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# Teachers' Notes

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## THE NARDI PUZZLE

Gabriella Page

ISBN: 9781761112232

Reading level: Middle Fiction 9+

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### BOOK SUMMARY

When 12-year-old Sebastian Walker is invited to legendary game-maker Elisabetta Nardi's mansion in Sardinia, he thinks he can finally leave his troubles behind. Instead, he's thrust into a real-world escape game with the other twelve guests, and the prize could change his life.

If Sebastian wants to solve the clues hidden around the mysterious East Wing and find the secret exit, he must team up with the bubbly Lali and brilliant Vita. Even as a team, though, it won't be easy ... and elimination is always just around the corner.

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## THEMES

Family Changes • Friendship & Teamwork • Courage & Personal Growth • Social Media & Privacy •  
Diverse Cultures & Global Connections • Resilience & Wellbeing • Problem Solving & Critical Thinking •

## CONTENTS

Book Summary.....	1
Themes.....	1
About the Author.....	3
Reasons for Studying this Book.....	4
Key Curriculum Areas.....	4
Comprehensive Reading.....	8
Discussion Questions.....	9
Classroom Activities.....	12
Worksheet: Nonograms.....	13
Worksheet Escape Room.....	16

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Rhiza Edge, PO Box 302, Chinchilla, Queensland 4413 admin@wombathriza.com.au



**Gabriella Page is available for author talks and workshops.  
Contact Wombat Books for more information.**

*The Nardi Puzzle Teachers' Notes can be used in schools (independent learning, small groups, and whole classes); at home with caregivers; and as part of mental health support programs facilitated by counsellors, psychologists, children's charities, etc.*

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Gabriella Page is a West Australian singer and children's author based in Italy. Since completing her master's degree in classical music, she's worked as an opera chorister, English teacher, and occasional translator.

In 2022, Gabriella was selected to take part in the ASA/CA Award Mentorship programme. She has a penchant for puzzles and mystery, and she aims to blend humour and darkness in her novels.

When Gabriella is not singing or writing, you can find her trawling the gelato shops around Cagliari; hoarding books; or applying sunscreen.

To learn more about Gabriella and her upcoming projects, head to <https://www.gabriellapage.com/> or follow her on Instagram (@glpagewrites).

### AUTHOR NOTES

I began writing *The Nardi Puzzle* back in December 2023, though I'd been planning it for at least a year before that. I wanted to create a book that combined some of the things I love most: puzzles, games, history, music, art, architecture... and, of course, great food!

I've been living and working in Italy for several years now, and the country influenced key parts of the story. Elisabetta Nardi's mansion, for instance, is partly based on La Scarzuola, a bizarre architectural complex situated in the Umbria region of Italy. The Bomarzo Monster Park and Villa Palagonia, with their surreal, fantastical statues and dreamlike atmospheres, also provided inspiration. Even the escape room contains references to famous Italian figures. See how many you can find while reading!

I hope you enjoy playing Elisabetta Nardi's escape game alongside Sebastian, Lali and Vita. You may even solve the puzzles – or guess the final combination – before they do. If you'd like to check out the extras I've uploaded, or if you feel like sharing your thoughts on the book, head to [www.gabriellapage.com](http://www.gabriellapage.com). Happy puzzling!

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## REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

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*The Nardi Puzzle* is a fast-paced, puzzle-filled adventure that provides rich learning opportunities across the curriculum. Skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and collaboration can be explored, encouraging students to predict, infer and connect ideas while reading. The narrative tackles timely issues such as social media use, privacy, and publishing content without consent. Through the exploration readers are encouraged to examine their own digital habits and online media usage, and consider strategies to stay safe online. Sebastian's story explores issues of mental health and resilience in a sensitive and accessible way, creating space for students to discuss anxiety and coping strategies. The diverse characters and international scene will help broaden students' understanding of cultural differences while sparking interest in other countries. Relevant themes of friendship and teamwork invite students into real world discussions about relationships and working with others. The novel's unique escape room structure is highly engaging, motivating even reluctant readers to unravel the mystery.

