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



2015 J-LEAP REPORT BY TAMAKI YOSHITOME

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Konnichiwa. I'm Tamaki Yoshitome, and I am currently working as an Assistant Teacher at Apple Valley High School in Apple Valley, Minnesota. Minnesota is a state in the midwest that borders Canada and Lake Superior. The state capital is Saint Paul, but St. Paul and Minneapolis together are called the "Twin Cities" because the Mississippi River splits the two cities. You can see many souvenirs that say "Land of 10,000 lakes" in Minnesota because it has so many lakes. Coming from Osaka, I was so impressed by the amount of nature in Minnesota. Right away, the big trees and numerous lakes and ponds impressed me. I have learned from my Minnesota friends that the summers here are so beautiful that it makes you forget how cold the winter gets.

Apple Valley High School (AVHS) is a public high school in northern Dakota County, Minnesota. AVHS is in the process of becoming a STEM school, which is an interdisciplinary approach that focuses on preparing students for careers in today's high-tech world. STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics and focuses on teaching critical thinking and problem solving skills. Since we are a STEM school, we have many high-tech machines, and students can learn how to make a variety of items that normally can only be created in the most advanced technology companies. Additionally, AVHS teachers try to incorporate STEM learning strategies into each of their subjects. For example, we used paper clips in our Kanji lesson to form characters on their desks. It is a way for learners to get a hands-on approach to learning characters. Also, AVHS is strong in athletics and arts programs. We have many State

Championships, especially in wrestling and basketball. We also have one of the top speech and debate teams, school news programs, and theatre programs in the state. Our school focuses on the AAA philosophy of placing equal value on academics, athletics and the arts.

My lead teacher is Ms. Laura Moy (Moy-sensei). I respect her because, when I met her former and current Japanese students and their parents, everyone said “Moy-sensei is a great teacher and we had a great time with her.” Even after they graduate, they still love and appreciate Moy-sensei. I think she has good rapport with her students, and I want to learn by watching.

We have four levels and five Japanese classes each day. There are forty-four Japanese 1 students, thirty Japanese 2 students, fifteen Japanese 3 students, and ten Japanese 4 students. Our Japanese level 1 students are learning about Hiragana, Katakana, Japanese greetings, and culture. Their goal is to be able to introduce themselves and their family in Japanese. Japanese level 2 students learn more Kanji, daily activities, and describing items and events. Their goal is to speak about what they do in their free time, describe



events, and invite friends to hang out. This year Japanese level 3 students are earning college credit through the University of Minnesota, so they learn a lot more grammar than Japanese level 1 and 2 students. Japanese level 4 students use an AP textbook that pushes them to use advanced vocabulary and grammar. AP means Advanced Placement and it is similar to college-level courses. Although the AP textbook is very difficult, our students can learn more spontaneous Japanese. Therefore, we give them many conversation opportunities to find their strengths and weaknesses and to bridge the differences in their Japanese levels.

Our Japanese students may also attend many Japanese activities like Japanese immersion camp (Mori no Ike), Japanese Day at the Minnesota Zoo, and J-Quiz, where the winners go to Washington, D.C. to compete nationally at the Japan Bowl competition. Also, Moy-sensei and I create many opportunities in and out of the classroom for students to encounter Japanese traditions and culture. This year we have a Japanese international student in our district, and we continually invite him to join all of our Japan related activities whenever possible. The other students have already enjoyed getting to know him.

During my two years here, I hope to be able to share Japanese culture and language with many people in the area. I would like to go to the elementary and middle schools in the district to teach about Japan. Also, I would like to visit other Japanese teachers' classes and inspire their students' love of learning Japanese. In the summer, I plan to volunteer for a week or so to teach Japanese at the Japanese immersion village in northern Minnesota. On top of that, I plan to learn about the American school system and specifically how they teach foreign language.

Lastly, I am thankful for all of the support from the people around me. Especially, I want to thank my lead teacher, Moy-sensei and my host family. Thanks to their help, I can be a Japanese Assistant teacher here in Minnesota. Thank you very much.

Arigatougozaimashita.

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