K-12 School Visits

I have visited 8 elementary schools, 2 middle schools and 10 high schools during my first year. Some of the students seemed very excited to see me for the first time. The teacher told me I was probably the first Asian person the students had ever met! For elementary students, Origami works (specially Ninja Stars) were pretty popular. I often taught younger grade students easy Japanese song “Kobuta-Tanuki- Kitsune- Neko” (Piglet-Raccoon-Fox-Cat) using Origami Animals. Animal sounds in Japanese were pretty popular as well as a dance imitating animals. As for older students, presentations on Japanese food and pop culture seemed very popular.

Students gave me a big reaction when I showed them MacDonald’s cups used in Japan. Some students became big fans of Japanese pop artists after my presentation. When I make students try Origami, no matter what grade they are in, I always make them make paper cups first. Most of the students can make Origami cups without my help, and it can make them confident.

Teacher’s comment

Having Haruko in my class was like taking a trip to Japan each time she visited! From Japanese language, culture and traditions to tea ceremonies and origami, Haruko’s thoughtful presentations and her natural ability to connect with students made her country come alive!
Cultural Events

Besides visiting K-12 schools, I have organized / attended several cultural events. The most successful event that I organized was “Step into Japan”. We set several stations where the participants could try different activities. Yukata fitting was the most popular station among all ages of participants. Other stations we had for this event were Origami, Calligraphy, school life and pop culture/fashion in Tokyo. Japanese pop music was played as background music throughout the event. We also set the room for 3.11. I put photos from Tohoku on the wall, and showed the DVD about the recovery from the earthquake and Tsunami. The DVD was provided by the Japan Foundation.

In November, UVa hosted a Japan Foundation film series. We had over 100 people come to see Japanese films. I had chances to have booths at festivals too. In April, the Japanese community in Charlottesville had a Japanese spring festival. Nen-daiko Japanese drumming group came all the way from Washington D.C. and people in the city enjoyed various cultural activities.

Participant’s comment
Wow! That was the least expensive international trip I’ve ever taken! From the flying crane origami demonstration to the rolling up and cutting of our own sushi creations, everywhere I turned was another delight at the buffet of Japanese cultural delicacies. My favorite was trying my hand at calligraphy, fashioning the katakana letters with real ink and brush on paper to write in Japanese!
Sunrise Park Community Center is one of the places that I visited the most this year. The residents of Sunrise Park tried everything that I introduced, and made many beautiful Japanese crafts. The most memorable activity that I had at Sunrise park was the Okonomiyaki party. Everyone loved cooking and eating okonomiyaki. The flavors of Japanese green tea and Mochi (Rice cakes) weren’t as popular but we enjoyed the ceremony of serving/drinking tea. We made Origami Sakura ornaments, paper cranes for the Tree of Hopes, Hachimaki, paper fans, and the mascots of Sunrise Park. We also danced a Japanese traditional dance, played paper sumo games, and made sushi rolls.

Another place that I visited in the Charlottesville community was Trinity Mission, a nursing home for older people. The residents were pretty skilled to make various origami works! Some of them enjoyed sushi for the first time.

**Supervisor’s comment**

*Haruko's work in Virginia has been extremely beneficial to the community and schools. She has contributed to events for all ages as well as those targeted towards K-12 students and teachers. The majority of the community she has reached is from rural and underserved areas with little to no prior acquaintance with Japan. They adore her!*
In addition to the schools I visited last year, I was able to visit many new schools. One new thing for this year, I invited a Japanese professor from Washington and Lee University to make sushi for one of my elementary school visits. The students enjoyed fresh sushi and so did the teachers. It was the first time for many of the students to try raw fish.

Another thing I did this year was implement a pen-pal project between schools for the deaf in Japan and Virginia. I could then visit the Virginia school for the Deaf and the Blind with a teacher from Tokyo Chuo school for the deaf.

I also worked on after school programs at four elementary schools, two high schools and one middle school.

These outreach activities for K-12 schools ended up being awarded the Jane Bakersville Community Award from Chesterfield County Public Schools.

**Supervisor’s comment**

*It is very exciting to watch Haruko teach students in Virginia schools. Her lessons on Japan are both informative and fun.*
Organizing Japanese Cultural Events

I organized and got involved in more events this year. “Step into Japan” at the International center was one of the most successful events. We had many participants who came back from last year!

The Japanese Spring festival in April was a big success too. We had more participants this year compared to last year. The Karuta Game Club from Piedmont community college, which was on a Japanese TV show, performed on stage during the event.

I also attended international fairs which were held at schools, colleges and in communities.

In March, I organized a Tea Ceremony Workshop for the students and staff of Blue Ridge Community College and Piedmont Virginia Community College. This workshop was a good opportunity to connect two community college members by giving the participants a chance to learn and enjoy Japanese traditional culture. One of the students taught us how to enjoy the culture and she demonstrated a tea ceremony. We all enjoyed our time together.

The Audience of Japanese Spring Festival

Participant’s comment

In March, I had the privilege of participating in the Tea Ceremony. It was so interesting and I enjoyed the hands on experiences- both of tasting the tea, and then later mixing and serving it to a partner. It was a good practice of leaving stress outside the door and calmly appreciating the moment; something we could use more of in the West! I also attended the Spring Festival, which was so much fun! There was quite a variety of demonstrations, music, and dance. It was very well organized and gave the opportunity for attendees to enjoy and appreciate Japanese culture.
Community College Visits all over Virginia

One major accomplishment this year was I worked with more community colleges and was able to visit schools near these colleges. Southwest Virginia Community College was the furthest community I visited during my two years. It’s in a beautiful mountain area which is 4.5 hours away from Charlottesville. I spent three days there and visited all levels of the school from elementary to high school in addition to presentations in classes at the college.

Virginia Western Community College was another college I enjoyed working with collaboratively. There were several students who knew a lot about Japanese culture. It was my great pleasure to hear what they thought about Japan after giving my presentations. I was also able to visit two elementary schools around this community college which had students who have limited options to learn about Japanese culture.

SWCC Faculty’s comment

We took advantage of the information that was given to us by contacting Haruko to come to visit our campus. We had an all-campus presentation where Haruko presented a PowerPoint presentation with about 130 students, faculty and staff present. She also visited public schools conducting hands-on activities. We feel that she contacted over 600 students. In totally approximately 750 people were presented to about Japan from this engaging and excellent presenter.