6 KENJI

Everyone saved paper for Sadako's good luck cranes. Chizuko brought colored paper from the bamboo class. Father saved every scrap from the barbershop. Even Nurse Yasunaga gave Sadako the wrappings from packages of medicine. And Masahiro hung every one of the birds, as he had promised. Sometimes he strung many on one thread. The biggest cranes flew alone.

During the next few months there were times when Sadako felt almost well. However, Dr. Numata said it was best for her to stay in the hospital. By now Sadako realized that she had leukemia, but she also knew that some patients recovered from the disease. She never stopped hoping that she would get well, too.

On good days Sadako was busy. She did her homework, wrote letters to friends and pen pals, and amused her visitors with games, riddles, and songs. In the evening she always made paper cranes. Her flock grew to over three hundred. Now the birds were perfectly folded. Her fingers were sure and worked quickly without any mistakes.

Gradually the atom bomb disease took away Sadako's energy. She learned about pain. Sometimes throbbing headaches stopped her from reading and writing. At other times her bones seemed to be on fire. And more dizzy spells sent Sadako into deep blackness. Often she was too weak to do anything but sit by the window and look longingly out at the maple tree in the courtyard. She would stay there for hours, holding the golden cranes in her lap.

Sadako was feeling especially tired one day when Nurse Yasunaga wheeled her out onto the porch for some sunshine. There Sadako saw Kenji for the first time. He was nine and small for his age. Sadako stared at his thin face and shining dark eyes.

"Hello!" she said. "I'm Sadako."

Kenji answered in a low, soft voice. Soon the two were talking like old friends. Kenji had been in the hospital for a long time, but he had few visitors. His parents were dead and he had been living with an aunt in a nearby town.

"She's so old that she comes to see me only once a week," Kenji said. "I read most of the time."

Sadako turned away at the sad look on Kenji's face.

"It doesn't really matter," he went on with a weary sigh, "because I'll die soon. I have leukemia from the bomb."

"But you can't have leukemia," Sadako said quickly. "You weren't even born then."

"That isn't important," Kenji said. "The poison was in my mother's body and I got it from her."

Sadako wanted so much to comfort him, but she didn't know what to say. Then she remembered the cranes. "You can make paper cranes like I do," she said, "so that a miracle can happen."

"I know about the cranes," Kenji replied quietly, "but it's too late. Even the gods can't help me now."

Just then Nurse Yasunaga came out onto the porch. "Kenji," she said sternly, "how do you know such things?"

He gave her a sharp look. "I just know," he said. "And besides, I can read my blood count on the chart. Every day it gets worse."

The nurse was flustered.

"What a talker!" she said. "You are tiring yourself." And she wheeled Kenji inside.

Back in her room Sadako was thoughtful. She tried to imagine what it would be like to be ill and have no family. Kenji was brave, that's all. She made a big crane out of her prettiest paper and sent it across the hall to his room. Perhaps it would bring him luck. Then she folded more birds for her flock.

Three hundred and ninety-eight.

Three hundred and ninety-nine ...

One day Kenji didn't appear on the porch. Late that night Sadako heard the rumble of a bed being rolled down the hall. Nurse Yasunaga came in to tell her that Kenji had died. Sadako turned to the wall and let the tears come.

After a while she felt the nurse's gentle hand on her shoulder. "Let's sit by the window and talk," Nurse Yasunaga said in a kindly voice.

When Sadako finally stopped sobbing, she looked out at the moonlight sky. "Do you think Kenji is up there on a star island?"

"Wherever he is, I'm sure that he is happy now," the nurse said. "He has shed that tired, sick body and his spirit is free."

Sadako was quiet, listening to the leaves on the maple tree rustle in the wind. Then she said, "I'm going to die next, aren't I?"

"Of course not!" Nurse Yasunaga answered with a firm shake of her head. She spread some colored paper on Sadako's bed. "Come and let me see you fold another paper crane before you go to sleep. After you finish one thousand birds, you'll live to be an old, old lady."

Sadako tried hard to believe that. She carefully folded cranes and made the same wish.

Four hundred and sixty-three.

Four hundred and sixty-four ...

Comprehension Check 6

本文の内容に合うものには○を、合わないものには×をつけなさい．

1. On good days Sadako did a lot of things, but gradually the atom bomb disease took away her energy. ( )

2. Kenji had been living with his mother in a nearby town. ( )

3. Sadako advised Kenji to make paper cranes, and he did what she said. ( )

4. Sadako made a big crane for Kenji and then folded more birds for herself. ( )