

Mandarin Trees

Every morning, I wake up at 6:00am. I get out of bed and have a simple breakfast; an *onigiri* with *ume* plum paste, which my mother makes for me. After breakfast and getting ready, I head to the station to take the 7:00am train. On the way to the station, I pass many mandarin orange trees – my prefecture is famous for them. On the train, I listen to EDM music while more mandarin trees pass by outside. I then bicycle twenty minutes from the station to school, where I begin classes for the day.

My favorite class is art. I really like drawing pictures, and I also enjoy seeing my friends' artwork. My least favorite class is math, because I find it hard to understand the teacher's lessons – so I usually get around 30 points on the tests, barely passing. After classes are club activities, so I hurry to the swimming pool, because I am the club manager. I prepare the pool for the swimmers, setting up the goalposts and getting the balls ready, so that they can start practicing right away. During practice, I run the timer and I referee. I first encountered this sport in senior high school, and I think it's really interesting, even if it's a bit aggressive.

Anyway, after club activities, we all go to a *conbini* and buy dinner for the evening – I often have bread. My day is not over yet, though. I'm studying for entrance exams, so I head to *juku*. I study at the big *juku* in front of the train station for a few hours, before I take the 10:00pm train home. The train is less crowded at night, so I can sit and study a bit more. In the future, I would like to have a job related to English. I have English vocabulary tests at school, so I often study for those, while the mandarin trees pass by again in the darkness outside. I enjoy the study, and often dream of sharing what I have learned with younger generations.

When the train arrives at my local station, my mother is waiting for me in the car. My nearest station is unmanned, so it's very quiet. It is a peaceful place to live, but it sometimes feels a little lonely. After getting home, I take a bath to relax, and then enjoy some free time reading. I have loved reading since I was a junior high school student, and usually read a book before going to sleep. I switch the light off at midnight to get six hours of sleep, enough for my next day of school.

Questions, Answers and Hints:

1. About how old is the narrator?

Answer: Around 17~18 years old.

Hints/Clues: She first discover the sport she manages for when she joined senior high school, so she is at least a senior high school student. She also mentions studying for (probably university) entrance exams at her *juku*, so she is probably a third-year student, meaning she is around 17 or 18 years old.

2. What prefecture does she come from?

Answer: Wakayama.

Hints/Clues: She mentions mandarin oranges (*mikan*) several times, and also that her prefecture is famous for them. Wakayama produces the most *mikan* in Japan.

3. How long does she spend on the train to school?

Answer: Around 1 hour.

Hints/Clues: Classes/Homerooms usually begin around 8:40 or 8:50. The narrator bikes from the station to school, which takes about 20 minutes. So, to make sure she is on time, she probably arrives at the station around 8:00am, around 1 hour after she catches the train.

4. What club does the narrator manage?

Answer: Water polo.

Hints/Clues: It is a sport that happens in swimming pools, but also uses balls and goalposts. Also, she describes it as an ‘aggressive’ sport.

5. Do many people her age live near her?

Answer: Probably not.

Hints/Clues: She mentions that her local station is unmanned, so it is probably very rural. (Also, the aging population is happening more quickly in rural areas, so there are often few child). She also mentions that it sometimes feels lonely.

6. What is her dream?

Answer: To be an English teacher.

Hints/Clues: She mentions that she likes studying English, and that she wants a job using English in the future. She also says that she ‘often dreams of sharing what I have learned with younger generations,’ suggesting she may want to be a teacher.