

# 第77回静岡県中学校英語弁論大会

The 77<sup>th</sup> Shizuoka Prefectural English Speech Contest  
for Junior High School Students



令和7年10月3日(金)静岡県男女共同参画センター あざれあ  
Friday, October 3, 2025 at AZAREA

主催:静岡県教育研究会英語教育研究部  
SPONSORED BY Shizuoka Prefectural Junior High School  
English Education Research Association

後援:読売新聞社  
SUPPORTED BY Yomiuri Shimbun

第 77 回静岡県中学校英語弁論大会プログラム

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2	Kawashima Koumei	川島 功盟	富士市立吉原第二中学校	One Life
3	Shunei Sano	佐野 駿瑛	静岡市立東中学校	The Two Countries I Love
4	Nguyen Minh Khang	グエン ミン カン	浜松市立三方原中学校	Between Two Worlds
5	Matsunaga Sara	松永 紗来	富士市立吉原第一中学校	Days Spun by Threads of Memory
6	Hitomi Kokubun	国分 仁美	静岡市立城山中学校	Finding Our True Colors
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9	Momoka Terabayashi	寺林 桃花	静岡市立清水第一中学校	Languages Open You Up to a New World.
10	Kawai Kyosuke	川合 杏典	浜松市立開成中学校	A World Without Borders
11	Yamada Yuho	山田 優歩	松崎町立松崎中学校	Different ways of talking
12	Shinkai Ito	伊藤 森海	菊川市立菊川西中学校	Protecting and Connecting, Green Tea Culture
13	Suzuki Nanami	鈴木 七菜実	浜松市立北浜中学校	More Than Words
14	Tsunemi Yume	常深 結夢	三島市立南中学校	What Do We Have To Do To Open Doors
15	Uluru Yanase	柳瀬 うるる	静岡市立大里中学校	Listen to silent voices
16	Masada Yuta	正田 優太	静岡県立浜松西高等学校中等部	Switch off Your Brain, Wake up Your Mind
17	Takahashi Anna Beatriz	タカハシ アンナ ベアトリス	清水町立清水中学校	The Little Interpreters
18	Ayumi Yoshida	吉田 歩未	牧之原市立相良中学校	One Step

## 第 77 回静岡県中学校英語弁論大会審査結果

期 日： 令和 7 年 10 月 3 日（金）

会 場： 静岡県男女共同参画センター「あざれあ」大ホール

主 催： 静岡県教育研究会英語教育研究部

後 援： 読売新聞社

### ○審査委員

審査委員長	静岡大学教育学部教授	河村 道彦
審査委員	静岡大学教育学部講師	大瀧 綾乃
	静岡県教育委員会高校教育課 ALT	Michaela Kokavcova
指導・助言	県総合教育センター	Ryan Forrest

### ○結果

	名前	学校	タイトル
第 1 位	タカハシ アンナ ベアトリス	清水町立清水中学校	The Little Interpreters
第 2 位	柳瀬うるる	静岡市立大里中学校	Listen to silent voices
第 3 位	小楠麻梨音	浜松市立南部中学校	My school bag is too heavy but...
審査 委員長賞	川口イザベラ	浜松市立佐鳴台中学校	One Coin, Two sides
	佐野駿瑛	静岡市立東中学校	The Two Countries I Love
	寺林桃花	静岡市立清水第一中学校	Languages Open You Up to a New World
	伊藤森海	菊川市立菊川西中学校	Protecting and Connecting, Green Tea Culture

### ○高円宮杯全日本中学校英語弁論大会

- ・決勝予選大会 11 月 26 日（水）赤坂区民ホール
- ・決勝大会 11 月 28 日（金）有楽町よみうりホール

タカハシ アンナ ベアトリス	清水町立清水中学校	決勝大会進出・第 4 位 ワールドファミリー賞
柳瀬うるる	静岡市立大里中学校	決勝大会進出
小楠麻梨音	浜松市立南部中学校	決勝予選大会出場

## One Coin, Two Sides

Kawaguchi Izabera (Sanarudai J.H.S.)

When you look at me, would you be able to say that I'm Japanese? A foreigner? Maybe it's 50/50?! Flip a coin and you may get it. Or, does it matter?

Because of my looks I always felt misunderstood by society or like I didn't belong. When I was a child, I moved from city to city because of my parents' work. At some point, they decided we would move to Japan. Little me thought it would be a wonderful experience, I could meet another country! But the reality was very different. We moved to a very tiny city where my family were the only foreigners. We instantly became famous for it, but that didn't make me feel good at all. Why? Because in Brazil, my home country, people often pointed out that I looked like a foreigner. I moved to another country, and people still said the same thing. That image of myself followed me as a curse. It was confusing. Which one was I supposed to be? When I couldn't understand the lesson we were taught, the students would instantly say things like, "You're not from here, so you don't understand!" or "Why can't you be just like us?". I truly felt disconnected from everywhere. If people saw me in that way, why shouldn't I agree with them? Like a coin flipping in the air, everyone was trying to call me one side or the other.

That all changed when I moved to Hamamatsu. Many foreigners live and grow up here, so both the Japanese side and the foreign side have learned to cooperate. My classmates truly opened my eyes. In junior high school, I studied with other foreigners for the first time. Foreigners that weren't judged by Japanese classmates, that didn't struggle with discrimination by society. I think I'm a very shy person because of my past experiences, but when I started to coexist with more foreigners that weren't being judged, I got more comfortable and felt included—something I was missing in elementary school. The students and teachers, both foreign and Japanese, helped create a comfortable atmosphere. Because of them, I was able to overcome the discrimination I was suffering.

For example, in the 1st grade, I joined the school lunch committee... even though I didn't want to. At first, I wasn't confident enough to speak when we had an important announcement. But I didn't give up. Instead, my friend helped me with support and advice. Her encouragement pushed me to speak. As I got more comfortable with myself and people around me, I volunteered myself for the lunch committee in the second and third year and felt even better. That same friend dragged me to the art club. It wasn't even my first choice! But I am happy I landed there. It was the first time I got compliments for the paintings I did. Even if they weren't that good, people started to see the things I could do, how I could express myself, and more, see me for the person I am.

