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



2014 J-LEAP REPORT BY HITOMI IKEYA

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The beautiful summer passed, colorful autumn came, and now the rainy season has started. The rain is making the leaves fall and calling winter. Here in the “Evergreen State,” we can enjoy four seasons like in Japan.

My name is Hitomi Ikeya. I am working as an Assistant Teacher at Roosevelt High School and Jane Addams Middle School in Seattle, Washington. I have been here teaching Japanese for almost three months.

Firstly, I would like to ask you a question. What do you know about Washington State or Seattle? Seattle Mariners and Ichiro? (Even though he left for NY, but...) That’s all!? This was my answer before I came to Seattle. Before I introduce you to my host organization, please let me tell briefly about Washington State.

Starbucks, Amazon, Costco, Microsoft... All these companies are headquartered in Washington State. For these companies, Japan is a very important market. Japan is also one of Washington’s largest export markets in the field of Agricultural, Food, Forestry, Fish and Marine Products.

On the other hand, there are some Japanese companies in Washington State and more than twelve thousand Washingtonians are working for them. One example is Nintendo of America. Therefore, Japan contributes to Washington’s Economy and Japan is one of the closest countries to the people of Washington State.

The strong connection between Japan and Washington State can be seen in education as well. There are more than ten thousand students of Japanese and many schools offer Japanese Language classes. one elementary school near my host organization has a Japanese immersion program, so some stuc

start to listen and speak Japanese from kindergarten or 1st grade. In this case, it is said that they will have studied Japanese for more than ten years if they continue taking Japanese class through middle and high school.

Next, I would like to introduce my host organization, Roosevelt High School (RHS). RHS is located about six miles to north of downtown Seattle, and is near the University of Washington. There are about 1,670 students in RHS and almost 85% of the students are studying to enter college when they graduate. Talking about language classes, RHS offers students five world languages; Spanish, French, Latin, American Sign Language (ASL), and Japanese. Language classes are not an obligation, but many students take them because the foreign language credits are required for college admission. I knew that Spanish is the most popular foreign language and students can study it at almost any school in the US, but I didn't know that ASL and Latin were also taught, so it was surprising for me.

As for Japanese class, there are four levels; Japanese 1, 2, 3 and Advanced Placement (AP), and there are about thirty students in each class this year. In Japanese 1, we start to teach Hiragana and simple greetings and sentences. In AP class, students reach an advanced level of Japanese and gain much knowledge about Japan and Japanese culture. I have realized that foreign language classes in the USA are very different from that of Japan. For instance I was not exposed to American culture nor was I required to work on projects to explain American culture in my English classes when I was in high school. This difference in teaching was the second surprising thing for me.

I am co-teaching with my Lead Teacher (LT), Tashibu sensei in all four classes in the morning and one class at Jane Addams Middle School (JAMS) in the afternoon. Tashibu sensei is an experienced teacher and has a very powerful teaching style. She attracts students to her lesson by using various materials and strategies. One day, we used iPads to research "What day is it today?" on a Japanese website. Our students used the information they found to make a presentation to show the unique days of Japan, for example, Pocky no hi (Day of the Pocky on November 11). Since we found that there was "Okonomiyaki no hi" in the Japanese calendar, we also cooked Okonomiyaki in class. This teaching style allows students to enjoy learning Japanese and Japanese culture. I am really learning from my LT about how to make language classes more fun and how to motivate students to study more.

I am also learning outside of class. I became a member of the Washington Association of Teachers of Japanese (WATJ) to improve my ability as a teacher and to contribute to the continuation and expansion of Japanese Language Education in Washington State. This year, four J-LEAP members in Washington are helping the board election of WATJ. My contributions are small, but I'm proud of taking part in this association. Regarding J-LEAP in my state, fortunately, there are four J-LEAP members including me this year. Therefore we are planning to work together not only for WATJ but also for each school and community to increase the benefit of having J-LEAP.

It is raining in Seattle today. It rains almost every day during the rainy season and this weather sometimes makes us fed up. However, thanks to the rain, trees can grow more and more, and keep themselves beautifully "evergreen." For me, these two years teaching Japanese here is a period to receive lots of precious "rain" to grow up like trees of Seattle. Although just three months have passed, I have already been learning many things and enjoying my growth. I am so excited at being able to learn more here.

Lastly, I would like to thank all who gave me this opportunity and who support me. I couldn't have been here now without your help. I'll do my best to bring about a better result to the USA, Washington State, my schools and myself. Thank you very much.

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