

Japan Bowl- Final @ Washington DC

Sunset High School team got selected for the National round of Japan Bowl which happened in Washington DC on April 18 and 19th. Two students from Sunset and myself traveled to DC on April 17th by red eye flight. The following day was a little hectic for the students as they appeared for the first preliminary round of the contest the evening of the day we reached the hotel. The next morning was reserved for preliminary round 2. The students showed great enthusiasm in answering questions in the preliminary rounds and also in participating in different cultural events at the venue. They got great exposure to the culture, language and to the latest updates about Japan and Japanese society. They also got the unique opportunity to meet and interact with the Japanese language learners from the other states.

The accommodation at the hotel of the University of Maryland was convenient and overall management of the event was also good.

Thanks for arranging the travel and the accommodation for the students and myself. I want to thank the Japan Bowl regional team for offering this opportunity to the Sunset team.

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**Japanese Language teacher
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The experience of one of the students is documented in the following report.

The National Japan Bowl was an amazing experience that really fostered understanding and interest. From the very start it was quite an adventure; there was a sense of excitement about heading to the airport on a school night. Then, on the plane, my partner and I found that they offered a variety of movies in Japanese. We both wanted to try out the dubs of some American classics, but we decided to try and get some sleep instead.

On the uber from the airport, even as we were all incredibly red eyed and jet lagged, we found that our uber driver had a shared interest in Japan. I thought this was very cool as he shared with us a few phrases he had learned back in the day. It was amazing that from the very start of the experience, we were able to bond with someone new over Japanese culture. He told us he would be checking out the livestream of the final competition.

The following afternoon and night was a whirlwind that we stumbled through bleary-eyed, but one which I thoroughly enjoyed nonetheless. We got to say hello to some of the sponsors of the event, were given a sales pitch in Japanese, and explore the campus of the University of Maryland, which wowed us with its impressive landscaping and architecture. We also got to meet tons of new people, which was my favorite part of the night. Something I've reflected upon the most while looking back at this experience is how kind and friendly so many of the Japan Bowl participants are. It's so valuable to have the opportunity to meet people with shared interests, and have an excuse to socialize.

The questions themselves were certainly educational. My partner and I found ourselves a bit lost at times, as we never really expected to make it so far, but we took the opportunity for what it was and made the most out of learning the correct answers to the questions. After a deep sleep, the morning questions were much the same.

We then got another round of free time, during which we enjoyed hanging out with friends we had made the previous day and meeting new people. Waiting for the conversation round we were both a bit nervous, but we had fun chatting about our shared fear with other people who had gathered around the venue. When the conversation round actually happened, it was really fun to give my Japanese a try! The practice we did with our teacher proved really helpful, but more than that, I enjoyed being able to express myself and listen to another person in Japanese.

The final round was very fun to watch, and we were disappointed (but not surprised) that we didn't make it. All the groups had some pretty fierce competition and made use of the buzzing in early rule. It was amazing how quickly they knew the answers to questions that I barely understood the prompts for. The questions themselves were crafted really well, and you could tell the contestants knew what they were talking about. It was fun to watch them compete and joke, and I was struck again by something I love about the Japan Bowl: above all, it feels like celebration. Of course, it's a great educational opportunity, but it's also a place where you're

encouraged to take a stab at an answer even if you don't know. It's a place where they invite you to give a team shokai, and have fun with it!

Overall, I had a great time at the Japan Bowl. Through everything, from the experience of going all the way across the country to having one of my first real conversations with someone in Japanese, I feel that I learned so much. I think my partner will say the same thing. I'm also excited to make use of the resources offered to us by JASWDC, who said they would be waving the membership fees for participants.

I truly appreciate everyone who made this trip possible for my partner and I. This experience will be one that sticks with me, and I do definitely feel encouraged to continue my study of both Japanese and the culture of Japan. Hopefully we will be back next year!



Riley Mitlehner