UTSA’s East Asia Institute hosted San Antonio’s 5th Annual Japanese Play Contest on February 24, 2018, with support from the Japan Foundation, San Japan, UTSA Department of Modern Languages and Literatures, and the Japan-America Society of San Antonio (JASSA) at UTSA’s main campus. This year’s theme was “Future Japan.”

The purpose of the play contest is to encourage students to apply the Japanese language skills they have learned in the classroom setting and have them create and perform an original play, which in return helps to enrich their understanding of the Japanese language and culture.

Approximately one hundred people came to observe and support the student participants performing their plays. Among them were friends and family members who were excited to see what the students had been preparing and see how much their Japanese proficiency had improved from taking Japanese language courses in school.

Seven teams comprised of 29 students from the University of Texas at San Antonio, Winston Churchill High School, and Claudia Taylor “Lady Bird” Johnson High School participated in the contest.

Prior to the contest, the students wrote and prepared their own skits and held numerous practice sessions in order to perfect their lines and acting skills. Many of the groups arrived with props and costumes to use with their skits.

Chinatsu Oku and Joshua Sako, MC's of the event, welcomed the audience and encouraged students to continue their language studies and to take part in future cultural events and activities. Then the play contest began!

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 captions projected through a Microsoft PowerPoint.

The Judges included Ian Cruz (International Relations Specialist, San Antonio International Relations Office), Reiko Johnson (Former Kumamoto Sister City Relations Chair, Japan-American Society of San Antonio),
Nobuo Kashiwagura (Principal, Japanese Supplementary School of San Antonio), and Yuko Kawabe (Japanese instructor, San Antonio College). San Japan also sponsored an award that was given to the team with the best costumes and props.

Although all the plays shared the theme of “Future Japan,” each group added their own unique flavor to the topic. One group had a spontaneous game show variation while others were about robots and cyborgs, to give it a futuristic touch.

Before the judges’ deliberations were announced, representatives from the UTSA’s Japanese Club, Japan-America Society of San Antonio, and San Japan all made a presentation about their own organization and their outreach activities, and/or future plans. Chinatsu Oku, a Japan Outreach Initiative Coordinator, sponsored by the Japan Foundation and the Laurasian Institution, who is housed at the University of Texas at San Antonio, also introduced her own outreach programs and San Antonio’s inaugural calligraphy contest, which will take place in April.

These aforementioned groups all provide opportunities for local residents to learn more about Japan, Japanese culture, and language through the the hosting of Japan-related events and activities in the San Antonio area.

The top three winning teams of the high school level are as follows:

1st: この素晴らしい未来に祝福を!(God's Blessing on this Wonderful Future!) by スターダスト クルセイダーズ (Stardust Crusaders) of Winston Churchill High School

2nd: 新〜新宿 (Neo-Shinjuku) by 立華不動産 (Tachibana Fudosan) of Winston Churchill High School

3rd: 未来の医療 (Future Medicine) by 関ジョニ5 (Kan Jyoni 5) of Claudia Taylor “Lady Bird” Johnson High School

The top three winning teams of the college level are as follows:

1st: 未来はNOW (The Future is NOW) by 田中たち (Tanaka Tachi) of UTSA

2nd: 日本の将来 (World War III) by もも (Momo) of UTSA
3rd: サイボーグはホテルの従業員 (Cyborg is a Hotel Employee) by いかのぶんたい (Ika no Buntai) of UTSA

Team ときどきどきどき (Tokidoki dokidoki) was the winner of the “Best Costume and Prop” Award, which was presented to them by Rudy Alba, Executive Associate of San Japan, San Antonio's Anime Convention organizing group.

After the awards ceremony, participants and guests enjoyed various refreshments provided at the reception. "The groups were very funny. I look forward to observing again next year," said an audience member. Another attendee stated, "It was awesome! My husband and I enjoyed it very much, lots of laughs." Many of the participants stated that they look forward to continuing their Japanese language studies and returning next year to compete once again. See you all next year!

The UTSA East Asia Institute’s mission is to promote appreciation and understanding of East Asian societies and cultures with a special focus on China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, and Taiwan 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 as well as administers a wide range of 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 offers B.A. and M.A. degrees in Spanish. They also offer a B.A. degree in Modern Language Studies with a concentration in French, German, Japanese, and Russian. In addition, students can complete a Minor in all the above languages, as well as in Comparative Literature, Foreign Languages (Italian and Japanese), and Linguistics. Skills-development courses are offered in all languages with a Major or Minor, and in Arabic and Chinese. The department also offers courses in Media Studies, which allow students to put into practice their theoretical studies in the humanities.

The Japan-American Society of San Antonio, or JASSA was established in 1985 to foster increased understanding and cooperation between the citizens of San Antonio and Japan. As a nonprofit, educational, and cultural group, their goal is to make Japanese culture better known in San Antonio.

San Japan's mission is to provide an opportunity for all participating cultures and participants to come together in appreciation of Japanese animation and other unique aspects from surrounding Asian and other fan cultures, which associate with this convention event.