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## KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

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### CURRICULUM V9

#### YEAR 4

##### English, HASS, Health and PE, Science, Digital Technologies

**AC9E4LA01** - explore language used to develop relationships in formal and informal situations

**AC9E4LA02** - identify the subjective language of opinion and feeling, and the objective language of factual reporting

**AC9E4LE01** - recognise similar storylines, ideas and relationships in different contexts in literary texts by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

**AC9E4LE03** - discuss how authors and illustrators make stories engaging by the way they develop character, setting and plot tensions

**AC9E4LY05** - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, to expand topic knowledge and ideas, and evaluate texts

**AC9HS4K05** - the importance of environments, including natural vegetation and water sources, to people and animals in Australia and on another continent

**AC9HS4K08** - the roles of local government and how members of the community use and contribute to local services

**AC9HS4K09** - diversity of cultural, religious and/or social groups to which they and others in the community belong, and their importance to identity

**AC9HP4P01** - investigate how success, challenge, setbacks and failure strengthen resilience and identities in a range of contexts

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**AC9HP4P02** - plan, rehearse and reflect on strategies to cope with the different changes and transitions they experience, such as the changes associated with puberty

**AC9HP4P03** - describe how choices and actions can be influenced by stereotypes

**AC9HP4P04** - select, use and refine personal and social skills to establish, manage and strengthen relationships

**AC9HP4P05** - describe how valuing diversity influences wellbeing and identify actions that promote inclusion in their communities

**AC9HP4P06** - explain how and why emotional responses can vary and practise strategies to manage their emotions

**AC9HP4P07** - rehearse and refine strategies for seeking, giving and denying permission respectfully and describe situations when permission is required

**AC9HP4P08** - describe and apply protective behaviours and help-seeking strategies in a range of online and offline situations

**AC9HP4P09** - interpret the nature and intention of health information and messages, and reflect on how they influence personal decisions and behaviours

**AC9HP4P10** - investigate and apply behaviours that contribute to their own and others' health, safety, relationships and wellbeing

**AC9S4H01** - examine how people use data to develop scientific explanations

**AC9S4H02** - consider how people use scientific explanations to meet a need or solve a problem

**AC9S4I01** - pose questions to explore observed patterns and relationships and make predictions based on observations

**AC9TDI4P08** - access their school account using a memorised password and explain why it should be easy to remember, but hard for others to guess

**AC9TDI4P09** - identify what personal data is stored and shared in their online accounts and discuss any associated risks

## **YEAR 5**

### **English, Health and PE**

**AC9E5LA01** - understand that language is selected for social contexts and that it helps to signal social roles and relationships

**AC9E5LA02** - understand how to move beyond making bare assertions by taking account of differing ideas or opinions and authoritative sources

**AC9E5LE01** - identify aspects of literary texts that represent details or information about historical, social and cultural contexts in literature by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

**AC9E5LA08** - understand how vocabulary is used to express greater precision of meaning, including

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through the use of specialist and technical terms, and explore the history of words

**AC9E5LE03** - recognise that the point of view in a literary text influences how readers interpret and respond to events and characters

**AC9E5LY05** - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning to evaluate information and ideas

**AC9HP6P01** - explain how identities can be influenced by people and places, and how we can create positive self-identities

**AC9HP6P02** - investigate resources and strategies to manage changes and transitions, including changes associated with puberty

**AC9HP6P03** - investigate how the portrayal of societal roles and responsibilities can be influenced by gender stereotypes

**AC9HP6P04** - describe and demonstrate how respect and empathy can be expressed to positively influence relationships

**AC9HP6P05** - describe and implement strategies to value diversity in their communities

**AC9HP6P06** - apply strategies to manage emotions and analyse how emotional responses influence interactions

**AC9HP6P07** - describe strategies for seeking, giving or denying consent and rehearse how to communicate their intentions effectively and respectfully

