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## 2025 PNW Japan Bowl Experience

It's weird to think that this was the last time I'd get to attend the Pacific Northwest Japan Bowl. This event has been with me for the past three years of my high school experience, and it's come to be so familiar to me. This year I competed with Aaron Guo and Olutomola Bolonduro, and I couldn't have asked for a better team. Not only did we have fun studying and competing together, but they're just great people. In general, I've found so many amazing people at the Japan Bowl. Though it's formatted as a competition, it feels like more than that. Win or lose, you get congratulations and smiles from everyone. Everyone—be they a student, teacher, volunteer, or judge—is just so kind.

Reflecting on the past three years of my life, Japan Bowl has been a big part of them. Though it's not like I spend all year staring at the study guide and making flashcards, the topics and vocabulary that I've learned have given me the confidence and ability to integrate Japan and Japanese into a lot of aspects of my life. For instance, the special topic of trains last year led me to write my extended essay, (an in-depth research essay required for the IB Diploma), on culture on trains in Tokyo and New York. I also never would have started seriously trying to learn Japanese if I hadn't tried the Japan Bowl in my sophomore year. The experience made me realize how much I didn't know about Japanese, but also how much fun it was to learn.

The PNW Japan Bowl is something I've looked forward to each year. This year, it felt so comforting and familiar. The format is so fun, and I love that there are so many opportunities to interact with Japanese culture throughout the event. One thing I really enjoyed this year was the networking session where I got to talk with other competitors and some volunteers from Japan. The exciting thing about this year was that we spoke in Japanese! I remember at my first Japan bowl, the exchange students asked us if we wanted to speak in Japanese, and we all said no. I wasn't confident in my ability to catch what they were saying, let alone speak. This year I decided to give it a try. We had a great conversation, mixing Japanese and English, and I was surprised by how much I was able to communicate. The Japan Bowl has given me a yearly push of motivation to continue practicing Japanese, and moments like this make me appreciate how far I've come. (Though there's still far to go, of course).

As for the content, this year I greatly enjoyed learning about haiku. Japan Bowl doesn't just ask you to look at the language of Japan, but also the culture, and I think each thing helps with the other. I have always loved poetry, and since I started learning Japanese and thought about how versatile of a language it was, I was excited about one day understanding Japanese poetry. While I can't say I grasp all the nuances a native speaker would, I did get pretty excited when I was able to understand the Bashou poems that the study guide showed, and there's also vocabulary from them that I won't forget because I found the poems so beautiful. I also recognized a reference to one of the poems in a Japanese show that I watched, a reference I never understood before. All this is to say, I found this topic not only really interesting, but it also helped me with the language even as it was more culturally focused. That's something I really appreciate about the opportunity of the Japan Bowl in general.

I'm super excited to go to the National Japan Bowl with my team, and I'm eternally thankful to everyone who helps set up and fund the PNW Japan Bowl each year. It's been an amazing part of my Japanese learning experience and I'll miss it next year! 全米のジャパンプォウルは私達が頑張ります!