

---

---

## Research Digest

# Imitating to Write: Reflections on Using a Model Summary Report in a Literature Seminar for JSL Students

Nobuko Koyama

*University of California at Davis*

This paper presents my personal reflections as an instructor using an experimental approach to writing instruction in a literature seminar in Japanese that took place at a Japanese satellite campus of an American university and targeted JSL (Japanese as a Second Language) college students. It was the first time that a model summary report created by the instructor was used in such a seminar, and it had therefore been incorporated on a trial basis. The primary purpose of using a model was to explicitly show JSL students how a summary report should appear and what elements it should include. A model was made available to students at the start of the seminar, and students were encouraged to start imitating it. Through imitation, they were expected to learn and acquire the summary report as a genre. In this paper, as the instructor, I would like to reflect on the use of this model and the challenges posed by the seminar.

本論文では、米国大学の日本キャンパスで開講されたJSL学生を対象とした現代日本文学セミナーでのモデル文を使用したライティング指導について振り返る。このセミナーでは、学生に模倣をさせることを目的としモデル要約文を講師が作成し、学生に提供するという初の試みを行った。モデル文使用の目的は、JSL学生たちに要約レポートとはどのような体裁のものであるか、またどのような要素を含むものであるかを具体的に示すことである。この模倣によって学生たちは要約レポートという一つのジャンルを理解・習得するものと仮定した。以下では、セミナーにおける制約と困難な点、およびモデル文使用について担当講師の立場から振り返る。

In this study, I reflect on the instruction of summary writing for JSL students in college. Summary writing concerns writing teachers who are eager to find better methods of teaching writing because it is “one of the most typical and critical academic writing skills for L2 learners” (Baba, 2009, p. 191). It is also one of the most important skills addressed in academic writing textbooks for L2

college students (Nitsu & Sato, 2000; Matsumoto & Kono, 2007). I adopted an experimental approach by using a model summary report for students to imitate. This approach was developed in response to fellow teachers' frustration and comments on their JSL students' writing, such as "They can't write a summary," "They don't know how to write a summary," "Their summary is not a summary but a recounting of the whole story," and so forth. In response, I had to ask myself the following questions as a teacher: What are the challenges of summary writing? Are there problems with our teaching or problems with our JSL students? If our students struggle with summary writing, how can we help them improve this writing skill? With these questions in mind, I would like to address other practical problems of teaching writing in a college seminar.

## **Problems of Teaching Writing in a Literature Seminar at College**

The literature seminar examined in this paper was not specifically designed as a college writing course; it was an upper-level liberal arts course with many subject-related reading assignments and discussion sessions. The major learning objective of the seminar was for students to learn, discuss and gain insight into contemporary literature in Japanese by applying critical thinking and reading skills. However, it was also designated as a writing-intensive course according to the university's protocol, which establishes standards for writing in quantity and quality. From a pedagogical perspective, this protocol assumes that if students have worked through lower-division courses successfully by learning both reading and writing skills as well as critical thinking, they are expected to be well prepared and well equipped for higher learning in the upper-division courses, such as seminars. Thus, in the seminar, students were expected to demonstrate their critical thinking and comprehension of reading assignments through a variety of writing assignments. In other words, their in-depth understanding and mastery of academic writing was assumed in the seminar. However, in reality, this dual nature of the seminar created a dilemma, as it left little time for writing instruction given the amount of time spent on facilitating students' engagement with and comprehension of the course materials: contemporary Japanese literature.

There have been long-standing pros and cons argued about the place of literature in writing (Belcher & Hirvela, 2001; Vandrick, 2003). Some claim in general that better readers are able to write better and that in particular they also write better summaries (Grabe, 2001; Hare, 1992; Johns 1985; Winograd 1984). On the other hand, reading literature could be simply difficult for some students. Some literary expressions may be archaic and only suitable in a written language, which means that they are of no practical use for students (Vandrick, 2003). This concern over the difficulty of reading literature is more prominent with regard to L2 students compared to L1 students. Thus, when literature was the primary focus of the seminar for L2 students, it increased the burden for both students and the instructor.

