

Haruko and Kiku. Karen bowed politely. She was glad her parents had taught her some of the Japanese customs.

Karen removed her shoes as she entered the house. She looked around curiously. Instead of walls, sliding doors of rice paper divided the rooms. The floors were covered with thick straw mats called *tatami*.

Karen's cousin, Kiku, led her to a low table in the center of the next room. They knelt on floor cushions with their feet tucked under them. Karen noticed a square hole in the floor beneath the table. She asked, "Do you keep something under there?"

Uncle Hisashi explained, "That is a *kotatsu*. We keep hot coals in it during cool weather.



*These Japanese are enjoying tea. The low table, the tatami mats, and the floor cushions are traditional. Also notice the sliding doors on the left. The electric heater is a modern addition.*