



A Holiday Set by the Sky, Not by Parliament

Read the passage and answer the questions. (CEFR B1–B2)

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1 Most national holidays are fixed by law to a calendar date or a weekday, but Japan's two equinox holidays are defined only by astronomy. Each year on February 1, the government publishes the next year's equinox dates in its official gazette, based on calculations by the National Astronomical Observatory. No other holiday in Japan works this way, except its spring twin. This means that calendar makers must wait for science before they can print anything.



2 The system also reveals how the holiday was reshaped after the war. Before 1948, the autumn equinox was an imperial festival honoring the spirits of past emperors. Lawmakers kept the date but rewrote its purpose, turning it into a day for everyone to remember their own ancestors. It can be seen as a compromise between old traditions and the new rule that the state should stay separate from religion.

3 Ironically, the astronomical idea behind the name is not quite true either. Even the word equinox, which means equal night, is only almost right. Because sunrise is measured from the top edge of the sun, and the air bends sunlight, daytime on the equinox is more than ten minutes longer than night.

Comprehension

1. What is the main idea of the passage?

- (A) Japan's autumn equinox holiday is unusual in its date, its history, and even its name.
- (B) The National Astronomical Observatory decides all of Japan's national holidays.
- (C) Day and night are exactly equal on the equinox all over the world.
- (D) The autumn equinox has always been a day to honor past emperors.

2. When does the government officially publish the next year's equinox dates?

- (A) On the day of the equinox
- (B) In September of the same year
- (C) On February 1 each year
- (D) Once every four years

3. What was the autumn equinox before 1948?

- (A) A day for farmers to celebrate the harvest
- (B) An imperial festival honoring the spirits of past emperors
- (C) A day with no special meaning
- (D) A day to remember everyone's own ancestors

4. What can be inferred from the sentence "calendar makers must wait for science before they can print anything"?

- (A) Calendar makers usually make mistakes about the equinox.
- (B) Scientists print all the calendars in Japan.
- (C) The equinox holiday is always on the same date, so printing is easy.
- (D) Calendar makers cannot be officially sure of the holiday's date until the government announces it.

5. In paragraph 2, the word "compromise" is closest in meaning to

- (A) a solution in which each side gives up something
- (B) a serious mistake
- (C) a complete change
- (D) a strong refusal

6. Why does the writer begin paragraph 3 with "Ironically"?

- (A) To show that the writer does not believe in astronomy.
- (B) Because a holiday decided by astronomy has a name that is not astronomically correct.
- (C) To explain why the government changed the holiday's purpose.
- (D) Because the equinox is a sad day for many people.



Vocabulary, Paraphrase & Summary

Match the words with the definitions. Then rewrite and summarize.

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|----------------|---|
| 1. define | a. not joined or connected to something else |
| 2. astronomy | b. to change direction or shape so that something is not straight |
| 3. publish | c. to explain or decide exactly what something is or means |
| 4. calculation | d. the scientific study of the sun, moon, stars, and planets |
| 5. reveal | e. to make information available to the public, often in print |
| 6. compromise | f. the act of finding a number or answer by using math |
| 7. separate | g. to show something that was hidden or not known before |
| 8. bend | h. an agreement in which each side accepts less than it wanted |

Paraphrase — say it in your own words

1. “This means that calendar makers must wait for science before they can print anything.”

Hint: Start with "So" and use "until scientists" instead of "wait for science".

2. “Lawmakers kept the date but rewrote its purpose, turning it into a day for everyone to remember their own ancestors.”

Hint: Use "did not change" and "changed the meaning", and make two sentences.

3. “Even the word equinox, which means equal night, is only almost right.”

Hint: Start with "The name equinox" and use "not exactly true".

Summary

Summarize the passage in about 50 words.



Debate & Opinion Essay

Prepare for a debate. Then write your opinion (100–150 words).

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Motion: Holidays with religious roots should be given new, non-religious meanings, as Japan did with the autumn equinox.

FOR 賛成

- A national holiday belongs to everyone. A non-religious meaning lets people of any faith, or no faith, take part.
- Japan's rule that the state should stay separate from religion was kept, while the date and the custom of visiting graves survived.
- New meanings help old holidays stay alive. Remembering one's own ancestors is something almost every family can understand.

Add your own reason:

AGAINST 反対

- Changing the meaning can hide the real history. Many people today do not know that the day once honored past emperors.
- Religious groups may feel that their tradition was taken away and used by the state.
- If the meaning keeps changing with politics, a holiday can lose its value. It is better to explain the history honestly than to rewrite it.

Add your own reason:

Opinion	<i>I believe / I think that ...</i>
Reason 1	<i>First, ... For example, ...</i>
Reason 2	<i>Second, ... In fact, ...</i>
Counter	<i>Some people say ... However, ...</i>
Conclusion	<i>In conclusion, ...</i>