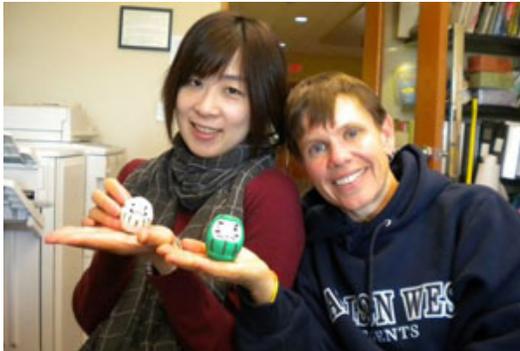


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A FREE MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR FRIENDS OF JAPAN & TEACHERS OF JAPANESE



2013 J-LEAP REPORT BY IZUMI TAKEDA

Madison Country Day School

Madison, WI

Hello. My name is Izumi Takeda, and I am currently working as a teaching assistant at Madison Country Day School in Waunakee, Wisconsin. Waunakee is 15 minutes away from Madison, the capital of Wisconsin.

Madison Country Day School is in the countryside, surrounded by the beauty of nature. From our classrooms, we can see lots of green, lakes, and even wild cranes during fall. The size of the school is very small; there are only 350 students in total (from pre-K to 12th grade). However, all students studying here are highly motivated and always enjoy learning new things.

Regarding foreign language education, students can choose between Japanese or Spanish when they enter 9th grade. Because Spanish classes have already been introduced into the lower school and middle school, some students continue to study Spanish, while some students start to learn a new language, Japanese.

There are only 5 students who take Japanese class in 11th and 12th grade, so these two levels have to be combined. In the 10th grade Japanese class, there are 10 students, and 15 freshmen (9th graders) chose Japanese class for the current school year. In short, the number of the students who are studying Japanese is 30 in total. All classes are full of vitality. Both students and teachers enjoy Japanese classes every day.

The policy of my co-teacher, Karen sensei, is not to use English in class...and, actually, even outside of class. To be honest, in the very beginning, I thought Japanese only classes might be too cruel for the students, especially for the freshmen who have never studied the Japanese language. However, it worked very well. Karen sensei and I said "Kiritsu" on the very first day of class. Of course nobody stood up. Next, Karen sensei said "Kiritsu" to me, and I stood up. We repeated this action many times, and finally students realized that they have to stand up when somebody says "Kiritsu". Students always pay attention to us because they know we never speak English in class.

we decided not to use English, role-playing is indispensable for classes in order to have students guess the meaning of what we are trying to teach.

In 10th~12th grade classes, students have textbooks, but we do not use textbooks so much. When we start a unit, we usually show students dialogues that we made and give them some activities based on that. When students finally open the textbooks at the end of the unit, they already know most of the grammar and vocabulary that is needed to accomplish the unit goals.

Madison Country Day School is authorized as IB school, so students need to memorize lots of vocabulary, and we teach them how to write letters, emails, and articles in Japanese as well. This is the biggest challenge for us. We are always trying to find good ways to cover the IB curriculum during 45 minute long classes. It also takes lots of time to prepare for classes, which is another challenge, but I learned from Karen sensei that it is very important to make a lesson plan in advance.

In addition to 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grade Japanese, we also teach 1st grade physical education and 5th~8th grade elective Japanese classes. In physical education classes, we say “Konnichiwa” when class gets started. When counting numbers, we also use Japanese like “ichi, ni, san, shi”. In elective classes, the main purpose is not Japanese language but Japanese culture so we get them to touch the culture, by explaining everything in English and providing interesting activities. The topics we brought up so far are Japan’s food culture, Japan’s bathroom history, and so on. We are now making our own *kamishibai*, and planning to make *okonomiyaki* or *sankakuonigiri* in November.

Of course teaching Japanese language and helping students to improve Japanese is my biggest goal, but I really hope that all students will want to go to Japan someday. Last month, Karen sensei and I visited a kindergarten class to read a book to kids. I read in Japanese, and Karen sensei read in English. Kids seemed to be very interested in it and we were asked to teach Origami next time. I believe that touching foreign language and culture to kids when they are young helps them widen their outlook. I would be very happy if they develop an interest in Japan and start learning the language in the future.

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5700 Wilshire blvd, Suite 100

Los Angeles, CA 90036

P. 323.761.7510

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