

"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto**Vocabulary Warm-up Word Lists**

Study these words. Then, complete the activities that follow.

Word List A

challenge [CHAL uhnj] *v.* to question or dispute the truth or correctness of something

We challenge your idea that skateboarders should not wear knee guards.

confused [kuhn FYOOZD] *adj.* mixed up; bewildered

After being awakened from a deep sleep, Heather felt confused.

consider [kuhn SID uhr] *v.* to regard as; think to be

Most people consider it rude if you sneeze without covering your mouth.

conversation [kahn vuhr SAY shuhn] *n.* an exchange of ideas by informal talk

Matt and Sylvia had a conversation about the tennis game.

extremely [ek STREEM lee] *adv.* much more than usual or common; very

Please be extremely careful when you cross that rickety bridge.

interesting [IN trist ing] *adj.* exciting curiosity or attention

Agnes's antics made the party much more interesting.

lack [LAK] *n.* the condition of not having enough; shortage

Surprisingly, Barry's lack of talent did not keep him from performing.

tennis [TEN is] *n.* a game played by striking a ball back and forth with rackets over a net

Although she rarely wins, Monica enjoys playing tennis.

Word List B

cultural [KUL chuhr uhl] *adj.* having to do with the way of life of a particular people, including their customs, religions, ideas, and so on

Our country is made strong by cultural diversity.

discussion [di SKUSH uhn] *n.* argument on or consideration of a subject

The topic under discussion is after-school activities.

formal [FAWR muhl] *adj.* requiring elaborate dress and manners

Jan's formal gown was made of silk.

occasional [uh KAY zhuh nuhl] *adj.* occurring now and then

Don made occasional comments as he observed the game.

powerful [POW uhr fuhl] *adj.* strong; mighty

Alphonse's powerful play in the last quarter won the game.

refer [ri FUHR] *v.* to call attention to; to speak of

Marsha's comments refer to Angela's previous statement.

response [ri SPAHNS] *n.* a reply or reaction

The audience's response to the performance consisted of wild clapping.

suitable [SOOT uh buhl] *adj.* proper for the purpose or occasion

A suitable response is a simple thank you.

"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto
Vocabulary Warm-up Exercises

Exercise A Fill in each blank in the paragraph below with an appropriate word from Word List A. Use each word only once.

At first, Allie felt [1] _____ by what Charlie had said. Then she took some time to [2] _____ his exact words. As she thought about it, it became clear that he had issued a [3] _____. It seemed that he wanted to play a game of [4] _____ with her to determine who was the better player. Allie already knew that Charlie was [5] _____ poor at the game. It was [6] _____ that he would choose this game to prove his superiority. Why not a game of checkers, at which he was clearly the better player? His [7] _____ of talent at tennis was obvious to everyone who knew him. Just then, Allie remembered a [8] _____ she had recently overheard. It seemed that Charlie had been taking tennis lessons lately.

Exercise B Answer the questions with complete explanations.

1. Would it be suitable to give a twelve-year-old a car for his or her birthday?

2. If you were told that a dog exhibits occasional bursts of violence, would you want to be around that dog?

3. What might you expect to see and hear at a cultural event?

4. What would you wear to a formal event, such as a wedding?

5. What is your response when you are introduced to someone for the first time?

6. What is the difference between a discussion and a speech?

7. Suppose you are doing research on a certain topic, and ten sources refer to a certain book. Would you try to find that book?

8. Do you think that a powerful flea powder would kill fleas on a dog?

"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto**Reading Warm-up A**

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities.

Listen in on the conversation of historians talking about the origins of tennis. You will find that they do not all agree. In fact, they seem confused about how the game began. Some think that an early form of the game was played by the ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Romans. No one has ever found any ancient drawings or descriptions of tennislike games. However, a few Arabic words dating from ancient Egypt have interesting sounds. For example, consider the Egyptian town of Tinnis on the Nile. Also, think about the Arabic word *rahat*. It means "palm of the hand." Notice how close it is to the word *racquet*.

Other than those two words, there is a complete lack of evidence of any form of tennis before the year 1000. Most historians agree that the game was started by French monks. That would have been in the 1200s or 1300s. There is evidence that they played a crude form of handball. Sometimes they would play against their monastery walls. Other times they would string a rope across a courtyard and play over the rope. They called the game *jeu de paume*, meaning "game of the hand." Historians who challenge the idea of more ancient origins point to the French word *tenez* as proof. The word means "take this." It was said when one player served the ball.

