



## Dear Student

---

Karen Hill Anton is an American writer who has lived for many years in rural Japan. Many know her through *Crossing Cultures*, a regular column in *The Japan Times* newspaper. Her essays let us share in the adventures, joys, and frustrations experienced by Karen and her husband Bill as they have raised their family, faced cultural difference, and made a life in Japan.

Karen's writing is deeply personal. She shares with us the details of her daily life — her children, her neighbors, strangers she meets on the train, her calligraphy teacher, her affection for her vegetable seller. We learn about cultural bumps: volunteering with a local parents' group, the loneliness of many foreign wives, a rude store clerk she meets. And Karen shares her insights about society — violence, education, and even vending machines!

To appreciate Karen's writing and develop intercultural understanding, it's not enough to read passively. *Insights* challenges you to think deeply about each essay and to react to it. Each unit begins with critical questions about ideas that Karen brings up. After reading, students check their understanding, summarize main ideas, and write or talk about their personal reactions to these ideas.

Expressing yourself is the best way to improve language ability. *Insights* helps you practice these skills. Take up the challenge! Share your thoughts and insights just as Karen has. As Karen shows us, learning another language and culture doesn't happen just in the classroom: it happens inside of each of us, as we think, grow, and share together.

Joseph Shaules  
Terumi Miyazoe



# Contents

---

<b>UNIT 1</b>	<b>Foreign Neighbors</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>UNIT 2</b>	<b>Kids and Culture</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>UNIT 3</b>	<b>Strong Women</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>UNIT 4</b>	<b>Global Shopping</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>UNIT 5</b>	<b>Meeting Strangers</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>UNIT 6</b>	<b>Calligraphy</b> .....	<b>37</b>
<b>UNIT 7</b>	<b>Human Touch</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>UNIT 8</b>	<b>Family Ties</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>UNIT 9</b>	<b>Freedom and Love</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>UNIT 10</b>	<b>Volunteering</b> .....	<b>61</b>
<b>UNIT 11</b>	<b>Kids and Violence</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b>UNIT 12</b>	<b>Racism and Stupidity</b> .....	<b>73</b>
<b>GLOSSARY</b>	.....	<b>79</b>

## UNIT 1

# Foreign Neighbors



### Think before reading!

*In this unit, Karen talks about her neighbors' curiosity towards her. Because of how she looks, they think she must be very different from Japanese. Before reading Karen's story, give your opinion about foreigners living in Japan. Mark your answers.*

1. Is life in Japan often difficult for foreigners?  
 not really                       it depends                       I think so
2. Is Japan open towards people from other countries?  
 not usually                       sometimes                       yes
3. Would you like to try living in a foreign country?  
 not really                       maybe                       definitely

### Ready to read?

*Before reading Karen's essay, use the glossary to check the meaning of these words. Mark the boxes of those you understand.*

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> <i>be</i> tired of ... | <input type="checkbox"/> reconcile ... with ...        | <input type="checkbox"/> diet                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> no more ... than ...   | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>be</i> accustomed to doing | <input type="checkbox"/> roam                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> confide ...            | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>be</i> relieved            | <input type="checkbox"/> <i>be</i> ignorant of ... |
| <input type="checkbox"/> comprise...            | <input type="checkbox"/> abide by ...                  | <input type="checkbox"/> exclaim ...               |

# Curiosity and the foreign neighbor



KAREN HILL ANTON

1 **T**here was an old woman who would repeatedly ask me how tall I was, and what did my family eat for breakfast. She was a farmer and neighbor in the mountain village where we lived for seven years. These two questions seemed of particular interest to her; at least, she never tired of asking them, and I answered her each time as though it were the first time.

2 Apparently she could not reconcile my looks and eating habits with some other facts. These facts were that year after year she'd seen me carry my children on my back as she had her children and then grandchildren. That we planted and pickled at the same time of year. That in summer we both donned our cotton kimono to dance in the Bon Festival. That we'd sat side by side at the recitals at the kindergarten, and stood side by side at the funeral of neighbors.

3 In any case, I continued to answer her questions about my height and diet, and with the respect her age demanded. Eventually she stopped asking. I suppose she came to realize that 170 cm wasn't all that tall, and the fact that I enjoyed miso soup more for the evening meal than for breakfast didn't make

that much difference — as far as she could see. I came to realize that it was very probable that I was the tallest person she'd ever met, and that in her world, miso soup, rice and pickles were the only possible breakfast.

I realized too that the simple people I lived among were no more accustomed to seeing someone who looked like me than I was to seeing tigers roaming. I learned to announce my coming with a cough or an audible footstep when I walked on back roads and the narrow paths that cut across tea fields; it seemed unfair to appear all of a sudden in front of some old farmer tending his fields and minding his business. (I seriously considered that I might be the unwitting cause of a heart attack!)