Now, I've become a brighter person and started to think of my life experience as a coin, with two different sides that complement themselves. The head of the coin, an analogy for the hardship during elementary school, while the tails, for my growing up in Hamamatsu. Those dualities made me look deeper into myself and the conclusion I got was that I'm a mix. The two sides make one complete whole. Two lives, one me.

Individual experiences make us who we are, not just the way we look. I'm glad that I have found a place where people can look past my appearance and see me for who I am. Each of us has dualities that mix and make us complete. Because I know the pain of discrimination from people who only saw one side of me, I will never do that towards others. Thanks to my classmates that showed me it was possible, I want to create a safe place where people can be themselves without being judged. A place where we can understand each other. Like my friend that helped me speak to others with confidence. If someone is being discriminated against, I'll speak up. If someone is isolated, I'll reach out. And I hope you will, too. These are things we can do together, and I believe we can make a better world. And it all starts with seeing two sides of one coin.

# One Life

Kawashima Koumei (Yoshiwara Daini J.H.S.)

Did you know that more than 9,000 cats are killed every year in Japan? Many of these cats have various backgrounds, such as lost house cats, abandoned cats, cats whose owners can no longer take care of them, and strays. Any cats or animals caught by animal control on the streets are often put down soon due to disease prevention. I saved my cat from this cruel fate.

Recently, cat shelters have become a popular means to save cats that would otherwise be put down. These shelter cats are healthy cats that just need a loving home. If you are thinking of keeping a cat, shelter cats are much cheaper than pet shops. Additionally, thanks to cat shelter organizations, many of the cats are well-trained.

My family adopted a shelter cat about six months ago. That's when I met my cat, "Jin". The day he came to our house, I was so happy. When I first met him, he was very scared but very cute. He wouldn't even look me in the eye; there was no light in his eyes. He just sat still in the corner of his cage for three days, and wouldn't eat or drink any water. Seeing Jin like that made my heart ache. I tried calling out to him many times and offered him toys, but there was absolutely no response. I was so worried that I even slept in front of his cage. Several days later, Jin came close to me for the first time and started to get friendly. I still remember how happy I was at that time when Jin finally opened up to me. Who knows what kind of trauma he had gone through...

Since living with Jin, I started looking forward to coming home. Just having him by my side makes me feel better. In fact, research has shown that interacting with animals reduces stress, and can even lower the risk of heart disease. Perhaps because of Jin, my mother has gotten less angry with me than before. Now, Jin is a proud member of our family. He eats well, sleeps with a loud snore, and is incredibly cuddly. Everytime I see Jin, I'm glad that we adopted a shelter cat. Sometimes I feel that I, who saved his life, was the one who was saved.

Taking care of Jin, I have started to think about the "weight of life" and the "responsibilities for a life". Shelter cats have finally become popular in Japan, but when I researched about it, I found that many places overseas value the lives of animals significantly more. For example, Switzerland is said to have the toughest animal protection laws in the world. They don't just care about the safety and health of the animals, but also psychologically. In Germany, every licensed animal shelter must commit to a no-kill policy—euthanasia is only allowed in rare, humane cases. These compassionate approaches have reshaped how some countries handle animals.

It can be said that human and animal lives are essentially the same "one life". I want to spread the knowledge and existence of shelter pets to as many people as possible. I hope that we can become a society where each and every life is cherished.

# The Two Countries I Love

Sano Shunei (Higashi J.H.S.)

Hello, my name is Shunei Sano. I have two names and two nationalities. But, I have to choose one.

When I was little, I lived in Busan, Korea. I lived with my Japanese mother, Korean father, and younger brother. I spoke Korean outside, but Japanese at home. As a child, I thought this was normal.

At school, I learned about Takeshima. I was taught that “Takeshima is a Korean territory that was taken back from Japan.” Also, I learned how Japan treated Korea badly. After class, a friend who knew I was Japanese, asked me if the lessons were true. I couldn’t answer. So, I asked my Japanese mother about what I learned. But, she chose not to answer.

When I was 8, I moved to Japan. I was shocked. The history classes in Japan were different from Korea. I didn’t know which one was right. I was confused. I realized why my mother didn’t answer my question before. She wanted me to decide what was right or wrong on my own. Now it’s time for me to research the relationships between Japan and Korea, and then choose one nationality.

There is a difference of historical opinions between the two countries. In a Korean survey, 87% thought Japanese people did not say sorry enough for their past. This is a problem. We can’t improve relationship with this way of thinking.

Recently in Japan, there has been a Korean boom. Younger people are becoming more interested in Korean culture. Also, the same thing is happening in Korea. In a survey of Koreans ages 18 to 29 years old, 66% said they like Japan. This makes me happy. I think our generation is the key to Japan and Korea’s growing relationship.

I have been here since I was 8. I am used to the Japanese language, culture, and lifestyle. I will choose Japan and continue living and growing here. But, I still see my family in Korea and they always welcome me with love. Such a relationship is ideal. I want to promote this kind of relationship all over the world. Would you dislike the people you care about if they had another nationality? If they weren’t 100% Japanese? No, I wouldn’t. I think it’s important to spend time and get to know each other.

Soon, I will lose one of my passports, but I will not lose my two names. They will always be a part of me. Until now, I haven’t really talked about my Korean roots. But if I talk about it more, maybe I can be a bridge between my two countries. Communication is important. By talking and listening, we can make good relationships. I want to see a world where everyone supports each other, like family. What can we do? Well, I can start with my self-introduction. Let me try it again.

Hello, my name is Shunei Sano. Also, my name is Junyoung Park. I have two names. I have roots in Japan and Korea. I love my two countries. Nice to meet you.

## Between Two Worlds

Nguyen Minh Khang (Mikatahara J. H. S.)

Have you ever felt different? Like really different? I have. Sometimes, I feel like I live in two different worlds: Japan and Vietnam. One is calm and polite. The other is loud and cheerful. And when those two worlds crash into each other...boom. Culture shock.

