

## Lesson 3

### Children in School



#### A. Warm-up activities:

##### Get into pairs and do the following :

- Think about your school days. What was it like? Share your experiences with your partner.
- Recollect one particular happy memory of your school and narrate it to your partner.

#### A. Read the following excerpt and answer the questions that follow:

This is an excerpt from a memoir, *Totto-chan: The Little Girl at the Window* by Tetsuko Kuroyanagi. The author is a Japanese television personality and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador. It is based on her childhood recollection of her school in Tokyo, during World War II.

#### The New School

When she saw the gate of the new school, Totto-chan stopped. The gate of the school she used to go to had fine concrete pillars with the name of the school in large characters. But the gate of this new school simply consisted of two rather short posts that still had twigs and leaves on them.

"This gate's growing," said Totto-chan. "It'll probably go on growing till it's taller than the telephone poles!"

The two "gateposts" were clearly trees with roots. When she got closer, she had to put her head to one side to read the name of the school because the wind had blown the sign askew.

"To-mo-e Ga-ku-en."

Totto-chan was about to ask Mother what "Tomoe" meant, when she caught a glimpse of something that made her think she must be dreaming. She squatted down and peered through the shrubbery to get a better look, and she couldn't believe her eyes.

"Mother, is that really a train! There, in the school grounds!"

For its classrooms, the school had made use of six abandoned railroad cars. To Totto- chan it seemed something you might dream about. A school in a train!

The windows of the railroad cars sparkled in the morning sunlight. But the eyes of the rosy-cheeked little girl gazing at them through the shrubbery sparkled even more.

"I like this school!"

A moment later, Totto-chan let out a whoop of joy and started running toward the "train school," calling out to Mother over her shoulder, "Come on, hurry, let's get on this train that's standing still." Startled, Mother began to run after her. Mother had been on a basketball team once, so she was faster than Totto-chan and caught hold of her dress just as she reached a door.

"You can't go in yet," said Mother, holding her back. "The cars are classrooms, and you haven't even been accepted here yet. If you really want to get on this train, you'll have to be nice and polite to the headmaster. We're going to call on him now, and if all goes well, you'll be able to go to this school. Do you understand?"

Totto-chan was awfully disappointed not to get on the "train" right away, but she decided she had better do as Mother told her.

"All right," she said. And then added, "I like this school a lot."

Mother felt like telling her it wasn't a matter of whether she liked the school but of whether the headmaster liked her. But she just let go of Totto-chan's dress, took hold of her hand, and started walking toward the headmaster's office.

All the railroad cars were quiet, for the first classes of the day had begun. Instead of a wall, the not very spacious school grounds were surrounded by trees, and there were flower beds full of red and yellow flowers.

The headmaster's office wasn't in a railroad car, but was on the right-hand side of a one-storey building that stood at the top of a semicircular flight of about seven stone steps opposite the gate.

Totto-chan let go of Mother's hand and raced up the steps, then turned around abruptly, almost causing Mother to run into her.

"What's the matter?" Mother asked, fearing Totto-chan might have changed her mind about the school.

Standing above her on the top step, Totto-chan whispered to Mother in all seriousness, "The man we're going to see must be a stationmaster!"

Mother had plenty of patience as well as a great sense of fun. She put her face close to Totto-chan's and whispered, "Why?"

Totto-chan whispered back, "You said he was the headmaster, but if he owns all these trains, he must be a stationmaster."

Mother had to admit it was unusual for a school to make use of old railroad cars, but there was no time to explain. She simply said, "Why don't you ask him yourself! And, anyway, what about Daddy? He plays the violin and owns several violins, but that doesn't make our house a violin shop, does it?"

"No, it doesn't," Totto-chan agreed, catching hold of Mother's hand.



### The Headmaster

When Mother and Totto-chan went in, the man in the office got up from his chair. His hair was thin on top and he had a few teeth missing, but his face was a healthy colour. Although he wasn't very tall, he had solid shoulders and arms and was neatly dressed in a rather shabby black three-piece suit.

With a hasty bow, Totto-chan asked him spiritedly "What are you, a schoolmaster or a stationmaster?"

Mother was embarrassed, but before she had time to explain, he laughed and replied, "I'm the head-master of this school."

Totto-chan was delighted. "Oh, I'm so glad," she said, "because I want to ask you a favour. I'd like to come to your school."

The headmaster offered her a chair and turned to Mother. "You may go home now. I want to talk to Totto-chan."

Totto-chan had a moment's uneasiness, but somehow felt she would get along all right with this man. "Well, then, I'll leave her with you," Mother said bravely, and shut the door behind her as she went out.

