

Listening Sample Script

Listening Monologue - Cherry Blossoms

Spring in Washington DC begins each year with the famous Cherry Blossom Festival. It's hard to believe, but many years ago there were no cherry trees there at all.

The story of how the cherry trees arrived in the US is just as interesting as the flowers themselves. But it might not have happened without the help of a few people who really cared.

Eliza Scidmore was a writer and photographer who loved cherry blossoms. After living in Japan, she came back to Washington, DC in 1885. She brought pictures of the trees with her and called them "the most beautiful thing in the world." She asked the US government to plant some in the city. At first, they said no. But she didn't give up and asked again every year.

In the early 1900s, American farms had very few types of plants. A scientist named David Fairchild wanted to find new plants that could be useful for US farmers. He brought back fruits like mangoes from India, peaches from China, and avocados from Chile. In 1902, he saw Japan's cherry blossom trees, or 'sakura', for the first time. Unlike the fruit trees and crops he had imported, the sakura trees had no immediate economic value. Still, he decided to bring them to the US and ordered 125 trees for his front garden.

At the time, Japan had just started to open up to the rest of the world. They wanted to share their culture and make peaceful connections with other nations. The person who sold the trees was so happy to have an American buyer that he only asked for 10 cents per tree.

In 1906, the trees in Fairchild's garden flowered for the first time. News of the pink flowers spread and many tourists came to see them. Excited by the interest, Fairchild ordered 300 more as a gift for his town. Pleased with the results of their planting, he and his wife also began telling people that the trees would be a good choice for planting on the streets of Washington.

Years later, President Theodore Roosevelt wanted to improve the city's appearance. At the time, Washington, DC was extremely dirty with mud from the Potomac River, and his wife believed cherry blossoms would be the perfect solution. The president agreed. In addition to their beauty, the couple also saw the trees as a way to strengthen the connection between the two countries.

In 1909, the mayor of Tokyo donated 2,000 young trees to Washington. But they arrived in bad condition... their roots had been cut too short and they were full of insects. Worried about foreign plant diseases, US officials burned them in a large fire. Not wanting their gift to be seen as a failure, Japanese officials quickly sent a second shipment – this time bigger and with healthier trees. 3,020 tall, strong trees were sent; these were the ones that were finally planted.

On March 27, 1912, the US president's wife planted the first two trees in a small private ceremony near the Potomac River. The wife of the Japanese politician planted the second tree, and Fairchild soon joined in.

Today, most of the original trees are gone... Cherry trees usually live for about 25 years, 50 if they're lucky. Of the original 3,020, only two remain. They stand near the Washington Monument, next to a plaque that marks the day they were planted: March 27, 1912.

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