**AC9HP6P08** - analyse and rehearse protective behaviours and help-seeking strategies that can be used in a range of online and offline situations

**AC9HP6P09** - investigate different sources and types of health information and how these apply to their own and others' health choices

## YEAR 6

### English

**AC9E6LA01** - understand that language varies as levels of formality and social distance increase

**AC9E6LA02** - understand the uses of objective and subjective language, and identify bias

**AC9E6LA07** - identify and explain how images, figures, tables, diagrams, maps and graphs contribute to meaning

**AC9E6LY02** - use interaction skills and awareness of formality when paraphrasing, questioning, clarifying and interrogating ideas, developing and supporting arguments, and sharing and evaluating information, experiences and opinions

**AC9E6LY03** - analyse how text structures and language features work together to meet the purpose of a text, and engage and influence audiences

**AC9E6LY05** - use comprehension strategies such as visualising, predicting, connecting, summarising, monitoring and questioning to build literal and inferred meaning, and to connect and compare content from

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a variety of sources.

**AC9E6LE01** - identify responses to characters and events in literary texts, drawn from historical, social or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors

**AC9E6LE02** - identify similarities and differences in literary texts on similar topics, themes or plots

## **HASS**

**AC9HS6S01** - develop questions to investigate people, events, developments, places and systems.

## **YEAR 7**

### **English**

**AC9E7LE01** - identify and explore ideas, points of view, characters, events and/or issues in literary texts, drawn from historical, social and/or cultural contexts, by First Nations Australian, and wide-ranging Australian and world authors.

**AC9E7LE02** - form an opinion about characters, settings and events in texts, identifying areas of agreement and difference with others' opinions and justifying a response.

**AC9E7LE03** - explain the ways that literary devices and language features such as dialogue, and images are used to create character, and to influence emotions and opinions in different types of texts.

**AC9E7LE05** - identify and explain the ways that characters, settings and events combine to create meaning in narratives.

**AC9E7LE06** - identify and explain how literary devices create layers of meaning in texts including poetry.

**AC9E7LA03** - identify and describe how texts are structured differently depending on their purpose and how language features vary in texts.

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## TEACHING POINTS AND ACTIVITIES

This book may be used in whole class, small group or independent learning activities in schools.

Please note, the following suggestions and activities are suited to a variety of year levels spanning Year Four to Year 6 primary aged children, and Year Seven secondary school teenagers. We advise teachers to use best judgement due to the large age range as to what will suit their students.

### COMPREHENSIVE READING

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#### PRE-READING QUESTIONS

1. Examine the cover of *The Nardi Puzzle*. What clues does it give about the setting, characters or genre of the story?
2. The title contains the word **puzzle**. What do you think this suggests about the events of the novel?
3. Read the blurb. What challenges do you think Sebastian might face during the game?
4. Have you ever solved a puzzle, riddle or escape room challenge? What strategies helped you succeed?
5. What qualities do you think someone would need to compete in a puzzle-solving competition?

#### DURING READING QUESTIONS

1. Why is receiving an invitation to Elisabetta Nardi's mansion so important to Sebastian?
2. What do we learn about Sebastian's family situation in the opening chapters?
3. How do Sebastian's experiences with his brothers affect the way he sees himself?
4. What are your first impressions of Lali and Vita? How are they different from Sebastian?
5. Why do the players decide to form teams?
6. Which puzzle or challenge has been your favourite so far? Why?
7. The characters in *The Nardi Puzzle* come from many different countries. Which countries are you curious about?
8. What clues have been revealed about Elisabetta Nardi and her motivations?
9. Which character do you trust the most? Which character do you trust the least? Explain your reasoning.
10. What predictions do you have about how the game will end?
11. If you were competing in the game, what strategy would you use to avoid elimination?

#### AFTER-READING QUESTIONS

1. Why do you think Sebastian was chosen to participate in the game?
2. How does Sebastian change from the beginning of the novel to the end?
3. What strengths does each member of Sebastian's team contribute?
4. Which puzzle, clue or challenge in the East Wing was the most memorable? Why?

