

ENGLISH TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION
of
WESTERN HARIMA



NEWSLETTER

GREETINGS!

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The weather has become the main topic of conversation in the last couple of weeks. Teachers are bonding over their mutual hatred of the humidity, and wondering what it will take for the relief of some air conditioning. Students look towards the teacher in class as always, but recently with expressions of discomfort and displeasure. Not only must us teachers cope with our own discomfort levels, but somehow encourage students to cope with theirs. There is no easy way to do this, though we persist as always.

Incoming prefectural ALTs are being introduced to their placement schools around this time. Whereas outgoing JETs are teaching the last of their full teaching days, and must now think about what preparations they will need in July. There's definitely more than you may think. On top of that, communication channels between the leaving ALT and the new are very important. What will they need to know? What don't they need to know?

Those of you not going anywhere may still experience some change. Some

JTEs will be receiving and welcoming a new ALT to their school. Please give the ALT as much guidance as possible! That is always appreciated by somebody entering a new workplace, especially in a foreign country. If that still doesn't apply to you, then perhaps you will just be seeing some new faces around town.

With only a few weeks until schools break up for the summer break, please enjoy reading this month's newsletter issue.

IN THIS MONTH'S ISSUE

In this month's article, we have three articles for you.

Firstly, Mr Kazunori Harada continues where he left off in last month's issue, this time talking about the influential mentors in his life. The article is titled 'History and English Education of Toyo High School - Part 2'. We all have people who have had a profound effect during our own lives, though it is not often that we hear about the mentors of others. For that reason, among many, please enjoy it.

Secondly, I try my hand at putting together an article about my high school. I'm more a science person by nature, so I hope my writing is somewhat readable. Innovating and experimenting with teaching methodologies is something I am very committed to doing. The truth is that from September, I will be a full time teacher of physics at a private UK secondary school (11 to 18 years). In that regard, creating effective and useful learning environments has been top of my agenda while I have working in Japan. With my article

titled 'Finding Natural Ways to Use English at School', I try to describe the ways in which some students are starting to use English as a communication tool rather than just a school subject.

Finally, Mr Futamu Kishimoto presents us with 'The English Tales of Haga - Obsession'. This story follows Bokusho, the Buddhist priest of temple An'yoji. Please enjoy the tale on these hot and humid days.

Thank you for reading.



HISTORY AND ENGLISH EDUCATION OF TOYO HIGH SCHOOL - Part 2 -

By Kazunori Harada

Continued from the last May issue, as a great storyteller, this month Mr. Kazunori Harada visualizes the greatness of three English teachers in the history of Toyo High School. Every single episode of the masters let us acknowledge the spiritual height and profundity we must pursue to be a good teacher of foreign languages. Again, you will surely rediscover the significance of being a teacher of English through reading the stories of three mentors in his life.



Three Great Mentors in My Teaching Career at Toyo High School

In my career as an English teacher for over 40 years at Toyo High School, we had three great teachers of English with us. I can call them “my life-long mentors.” They were Mr.Uchida, Mr.Miyahara, and Mr.Takahashi. Mr.Uchida was a real scholar. Mr.Miyahara was an internationally minded person with good command of English. Mr. Takahashi was once a teacher at a famous preparatory school for university entrance examinations. Now, only Mr.Takahashi is alive, and is working at Hyogo Prefectural Nishiwaki Industrial High School as a part-time teacher. The fortunate encounters with them as my colleagues occurred in my twenties and forties.

(*The years after each teacher’s name show the working period at our school.)

1 Mr. Yoshimi Uchida(1964-1989)

(1) My decision to work for Toyo High School

Mr.Uchida’s academic greatness made me decide to continue working at Toyo High School, in spite of its notoriety for the frequent school violence among the students. At any rate, I had a strong desire to be in the state of being influenced by his greatness. It was in 1977, when I was 22 years old.

(2) Reading sessions of “Silas Marner”

The first time I met him, I found no difference in him from the other English teachers. At one time, though, he invited some of the teachers to have a reading session with him once a week. We selected an English literature entitled “Silas Marner” by George Eliot (1819-1880). I remember his beautiful translation and outstanding background knowledge of those days in the Great Britain. His expertise covered politics, religion, philosophy, social conditions and customs, and the like. He could vividly reproduce how the court functioned or what kind of life people were leading under the oppressive religious control, for example. He always used the biggest Webster English-English Dictionary, while the other teachers used to depend on handy English-Japanese dictionaries.

