JOI Report 2008-09

Yukako Yamada
Day 1: Origami and Calligraphy:
The first day included Japanese greetings, a Japan quiz and Halloween activities. Since it was October, we made an origami jack-o-lantern. To complete the jack-o-lantern body, students wrote １ and 人 using Japanese calligraphy.

Day 2: School Life: Next Japanese students described school life. Galena students were surprised at the variety of the lifestyles. Finally, we had a chopstick race. The Japanese taught Galena students how to use chopsticks -- a big challenge for Galena students but they enjoyed it. The interaction between Mississippi students and Japanese students had been a success!!

Day 3: Family: On the last day, we discussed family and family life in Japan. Japanese students described their families. Galena students enjoyed listening to their stories because they found both similarities and differences: the students determined that family groups enjoy sports; however, only the Galena families enjoy hunting. At the end, we drank Japanese green tea. Everyone sat on the floor and ate Japanese sweets and drank green tea. Many Galena students had difficulty bending their knees but they gave it their best. Green tea is different from the sweet tea they are used to, but they still enjoyed the experience. Actually many asked for a second cup of green tea.

Coordinator’s Comments: The involvement of Japanese students and Ole Miss students studying Japanese turned out to be a success. It was a great opportunity for Galena students to meet various Japanese. Galena students asked Ole Miss students how they could learn Japanese, so the Ole Miss students became mentors. It was also a good experience for the Japanese because it exposed them to the US education system and improved their communication skills. It was hard to manage everyone’s schedules since college students are already busy with their schoolwork. Yet if schedules can be coordinated, this is be a great way to introduce Japanese culture to local communities.

Supervisor’s Comments: This activity exemplifies a primary motivation for JOI—“bringing Japan to the classroom.” This is a perfect example of the “bread and butter” type activities Yukako conducted many times across Mississippi during the two years she was here. As a result of these types of programs, Yukako provided very tangible and engaging experiences for many students, experiences when they not only learned about Japan but actually received a sense of what Japan is like.
Japanese Greetings: I started with greetings teaching them how to say “hello” and other greetings in Japanese as well as how to bow. Students had difficulty pronouncing Japanese and hesitated about bowing in the classroom; but I did see a lot of students say “Konnichiwa” while bowing with their friends in the corridor after class.

Japanese Geography: Since the class was world geography, I included many geography aspects. One interesting activity was a mental map: students drew a world map without a model anything, which helps show how they see the world. Students learned physical and human characteristics of place using pictures of Japan. In one picture, they saw Japanese high school students, and as a result, they not only learned about geography, but also learned about the lives of Japanese high school students. The students were interested more in Japanese culture because they saw other high school students in Japan.

Coordinator Comments: It was a tough but very interesting presentation. I was surprised many students were interested in Japan and many thought Japan was “cool”; however, since they didn’t have much information on Japan, students attended the workshop apprehensively. I was glad afterwards when many students said, “I want to learn Japanese.” “I want to go to Japan some day.”

Supervisor’s Comments: This presentation helps to illustrate the synergy that existed in the partnership between JOI and the Mississippi Geographic Alliance. Yukako made substantive efforts throughout her time in Mississippi to integrate the goals of these two programs – teaching about Japan and about geography. This was a challenging endeavor, but as the report of this activity shows, she was quite successful.
Japanese Festival

- Place: McCoy Elementary School
- Audience: 4th and 5th graders
- Length of Presentation: All day
- Goal: Students will be able: (1) to share their experiences with others, (2) to develop communication/presentation skills.

Kimberly Newton, a McCoy Elementary teacher, and I developed a year-long unit on Japan after I met her at a teachers’ workshop in the summer of 2008. I visited the school every month to provide culture and language presentations. At the end of the unit, the 4th and 5th graders had a Japan Festival and invited all the other students with their teachers and families. At the festival, they gave presentations about what they had learned about Japanese culture during the school year.

Students explain school life showing off a yellow cap and randoseru.

“This is how you make a crane . . .”

After reading Sadako, students made thousands of cranes they gave to guests.

Mrs. Newton, Mrs. Robert, Mrs. Anderson, Mrs. Ables and their 4th and 5th graders.

Students explain Japanese events: “There’s a Boy’s Day & Girl’s Day in Japan.”

“This is Hokkaido. This is Honshu . . .”

Finally some quiet as students concentrate on using a brush.