As the game grew in popularity, indoor courts began to be used. The ball was still played off the walls. To protect their hands, players started using a glove. At first the glove had webbing between the fingers. It evolved into a handle with webbing attached—the first racquet.

The monks introduced the game to the nobility. Among them it became extremely popular. According to some accounts, there were as many as 1,800 tennis courts in France by the thirteenth century. Soon the game became popular in England, where over the years it evolved into the game we know today.

1. Underline the word that tells who is having a conversation about tennis.
2. Circle the words that explain what about tennis is the subject of the discussion.
3. Underline the words that tell what historians are confused about. What does confused mean?
4. Circle the word that tells what is interesting about the Arabic words.
5. Underline the two words that you are asked to consider.
6. Circle the words that tell what there is a lack of. What would you like to see in your classroom that there is a lack of now?
7. Underline the words that tell what the historians challenge.
8. Circle the words that tell what became extremely popular among the nobility. What does extremely mean?

"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto**Reading Warm-up B**

Read the following passage. Pay special attention to the underlined words. Then, read it again, and complete the activities.

The Japanese tea ceremony is a cultural tradition that follows a basic format. The host usually wears a kimono, a traditional Japanese costume. Guests have the choice of a kimono or other formal wear. After walking quietly and calmly through a garden, guests are met by the host, who silently greets them with a silent bow. Each guest's response is a similar bow. Everyone then removes his or her shoes and goes through a small door to enter the teahouse.

Once inside, guests admire the kettle, the flowers, and other decorations. The decorations, suitable to the season or the occasion, are always simple. Then the guests kneel on mats made of rice straw, resting on their heels. They watch as the host performs the various ceremonies. If no meal is offered, the host will serve small sweets. Then each utensil for the tea is cleaned in front of the guests in a precise way. The tea is prepared by whisking powdered green tea into hot water with a bamboo whisk. With much ceremony, bowing, and wiping of the bowl's rim, the bowl is passed among the guests.

After the guests have had the tea, the host cleans each utensil again. Again, much ceremony goes along with this. Guests take turns examining and admiring each item, often using a special cloth to handle each one. After the host collects the utensils, the guests depart. The host stands at the door and bows, ending the ceremony.

The ceremony is a time for the host and the guests to be spiritually refreshed. Discussion is limited. Guests relax, enjoying the atmosphere. They listen to the sounds of the water and the fire. They smell the incense and the tea. They make occasional comments. They might refer to the beauty of the teahouse as they enjoy one another's company. The ceremony is a powerful reminder of the importance of slowing down our hectic lives.

1. Circle the word that is described by cultural.
2. Underline the word that names a Japanese garment that can be worn on a formal occasion. Describe what you would wear on a formal occasion.
3. Circle the words that describe each guest's response to the host's bow.
4. Underline the noun that is described by suitable. What does suitable mean?
5. Circle the word that describes the amount of discussion at a tea ceremony. What is another word for discussion?
6. Underline the word that occasional describes. What does occasional mean?
7. Circle the words that explain what guests might refer to in their discussion.
8. Circle the root word in powerful. Define powerful.

"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto
Reading: Adjust Your Reading Rate to Recognize
Main Ideas and Key Points

The **main idea** is the central point of a passage or text. Most articles and essays have a main idea. Each paragraph or passage in the work also has a main idea, or **key point**.

The main idea of a paragraph is usually stated in a **topic sentence**—a sentence that identifies the key point. The paragraph then supplies **supporting details** that give examples, explanations, or reasons.

When reading nonfiction, **adjust your reading rate to recognize main ideas and key points.**

- **Skim** the article to get a sense of the main idea before you begin reading. Look over the text quickly, looking for text organization, topic sentences, and repeated words.
- **Scan** the text when you need to find answers to questions or to clarify or find supporting details. Run your eyes over the text, looking for a particular word or idea.
- **Read closely** to learn what the main ideas are and to identify the key points and supporting details.

A. DIRECTIONS: Scan each paragraph below to find answers to the questions that follow.

A western-style conversation between two people is like a game of tennis. If I introduce a topic, a conversational ball, I expect you to hit it back. If you agree with me, I don't expect you simply to agree and do nothing more. I expect you to add something—a reason for agreeing, another example, or an elaboration to carry the idea further. But I don't expect you always to agree. I am just as happy if you question me, or challenge me, or completely disagree with me. Whether you agree or disagree, your response will return the ball to me.