I was born in Japan, but my family is from Vietnam. At home, we speak differently. In Vietnam, emotions are freely expressed. If we're happy, we show it. If we're upset, we talk it out right away. But in Japan, everything is quieter. Even lunch at school is peaceful.

When I was in elementary school in Japan, I talked a lot and made a lot of noise during class. Every year, my teachers often told me, "Be quiet." I didn't understand why. In Vietnam, it is normal to talk loudly, laugh, and show feelings freely. Because of how I was raised, I got in trouble a lot. Every time, I felt confused. "Should I be quiet today?" "Am I too loud? Too cheerful?"

One day in social studies class, during a group project at school, I shared my ideas quickly and confidently, but my classmates didn't like it. They said, "You're pushing your ideas too much." "You should listen to everyone." I was so surprised. I didn't understand why they were so angry. In my culture, sharing your opinions even if it's different is normal and expected. I didn't mean to be rude. I thought I was being helpful. Growing up, we were taught to speak up and share ideas, but after I explained my situation to my dad, he told me that I should be careful about how I say it.

The next day, when I expressed my opinions, I tried to be polite and used kind words. I also listened to other people's opinions with respect. Then, my friend also started to share their opinions, and we were able to understand each other. After that, we talked more and we ended up making a great project together. It was hard at first, but we learned to adjust to each other's style. And that made us better friends.

Through these experiences, I learned that sometimes, by clashing with each other, we can actually build better friendships. At first, I tried to hide my "other side." The loud one. The cheerful one. The different one. But then I learned something important. Sometimes opinions may clash, but they can become a bridge that connects two people. When I stay true to myself, I make real friends. When we share our cultures to each other, we learn something special: how to build meaningful connections. Being different isn't a weakness. It's a gift. I don't have to erase one culture to fit into another. I can be both. I can be me.

So, have you ever felt different? Don't worry. Different doesn't mean wrong. It means you have something special. Your voice, your culture, your story. They matter. I want to keep living true to myself from now on.

# Days Spun by Threads of Memory

Matsunaga Sara (Yoshiwara Daiichi J.H.S.)

Do you have someone you love dearly and don't want to lose, or happy memories you never want to forget? What if those important people or memories were suddenly taken away from you, how would you feel? Today, I would like to talk about dementia.

My grandmother has dementia. Dementia gradually reveals aspects of a person that we didn't know about. Honestly, it was really upsetting to see my beloved grandmother changing so much. She kept asking the same questions and repeating the same stories over and over again, which was so frustrating that I sometimes felt like I didn't want to see her anymore. Seeing her like that made me feel like she was truly changing, and it was like being confronted with the harsh reality of her transformation. I also felt anxious and lonely thinking that I might disappear from her memories, and there were times when I wished I could just forget about her altogether. But I have so many happy memories with my grandmother that I don't want to forget. Perhaps the happy, smile-filled past that cannot be erased is what is tormenting us now.

So, I imagined what would happen if I lost my memory. If my memory were gone, I wouldn't even realize it. Thinking that the happy memories would be lost and the people I was close to would become strangers I didn't know made me feel incredibly lonely, sad, and even terrified. I thought that would mean I wouldn't be myself anymore.

How is my grandmother feeling right now? Perhaps she feels lonely and sad, but she might forget it quickly. However, what we as her family must do is not to preserve our happy memories with her, but to be there for her and support her feelings.

People cannot live alone; we are always supported by others. Even if memories fade, connections with others never end. If I were to have Dementia, I believe my family and friends would still remember me. I began thinking about what I could do now for those with dementia.

There are many people around us who are battling dementia. Dementia is a disease that gradually robs one of memory and judgment. It is extremely difficult for both the individual and their family. People with dementia are not "forgetful people." They are human beings just like us, seeking love and warmth. What is most important is to sympathize with their hearts, respect them, and support them. Furthermore, by deepening our understanding of dementia, we can achieve early detection and appropriate care, thereby preserving their quality of life. Also, when each of us shows compassion toward those with dementia and their families, it warms society as a whole. In order to create a society where everyone can live with peace of mind, our kindness and actions are essential.

Finally, I think that our understanding and support are the greatest source of strength for those with dementia and their families. Our small acts of kindness and consideration can be the light that brightens their future.

# Finding Our True Colors

Kokubun Hitomi (Shiroyama J.H.S.)

They say you shouldn't judge a book by its cover. But on social media, all we can show is the cover of our books. For example, we love posts with pretty photos, famous people, and funny videos. However, these posts are only what someone else wants us to see, and they may be different from the way things really are. In other words, it's possible to create a seemingly perfect version of our lives on social media. The problem is that some people judge themselves based on the posts that they see and make. This is especially hard for teenagers. When we see posts of people who seem like they have many friends and are good at everything, we wonder why we can't be like them. Thinking this way is dangerous, since it makes some of us stop eating in order to look thinner, or study all night long in order to get better grades. But in reality, nobody is perfect. Social media makes us forget this sometimes, but it's not the root of the problem. Actually, we face the same pressures to succeed and fit in at school, as well.

Fitting in at school was particularly challenging for me, since I am from Peru. Although my family has Japanese roots, we act differently from other Japanese people. To start, we like to express our opinion directly and treat everyone similarly, whereas Japanese people tend to change their way of speaking depending on who they're talking to. For example, my Japanese teachers told me to use respectful language called *keigo* when speaking to them, which is different from how I talked to my teachers in Peru. Also, when we receive a compliment, we accept it and say "thank you" instead of refusing it.

Because I was raised with different values, one of my classmates used to be disrespectful to me, which made me feel like I wasn't good enough. However, I still tried my best to come to school and make new friends. These friends helped me realize that it was okay to be different, because they liked every part of me, even my differences. Now, it doesn't hurt me anymore if someone disrespects me because of my differences. I am grateful for my friends because they helped me gain confidence in myself, but friends aren't the only way to gain self-confidence. For example, we can talk more with our families, watch uplifting videos on YouTube, talk to a psychologist, and talk positively to ourselves.