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5. How do the friendships Sebastian forms influence the outcome of the story?
  6. What role does trust play in the novel?
  7. Which character did you find most interesting? Explain your answer using examples from the text.
  8. What message do you think the author wants readers to take away from the story?
  9. Were there any clues that helped you solve parts of the mystery before the characters did? Explain.
  10. Would you like to participate in Elisabetta Nardi's game? Why or why not?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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### FAMILY CHANGES

- Sebastian's father works in the mines, which means he is away from Perth for long periods of time. How does this make Sebastian feel? How do the two stay in contact?
- How could Sebastian feel more connected to his father when they cannot see each other? Think of three creative suggestions.
- Sebastian is having a tough time accepting his parents' separation. How do we know this? Provide specific examples from the text.
- How does Sebastian's relationship with his family influence the way he sees himself?
- Sebastian's mum is having a difficult time after the separation, although she does not openly discuss her feelings. What clues in the story suggest she is struggling?
- Is help available to people experiencing major family changes? If you were Sebastian, who could you go to for support?

### FRIENDSHIP & TEAMWORK

- Sebastian has struggled to make friends at school and mentions being teased. How does this affect the way he approaches the other guests at Elisabetta Nardi's mansion?
- Sebastian often feels as though he is not good enough. How do Lali and Vita help build his confidence?
- Was it a good idea for Sebastian to team up with Lali and Vita? Do you think he could have won the game on his own? Why or why not?
- Think of a time in the story when not everyone on the team agrees. How do Sebastian, Lali and Vita resolve the conflict?
- Which guest decided not to work in a team? Why do you think they made that choice?
- How were Sebastian, Lali and Vita effective team players? Find specific examples from the novel.
- Using examples from the story, create a list of the advantages and disadvantages of:
  - Working in a team
  - Working alone

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## SOCIAL MEDIA & PRIVACY

- How does Sebastian feel about his brothers posting videos of him online?
- How have the videos affected Sebastian's life? Have the effects been positive, negative or both?
- What are some positive ways people can use social media?
- Imagine you are Sebastian's friend and discover that his brothers are sharing personal videos of him online. What would you do? How would you help?
- Australia has introduced age restrictions for some social media platforms. Why do you think some countries place limits on social media use for young people?
- In Chapter 22, Elisabetta Nardi says, "Privacy is a right that must be protected at all costs, though some may try to convince you otherwise." What do you think she means?
- Why is privacy important?
- What types of personal information should never be shared online? Explain your reasoning.

## RESILIENCE & WELLBEING

- How does Sebastian feel about himself at the beginning of the novel? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
- Does the way Sebastian feels about himself change over the course of the story? How do we know?
- What does the word resilience mean?
- Is there a time in the story when Sebastian wants to give up? What does he do instead?
- Sebastian, Lali and Vita face a great deal of pressure during the game. How do they manage stress and setbacks?
- Sebastian can be quite anxious at times. How does his anxiety affect his thoughts, feelings or actions?
- What strategies can people use when they feel worried, overwhelmed or discouraged? Think of at least three ideas.
- Find examples of:
  - Sebastian using negative self-talk
  - Sebastian using positive self-talk

## COURAGE & PERSONAL GROWTH

- What does courage mean to you? Can you think of a time when you showed courage?
- Find three examples of Sebastian showing courage during the game.
- How does courage help Sebastian overcome challenges in the novel?
- At the beginning of the story, Sebastian often doubts himself. How does his confidence change by the end of the novel?
- What is the bravest decision Sebastian makes? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

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- How might the story have been different if Sebastian had allowed fear to control his decisions?

### DIVERSE CULTURES & GLOBAL CONNECTIONS

- When Sebastian arrives in Sardinia, it is his first experience in another country. What words would you use to describe how he feels?
- How does Elisabetta Nardi make her international guests feel welcome? Find examples from the text.
- What differences does Sebastian notice between Sardinia and Australia? Are there any similarities?
- The guests come from many different countries. What does Sebastian learn from meeting people with different backgrounds and experiences?
- Do you think learning another language is valuable? Why or why not?
- Which languages do you know? If you could learn another language, which would you choose and why?

