When the Emperor Was Divine

Chapter 4 and 5 questions

1. Who is narrating this chapter?
2. Whose perspective is it told from?
3. What has changed while the family was away?
4. Why doesn’t the narrator tell us what words have been written on the wall? What earlier episode in the book does this recall?
5. Why does the family choose to sleep in the back room?
6. How quickly do the children and their mother adapt to freedom? What habits of their internment do they still cling to?
7. How do the neighbors treat them on their return, and how does this compare to their behavior in the past?
8. On the rare occasions that someone actually asks where they’ve been, why does the mother respond so vaguely?
9. How much money is the family given on its release? What is the significance of this sum?
10. How does the narrator describe the men coming back from the war?
11. What measures do the children take to fit in following their return? How does their new behavior correspond to popular stereotypes of Japanese Americans?
12. Why do the children keep seeing their old possessions around the neighborhood, and why does their father appear among them? Are we meant to take this literally? In what ways does this passage echo earlier false sightings of the father?
13. Why does the mother take a job? What reason does she give for turning down the job in a department store? What does she say are the secrets of being a successful housecleaner?
14. How has the father changed during his incarceration? How do the children seem to feel about these changes?

Chapter 5

1. In the final chapter, it is the father who narrates. I don't really find any irony in his speech, but he does call into question his false testimony about being the sniper, and he leaves us with a lot of food for thought, as we question....... why?