

My experience at the National Japan Bowl is more than worth sharing, because it was absolutely unforgettable. This national event, that brought students from all four corners of the country and beyond, is one I can confidently say I will remember for a long while, definitely throughout the rest of my young adulthood. I learned consistently throughout my journey competing. Mistakes made were lessons learned, and something of value that I will keep close with me throughout my adult life. I also want to mention that my experience here was 'grand', not that regionals weren't as fun, but nationals took it a little step further with a place to stay on campus and many opportunities to explore and have a "college life experience." I know that I appreciate this personally because I currently take Japanese through a university, per my schools method of teaching, so I already have a small taste of it what that's like. I can confirm that it is worth while for high schoolers, should they get the lucky chance to attend!

As a recap for those who don't know yet, I come from a small school in Oregon, and our high school doesn't actually have many opportunities to take advanced classes or language classes, because the offerings are limited. But luckily, my local university has a program for non-degree seeking students, which does include high school students, to take classes (like Japanese). For me, this is huge, especially because it doesn't cost anything. Such an opportunity made this experience all the more worthwhile as I had to work a bit harder to make the standards for this competition. As you could imagine, the education's pace or lesson plan is slightly different, much faster paced. None the less, thanks to the help of many officials and the Japan American society, this trip and experience was possible and I couldn't be more thankful.

I can't say I was one of the top competitors at this competition despite my team and my own effort, but I know that this opportunity pushed us to go to great lengths, learning many great and wonderful things about both Japan, and even The United States and our relationship with Japan. This competition is not exclusive to only the highest of skill, but still provides testing difficulty that pushes us to reach those skill levels, which resulted in a exciting experience overall. Not only was this experience at the National Japan Bowl exciting, but I have made numerous friends from different schools around the country who made the event a permanent memory in my heart. Even among different team levels, I felt no barrier to whom I could socialize and make memories with. Coming from Oregon and having traveled around the West Coast a few times, I felt connected to schools from either California or other neighboring states. It's nice to know those who seem so far, can feel so close. That's not to mention the

sense of accomplishment and pride you feel being able to compete with those from across the nation alongside you. The freedom to communicate with those from all around the country is an experience I think everyone should seek, because I believe that having the chance to share your different backgrounds and experiences, from possibly very different places, can provide a wonderful insight into life.

This diverse event leads me to believe that Japanese culture has more to offer than I first thought, as I've learned many great things from Japan's history and impact on the development of other nations alongside it. This is without mentioning that America and Japan have an extensive history going back and forth from positive and negative, in the end leading to the best of both nations. Japan has a lot of fascinating history, I have learned through my studies, and has shown me many things I grew fond of. As an example, many great leaders who've overturned the "corrupt" for the best of the nation. Thanks to the many developmental growths they have faced, Japan has been able to grow a more in-depth economy and trade/connection with other nations, like the U.S. There are many other things I learned to like and experience that I will continue to explore. Thanks to this opportunity, I was given a drive, direction, path, and a lot of guidance towards learning.

I want to leave a special thanks to all who made this competition possible and for all the great lengths they pushed for. All of the sponsors who pitched in, all of the leaders who helped organize, and even all of the competitors who made this truly a thrilling competition. It was worth taking a chance at this, even if I couldn't compete among the top schools, I enjoyed watching and supporting those who worked their hardest to make it there.

Additional thanks to organizer and sponsors of the Pacific Northwest regionals who allowed us to fly over and participate without costs. Without your sponsorship, I would not have had this opportunity. Because of your willingness to give us a chance, I was able to explore something I never thought I'd have the chance to. Thank you Sakurauchi Sensei for teaching me Japanese, and thank you Kaoru Miyanaga for the flight accommodations and preparations made for this trip to get me here. It was a pleasure to compete regionally, and you allowed me to take things further. I was able to see many parts of Washington D.C. which I had only dreamed of, coming from the West coast, and all. I saw live events that I hadn't expected, I travelled to see monuments I wished to see from a young age, and not only that, but I got to experience this alongside my Mom (and some remaining cherry blossoms!). Thank you all for the amazing experience, and I hope everyone decides to take the chance and participate with all you have got. It's worth it.