I want other teenagers to feel good about their true selves, so that they won't feel bad when other people judge them or feel the need to compare themselves to others. This will help them not only in school and on social media, but for the rest of their lives, since there is peer pressure everywhere in the world. Also, it will help us value the differences in each other. Learning about each other's differences will encourage us to try new things and have diverse experiences. I believe that we all have a unique story to tell. Let's enjoy these stories, without judging ourselves or each other. Let's read each other's whole book, not just the cover.

# My school bag is too heavy but...

Ogusu Marion (Hamamatsu Nambu J.H.S.)

Today, I want to ask all of you a very interesting question: Have you ever thought about what your school bag really means to you?

Most people might say it's just a bag to carry stuff. But to me, it's very important. It's my partner. It carries not only my things, but also my stories. I think school bags across Japan carry something similar for many students.

Actually, Japanese school bags have a long history. The randoseru, for example, was first used in the Meiji period at Gakushuin, the first school in Japan. The idea was simple: "Carry your own things. Be strong. Be independent." And that spirit still lives on today.

So, I imagined for a moment, what if my school bag could talk? It would probably scream: "Help! I'm too heavy!" But, every morning, I throw it over my shoulder and rush out the door. Inside it? Textbooks, notebooks, handouts... and mysterious pieces of paper that I can't throw away. They are more than school supplies. They are reminders of my daily drama, my laughter, and sometimes even my tears. My school bag is always full, yet stays silent, strong and supportive.

Going to school often feels like Mission: Impossible. When the traffic light starts counting down, I run like I'm in an action movie. But actually... I look more like a sleepy turtle, and if I bump into a friend it turns into a comedy scene. (Oh, sorry! No, I'm sorry. It was my fault. No, no. It was my fault.) When I trip, my bag catches me like a cushion. Arriving at school means we've completed our first mission of the day.

Rainy days, windy days, angry days, lonely days my bag always supports me without a word.

But what about students around the world? In America, colorful backpacks with stickers and charms show their personality. In Korea, smart, stylish designs are popular. But in Japan, our bags are strong, heavy, and serious. All the same shape. The same color. The same standards. But in them, I see our values: effort, harmony, teamwork and safety.

If school bags in other countries are like loud friends, then Japanese bags are like quiet ninjas, working silently behind the scenes. There's no "better" or "worse", they all help us do our best every day. But I am proud to carry my bag knowing its history and values.

My bag is worn at the corners now. The handle has small tears and the color is starting to fade. But that tired look is proof of all the days we've spent together. To be honest, I used to think, "This bag is too heavy." But now I don't mind the weight. Because inside, it carries my memories, my growth and everything that makes me who I am.

So today, I want to say thank you to my school bag. Thank you for carrying my books, and my memories, every single day.

Soon I'll take off this bag and graduate. But that won't be the end. The time we spent together will stay with me forever. My next bag will carry new books, new dreams, and new memories, but no matter where I go, I'll never forget the strength and courage that my school bag gave me.

# My Experience of War

Chan Myae Thu (Fujinomiya Daisan J.H.S.)

I'm sure that everyone here wakes up every morning, eats breakfast with their family, goes to school, hangs out with their friends and has a good time. But what if that life was suddenly taken away? What would you do? This is what happened to me.

I'm from Myanmar and on February 1st of 2021, I woke up to the news that our leader, Aung San Suu Kyi had been arrested by the military who had started a coup. Everyone including me was lost and devastated. The internet was cut off, and we could only see the state news broadcast. We were not able to know the truth. Since that day, we started protesting in any way we could, but after about 2 months they started killing the protesters to scare them. I just wanted it to end.

One day when I was 10, I was at a demo against the military and I was scared. The army started shooting at us, and we had to run for our lives to get away from the bullets. I was with my uncle when he was caught, but luckily I was able to escape with the help of other protesters. He was an amazing man, but his luck wasn't. He is still in prison to this day.

On May 12th of 2021, another uncle of mine got arrested. All he did was talk about the situation in Myanmar. His trial went on for about 5 months and he was sentenced to 11 years in prison. Things like this happen almost daily. After that my family became quiet and family time became a rare thing since we concentrated on other things to ease the pain. My mother worked more overtime, and I threw myself into my studies. I still miss them but I know until this bad dream is over I need to become better and stronger.

Apps like Facebook, and Instagram were banned so we had to start using VPNs to use social media since it's the only source of legitimate news that we can get. When school started again I stopped going to school as a way of protest. It's called CDM. It stands for Civil Disobedience Movement. Can you imagine this in Japan? After about a year I had to go back to school because my education was also important, so I went to private school so the tuition fees wouldn't get into the government's hands.

Now Myanmar has fallen into civil war, with the government and opposition groups like the PDF fighting daily. Because of this my father, who has been working in Japan for a long time, decided that I should join him to be safe. I didn't want to come, but not because I didn't like Japan but because I felt guilty about leaving my friends and family behind. I had to come for my own sake. That's why I'm here now.

Now in Japan, my life is very different from when I was back in Myanmar. Now, I have more freedom and I can go out with my friends anytime without being afraid. I can also have a better education and a chance of a good career. It's still not the same but I feel like I'm starting to have a normal life again. But memories of my childhood still flood my head. I remember hanging out with my friends, playing games and attending events with my family. I had the perfect life taken away from me. Everytime I call my family in Myanmar, my childhood home, streets, snacks, friends, and every nostalgic memory hits me like a bomb. I think to myself "when will I wake up from this nightmare?"

I just want to reunite with my friends and family. I want to spend time with them like we used to, attending events, celebrating birthdays and so on. Some say I'm delusional, some say I'm hopeless and some say I'm pitiful. But none of them have tried to understand me or tried to see things from my point of view. War is a terrible thing. I really wish that the war had never happened and now I wish that it would end now, so that the next generation won't have to go through the same horrific situation as so many people are now.