4 The first time I met the old woman, I'd gone to her home to return a shovel I'd borrowed from her son the day before; expressing my gratitude and uttering the ordinary politenesses, I left. Much later she confided that she'd seen me coming and had actually wanted to



hide, simply because she didn't know what she would, or could, say to me. After our brief and uneventful encounter she said she'd felt relieved, and thought to herself that she must be "just an ignorant old country woman."

6 However, the ignorance of my old neighbor, a farmer who knew only farmers, was hardly greater than that of supposedly more educated and sophisticated folk who would continually ask the usual questions: "Can you sleep on a futon, use chopsticks, eat sushi, drink green tea?"

7 I didn't mind the questions, really, but it was the *can* part that got me, since these things simply comprise ordinary behavior in this country. And then too, after all, there we were, living in an old farmhouse in the middle of one of the

country's prime tea-growing regions, generally abiding by, naturally, traditions these same people had only heard about from their grandparents.

8 It would not have occurred to me to question if they could drink coffee and eat a steak with a knife and fork, or to exclaim in wonder that they sat on chairs and slept in beds, though these characteristic Western ways were not my own. I could not have remembered the last time I'd eaten a steak, I did not drink coffee, and in that old farmhouse there were neither chairs nor beds.

9 But how could they know? People see me and my dark skin, my husband's distinctly non-Japanese features, our children's curly hair—and make all the wrong assumptions.



## Comprehension Check

First Reading: Understanding the Main Ideas

*Read the statements and mark T(True) or F(False) in the boxes.*

1.  The old woman asked Karen the same questions many times.
2.  Karen's lifestyle is very different from her Japanese neighbors.
3.  The first time she saw Karen, the old woman was very friendly.

Second Reading: Understanding the Details

*Choose the best answer for each question.*

1. What was one thing that the old woman in the village often asked Karen about?
  - a. When she pickles.
  - b. Where she is from.
  - c. What she wears at the Bon Festival.
  - d. How tall she is.
2. Why does Karen refer to "seeing tigers roaming" in Paragraph 4?
  - a. To show that she lives deep in the countryside.
  - b. To show that people thought she was dangerous.
  - c. To explain how unusual it was for people to see someone like her.
  - d. To explain how easily people are frightened.
3. How did the old woman react when she saw Karen for the first time?
  - a. She laughed.
  - b. She thought Karen was Japanese.
  - c. She wanted to ask Karen many questions.
  - d. She wanted to hide.
4. What kind of questions bothered Karen?
  - a. Questions about her height.
  - b. Questions about where she was from.
  - c. Questions about whether she could use chopsticks.
  - d. Questions about whether she was married or not.
5. Why do many Japanese expect Karen to be different from them?
  - a. Because she doesn't speak Japanese.
  - b. Because she looks so different from Japanese.
  - c. Because she doesn't know traditional Japanese customs.
  - d. Because her lifestyle is so different from Japanese.

## Guided Summary

Read the following paragraph and fill in the blanks using words from the list.

There was an old woman who <sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ asked Karen the same questions. Though Karen <sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ herself successfully into the everyday life of the region, her <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ features seemed to make it difficult for one old woman to understand that Karen was not so different from <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. Karen <sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ it when people suppose she cannot do the things any Japanese can. For her, questions such as "Can you use chopsticks?" are <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_, since it's like asking a Japanese "Can you use a knife and fork?"

- Japanese
- enjoys
- dislikes
- integrated
- generally
- physical
- nonsense
- repeatedly
- unwitting

## Compositions

Based on Karen's essay, answer the questions in your own words.

A. When does Karen prefer to eat miso soup?

---

---

---

B. What questions do so-called "educated" people sometimes ask Karen?

---

---

---

C. What does Karen look like?

---

---

---

# Critical Thinking

## Is Japan open towards people from other countries?

### Point of View



A. Read Jun's opinion about the discussion question above.

Jun



I think so. People from my generation are used to foreigners. I had foreign teachers in school and often talked to them. These days we can see foreigners on TV and in movies. But many people get nervous speaking English. I think we should have more confidence speaking to people from other countries. They are our guests!



B. Answer these questions about Jun's opinion.

1. How do people from Jun's generation feel about foreigners?
2. What contact has Jun had with foreigners?
3. How does Jun feel about speaking to people from other countries?

### Your Turn

Write your opinion about the discussion question. Use the hints below.

#### Giving opinions

- I know few/some/many people from other countries. For example . . .
- Life in Japan is easy/difficult for people from other places because . . .
- For people from different countries to get along, we should. . .
- I would/wouldn't like to live in a foreign country because . . .

---

---

---

---