"Honey!" Robbie's mother called from upstairs. "If you're making tea, can you make me some?"

Robbie wasn't making tea, and he suspected his mother knew that. She had just brought him home from school, and tea was the last thing on his mind. She should have realized that he wanted to pull off his shoes, flop down onto the couch, and stare at the ceiling until he drifted off into his afternoon nap. The last thing he wanted was to be hustling around the kitchen, fiddling with spoons and teapots, and fussy little bags of tea. Making tea was the opposite of a nap, and after a long day at school, Robbie knew there was nothing that would make him happier than a nice little nap.

But he also knew when his mother said "If you're making tea," it wasn't a question. It was a command. "If you're making tea, can you make me some?" meant, "Hey Robbie-why don't you make us some tea already!" Robbie knew the code. And so he hauled himself off the sofa, rubbed his bleary eyes, and started to fix tea.

The trouble had started six months earlier, when Robbie decided to quit drinking soda.

"The dentist says it's rotting my teeth," he told his mother. "He says that if I quit, I might not get any more cavities. I can't stand the thought of getting any more cavities."

"Who needs soda anyway? It rots your teeth and it makes you burp and it tastes like a melted Popsicle. I think you should try drinking tea."

"Tea? Like proper old English ladies drink?"

"Do I look like a proper old English lady?!"

Robbie shook his head. His mother wasn't old, she wasn't English, and she definitely wasn't
proper. She dressed in long, colorful dresses, big floppy hats, and scarves that went all the way to the floor. She called herself a hippie, but Robbie had always thought of her as a goofball: kooky but harmless. She called tea her "bad habit," but Robbie couldn't think of a more harmless thing to indulge in. He rarely saw her without her rainbow mug clutched between her hands. When she had too much tea and began to feel jittery, she would switch to one of her herbal teas: jasmine or chamomile, mixed berry or "lemon zinger." Robbie wondered what the appeal was.

"It's got to be better for my teeth than soda, anyway."

And so he tried tea, and he liked it. He liked green tea and black tea, white tea and herbal tea. He liked it with lemon, and he liked it with milk. He avoided sugar—was the whole point of quitting soda—but sometimes he added a little honey. And the more tea he drank, the more his mother drank, too. He'd never thought it possible that Mom could drink more tea than she already did, but she seemed to have a limitless appetite. Every time he was about to sit down to do homework, watch TV, or take a nap, she would call from upstairs:

"Honey? If you're making tea, could you make me some?"

And he would get to work.

"I'm starting to feel like Cinderella," he muttered to himself as he filled the kettle with water. "At least I'm getting good at this."

He had become something of a tea expert. The first thing he learned was the difference between a tea kettle and a teapot. A kettle is what you put on the stove to heat the water. A teapot is what you put loose tea in, and fill with boiling water to make tea. Despite what the song "I'm A Little Teapot" said, it was not a good idea to put a teapot over an open flame. It wouldn't get all steamed up and shout, Robbie knew. It would just explode.

When the water boiled, Robbie poured a little into the teapot. He let it sit for a moment, swirling it around before dumping the water out. Now the teapot was warm and wouldn't cool down the water when he filled it up. He scooped out three teaspoons of tea leaves—one for him, one for mom, and one "for the pot," which just meant one extra—and poured the boiling water on top of it.

It would take four minutes for the tea to steep. Four minutes when Robbie could be taking a nap. Four minutes when...boy, his eyes were getting heavy. His arms were moving slowly. He wanted to be asleep more than anything in the world, or at least, more than he wanted to be watching the second hand on the clock, waiting for the tea to finish.

He poured a little milk in the bottom of two mugs. When four minutes had passed, he poured the finished tea into each one. The color of the tea was just right: a pale brown, which told him he had put in just the right amount of milk.

He clomped up the stairs, a mug in one hand, and set it down beside his mother.

"Thanks, sweetheart," she said.

He left silently. It was nice to be thanked, but a nap would have been better. He flopped back down onto the couch, shut his eyes, and opened them again. His mug of tea was on the counter, a wisp of steam rising from it, catching the late afternoon light. He took a careful sip: it was a perfect cup.

Maybe he would skip the nap today.
Ceremonial Teahouse: Sunkaraku

This text and image are provided courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art.
Imagine that you are a guest at this Japanese teahouse set in a tranquil garden. Before the tea
ceremony begins, you wait in the building on the right to quietly prepare for the ritual. After a signal from the host, you walk slowly along the stone path to a mossy stone basin and wash your face and hands. Before entering the teahouse, you must remove your shoes and bow, then crawl through a small door. Its low height is meant to remind you and the other guests to enter the tearoom and the ceremony with humility and respect. Once inside, you may notice that there are no chairs. Instead, there are three tatami (mats made of rice-plant straw) on the floor. The entire teahouse is made from natural materials such as cedar and bamboo, creating a sense of harmony with nature. A branch of Japanese evergreen extends along the half wall inside the house as a reminder of what grew there before.

The Japanese tea ceremony engages all five senses: you can smell the woody scent of the surrounding garden, hear the wind in the trees outside, feel the teabowl and chakin (napkin) in your hands, see a beautiful painting or ceramic pot in the tokonoma (alcove), and taste the hot green tea and sweets. During this detailed and elegant ritual, each movement is performed with careful attention to four spiritual qualities: respect (kei), harmony (wa), purity (sei), and tranquility (jaku). With these in mind, the tea ceremony becomes a contemplative, calming experience.

Philadelphia Museum of Art: Purchased with Museum funds, 1928-114-1
Use the article "Ceremonial Teahouse: Sunkaraku" to answer questions 1 to 2
1. A Japanese tea ceremony is performed "with careful attention to four spiritual qualities." What are these qualities?

2. How might the teahouse itself contribute to the quality of harmony during a tea ceremony? Support your answer with evidence from the text, image, or both.

Use the article "Tea Time!" to answer questions 3 to 4
3. What would Robbie rather be doing than making tea?

4. What qualities does Robbie display when making tea? Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Use the articles "Tea Time!" and "Ceremonial Teahouse: Sunkaraku" to answer questions 5 to 6
5. What do "Ceremonial Teahouse: Sunkaraku" and "Tea Time!" have in common?

6. Contrast the qualities of a Japanese tea ceremony with the qualities Robbie displays when making tea.