If I could wish for three things I would wish for people all over the world to know about Myanmar, both about the terrible situation and the wonderful country that it really is, I would wish for it to be a more humane society and I would wish for this nightmare to end. This is my experience of war.

# Languages Open You Up to a New World

Terabayashi Momoka (Shimizu Daiichi J.H.S.)

"Bonjour, je m'appelle Momoka. Comment ça va?"

Oh, are you confused? Maybe you're thinking, "Why is she speaking French? This is an English contest!" But, you see, I want you to experience how words can reach your heart, even if you don't know their meaning. I had such an experience, and it convinced me that words can be a bridge to connect our hearts. Let me share my wonderful story of how I crossed that bridge.

First, I want to ask you a question. Why do we learn languages? Many people would say it's to get more knowledge or to know more about the world. I used to think that way. But that all began to change last May when my teacher suggested I work for the United Nations. I looked it up and learned that English and French are two official languages. I thought, "French? Sounds cool!" Soon I started learning French casually. At that time, language was just knowledge to me.

Using a popular app called Duolingo, I studied French for just three minutes a day. I learned a little vocabulary, like *chat* is cat and *garçon* is boy. But it wasn't always so easy. Around day 150, just before my exams, my motivation was decreasing. While I could memorize new words, French grammar was too difficult, and I began losing my passion. But I told myself, "Hey, if I stop now, I might never try again." So, I decided to continue. And I'm so glad I did.

On day 362, I was in Nara Park on a school trip. I was taking pictures with foreign tourists using English when a lady said, "I'm sorry, I can't speak English well. I'm French." My heart jumped! A real French person, right there in front of me! I took a deep breath and said, "J'étudie français." She smiled and said, "Super!" I'll never forget that special moment. It wasn't an AI-generated voice, but a real person's voice. I was so moved!

Later, I heard another woman say, "Je suis fatiguée." I decided to talk to her too. In broken French, I asked, "Excuse-moi, vous êtes français?" She replied, "Oui nous sommes français." We were able to have a short conversation, and I learned she was from Paris.

It was like a dream. I expressed my feelings in French and understood what she was saying. We connected to each other through words, and it was so much more lively and heartfelt than using a machine translation.

After taking photos together, I said, "Au revoir, merci beaucoup." She replied, "À bientôt. Nous vivons à Paris!" which meant, "See you again. We live in Paris!" I could tell this wasn't just a farewell. She was inviting me to meet her again in the future. Her words deeply touched my heart. I understood her feelings and thoughts beyond the individual words. I knew then that language was a bridge that closed the distance between our hearts.

So, back to my question. The true purpose of learning languages isn't just to get knowledge or to see the world. It's to connect our hearts to others around the world.

This experience has completely changed my attitude toward words and languages. I've become more conscious of how to convey my feelings and thoughts. One day, I hope to be a spokesperson at the United Nations Information Center and send out words of hope to people suffering in wars or from discrimination.

Words have power. It's up to each of us to use that power wisely and to carefully consider the feelings and thoughts we put into them.

So, why should we learn languages? You won't find the answer in textbooks, dictionaries, or apps. The answer will come to you in the chance encounters you experience during your life. Just like me, I hope you'll learn languages not just for knowledge, but to connect with people and open up a new world. "À bientôt."

# A World Without Borders

Kawai Kyosuke (Kaisei J.H.S.)

Have you ever looked at a map and carefully examined the borders? I have. When I look at it, I sometimes wonder what it would be like if there was a unified world without borders. There are currently over 7,000 languages and countless ethnic groups in the world. When I look at the map, my imagination runs wild wondering what kind of people they are and what kind of lives they lead. This is why I want to talk about the importance of embracing differences.

Since ancient times, there have been instances when borders were established, and when nations invaded nations. Recently, you may have seen the news about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and the conflict between Israel and Palestine. There are many conflicts of this kind in almost every part of the world. Ethnic groups are discriminated against and chased out of their homes by other ethnic groups. In the West, issues caused by racial differences continue to occur. When I see this news, I feel disheartened.

At home, my family and I often talk about war. When we do, the conclusion that we often reach is, "both sides are in the same boat; and both are killing people." I believe that if we could reach this conclusion, it means that the war was unnecessary in the first place. The astronaut Mamoru Mori has often said in interviews that from space, there are no defined borders on Earth. Therefore, why do people groups fight each other? Perhaps it is because when we learn about geography and history at school, we become aware that there are many different countries with many different peoples, who all have their own histories. These differences can create conflict.

I think it is good to learn history. George Santayana once said "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Yet, there is sometimes the difficulty of understanding who is right depending on your perspective. The history we learn from our communities are often one-sided, and this makes it difficult for people around the world to understand each other. Still, we should be able to look past these different perspectives and learn from each other.

I also think that we should treat people equally. I think it would be good to live in a world where we can treat people well without distinctions such as nationalities or races. For example, there are many foreign students at my school. When I talk to them, I try not to treat them as foreigners, but just as another person.

Japan, as the only country in the world to have suffered an atomic bombing, does not teach its people to criticize the country that dropped the bomb. It teaches its people about the bombing as a part of history, and also teaches how we can come closer to true peace. If all different peoples can overcome the past and look to the future, it may be a step towards a borderless world without conflict. People on Earth are connected by a huge circle. I believe that if each person opens their heart to that circle, we can slowly come closer to a world without borders.

## Different ways of talking

Yamada Yuho (Matsuzaki J.H.S.)

Have you ever heard of the term hearing impaired? It means those who have trouble hearing. Some people cannot hear at all, while others can only hear a little. My mother's parents are hearing impaired. They communicate using sign language, called shuwa in Japanese. I like my grandparents very much, but I never tried to learn sign language. That's because I rarely saw them each year. However, this situation suddenly changed. Our family decided to live with them because my brother changed his baseball team. We moved from Matsuzaki to Toi, so I also had to change schools at that time.

At first, I was worried about whether I could make friends or not. But after a few days, I realized that making friends was not the biggest challenge. Communicating with my favorite people, my grandparents, was.

