

## My Ancient Home

It's often said that our country has four distinct seasons. In my home prefecture, we enjoy the seasons, too – even though we don't have any beaches, and don't get much snow either. In the summer, many people go south to enjoy the sea, and in the winter, they go north for the snow. I often travel out of my prefecture, too, but if I want to fly, or to use the *shinkansen*, I have to go to my neighbouring prefecture first, since we don't have an airport and the *shinkansen* doesn't stop here, either. Sounds like quite an inconvenient place, right? But this prefecture actually used to be very prosperous. I wonder if you know what prefecture I'm talking about? Let me share a little more about it, and see if you can guess.

There's a famous mountain nearby, that I like to visit in spring. Many tourists come here too, to see the cherry blossoms – there are more than 30,000 cherry trees on the mountain. There is a legend that says cherry blossoms first came from this mountain, but I don't think that's really true. Although, there is a type of cherry blossom named after this mountain! A long time ago, some gardeners from Edo visited, and they were fascinated by the beauty of the cherry blossoms in this area, so they used the mountain's name for them. To be honest, I'm not sure if that is true, either, but that is what I was told when I was young. Anyway, the blossoms are very beautiful, so I definitely recommend visiting!

My prefecture is beautiful in the autumn season, too. The changing colours of the leaves complements the ancient architecture of the many temples and old tombs. Perhaps most famous is the park, though – many people come to visit its huge temple, which also has a large statue inside. I'd heard that the hairstyle of the statue inspired the punch perm style of haircut that was popular in the 1970s, although when I tried to look this up, it turns out that the punch perm was actually based on afro hairstyles. I guess my prefecture has a lot of urban legends. Anyway, one time when I was in elementary school, I was eating my lunch in this park. I put my lunchbox down beside me and turned to talk to my friend. As I was talking, I didn't notice something approaching me from behind. When I turned to pick up my lunchbox again it was gone! I turned around, and there was a very contented looking animal making a snack of my lunch. This kind of thing happens frequently in this park, so be careful if you visit. Of course, you can buy snacks for the animals in the park, if you actually want to feed them.

Speaking of food, my home prefecture is also famous for a specific fruit. This fruit also appears in a famous *haiku*, written by *Masaokashiki*. One day, he was taking a break in a kind of café near a temple. He was eating this fruit when suddenly the bell of the temple rang. Inspired by the autumn feeling of that moment, he composed his *haiku* poem. How *wabisabi*!

Finally, my prefecture recently made an appearance in an *anime*. Do you know the character Tanjirō, from the anime *Demon Slayer*? One scene involved Tanjirō fighting with the long-nosed goblin, the *tengu*, which he sliced in two. After that, the *tengu* turned into a sliced stone. This scene was based on a village in my prefecture, and if you visit the village, you can see the real stone.

Well, those are all the hints I have for you today – do you know what my home prefecture is now?

### Questions, Answers and Hints:

#### 1. Which prefecture does the author live in?

**Answer:** Nara.

**Hints/Clues:** Many clues, including those that overlap with the following questions, such as geographical clues (no *shinkansen* or airport, but they are in neighbouring prefectures), the mountain famous for *sakura*, the park (奈良公園) with deer, a large temple (東大寺) and the *daibutsu* statue, as well as hints from Masaokashiki's (正岡子規) poem and *Demon Slayer*.

#### 2. What type of *sakura* does the narrator talk about?

**Answer:** Somei-yoshino or Yoshino cherry (ソメイヨシノ).

**Hints/Clues:** No specific clues beyond the mountain and related urban legends, but with the knowledge that the prefecture is Nara, and they are named after a mountain, a cursory Google search should be sufficient for students to find the answer.

**3. What is an *urban legend* (and how could you tell from the narrator's story)?**

**Answer:** Answers will vary.

**Hints/Clues:** While specific answers will vary, anything similar to 'widely shared stories that are not actually true' will suffice.

**4. What kind of animal ate the narrator's lunch?**

**Answer:** Deer.

**Hints/Clues:** Should be very easy to guess as students will likely already have realised that the prefecture is Nara. If they are unaware of the deer in Nara park, here too a Google search will suffice.

**5. What fruit is this prefecture famous for?**

**Answer:** Persimmon (柿).

**Hints/Clues:** The *haiku* by *Masaokashiki* is incredibly well-known, so students should be able to guess immediately. However, there are also sufficient clues to prompt a search if necessary – *Masaokashiki*, *haiku*, autumn, temple bell.

**6. In what village was the episode of *Demon Slayer* set?**

**Answer:** *Yagyū-cho* (柳生町).

**Hints/Clues:** The information given about *Demon Slayer* (鬼滅の刃) is sufficient that if students search for '鬼滅の刃' (*kimetsu no yaiba*), '天狗' (*tengu*), and Nara (奈良), they should be able to find the answer.