(3) Reading sessions of “TIME”

At another time, we read a world-famous English magazine, “TIME.” This time, his linguistic knowledge astounded us, because he could guess the meanings of all the difficult words we came across, from origins of words deriving from Latin, Greek, and other old European languages. His etymological knowledge gave me the impression that his major at university was linguistics, but he denied it. He studied it by himself. Also, he was well versed in the state of affairs concerning the Middle East, Russia and China. Especially when we were reading an article about the conflicts between the Jews and the Arabs, he always stood by the Arabs, quoting the fact that the Jews could found their own country, while the Arab refugees couldn’t, adding that the Great Britain was to blame for breaking the promise to help Arabic people found their own country, while it helped the foundation of Israel. Actually, in the course of its foundation, lots of Arabic people were driven away from their land or killed. He went on to say that in one district where Jewish people were the majority of the population, Arabic people were often persecuted, whereas in another district Jewish people were not, despite their minority. His interpretation of the Arabic world inspired me to read more articles and books about it. Consequently, when the American embassy in Iran was attacked by Iranian citizens, I could easily guess what kind of action ex-President Jimmy Carter would take. Actually, he dispatched special commandoes to rescue the ambassador and the other officials.

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HISTORY AND ENGLISH EDUCATION OF TOYO HIGH SCHOOL - Part 2 -

By Kazunori Harada

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(4) Mr. Uchida's other episodes

Later, I learned Mr. Uchida was also good at some other languages like German and French. A certain coworker confessed that he had asked Mr. Uchida to translate Japanese sentences into German. He said Mr. Uchida had set to work and finished it in no time. Once I was invited to study French together, but this time I declined his proposal. I wanted to give priority to spending more time brushing up my students' English abilities. I would like to show you more episodes about him. The fact is that he enjoyed listening to a short wave Russian broadcasting at midnight, too. I remember he said "Apart from the government style of Russia, I like Russia and Russian people. Ordinary Russian people are very pure at heart." He might have been influenced by Tolstoy's famous work, "War and Peace." In this novel, there are an opponent French soldier's words: "I've never seen such good people." One day, he was grumbling about "Random House English Japanese Dictionary." When I asked the reason, he said "the phonetic symbol of a Czech word incorporated into English is wrong."

(5) Mr. Uchida's mentor at Kyoto University

He graduated from two prestigious universities: Kyoto University and Tokyo University. Several times in the reading session, he referred to "Kojiro Yoshikawa," one of the greatest scholars on Chinese literature at Kyoto University. As a student of Kyoto University, he sometimes visited professor Yoshikawa at his laboratory. He always found the professor dressed in Chinese clothes and adopting Chinese manners and customs including greetings. He said he had been surprised at the professor's devotion to acting like a real Chinese.

(6) Mr. Uchida's identity - an eternal mystery -

After all, Mr. Uchida was born and brought up in Iga, Ueno, Mie prefecture. Some teacher spread the rumor that Mr. Uchida was a descendant of "Ninja." As might be expected, he was skillful at gathering information. As I wanted to make sure of his story, I asked him whether it was true. He just smiled without disapproving of it.



Mr. Uchida teaching English
at a summer seminar.



Mr. Uchida in a classroom.

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HISTORY AND ENGLISH EDUCATION OF TOYO HIGH SCHOOL - Part 2 -

By Kazunori Harada

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2 Mr. Yoshiteru Miyahara(2000-2007)

(1) An ideal teacher for the international programs of Toyo High School

Mr. Miyahara was employed by Toyo High School in 2000 as an expert of international programs. He had already been known as a respected English teacher in Hyogo prefecture before going to South Australia in his late 50s. Principal Asai, who employed Mr. Miyahara, had also been engaged in international programs in Hokkaido, and was enthusiastic about making our school devoted to its globalization. Principal Asai considered Mr. Miyahara to be an ideal person to materialize his dream, because he got the information that Mr. Miyahara worked as a Japanese language teacher at three high schools in South Australia for three years. He first went to South Australia as an exchange assistant language teacher, and later he took a teacher's license in Adelaide to become a regular teacher in the state. He said he was obliged to take high scores in IELTS [International English Language Testing Service]. Naturally, IELTS contained a difficult interview test.



Mr. Miyahara and Mr. David Thomson.

