



JAPANESE LANGUAGE COMPETITION DRAWS HIGH-SCHOOL AND COLLEGE STUDENTS

By: AmberRose Ramos

The sun had just risen, and there were already students and family members gathered as I walked through the doors to the Oppenheimer Building at San Antonio College. Bright eyed and focused, the students appeared ready to take on a major challenge!



Students and family members gathered in the lobby

February 6, 2016 marked the 27th year that the Japanese Speech Contest has been held in San Antonio. Although the lobby was full of new faces, the day brought on the same exciting competition between friends and fellow classmates as had been seen in the past. Whether they were at an advanced level or just starting out, everyone was eager to display their Japanese language skills.

The judges had the difficult task of determining the outcome of the contest, and I was fortunate enough to sit in on a session to watch them in action. While I waited and listened to high school students recite poems, I took notice of the two judges who were immersed in the words flowing from the students' mouths. Even though each student recited the same poem, it was as if they were telling their own story. I can only imagine how the students in the other rooms told theirs!



Some of the judges pictured left to right: Prof. Erina Romanowich, Ms. Miyako Wallace, and Prof. Makiko Fukuda

After an hour flew by and when everyone was finally done reciting their selections in their respective divisions, the participants gathered in the lobby, mingling with family and friends once again.

Finally at 11:00 sharp, everyone assembled in a neighboring conference room eager to see the results of the contests! Professor Yuko Kawabe, who has organized and conducted the event for the past several years, introduced the event. She thanked JASSA for their



generous support. Then the time came for the students to receive their long-awaited awards.

Certificates of participation were given to all the students involved. Everyone was a winner in my opinion! It takes a lot of courage to go in front of a crowd of people and speak for several minutes (in Japanese no less!)

Kawabe Sensei: Japanese Language Professor + Organizer of the event is pictured at the left. The event was sponsored by Japan – America Society of San Antonio, represented by Prof. Costello at the right.

Congratulations to all of the winners and a special good luck to Estevan Martinez who placed 1st in the college division. He will go to Houston in March to compete in the finals. The theme of his speech was about believing in oneself. Estevan visited Japan for the 1st time last year for 10 days. However, he was inspired to learn about the Japanese culture at a very young age which sparked an interest in the language as well. Even though his topic was about a personal experience, it spoke to each one of the students there. They (including Estevan) all believed in themselves and had people who believed in them. This encouragement allowed them to take part in this short yet very intense competition. Good luck to all of the 1st place winners who will compete in Houston! You can do it! がんばって!

Advice to those wondering if they might want to enter the speech contest next year: GO FOR IT! Winning is great, but it is not everything. The opportunity to demonstrate your Japanese skills in front of others can be just as rewarding as a confidence builder!

Thanks to all who participated in helping with the contest! Professor Kawabe is the mastermind behind the scenes and in all aspects of the contest. Last but not least, thanks to JASSA for their generous support of this important milestone marking the success of Japanese Language Programs in San Antonio.

Please scroll down to see the list of participants and winners.



Estevan Martinez: Believe in Yourself!

A little about the writer: AmberRose is a nature lover who enjoys learning about different cultures and languages. She has been studying Japanese for four years and plans to attend the University of Texas at Austin in the fall where she will major in Environmental Science and Asian Languages.



Photo courtesy of Professor Costello

Participants, Judges, and Placement

Division 1: Poem Recitation OC 101 Judges: Dr. Fukuda, Ms. Wallace

1. Jessica Artalejo
2. Chapa Lorna
3. Margarita Esqueda
4. Dylan Fernandez
5. Mia Garcia
6. Mia Gonzales
7. Ashlyn Harris
8. Maggie Hernandez
9. **Santiago Hoffman 1st Place**
10. **Amber Lewis 3rd Place**
11. **Elena Mills 2nd Place**
12. Denton Poss
13. Odethe Rodriguez
14. Anna Tabet
15. Erika Thomas
16. Natalia Velazquez

Division 2: Haiku OC108 Judges: Prof. Romanowich, Prof. Balite

1. **Kevin Guerra 3rd Place**
2. **Keoni Hernandez 1st Place**
3. Juan Carlos Jaimes Jr
4. **Andrea Lopez 2nd Place**
5. Emma Saucedo

Division 3: Free Speech with Text, OC108 Judges Prof. Romanowich, Prof. Balite:

1. **Michael Blundell 2nd Place**
2. **Victoria Crevoisier 1st Place**
3. **Brook Neeley 3rd Place**
4. Erika Mae Ojoy
5. Julianna Pope
6. Sebastian Wilson

Division 5: Free Speech: Aurora Division OC106 Judges: Prof. Legris, Ms. Baxter

1. **Eric Bippert 1st Place**
2. **Adriana Flores 3rd Place**
3. **Jessica Hairston 2nd Place**
4. Chris Mireles

Division 6: College OC106 Judges: Prof. Legris, Ms. Baxter:

1. Pazir Bilal
2. Angelina Campbell
3. **Amanda Hylton 3rd Place**
4. **Estevan Martinez 1st Place**
5. Tiffany Newton
6. **Melissa Perez 2nd Place**
7. Nicholas Salinas