

New Friends

With February came a variety of weather. The month began with snow but has ended with sun and the promise of warmer weather. Final exams are coming and Shiroyama students have already begun to prepare for graduation and the end of the year.

Students had the opportunity to learn about the Roman origin of St. Valentine and Valentine's Day. Many were surprised to learn that Valentine's Day is celebrated a little differently abroad, with small cards and gifts exchanged by men and women. There was some dismay when they learned that America doesn't celebrate White Day as well.

Outside of school, Shiroyama's ALT spent one weekend doing some sightseeing in Kyoto. She visited Yasaka Shrine and Heian shrine with her friends. She bought what she initially thought was just a picture of the guardians of the four cardinal directions (四神), was actually a stamp card for major shrines. She hopes to collect all five of the stamps eventually. She also participated in the teacher's trip, which included an overnight stay at an Onsen in Mie and then a gondola ride up Mount Gozaisho and a visit to the Nagashima Resort gardens. It was a wonderful opportunity to talk with staff and to see Mie prefecture for the first time.

Shiroyama JHS received one exchange student from Dewitt, Michigan this month. Prior to her arrival, the host family's daughter (a student at Shiroyama), as well as the ALT, attended meetings at Koka City hall to prepare. They practice English conversations about explaining different things around the home and school and worked on welcome posters for when the American student would arrive. The students of Minakuchi, Shiroyama, Konan and Tsuchiyama middle schools grew more and more excited as the meetings went on.

Unfortunately, the American student missed out on Nin nin nin, Ninja Day, when workers at Koka City hall dressed as Ninja and the schools had a special ninja lunch with ninja gyoza and black rice. On Facebook, NHK shared a news clip about Ninja Day in English, the ALT was happy to be able to share a news video about her city with her friends and family back home.

The student from Michigan arrived. She got to experience wearing a kimono and visited the ninja village. She got to wear the school uniform and attend classes with the second-year class. The ALT was able to attend lunch with the second-year class to help out. In English class, the Michigan student participated in a class interview activity where students guessed her likes and dislikes and then asked her, "Which do you like, A or B?". Students found that they had a lot more in common with her than they initially thought. The English class also made posters with common and useful Japanese phrases with their English translations and presented them to the Michigan student and then enjoyed an American word game called "Apples to Apples".

The week proved to be a life-changing one for the Michigan student. There were happy memories shared and some tears shed at the farewell party. The ALT gave some parting words to encourage continued studies of the Japanese language and culture and enjoyed talking with the Japanese and American staff involved in the program. It was clear that the exchange program is an amazing opportunity to create lifelong friendships and encourage lifelong learning.

