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



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Hello. My name is Chieko Yamada and I'm working at Maloney Interdistrict Magnet School (Maloney) in Connecticut as a Japanese language teaching assistant.

Maloney is a magnet school so the students come to school from not only one district, but from many different areas. Our students range from Pre-kindergartens (3, 4 years old) to 5 graders (10 years old) and everyone

studies Japanese for 25 minutes a day, 3 times a week.

"We want students to love studying a foreign language" and "We create units that are age-appropriate and fun!" describe the goals of the Japanese Language and Culture Program at Maloney. Therefore we don't use particular text books, and we try to create classes where the students can have fun with activities aligned with the curriculum such as singing Japanese songs.

The students love Japanese songs, so they sing the songs even when they are not in Japanese class. When I meet students in the hallway, they always give me a greeting like "Konnichiwa" or "Sayonara." It's not only late elementary students, but also Pre-kindergarten students that do this. How do teachers get students attention and concentration in a short 25 minute class? I don't have much experience as a Japanese language teacher so my supervisor's classes really help me learn how to manage and create classes every day.

I assist with different grades every other week; the first week I help out with students in kindergarten through 2nd grade, the second week I help out with students in 3rd grade through to 5th grade, and then the cycle repeats and I help out with students in kindergarten to 2nd grade again. Each grade has a different atmosphere so I really enjoy the variety of classes.

During the class, I am in charge of routine activities, demonstrating how to write Japanese words (Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji) and helping the students who were absent during the last class. Students think I can't speak English because we try to speak only in Japanese to the students and sometime:

challenge for me to relate to students in Japanese. But now, the students have settled into a routine, and they work hard to understand what I say (sometimes relying on the hint sheet on the wall in Japanese class room).

It has already been 5 months since I came to America and during that time, I learned a lot as a Japanese language teacher, but I also learned a lot about American culture through my host family and at school. In the school, teachers wear some crazy costumes on Halloween and pajamas on Pajama day, but this is something you would never see if you teach in Japan. I have also had some wonderful memories during my free time when I went on vacation with my host family, when they threw a birthday party for me, and during Thanksgiving. I feel like I have experienced a lot of American culture; however, there were also some painful events like when I heard about the tragedy at Sandy Hook Elementary, which is in the nearby town of Newtown. I thought about a lot of things, especially how I should I behave as a teacher and also school safety. Unfortunately I haven't found all the answers yet so I hope to answers these questions during my remaining time in the United States.

Over the next 17 months, I have many challenges as a Japanese teacher and I have settled on following 3 goals:

1. Be a reliable assistant
2. Bring back a lot of knowledge and experience to Japan
3. Enjoy my life in America

I will try to do my best to achieve these goals.

And finally, I really appreciate all the people who provided me with the opportunity to come to the United States, and help me adjust to my new life here.

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