When I tried to talk to them, we would write in air with our fingers to communicate. It took a lot of time to understand each other, but it was not a big problem before, because we did not talk very often. After moving to Toi, though, this way of communication became a real problem. Maybe my grandparents felt the same way, so they asked me to learn finger alphabet. It is used to spell out the Japanese syllabary. They told me it was much easier than learning full sign language. They kindly taught me with smiles on their faces. Just as they said, it only took about 10 minutes to learn. When they showed me this new way of communication, I felt both happy and a little awkward. I realized not only that they were trying to connect with me, but also that I had not tried to connect with them.

My grandparents also give lectures to help others learn about the hearing impaired. What impressed me the most is how much they do for this issue. They always try to break the barrier between able-bodied and disabled people. They care about everyone, not just the people around them. When I reflected on my own actions, I felt ashamed. Even though I had chances, I hadn't tried to understand my favorite people.

Their attitude encouraged me to try. After talking with them more, I started to learn sign language. Now I try harder to understand them, because I want to be like them. This speech is a part of that effort. Compared to everything they've done, this may be a small step, but it's still a step forward. Just like I started with the finger alphabet, I'm moving forward little by little. It doesn't matter where you're from or what you look like. I want to find ways to help others, and I believe the first step is to try to understand them. I know that's harder than it sounds, but I will hold on to this idea and keep trying, just like my grandparents do for me.

# Protecting and Connecting, Green Tea Culture

Ito Shinkai (Kikugawa Nishi J.H.S.)

Green tea has always been a part of the daily lives of Japanese people. Until around the Showa era, almost every household had a kyusu teapot, and it was perfectly normal to sip tea from a yunomi teacup after meals. When I was a small child and visited my grandparents' house, they would always serve hot green tea. For many people, that hot tea may have symbolized warmth and security. However, this familiar scene is quietly fading away. Many younger people have never used a kyusu to make tea, not even once. Instead, they make coffee, or buy bottled drinks.

I remember playing hide-and-seek and tag in the tea fields when I was little. But now, I hear that those tea fields aren't being used. In Shizuoka, many farms are family run and still use traditional methods. But young people aren't interested in taking over. The tea farms are closing down one after another. As a result, many tea fields are abandoned, and the once green-covered hillsides are now overrun with weeds. I want to change this situation.

My family runs a 20-hectare tea farm in Mangrove Mountain, Australia. In 1995, when green tea demand in Japan was at its peak, my grandfather had the idea to grow new tea in Australia, where the seasons are opposite, so that "seasonal flavors" could still be delivered during Japan's winter. That's how my family's business began. It was very hard work getting the soil, the tea leaves and the taste right. But after 27 years of trial and error, we finally achieved a green tea we were happy with. This new idea was a first step, not only for preserving Japan's green tea culture, but also for expanding it to the world.

Today, there is an unprecedented matcha boom going on around the world. Matcha is a superfood rich in nutrients because we eat the entire tea leaf. It offers health benefits such as antioxidant effects, relaxation, and clearer thinking. Blending with café culture, matcha lattes, matcha frappuccinos, and matcha ice creams are appearing everywhere, gaining popularity worldwide. We must not waste this opportunity.

I think it would be a good idea to create more chances for people overseas to try Japanese tea, like at department stores, tourist spots, airports and other places. There's still a lot of room to promote Japanese tea.

Another idea is to hold workshops where people can experience tea ceremonies or learn how to brew tea properly. This would help them enjoy Japanese traditions and feel closer to green tea. I think tourists from other countries would be interested in these experiences, too.

A third idea is to help the local area grow. We could offer experiences like tea farming or harvesting, and hold tea ceremony events to give people more chances to get involved. When people experience tea first-hand, even locals can feel more connected to green tea.

These kinds of efforts could lead to things like export businesses and other new activities. Young people might also start to feel like they can do work that connects their hometown with the world. If the image of tea farming changes from 'tough and not profitable' to 'challenging but meaningful,' more young people will want to carry it on. It's important to grow tea not just as something we drink, but as a culture people can take part in.

Let's bring the tea fields of Shizuoka back to life and vibrancy. Let's take Japanese green tea culture to the world and to the next generation. We must keep moving forward so that our tradition is not lost.

## More than Words

Suzuki Nanami (Kitahama J.H.S.)

The connections we make in our lives are achieved through more than just words. My grandparents, who are deaf, taught me this.

How do you communicate with your loved ones? If you lost your hearing, would you feel as close with them? For most of us, we have the privilege of communicating through speaking. My grandparents, however, aren't as lucky. Despite lacking the ability to hear, they were able to build a loving relationship for which some people spend their entire lives searching.

As a child, I was uncomfortable with them. I was not able to understand their emotions. Even though I didn't want them to, my grandparents would babysit me. There, I would sit in silence, wondering how my mother and father got along so naturally with them.

I answered that question when I was gardening with my grandfather. We had no shared language, yet there was no silence. We laughed and smiled together anytime we dug up a big potato. He was even able to teach me a thing or two about gardening. I could feel his love and warmth surrounding me even with no spoken language.

I realized that true connection is felt, not said. Sharing a genuine laugh, smile, or glance is how we truly build meaningful relationships with others. Words can be empty, and people use them to lie to each other every day. But with my grandparents, every facial expression, laugh, and gesture were all made with real love.

My grandmother, who is an excellent lip reader, has always been able to understand exactly how I feel, despite our language barrier. When I am communicating with her, it's impossible to mask how I feel, because I can't hide behind my words. She pays attention to my eyes, expressions, and mood, which allows her to understand me on a personal level.

The thing that surprises me the most about my grandmother is how funny she is. While I visit her, she often has friends over too. Watching my grandmother spend time with her friends showed me that speaking is not essential to building strong bonds. Her friends are not deaf, and they are not family. They have no reason to spend time with her other than they enjoy her company. It fills my heart with joy knowing that other people see my grandmother for the amazing person she truly is.