(2) The first international programs in Australia

From July 21 to August 7, 2000, Mr. Miyahara and I took 14 students to Adelaide during the summer vacation. When our airplane was about to arrive at Adelaide Airport, the day had not completely broken yet. Adelaide seemed to be all covered with mist. 14 Toyo High School students and I were moved to see, from high above the city of Adelaide, lots of orange street lights looming out of the darkish mist. The beautiful arrangement of street lights clearly outlined the whole city, and it indicated that Adelaide was constructed based on the excellent city planning. During the daytime, we stayed at a language school, CALSA next to South Australian University, while our students were learning English. When the lesson was over at 4:00 p.m., however, Mr. Miyahara guided me around the city like a real Adelaide citizen. We walked and walked. In some cases, we might have walked about 10 km a day. He took me to Central Market, Art Gallery, Museum, GPO(General Post Office), Botanical Garden, Education Department, Adelaide University, TAFE (Technical and Further Education), and so on.

(3) Mr. Miyahara's dream

Mr. Miyahara introduced me to his close friends, some of whom I keep in touch with even now. Mr. David Thomson was among them. Now he is one of the vice principals at Brighton Secondary School, and he used to be Mr. Miyahara's partner in Japanese language classes. David says Mr. Miyahara compiled a very understandable grammar book of Japanese language for the Brighton students, and that even now they use it. During the stay in Adelaide, Mr. Miyahara confessed to me that they had cherished a dream of having a sister-school in Japan. One day he made a new plan to visit Brighton Secondary School, though the language school CALSA had already had another schedule for our students. He succeeded in persuading the chief staff on the pretext that a CALSA English teacher would accompany our students. Mr. Miyahara was an excellent negotiator.

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HISTORY AND ENGLISH EDUCATION OF TOYO HIGH SCHOOL - Part 2 -

By Kazunori Harada

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(4) Interactions at Brighton Secondary School

At Brighton Secondary School, we were invited into a classroom. At the entrance of it was hung a “NOREN,” a shop curtain on which Kumamoto dialects were printed. Inside the classroom, we found lots of things Japanese exhibited on the walls and shelves: copybooks of calligraphy and students’ works, photos and photographic albums, fans, cards showing news about Japan, a bamboo sword, fairy tales, and so forth. Mr. Miyahara and David demonstrated to us how they had taught Japanese language at this school. When he thought extra explanations would be needed, he added them, using easier words both in Japanese and English because our students used unfamiliar Japanese nouns for Australian people to understand. I was again impressed with his flexible thinking and ideas. After that, Japanese students were given chances to speak English. Each of them asked Australian students questions in English, and Australian students answered them in English. At the end of the lesson, 14 students and we sang world famous “Sukiyaki Song” in Japanese in front of Brighton students and teachers. Of course, the conductor of the chorus was Mr. Miyahara. Australian students looked satisfied with the melody. Soon they started to clap their hands to the rhythm of the song.

(5) At Mr. David Thomson’s house

After our visit to Brighton Secondary School, Mr. Miyahara and I were invited to David’s house. Supper was over and we talked a lot over tea and cookies. David’s wife also joined us. It was when Mr. Miyahara and I talked about our strong baseball team that David’s eyes started shining. He got excited and repeatedly asked us, “Did your baseball team really take part in the national baseball tournament at Koshien stadium?” “Is it true?” “Really?” Toyo High School might have seemed to him to be an attractive candidate for a sister school in Japan.

(6) Sister school relation was signed in the end.

After all, on November 9th, 2004, the sister school signing ceremony was held in the gymnasium of Toyo High School. This is all thanks to Mr. Miyahara’s tremendous efforts. For four years after our visit to Brighton Secondary School, Mr. Miyahara exchanged emails with Mr. David Thomson frequently so that their long-cherished dream would come true. Both teachers persuaded their principals and staffs with patience. Mr. Miyahara stressed the merits of having Brighton Secondary School as a sister school by saying that this school was among three excellent public high schools in South Australia, and that it had two courses, “Special Interest Volleyball” and “Special Interest Music” as well as its academic excellence. Also, he completed Toyo High School’s written oath in English for the signing ceremony. After the ceremony, Mr. Miyahara and David Thomson showed good partnership in teaching English to Toyo High School students. Of course, in the evening there was a grand welcome party at “Castle Hotel”. Mr. Miyahara played a part of a translator, when Brighton Secondary School Principal Trevor Potts made a speech. Principal Asai, with one of his projects realized, looked satisfied.



