School visits were the main outreach activity during my first year as a JOI coordinator in South Dakota. I have visited 6 schools in Aberdeen and Groton and introduced Japanese culture to students. Presented topics varied from Japanese school life, Japanese food, holidays and celebrations. I set monthly topics for presentations and questions’ sheet. Therefore, kids could have learned new things about Japanese culture every time I visited and they can ask me whatever they wonder about Japan. Kids always enjoyed hands-on activities such as Origami, bookmarks and chopsticks challenge.

One time, I gave a presentation about Sport-day and did some activities that Japanese students do on Sport-day. Students learned to corporate with others and follow rules. Even thought it was first time for them to do the activities, they did very well and enjoyed them.

Teachers at schools often tell me that kids in Aberdeen rarely have opportunities to be experience different cultures. I believe that learning and experiencing a different culture at an early age is important and opening their minds. School visits are my favorite activity because seeing kids’ smiles always makes me happy and motivated. I’m looking forward to reaching out to more schools in the following year.
I have had chances to go into the two prisons in Sioux Falls, South Dakota to teach Japanese culture. First time I visited there, I was full of anxiety in front of inmates but they welcomed me and told me about their experiences. Communicating with inmates made me realize that people can't live without others and how important to appreciate and forgive someone who supports you. This outreach was my life changing outreach.

I gave a presentation that inmates had asked me to present about Japan in front of more than 40 inmates. Their questions were about Japanese language, food, politics, natural disaster, and life in Japan. They also asked me a lot of questions during the presentation. When I was leaving, they said to me “Thank you for coming. We are looking forward to seeing you again.” I am really glad that I could give chances to inmates to learn Japanese culture because they don’t have any access to other cultures even outside of the prison. I hope I will keep visiting the prisons in Fall.
COMMUNITY VISITS

For community outreach, I have given presentations at local libraries, senior center, and Northern State University and held movie nights at NSU. These presentations were mainly conducted for university students and adults. The most significant difference between K-12 and community visit are that we could discuss the presentation topics after. I could also learn about the U.S and find out what I needed to study more about Japan.

My memorable community visit was the tea ceremony at the library. I had learned tea ceremony for 6 years in middle school and high school and wanted to have a tea ceremony activity since I came to Aberdeen. First, I gave a presentation about history, philosophy, and manners at tea ceremony. Afterwards, I showed the audience how to make the tea. Everyone had a chance to make tea at least one time and to drink it with Japanese sweets. I believe that it is important for people to experience actual cultures to comprehend the cultures. Participants were satisfied to make tea by themselves and served and drink the tea with proper manners.
Although all programs had to be abruptly halted due to the COVID-19 outbreak, NSU’s JOI Coordinator, Kirika Shimmei, made very significant contributions to our University, our local schools, and the Aberdeen community in general this past year. Her aggressive scheduling of programs at the elementary schools meant that around half of the 2nd and 3rd grade students in the district had the opportunity to experience at least one of her visits. At two sites we got to meet with every class in the entire school. Ms. Shimmei developed a confident, engaging and inclusive presentation style that made learning about Japan fun for all of the students. Her programs at the University, the Senior Center, and the prisons similarly fulfilled the highest ideal of educational institutions--making opportunities to learn available to everyone. The eager engagement of Ms. Shimmei’s students--their enthusiasm, their questions, their desire for follow-up programs--shows that the JOI program is addressing an urgent need for international education in South Dakota.

Greg DePies
I have worked with YMCA since summer of 2020. Presented topics varied from New Year, HINAMATSURI, SETSUBUN, spring in Japan. I have mainly introduced seasonal Japanese holidays, and events. It was great opportunities for kids to watch videos of what I did on those days in Japan. Moreover, I had activities that are related to the topics for them to have some experience of Japanese culture.

"YOUR ACTIVITY SESSIONS IN THE PAST WERE WONDERFUL AND APPRECIATED"
- YMCA youth development center director

When I presented HINAMATSURI presentation, the activity was coloring OHINASAMA. The kids were showing me their colored OHINASAMA. I noticed that there are OHINASAMA that has variety of hair colors and skin colors. I was amazed how creative the kids are and they opened up my eyes.
Since the first year, school visits are one of my main outreaches that I have dedicated for. Even during the pandemic, I had wonderful opportunities with elementary schools and a high school. I gave a presentation of school in Japan and seasonal events in Japan. As one of the activities, students tried to use chopsticks. I was surprised how well they could use chopsticks.

One of my memorable lessons was with elementary school students. The topic of school in Japan always gets students' attention of how different school life in Japan and in the U.S. I taught the students how to start and end class in Japan (KIRITSU/REI/CHAKUSEKI) and we did it together in the class. After the class, I received an email from the teacher saying "The students love how to start and end the class and they decided to do it in their class too." I was happy to hear that they kept doing it.

"THANKS FOR TEACHING US ALOT ABOUT YOUR CULTURE AND GIVING US INSIGNS INTO YOUR COUNTRY."

-High School teacher
At NSU

"I WAS HAPPY TO WORK WITH WONDERFUL PEOPLE AT THE INTERNATIONAL OFFICE"

At the international week, I gave a presentation about Japanese language and making bookmarks that I taught how to write their name in Japanese. I also had a chance to present SADO. All audiences made Maccha by themselves and learned proper manners in Sado. It was a precious opportunity not only for the audience but also for me that we all had a moment to learn something new and experience it together.
It's been a pleasure working with Kirika. She is passionate about what she does! Kirika is one of the kindest and hard-working people I have ever met, who truly cares about her work. It was wonderful having her at NSU, the Office of International Programs, and the Aberdeen community.

Kirika has done an outstanding job sharing her love and knowledge of the Japanese culture, customs, language, and history. She has created a lifelong impact on the people she met during the last two years, from the children in the elementary schools and various organizations to college students, faculty, and staff at Northern State University, to the people in the Aberdeen community and beyond. We wish Kirika all the very best in her next endeavor.

-Dominika Blum