The major difference between a literature seminar and a regular writing course was the importance of the learning objective of writing. In the literature seminar, writing pedagogy was important, but it was positioned as a by-product of the study of literature. Thus, students' abilities to write were assumed. Furthermore, literature was taught at an L1 pedagogical level to L2 students. As a result, more time was spent on critical reading than on writing, although for the students, critical reading and academic writing were equally demanding. This unique situation posed challenges to L2 students and the instructor, which can be summarized by the following predicament: When little time could be spared for writing instruction, how could the instructor help the students develop their writing? Now, let us return to the questions addressed earlier from a teacher's perspective and propose the following: What if we provided a model that showed students how to properly summarize? This led to the creation and implementation of the model in the literature seminar examined in this paper.

## **Summary Writing at College and Using a Model**

### **Summary**

A summary is one of the classroom genres (Johns, 1997) in which students must be proficient at college. It is a foundational writing skill that underlies other classroom genres, such as essays and term papers. Summary writing is an essential academic skill in any discipline that requires reading comprehension, critical

thinking and writing skills (Abasi & Akbari, 2008; Baba, 2009; Casazza, 1993; Chen & Su, 2012; Kim, 2001; McDonough, Crawford & De Vleeschauwer, 2014). It is also considered to be a useful skill “for integrating and synthesizing sources” (McDonough, et al., 2014, p. 21).

To write a summary, students must comprehend and digest the text, have “the ability to identify and select the important ideas in the text” (Kim, 2001, p. 570), delete “minor and redundant details” based on their judgment (Casazza, 1993, p. 203) and finally present the ideas or arguments of the text in their own words (Baba, 2009; Keck, 2006, 2014). Writing a summary clearly requires handling multiple tasks and a series of decisions (Reinhart & Thomas, 1993). While summary writing is the most basic academic writing skill, it could be a daunting task for L2 writers.

To teach summary writing, modeling is helpful and considered “an important scaffolding activity” (Hyland, 2004, p. 132). Casazza (1993) proposed modeling as an instructional process and explained two ways to implement it. One is a think-aloud activity led by the instructor who demonstrates how s/he processes the text after reading it by reflecting aloud. The other method is “to provide written models of summaries” that can either be the students’ submitted work or one “constructed by the instructor” (pp. 204-205). Chen and Su (2012) adopted a similar approach in teaching how to write a summary of a narrative text by providing “the students with three prize-winning summaries from a national contest . . . written for *The Age of Innocence*” (p. 187). With a model, students can analyze and discuss the strengths and weaknesses of the sample work. More importantly, a sample work can clearly demonstrate to students what to include in a summary and how to write it in a format appropriate for a given subject or academic course.

It is clear that there is a certain benefit in using a model summary as part of writing instruction. A model summary embodies its genre and provides guidance regarding format, style, language, a reader’s (and, in this case, a grader’s) expectations and a writer’s communicative intent. Most importantly, a model summary can demonstrate the type of information that should be extracted from a given reading and how that information should be presented. Note that the

definition of a genre differs depending upon the context. In this paper, genre refers to Hyland’s definition of “a term for grouping texts together, representing how writers typically use language to respond to recurring situations” (2004, p. 4). It is general enough to be applicable to the genre of the summary report, as well as other classroom genres.

L2 students could be at a disadvantage if their understanding and application of a classroom genre in L1 is different from what is expected in L2 writing. To facilitate the improvement of L2 students’ writing, it is imperative to provide explicit instruction that explains the generic conventions to which their writing must conform.

## Research Rationale

An annotated model summary report was created and provided to students (Appendix). It included detailed, required features of a summary report, met the format and style requirements specified in the seminar (APA, MS Mincho, 1000-1500 characters in Japanese) and adhered to the macrostructural and lexico-syntactic features that embodied this particular genre (Table 1). It could also

Table 1

*Model Summary Report*

| Paragraphs                | Macrostructures (MS)                       | Lexico-Syntactic Features (LS)  |
|---------------------------|--|---|
| Throughout a summary      |  | (1) Use of written Japanese<br>(2) Use of Renyō forms (a verb conjugational pattern) (e.g, ‘iki’ instead of ‘itte’ [to go (and)])                   |
| Paragraph 1: Introduction | • Author information<br>• Book information | (3) Author’s name in a thesis statement   |
| Paragraph 2-5: Body       | • Story summary                            | (4) Book title in a thesis statement  |
| Paragraph 6: Conclusion   | • Conclusion                               | (5) Protagonist’s/characters’ names in a thesis statement<br>(6) In-text citation for key words and phrases<br>(7) Book title in a thesis statement |
|                           | • References                               |   |

serve as reference and writing guide for students.

