

This summer marked the end of my first year here in Shigaraki and in Japan in general. As such, I've been in a pensive mood more often of late. I can't say that I always excelled at everything I tried or achieved all of my goals spectacularly, but I am proud of the work that I've done and the students I've helped. And with the start of August, a new group of Jet Program ALTs arrived. Teaching them at orientation and preparing to support them in their transition to Japan has made me realize how much I've learned since I arrived. I owe a lot of thanks to my senior ALTs, Koka City Board of Education, and my coworkers, with whose help I have begun to flourish. It also makes me realize how much more I have to learn about living here and the wonderful people around me. This year I am going to focus even more on Japanese, so that I can truly begin to bond with the other teachers and students (or at least learn how to not sound overly formal in the staff room). And I am just as excited about the journey of continuing to learn as I am for being able to apply those new-found abilities. There have been moments in the past year that were less than pleasant – people who were rude or fearful, times I failed to understand something important, students who were unruly – but the vast majority of my time has been positive. The moments of discomfort simply accent that. Looking back at the US over this year, I can't say I feel compelled to rush home. Someday I will most likely want to return and help heal the divisions there, but I believe that teaching is an action that helps the future, regardless of location. Plus, I think Americans could learn a lot from the Japanese, and I don't understand well enough to teach them yet. So here's to an exciting and bright near future in Shigaraki.

