

# JAPANESE ENTRANCE EXAMS FOR EARNEST YOUNG MEN

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He didn't feel like it, but Ichiro Asaka skimmed through the first test problem anyway.

READ THE NEXT PASSAGE AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW:

Allowing the existence of such a thing as "active stasis," one might well also speak of "passive destruction." This, of course, would be irony. For, as surely everyone knows, the self-absolution of certain intensely intimated convictions may on occasion take on a transparent malice.

By the time he'd read this far, Ichiro's mind was in a fog.

He hadn't the slightest idea what he was reading. Whenever he read modern literary criticism, it was always the same. He could not begin to fathom what anyone was trying to say.

He knew all the words, one by one. He knew what

"active" meant and he knew what "stasis" meant. But when they pulled an "active stasis" on him, he gave up. No image, no thing arose in his mind.

Almost all the problems in the Japanese language section of the entrance exams for the national universities were like this.

Ichiro glanced up quickly at Tsukisaka. He made a "beats-me" face, but Tsukisaka ignored him. Tsukisaka's whole attitude seemed to say, "Hurry up, you're wasting time!"

Ichiro did fairly well in English and mathematics, but Japanese was his Achilles' heel: Japanese was the source of all Ichiro Asaka's troubles as the National University Entrance Exams loomed ahead. He bought reference books and study guides full of sample problems and pored over them, but it didn't do any good. In other subjects, when he looked at the right answer in a study guide, he could tell that his own was wrong, and if he thought about it he could even figure out where he had gone wrong, and how. You learn by making mistakes.

But that didn't work for the Japanese questions. Maybe it was because he had a complex about it, but even when he looked at the correct answer he had no idea why it was right. However many sample problems he tried, he never learned anything. He had no inkling how he should approach the test questions or what formulas he should use, and that was why his grades in Japanese were always bad.

When Ichiro discussed this with his father, his father found a tutor for him: Mr. Tsukisaka.

Tsukisaka was admirably qualified for the task. He was a Japanese instructor at a prep school; he'd even published study guides for Japanese. For all that, he was still quite young, maybe in his mid-thirties. He seemed more like an ultra-perfectionist hot-shot technician at some electronics firm than a teacher, actually.

Today was Ichiro's first lesson with Tsukisaka. Ichiro was to try answering a test problem. He attacked the question with little confidence.

Tsukisaka paid him no attention, so Ichiro continued reading the passage.

Ebbert Shaftner brought that a ultimate thesis to life-size conception and gave it manifest<sup>1</sup> structure. Humans manufactured and utilized tools to bond themselves to nature, thereby overcoming defeatism via dogmatic stance. The qualitative difference was thus one of disposition.<sup>A</sup> Which, it goes without saying, accounts for the inaccumulation of experiential \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>A</sup> Thus, if realism can be characterized as objective and rational, it is likewise possible to interpret metaphoric expression as intuitive, hyperbolic, suprarational, and \_\_\_\_\_.<sup>B</sup> This<sup>b</sup> is actually proven in E. Durkheim's assertion that a god is a symbol of the group and religion tantamount to the group's self-invocation.<sup>2</sup>

Hopeless, thought Ichiro. He was gripped by despair. He hadn't the slightest idea what it could mean, from the first word to the last.

In math he could always get respectable scores. Why was Japanese so utterly beyond his ken? Ichiro was humiliated. Maybe he was just stupid after all. He gave up reading the rest of the passage, which seemed to stretch on forever, and glanced down at the questions.

#### I. REPLACE UNDERLINED WORDS 1-4 WITH SYNONYMS.

That should be okay. "Manifest" meant clear, right? "Invocation." Yeah, well, sure. He couldn't think of it right at that moment, but it had to do with religion, right? You know—well...uh...*invocation*. Anyway, it was like praying or something.

Sure, he was embarrassed to admit that there were some words he didn't really know, but not so badly that it really

bothered him. Unfortunately, he couldn't say the same for the other questions.

