

I'd like to share my experience attending the Pacific Northwest Japan Bowl, and the incredible moments I shared with many others. This event is something I hope to remember for a long time, but I also want to express my gratitude for being able to participate and compete with such outstanding and impressive people. My experience here at the Japan Bowl was unlike any other I've faced, and I mean that with all good in mind. It was a new challenge for me, to be a part of this amazing event. While it was a journey to get to where I am now, it is something I will remember fondly.

From the beginning until now, my journey through learning Japanese has been far more rewarding than I had ever expected. It all started when someone dear to me had mentioned their experience taking Japanese at the local university in town. I was initially shocked, because not only were they taking a class at a college whilst in high school, but they were also taking Japanese. I learned a lot from them throughout this past year. Students have the opportunity to take a select few classes at my high school through this university, including Japanese, which I was more than excited to hear about. So, after learning that I could take classes my school didn't offer (such as Japanese), I felt like it was a good opportunity to give it a shot. I never thought I would have been able to get where I am today, and finally follow my passion in Japanese. It's been a whirlwind of an experience. It was initially daunting having to balance a schedule at multiple campuses and go to a university to learn a new language at college level. I quickly realized that I enjoyed it and that it was the start of something I would quickly grow very fond of.

Taking Japanese at my local University, Pacific University of Forest Grove, was, and still is, something I cannot be more appreciative of. It was not as difficult as I expected, and the people I got to meet and talk with were vastly different than those in my high school. It felt like an entirely new community, full of people from other states coming to learn together. It provided a refreshing environment for me, in which to socialize. Although it was more like high school than I thought it would be, the instructors still treated things a little differently and more

fast-paced. I have to give a lot of appreciation and credit to the 先生 (せんせい、sensei) I have now, for helping me make it this far and win the Pacific North West Japan Bowl.

I was given an offer to participate in this competition by an upperclassman at my university. I was nervous and unsure of whether or not I could perform, especially at the level our team would (and will) have been. With the reassurance of one dear to me and my teacher, we decided it would be a great chance to challenge myself and further my studies in the Japanese language. I learned a lot preparing for the competition and even on the day of, I continued to learn. People at the competition had even taught me new valuable lessons and understandings.

The community that I experienced at this event was like no other. People were nervous but also excited. It was a chance for everyone to share their passion and compete. To me, the Japan Bowl felt like more than a competition. It was a chance for everyone to come together with a shared passion and share their experiences and enthusiasm. There were teams there to win, and others to learn. However, I believe that in the end, everyone still came to have fun. I know that I did. Despite our teams being competitors, with a sense of commonality in our stress to perform and win among all others, I felt that we were more than just competitors. It felt welcoming. We were all given a chance to get to know one another and network, and I realized that I wasn't alone in how I felt.

In addition to getting to know a new and unforgettable community of amazing people, there were also other fun events we got to experience at this annual competition. Networking was fantastic in my opinion, and so was the chance to meet many sponsors who supported this event and those who wanted to see young students find passion in their language and culture and potentially take that further in life. The sponsors were great and made the experience as amazing as it was. They helped fund many things to make this year one to remember. A lot was made possible this year as a result, and I'm sure others could agree.

Beyond the networking and people who supported this event, there were even more events that were made possible for us. There was a great performance that set me at ease during

a wonderful Japanese lunch. Bento boxes were provided for all to enjoy alongside Japanese breakfast options and pastries. Having a taste of what people eat in Japan helped create a more immersive experience for a Japanese event. It wasn't just their food that created this immersion, but also the shocking performance we all got to see. People who have practiced for a great majority of their lives or education all came to share a piece of Japanese culture through music. An experience of authenticity that was like no other, brought Japan's culture here as if it weren't from afar.

I want to thank all of those who made this competition possible and went to such great lengths to ensure its success. I came across many new things and many familiar things. I felt as though there was a lot to learn, but also a lot to remember. The people who made all of this possible provided me with an experience that I will continue to tell, and never forget. Everyone I was able to meet along the way created a strong memory that I am sure to hold on tight. If I could, I'd love to participate again - and for those who'd like to try? Please do. This event is one I couldn't be more thankful for and would highly recommend. It was unforgettable. Thanks again to everyone who made this possible.

My name is Aidan Siemsen, and I come from Forest Grove High School. This is an opportunity not to take for granted. Test yourself, prove yourself, and have fun while you do it.