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



2013 J-LEAP REPORT BY AMIKO NISHIJIMA

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Hello. My name is Amiko NISHIJIMA and I am currently working as a teaching assistant at Garfield High School, which is located in the Central District of Seattle. It has been almost 1 month since I came here.

Before I came here, I taught Japanese language in Uzbekistan for 2 years. As the Japanese proverb says, “Sumeba miyako- Home is where the heart is.” I loved living in Uzbekistan, so I was looking forward to coming here to Seattle.

As you might know, Seattle is famously known as “the Evergreen State.” I’m fascinated by its beauty. At the same time, it is often called “Rainy City” because from fall to spring it will rain almost every day. Some people told me it is very depressing and they suffer from lack of sun, but fortunately, I have not experienced “SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)” yet.

In this report, I would like to introduce briefly my surprising and challenging school life in Seattle.

Garfield High School is a public high school and was established in 1923. The number of students is about 1600. This school is famous for Drama and Jazz Orchestra Clubs. The Garfield High School student population is very ethnically diverse. Students can select foreign language classes from Spanish, French, Latin, and Japanese. The number of students who take Japanese classes is as follows:

Japanese 1: 54 (2 classes)

Japanese 2: 54 (2 classes)

Japanese 3: 44 (2 classes)

AP Japanese: 29(1 class)

So the total number is 181. Do you think it is a huge number?

Students have many reasons to study Japanese. Some students say they learn Japanese because their relatives have Japanese backgrounds. Others say they love Japanese sub cultures like anime and manga so they want to understand Japanese anime without subtitles. On the other hand, a few students take

Japanese just because other foreign language classes were over their limits, so they had no other choice but to take Japanese.

The motivations of students are different, but I want all of them to broaden their perspectives through learning Japanese language and culture.

Now I mainly co-teach Japanese 1 class with my supervisor, Sarah-sensei. In this class, we started to learn あ、い、う、え、お(A,B,C).

What do you think was the first homework and quiz in this class? The answer is “Memorizing and writing all the classmates ‘names.” I am impressed that Sarah-sensei always makes every effort to build a comfortable learning environment for her students and I am learning a lot from her.

From now on, I would like to devote myself to spending time with the students as much as possible through “Japanese tutoring” and “Japanese only lunch.” Japanese tutoring is held every morning and after school hours to support learning Japanese. “Japanese only lunch time” is when students are prohibited from using English and encouraged to talk in Japanese with not only classmates but also other friends from Japanese class.

My work extends beyond the limits of high school because Sarah-sensei and I are planning to visit local elementary and middle schools to introduce Japanese culture. I am also excited to participate in WATJ (Washington Association of Teachers of Japanese) to learn from other Japanese language teachers in the area.

Finally, I really appreciate all the people who provided me with this opportunity to live in the U.S. and helped me adjust to my new life here. I would not have been able to handle this new experience if it were not for the people around me, especially my host mother Ms. Debbie Robinson. I will do my best to make the most of this great opportunity.

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