II. CHOOSE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING BEST PARAPHRASES THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE UNDERLINED WORD THAT<sup>3</sup>:

1. That culture sometimes stands in opposition to nature.
2. That which derives from the gap between experience and the self.
3. That, comprehensively speaking, a panorama of events transpired.
4. That expression germane to the literature of Na-sume Soseki.

III. CHOOSE WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MOST CLOSELY APPROXIMATES THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNDERLINED SENTENCE<sup>4</sup>:

1. Distinctions of quality depend on the temperament of the perceiver.
2. Quality is quality; quantity is quantity. Only a fool would confuse the two.
3. Humans are diverse.
4. It was as great as the difference between a tomato and a lemon.

Ichiro wanted to cry.

Since he didn't understand the original sentence, there was no way he could pick one with a similar meaning. And on top of that, the sentences he was supposed to choose from were all insane gibberish.

IV. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MIGHT MAKE THE MOST APPROPRIATE TITLE FOR THIS PASSAGE:

1. Human Beings and the Nation State

2. *L'Automne à Peking*

3. The Resurgence of Realism

4. The Further Adventures of Mr. Company President

"I have no idea what any of this means," Ichiro admitted defeat and looked across at Tsukisaka.

"Yup. This is actually a pretty tough one. No reason to lose your confidence just because you don't get it."

"Really?" Ichiro was taken aback by Tsukisaka's comment.

"I had you try this one just to see for starters how you'd attack this kind of problem. And what I saw as I watched you is that you have a basic misconception of just what a test question in Japanese really is."

"I do?"

Since Ichiro had never had any confidence in his ability in Japanese, he offered no resistance to Tsukisaka's snap judgment.

"The first thing you do when you get a test question is read the problem. That's a mistake."

"But it says, 'Read the next passage and answer the questions that follow.'"

"That's just a meaningless set phrase. You can't accept it at face value. A test takes place in a limited time frame. In that short time you have to solve as many problems as you can. You don't have time to read all these complicated passages that were only designed to give students a hard time anyway."

But if he didn't read the passage, how could he answer the questions about it? Ichiro swallowed the doubt rising up inside. Tsukisaka's declaration was so full of certainty and conviction that he didn't dare ask.

"And even worse, you actually tried to understand the passage. Am I right?"

"Yes. I did try to understand what it meant. But it was too difficult, and I couldn't."

"That's another mistake. What good is it going to do you if you understand the passage? It's a waste of time to even think about what it might mean."

"But..."

"What's important here is to choose the right answers. Am I right? Understanding the passages isn't going to get you anywhere."

"Yes, but if I don't understand the passage, I won't be able to answer correctly, will I?"

"That's where you're wrong. This kind of problem is a game, Ichiro, and you want to score as many points as you can. It has nothing to do with the essay passage. All you have to do to choose the correct answers is know the rules. What's important is to master the rules of the game."

"Huh?"

Ichiro did a double take at Tsukisaka's cynical pronouncement.

"The people who get this type of problem right start by skimming the questions. Then they glance at the passage, just enough to answer the questions. It's not impossible, in fact, once you really get the hang of it, to answer the questions without reading the passage at all."

Ichiro gasped. This was unbelievable!

At the same moment he thought how wonderful it would be if he could master a technique that enabled him to get the right answers without reading those stupid little essays.

"I see the light's beginning to dawn. You have been playing a game, but you had the rules all wrong. Once you've got the rules down, the questions are a cinch."

"Please. Teach me the rules."

"Right. Okay, let's start from the rule about choosing the right answer on 'content' questions."

READ THE NEXT PASSAGE AND ANSWER THE QUESTIONS THAT FOLLOW:

The origins of the English language are to be found in Japanese.

Thus would I, in one short sentence, summarize what I am positing here.

Needless to say, however, the brevity of that one statement is by no means commensurate to the vastness of the subject. For that matter, never have scholars of comparative linguistics thus far even entertained the notion that Japanese might be the root of any other language.

What are the origins of the Japanese language? Their steadfast powers of thought solely addressed this question. The root of Japanese is Korean, is Ainu, is Tamil, is Mongolian,...*ad nauseam*. Never straying from that all-too-circumscribed, even self-deprecatory frame of reference of the Japanese cultured person, it is only natural that they never dreamed that Japan might have ever been other than on the receiving end of the tongues of other countries.

