I have been teaching Japanese at a private girls’ high school for nearly twenty years. This experience has convinced me that the Japanese language syllabus not only aims at teaching the Japanese language but also plays an important part in developing ‘a Japanese mind’.

I lived in Beirut, Lebanon, as a primary school pupil, and studied in the English class. The other students were from the US and more than ten other countries. Most of the textbooks were American; those for ‘Reading’, ‘Writing’ and ‘Poetry by Wordsworth’ were thick and splendid in appearance. Most of the time was spent in English lessons. At the age of ten, I felt attached to Shakespeare by reading his masterpieces and by reciting his poems. But we were not taught about the minds of the characters in his plays, which, I presume, was due to the fact that English was not the mother tongue of most of the students; we were taught to grasp the meaning of the words and the outline of the story. The questions in the textbooks were not about the minds of the characters. Even primary school students were expected to understand the masterpieces through the complete acquisition of the faculty of speech.

In Japan, on the other hand, literary works are studied in depth. When we deal with those works, we take great interest in trying to understand the minds of the heroes and heroines’. The textbooks never fail to include questions about the characters’ minds. The teachers are expected to encourage the students to share their opinions. Of course, the study of a particular novel may produce conflicting opinions and we may not reach a definite conclusion. The teaching of the Japanese language in Japan, I feel sure, aims at letting the students share the minds of the characters in literary works.
Twenty years ago, the students had little difficulty with comprehension, but those in the present class cannot read and understand deep psychological analysis. One reason may be that the social trend towards the nuclear family where parents are too busy at work to teach them how to give due consideration to others. Another reason may be their growing accustomed to the exaggerated world of animated cartoons.

I remember a class in junior high school in which I introduced a certain novel as a text. The story is set in an ordinary Japanese home of forty years ago. The hero is a fifteen-year-old boy, whose home is actually a simple family store dealing in dry provisions. During the rainy season all his family become quite nervous, because the dry provisions sold at the store can be quickly infected with vermin or go mouldy. In such conditions, his mother says unpleasant things to his father who loafs on the job and gets into an argument. The boy, trying to avoid getting involved, earnestly lends a hand with the housework and tries to think of something to say which will please his father. His grandmother also helps to lighten the atmosphere by cracking jokes. The tense atmosphere in the house is gradually relieved by their efforts, and the family sit at table for dinner in the usual peaceful way they do every day. The boy feels a weight has been lifted from him. The story is very common and can happen in any home in Japan. Since ancient times the Japanese have set a high value on a capacity always to be concerned about those around them. We, the middle-aged, have naturally acquired such a sense, which the children of the present age find difficult to understand. This may be because children are left alone at home while both parents are out working to earn a living. Many years ago, children used to behave themselves to please their parents, but these days the situation is reversed. Parents spoil their children by attaching the greatest importance to sending their children to excellent schools. This reality has increased the number of students who find it difficult to relate to other human beings.

The following is what I experienced when I taught *Botchan*, a novel by the famous Japanese novelist Natsume Soseki, who was born in 1867. It is a very interesting novel that Soseki wrote while he was young.

In his childhood, the hero is naughty and unyielding, and oftenannoys his family. When his friend asks him if he can jump from the