Mr. Miyahara at the signing ceremony with Mr. Trevor Potts .

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HISTORY AND ENGLISH EDUCATION OF TOYO HIGH SCHOOL - Part 2 -

By Kazunori Harada

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3 Mr. Yoshihiro Takahashi (2003-2008)

(1) Coincidental meet at a hospital

When Principal Asai was in a hospital in 2002, he happened to meet Mr. Takahashi there. They underwent the operation of the same disease. Mr. Takahashi had just retired from a private high school in Kagawa prefecture. When Principal Asai learned that he had once worked for a famous preparatory school for university entrance examinations, he soon employed him.



Mr. Takahashi in a classroom.

(2) Actualities of cram school teachers

I remember he described what kind of life he had had as a cram school teacher. He said it was not rare that he gave a 90-minute-lesson four times in a row a day. Also, he was often sent for many branches in local big cities. When he was on the way to the branches, he always spent almost all the time on a bullet train preparing for the lessons. Sometimes, he was given teaching materials the moment he arrived at a branch. Occasionally, ambulances rushed to cram schools because some teachers fell down because of fatigue, particularly during an intense study period for would-be examinees of university entrance examinations. A famous teacher committed suicide after he was fired. Mr. Takahashi said the teacher's pride had not allowed him to be alive. "It is important to be completely knowledgeable about grammar, usage of words and phrases, and background information of entrance examination English. The point is whether the students can be satisfied with the explanations of the teachers from the bottom of their heart, thereby encouraging them to become more passionate about improving their English abilities."

(3) About Mr. Takahashi's contribution to our school

He contributed to the remarkable progress in university entrance examination results of our school. I guess his pride and experiences as a famous cram school teacher made the impossible possible. In 2006, the total number of 63 students passed four major private universities in Kansai districts: Kansai University, Kwansai University, Doshisha University and Ritsumeikan University. Besides, out of the total 63 successes, 13 were successful examination results of Doshisha University, the most difficult university of the four. This is one of the amazing entrance examination results in the history of our school, considering the T-scores of the students just after their entrance into Toyo High School. In those days, we had two advanced classes: an advanced science class and an advanced literature class. Mr. Takahashi was in charge of the literature class. A few students' T scores of English practice examination were around 55 and the other majority of the students' were about 50 or less, but in the second term of the third year, most of them looked confident, because their T scores had already reached the ones ranging from around 65 to over 70. One day, he dropped in at his classroom 3-2 during the lunch time in the second term and found his students eating their lunch without expressing any word. I suppose he wanted to refer to the amazing concentration of his students at that time.

(4) Mr. Takahashi's another episode

Mr. Takahashi was also a good disciplinarian. He skillfully controlled mischievous boys. One day, he pushed forward his face to them and roared, "If you have complaints about me, I will let you hit me on my face! Now, do that!" They soon felt intimidated and became obedient to him. He loved university entrance examination English more than other English materials, and looked happiest when he was teaching students.

4 Significance of having had the above-mentioned three mentors as my colleagues

Each time I feel like being self-complacent with having done something, I try to recall their greatness and imagine their endeavors to attain it. This attempt always brings home to me my immaturity and admonishes me never to stop making efforts. Having been able to work with them at the same school really enriched my life. I cannot appreciate my fateful encounters with them too much.

(The End)

FINDING NATURAL WAYS TO USE ENGLISH AT SCHOOL

By Luke Stoneman

My two years as an ALT at Yamasaki Senior High School are coming to an end. It is quite hard to believe how much my school has changed in that short time. Looking back, it seems like my biggest challenge has been trying to change my students' opinions of English, rather than the teaching itself. Thanks to the open and progressive members of the English department at my school, there have been some good changes in recent years concerning English. With this article, I would like to take the opportunity to talk about those changes and how the partaking students' perception of English appears to have changed.