The entirety of Japanese culture is borrowed from abroad—such is their secret inner belief.

So it is, my advancement of the notion that the Japanese language is the root of another foreign tongue must come as nothing less than a challenge to the hallowed halls of the academe.

—Genzaburo Yoshiwara,

*The Japanese Roots of the English Language*,  
Introduction

1. WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MOST CLOSELY APPROXIMATES THE CONTENT OF THE PASSAGE?
1. If even brief words might speak to unclouded eyes, they would have much to tell.
2. Japanese intellectuals are self-deprecatory.
3. Japanese should not feel inferior, but take pride in their own culture.

4. My theory will probably not be accepted by academia, but it is great nonetheless.
5. The reason that it never occurred to anyone that Japanese might be the root of some foreign language is that Japanese are not foreigners.

Since he hadn't yet mastered the secret key, Ichiro took the precaution of reading the passage carefully. This one isn't so bad, he thought. He understood most of it.

But it still wasn't easy to pick which of the five answers was the right one. All of them somehow seemed to be saying the same sort of thing as the essay passage.

Thinking it over more carefully, he eliminated number five. It was the only one that he couldn't really make sense of.

Next he eliminated number four. It sounded different from the others somehow, and it was rather petty, actually.

But numbers one through three all seemed right. After a little more thought, Ichiro picked number three. He thought it sounded the most impressive, and it seemed to be what the essay's author was trying to assert.

"I think the answer is number three."

"And what makes you think that?"

Ichiro explained his reasoning process. Tsukisaka listened without comment, favorable or otherwise. As he was talking, Ichiro began to lose confidence in his choice.

After hearing Ichiro out, a faint smile crept across Tsukisaka's face, and he spoke.

"A typical mistake. You've fallen right into the trap the person who invented this problem set for you."

"You mean there are traps?"

"Of course. The goal of the people who write these problems is to catch as many students as they can and trick them into giving the wrong answer. That's the first thing you have to realize. Test questions in Japanese are *designed* to make you make mistakes."

"Oh."

Thinking back on his experiences up to now, Ichiro saw how this made sense.

"So now let me explain the rule that you have to use to answer this kind of question."

"Please."

"The first thing to remember is this. When questions about content have four possible answers, you can usually divide them into Big, Small, Further, and Out of Focus. When there are five, then you have to add the category Wrong."

Ichiro copied the five categories into his notebook as Tsukisaka explained.

"Big means that the answer inflates the meaning of the essay passage. In this case, Big is number one. It organizes the content of the essay and expands it into a more general statement. That means that as a general principle, this one is true."

That sounded right.

"Next is Small. That's number two. Small picks out and focuses on one part of the essay. A Small answer is always right there in the essay, but the trick is that it's not all that's there. There's more to it than that. Now the beginner usually falls for one of these two patterns, Big or Small."

Since I chose number three, maybe I'm not a beginner after all, Ichiro thought, with a surge of pride.

"Be careful not to get caught by either Big or Small. In other words, you've got to be on the lookout for an answer of the same scale as the essay itself."

Ichiro nodded. Tsukisaka's instructions were perfectly clear.

"Next is Further. That's number three here. The one you chose. This is the one that people are likely to fall for when they give the problem a little thought."

It had been a mistake after all.

"This one develops the main idea of the essay one step further. If you read it again carefully, you'll find that there is no statement like the Further anywhere in the essay itself."

In the essay it says that Japan's intelligentsia are self-deprecatory as regards foreign countries, but it never says that they should take pride in their own culture or anything like that. Number three presents a conclusion that you would expect to draw from the essay, what you would imagine the author's opinion to be. That's why people who have at least partially understood the essay are likely to choose the Further. But what you're being asked to do is choose the sentence that's *closest* to the meaning of the passage. It doesn't say to choose what the author of the passage is thinking."

"The secret is not to think about what you're reading, right?"