1. What game does the author discuss in this paragraph? _____

A Japanese-style conversation, however, is not at all like tennis or volleyball. It's like bowling. You wait for your turn. And you always know your place in line. It depends on such things as whether you are older or younger, a close friend or a relative stranger to the previous speaker, in a senior or junior position, and so on.

2. What game does the author discuss in this paragraph? _____

B. DIRECTIONS: Now, read the paragraphs closely for main ideas and supporting details.

1. What is the main idea of the first paragraph?

2. What are two details that support that main idea?

3. What is the main idea of the second paragraph?

4. What are two details that support that main idea?



Meet Nancy Masterson Sakamoto

(b. 1931)

Author of **CONVERSATIONAL BALLGAMES**

Nancy Masterson Sakamoto graduated from UCLA with an English degree. She married a Japanese artist and Buddhist priest, and the couple lived in Japan for twenty-four years. There, Sakamoto was a visiting professor at the University of Osaka, where she trained Japanese teachers who taught English to middle school and high school students.

Cultural Differences While living in Japan, Sakamoto was able to observe conversations from both the Japanese and American perspectives.

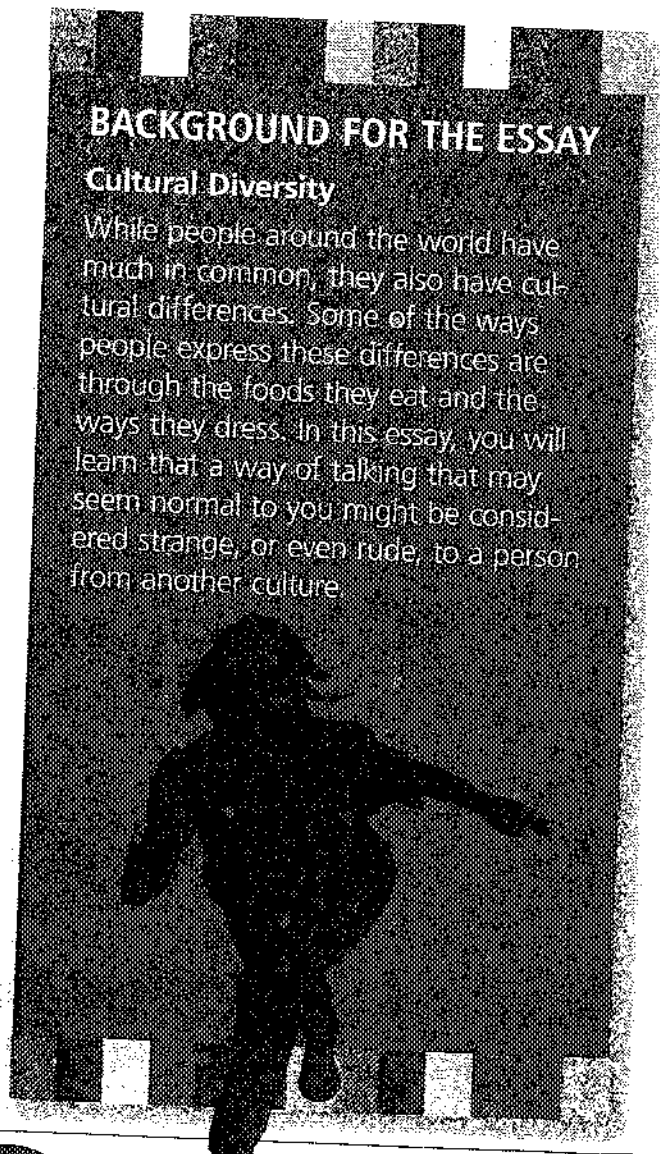
DID YOU KNOW?

Sakamoto was a professor of American Studies at Shitennoji Gakuen University in Hawaii.

BACKGROUND FOR THE ESSAY

Cultural Diversity

While people around the world have much in common, they also have cultural differences. Some of the ways people express these differences are through the foods they eat and the ways they dress. In this essay, you will learn that a way of talking that may seem normal to you might be considered strange, or even rude, to a person from another culture.



"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto
Vocabulary Builder

Word List

elaboration indispensable murmuring parallel suitable unconsciously

A. DIRECTIONS: Think about the meaning of the italicized word in each sentence. Then, answer the question.

1. If two lines run *parallel* to each other, what do you know about them?

2. If a speaker is *murmuring*, what might he or she be asked to do?

3. Why might someone who is learning Japanese say that a dictionary is *indispensable*?

4. If you were engaged in a conversation about cultural differences, and someone asked you for *elaboration*, what would you do?

