Every morning, we queue up in a neat line in front of the machine. We don't choose what we learn. Our teacher sets up the headpieces every day, and then we put them on, press the button, and stand there shifting impatiently from one foot to the other while we wait the long five minutes it takes to upload the entire data pack into our brains. Sometimes, when I'm wearing the headpiece, I feel a warmth between my eyes, but otherwise I don't feel any different afterwards. It's only when I look over the activities for the day's lesson, or when our teacher asks me a question, that I realise just how much information is in my brain that wasn't there the day before. 1

There aren't many people left now who remember life before the machine. My grandfather recalls computers—bulky pieces of equipment that needed a table to stand on, then later little black screens you could hold in your hand... but you could store whatever information you wanted on them. Eventually, some bright young scientist found a way to apply the same technology to the human brain—and we've been learning from the machine ever since. They said it would transform people's lives. Since any information in the world could be uploaded into your brain in minutes, they said there would be no more need for tests or exams to check if someone had learnt something. With no more tests, they decided to close down all the schools: they said there was no point to them any more.

Of course, it wasn't as simple as that. The brain is still organic. It can't hold *all* the information in the world, so you have to determine what you want to keep and what you don't need and can delete. My grandfather says they should have realised that earlier, because computers worked exactly the same way. The organic brain also needs time to rest and recover; that's why we get a little bit of information every day and never too much all at once. They made that mistake in the beginning and the results were horrible. Even once they got the process working perfectly, they soon perceived that having information in your brain isn't the same as being able to use it. You still need to train your mind and practise using the skills. Schools opened again. 2

My grandfather is still trying to understand how it works. 'What is it you do in school all day?' he's always asking me. 'You get everything from that machine.' I've tried to explain it to him. 'Imagine you've memorised a language dictionary,' I tell him. 'It doesn't mean you can go out and speak the language instantly. You still have to practise communicating with others. You need to integrate the information you've just received with all the knowledge and memories you've already acquired.' 3

He can't really imagine it, of course. The same way I can't imagine what it was like for him. He spent years reading and studying. In his day, people finished school at 16—or even older. That seems inconceivable today. Even now, he reads a lot of books. Old-format books, I mean, made of paper. It's a huge waste of time, but he enjoys it. 4

Recently, he's been trying to persuade me to read books too. 'Look,' I said, last time he brought me one, 'I've learnt information from 14,298 books already this year. Why do you want me to spend hours reading just one? What's it about, anyway? It looks ancient.' I lifted the cover and wrinkled my nose at the grimy yellow pages. 5

He just shook his head at me and wandered off, muttering something about young people not knowing how to have fun or appreciate good literature. I've tried to tell him that sort of thing isn't useful any more, but it just doesn't seem to register.

LIVEWORKSHEETS