### PROBLEM SOLVING & CRITICAL THINKING

- Which puzzle or challenge in the East Wing did you find the most interesting? Why?
- What skills did Sebastian, Lali and Vita use to solve puzzles throughout the game?
- Think about a puzzle the team struggled to solve. What clues eventually helped them find the answer?
- Why is it important to consider different ideas and perspectives when solving a problem?
- How did teamwork help the characters solve challenges they may not have been able to solve alone?
- If you had been a contestant in the game, what problem-solving strategies would you have used?
- Design your own puzzle for the East Wing. What clues would players need to solve it?
- What does the novel teach readers about persistence when faced with a difficult challenge?

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## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

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### PERSUASIVE WRITING

Your parent or guardian does not want to send you to the Nardi Corp launch party. Write a persuasive letter explaining why you should be allowed to attend and why the opportunity is important to you.

### VISUAL ARTS

Imagine you are a legendary game-maker like Elisabetta Nardi. What would your dream house look like? Draw and label your house, including any special rooms, puzzles or features you would like to include.

### WRITING

Imagine you are a journalist interviewing Elisabetta Nardi after the competition. Write five interview questions and Elisabetta's responses.

### WRITING AND DRAMA

At the end of the novel, Sebastian thinks he might enjoy being interviewed by his older brothers after all. In groups of three, write a script for the interview and perform it for the class.

### RESEARCH AND PRESENTATION

The thirteen players in the novel come from different countries around the world. Choose one of these countries to research and create a short presentation to share with your class.

### DESIGN

When Sebastian and the other players arrive at the mansion, they are treated to an incredible banquet. Imagine you are organising a special dinner for your class. Design a menu featuring food and drinks you think your classmates would enjoy.

**Extension:** Research recipes for the dishes on your menu.

### VISUAL ARTS AND DESIGN

During the game's bonus round, players roll a die to receive a prize or penalty. Use the template provided to create your own game die. Draw a different image on each side, then create a matching list of prizes and penalties for your classmates to try.

### RESEARCH AND DESIGN

Which country mentioned in the novel would you most like to visit? Research the country and design an informative travel brochure highlighting its attractions, culture and landmarks.

### COOKING

In the novel, Sebastian and the other players try traditional Sardinian sweets. Follow a recipe to make Pistoccus and learn more about Sardinian food and culture.

### CREATE A PUZZLE

Design a puzzle that could appear in the East Wing of Elisabetta Nardi's mansion. Write the instructions, create the clues and challenge a classmate to solve it.

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# WORKSHEET: NONOGRAMS

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**Name:**

**Date:**

## YOUR TASK

Nonograms are picture logic puzzles. Your goal is to reveal a hidden image by correctly filling in the grid.

Each row and column has number clues that tell you which squares should be filled in.

- Fill squares to create black (filled) cells
- Leave other squares white (empty)

## HOW THE CLUES WORK

- 1. Numbers show blocks of filled squares:** Each number tells you how many black squares are in a row or column.
- 2. Order matters:** The numbers must appear in the same order as the blocks in the grid. (e.g., "3 1" means three consecutive black squares, then a gap, then one black square).
- 3. Blocks must be separated:** There is always at least one empty square between separate blocks.

## HELPFUL STRATEGIES

- **Edge Check:** If a row is 10 squares long and the clue is "8", overlap the possibilities from both ends. Any shared squares must be filled.
- **Mark Empty Squares (X):** Mark squares you know cannot be filled with an X to help narrow down options.
- **Complete a Block:** Once a block is finished, mark the spaces before and after it with an X if they must remain empty.
- **Use Logic:** If a clue matches the full length of a row (e.g. "5" in a 5-square row), the entire row is filled.

