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2017 J-LEAP REPORT BY YUI KIMURA

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Since I was in high school, it was my dream to work in the U.S. I will never forget when I received the letter from The Japan Foundation with the words “ACCEPTED” on it. My life here has just started but I am sure the next two years will be one of the most significant parts

of my life.

Konnichiwa. Hello! I am Yui Kimura. I am from Fukuoka. I am teaching Japanese with Kristin Wingate-sensei in Cranford, NJ. It has already been three months since I arrived from Japan. So far, I am really enjoying my time in New Jersey.

I've been working in Cranford, NJ, where it only takes an hour to get to NYC by train. Cranford is such a beautiful town with lots of trees and parks. New Jersey is called “The Garden State”. You will agree with this nickname if you ever come here as there are so many squirrels, rabbits, and deer in the streets and parks. New Jersey is located just beside the one of the biggest cities in the world but it is beautiful with nature and it is very comfortable.

I am co-teaching Japanese with Wingate-sensei in Hillside Avenue School (middle school) and Cranford High School. In the morning we go to Hillside Avenue School first and have class with the 6th, 7th, and 8th graders. After that, we drive to the high school, which takes only 10 minutes by car. In the afternoon, depending on the block schedule, we have one or two classes in the high school.

My first impression being in American public schools is that students talk a lot! In comparison with Japanese students, I think both have good points and bad points. Japanese students listen to their teachers more than American students do but I think they are not as good at expressing themselves. But on the other hand, American students feel free to ask their teacher anything in class so they are good at expressing their feelings. Meanwhile, Japanese students are more hesitant.

Secondly, I was so surprised at how much the students knew of Japan. They know so much about Japanese anime or games - they know more than me! Japanese food such as sushi or ramen is also popular here. It really serves as good motivation for them to learn Japanese.

This is a great opportunity for me to see the difference between Japanese and American schools and what the image of Japan is for Americans.

In class, Wingate-sensei and I teach together. I assist her when we do listening comprehension or we often show the students a skit in Japanese. I also show the classes how to write hiragana, katakana or kanji. I have experience teaching Japanese in Japan as I taught for one year in a Japanese language school. But Wingate-sensei has been teaching Japanese for over 6 years in the U.S., so this is great experience for me to see how she teaches her classes. We have different level classes from the 6th grade in middle school to the seniors in high school so she changes how she teaches in every grade.



In high school we have one class that is a mixed-level course. So Wingate-sensei takes care of lower level students and I take care of higher level one. Now I am trying to teach only in Japanese, which is difficult for me. I have to make the students understand and they also have to listen carefully in order to understand me. But through my experience learning a language, it is really important to understand the target language in the target language. Also, if you want to learn a language quickly it depends on how often you hear it and how many times you speak it. Actually, to be honest, I currently speak too much English in our classes. So I am trying to change my methods and I hope it will help my students.

In addition to teaching, Wingate-sensei and I run Japanese clubs in both schools. Since it is still the beginning of the school year, we have not done any cultural activities yet, but members of the club are all interested in Japanese pop culture such as anime, manga, or Japanese characters. At the first meeting they said, "I want to wear kimono," or "I want to cosplay!" or "I want to make sushi," and it made me excited. I think that they are really having fun with Japanese culture and are enjoying it. I feel embarrassed that I was not interested in Japanese anime so I don't know too much about it, but I would like to learn more about it with the students. But I would like to share my experience too, so I'm looking forward to teaching

how to wear yukata, how to cook Japanese food, or how to use chopsticks properly and introduce them to Japanese culture. I hope students become more familiar with Japan and deepen their interest in Japan.

I came here not only to teach Japanese and the culture but also to learn English and American culture, too. Right now, I'm staying with a host family in Cranford. During this stay I am hoping to learn American culture and improve my English.

At first that was hard to get used to the surroundings and I'm still in a continuous process of trial and error. "Worries make you grow up." In different surroundings sometimes it is so hard for me but I know it make me grow up. And I would not be here without the support of my family, friends, lead teacher Kristin Wingate and the Japan Foundation and The Laurasian Institution staff. Thank you so much to all who have supported me. I want to cherish my time here for the next two years.

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