I believe that everyone has someone in their life who they struggle to communicate with - maybe it's a family member, or a friend from another country. My grandparents taught me that when words fail, kindness, patience, and effort keep us connected.

As I have grown up, I have tried to learn other ways of communicating with them at a deeper level. I've spent time trying to learn sign language. While I am still not quite at my desired level, my efforts have not been in vain. Today, when I am with my grandparents, we use lip reading, sign language, palm reading and gestures. Even without fluency in sign language, the bond I share with my grandparents is one of the strongest I have.

I have realized that it's not about choosing the right thing to say, or using the correct grammar. What really matters is the effort we invest in one another. For me, my time spent learning sign language helped me communicate with my grandparents - but more importantly, it shows how much I love them. This is how I show love - more than words ever could.

# What Do We Have To Do To Open Doors

Tsunemi Yume (Mishima Minami J.H.S.)

Does money determine our lives? I didn't think so. I had not really worried about it. There were times I couldn't buy something I wanted or had to say no to doing something with my friends but money never felt like something that could control my life.

That all changed one day when I told my parents I wanted to study abroad in high school. I had thought of learning in a new environment, meeting people from different countries and growing through those experiences but they said, "Sorry, we don't have much money, so you can't go." In that moment, the door to my dream shut. I realized at that moment, money doesn't just affect what we buy, it affects our opportunities, our education and even our future.

Instead of being frustrated, I felt curious. I've been interested in money before that happened so I had a strong desire to understand. I began reading more books and learning how money is used. What I discovered was interesting to me, young students need financial education. Not someday but now.

In Japan, financial knowledge is rare. A 2024 survey by the life insurance company Manulife found that only one in four Japanese students said they had good financial knowledge. That means most students are walking into adult life not prepared to make basic financial decisions.

Why does this matter? Because money is connected to nearly every part of our lives like university, work, healthcare and travel. If we don't know how to save, earn, increase, use and protect our money, we may struggle and miss life changing opportunities. Around the world, countries like Denmark, Canada and Poland are leading in financial education but others are behind. Even in Japan, some schools teach it and others don't. So, what can we do?

Students like us can learn about it ourselves. There are free books, websites and we can even have conversations with adults who can help us understand. We should not wait until we are adults because the future will not wait for us. Also, as Japan gets older and births decline, the financial pressure on our generation will grow. Some of us will need to support not just ourselves but our families. Those who understand money will be better prepared for that future.

So, does money equal happiness? For me, no money is not everything. We can still laugh, dream and build relationships without spending a single yen. In fact, I've found international cultural events in my city and I realized now with AI, I can have a conversation with it in English. I've found that money gives us choices and choices open doors. I will someday open my door and go to a foreign country so that I can get an opportunity to try my English. This is why as young students we must learn about financial education. We need to learn about money to become ready to say yes to opportunities and ready to shape our future instead of it shaping us. Because money shouldn't decide our lives. We should.

## Listen to silent voices

Yanase Uluru (Ozato J. H. S.)

Do you feel awkward? I know you were wondering why I kept silent. There are some people who can't talk at all in certain situations because of extreme fear or anxiety. This is called selective mutism. It is a mental health condition in which they can't talk even though they're willing to talk.

I have a friend who has selective mutism. She can't talk at all in our class, even when the teachers ask her a question. She only nods or shakes her head a little. In the first English lesson, we introduced ourselves. When it was her turn, she stood up and said nothing. Her face had no expression. Our teacher was worried about her because she didn't speak at all. The teacher went closer to her and asked her questions little by little. "What fruit do you like? Apples? Bananas? Strawberries?" It looked like she nodded a little when the teacher said strawberries. At that time, I thought she was very shy. I wondered why she didn't answer with her voice. I also thought there may be quiet kids naturally like her. So I didn't worry too much about her behavior. I just wanted to be friends with her because I discovered she had a pencil case with my favorite character.

On her birthday, I gave her a present and wrote her a letter. A few months later, she replied with a letter. Recently, my mom told me my friend might have selective mutism. That was the first time I had ever heard of the disorder. My friend can speak with her family in a comfortable situation, but at school or outside of her home, she suddenly becomes silent. I read many books and researched about selective mutism. What I learned is that individuals have different needs for support based on the degree of their disability and personality. So, I asked her if I could do something for her. To my surprise, her mother explained to me she has no trouble at school, because of the teachers' help. But, doesn't she need our help, from the other students, as well? She doesn't write much by text or letter. I still don't know what she needs. She might have given up asking for help or wants us to leave her alone. Since her disorder started, maybe countless people have misunderstood her and walked away.

If she wants to try to overcome her difficulties, I can wait. And if she needs help, I'm always ready to offer help. I'm always her friend. At school, I learned there are people in our society who use a wheelchair, are blind, or deaf. However, there are even more people who have hidden disabilities. According to the World Health Organization, up to 80% of disabled people are living with an invisible disability. I think schools should teach about them. We need to understand there are many people struggling for *many* many reasons, that may not be obvious.

People with selective mutism want to talk, but they can't and they don't know when they'll be able to talk freely again. Try to talk with a warm heart. It might take a little courage from you. However, continue to ask, "Do you need help?". Someone might be grateful and appreciate your kindness. Your little action will inspire others to help more, and make a big difference. We should increase awareness of hidden disabilities, promote acceptance and create a more caring and inclusive society.

Why are we here? We are here for each other.

# Switch off Your Brain, Wake up Your Mind

Masada Yuta (Hamamatsu-Nishi J.H.S.)

An apple fell from a tree. A man watched it happen. This moment led to Isaac Newton's discovery of gravity. Here's a question. What was he doing when he saw it fall? Nothing. He was sitting under a tree with nothing to occupy his thoughts. In other words, he was bored. Today, I'd like to explore an aspect of boredom you may never have considered!

Boredom is the moment when you have time but nothing to do. Well, there are many fun and easy ways to pass time, such as watching videos, scrolling through social media, or playing games. For example, you are playing on your phone and before you know it, time has passed and you haven't finished what you planned to do that day. I have been in this position countless times. While modern life is becoming more convenient, it is also taking precious time away from people. In other words, we're losing the experience of boredom. Why is boredom necessary for our lives? Many people might think that boredom should be avoided. But that doesn't seem right to me. I have two reasons.

