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

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“What are you doing in Wyoming?” When I say I’m living in Wyoming, most people have the same reaction. And I answer “I am teaching Japanese Language”, they also ask me, “Does Wyoming have any students who want to study Japanese?” My answer is of course “yes.”

My name is Sayaka Hanami, and I’m from Fukushima, Japan. And now I am working at Kelly Walsh High School as a Japanese teaching assistant with my supervisor, Mrs. Kaoru Slotsve in Casper, Wyoming. We have 3 classes (J1, J3, J4.) and about 50 students this semester. My school is

adopting a block schedule, so I can meet my students every day. It really helps me to make good relationships with my students.

Our classes are 90 minutes long, which is a very long time not only for high school students, but also for teachers. The most difficult thing is to keep them concentrated on the subject. So we are trying to do some physical activities such as singing J-POP songs, doing group match quizzes, drawing pictures, and acting out mini dramas.

The classes are long, but we can work on big project during that time as well. Last semester, we studied about “BENTO” which is a Japanese styled lunch box. After studying about “BENTO,” students made their own bento box using the knowledge that they acquired including nutrition balance, color balance, and the importance of making it be cute for Japanese culture. Even now, some students are bringing their own bento boxes for lunch instead eating cafeteria food.

As you know, a big earthquake and tsunami struck Japan last year on March 11. Because of the problems related to that disaster, many tourists from foreign countries to Japan have decreased. It is a very sad situation because I know how beautiful Japan is, especially Tohoku area. I think the most important thing that I can do as a Japanese teaching assistant is to present an accurate picture of Japan. In two months, it will be one year from that disaster, but it will take much more time to revive the area. I would like my students to understand that Japan still needs help and support by foreign countries.

My school is the only one school that has Japanese Language education for K-12 in Wyoming. And Casper has only about six Japanese people. Compared to other J-LEAP colleagues this is unusual, but I want to do what only I can while I am here. I would like to work with local community to get people interested in Japanese, not only high school students, but also their family, friends, and people who live in Wyoming!

I learned a lot about American culture so far, and I'm looking forward to learning more. When I go back to Japan, I'd like to share my wonderful experiences with my future students.

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