1 The Early Years

Osamu Tezuka was born on November 3, 1928, in Osaka. He was given the name Osamu in honor of the Emperor Meiji, whose birthday fell on the same day. His father had a good job in a large company. On his father's side of the family, his grandfather was a jurist and his great-grandfather was a doctor. His mother was the daughter of a professional soldier and was brought up in a strict household. Tezuka was thus born the eldest son of a father of good family and a mother schooled in patience. Two years later his brother was born, and four years later, his sister.

After the death of his grandfather, when Tezuka was five years old, the family moved to Takarazuka in Hyogo Prefecture. In those days, Takarazuka was one of the big resort attractions in the Kansai, popular both for its hot springs and pleasant natural surroundings. Right behind Tezuka's house, in fact, there stretched a copse where all kinds of insects lived. There was also the Takarazuka Review, to which his mother frequently took him.

As a young boy, Tezuka did not always have an easy time. He was short and thin, a weakling and a crybaby. His wavy hair and glasses made him an easy victim of jokes at his elementary school. There was even a song that made fun of him. The school teasers liked to wait for him at the school gate and sing this song when he appeared, which always made him cry.

When Tezuka arrived home after school every day, his mother would skip the usual "Welcome home" and instead ask him, "How many times did they make you cry today?" Tezuka would count the times on his fingers and blubber "Eight," which always elicited the cheerful reply: "Never mind. Just grin and bear it." And no matter what had been said or done to him, Tezuka would take these words to heart, put on a brave face, and simply laugh. He eventually found ways to escape his teasers by changing the time or route of his journeys to and from school.

During these sometimes difficult times, Tezuka found great comfort in reading manga, or comics. Comics were less widely read in those days than they are today, but Tezuka's mother let him read them to his heart's content. Not only that, she herself also read them to him and asked him questions about them. Varying her voice to suit the different characters, she read with such skill that Osamu shouted, laughed and even burst into tears as he listened. He ended up with a collection of about 200 comics, which he read and re-read so many times that in the end he practically knew them by heart.

Comics also helped Tezuka in another way. In his class it was well known that he had all these comics at home, and he was the envy of his classmates. In time, these classmates began to visit his home on Sundays to read. Some of the school teasers came too, grinning sheepishly as they handed over the gifts that they, like all the others, had brought from their parents. Tezuka's mother, with never a sign of ill feeling, welcomed them all alike into her house where they spent the day reading. In this way, the teasing gradually died down and Tezuka made more friends.

Comprehension Check　1

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1. Tezuka was born and raised in Osaka. ( )

2. The school teasers sang a song to make fun of Tezuka. ( )

3. Tezuka's mother was not happy about his reading comics. ( )

4. With the help of comics, Tezuka gradually got away from being teased. ( )