9 Osamu Tezuka's Gift

In 1980, on the completion of the film Hi no Tori 2772 ("Phoenix 2772"), Tezuka visited the USA. He went as a "comics ambassador" to introduce Japan's comic culture. He was delighted to undertake this role. "Comics are an international language. They can cross boundaries and generations," he said. "Comics are a bridge between all cultures."

Starting with a keynote speech at the UN headquarters, he visited universities and colleges all over the USA to give lectures. From that time on, in his role as "comics ambassador," he traveled widely inside and outside Japan. Besides the USA, his journeys overseas took him to Europe, China, and many other countries around the world.

Constantly busy giving lectures, drawing comics and making animations, in 1988 Tezuka complained of not feeling well. On 15 March of that year he was urgently hospitalized and underwent an operation. He was found to have stomach cancer. In the winter of the same year he underwent a second operation, but on 9 February 1989, he passed away. He was 60 years old.

"I'm not a very clever man," Tezuka once said, "so I don't have the skill to do craftsmanlike tricks dealing with various major themes or ideologies. All the time I'm basically trying to draw one central idea using the means at my disposal. This idea might be presented in various guises, such as SF, a girls' story, or a historical drama, thus giving the impression that different ideas are being introduced. The truth is, though, that all the time I've been working on one basic idea."

The idea that Tezuka tried so hard to express was that of "gratitude for life." It was the experience he had had that day in Osaka, at the end of the war, upon seeing the chandeliers lighting up the darkness.

In Hi no Tori, a representative work of Tezuka's which turned out to be his life work, the Phoenix speaks to the youth who is searching for eternal life:

"Insects, during the lifetime allotted to them by nature, grow up, eat, make love, lay eggs, and die contentedly. Human beings lead longer lives than insects or fishes, dogs or cats, or monkeys. If they discover the joy of living in the space of their lifetime, isn't that happiness?"

Tezuka's works continue to be read even after his death, conveying to all who read them their message of "gratitude for life."

Comprehension Check 9

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. Tezuka visited many countries to collect comics. ( )

2. Tezuka was busy traveling abroad even after the operation. ( )

3. Tezuka wanted to express the idea of "gratitude for life" through his works. ( )

4. The Phoenix gives the message about happiness in place of Tezuka. ( )