"Exactly. Or to put it another way, there's no need to give the person who wrote the essay passage any more credit than he's due. Just concentrate on what's there on the page. You've got to watch that. This is just another trap set for you by the person who wrote the problem."

"I can't believe how many times I've fallen for this kind of stuff up to now, taking these problems seriously."

"Great. Once you've realized that, everything's going to be okay. Right. Let's get on to the next one. Skip number four and look at five—that's the Wrong. This is a simple mistake, and actually very few people are fooled by it. The sentence itself is contradictory and screwy. They just put this one in to take up space. We don't need to worry about this kind. The next one is Out of Focus—number four. Hmm. In this problem it's 'My theory will probably not be accepted by academia, but it is great nonetheless.' This is Out of Focus. By that I mean a sentence that seems to be a little out of sync, it has no clear connection to the essay. Yes, this sort of thing *does* appear in the essay, but it's not really the main idea."

"Excuse me, but if this isn't the main idea, then why should you choose it as the right answer?"

"Hold on, now. In this kind of problem, the right answer is this far-fetched, Out of Focus type of answer. The answer

to this problem is number four."

"What? You mean the one that's Out of Focus is the right answer?"

"Read the instructions carefully. It says to choose the sentence that's closest to the content of the essay. It doesn't say to choose the one that best summarizes the essay. It makes perfect sense, if you think about it. If there was a sentence that properly summed up the essay, most students would get the answer right. But that's not what tests are designed for, now is it?"

Tsukisaka's words came as a violent shock to Ichiro. He felt as if he had been kicked in the head.

It had never occurred to him that the Out of Focus answer might be the right one. Otherwise, too many students would get the right answer—what a horrible fraud this all was!

"It's rigged."

"That's Japanese test questions for you. For example, if you were going to summarize this passage correctly, it would probably go something like this: 'My theory will not be accepted by Japanese academics, whose thinking is perverted and who are self-deprecating as regards foreign countries, but it is really a great theory.' That's about it. Number four has most of that in it. It leaves out 'perverted thinking' and 'Japanese,' but otherwise it's all there. And it's phrased in such a funny way that it seems too petty or too self-serving or something to be the right answer. But if you're asked to pick the sentence that's closest to the content, this has got to be it. The person who wrote this problem purposely twisted it Out of Focus to confuse people taking the test."

Ichiro was lost in thought. So it was only to be expected that he would get these kinds of problems wrong, only natural that he wouldn't be able to understand even when provided with the correct answer. The problems were designed from the start so that none of the answers would seem right.

"But if you master the rule that I have taught you,

everything will be fine. First you divide the sentences into Big, Small, Further, Out of Focus, and Wrong. Once you've gotten the hang of that, it's easy. Then all you have to do is pick Out of Focus. It'll be right."

"Hmmm..."

Ichiro began to trust his tutor Tsukisaka. It was refreshing to hear his confident voice offering such a clear analysis of all these things that had been swirling amorphously around in his head up to now.

"I understand what you've just said. But if I follow this formula, I still have to read the passage, right? Before, you said that there was a way you could get the answers right without even reading the passage. Could you please teach me that?"

"Well, well. You haven't even completed the basic course and you want me to skip ahead to the advanced lessons?"

"Oh, that's not allowed? That's okay. I just thought that would be a lot easier for me."

"Well, all right. Today I'll make a special exception and reveal to you the secret technique for answering the questions without even reading the essay."

"Oh thank you, thank you!"

"But you have to realize that, even though it's a highly effective technique, it isn't fail-safe. You can't expect to get one hundred percent of the questions right without reading the essays. Some Japanese test questions are poorly designed things, written by second-rate teachers, so taking those into account the best you can expect is eighty percent correct. You should only use this method when you simply don't have enough time."

"All right, I'll remember that."

"Okay, here goes. The method is based on two rules. The first is Eliminate Long and Short.

"Right. Eliminate Long and Short."

"In other words, don't even read the longest and shortest answers among the multiple choices. Just eliminate them."

"Really? You can tell by the length of the sentences?"

