Japanese Stage 4 Visiting the Nihongo Tanken Centre

げんかん

1. How is the げんかん similar to or different from the entrance of your house?
2. In the げんかん scene, Caroline made two mistakes. Explain in English what she did wrong.

In Japan, it’s customary to take off your shoes at the げんかん. Originally this custom was based on Buddhist philosophy, but people now do this mainly to stop dirt and germs coming into the house. Usually you have to step up into the house, and it is quite clear where you should remove your shoes. If you don’t place your shoes neatly, the げんかん would look very untidy with everybody’s shoes everywhere. It is important etiquette to leave your shoes neatly.

たたみのへや と ざぶとん

1. Do you think Caroline learned from the mistakes she made in the げんかん scene?
2. Explain what a ざぶとん is and what you’re supposed to do with it.

とこのま

1. Explain the mistake Caroline made in this scene.
2. What do you think とこのま is? What is the purpose of this space?
3. Do you have a space similar to とこのま in your house?

Tokonoma is a traditional area in a Japanese house, where people display beautiful flowers, hanging scrolls, and other ornaments. Usually it is elevated a couple inches from the tatami area. Originally, tokonoma was a special area where there was an incense burner, flowers and a Buddhist picture scroll hanging on one of the walls. It is now used for less religious purposes. It is a room which adds formality and grace to the home, and is an area where people can feel tranquil and serene.
Write a summary of the にわ scene in English.

The garden at the Tanken Centre is built in the style of a Japanese rock garden. Japanese rock gardens have philosophical and religious significance. This style of garden arose under the influence of Zen Buddhism and it represents the universe in miniature. The white gravelled area symbolises rivers or oceans. The rocks suggest islands. This style of Japanese garden symbolizes the universe.

What mistake did Caroline make in the しょうじ scene? Explain why you think it was wrong.

しょうじ is usually made from a wooden frame and rice paper, and is used along the side of the home where the windows are. The wooden framework typifies the simplicity which is characteristic of traditional Japanese interiors. The rice paper softens the light coming from outside without blocking it. At the same time it provides privacy to the inside of the room. Since the paper loses its fresh white colour when it is in use, it is common for people to replace the shoogi paper at the end of the year, so that rooms can look fresh and clean for the New Year.

Describe the scene.

How is the おしいれ similar to or different from the closet of your house?

A tatami room can be used as a living room in daytime, and as a bedroom at night time. おしいれ is the space where futon and other items are stored when not in use. おしいれ is a very important part of a Japanese house.

Caroline put her pillow at the northern end of the futon first. Keishi sensei corrected her by saying きた、まくら、だめです。

きた means north and まくら means pillow. In Japan, it is considered bad luck to sleep with your pillow facing north. This idea comes from Buddhism. When Buddha died, he was lying with his head pointing towards the north. So, in Japan, it has become a custom at funerals to place the coffin with the head facing north.

What brings bad luck in your culture? Why? Discuss with your class.