

Evan Lopez
3/07/2026

My 2026 Japan Bowl Reflection

My experience for this year's Pacific Northwest Japan Bowl was really memorable. This is the second time I have done Japan bowl; last year I was in Level 2 and skipped to Level 4 this year. I studied a lot harder this year, since I had to catch up to the people who did Level 3 last year. When I got there, everything was very lively despite it being 8 A.M. There were a lot of charming people there both competing and watching it. The exercise we did during it was charming, we did a traditional dance called the *Tanko Bushi* which originated to honor coal miners. It was nifty learning a traditional dance and also learning the history of it.

When the preliminary rounds started, I was nervous about it, and I didn't know all the questions I wanted to know, however the rest of my team knew a lot so it turned out fine. After the two preliminary rounds our Level 3 team, teacher, and our team had lunch together. The lunch was excellent, it was one of the things that I wanted to revisit from last year. I ate more from lunch than I usually do, the people who gave out the lunches had the regular version and vegan versions of the meal. After eating lunch, our group first went to the college information center. During that I learned a lot about the colleges and Japanese programs, as well there was an information booth for Toyama prefecture as well since it is Oregon's sister prefecture.

After that we went to networking, where we talked with other high school participants and a Japanese student. My group was really fun, we talked a lot more than I thought we would initially, since it felt a little awkward. It was also fun to learn modern Japanese culture from the Japanese student and see how it contrasts and compares with modern American culture. Afterwards, we saw a *shamisen* performance, which was really cool. The *shamisen* is really distinct which made it sound cool. It was also fun, because they had a pop quiz with audience participation about the instrument.

Finally we had the championship round for each level, which was very nerve racking considering we were called on last, being part of Level 4, but even that didn't stop me from being nervous when the Level 2 and Level 3 teams were being called on. This year, our prize for winning was the trophy, sticky notes, pens, a notebook—and the best one—the Wani Kani alligator plushie. The plushie looks so cool, and last year they didn't give it out, so I really wanted it this year. I was also really nervous because I didn't even know if we made it past the Preliminary Rounds; I thought we did pretty good, just didn't know how well everyone else did in comparison. I was a bit startled that we made it, but

that meant that I really had to do my best this round. It was really fun doing Japan Bowl this year, and I want to thank the sponsors, competition organizers, and people volunteering for letting it happen, because if not then I wouldn't be able to learn Japanese history and culture nearly as accessibly.