

In Focus 1 - Speed Reading Unit 5

Growing Old in Okinawa

Okinawa is part of Japan. It is made up of many islands. There are no big cities and many people work in farming or fishing. People in Okinawa are not rich, but they live for a long time. In fact, they live longer than people in most other places in the world.

Scientists wanted to know why people in Okinawa have such long lives, so they studied the people in Okinawa. They studied how they spend their time. They discovered many things that might explain why they live so long, but there seem to be three main reasons.

One reason is the food they eat. People in Okinawa eat good food. They eat a lot of vegetables, fish, and tofu. They don't eat a lot of animal products or sweet things. They also eat small amounts of food, but often—not too much at one time. This helps them stay in good health. Eating this kind of food is good for us too. Vegetables, fish, and tofu are things that help our bodies grow and stay strong. Eating small amounts of food often can also help us digest our food better.

Another reason is their friends. People in Okinawa have special friends. They call them “moais”. Moais are groups of friends who do things together. They support each other and help each other. This makes them happy and full of health. Moais do things like exercise, cook, and talk together. They also help each other when someone is not well or needs help. This makes them feel good and helps them live longer. Having friends is good for us too. Friends can make us happy and help us when we're not feeling good. They can also help us learn new things and see the world in different ways.

Reason number three is their purpose in life. People in Japan have a special word for it. The word is “ikigai”. Ikigai means “reason for being”. It's a word that helps people find their purpose in life. When people have a purpose, they are happier and in better health. People in Okinawa find their ikigai by doing things they love. They might help others, learn new things, or do things that make them happy. When they have a purpose, they feel good and live longer. Having a purpose is good for us too. When we have a purpose, we feel like our lives have meaning. We feel like we're making a difference in the world. This makes us happy and helps us live longer.

So, people in Okinawa live a long time because of what they eat and their special friends. They also live longer because they have a purpose in life. They show us that eating good food, having friends, and finding our purpose can help us live longer and be happier. We can learn from the people in Okinawa. We can eat well, make friends, and find our purpose. When we do, we can live long and happy lives too.

When you have finished, write your time in the box.

Now, go to the next page and answer the questions. **Do NOT look back at the text.**

Now, let's test your understanding of the text with some questions.

1. Where is Okinawa located?
 - A) In China
 - B) In Japan
 - C) In Korea
 - D) In Thailand

2. What is a common occupation in Okinawa?
 - A) Technology
 - B) Automotive manufacturing
 - C) Banking
 - D) Farming and fishing

3. What is notable about the lifespan of people in Okinawa?
 - A) It is shorter than average.
 - B) It is about average.
 - C) It is longer than in most places.
 - D) It is the shortest in the world.

4. What type of diet do Okinawans follow?
 - A) High in animal products and sweets
 - B) High in vegetables, fish, and tofu
 - C) High in processed foods
 - D) Low in protein and high in carbs

5. How often do Okinawans eat?
 - A) Once a day
 - B) Large amounts infrequently
 - C) Small amounts but often
 - D) Only when they are extremely hungry

6. What role do "moais" play in Okinawan society?
 - A) They are religious groups.
 - B) They are government councils.
 - C) They are groups of friends who support each other.
 - D) They are competitive sports teams.

7. How does the concept of "moais" impact longevity?
 - A) By increasing competition
 - B) By reducing social interaction
 - C) By providing support and companionship
 - D) It has no impact

8. What is "ikigai"?
 - A) A reason for being or purpose in life
 - B) A type of Okinawan food
 - C) A traditional Okinawan dance
 - D) A historical site in Okinawa

9. How does having a purpose affect Okinawans' health?
 - A) It has no effect.
 - B) It makes them wealthier.
 - C) It contributes to happiness and better health.
 - D) It causes stress.

10. What is NOT listed as a reason for the long lives of people in Okinawa?
 - A) Having a supportive social network
 - B) Eating a healthy diet
 - C) Having a purpose in life
 - D) Eating lots of sweets