"Yup. Because these multiple choice sentences were designed to trick the test takers, the test writer doesn't want the right answer to stand out—as one that's too long or too short would. That's what the writer is thinking, you see. In this problem, for example, number two is the shortest. And numbers one and five are about the same length, the longest possibilities. So you eliminate one, two, and five without even reading them."

"Then three and four are left. But they're about the same length. So even if I got this far, I could still make a mistake. Number three expresses a very positive opinion, but number four is self-serving and petty, so I'd probably end up choosing number three."

"That's where rule number two comes in handy. Eliminate the Logical Choice."

"Huh? The Logical Choice?"

"Eliminate the Logical Choice. That means cross out the one that sounds logical and right and true. I'll bet you already know the reason. The test is trying to catch the students by getting them to choose what *seems* right."

"I've fallen for that so many times!"

"Beginners often get caught on this one. But you don't have to worry about that any more. If you know these two rules, you'll choose number four, without even reading the essay."

This guy is amazing, thought Ichiro. He explains the way to answer those slippery Japanese test questions as if he were teaching you how to take apart and reassemble a machine. What used to be a foggy, intangible mass had been made comprehensible in its sharpest outlines.

Ichiro had always been pretty good at subjects based on logical reasoning, like mathematics. Once he had absorbed the logic and rules that Tsukisaka taught him, his grades in Japanese improved suddenly and dramatically.

Take, for example, the following problem:

When we read the phrases "One hundred geese flying in a single line" and "The warm quiet of the evening sky," we are carried away to some unfathomable \_\_\_\_\_ of the distant skies.

CHOOSE THE BEST WORD TO FILL IN THE BLANK ABOVE FROM THE FIVE CHOICES BELOW:

- a. Mystery
- b. Emptiness
- c. Longing
- d. Sorrow
- e. Contemplation

First there was a poem, and this question was related to its interpretation.

It wasn't an easy problem; the *old* Ichiro would have puzzled about the right answer a long time. All five possibilities seemed just fine to him.

But Tsukisaka taught him this rule: Mysticism is a trap; go for Sentiment.

Mysticism referred broadly to any mystical or metaphysical kind of words. "Mystery," (a), and "Emptiness," (b), came under this heading. For high school students, these words had a very broad meaning and a strong appeal, so they were likely to choose them. Which was exactly what the problem writers figured.

According to Tsukisaka, while of course there were poems and essays that expressed a mystical feeling or a magical beauty, the sort of people who wrote problems for the Japanese language examinations were not on the intellectual level to appreciate them. As a result, they would not appear in test questions.

What the problem writers understood and liked and used in their test questions was pretty elementary stuff—longing for home, dreams of distant lands, the sadness of being alone,

the pains of youth—all that Sentimental schlock. So when you came across this kind of problem, without even reading the poem, you would choose from (c), (d), or (e). Now (d) was just too drippy, and (e) reeked of the intellectual. So by adapting and applying the Eliminate Long and Short rule, you knew at a glance that (c) Longing was the right answer.

Could it be true, wondered Ichiro as he looked at the answer in the study guide. There it was: (c) Longing.

His respect for Tsukisaka rose. Why didn't I meet him sooner? he thought.

With Tsukisaka's method, if you made a mistake at least you could understand how you had done it. You had simply erred in the way you applied the rules.

Ichiro loved to study now. He even came to like Japanese, which he had hated so much before. When he saw through the traps that the test writers had set for him and sidestepped them with ease, he felt the same exhilaration he felt when he dodged and outran a pursuer on the soccer field.

Ichiro became good at Japanese. Finally the day came when he was ready to attempt that most perverse of problems, Summarize the Passage Above in X Words.

Before they started, Tsukisaka offered a brief introduction.

"These problems where they ask you to summarize the passage in thirty words or explain the meaning of the underlined sentence in fifty words are really ridiculous. They are the dumbest of the dumb."

"Really?"

"Absolutely. If you could say it in thirty words, of course the original authors would have said it in thirty words! They couldn't—that's why they wrote something longer. Let's say these are the directions to your house—"To get to my house you get out of the station and go right. Follow that road for about thirty minutes until you get to a corner with a watch shop. Turn left there and keep going until you get to a bank. Right past the bank is a tobacco shop, and my house is across the street from it, the one with the hedge." Could you



summarize that as 'You can walk to my house from the station'? That's what these problems are asking you to do. They're completely arbitrary."

