Name: _____ Date: _____

The Fast Train to Kyoto

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 465 words

Haru's grandmother had packed two rice balls, a thermos of tea and a small notebook. She had also packed a surprise. "We are not taking the slow road to Kyoto this time," she said, and she held up two tickets for the bullet train. Haru had dreamed about riding one since he was six. He was eleven now, and his heart was racing already.

The train slid into the station without a sound, long and white and shaped like the nose of a bird. Haru and his grandmother found their seats by the window and sat down. A moment later the platform began to slide away. Haru watched the people on it grow small. Then the buildings of Tokyo blurred, and the train was already at full speed.

"How fast are we going?" Haru asked. His grandmother looked at the sign above the door. "This kind of train, the Tokaido Shinkansen, has a top speed of two hundred and eighty-five kilometers an hour," she said. "It started running in 1964, and we have ridden it many times." Haru nodded and watched the numbers on the sign flicker, one after another.

Out the window, the fields and rooftops flew by in a long green stripe. Haru pressed his cheek to the glass. "Look," said his grandmother softly. Far off to the right, a perfect cone rose above the clouds. "Mount Fuji," she said. "It is the tallest mountain in Japan, and a volcano, though it last erupted more than three hundred years ago." Haru stared until the mountain slid behind a hill.

Around noon his stomach growled, and his grandmother laughed. "Time for lunch," she said. She lifted two lunch boxes from her bag, which they had bought at the station before boarding. Haru's eyes went wide. Each box had a big helping of rice, because rice is the main food in Japan, with fish and vegetables on the side. He wanted all of them.

He chose a box with grilled fish and a rice ball wrapped in nori, which is seaweed pressed into thin dried sheets. His grandmother chose a box with pickled vegetables. "Hashi," she said, handing him a pair of chopsticks. At the first bite of the rice ball, Haru went quiet. Then he tried the fish. Then the pickles. By the time the train slowed for the next station, he had tried something from every little compartment.

Back on board, the afternoon sun poured through the window and Haru's eyes grew heavy. He thought about how far they had come already, and how little time it had taken. Soon they would be in Kyoto. "Grandma," he mumbled, "next time, let's take the train even farther." She tucked the notebook into her bag and smiled at the small head leaning on her shoulder.

Questions

1. What did Haru's grandmother pack as a surprise?

A. A new notebook
B. Two tickets for the bullet train
C. A map of Tokyo

2. What mountain did they see from the train?

A. A hill near home
B. Mount Everest
C. Mount Fuji

3. What is the main food in Japan, according to the story?

A. Rice
B. Bread
C. Noodles

4. How did Haru feel about the lunch boxes?

A. Afraid of the food
B. Bored
C. Excited, he wanted to try them all

5. What does the end of the story suggest about Haru?

A. He wanted to go home
B. He loved the trip and wanted more
C. He was angry

6. What does "compartment" mean?

A. A small separate space
B. A kind of rice
C. A train seat

Words to know

platform: where passengers wait
nori: dried seaweed sheets
chopsticks: two sticks for eating
compartment: a small separate space
volcano: a mountain that erupts
thermos: a bottle that keeps warmth

Answer key: The Fast Train to Kyoto

1. B. Two tickets for the bullet train
2. C. Mount Fuji
3. A. Rice
4. C. Excited, he wanted to try them all
5. B. He loved the trip and wanted more
6. A. A small separate space