When the seminar class began, I hypothesized the following: If the students are aware, implicitly or explicitly, of the characteristics of a summary report, their writing should include both the macrostructural features (MS) and lexico-syntactic features (LS) of the model. In other words, the better the students understand this model and apply that understanding in their writing, the more MS and LS should be incorporated into those summary reports. Furthermore, I posed the following research question as a way to reflect on the use of a model in the seminar:

Research Question: Regardless of their preparedness and linguistic skills, could JSL students in the seminar learn and understand a summary report as a genre through the imitation of the model with guidelines and a rubric?

With the hypothesis and research question in mind, students' summary reports were analyzed and examined in comparison with the model.

## **Methods and Results**

The seminar (14 weeks) was offered in 2012 at a satellite campus of an American university in Tokyo, Japan. Six senior students majoring in Japanese participated in the seminar, and each wrote six summary reports, one analytical paper, three short essays (mid-term), and a term paper. They were all JSL speakers. At the time of their participation in the seminar, their proficiency level ranged from Intermediate-Mid to Advanced-Mid (ACTFL Guidelines, 2012), based on the instructor's observations and assessment. Of those six students, five completed all six summary reports. Their reports (30 in total) were analyzed in comparison with a model for MS and LS.

In the second week of the seminar, a model summary report was presented to students with the guidelines and the grading rubric (Table 2) followed by a thirty-minute lecture. In the lecture, I reviewed the model sentence by sentence with explanations of word choice, the appropriate style and length, and then I asked the students to pay special attention to features such as in-text citations and long quotes, all of which were embodied in the model. To conclude the lecture, I stressed the differences between "imitating" and plagiarizing. Eisner and Vicinus

Table 2  
*Grading Rubric*

| Required Elements  | Grade Points |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Structures</b>  |              |
| Meet the deadline  | 1            |
| Typed/double-spaced/11-point/MS Mincho                       | 1            |
| 1000-1500 characters in Japanese                             | 2            |
| <b>Content</b>   |              |
| Concise information about the author (Evidence of research)  | 1            |
| Concise information about the work (Evidence of research)    | 1            |
| Summary of the story   | 2            |
| Appropriate use of key words and phrases as needed           | 2            |
| Concluding remarks   | 2            |
| <b>Language (Style, Vocabulary etc.)</b>                     |              |
| Use the plain forms correctly throughout the writing (Style) | 1            |
| Use the written expressions and words (Vocabulary)           | 2.5          |
| Grammar  | 2.5          |
| Logical flow (Linking expressions, etc.)                     | 2            |

(2008) defined imitation as “emulation, not perfect reproduction” and stated that imitation enables “students to master the distinctive and defining terms and style of their specialty” (p. 4). Therefore, by “imitating,” I expected students to absorb the model and imitate the vocabulary, style, form, and structure most appropriate for a summary report, all of which are embodied in MS and LS.

Figures 1 and 2 reveal the ways in which students incorporated MS and LS from the model into their writing. The analysis of MS and LS indicated the degree of imitation (Table 3). As the class averages indicate, the overall

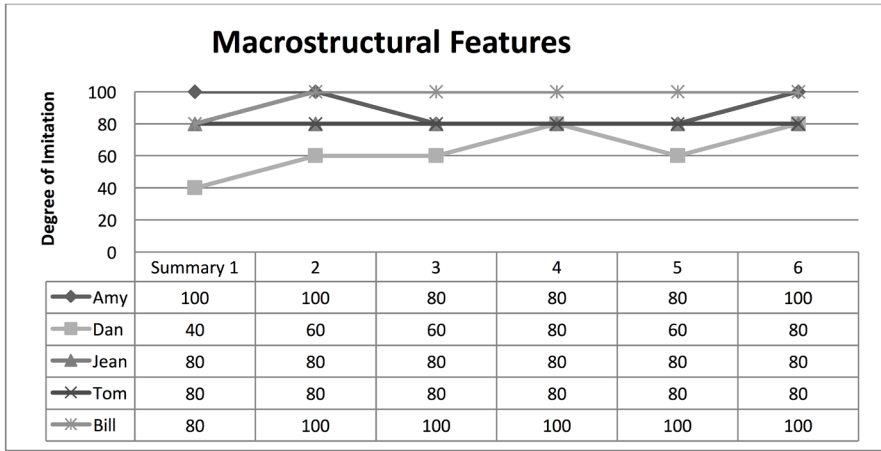


Figure 1. Degree of imitation in terms of Macrostructural Features (MS) is indicated by %. Notice that Dan and Bill made significant progress in increasing the use of MS, while Jean and Tom remained the same.