Before I get to that, I would like share a brief personal story. A very wise teacher at my school once told me something that has stuck. He reasoned with me that the job of an ALT at my school is a lot like fishing. Speaking metaphorically, I must cast out my fishing line and wait for the students that bite. In other words, keep a look out for the students that show some desire to use English beyond the bare minimum expected by the education system. It may sound rather simple, but this was a significant change of perspective during my time here. It made me realize that feeling frustrated with the issues of English education in Japan was just energy wasted. One person cannot change something that does not want to change. Instead, I began to only focus on areas in my school where I could make significant impacts and positive changes, which are mutually enjoyable and productive for the ALT and the students involved. Without further ado, here are some of those changes:

1 An ESS club with an exclusive ESS space

My ESS club has changed completely during my time here. Two years ago, I was told that there was just one girl in the ESS club. The numbers of members has been gradually increasing since then and finally, this academic year, my campaigning has resulted in a private ESS classroom. As the ALT, I make sure I'm in the classroom every lunch time and most days after school, so students can freely come and spend some time there. It's a place where we can enjoy some real British tea and biscuits. Often students bring their lunch to eat there too. I feel it's so important for there to be a space that students feel welcome to approach the ALT, on their own terms. World maps and student work is displayed on the walls, and personally I'm very proud of it. I love the surprised look on the face of a student that visits the room for the first time. That look when they realise that, firstly, I am not so scary to talk with, and secondly, that maybe English isn't so bad.

The students that regularly show their faces have shown significant improvement in terms of conversational English. Not just speaking and listening, but just general openness and curiosity for the English language and English speaking cultures. They ask questions and are inquisitive. They want to know things, and because they want to know, they will learn and improve. I have started to speak with a few of them at an increasingly faster and natural speed. I can tell that it is outside of their comfort zone, but it is so important for them to experience realistic and natural conversations. I know they have the ability to handle it, and recently I have noticed them taking more active roles in the conversations. Some students still often get flustered and reply in Japanese, but I can see that it is something that will change naturally with time! The essence of language is communication, and making them feel comfortable in an English environment is arguably more important than making them speak in English. This kind of ESS club system has not easy to implement, but opening an exclusive English space has been one of the highlights of my school life!

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FINDING NATURAL WAYS TO USE ENGLISH AT SCHOOL

By Luke Stoneman

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2 The Optional English Course 「実践英語」

This year is the second year since this optional course was introduced for some of our third grade students. This year, there are 25 students in the class and thankfully the curriculum is very flexible. It has been the perfect class for me to express myself as an English teacher and use all of the ideas that aren't usable in the traditional classes. I make sure that students encounter only native and authentic materials from foreign cultures that should be studied more. That is because, in short, I believe that it is unequivocally best to consume media as it was intended to be consumed by the creator. As a student of Japanese in my UK high school, one of my greatest memories was studying Ryunosuke Akutagawa's short story called 'Hana' or 'The Nose'. You could say that my enjoyment of authentic Japanese stories played a part in my decision to move to Japan. Of course, there are many teachers who argue native materials are too difficult for students, which I agree that most are. However, what about young children that learn English as their first language? What do they read to learn? With that in mind, I have been exclusively searching for authentic English materials created for children and presenting them to students without dumbing anything down. One can only hope that Japan will start moving away from the textbooks that are written for Japan, by Japan, about Japan. I'm sure most ALTs share that same sentiment.

Getting back to talking about the optional English class itself, the activities are mainly group projects led by the students. Also, each project will end with some form of output assessment, which increases student productivity and participation in class. Throughout June, we have been working on a 'Country Research Project'. I simply searched the internet for 'Country Information for Kids' and found a wealth of interesting material created for English speaking children! I printed out and put together some information packs about some different countries together with pictures and assigned a country to each group of students. In class, the first activity involved the students searching for information and key points from throughout the material. Since then, they have been making posters and preparing for the term-end speaking test about the country that they have been studying. Below, you can see the printout that I distributed to the students two weeks in advance of the test. The printout explains the content of the speaking test and the assessment criteria. I always make sure that the test questions are quite open so that the test will flow more like a natural conversation, dissuading the students from just memorising and repeating rehearsed answers. I encourage students to take initiative and come to the ESS classroom during lunchtimes, where I will gladly help them prepare in anyway that I can. I love seeing proactive students coming to ask me questions and taking control of their own English learning. As you can also see in the printout, the speaking test also includes a small debate question (about a topic relevant to their lives) and a small pronunciation game, both of which were practised during class time. In the end, you have a 5 minute speaking test which covers and assesses a lot of natural English content in a short space of time.

