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



### 2016 J-LEAP REPORT BY NATSUMI UEJO

*Silver Creek High School  
San Jose, CA*

“Mistakes are treasures” is the motto in our Japanese classes. My Lead Teacher (LT), Nicholas Sturtevant, believes “mistakes are treasures” because mistakes are the only way that we learn a language. In fact, they're the only way we learn pretty much anything. And

he also likes the phrase because it makes him think about diamonds and how they look like dirty rocks at first and need to be polished. If you don't have dirt on the outside, you certainly won't have a diamond on the inside. So by slowly taking off and polishing away the dirt, you get a diamond. And that is just like learning a language.

Hello. My name is Natsumi Uejo. I work at Silver Creek High School (SCHS) as a Japanese language assistant teacher in San Jose, CA. Half a year has already passed since I came to San Jose. Time flies so fast!

San Jose is the third-largest city by population in California and is known as the capital of Silicon Valley. There are a lot of famous IT companies nearby, such as Google and Facebook. San Jose is a very convenient place to live because there are big shopping malls, Japan Town, a Japanese supermarket, and also Japanese restaurants. Also, it only takes about one hour to go to San Francisco by car. Though this is my first time to live in the U.S., I feel very comfortable.

SCHS is the only school in the district that offers a Japanese language program. Students have to take one language for two years and can choose from among Spanish, Japanese, French, and Vietnamese. The student demographic at SCHS is very diverse, but students who take Japanese language are mostly Asian American, especially Vietnamese American, so it sometimes feel like I'm teaching Japanese in Asia. There are about 2,500 students at the school, and 183 of them are taking Japanese this year. We have 6 classes each day: two Japanese 1 classes, two Japanese 2 classes, a Japanese 3 class, and an AP class. I support the students who need help, grade students' work, demonstrate pronunciation, make class materials, and introduce Japanese culture. I feel that our students are very well-behaved and heartwarming. When my LT was absent for the first time, I was so nervous. But my students listened to me and the students who understood what I said explained things to the other students who didn't. They helped me to continue our classes. I'm really happy to have such nice students.



Tuesday through Thursday, we have Japan Bowl Club after school. Japan Bowl is an academic competition that tests the skill levels of high school students throughout the United States who are studying the Japanese language. It also tests the students' knowledge of Japan. There are 17 students participating, and they placed 5th last year. They study Japanese history, idioms, onomatopoeia, culture, and current news based on study guides every week. They're working so hard to win Japan Bowl this year!

“Akemashite omedetou gozaimasu. Kotoshi mo yoroshiku onegaishimasu.”



The new semester has begun. The first week was Japanese culture week in our class. We showed a video of my relative's New Year's gathering, played Japanese traditional games such as karuta, fukuwarai, sugoroku, and otedama, and also wrote our New Year's resolutions in calligraphy. The last day of the week, the students presented them to the class. I was surprised because a lot of my students' resolutions were studying hard and getting good grades. They're so hardworking.

My New Year's resolution is “Challenging”. I am going to start taking English as a Second Language (ESL) classes after school four times a week at the adult education program. There are two reasons why I'm taking ESL. One is to improve my English skills, and the other is

learn more about teaching a language. I think taking ESL class is a good opportunity to become aware of my students' needs because I have empathy for them. Plus, I can get some ideas for practice activities from the ESL class, and I would like to try to use them in my Japanese class.

During my arrival training, I expressed my three goals for the next two years. Firstly, I will keep smiling and be positive if I have difficulties in the U.S. Secondly, I would like to deepen the intercultural understanding between Japan and the United States and share my knowledge of the differences between Japanese and American culture/customs with my students. Thirdly, I'll also cooperate with my LT to create classes that use the team-teaching philosophy, and I'll work to increase student engagement and involvement in Japanese classes. To reach my goals, I'll work hard for the rest of my time here.

Lastly, I'm thankful to have had the opportunity to be an assistant teacher in such a nice school. I'm always thankful for all the support that I've received from JF, TLI, my host family, and friends. It has been an amazing six months at SCHS.

Breeze #122	▼
Breeze #121	▼
Breeze #120	▼
Breeze #119	
Breeze #118	
Breeze #117	
Breeze #116	
Breeze #115	▼
Breeze #114	▼
Breeze #113	▼
Breeze #112	

Japanese Language Education Update 39

2016 J-LEAP Report: Hina

2016 J-LEAP Report: Natsumi Uejo

Breeze #111



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