"I see."

"You can't tell the truth in a certain number of words, and that's it. For example, just look at this problem."

And Tsukisaka pointed to this question:

THE AUTHOR USES THE EXPRESSION "AN INSTANTANEOUS FLASH OF ART." EXPLAIN HIS MEANING IN THIRTY WORDS.

"Now let's pretend that the great painter and sculptor Taro 'Big Bang' Okamoto was answering this question. It would probably go something like this."

Flipping through his notebook, Tsukisaka showed Ichiro a paragraph that he had obviously prepared beforehand, faithfully imitating the artist's inimitable style of delivery:

*Harumph.* What we call art has nothing to do with any constricting, nit-picking theories. Living human beings, their life force, perhaps you could call it, the *energy* of the human creature gushes forth instantaneously. It is the product of an explosion, *harumph*—not a "flash" or anything as puny or dim as that. And the person who creates it makes it without knowing, without understanding what he's doing. That is what art is. Art must be something that people see and think What on earth is this? *Harumph.* (ninety-seven words.)

"As you can see, Mr. Okamoto was unable to explain the phrase in thirty words or less. Of course, when you compare what he wrote with the thirty-word summary of some university professor or cram-school instructor, there's no question which is better as far as content goes. Okamoto's is

superior. But on a Japanese language test, his answer will be marked wrong."

"In other words, there's no need to try to say what's true or even anything very intelligent."

Lately Ichiro had become quite expert at seeing what made those test questions tick.

"That's it. A very sharp insight. The high and low of it is that these are stupid problems, and you'll end up the loser if you take them seriously. Let me give you three points to observe when answering this kind of question."

And with that Tsukisaka explained the following three points to Ichiro.

"(1) Employ a diversionary tactic by sprinkling your answer with words and phrases from the original.

"(2) Make yourself sound like a fan of the author; write as if you were writing him a fan letter.

"(3) Don't give any specific examples; just list a long string of vague, abstract expressions and wind everything up with 'and so forth.' (Refer to forms and announcements from your local government office for good examples.)"

Example:

In the future, it is to be hoped that, aiming as we do for life-long education, universities and other institutions of higher learning will initiate research in areas concerned with education and learning that exploit the unique characteristics and abilities of adults, thereby creating a scientific basis for lifelong education and exploring suitable curricula for adult education aimed at a wide variety of free and independent students, and meeting the learning needs of contemporary society.

—Report of the Ad Hoc Committee  
on Educational Evaluation,  
"Outline of the Evaluation Process," No. 4.

"Got it. Bad writing is better. You suck up to the writer and write something so muddy that no one knows what you're saying." Ichiro announced in confident tones.

"That's the rule. I mean, when the question's stupid, the answer has to be stupid to be correct, right?"

With that preparation, Ichiro tried a perverse Summarize In X Words problem. As he expected, it was not as easy as the other problems, which you could answer as long as you knew the rules. Ichiro was naturally of a logical frame of mind, so before he knew what he was doing he had written an answer without any gross contradictions or misstatements, taking pains not to go over the allotted number of words.

But his efforts gradually paid off. Finally, Ichiro reached the level where he was able to answer even this kind of question. The original was about ten pages long; here is a summary:

The heroine Sugako Miki lost her beloved brother in an accident at sea when she was a little girl, and she has been haunted by his memory ever since. When she was seventeen, she met the rugged fisherman Umekichi and, seeing her brother in him, fell in love with him. Her father's strong opposition to the match and her sister's attempted suicide made things extremely difficult, but eventually the pair were married. But just then the war started and the day after their wedding Umekichi was sent off to the front. Left alone, Sugako opened a craft workshop, but because of the political situation it was closed down by the military. The officer Yamamura had sinister designs on Sugako and pursued her relentlessly, but she was rescued by her childhood friend Mitsutaro. Eventually a son, Umeo, was born, the fruit of her single night of wedded bliss with Umekichi. At last the war ended, and with it came news of Umekichi's death in battle. The grieving

