UTSA’s East Asia Institute hosted San Antonio’s second Japanese Play on March 28th, 2015 with generous grants from the Japan Foundation, Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (UTSA), and The Japan America Society of San Antonio on UTSA’s main campus. This year’s theme was “これが日本だ！ トトロパート２” (“This is NIPPON! Totoro II”)

Friends and family members came in to support all the students performing in the play. They packed the auditorium to get a glimpse of what this play contest was all about and to enjoy an evening of shared cultural experience. Many of them were excited to see what their classmate or child has been working on and to see how much their Japanese proficiency has improved from taking Japanese language courses in school.

UTSA Japanese lectures Dr. Makiko Fukuda, Erina Romanowitch, and Mimi Yu kicked off the event. Eight teams comprised of more than 30 Japanese language students participated in the contest, including students from the University of Texas at San Antonio, James Madison High School, Churchill High School, and Johnson High School. Dr. John Frederick, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs of UTSA, welcomed the audience and encouraged students to take part in global experience. He also presented what UTSA has to offer in terms of international education.

Prior to the contest, the students wrote and prepared their own skits and held numerous sessions of rehearsals to perfect their lines and acting. Most groups arrived with props and costumes for their skits. The purpose of the play contest is to encourage students to apply the Japanese language skills they have learned in a classroom setting to create and
and perform an original play, and to enrich their understanding of Japanese language and culture.

The contestants were evaluated according to their Japanese language proficiency level by a panel of four judges along with the depiction of Japan, grammar, pronunciation, storyline, creativity, understandability, acting, fluency, and the use of visual aids including props, costumes, background music, and English caption projected in PowerPoint. The judges included Noriko Baxter (Japanese instructor at Incarnate Word High School), Rieko Johnson (Former JASSA Sister City Relations Chair), Yuko Kawabe (Japanese Instructor at San Antonio College), as well as Miyako Wallace (a certified Ikebana instructor).

“All of the plays were creatively put together,” said Mimi Yu, Associate Director of the East Asia Institute. “They all had a good story twist with Totoro being the main character of the of these plays.”

Even though all of the plays shared the same theme of “Totoro”, a Studio Ghibli character, students created a wonderfully rendered adaptation on the topic. One group had an entertaining puppet variation. While others had a multitude of genres such as superstitions, comedies, dramas, and everyday life. Some students mixed modern Japanese pop culture to make the plays feel new, despite the requirement of having a 27 year-old character in the play.

“Their scripts were well written, rehearsed, and used Japanese taught in the classroom. Some had to do their own research to say what they wanted to say,” said Dr. Makiko Fukuda, Senior Language Lecture of the MLL. “The contestants all put in a lot of time and effort to prepare for their plays, which were totally beyond our expectations.

The top three winning teams of the high school level are as follows: “Totoro’s Adventure- トトロのほうけん” by むかしむか (Once Upon A Time), Johnson High School
“Falling Rain- あめがふる” by ネコとヘビ (Cat and Snake), Churchill High School
“Totoro Strikes Back- トトロのリベンジ” by あついつ先輩たち (Hot Seniors), James Madison High School

The top three winning teams of the college level are as follows: “Totoro’s Forest- トトロの森” by ドングル (Acorn), UTSA
“Good Morning Totoro!- おはようございますとうとる” by とんかつさま (Mr. Tonkatsu), UTSA
“Totoro’s Bizarre Adventure- トトロの奇妙な冒険” by ススワタリ (Susuwatari), UTSA

“We hope to use the Japanese play contest to reach out to the students who are learning Japanese to use and think in Japanese creatively and culturally,” said Erina Romanowich, Program Coordinator of the UTSA East Asia Institute and Lecturer of Japanese. “We would like to see more teams competing in next year’s play contest and can’t wait to host the second play contest a year from now. We are looking forward to seeing how the students...
have grown linguistically!"

In addition to the play contest, Martha Fabrique represented JASSA with her Shakuhachi flute performance and gave a description of JASSA, their outreach activities, and scholarship information for students.

Japanese Club at UTSA also gave a short presentation on outreach and welcomed other college and high school students to join them. They showed pictures of the club meetings activities including ikebana and other events such as fundraisers as well the club and volunteer events they have attended.

Refreshments were provided afterwards as people gathered around and chatted after the contest. Parents commented “This tradition has to be kept up,” and expressed the value of having their kids practice their Japanese in a public setting. One performer commented, “It was really fun! Even though I was very nervous, I really enjoyed it!” While another performer said, “I am glad there are opportunities like this to practice my Japanese. There should be more events like this to encourage people to speak Japanese!”

Due to popular demand, the Japanese Play Contest will return, so stay tuned!

The UTSA East Asia Institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures both on campus and in the community through research, outreach, networking, education, student/faculty exchange, and business development and cooperation.

The Japan Foundation, Los Angeles (JFLA) promotes international awareness and mutual understanding between Japan and the U.S. through cultural exchange programs and grants aimed at introducing Japanese arts and culture, supporting Japanese Studies and language education, and promoting publications, translations related to Japan.

The Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at UTSA offers students a wide variety of language study choices with courses to increase their marketability in business, law, government work, education, and many other fields.

The Japan America Society of San Antonio fosters increased understanding and cooperation between the citizens of San Antonio and the citizens of Japan through educational and cultural outreach.

---

Special thanks to our sponsors

---

All photos copyright and courtesy of Alexandar Poe