The headmaster drew over a chair and put it facing Totto- chan, and when they were both sitting down close together, he said, "Now then, tell me all about yourself. Tell me anything at all you want to talk about."

"Anything I like?" Totto-chan had expected him to ask questions she would have to answer. When he said she could talk about anything she wanted, she was so happy she began straight away. It was all a bit higgledy-piggledy, but she talked for all she was worth. She told the headmaster how fast the train went that they had come on; how she had asked the ticket collector but he wouldn't let her keep her ticket; how pretty her homeroom teacher was at the other school; about the swallows' nest;



about their brown dog, Rocky, who could do all sorts of tricks; how she used to go snip- snip with the scissors inside her mouth at kindergarten and the teacher said she mustn't do that because she might cut her tongue off, but she did it anyway; how she always blew her nose because Mother scolded her if it was runny; what a good swimmer Daddy was, and how he could dive as well. She went on and on. The headmaster would laugh, nod, and say, "And then?" And Totto-chan was so happy she kept right on talking. But finally she ran out of things to say. She sat with her mouth closed trying hard to think of something.

"Haven't you anything more you can tell me?" asked the headmaster.

What a shame to stop now, Totto-chan thought. It was such a wonderful chance. Wasn't there anything else she could talk about, she wondered, racking her brains? Then she had an idea.

She could tell him about the dress she was wearing that day. Mother made most of her dresses, but this one came from a shop. Her clothes were always torn when she came home in the late afternoon. Some of the rips were quite bad. Mother never knew how they got that way. Even her white cotton panties were sometimes in shreds. She explained to the headmaster that they got torn when she crossed other people's gardens by crawling under their fences, and when she burrowed under the barbed wire around vacant lots. So this morning, she said, when she was getting dressed to come here, all the nice dresses Mother had made were torn so she had to wear one Mother had bought. It had small dark red and gray checks and was made of jersey, and it wasn't bad, but Mother thought the red flowers embroidered on the collar were in bad taste. "Mother doesn't like the collar," said Totto-chan, holding it up for the headmaster to see.

After that, she could think of nothing more to say no matter how hard she tried. It made her rather sad. But just then the headmaster got up, placed his large, warm hand on her head, and said, "Well, now you're a pupil of this school."



Those were his very words. And at that moment Totto-chan felt she had met someone she really liked for the very first time in her life. You see, up till then, no one had ever listened to her for so long. And all that time the headmaster hadn't yawned once or looked bored, but seemed just as interested in what she had to say as she was.

Totto-chan hadn't learned how to tell time yet, but it did seem like a rather long time. If she had been able to, she would have been astonished, and even more grateful to the headmaster. For, you see, Mother and Totto-chan arrived at the school at eight, and when she had finished talking and the headmaster had told her she was a pupil of the school, he looked at his pocket watch and said, "Ah, it's time for lunch." So the headmaster must have listened to Totto-chan for four solid hours!

Neither before nor since did any grown-up listen to Totto- chan for as long as that. And, besides, it would have amazed Mother and her homeroom teacher to think that a seven-year- old child could find enough to talk about for four hours nonstop.

Totto-chan had no idea then, of course, that she had been expelled and that people were at their wit's end to know what to do. Having a naturally sunny disposition and being a bit absent- minded gave her an air of innocence. But deep down she felt she was considered different from other children and slightly strange. The headmaster, however, made her feel safe and warm and happy. She wanted to stay with him forever.

That's how Totto-chan felt about Headmaster Sosaku Kobayashi that first day. And, luckily, the head-master felt the same about her.

**B. Now work in groups and write the answers of the following questions.**

- a) What is the excerpt about?
- b) How did Totto-chan react when she realized that the school had railroad cars as classrooms?
- c) How long did Totto-chan talk to the headmaster, Sosaku Kobayashi? What does that tell you about the headmaster?

**C. What do the following words mean? Write one sentence with each of these words.**

twig, squat, peer, shrub, askew, glimpse, abandoned, sparkle, whoop, semicircular, abrupt, shabby, embarrass, scold, shred, burrow, disposition

**D. Make a list of things that Totto-chan said to the headmaster on her first day of school, Tomoe Gakuen.**

**E. In the excerpt, headmaster Sosaku Kobayashi encouraged Totto-chan to speak for as long as she wanted. Now answer these questions and develop a paragraph based on the following questions and give a title to your paragraph (200 words). You may have a look at the steps of paragraph writing provided in section F.**

1. Do you think listening to children is a helpful practice?
2. Did you have anyone in your childhood who used to listen to you without interruption? Describe how that made you feel.
3. What benefit may a child have when he/she is allowed to express themselves?