5. If two cultures had different ideas about *suitable* times for serious conversation, would holding a meeting be simple or difficult?

6. Why is it hard to stop doing something if you do it *unconsciously*?

B. WORD STUDY: The suffix *-able* means "capable or worthy of being." Read the following sentences. Use your knowledge of the suffix *-able* to write a full sentence to answer each question.

1. Does a *capable* person need help?

2. If an experience is *enjoyable*, are you eager to have it end?

3. Is a *breakable* plate a good choice for a picnic?

CONVERSATIONAL BALLGAMES

Nancy Masterson
Sakamoto

Expository Essay
What do you think
the main topic of this
essay might be?

Vocabulary
unconsciously (un-
kăn' shəs lā) *adv.*
thoughtlessly

After I was married and had lived in Japan for a while, my Japanese gradually improved to the point where I could take part in simple conversations with my husband and his friends and family. And I began to notice that often, when I joined in, the others would look startled, and the conversational topic would come to a halt. After this happened several times, it became clear to me that I was doing something wrong. But for a long time, I didn't know what it was.

Finally, after listening carefully to many Japanese conversations, I discovered what my problem was. Even though I was speaking Japanese, I was handling the conversation in a western¹ way.

Japanese-style conversations develop quite differently from western-style conversations. And the difference isn't only in the languages. I realized that just as I kept trying to hold western-style conversations even when I was speaking Japanese, so my English students kept trying to hold Japanese-style conversations even when they were speaking English. We were unconsciously playing entirely different conversational ballgames. •

A western-style conversation between two people is like a game of tennis. If I introduce a topic, a conversational ball, I expect you to hit it back. If you agree with me, I don't expect

1. **western** *adj.* from the Western Hemisphere and Europe.

you simply to agree and do nothing more. I expect you to add something—a reason for agreeing, another example, or an elaboration to carry the idea further. But I don't expect you always to agree. I am just as happy if you question me, or challenge me, or completely disagree with me. Whether you agree or disagree, your response will return the ball to me.

And then it is my turn again. I don't serve a new ball from my original starting line. I hit your ball back again from where it has bounced. I carry your idea further, or answer your questions or objections, or challenge or question you. And so the ball goes back and forth, with each of us doing our best to give it a new twist, an original spin, or a powerful smash.

And the more vigorous the action, the more interesting and exciting the game. Of course, if one of us gets angry, it spoils the conversation, just as it spoils a tennis game. But getting excited is not at all the same as getting angry. After all, we are not trying to hit each other. We are trying to hit the ball. So long as we attack only each other's opinions, and do not attack each other personally, we don't expect anyone to get hurt. A good conversation is supposed to be interesting and exciting.

If there are more than two people in the conversation, then it is like doubles in tennis, or like volleyball. There's no waiting in line. Whoever is nearest and quickest hits the ball, and if you step back, someone else will hit it. No one stops the game to give you a turn. You're responsible for taking your own turn.

But whether it's two players or a group, everyone does his best to keep the ball going, and no one person has the ball for very long.

A Japanese-style conversation, however, is not at all like tennis or volleyball. It's like bowling. You wait for your turn. And you always know your place in line. It depends on such things as whether you are older or younger, a close friend or a relative stranger to the previous speaker, in a senior or junior position, and so on.

When your turn comes, you step up to the starting line with your bowling ball, and carefully bowl it. Everyone else stands back and watches politely, murmuring encouragement. Everyone waits until the ball has reached the end of the alley, and watches to see if it knocks down all the pins, or only some of them, or none of them. There is a pause, while everyone registers your score.

Main Idea

What details in this paragraph support the idea that conversation is like tennis?

Vocabulary

elaboration (ē lab' ə rā' shən) *n.* addition of more details

murmuring (mur' mər in) *v.* making low sounds that cannot be heard clearly



Spiral Review

Author's Point of View How does the author seem to feel about communication across cultures? Explain your answer.



Reading Check

What happens when the author tries to join Japanese conversations?

Vocabulary

parallel (par' ə lel') *adj.*
extending in the same
direction and at the
same distance apart

suitable (soōt' ə bel)
adj. appropriate

▼ Critical Viewing

How does this image fit
the author's description
of a conversation
between someone from
Japan and someone from
the west? [Connect]

There is no back
and forth at all.
All the balls run
parallel.

