

DECEMBER, 2012: BREEZE ISSUE #62

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



CHIGUSA IZUMI

*Booker T. Washington High School
Tulsa, OK*

Hello. My name is Chigusa Izumi and I work at Booker T. Washington High School (Booker T.) in Tulsa, Oklahoma as a teaching assistant of Japanese. It has been over 3 months since I started working for this school.

The most striking feature of Booker T. is its diversity. The school has over 1300 students: 40% White, 40% African American, 8% Hispanic, 8% Native American and 3% Asian.

It is very interesting as the school is located in Tulsa, Oklahoma where the majority of the population is White. You can feel different cultures harmonize with each other at Booker T. Also the variety of foreign language courses at our school also symbolizes its diversity. Students are required to take foreign language classes for 2 years and they can select from 8 different languages including Spanish, French, German, Greek, Latin, Russian, Chinese and Japanese. Booker T. is the only school which offers a Japanese language course at the high school level in Oklahoma.

Our Japanese course has four different classes. Japanese 1 and 2 are beginner classes, which are mainly for freshmen and sophomores. Students learn how to write in Hiragana and Katakana in Japanese 1, and learn basic conversation and simple Kanji words in Japanese 2. Japanese 3 and 4 are the upper level classes and we focus more on preparation for the IB test than normal conversation.

My supervisor is a very open-minded person and he lets me try a lot of things in our classes, such as oral practice, different activities and making homework or daily quizzes. He also lets me introduce Japanese culture to the students. We just had a holiday lesson about “Shichigosan (七五三)” the other day and made the traditional candy called “Chitose-ame (千歳飴)” in class. Students were excited to make Japanese traditional candy with the ingredients that are also available in America. I would like to introduce as much culture as possible not only to the classes but also to other students who are not taking Japanese courses while I’m working for Booker T.. I have had a couple of presentations about Japanese culture outside of the Japanese classes. After giving a presentation about Japanese archery, some students came up and asked me questions about it. I appreciate that I get to talk to more students through these cultural interactions. Although these presentations are not directly relevant to language education itself, I believe these activities will let students feel closer to Japan. Accordingly, it will be one of the motivations for

students to learn the Japanese language. It is not a very big number, but there are some parents at Booker T. who have Japanese backgrounds, and there also is a local Japanese friendship club too. I would love to have these people involved in the course and would like to share more aspects of Japanese culture with the students.

Although I love and enjoy teaching Japanese to Booker T. students, it also has been a great challenge for me to teach them. I have found out that the teaching method or belief that I had gained through my Japanese as a second language (JSL) teaching experience in Japan does not work very well for the students here since they live in the area where they seldom have opportunities to talk in Japanese. However, I regard this challenge as a good opportunity to study new ideas, beliefs and teaching methods. I will work hard to grasp both the goal of the course and the needs of each student, and be a well-rounded teaching assistant.

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5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100

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P. 323.761.7510

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