

Feels like Christmas

December brought in the holiday spirit with the ALT Community in Shiga going to Kyoto to see illumination and a Christmas party that included a Christmas sweater contest, singing Christmas songs and a gift exchange. The windows of Shiroyama's own ALT's apartment was full of snowmen, a Santa Claus and snowflake stickers and lights.



The spirit of the season seemed to spread through Minakuchi with lights near the international community center and in various shops. Signs reading "Merry Christmas" could be seen throughout town as the ALT's mailed Christmas presents and Christmas cards home to America.

At Shiroyama JHS, the semester was coming to a close. Tests had finished, and students were getting excited about winter break. One Shiroyama student along with her ALT met at Koka City hall a few times this month to ready her for her trip with students from other schools to Michigan in the USA. Together they worked on a letter to their host families, how to go through customs at the airport and practiced self-introductions and farewell speeches.

In class, first-year students learned about the differences between Japanese and American Christmas and the origins of a few Christmas traditions. The students were surprised to learn some of the history of Christmas as well as the names of all eight of Santa's Reindeer. To the ALT's delight, many students knew Christmas carols and were more than happy to sing them. Second-year students watched an American classic, the animated, "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" (1966). The film had no Japanese subtitles but with a little help from the ALT, the students found their confidence boosted as they realized that they could understand many words and most of the story on their own. Many more were excited to see the original film before the release of this year's remake. Many students asked the ALT about a character they knew as "ブラックサンタ" after some research, the ALT found the origin. In English to say, "Black Santa" refers to an African American person dressed as Santa Claus, but the Katakana in Japanese refers to a Santa Claus villain. He has many names in Germany (where the ALT's grandparents come from) he is called Krampus. He punishes bad children where Santa protects children and gives good children presents. In America, however, this story is not very famous.

Also, in December was the International Festival at the International Community Center. The ALT learned AKB48's "365 days of Paper Airplanes" with her classmates in her Japanese class for the festival. Together with people from America, Vietnam, Indonesia, India, China and more gathered on the stage to introduce themselves in Japanese and sing the famous AKB48 song to show their new Japanese skills. The festival had many delicious cuisines and beautiful performances.



The month came to a close with students leaving school for winter break. The ALT made trips to the post office to pick up gifts from abroad. She got together with friends on Christmas Eve for a delicious lunch and Christmas cake and finished the evening in Kusatsu around the station's beautiful lights for some shopping. Her and Minakuchi JHS's ALT picked up textbooks from the large international section in the bookstore beneath the station. The textbooks they will use to study for the Japanese proficiency test next year. After a morning of skyping with her family, the ALT is reminded of the love and hope of the season.