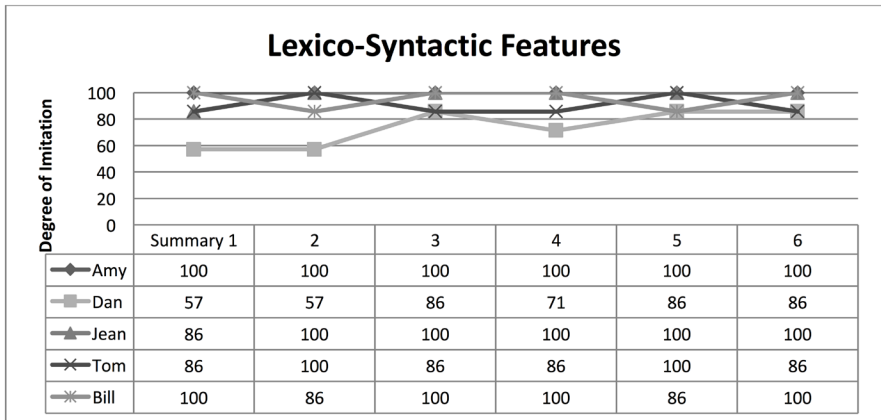


Figure 2. Degree of imitation in terms of Lexico-syntactic Features (LS) is indicated by %. Notice that Jean and Bill increased the use of LS from Summary 2, and Amy used LS fully in all the summaries. Compared to Summary 1, Dan increased the use of LS in Summary 6 by nearly 30%.

Table 3

Class Averages (Degree of Imitation)

|    | Summary 1 | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   | 6   |
|----|-----------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| MS | 68%       | 84% | 80% | 84% | 80% | 88% |
| LS | 86%       | 89% | 94% | 91% | 94% | 94% |

MS=Macrostructural features, LS=Lexico-syntactic features.



degree of imitation increased as the seminar progressed. When the first and last summary reports were compared, the last one showed a clear increase of MS and LS integration throughout. Overall, regardless of individual differences, such as proficiency levels and readiness, all of the JSL students had a better understanding of a summary report than they did at the start of the seminar.

## **Reflections on Using the Model and Improvement**

In this literature seminar, critical thinking and reading of literature were the major topics, and they required more instruction time and discussion than the writing instruction. As an instructor, I hoped that having an annotated model would save time on my part so that I could focus more on reading instruction and better help students improve their writing because “imitating” was easier than writing from scratch. Thus, I purposely created a model by selecting Banana Yoshimoto’s short story, which was the first reading/summary assignment. That way, students could clearly see how the author’s information was written and incorporated into a summary report. After all, they could copy the information from the model summary and paraphrase it in their summary. However, from what I examined, “imitating” was not as easy as I initially thought. As I noticed the difference in the degree of “imitating” among students, I came to see how “imitating” could require the students to analyze, examine and synthesize the model, allowing them to know not only what to include and how to write the summary, but also what not to do.

Better readers/writers, such as Amy and Bill (all names are pseudonyms), wrote better and followed the model carefully from the first summary assignment. They required less advice and instructional intervention throughout the seminar. Their minor errors were corrected immediately when I provided written feedback and suggestions. On the other hand, Dan and Jean were the only students who required more individual consultation, especially during the first half of the seminar. Dan expressed the difficulty he had in following the required format and style, and he was troubled by his lower scores. During our meetings, I noted relevant parts in the model and the difference between his writing and how it was written in the model. It was clear that Dan did not

examine the model carefully enough to be able to “imitate” important features. Jean was grade-conscious and wanted to make sure that her summary report had all the required elements listed in the grading rubric. At our meetings, we went over each item in the grading rubric and examined her writing in comparison with the model.

The use of a model benefitted both students and the instructor. For students, a writing example was readily available for their reference as they wrote. For the instructor, the model made it easier to assist students outside the classroom, as it clearly showed how much information a summary should contain and how the summary should be presented. For this trial, though it could have been implemented differently, I concluded that there was certain effectiveness in the use of a model because students such as Dan, who had trouble incorporating MS and LS, eventually began to incorporate more of these features in their summary-report writing. In retrospect, it became clear to me that the process of “imitating” without plagiarizing could be creative, analytical and even challenging to some students. This finding came as a surprise to me as an instructor and presented another point of interest concerning writing instruction.

