

1. Earthquake in Hyogo

On January 17, 1995, there was a big earthquake in Hyogo and Osaka prefectures. This earthquake was so big that it brought great damage to Kobe. More than 6,300 people were killed and about 5,600 houses and buildings were damaged.

After this earthquake, people in Japan got more interested in volunteer work. A large number of volunteers took care of the people who lost their houses. Some high school students in Osaka brought food and water to Kobe right after the earthquake. Some college students helped to save the people who were trapped inside their houses. Twenty-five volunteers came with their dogs from Switzerland. They used their dogs to look for people who were still alive under the broken houses and buildings.

What does the word "volunteer" mean? It means "a person who works willingly for other people without taking money." A lot of people think that "without taking money" is very important. But the most important thing in the idea of volunteering is "willingly," not "without taking money." If you work willingly for other people, you will be a volunteer. Everyone can be a volunteer.

2. Mottainai

Mottainai is a Japanese word. If you buy a new notebook before finishing your old notebook, someone in your family will say, "*Mottainai*." It means "Wait. You can still use that. You don't have to buy another one."

Now *mottainai* has become a key word for an ecology campaign. Who began to use this Japanese word for the campaign? A Kenyan woman did. She worried about the forests in her country and wanted to save them, so she began the Green Belt Movement in 1977. Since then, she and the other members have planted 30,000,000 trees or more. She is known as "the tree woman of Kenya." For her hard work she got the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. This news made her very famous around the world.

Some Japanese people who heard the news asked her to come to Japan. In 2005 she visited Japan. During her stay in Japan something important happened to her. She heard the Japanese word *mottainai*. She understood that the word had an important idea for helping the earth. She wanted many people around the world to know the word *mottainai*, so she began to use it everywhere in her speeches. Thanks to this Kenyan woman, many Japanese people have realized that the idea behind *mottainai* is wonderful.

(214 words)

3. Grandfather's House

This morning, I visited my grandfather's house. I saw him in the yard and asked him, "What are you doing here?" He said, "I'm repairing my bike." "It looks very old, but are you still going to use it?" I asked him. Then my grandfather answered, "Of course, I will. This bike is very old, but I'll use it while it still works. If I throw this bike away, the people who made it will be sad. Making all of the things which we use in everyday life is not easy. It takes a lot of time and work." When I heard his words, I was very ashamed that I didn't think of such things.

Today we can get many kinds of things easily, so we often want to buy new things. For example, I got new shoes two weeks ago, because one of my friends was wearing nice ones. After that, I didn't wear my old shoes. But I want to use them again when I think about my grandfather's words.

My grandfather gave me a good chance to learn a very important thing.

4. The Earth's Resources

We are using the Earth's resources very quickly. Is that all right? Aren't we buying too many new things and throwing them away when they get a little old? Aren't we filling the Earth with garbage?

If water is polluted and trees are cut down so quickly, the Earth will some day become too dangerous for animals, fish, plants and even people.

To save the Earth, let's join the recycling movement. Most bottles are made of glass. Every month we Japanese are throwing away lots of glass bottles, but we can use glass again and again.

More than 7.5 billion juice cans are used in Japan every year. We can recycle aluminum juice cans, aluminum foil and other aluminum things.

More than 500 million trees are cut down yearly for paper. We use a lot of paper in schools and offices. But is paper recycled enough? We can also recycle milk packages. Many of them were not recycled before. How about now?

You have a recycling center in your city or town, don't you? Then use it! If we think more about garbage, we can certainly do something to save the Earth.

5. Mr. Brown

When Mr. Brown got on a train, he always put his suitcase on the seat beside him. He didn't like anyone to sit beside him on the train.

One day when the train was very crowded an old man came, looked at Mr. Brown's suitcase and said, "Is this your suitcase?"

"No. It's my friend's," answered Mr. Brown. "He is traveling with me and he has gone to buy something. He will come back soon."

"All right," said the old man, "I'll sit here, but I'll give up the seat when your friend comes back." He put the suitcase up above him and sat down. Mr. Brown was not happy about this.

A few minutes passed and the train began to move. Then the old man jumped up suddenly and said, "I'm very sorry, but I think your friend couldn't get on the train. Let's leave his suitcase for him in the station." He took the suitcase down and tried to throw it out of the window.

Then Mr. Brown shouted, "It's mine! Don't throw it away, please."

"Oh, is this yours? Well, I see," said the old man.