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FINDING NATURAL WAYS TO USE ENGLISH AT SCHOOL

By Luke Stoneman

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実践英語期末面接テスト内容	Part B: Debate Question (12点)						
<p>このテストは5分かかり、テスト期間中に私（ルーク）と向き合って英会話をします。セミナー室で行われます。今回は項目が三つあります。</p>	<p>コミュニケーション英語の授業で勉強したディベート質問が聞かれます。</p> <p>“Is it better to live in the city or the countryside?”</p>						
<p><u>Part A: Country Project (30点)</u></p>	<p>前もって理由を2つずつ考えておいてなるべく長い英文で答えてください。</p>						
<p>What country did you study?</p> <p>Please talk about that country for 2 minutes. (2分)</p> <p>Please include these topics: (この下記の話題について話してください)</p> <table border="0"> <tr> <td>i. Location 位置</td> <td>iv. Geography 地理・特徴</td> </tr> <tr> <td>ii. Population 人口</td> <td>v. Food 食べ物</td> </tr> <tr> <td>iii. Language 言語</td> <td>vi. Attractions 魅力</td> </tr> </table>	i. Location 位置	iv. Geography 地理・特徴	ii. Population 人口	v. Food 食べ物	iii. Language 言語	vi. Attractions 魅力	<p>The city:</p> <p>i. _____ (3点)</p> <p>ii. _____ (3点)</p> <p>The countryside:</p> <p>i. _____ (3点)</p> <p>ii. _____ (3点)</p>
i. Location 位置	iv. Geography 地理・特徴						
ii. Population 人口	v. Food 食べ物						
iii. Language 言語	vi. Attractions 魅力						
<p>(面接テストのとき、私はこの話題点を書いてある紙をあげます。)</p> <p>Also, Luke will ask you some questions about that country.</p>	<p>Remember that a strong reason: a) supports your opinion b) is easy to understand c) is convincing to most people</p>						
<p><u>採点方法:</u></p> <p>(6点) Include all 6 topics ・ 全ての話題を含んでいる</p> <p>(6点) English is easy to understand ・ 英語が分かりやすい</p> <p>(6点) Correct Grammar ・ 正しい英文法</p> <p>(6点) Use of Impressive English ・ 印象的な言葉を使う</p> <p>(6点) Answer Luke's Questions ・ ルークの質問に答える</p>	<p><u>Part C: Pronunciation (U or A) (8点)</u></p> <p>uncle と ankle などの似ている単語を言ってください</p> 						

An example of a speaking test

This speaking test format has been a great success. I have tried countless ways to improve English speaking levels inside and outside of the classroom. There is no substitute for regular face to face conversations with a native speaker. I don't think there is any way around that. Of course that is a logistical nightmare to organize for each and every student with only one ALT, but the positive results are irrefutable. I remember some time ago when I invited one of my JTEs to sit in on some of these one-to-one conversation tests. She had been thinking about new ways to encourage students to speak in her classes. After the last student had finished and left the room, she turned to me and said “They are speaking English! And they are smiling too!” Again, perhaps it seems a bit trivial, but this was a big step in my school to demonstrate that our students are capable of using English in a natural way. Despite the students who take this class being considered as less capable students, they soon become the best English speakers in my school after just a year of this optional course. It's no coincidence.

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FINDING NATURAL WAYS TO USE ENGLISH AT SCHOOL

By Luke Stoneman

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3 My makeshift role as a strength coach

When it comes to sports, my area of expertise and greatest enjoyment is Olympic Weightlifting. You can imagine my delight when I first discovered my school has a weight room. From then on, I could be found in the weight room most days after school pursuing my hobby. This was, and still is, a great way to connect with students and teachers. Particularly, I am very grateful to have been able to create relationships with colleagues who share this same interest. It can be quite difficult to break past typical surface conversations in the workplace, so I always enjoy having these interesting discussions about a topic I could talk about for hours. As a result of these relationships, I was asked to organise and hold a weight room session for the members of the boys basketball team twice a week. I look forward to every one of these sessions and I shall attempt to explain why.

As an ALT, we always find ourselves in the classroom or the staffroom talking about all things English. It has been completely refreshing for me to have different conversations that make no reference to my culture or language. I enjoy those conversations the most. The students and teachers start to learn more about who I am as a person beyond the country that I'm from (and vice versa), making the ALT experience feel a lot more human for me. Thanks to these sessions, I'm close with the basketball students and have noticed an a positive change in their attitudes towards English.

The aim of these sessions is strength and conditioning, but what surprised me is how English became a big part. The boys are keen to find out the English words to describe equipment and exercises. Also, recently, the boys have been coming into the weight room and declaring "No Japanese! Only English!" and giving English their best shot. These are the same boys that are uninterested in the traditional English classroom. It amazed me the amount of motivation to speak that students have when English is considered a communication tool instead of just a school subject. I can only conclude that all students have the capability to speak English, but it needs to be a situation or topic that they want to talk about. I feel that is the challenge as a language teacher. What do students want to talk about? How do we create an atmosphere for that?

