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



2018 J-LEAP REPORT BY YU HIRAOKA

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Hello from Nebraska! My name is Yu Hiraoka. I have been working in Lincoln Southwest High School since last summer. The breathtaking beauty of the sunset that I see on the way back from grocery shopping makes me feel very lucky to be here. Lincoln has become one of my hometowns.

When people say “Nebraska,” we might think of the vast land with a lot of corn fields, and the cruel weather, hot summers and cold winters. Or some might look up the location on the map first, which I did when I was informed of my job assignment! What I appreciate the most here after six months, are the people. I feel grateful that I can live and work in such a

beautiful place with the nicest people.

Lincoln is the capital and the second-most populous city in Nebraska, with about 285,000 people. It is located on the Great Plains. (The Great Plains...I learned the word in geography class a long time ago! It is amazing to think about now that I live here!) Lincoln has 6 public high schools and our high school is one of the biggest among them, with nearly 2000 students. It is the only one that offers a Japanese language program. Here, I am assisting the fun, creative, and energetic Lead Teacher (LT), Tammy Cunningham in her Japanese classes.

Although I came as an Assistant Teacher (AT), she treats me as a co-teacher and she gives me equal opportunity to teach in the class, which I am very thankful for! It is very fun to plan, do the lessons, and interact with the students together with her.

One of the characteristics of our high school is that we operate on a 4x4 block scheduling system, which means there are four 90-minute classes a day - every day. The advantage is that we can teach many more things in a day, and our students can finish two levels of Japanese courses in a year. As a result, the students' options for classes during each term are limited. For example, the freshmen taking band, who finished Japanese 1 during the last semester, couldn't take Japanese 2 successively due to band being offered at the same time as our Japanese class. They were some of our most diligent, highly motivated students. That was a shame. They have to wait until next January in 2020 to continue to Japanese 2. They will probably need to do a lot of review in order to recall what they have learned after a long interval. What's more, I can't see them finish through Japanese 4 while I am here!

Although our high school has provided Japanese courses since it opened in 2002, many people in Lincoln don't know about it. Even the counselor in the nearest junior high school I met didn't know, who advises the 8th grade students which classes to take in high school! That is shocking! One of the goals of Ms. Cunningham and I is to make the Japanese program known widely and gain more students in each class. For that, we visited the nearest junior high school two times in January. Once with our Japanese 4 students for a multicultural day and the other time with Japanese club members after school. Japanese 4 students taught a short Japanese lesson to junior high school students and Japanese club members did a cultural event with Japanese New Year's games. We also finally had a chance to introduce mochi (rice cake) tasting.



As for our daily lessons, we have been trying to incorporate fun activities as much as possible. For example, in Japanese 1, after learning how to say "Please lend me ~" in Japanese, we introduced karimono kyoso, which is similar to a scavenger hunt here, and we did it in the class. In Japanese 3, after learning the different ways to say "to wear", students wrote the narrations for their fashion show.

Other than the classroom activities, we assisted with Japanese club events such as a pumpkin painting contest in October, and cookie decorating in December. In September, we also participated in the local Chinese harvest moon festival with the students who volunteered, and we did kingyo sukui, catching a gold fish with a thin paper net, which is often seen in Japanese summer festivals. Ms. Cunningham has done this with her students for many :



What an energetic teacher she is! She does everything she can to make the students experience Japanese culture. There is so much to learn from her.

Thanks to all the people I met, my time here even out of school has been very fulfilling; doing a “nabe party” (cooking pot) with Japanese mothers, learning how to cook Brazilian dish, Feijoada, black bean stew, from a Brazilian friend, and doing weekly language exchange with a Korean friend. In the

beginning of January, she invited me to have soup with Korean rice cakes together with her family, which is a Korean tradition for the New Year’s to become one year older! I am glad that I have got the chance to learn about other cultures too!

2019 has begun with new things for me. Ms. Cunningham took me to a country dance and I learned all the different dances, cha-cha, waltz, and line dances with live music. I started living in a new place with a wonderful roommate, leaving my host family, who helped me to start my new life here since the beginning.

Additionally, some good news for Lincoln, and more specifically for the Japanese class at Southwest High School, is the introduction of Round One, a Japanese game center at the local mall. It must be me who is excited the most but I am looking forward to going there with Cunningham-sensei and our students for karaoke! We have more things to do now! Please come and visit us! Now is the perfect time to experience a winter in Nebraska! Be sure to bring a sleigh and an ice scraper!

Your Japan #8 - December

Your Japan #7 - November

Your Japan #6 - October

Your Japan #5 - September

Your Japan #4 - August

Your Japan #3 - July

Your Japan #2 - June



Your Japan #1 - May

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