

FEBRUARY, 2014: BREEZE ISSUE #76

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



2013 J-LEAP REPORT BY HARUKA NITANI

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Hello or as we say in Japan, Konnichiwa. My name is Haruka Nitani and I am currently working as a Japanese Assistant Teacher at Montgomery Blair High School and Paint Branch High School in Maryland.

Where is Maryland? Many Japanese people think of “merry-go-round” because the pronunciation is similar.

Maryland is located on the east coast of the U.S., north of Washington, D.C. in a place called Montgomery County. It takes about 20 minutes by subway and 30 minutes by car to Washington, D.C. where there are many beautiful government buildings and national museums that have free admission!

My lead teacher, Zoll Hagihara Yoko-sensei and I go to two high schools every day. In the morning, we go to Paint Branch High School to teach Japanese levels 1, 2, 3, and 4. Paint Branch High School has about 2,000 students with about 60 of them taking Japanese.

In the afternoon, we drive to Montgomery Blair High School and teach Japanese levels 1, 2, 3 Honors, 4 Honors, and AP. Montgomery Blair High School has about 3,000 students with about 60 of them taking Japanese. Montgomery Blair High School also has a magnet program for science, mathematics, and computer science. In the hallways after school, we are able to see activities such as the robotics club. Montgomery Blair High School also offers CAP, the Communication Arts Program for the liberal arts. In addition, Zoll-sensei and I sponsor the Japanese and Anime club every Tuesday after school.

We share the rooms with other subjects like French, Spanish, English, and accounting, etc. Sometimes, we get hints for our Japanese class activities from material provided by other classes, for example, by looking at posters on the walls that have student writing on them. Also, we belong to the World Languages Department at both schools. Our colleagues are so kind and they teach me many things about the school and students, including words in other languages “¡Hola!”, “Bonjour!”, “مرحبا”, “Salve!”

As an assistant teacher, I help Zoll-sensei support students at both schools, make materials and activities, suggest Japanese and Anime club activities, and assemble Japan Bowl meetings at Montgomery Blair High School. Most importantly, I help students in two ways. First, I walk around the classroom to answer student questions during class. Second, I sit in the back of the room during class and students can ask me questions or work on their Japanese class packets (we use packets instead of textbooks).

In regards to the Japanese and Anime club activities, I introduce Japanese Janji and Katakana characters that match their names phonetically.

In preparation for the Japan Bowl, we hold a meeting at Montgomery Blair High School once or twice a week for the Japan Bowl levels 2, 3, and 4. Before the meeting, Zoll-sensei and I talk about the topic and assignment for the meeting. During the meeting, the students practice conversations with me and do some activities.

Teaching at two schools seems to be hard and extremely busy. As I stated above, we move between two high schools every day by car, which takes about 15 minutes. Every time people see us, they say “You guys are always running!!”, but I believe I can get “double” the experience from working at two schools. It means, “sharing twice as many accomplishments with my lead teacher”, “doubling the opportunity to teach the same level”, “doubling the experience of school events”, “doubling the number of awesome colleagues”, and “doubling the number of student smiles!!!”

In regards to out-of-school activities, I also belong to some associations and projects. One of the associations which I have joined is MAATJ, Mid-Atlantic Association of Teachers of Japanese. They are a large group of Japanese language teachers in the Mid-Atlantic area. I can go and observe other schools and colleges not only in Maryland, but also in Virginia, etc. The other association is JASW, Japan America Society of Washington D.C. We can meet people who are interested in Japan and Japanese people who live in the Washington, D.C. area. Through JASW events, I have met JET alumni who live in the same area where I live, and we have become friends. JET is the program in which Americans can go to Japan as teaching assistant for English classes in Japanese schools. JET and J-LEAP are similar programs where we can share our experiences about teaching foreign languages and living in other countries. I also participate in J-GAP, Japanese Global Articulation Project supported by the Japan Foundation. Through this project, I can attend meetings where Japanese teachers in Maryland discuss issues related Japanese language education.

Around the Maryland area, there are not many Japanese people nor are there many Japanese language learners. However, there are people who like Japan and are interested in Japan, so there is a need for Japanese language education. Zoll-sensei and I are happy to welcome all students who want to study the Japanese language and know more about Japan. Through our Japanese classes, we teach our students the necessary skills to be able to communicate not only in Japan, but also in international environments. That is why we teach Japanese culture and traditions in class so our students not only know the language, but they also understand the Japanese people and customs as well.

My biggest goal is to bring the knowledge and experience I have received back to Japan. I would like to become a Japanese teacher at a public school in Japan and support foreigners living there. Teaching Japanese and living in a foreign country can sometimes be difficult, but people always help and support me. I really appreciate my lead teacher Zoll-sensei, colleagues, host family, J-LEAP members, friends, my family, the Laurasian Institute, and the Japan Foundation. Thanks to everyone, I am really enjoying life in the U.S. After returning to Japan, I would like to be the person who helps foreigners who need help Japan. This would also be a great way to reciprocate all the help everyone has given me during my the U.S.

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Annual Report

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