Overall, a few things could have been added to further facilitate students’ understanding of the genre of the summary report. For instance, the implementation of a model and its usefulness could be better emphasized and explained through the addition of a peer review session. Another remedial intervention could be assigning students to compare their summary reports with a model, prompting them to examine and analyze their writing and note differences between their work and the model. As Dan’s struggle clearly suggests, some students were not aware of or receptive to the model and what it embodied. Thus, these exercises could heighten students’ awareness of and familiarity with this genre.

Lastly, there are limitations to this study. Without any post-seminar tests or surveys, it may not be clear whether the imitation of a model was functionally equivalent to the comprehension of this particular genre. In the future, pre- and post-seminar tests could be implemented to reveal students’ comprehension and acquisition of the genre.

## Acknowledgments

Some of the findings in this study were presented at the Society for Teaching Japanese as a Foreign Language, Spring Conference, Tokyo, May 26, 2013 and ACTFL, Annual Convention and World Languages Expo, San Diego 2015, November 20, 2015.

## References

- Abasi, A., & Akbari, N. (2008). Are we encouraging patchwriting? Reconsidering the role of the pedagogical context in ESL student writers' transgressive intertextuality. *English for Specific Purposes, 27*, 267-284.
- ACTFL (2012). *ACTFL proficiency guidelines*. Retrieved from [https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/public/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.actfl.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/public/ACTFLProficiencyGuidelines2012_FINAL.pdf)
- Baba, K. (2009). Aspects of lexical proficiency in writing summaries in a foreign language. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 18*, 191-208.
- Belcher, D., & Hirvela, A. (Eds.) (2001). *Linking literacies: Perspectives on L2 reading-writing connections*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Casazza, M. E. (1993). Using a model of direct instruction to teach summary writing in a college reading class. *Journal of Reading, 37*(3), 202-208.
- Chen, Y., & Su, S. (2012). A genre-based approach to teaching EFL summary writing. *ELT Journal, 66*(2), 184-192.
- Eisner, C., & Vicinus, M. (Eds.) (2008). *Originality, imitation, and plagiarism: Teaching writing in the digital age*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Grabe, W. (2001). Reading-writing relations: Theoretical perspectives and instructional practices. In D. Belcher & A. Hirvela (Eds.), *Linking literacies: Perspectives on L2 reading-writing connections* (pp. 15-47). Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press.
- Hare, V. (1992). Summarizing text. In J. Irwin & M. Doyle (Eds.), *Reading/writing connections* (pp. 96-118). Newark, DE: International Reading Association.
- Hyland, K. (2004). *Genre and second language writing*. Ann Arbor, MI:

University of Michigan Press.

- Johns, A. M. (1985). Summary protocols of “underprepared” and “adept” university students: Replications and distortions of the original. *Language Learning, 35*, 495-517.
- Johns, A. M. (1997). *Text, role, and context: Developing academic literacies*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Keck, C. (2006). The use of paraphrase in summary writing: A comparison of L1 and L2 writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 15*, 261-278.
- Keck, C. (2014). Copying, paraphrasing, and academic writing development: A re-examination of L1 and L2 summarization practices. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 25*, 4-22.
- Kim, S. (2001). Characteristics of EFL readers’ summary writing: A study with Korean university students. *Foreign Language Annals, 34*(6), 569-581.
- Matsumoto, S., & Kono, T. (2007). *Daigakusei no tameno “Yomu, Kaku, Presen, Debate” no hoohoo* [Methods for reading, writing, presentation and debate for college students]. Tokyo, Japan: Tamagawa Daigaku Shuppanbu.
- McDonough, K., Crawford, W. J., & De Vleeschauwer, J. (2014). Summary writing in a Thai EFL university context. *Journal of Second Language Writing, 24*, 20-32.
- Nitsu, N., & Sato, F. (2000). *Ryuugakusei no tameno ronriteki na bunshou no kakikata* [How to write logical sentences for international students]. Tokyo, Japan: Three A Network.
- Rinehart, S. D., & Thomas, K. F. (1993). Summarization ability and text recall by novice students. *Reading Research and Instruction, 32*(4), 24-32.
- Vandrick, S. (2003). Literature in the teaching of second language composition. In B. Kroll (Ed.), *Exploring dynamics of second language writing* (pp. 263-283). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Winograd, P. (1984). Strategic difficulties in summarizing texts. *Reading Research Quarterly, 19*, 404-25.