## THE GOLDEN RULES

**There are only three rules!**

- 1.** Paint only those cells that you are 100% sure about.
- 2.** Cross out numbers once their block is complete.
- 3.** Mark squares that cannot be filled with an X.

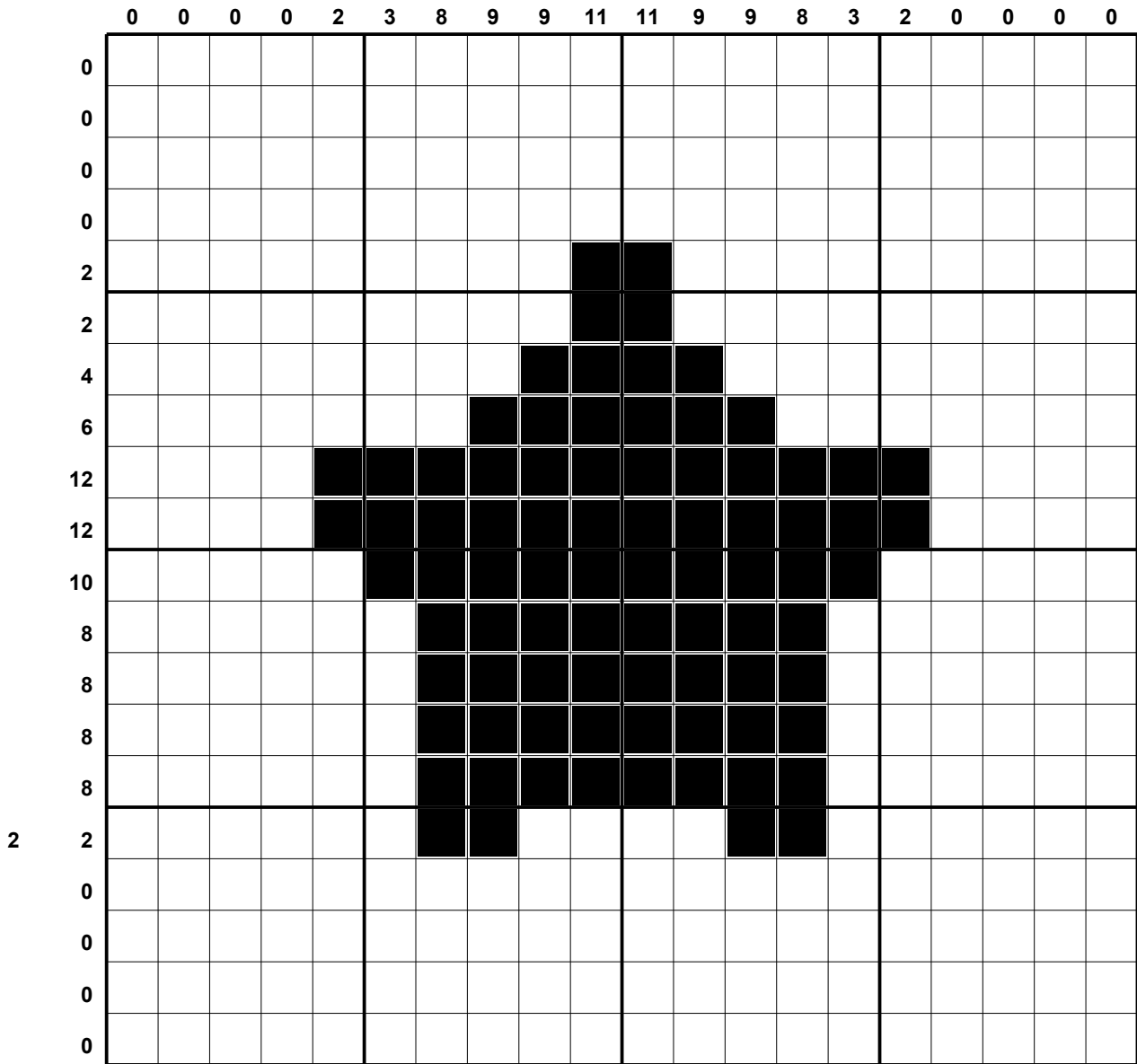
**Extension:** On grid paper, create your own nonogram and challenge your friends!