Mr. Brown never put his suitcase on the seat beside him again when he traveled by train.

6. Big Ben

Big Ben's story starts in 1834. In that year, the old Parliament building burned down. Its clock tower fell to the ground. There had to be a new building and a new clock. People wanted a "King of Clocks, the biggest and best in the world." So the clock had to be big. And the clock had to keep very good time.

Some people said, "No one can make such a clock." They were not right. The big clock was made in two years. But it couldn't be put in the tower. The tower was not even built.

Five more years went by before the clock tower was finished. Then the 10 great hour bell was brought into the tower. It rang out for the first time on July 11, 1859.

This great bell had to have a name. A meeting of Parliament was held to choose one. "The clock is the King of Clocks," one man said. "Let's call the bell the Queen of Bells." "Then how about Victoria?" said another.

The talk about names went. Then Benjamin Hall got up to speak. He was a big man whom the others liked. By this time they were very tired. Someone shouted, "Why not call it Big Ben?"

Everyone laughed, and the meeting was over. But it was really Big Ben from then on.

7. Get Better at English

Do you want to become better at English? I think many of you will answer, "Yes!" English is now an international language. You can make many friends all over the world by using it. Then, how can you improve your English?

Studying abroad is certainly a good way to get better at English because you can practice it every day. But you can improve your English in Japan too. You are learning English at school. You have a lot of chances to use it during English classes. Are you trying to answer in English when your teachers ask you questions? You don't have to speak it well. If your teachers understand, that's OK.

You can also improve your English at home. Listen to English CDs and repeat after them. Watch movies and the news in English on TV. Then, try to say something in English. You can say, for example, "Oh, it's nine o'clock. I'll take a bath." Using English as often as possible is very important.

You can make your English better by studying abroad or studying in Japan. But the most important thing is to try to use English. You should always remember this if you really want to become better at it.

8. Great Ears

Some years ago, there was a young man in a small village in Bohemia. He worked in a city nearby. Every day he had to go there by train. And the trains were not like our trains today. They were so slow that many people complained about it.

But this young man did not. He was glad to close his eyes and listen to the sound of the 'wheels on the rails. He thought the wheels were singing a song. One evening he sat listening to the sound of the wheels. Then, suddenly, he thought the sound was a little strange. He jumped up and cried, "Stop the train. There's danger before us!"

The people on the train thought that the young man was foolish. Then one of them came up to him and said, "What? How do you know?" "By the sound of the wheels," answered the young man.

Slowly the train stopped. Soon a man came running up with news. The young man was right. The rail was broken just in front of the train.

In this way the good ears of the young man saved the train and the people from a bad accident. This young man later became a great musician. His name was Antonin Dvorak.

9. Christopher Columbus

Christopher Columbus had a party to celebrate his arrival in America. A man at the party was not happy with his success. He said, "You just kept sailing west and reached America by chance. There is nothing great about it. Even I could do it." Everyone at the party got angry at the man, but Columbus didn't. He put a boiled egg on the table and asked everyone, "Can anyone make this egg stand on the table?" Everyone tried, but no one succeeded.

Then Columbus hit the egg against the table and put it on the table. The egg stood! The man shouted, "That's not fair! You didn't say it was OK to hit the egg! If it is OK to crush the egg, anyone can do it."

"Of course I didn't. But I didn't say that you must not hit the egg either. If someone does something, it is very easy for other people to do the same thing. The important thing is to think of a new thing first, and do it first," answered Columbus. The man couldn't say anything.

10. Tezuka Osamu

Tezuka Osamu was born in Osaka in 1928. His mother often read some interesting comic stories to him. He liked drawing pictures and writing stories.

World War II started when Osamu was a boy. He didn't stop drawing comics during the war. Some people thought it was a bad thing to draw comics at such a time. His art teacher said to him, "You are very good at drawing comics. Don't stop. It might help you in the future."

After the war, he studied at college to become a doctor. His parents wanted him to become a doctor. But Osamu had a different dream. He wanted to become a cartoonist and write many comic stories. He couldn't decide which way to go. Osamu asked his mother, "I want to work as a doctor, but I want to write comic stories, too. What should I do?" His mother said, "You should do the thing you really like." When he heard this, he decided to be a cartoonist.

Osamu wrote many comic stories. In 1963 *Tetsuwan Atomu* began on TV. People enjoyed watching his comic stories on TV. He died in 1989. Many people still love his stories and read them.