

BRaille READING PASSAGE: WORKSHOP 26

Workshop 26: Grade 1 Indicator

Hosting an Exchange Student

Have you ever met an exchange student? My family decided to host a Vanderbilt University 2020f (fall-semester) junior from Tokyo. We wanted our teenagers to learn from an international student and for the whole family to experience the culture of another country.

Our family participated in an orientation with Education-For-2Day, a well-established 501c3 cultural exchange program, to learn how to be a sponsoring family. We nervously arrived at room 6d in the new 4-H center in town, and soon realized that all of the other host families were just as nervous.

The student assigned to us was 19-yr-old Sakura, spelled S-a-k-u-r-a, and she had taken formal English classes in school. Since we speak very little Japanese, I knew it would be interesting because so much of English uses slang and informal meanings to understand conversations. Finally, the big day arrived, and it was activity 25d on August 25th. This might sound odd, but my daughter made a spreadsheet of things we should do with our new friend. 25d happened to be the 4th thing we did that day, so you can figure out our system. We met Sakura outside the airport baggage claim 8b. This was her 3rd flight in 12 days. First, Sakura visited friends in El Al Israel for 2 days. Then she went to AL, Canada, to visit relatives. Thankfully, her flight to the US had only one short layover in Fargo, SD. It was good that this flight was 5 hours rather than the 15h-10m direct flight from Tokyo to TN.

We were a laughing bunch as we headed home. First, Sakura told us a fun fact about our parking section. Japanese has many double meanings for words and numbers, and we happened to be driving our Nissan and parked in section 23f. In Japan 23 can be read as "ni san." We thought Sakura would want to try local restaurants, but she requested to eat lunch at In-N-Out Burger. She hoped to also try K.F.C. Chick-fil-A and Steak 'n Shake while she

was visiting TN. Later, as we snacked on M&Ms, we took a U-turn to the scenic ride home on I-14. Sakura giggled as she told us that in Japanese I-14 is the nickname for her favorite video game series. I expected Sakura to catch some Zs on the way home, but instead I could hear her discussing J. R. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling books with our teenagers, while setting up her 5g cell phone service. We, who thought we would be the teachers, were quickly learning how different our cultural experience was going to be.

The next morning, we drove Sakura to the VU Parking Lot T-49 and took the C-Bus to meet with Sakura's advisor. We thought she might have some difficulty navigating campus transportation, but Sakura shared that many Japanese children take public transit to school, so she learned this as a 10-yr-old child.

Sakura first got her ID number, 420d219g, and mumbled "d-d-d-dad" and "g-g-g-game." She shared that in Japanese, 420 can mean "excuse me" and 219 means "volleyball." She remembered her ID number because 420d could mean "excuse me, Dad" and 219g would be "volleyball game."

Our tour of the area around the VU campus turned into Sakura teaching us, as she had studied maps of VU, Nashville, and TN in advance of her trip using the TNyr2020.gov website. Next week we plan to visit the NASA center in Huntsville, AL for a special foreign exchange student meeting and we must R.S.V.P. in advance. I wonder what Sakura will teach us there?

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