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# NONOGRAM PUZZLE

	0	0	0	0	2	3	8	9	9	11	11	9	9	8	3	2	0	0	0	0
0																				
0																				
0																				
0																				
2																				
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# NONOGRAM ANSWER KEY



# ESCAPE FROM ELISABETTA NARDI'S MANSION

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**Solve the puzzles. Find the secret exit. Escape before your time runs out.**

The legendary game-maker Elisabetta Nardi has invited you and your classmates to her mansion on the island of Sardinia. At midnight, classical music blares out and ghostly figures appear in the halls.

The figures lead you into the mysterious East Wing of her home.

The door slams shut behind you.

To escape, you'll need to solve five hidden puzzles scattered throughout the East Wing and find the secret exit...

## **PUZZLE 1 – THE HIDDEN WARNING**

In the library, you discover a strange poetry book.

At the bottom of one page, a note reads:

*“The truth hides at the beginning... but only every second line matters.”*

Shadows stretch across the marble floor.

Dust drifts through the moonlit hallways.

Eerie whispers echo behind the walls.

Candles flicker beside the staircase.

Ancient paintings stare down from above.

A clock chimes somewhere in the dark.

Rustling curtains move without warning.

Footsteps creak along the balcony.

Creaking doors groan open slowly.

Rain taps sharply against the windows.

Hidden secrets wait beneath the mansion.

**Follow Elisabetta's clue to reveal the secret word.**

Write the answer below:

# ESCAPE FROM ELISABETTA NARDI'S MANSION

## PUZZLE 2 – THE MORSE CODE MESSAGE

In the mirror room, one of the lamps flashes in odd patterns.

A nearby note reads:

*“Dots and dashes reveal the next location...”*

### MORSE CODE

A    • —	N    — •	1    • — — — —
B    — • • •	O    — — —	2    • • — — —
C    — • — •	P    • — — •	3    • • • — —
D    — • •	Q    — — • —	4    • • • • —
E    •	R    — • —	5    • • • • •
F    • • — •	S    • • •	6    — • • • •
G    — — •	T    —	7    — — • • •
H    • • • •	U    • • —	8    — — — • •
I    • •	V    • • • —	9    — — — — •
J    • — — —	W    • — —	0    — — — — —
K    — • —	X    — • • —	
L    • — • •	Y    — • — —	
M    — —	Z    — — • •	

Decode the message:

— • • • / • — / — / • • • •

Your Answer

# ESCAPE FROM ELISABETTA NARDI'S MANSION

## PUZZLE 3 – THE CIPHER WHEEL

Inside the study is a strange spinning cipher wheel.

A note says:

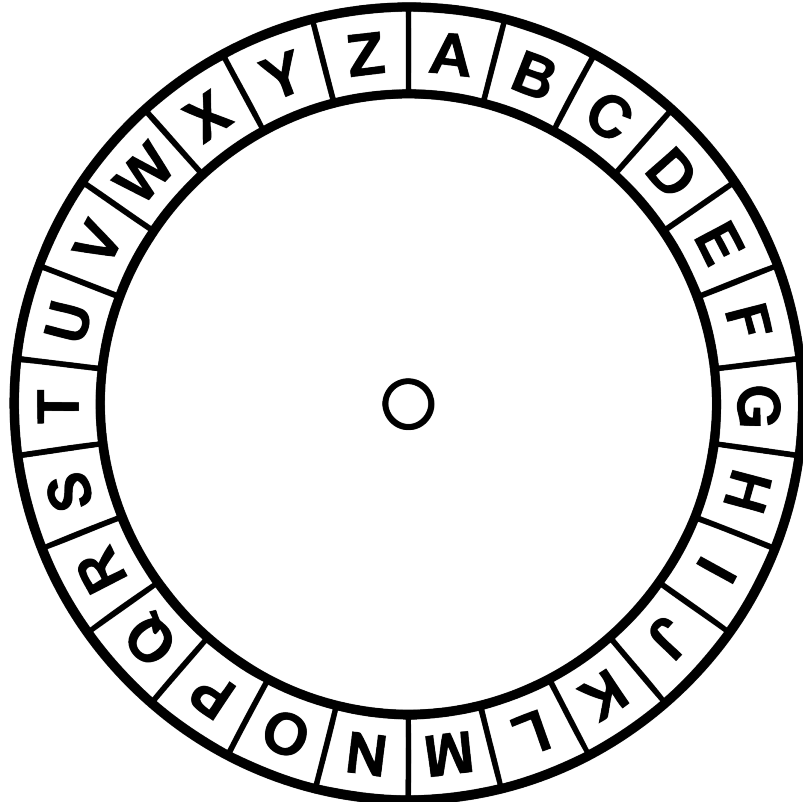
*“Shift every letter backward by ONE.”*

Example:

- B becomes A
- C becomes B
- D becomes C

Decode This Word

UVC



Decoded Word

## PUZZLE 4 – THE FINAL ANAGRAM

A poster by the door of the theatre reads:

N T E N L U

Unscramble the letters to reveal the final clue.

# ESCAPE FROM ELISABETTA NARDI'S MANSION

## PUZZLE 5 – CRACK THE SAFE CODE

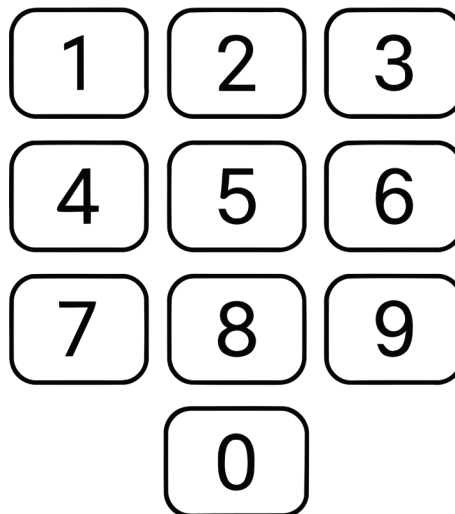
You enter the hidden tunnel beneath the bathtub and find a locked door. It's the secret exit! On the door is a screen containing a riddle:

Twice each day, the hands align,  
Perfectly matched in shape and time.  
Morning passes, evening too,  
Write both moments as numbers do.

Below the riddle is a number pad. You must enter FOUR NUMBERS to unlock the door.

Write the code below:

Try your code on the safe lock!



**DID YOU ESCAPE THE EAST WING?**

# ESCAPE FROM ELISABETTA NARDI'S MANSION

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## TEACHER KEY

### PUZZLE 1 – THE HIDDEN WARNING

Students use:

- only every second line
- then take the first letter

Students must notice the instruction clue, then select the correct lines and identify the acrostic pattern.

Which would spell: **SEARCH**

### PUZZLE 2 – THE MORSE CODE MESSAGE

Decodes to: **BATH**

### PUZZLE 3 – THE CIPHER WHEEL

UVC shifted backward by one: **TUB**

### PUZZLE 4 – THE FINAL ANAGRAM

Unscrambles to: **TUNNEL**

### PUZZLE 5 – CRACK THE SAFE CODE

The clock hands overlap at:

- 12:00
- 12:00 again twelve hours later

Expected code: **1200**

(You could also accept 0000 depending on how students interpret the riddle.)

## FINAL MESSAGE

The completed clues reveal: **SEARCH BATH TUB TUNNEL**

If the students have achieved all of the answers they would then go to the bathroom, enter the tunnel below the bathtub, and try their hand at the riddle on the secret door. If they correctly answer the riddle within the time limit, they escape the East Wing of Elisabetta Nardi's mansion.