“Do you know about samurai?” Kids loved samurai culture.

Coordinator’s Comments: I appreciated students’ interest in Japan and teachers’ support. An entire year was a long commitment but it was also amazing. I will never forget their surprised expressions when they first met me when many asked me, “Are you a real Japanese?” Students just couldn’t stop asking questions. That encouraged me to bring as many things as I could to their class. Thanks to the teachers, the Japan Festival succeeded. Many people came to see students’ performances and they were proud their children/students. I hope that students will continue pursuing Japanese culture.

Supervisor’s Comments: This activity is clearly a special, “capstone” that goes beyond Yukako’s usual activities. It was a fabulous and memorable activity with strong impact on not just students but also teachers and parents in an entire school. It resulted from a constellation of factors difficult to repeat, but it illustrates two important traits of Yukako’s work in Mississippi: (1) return visits Yukako made to many schools to extend the program beyond just a “one shot” experience, and (2) the energy, commitment, and dedication that Yukako applied to all her work in the JOI program.
Content:

1. **Question game**: As an icebreaker, participants answered four questions related to Japan. Each chose one question to ask another, so they could hear others’ interests and experiences. I instructed them to say “Domo arigato” (thank you in Japanese) to add to each conversation and bow.

2. **Bring Japan to your classroom**: I demonstrated lessons & materials I use in presentations. Teachers loved the *randoseru*, specialized maps, and pictures of Japanese schools and children. Teachers said it was good to know what JOI provides. Some found new ideas too!!

3. **Why do we learn about Japan?**: At the end, I reviewed that we study about Japan to encourage students to learn not only about Japan but also other countries. I made the reasons simple as if we were taking to 1st or 2nd graders.

From teachers:
- “We learn about other countries because we are linked to each other. Japan is very important to learn about because of Toyota, and this will create jobs for our students.”
- “We are all connected; just as we learn about family who don’t live by us, we learn about countries far away from ours. It enriches our lives.”

**Coordinator Comments**: The biggest benefit for me in the presentation was knowing JOI presentations are applicable to these elementary teachers. Since kamishibai was popular, I will put kamishibai presentations on my list. All participants were energetic, and I appreciated their high interest in Japan and the JOI program.

**Supervisor Comments**: Yukako is becoming a highly admired professional among teachers around the state. Some teachers who attended the workshop had already heard of JOI and Yukako, and were especially interested in seeing her in action. I observed a change in their attitudes throughout Yukako’s presentation. While many seemed hesitant to openly participate in the icebreaker, they grew more interested as she introduced information and materials. They became increasingly curious, asking more and more questions as the presentation progressed. Yukako also loosened up; she had thoroughly prepared as this was her first presentation to an audience of teachers. It was clear she wanted to be very professional, and appeal to their curiosity and teach them something, not only present what she could teach their students. I think this method of having Yukako present to groups during teacher workshops is a fabulous avenue for Yukako to ‘advertise’ JOI.
School: Madison Elementary School
Audience: 2nd graders
Time: 60-90min each
Goal of this presentation: To help students understand Japan better, and implement funds from a grant received by Ms. Webb from Nissan to do a class study of Japan.

Day 1: Where is Japan? – Japanese School Life: The first presentation included Japanese greetings, geography and school life. According to State educational standards, I focused on cardinal directions, geography and expanding their knowledge of the scope of the globe. Some students were confused by the concept of the greater world, but after talking about Japanese schools, they got the idea saying “people like us are in different countries, too.” Students loved learning about different customs, such as student lunch duty and swimming lesson at Japanese schools.

Days 2 & 3: Origami and Calligraphy Activity: Students found the origami and calligraphy activities interesting and surprising. Using newspaper was an interesting idea for students because they can do origami at home anytime. In calligraphy, students had fun trying to master the difficulty of keeping their elbows up while they were using the brushes and making strokes sensitively.

Day 4: Japanese tea and meal: Thanks to cooperation from the students’ parents, we celebrated the final Japan unit. Students wore handmade Asian cloth. I served a “Madison Elementary version” of a Japanese tea ceremony. Since students had sensitive tastes, I used bagged green tea and prepared sugar as needed. I explained what an authentic Japanese tea ceremony is, and told them I hope they will have the experience sometime in the future.

