listed. Each group must read and complete their individual table for the key passage they are given and then create 4 'fat questions' for the class to complete. A 'fat question' has a diverse answer and often begins with why, how, what if, explain, justify etc. Initially, the whole class reads the passage together, the group then reports their findings and then engages the class with their fat questions.

Passage	Character Development	Themes	Key Quotes	Motif/Symbol

1. The secret mission: pages 53–56  
“We were at the top of the street.”
2. The bucket list: pages 74–81  
“So Yiayia gave me this today,’ I said, producing the sliver of paper and sliding it across the counter.”
3. Sticks and Joel: pages 170–175  
“Sticks was like baking paper, nothing ever stuck to him.”
4. Maria and Moussaka: pages 195–202
5. Simon revealed: pages 226–231 (after the break)
6. Mission accomplished: pages 245–249



## WORKSHEET 2: Finding Quotes

Fill out the table below, matching context and themes to quotes from the novel. Then, see if you can find any further examples that illustrate the themes dealt with in *The First Third*.

Page	Quote	Context	Theme
1	Our fingers were greasy and our mouths were full. We were in our own little ethnic bubble.	Yiayia's hospital bed	Identity and culture
3	All things considered though, she was doing okay. She was acting like herself and that was the most important thing. That's what the doctors kept saying.		
8	Spending Stick's 18 <sup>th</sup> hiding in his bedroom with a bottle of sparkling water and a stack of sausage rolls. I'm so cool it hurts.		
10	It was a moment. And when you put all the moments together, the letterboxes, the speed-limit signs and condiment bottles, you got a sense of how chaotically awesome it was to have Sticks as a best friend.		Mateship
11	We weren't the exact same person, he was three times four and I was two times six. We both equaled twelve; we were just made of different parts.		
19	My heart raged against my chest, half because I'd been caught with chocolate in my pocket during Lent and half because she'd chosen to sit with me.		
29	I don't want to imagine a world without someone like her in it – I can't.		
32	I was fourteen when my grandmother taught me about love and the difference between moussaka and lasagna. I was fifteen when I fell in love with lasagna. I was sixteen when I met moussaka. And I was seventeen when I realized it didn't matter. Lasagna or moussaka, being on the other side of love hurt.		
37	There's an icebreaker and there's your grandmother chastising your mum for not putting out. I couldn't <i>not</i> laugh at it.		
41	There was something about trying to interact with Peter that made me instantly nervous. The way he could take our entire sixteen-year history and casually dismiss it was just unnerving.		



## WORKSHEET 2, continued

43	But then, he moved, and almost overnight, it snapped apart. He became an occasional brother, one that flew in for Christmas and Easter and texted on birthdays.		
47	Whoever she wanted me to visit, it was serious.		
50	'She'll be fine Bill, trust me.' He buckled his seatbelt. 'Easter is all about amazing comebacks.'		
54	I went to say something, but couldn't. Mouth open, I pointed at the toy truck on the lawn. Breathing was suddenly more difficult.		
63	What started as a means of avoiding being carded by a police officer, had in five minutes, become something that could spend the rest of my life doing.		
65	On the way out the door, I looked back. Dean slid the coaster off the table and scrunched it into a ball.		
68	Peter's concrete bravado was gone, and I could see it made my grandmother so happy.		
73	It's a list of things a person wants to accomplish before they kick the bucket. Bucket. List.		
75	I have to be the glue that holds the family together.		
75	I had to repair my family or face losing it forever. It was my grandmother's dying wish.		
115	He was living a twenty-year-old- guy's dream, who would want to give that up?		
123	You have to do everything I do, don't you? You can't just let me have one thing that makes me happy, can you?		
134	'It's a dad's job to teach you to ride,' he said. 'Consider this a loan.'		
147	He was an aspiring comic. And I had become one entirely by accident.		
170	Sticks was like baking paper, nothing ever stuck to him.		
171	The difference between someone finding you attractive, and someone pitying you and never wanting to touch you, is the difference between sitting down and standing up.		
205	It was the circle of Greek life.		



## WORKSHEET 2, continued

217	You spend the first third getting embarrassed by your family. When they pass away, you spend the next part trying to make a family like the one you had. And when you're old, you just embarrass whatever family you've made.		
220	A doctor stepped out from inside. And it was all in his eyes. Mum's knees buckled.		
230	I thought he was having the time of his life up there.		
246	It wasn't up for negotiation. I would be at the burial, and knowing my brothers, they would be too.		
249	And for one last time, Yiayia's voice echoed through the house.		



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