Then, after everyone is sure that you have completely finished your turn, the next person in line steps up to the same starting line, with a different ball. He doesn't return your ball, and he does not begin from where your ball stopped. There is no back and forth at all. All the balls run parallel. And there is always a suitable pause between turns. There is no rush, no excitement, no scramble for the ball. No wonder everyone looked startled when I took part in Japanese conversations. I paid no attention to whose turn it was, and kept snatching the ball halfway down the alley and throwing it back at the bowler. Of course the conversation died. I was playing the wrong game.

This explains why it is almost impossible to get a western-style conversation or discussion going with English students in Japan. I used to think that the problem was their lack of English language ability. But I finally came to realize that the biggest problem is that they, too, are playing the wrong game.

Whenever I serve a volleyball, everyone just stands back and watches it fall, with occasional murmurs of encouragement. No one hits it back. Everyone waits until I call on someone to take a turn. And when that person speaks, he doesn't hit my ball back.

He serves a new ball. Again, everyone just watches it fall.

So I call on someone else. This person does not refer to what the previous speaker has said. He also serves a new ball. Nobody seems to have paid any attention to what anyone

else has said. Everyone begins again from the same starting line, and all the balls run parallel. There is never any back and forth. Everyone is trying to bowl with a volleyball.

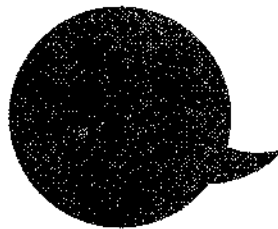
And if I try a simpler conversation, with only two of us, then the other person tries to bowl with my tennis ball. No wonder foreign English teachers in Japan get discouraged.

Now that you know about the difference in the conversational ballgames, you may think that all your troubles are over. But if you have been trained all your life to play one game, it is no simple matter to switch to another, even if you know the rules. Knowing the rules is not at all the same thing as playing the game.

Even now, during a conversation in Japanese I will notice a startled reaction, and belatedly realize that once again I have rudely interrupted by instinctively trying to hit back the other person's bowling ball. It is no easier for me to "just listen" during a conversation than it is for my Japanese students to "just relax" when speaking with foreigners. Now I can truly sympathize with how hard they must find it to try to carry on a western-style conversation.

If I have not yet learned to do conversational bowling in Japanese, at least I have figured out one thing that puzzled me for a long time. After his first trip to America, my husband complained that Americans asked him so many questions and made him talk so much at the dinner table that he never had a chance to eat. When I asked him why he couldn't talk and eat at the same time, he said that Japanese do not customarily think that dinner, especially on fairly formal occasions, is a suitable time for extended conversation.

Since westerners think that conversation is an indispensable part of dining, and indeed would consider it impolite not to converse with one's dinner partner, I found this Japanese custom rather strange. Still, I could accept it as a cultural difference even though I didn't really understand it. But when my husband added, in explanation, that Japanese consider it extremely rude to talk with one's mouth full, I



▲ Critical Viewing

Does this image illustrate the author's ideas about Japanese conversation? Explain. [Analyze]

Vocabulary

indispensable (in' di spen' sə bəl) *adj.*
absolutely necessary

✓ Reading Check

To what two sports does the author compare western-style conversation?

Main Idea

State the main idea of this paragraph in your own words.

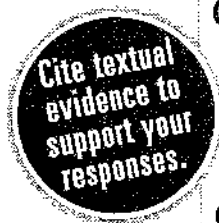
got confused. Talking with one's mouth full is certainly not an American custom. We think it very rude, too. Yet we still manage to talk a lot and eat at the same time. How do we do it?

For a long time, I couldn't explain it, and it bothered me. But after I discovered the conversational ballgames, I finally found the answer. Of course! In a western-style conversation, you hit the ball, and while someone else is hitting it back, you take a bite, chew, and swallow. Then you hit the ball again, and then eat some more. The more people there are in the conversation, the more chances you have to eat. But even with only two of you talking, you still have plenty of chances to eat.

Maybe that's why polite conversation at the dinner table has never been a traditional part of Japanese etiquette.² Your turn to talk would last so long without interruption that you'd never get a chance to eat.

2. etiquette (et' i kit) *n.* formal rules for polite behavior in society or in a particular group.