Sugako was encouraged by Mitsutaro to open a weaving workshop. She displayed a talent for business, and her little classroom grew into a large school. Mitsutaro asked Sugako to marry him, and she accepted. Then, on the day of the wedding, Umekichi reappeared—the report of his death had been false. Though Mitsutaro and Sugako were already officially married, their relationship remained pure. Sugako's sister returned to live with her and eventually fell in love with Mitsutaro. Sugako divorced Mitsutaro and remarried Umekichi, who had become the president of a shipbuilding company. Then Sugako's mother died of cancer. Her father became senile. Her son turned into a juvenile delinquent. Her husband's company went bankrupt. Her school was taken over by someone else. Taking her husband's hand, Sugako looks back over her life and considers its vagaries as she prepares herself to start over from zero.

# I. IN SIX WORDS OR LESS, WHAT DID THE HEROINE SUGAKO THINK WHEN SHE LOOKED BACK OVER HER LIFE?

Ichiro had an immediate answer for this most difficult of problems:

"A lot of stuff happened."

"Superb! *Five* words! And you've summarized precisely what she thought about her life," Tsukisaka praised him.

"Is this right?"

"Yes, it is. It's perfect. You have reached the highest level. I have nothing left to teach you."

"B...but, Mr. Tsukisaka!"

And that's how Ichiro Asaka came to get good scores on his Japanese tests. The new year arrived and the time for the

university entrance exams drew near.

Of course Ichiro got into the college of his choice. He had always been good in English, and once he was able to get good scores in Japanese, nothing could stand in his way.

Ichiro composed a letter to Tsukisaka, to whom he owed so much, to share the news and express his thanks.

His letter was eloquent testimony to the fact that expertise at answering questions on Japanese tests had no relation whatsoever to skill at using the language. If anything, it suggested that being able to answer those questions correctly led to a degeneration in his Japanese skills.

This was the letter:

I have learned that one of the joys of life is the joy of achieving a goal you have set.

Did you perhaps teach me that?

Or did you accomplish the task of sending one more person, whose ability you nurtured and cultivated, out into the world?

Or finally, thanks to you, I have passed the entrance exams, and I'll never forget what you did for me.

If you were to select from the five sentences above the one that was closest to my feelings right now, which would it be?

Anyway, when I remember you I think of all kinds of things, which I could never summarize in six words or less, but if I had to I would say: I owe it all to you.

As far as my future is concerned, which of the five phrases below best describes my feelings:

1. The world is an uncertain place.
2. I am determined to persist in my efforts to succeed.
3. I just want to sit and stare and not think about any thing.
4. I'd like to have some fun, finally.
5. Mystical and melancholy.

When I reflect upon it, that paradigmatic experience known as the examination, as an abstraction of our present reality in which truth and fiction carry out a fantastic and endlessly repeating excoriation of our *Weltanschauung*, has taught me \_\_\_\_\_. The \_\_\_\_\_ is, probably, the fact that you can do it if you try. In our amusement, just as in a religious sacrament, we seek both solace and courage.

- I. BY THE WAY, ARE YOU MARRIED?
- II. MAY I COME VISIT YOU?
- III. WAS I A GOOD STUDENT?

CHOOSE THE MOST APPROPRIATE ANSWER FROM AMONG THE FOLLOWING:

1. Ichiro was a very good student.
2. Ichiro was a lousy student.
3. Ichiro had personality problems.
4. Ichiro was a forgettable student.
5. Ichiro was an arcanelly objectified student.

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TRANSLATION BY JEFFREY HUNTER

Yoshinori Shimizu (b. 1947) is most often associated with the idea of pastiche. He assumes the exact verbal color of everything from scholarly tomes to bestselling advertising pamphlets with painfully absurd results. Primarily a writer of short stories, he is best known for his collections *Soba and Kishimen Noodles* (1986), *Eternal Jack and Betty* (1988), and *Growing Down* (1989). *Japanese Entrance Exams for Earnest Young Men* (1988) won the Eiji Yoshikawa New Writer's Award.