**F. Please read the following strategies of writing a paragraph.**

### **Academic Paragraph Structure | Step-by-Step Guide & Examples**

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Every piece of academic writing is structured by paragraphs and headings. The number, length and order of your paragraphs will depend on what you're writing—but each paragraph must be:

- Unified: all the sentences relate to one central point or idea.
- Coherent: the sentences are logically organized and clearly connected.
- Relevant: the paragraph supports the overall theme and purpose of the paper.



Let's have a look at the steps to write a good paragraph:

### **Step 1: Identify the paragraph's purpose**

First, you need to know the central idea that will organize this paragraph. You can start by drafting a sentence that sums up your main point and introduces the paragraph's focus. This is often called a topic sentence. It should be specific enough to cover in a single paragraph, but general enough that you can develop it over several more sentences. e.g.

Although the Braille system gained immediate popularity with the blind students at the Institute in Paris, it had to gain acceptance among the sighted before its adoption throughout France.

This topic sentence:

- Transitions from the previous paragraph (which discussed the invention of Braille).
- Clearly identifies this paragraph's focus (the acceptance of Braille by sighted people).
- Relates to the paper's overall thesis.
- Leaves space for evidence and analysis.

### **Step 2: Show why the paragraph is relevant**

The topic sentence tells the reader what the paragraph is about—but why does this point matter for your overall argument? If this isn't already clear from your first sentence, you can explain and expand on its meaning. e.g.

This support was necessary because sighted teachers and leaders had ultimate control over the propagation of Braille resources.

- This sentence expands on the topic and shows how it fits into the broader argument about the social acceptance of Braille.

### Step 3: Give evidence

Now you can support your point with evidence and examples. “Evidence” here doesn’t just mean empirical facts—the form it takes will depend on your discipline, topic and approach. Common types of evidence used in academic writing include:

- Quotations from literary texts, interviews, and other primary sources.
- Summaries, paraphrases, or quotations of secondary sources that provide information or interpretation in support of your point.
- Qualitative or quantitative data that you have gathered or found in existing research.
- Descriptive examples of artistic or musical works, events, or first-hand experiences.
- Make sure to properly cite your sources.

Many of the teachers at the Royal Institute for Blind Youth resisted Braille’s system because they found the tactile method of reading difficult to learn (Bullock & Galst, 2009).

- This sentence cites specific evidence from a secondary source, demonstrating sighted people’s reluctance to accept Braille.

### Step 4: Explain or interpret the evidence

Now you have to show the reader how this evidence adds to your point. How you do so will depend on what type of evidence you have used.

- If you quoted a passage, give your interpretation of the quotation.
- If you cited a statistic, tell the reader what it implies for your argument.
- If you referred to information from a secondary source, show how it develops the idea of the paragraph. e.g.

This resistance was symptomatic of the prevalent attitude that the blind population had to adapt to the sighted world rather than develop their own tools and methods.



- This sentence adds detail and interpretation to the evidence, arguing that this specific fact reveals something more general about social attitudes at the time.

Steps 3 and 4 can be repeated several times until your point is fully developed. Use transition words and phrases to show the connections between different sentences in the paragraph such as moreover, in addition, similarly in contrast etc.

### **Step 5: Conclude the paragraph**

Finally, wrap up the paragraph by returning to your main point and showing the overall consequences of the evidence you have explored.

This particular paragraph takes the form of a historical story—giving evidence and analysis of each step towards Braille’s widespread acceptance.

It took approximately 30 years, but the French government eventually approved the Braille system, and it was established throughout the country (Bullock & Galst, 2009).

- The final sentence ends the story with the consequences of these events.

### **Step 6: Read through the whole paragraph**

When you think you’ve fully developed your point, read through the final result to make sure each sentence follows smoothly and logically from the last and adds up to a coherent whole.

Although the Braille system gained immediate popularity with the blind students at the Institute in Paris, it had to gain acceptance among the sighted before its adoption throughout France. This support was necessary because sighted teachers and leaders had ultimate control over the propagation of Braille resources. Many of the teachers at the Royal Institute for Blind Youth resisted learning Braille’s system because they found the tactile method of reading difficult to learn (Bullock & Galst, 2009). This resistance was symptomatic of the prevalent attitude that the blind population had to adapt to the

sighted world rather than develop their tools and methods. Over time, however, with the increasing impetus to make social contribution possible for all, teachers began to appreciate the usefulness of Braille's system (Bullock & Galst, 2009). Access to reading could help improve the productivity and integration of people with vision loss. It took approximately 30 years, but the French government eventually approved the Braille system, and it was established throughout the country (Bullock & Galst, 2009).

### References:

McCombes, S. (2023, March 27). Academic Paragraph Structure | Step-by-Step Guide & Examples. Scribbr. <https://www.scribbr.com/research-paper/paragraph-structure/>