Critical Thinking



- © 1. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** What happened at first when the author joined in during conversations in Japan? **(b) Draw Conclusions:** What misunderstandings took place during those initial conversations? Use examples from the essay to support your response.
- © 2. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** To what sports or games does the author compare Japanese-style and western-style conversations? **(b) Apply:** What do the author and her family and friends need to understand about each other?
- © 3. **Key Ideas and Details (a)** How do the Japanese feel about conversing during dinner? **(b) Compare and Contrast:** How does their behavior compare with westerners' behavior during a meal?
- © 4. **Integration of Knowledge and Ideas (a)** How does awareness of other cultures help us to communicate with people? **(b)** How does it help us to understand the world better? *[Connect to the Big Question: What should we learn?]*

Name _____

Date _____

"Conversational Ballgames" by Nancy Masterson Sakamoto**Open-Book Test****Short Answer** Write your responses to the questions in this section on the lines provided.

1. Toward the beginning of "Conversational Ballgames," author Nancy Masterson Sakamoto compares western conversations to tennis. In what two ways are western-style conversations and tennis similar?

2. In the middle of "Conversational Ballgames," the author states that Japanese-style conversations are "not at all like tennis or volleyball. It's like bowling." What two details in the paragraph with this statement support this main idea?

3. In the middle of "Conversational Ballgames," the author says that in Japanese conversations, all the conversational "balls run parallel." What does she mean by this? Base your answer on the meaning of *parallel*.

4. In the middle of "Conversational Ballgames," the author says she "was playing the wrong game" when she took part in Japanese conversation. What does she mean by this? Explain.

5. What custom do Japanese people and westerners agree about at the end of "Conversational Ballgames"? How does this custom affect dinner conversation?

6. In "Conversational Ballgames," the author gives details of two different conversational styles. Fill in this chart with two details about each type of conversation. Then, provide an appropriate title for your chart.

Japanese-style Conversation	Western-style Conversation

Title: _____

7. What kind of essay is "Conversational Ballgames"? Explain your answer.

8. What two processes does "Conversational Ballgames" explain? Is the organization of the information in this essay comparison and contrast, or is it problem and solution? Explain your answer.

9. An essay's title often reflects its main idea. What other title could describe "Conversational Ballgames"? Explain your answer.

10. The author of "Conversational Ballgames" compares Japanese-style conversation to the game of bowling. How is this conversation like bowling? Do people take turns speaking? Do people interrupt each other?

Name _____

Date _____

Essay

Write an extended response to the question of your choice or to the question or questions your teacher assigns you.

11. In an essay, describe an advantage and a disadvantage of one of the styles of conversation described in "Conversational Ballgames." First, briefly describe the conversational style. Then, explain one advantage and one disadvantage. Use examples from the selection to support your points.
12. Most Americans are used to the western style of conversation described in "Conversational Ballgames." Imagine a conversation in the Japanese style. How would that conversation be different from the conversations you are used to? In an essay, describe what would be different about the Japanese-style conversation. Cite details from Sakamoto's essay to support your points.
13. Toward the end of "Conversational Ballgames," Nancy Masterson Sakamoto says it is no easier for her to "just listen" during a conversation than it is for her Japanese students to "just relax" when speaking with foreigners. What does she mean by this? How does the statement reflect the subject of her essay? In an essay of your own, explain the statement and the author's meaning. Support your explanation with details from the essay.

Literary Analysis: Expository Essay

An **expository essay** is a short piece of nonfiction that explains, defines, or interprets ideas, events, or processes. The way in which the information is organized and presented depends on the specific topic of the essay. Writers organize the main points of their essays logically, to aid readers' comprehension. They may organize information in one of these ways or in a combination of ways:

- Comparison and contrast
- Cause and effect
- Chronological order
- Problem and solution

"Conversational Ballgames" is an expository essay that explains two processes. It uses comparison and contrast to make the explanation clear. In the paragraph below, the details set up the differences between Japanese and western styles of conversation.

Japanese-style conversations develop quite differently from western-style conversations. And the difference isn't only in the languages. I realized that just as I kept trying to hold western-style conversations even when I was speaking Japanese, so my English students kept trying to hold Japanese-style conversations even when they were speaking English.

DIRECTIONS: Use this chart to compare and contrast Japanese-style conversation and western-style conversation. In the left-hand column, write five characteristics of western-style conversations as those conversations are described in "Conversational Ballgames." In the right-hand column, describe how the Japanese style differs from, or is similar to, each characteristic described on the left.

Western-Style Conversation	Japanese-Style Conversation
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	