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



2016 J-LEAP REPORT BY SAKURAKO HIROIKE

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Hello. I am Sakurako Hiroike.

I am currently teaching Japanese with my Lead Teacher, Deana Kramer sensei at Perry High School in Massillon, Ohio.

Massillon is in the north east part of Ohio, which is about the same latitude as Aomori in Japan. Although it is not a big city, there is a lot of green landscape and scenery. The people are nice and friendly. Right now we are enjoying pretty autumn trees and leaves. What surprised me most about this city was the fact that I literally could not go anywhere without driving. There is really no public transportation. Although at first I found it a little inconvenient, now I feel it is more comfortable not having to use public transportation. All in all, I LOVE living here.

Perry High School is in a community between two small cities. There are four levels of Japanese; 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th, with a total of about 120 students. Kramer sensei uses Japanese almost all of the time in class. The students are very nice and respectful, and I am surprised at how enthusiastic and passionate they are toward learning Japanese. They always give their best effort to what we give them, and as a language learner myself, I have been learning a lot from them. This is my first time to work in a real class room, and I feel so lucky to be with an experienced teacher like Kramer sensei. I have been learning a lot from her every day.

Kramer sensei and I teach Japanese history and cultural events as well as language. This year, we have been teaching Japanese history, in Japanese, to our third year students. Initially, we taught history only using slides with visuals, but found it was very difficult for the students to understand. Kramer sensei and I decided to change the way we were teaching. After showing a brief overview of each era, we decided to create short, fun stories which include important events and characteristics about each era. Some days students listen to the stories. Other days the students work in small groups to draw pictures to illustrate the stories. This approach has really helped the students understand history better.

Before I started to teach here, I used to think teachers always plan and teach in the same way. Through this experience, however, I learned that teachers have to be flexible and adjust to meet the students' needs. We use a lot of different strategies during each class period to help them learn better.



Outside of the classroom, we have Japanese club which includes fun activities. We want students to be interested in Japanese culture and language. In our last meeting, we held an *omikoshi* competition. After an officer of the club introduced the concepts of *omikoshi* as a portable Shinto shrine, students made their own *omikoshi* in groups. This week, we visited the intermediate school in our district and began a Japanese club for fifth and sixth grade students. We introduced *teruteru bouzu*, listened to the song and made *teru teru bouzu* together. We also did a chopsticks race using marshmallows. I am amazed how our officers and club members prepare and work hard to plan the meetings. I was so impressed to see the high school students working with the younger students. They taught the kids basic greetings and how to write a few hiragana. With the younger children, the high school students looked even more mature than usual. The fifth and sixth grade students looked like they were having fun doing these activities. Through these activities, we hope students will be more interested in Japanese cultures and be inspired to learn Japanese when they get to the high school.

Three months have passed since I came to this country and I am having the greatest time. I would like to show my deepest appreciation to Kramer sensei, our students, my host family, my friends, and all of the people who have been involved in this experience. I am sure this experience will be the treasure of my entire life, and I am looking forward to building stronger connections with all of these people as I continue living and working here.

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