4 Closing words

Often the most effective learning experience doesn't feel much like learning at all. If I were to try to pinpoint a recurring idea in the things I have written here, it would be that I strongly believe it is possible to use English naturally as a communication tool in a Japanese school. That doesn't simply mean repeating "I'm fine!" for the thousandth time, or speaking English just to have the same words translated for the students two seconds later. It is taking the time and effort to construct skill-appropriate situations where students are prepared and willing to take active roles in English conversations. It falls to examiners, course creators, textbook companies, schools and teachers, to all take responsibility in order to implement an education system that encourages the natural use of English in schools. Here's hoping for more positive changes in English education for the future. I will be rooting for Japan from afar. Thank you for reading.

THE ENGLISH TALES OF HAGA

- OBSESSION -

By Futamu Kishimoto

The following story happened just before the annual Bon Festival. Bokusho, the Buddhist priest of the temple An'yoji, was busy visiting all the houses of his congregation. It was hot and humid that day.

Bokusho had taught English at the local high school for many years, but he had to retire when his father, the priest of the temple, died. An'yoji is a big temple as far as national temples go.

One day, after coming back exhausted, Bokusho was resting when a lady visited him. She looked pale and scared. He kindly invited her in and asked her why she had come to see him. She took a seat but was still trembling. He calmed her down and asked her what the matter was.

“A very terrible thing has happened.” She then started to tell him, little by little, what she had seen.

The story is as follows: She was born to a temple priest in Okayama. Later, she got married, but then divorced. She didn't explain in detail her reasons for doing so, but it seemed that she had escaped from her ex-husband and now lived in a distant place where he wouldn't find her. She had managed to find a job and a house in Saiki Village in Haga.

“The first night I dreamt a very strange dream,” she explained. “After coming home, I finished supper and went to bed at around ten o'clock. Soon after I turned off the light, I saw something strange, like human hands protruding from the darkness. It looked like as though it was floating in the darkness. I was so terrified that I flung myself up to turn on the light. The moment I turned on the light, the hands disappeared, so I thought I had been dreaming. I turned off the light again and went back to bed. For a while nothing happened, but then, to my surprise, the image appeared again. This time, I could see the fingers even more clearly, and one finger had a scar on it.”

The lady lived in her house alone. During the day, she worked at a nearby factory. According to her, the same thing happened every night. She was so terrified that she came to see the priest for help. It was immediately noticeable that the lady was very tired and hadn't had enough sleep. She went on: “These apparitions reoccurred over several days. Then I also started hearing a strange noise. It sounded as though the paper sliding door was being brushed with a broom: *sa, sa, sa*. This happened every night. Then, one night, I heard a tremendous sound: *ZOON!* It was as if a big stone had fallen from the sky onto the roof of the house. What should I do to get rid of these visions and sounds?”

Even after listening to the whole story, Bokusho didn't believe her and thought it was all in her mind. So he said to her kindly, “What you saw and heard was only in your imagination. You must be tired. There is nothing to be afraid of. Please go home and get lots of sleep.”

So the woman went home.

Early the next morning, however, Bokusho got a telephone call.

“You are wrong, Priest!” the woman exclaimed. “The same thing happened again last night. I'm sure that it's not my imagination. Please come to my house and see it with your own eyes.”

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Original Illustration buy Ms. Ryoko Tanaka

THE ENGLISH TALES OF HAGA

- OBSESSION -

By Futamu Kishimoto

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It was just before the Bon Festival, so Bokusho was very busy. Every day after coming home from offering prayers at the houses of his congregation, he felt completely exhausted. However, the lady appealed persistently for his help. Even so, up to that point, he still thought that she really ought to visit a psychologist. At last, he relented and decided to visit her house.

After supper, at around nine o'clock, Bokusho went to the woman's house. They waited together for a long time. Soon it was ten and then eleven, but still nothing happened. He told her to turn off the light, and then they waited in the darkness. Still nothing happened. He stayed until a little after twelve o'clock. Because it was generally not good to be in the same room with a lady for so long, Bokusho soothed her by saying that everything would be all right and finally went home.

