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



2016 J-LEAP REPORT BY KEI YAMAGUCHI

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Konnichiwa and hello, my name is Kei Yamaguchi. I have been working as an assistant teacher at Cabell Midland High School and Huntington High School in West Virginia. I am teaching Japanese here with my Lead teacher, Meagan sensei.

The first time I was told that I was going to West Virginia, only the song “Country road” came to mind. Then I told my family about it, and they also thought of “Country Road”. However, I found out even Americans don’t really know where West Virginia is located. Some people think West Virginia is just the western part of the state of Virginia. It has been 4 months since I came here and I have found it to be a very nice place. I really like the statement, “Wild and Wonderful” which you can see when you come to this state.

I’m working at two high schools. I go to one school in the morning and drive to the other school after lunch. We have our own class room in the afternoon but we don’t at the other school. We use other teachers’ classrooms. One of these teachers greets us “Good morning” in Japanese which is “Ohayo gozaimasu”. There are three classes at each school with about 100 students combined. Our Japanese classes are a little unique because four of them are mixed levels. For example, first period class is split between JapaneseI and JapaneseIII. There is a huge gap in Japanese proficiency levels. Therefore we divided our class so my LT teaches JapaneseIII and I teach JapaneseI. Every day, I make lesson plans for four classes including JapaneseI& share the materials with Meagan sensei. This is a really good opportunity for me to learn to teach Japanese by observing Meagan sensei. She teaches grammar and creates activ.

the students use the grammar they learn. I feel very lucky to work as an assistant teacher with my LT because she shares everything, accepts my ideas, and communicates with me a lot. She teaches me American culture and many words that I would never learn by myself.

My job as an assistant teacher is making quizzes, grading, walking around the classroom to support students, and modeling dialogue with Meagan sensei. Also, since I'm teaching Japanese I students from the beginning, I've been watching them improve step by step. They started studying how to write Hiragana and now they are able to read and answer questions in Hiragana. This improvement makes me really impressed and touched. I'm really proud of my students. In the classroom, I use only Japanese, no English. The first couple months, students couldn't understand and seemed confused. However, recently, they are getting used to it day by day. For example, I use "Daijoubu" a lot which means, "It's alright" or "you are alright". So students picked up the word and didn't need to ask us for the meaning. It made us really happy because students actually listen and pay attention when we talk.

We had finals from Dec 20th to 22nd. At the same time, we also had oral exams in the hallway. I talked with each student for about 3 minutes and asked questions about them. Of course, we studied and made a script but I asked questions and they had to ask me, too. Higher level Japanese students can ask me additional questions based on my reply. It was a really good opportunity for both my students and I because we can learn from each other. I can learn more about our students, for example what they like, and how much Japanese they can actually use. For our students, I felt that they can feel confident talking with me. A few students said, they are going to talk to me in Japanese more which is really great!

There are many funny experiences I have had at school. Since I started working at the high schools, I get many chances to talk with other foreign language teachers. When we talk, Meagan sensei accidentally replies in Japanese to them, then they also reply in their own language. Since I can also speak Malaysian, Meagan sensei and I often speak the wrong language at the wrong time. I felt it was such an excellent and funny moment.

I'm not only teaching Japanese, but also learning English every day. Sometimes, I catch words from conversation between Meagan sensei and our students. When I hear that, I ask the meaning at that moment in Japanese so students can see I'm also studying. They notice that I'm taking notes when I ask Meagan sensei about new words. She also asks me questions about Japanese, which is really great! She asks questions in front of students so it's really good for students to notice that we are both learning together. Some students think Japanese is really hard but we keep telling them that they have just started to learn. Once they figure out that learning a new language takes time and that even their teachers are still learning, they will feel more comfortable to keep studying.

Lastly, I really appreciate everyone who I've met through this program. They teach me American culture, language, etc. I feel that I'm really lucky to be a part of this program and I look forward to all the new experiences I have here in West Virginia during the next 2 ye

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