

## FEBRUARY, 2016: BREEZE ISSUE #100

A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



### 2015 J-LEAP REPORT BY MIHOKO TSUJINO

*Castro Valley High School  
Castro Valley, CA*

First of all I've been lucky to have a nice Co-Teacher, Gozu Hisae sensei, host family and friends. Thanks to them, I always enjoy my time here. My host family's favorite song "Mr.Roboto" by Styx has the famous lyrics "Domo Arigato".

Hello. My name is Mihoko Tsujino. I have been working as an assistant Japanese teacher at Castro Valley High School (CVHS) located within Castro Valley, a census designated place in the East Bay region of Northern California. The East Bay area contains many suburbs from which residents commute to places like San Francisco or Silicon Valley, on a daily basis. So, it is a great place to live because its proximity to large metropolitan areas means that you can choose to live a quieter life in a suburban place like Castro Valley, if you so please.

So let me give you some background information on the relationship and similarities that California has with Japan. First of all, I think that while the image of California might make many of you think about the beach or sunshine, a lot of people who live in the Bay Area never go to the beach, even in the summer. Reason being that even though California is known for having warmer, sunnier places like Los Angeles or San Diego, it's a very large state (of a similar shape to, but slightly larger than Japan) meaning that the environment is very different when you compare places like San Francisco to places like San Diego; just as it is when you compare, for example, places like Fukuoka, in southern Japan, to places like Sendai, of northern Japa state's large size is one reason why people living here in California are able to uniquely

experience many different types of places within the same state; there are some metropolitan cities like San Francisco or Los Angeles, but on the other hand, there is still a lot of nature, like at Yosemite National Park.

Because of appealing points such as this (as well as due to many more that I won't discuss), many tourists come each year from Japan. In addition, California has historical, economical, and educational ties to Japan. From when Japanese immigrants first moved here in the 1860's, the population of Japanese nationals and Japanese Americans living in California has grown to become one of the largest in the US. Similar in concept to Chinatowns, California has three "Japantowns", which are located in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and San Jose. These are the only three in the US. Economically, Japan is California's 4th largest export market after Mexico, Canada, and China. Approximately 20% of Japan's US imports are from California. Also, a lot of people here are interested in Japan, and about 200 people go to Japan each year through the JET program. Of course, some CVHS students also say that they want to do so as well, after they graduate. Because of these many factors, I think that California is one of the best states for high school students who are eager to learn about Japanese language and culture.

Next, I'm going to tell you about my school and my Japanese classes. There are about 3,000 students attending CVHS, almost all of which are studying to enter college after they graduate. The ethnic makeup of the student population includes: 32% White, 27% Asian, 23% Hispanic, 10% African American, 7% Pacific Islander and 1% Native American/Alaskan. I can say that the diversity of the student body at CVHS reflects that of Northern California as a whole.

As for the Japanese classes at CVHS, we have five levels: Japanese 1, 2, 3, 4, and Advanced Placement (AP), with about 160 students in total. In Japanese 1 class, students learn to write Hiragana, Katakana, and about 60 Kanji, as well as how to hold basic conversations. From Japanese 2 through Japanese 4, the grammar covered in class gradually becomes more and more complex, and more time is devoted to learning about culture. By the end of Japanese 4, students should be able to write more than 300 kanji characters. In AP Japanese, with the goal of passing the AP test, students begin to learn about Japanese literature and history through excerpts from authentic materials, while attaining a high level of conversational proficiency. About half of the students that take Japanese 3 and 4 continue on to take AP Japanese. Emi Crow-sensei, my lead teacher, and I, teach six classes in total. Two Japanese 1 classes, two Japanese 2 classes, one class with combined students from Japanese 3 and from Japanese 4, and one AP Japanese class.

My job duties include: helping to conduct student activities, teaching about cultural differences between that of the US and Japan, teaching one class within the combined Japanese 3 and 4 class period, grading students' performance, and planning lessons and activities together with Crow-sensei. I know the above stated class goals are not easy, but the students are very good and study hard.

Although we love teaching Japanese at CVHS, having to teach 160 students, spread across different levels, in six classes, can be exhausting. I can't believe that Crow-sensei had to teach all of the students by herself before I came. With that in mind, I would like to continue doing as

much as I can to assist her. I think that in doing so, it would provide an even better environment for connecting to students and meeting their educational needs.

I am so honored to be able to be here, having such a good time teaching. I really appreciate Crow-sensei's guidance as my lead teacher, as well as for teaching alongside with me. Also, I would like to say thank you to my CVHS students for having me as their sensei. The past 6 months have gone by all too quickly, so for the remaining year and a half, I would like to continue doing my best, enjoying my time here teaching the wonderful students at Castro Valley High School.

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