The next day, the woman called Bokusho very early in the morning and told him that, after he left her, the vision appeared again. So again, he visited her house.

As it was hot that day, she served the priest a glass of beer. Again, they drank and waited for a long time, but nothing happened. Having nothing to do, he went outside to see if he could find anything strange, but he found nothing there. However, just behind the house, he stumbled upon a small locked shack. The priest asked the lady to bring the key to the shack and then opened it.

To his surprise, he found a small Buddhist altar in it. Inside the altar was a small package. Opening it, he discovered a person's picture in a type of frame used for funeral ceremonies. He took the picture into the house and showed it to the woman. Looking at it, she suddenly burst into tears.

"That's it!" she cried.

He asked her how she knew the man in the picture. She didn't answer, but insisted that that was the cause of her troubles. The priest laughed and said, "Please take it easy. You will be able to sleep well tonight. I'll take this back to the temple."

That night, the priest went to bed with the picture beside his pillow. He was so tired that, soon after he got into bed, he fell asleep. At that time, he was alone in the temple, because his wife was about to have their second baby and was staying in the hospital. In the dead of the night, he woke, thinking he had heard a loud noise. Looking up, he saw a big rock floating in the darkness. He turned on the light to check what it was. After that, nothing happened, so he fell back asleep again.

The next morning, the lady visited the temple and said that she had been able to sleep well the previous night. She thanked him many times and went home.

However, after a few days, the lady visited Bokusho and told him that the image had started to bother her again. She complained that, this time, she hadn't seen the hands but had heard the sound of the paper door being brushed with an object like a broom.

Bokusho didn't know how to resolve the matter by himself, so he took the lady to Fukukai Temple in Chikusa. Bokusho's uncle was the priest of that temple. Though his uncle was a little over ninety years old, he was still in good health.

His uncle said that he had often heard of similar occurrences before. He slowly explained to her that what she had seen was in fact an illusion. "You saw it only in your mind. There is nothing to be afraid of," he explained. "It is just complaining or demanding something of you. You must have a special talent that others don't."

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THE ENGLISH TALES OF HAGA

- OBSESSION -

By Futamu Kishimoto

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The priest also added that, in cases such as when a man dies but has no one to inherit his property, even after his death, he continues to worry about it. “That’s called attachment,” the priest said.

Returning to his temple, Bokusho and the lady went to the man’s grave, taking with them the picture of the man, flowers, and some offerings. Chanting a sutra, Bokusho burned the picture. He promised the man in the picture that he would find out the cause of his attachment.

When they returned from the grave to the temple, a man was waiting for Bokusho. The man introduced himself and explained why he was visiting the temple.

He had been born in this village. However, because his parents had been such poor farmers, he had decided to leave the house to work in the city when he was 16. Since then, he had worked hard from very early in the morning until late at night. Even when his parents died, he could not come home for their funerals. Due to this, his only brother, who had cared for their parents, got very angry and, from then on, the two brothers had been on bad terms.

The man admitted that he had been, in some ways, an undutiful son. He went on to explain that he’d gotten married in Kyoto and was living there now. His son had also married, had two children (a boy and a girl), and was working for a very good trading company. The man told the priest that he had already retired and was now living happily with his wife near their son’s apartment.

He continued to say that, a few days before, he had had a strange dream in which his brother appeared. In the dream, his brother said nothing but looked at him sadly. The same dream reoccurred for three days. The man thought it very strange and came back to find that his brother had already died three years earlier. The man hadn’t heard anything from his brother for a long time.

His brother’s neighbors said that the brother’s wife had died several years before and that they had had no children and thus no one to take care of him. The neighbors had done everything for him, including arranging his funeral.

The man said, “I have to thank everyone who took care of him. I came here, first of all, to express my sincere gratitude to you, Priest. From now, I must sort out his belongings, such as his house and properties.”

Bokusho did not say anything about the vision of his brother. After this, the man thanked the priest again and again. Then he left the temple.

Strangely enough, from that time, nothing out of the ordinary happened in the lady’s house or at the temple. One day, the lady visited the temple to tell the priest that she was going to become a nun and then came a second time to say goodbye.

Several days after that, the man and his wife visited the temple to say that they were going to move into the house where he had been born and live out the rest of their lives there. Their son and his wife didn’t oppose the idea. The couple moved into the house that very day, and they are still living in that house now, in peace and quiet.

This is a story I heard from Bokusho, who was my fellow English teacher.

(The End)