## **Author bio**

*Nobuko Koyama is Assistant Professor and Coordinator of the Japanese Language Program in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at the University of California, Davis. Her research interests include literary discourse analysis, interface of discourse analysis and language pedagogy, and L2 writing and reading. [nkoyama@ucdavis.edu](mailto:nkoyama@ucdavis.edu)*

Received: April 19, 2016

Accepted: January 10, 2017

---

---

## Appendix

### Model Summary

(1) 吉本ばなな著『キッチン』の要約

Your name

(2) 吉本ばなな(2000年によしもとばななに改名)は1964年に東京で生まれた。父は批評家の吉本隆明、母は詩人、そして姉は漫画家という芸術色豊かな一家に生まれ、早くから作家を志していたという。その吉本のデビュー作である(3)『キッチン』は、1987年に海燕新人文学賞に輝いた作品で、翌年福武書店から出版されベストセラーとなり、海外でも翻訳されて読まれている。「私がこの世でいちばん好きな場所は台所だと思う」という有名な出だしで始まる『キッチン』は、世界中で最もよく知られている吉本作品の一つであろう。

(4) 『キッチン』の主人公である女子大学生、桜井みかげは、唯一の肉親である祖母を亡くし、傷つき行き場を失っていた。そこに現れた祖母の友人だという田辺雄一は、みかげに救いの手を差し伸べ、彼と母えり子とともに暮らすことを提案する。初めて田辺家を訪れたみかげに、(5) 雄一は「家と住人の好み」をどこで決めるのかとみかげに問いかけると、みかげは「台所。」(16ページ)と答えて田辺家の台所に足を踏み入れた。

(6) うんうんうなずきながら、見てまわった。いい台所だった。私は、この台所をひと目でとても愛した。(17ページ)

そして、みかげは戸惑いながらも「いい台所」がある田辺家に移り、すぐに彼らと暮らし始めた。肉親を失い傷ついたみかげ同様に、田辺家にも事情があった。

雄一の母えり子は、元は男性だったのだが、妻を失った悲しみから男性であることをやめ、性転換をして今は女性として生活していた。雄一とえり子の奇妙な母子の生活に

思いがけず加わったみかげは、二人の優しさに見守られながら少しずつ心の傷をいやしていくのだった。そして、田辺家の「居候生活」(32ページ)の中で、「少しずつ、心に光や風が入ってくるのがとても、うれしい」(33ページ)と感じ始める。そうした穏やかな日々を送る中で、祖母と暮らしていた住まいをすべて片づける日が来た。一人バスに乗り、荷物を手に田辺家へと向かうみかげは、バスの中で老婆と幼い孫を見かける。その二人のやりとりを聞き、二人のほほえましい姿を見るうちに自分が泣き始めていることに気付き驚く。祖母が亡くなって初めて一人号泣をするみかげは、街角の厨房から聞こえてくるにぎやかな気配に心を救われるのであった。

(6) 私はどうしようもなく暗く、そして明るい気持ちになってしまって、頭をかかえて少し笑った。そして立ちあがり、スカートをはらい、今日は戻る予定でいた田辺家へと歩き出した。(55ページ)

(7) キッチンに立ち、キッチンで食事を作り語らうことで救われていることに気付くみかげは、「夢のキッチン」(67ページ)を心に描きながら未来へと心をはせるのであった。

(8) 『キッチン』は、傷ついたみかげがキッチンという場所を通じて、心の傷に向き合い、癒し、再生へと歩みを進める物語であるといえるだろう。

(9) 参考文献

吉本ばなな(1991)『キッチン』 福武文庫 (10)

(1) Clearly state whether it is a summary or an analytical paper in the title.

(2) Information about the author.

(3) Information about the publication.

(4) Information about the story/synopsis.

(5) Use key words from the story.

(6) Indentation for a long quote.

(7) Summarize a story in your own words.

(8) Conclude a summary in your own words.

(9) Reference section: Use the appropriate style and format.

(10) This summary has 1200 characters in total.