Coordinator Comments: I appreciate that I could stay with the same class for a longer term. I was pleased to hear that they enjoyed learning Japanese and their Japanese greetings became better and better. During the four presentations, I was thrilled at the students’ retention. They memorized my lessons clearly and quickly. I will prepare more consecutive programming for next year, as I feel that students gain much more from a series of lessons, as opposed to just one.

Supervisor Comments: I am very pleased Yukako was able to do a series of lessons with Ms. Webb’s class. There are other teachers in other schools she was able to provide repeat visits to, and it does indeed seem that this approach has the highest impact for students. Not only do they grow more comfortable with her, she does the same with them, and it is clear that she becomes inspired by working with these groups. I believe that when Yukako sees them demonstrating what they have
learned and grasping numerous principles from her lessons, the reward for Yukako is greater – she is able to feel she is making a true impact, and that she is indeed fulfilling her goals and JOI’s as well. Additionally, the series approach allows students to experience many different aspects of Japanese culture, and with the Madison Elementary group, it penetrated not only the school but the families as well. You can see people becoming more open and more curious. During this and other similar experiences, we see the changes in people as they begin to ask more probing questions, especially about Yukako, her family, and non-stereotypical questions. During many of Yukako’s presentations, she receives questions that begin with “Why do Japanese people...”, or “Do all Japanese...”, etc. The more exposure she provides, the questions change, becoming less ‘blanket assumption’ type questions. If nothing else is accomplished, I appreciate Yukako is able to change people’s perception that all Japanese are the same, or in some cases, that all Asian countries and people are the same. I believe that breaking these barriers is one of the most important aims of JOI in Mississippi.

JAPAN NOW!!

1. **Japanese Greetings**: I introduced basic Japanese greetings such as good morning, hello, thank you, etc. Students were initially hesitant as it was their first. I found the best way was for me to speak first –and quite loudly- and let them repeat. Later, they said “konnichiwa” among friends and to teachers. Gradually they thought speaking another language was cool.

2. **Japan Geography**: We discussed the location of Japan, the US and China and talked about the population of Japan compared to the US. Students were surprised at Japan’s high population density. Our review of Kyoto and Tokyo with pictures provided a link reminding them of what they already learned in history class.

3. **School Life in Japan**: I explained school life using pictures. Students were surprised at all the differences between school in Japan and the US, such as school uniforms, juku, year-long schedule, etc. They asked many questions about popular sports, movies, music, future careers, etc.

Teachers’ Comments: Comments from teachers:

--“The students loved Yukako and her presentation. They stayed with her throughout the whole class time.”

--“I hope it will be possible to repeat this program next year. “

Coordinator’s Comments: I appreciated their attention in the classroom. Since their knowledge of Japan was fractured, I discovered they often confused Japan and other Asian countries. I enjoyed talking with them to put the pieces in the right place. Middle school students are generally interested
in movies and music, just like Japanese students. The most frequent question was about a movie called *Tokyo Drift*, as I expected. They had fun finding similarities with Japanese students throughout the presentation. I find when it comes to other cultures, students usually learn only history. This was summed up by a comment I received from a teacher: “This is a wonderful presentation. We never hear this kind of presentation about the current Japan.”

**Supervisor’s Comments:** This was by far one of Yukako’s most challenging presentations of the year. 7th graders are not only a very tough audience due to their maturity, but this school contracted Yukako to do 6 presentations a day for 6 days. This was quite the toll on Yukako, both mentally, physically, and emotionally. I think this series of presentations made Yukako much tougher and confident. Initially, when receiving questions like, “How come all y’all look alike?”, I’m quite sure Yukako wanted to simply throw in the proverbial towel. Instead, she mustered great courage and confidence, and answered that question poetically – she told the young student that she too could say that when she first came to Mississippi, that many people all looked the same to her. But once she began to introduce herself to more and more Mississippians, she began to recognize the differences. As I commented in the last section, this once again shows how Yukako is breaking down ethnic stereotypes.

Also, with the volume of presentations in this series, Yukako proved that she has the stamina to travel and present numerous times weekly. After she lost her voice halfway through the week, I was ready to contact the school and say that we would need to reschedule the rest of her presentations for a later date. But Yukako insisted on finishing and fulfilling her agreement. After this ‘onslaught’ of 7th graders, I think her following presentations were a piece of cake.

Lastly, Yukako showed her prowess for talking with interviewers, as the local newspaper covered the JOI program in Tupelo Middle School. We received a lot of praise and inquiries following the exposure in the Tupelo Daily Journal (see photo on the right).