First, boredom has the power to inspire us. It can remind us of something we had forgotten and give us an opportunity to reflect on ourselves. When people are bored, they tend to take action. One day, I was very bored and didn't know what to do. Then, I remembered a movie that I loved as a child. I decided to watch it again, but this time I changed both the audio and subtitles to English. At first, I had a hard time understanding it, but I started to catch some words and phrases. After that, I started listening to English daily. It made me want to study English more. That boring time turned into a small but meaningful challenge for me. Isn't this something that all of us have experienced naturally? Think about how babies grow. They don't have phones or other devices to entertain them. When they're bored, they look around, touch things, and try to understand their surroundings. They explore. Boredom sparks curiosity, which is how they started learning.

Another reason why boredom is important is that it helps reduce stress and gives our mind a break. Leaving some space in your schedule is essential for reducing stress. When we're constantly busy, it becomes difficult to focus on the present moment. Therefore, it's important to make time to simply do nothing. Allowing yourself to feel bored can help reset your mind and organize your thoughts.

We need to find ways to effectively use our time when we're bored. For example, before going to bed or during dinnertime, write a brief description of your thoughts when you are bored. You could also talk about it with someone. You might write: "I was looking out the window of the bus and saw a restaurant that looked delicious. I decided to go there next time. "You may discover something you've never noticed before.

Boredom provides an opportunity to rest our minds and inspire ourselves. Of course, using smartphones and playing games can be enjoyable, but those activities don't allow us to focus on ourselves. Therefore, we need to reclaim our boredom. The next time you feel bored, will you use your smartphone or watch the apple fall?

# The Little Interpreters

Takahashi Anna Beatriz (Shimizu J.H.S.)

Many people ask me, “Why do you have the last name Takahashi if you're Brazilian?” Behind that question lies a story that spans three generations and has changed my life.

In 1931, my Japanese great-grandmother was only ten years old when she immigrated to Brazil by ship, a journey that took three months. She began a new life in a small village where many Japanese people lived. The community grew, and she eventually married and had children. Ten years later, my grandfather was born, and he would play an important role in our family's story. Because my great-grandparents didn't speak any Portuguese, they depended on my grandfather, who grew up in Brazil, to be their interpreter. He became their voice in a foreign land. Years passed, and my grandfather started his own family. One of their children was my parent. That's why I have the last name “Takahashi.” My roots are Japanese.

The story came full circle when my parents moved to Japan for work. I grew up here, receiving my education in Japanese schools, and soon I found myself taking on a familiar role, just like my grandfather before me. As a child, I quickly learned Japanese and became what I call a “little interpreter.” I have translated school handouts and many documents for my parents. Also, I have interpreted conversations between them and others. In a way, I am connecting my family to society.

Still, life is not easy. Although we speak Portuguese at home, I am not as fluent as my parents, and I often avoid using it. At times, I get frustrated when they ask me to share in Portuguese what happens at school every day when I spend all day speaking Japanese. It is difficult for me so we have less conversations. Sometimes this leads to conflicts but they patiently wait for me to sort out my feelings. That's why I love them so much.

There are many “little interpreters” like me around you—children who help their families bridge cultural and language gaps. To all of them, I want to send a message: Yes, interpreting for our parents can feel annoying or even like a waste of time but it is also a chance to learn and to grow. Whether it is translating documents, or interpreting conversations, all of those are good for you. You gain knowledge, develop problem solving skills, build relationships, and see the world from different perspectives. I remember when I interpreted my mother's words to important people at her work event. At that time, I was impressed by the possibility of working as an interpreter who can use it as a tool to help others and convey feelings clearly.

As I try to become fluent in Portuguese, Japanese and English, I understand this journey is not just about me but also my family's legacy. From my great-grandmother who left Japan for Brazil, to my grandfather who translated for his parents, to me interpreting for mine, our family story has always been about communication and connection. I know I am not alone—there are many “little interpreters” around the world. Our struggles are real, but so are the opportunities to learn, grow, and build bridges between people. One day, I hope to use my languages not only for my family but also to connect cultures and help create a kinder, more understanding society.

# One Step

Yoshida Ayumi (Sagara J.H.S.)

“Why try so hard when talent always wins?” Anyway, even if I do my best, maybe nothing will change. Why not just stop before I even begin, right? But deep inside, I wanted something more. I believed, I deserved more.

Then, I found dance. I took one step toward it, but I wasn’t good. I had no special talent. But I fell in love with it, the music, the movement, the feeling. In 5th grade, I started learning seriously. Not so early for a dancer. But it was my first real step.

Then I took another step. I practiced. I failed. I stood up, and I tried again. Sometimes I felt tired. Sometimes I felt like giving up. But little by little, I was getting better. And that small progress gave me strength to keep going. So, I took another step. I danced in a world competition. I got good results. I felt proud. And I knew I wanted to become a professional dancer.

Then came another wall. I was also good at studying. People said, “Why not take the safer path? Study hard. Get a good job. Make money. Live a comfortable life.” It made me think. Should I step back to what’s safe? Or step forward to what I love? After many nights of thinking, I took a deep breath. And I stepped forward. It was scary. It was risky. But it was real. And that step was my *determination*.

Now, you’ve heard my story. I failed many times. I lost. I cried. I felt small. But every single time, I stood up. And I took one more step. Now, I am stronger. I am proud of who I’m becoming.

So today, I’m speaking to you. To the one who feels stuck. To the one who’s scared to choose. To the one who’s asking: “Should I follow my heart or follow the rules?”, “Should I step back or step forward?” Here’s my answer. You don’t need to decide everything today. You don’t need to be perfect. You just need to be brave enough to take one step. Fall down. Stand up. Take one more step. That’s how you grow. That’s how you build *your* life — not anyone else’s. I believe in you. Let’s dance the steps of life, one step at a time together.