

Lost in Translation?

Student Tom Barrett proved that he certainly isn't..

Tom Barrett, a Year 13 student from St. Augustine's Catholic College in Wiltshire, defies the image that the British are poor and unenthusiastic language learners. In December 2006 he was awarded 3rd prize in the 4th Shizuoka Junior Translation Competition; the only non-Japanese to win a prize. Planning to take JLPT 1 in December 2007, Mr Barrett is an outstanding example of how an interest in contemporary Japanese pop-culture can inspire a deeper interest in the language and culture.

Tom was encouraged to enter the competition, where he was required to translate an extract from Tachihara Erika's 'Yuki no hi no Orugooru', by his tutor Lydia Morey, a prominent figure in secondary Japanese language education in the UK. When asked what it is about Japanese that interests him, he says that he was initially inspired by Japanese films and comics, an interest which has developed in the four years that he has been studying the language. In summer 2005 Tom organised a home stay in Hiroshima and, having reconfirmed his motivation to learn the language, Tom returned to Japan in summer 2006 to attend a language school in order to prepare for JLPT2.

When asked about his aspirations for the future, his determination is ever clearer:

'I really want to reach a native level of fluency in the language, and I aspire to eventually end up working as a translator for the Japanese media. Dave Spector is a real inspiration, seeing him on talk-shows on Japanese television really proves to me that it is possible for a non-native to achieve an impressive command in the language. I plan on sitting JLPT1 of the JLPT this December, so I feel confident that I'm certainly on the way to achieving my ultimate goal of fluency'!

The Shizuoka Junior Translation competition, for secondary school students or those under the age of 18, is aimed at deepening understanding between different cultures, whilst giving young people the opportunity to enjoy translating Japanese and other country's literature. For more information see <http://www1.sphere.ne.jp/shizuoka/junior/>

Ms Morey is an influential figure in Japanese language education in the UK. Her work with the Japan Foundation London Language Centre includes the organisation and judging of the Nihongo Cup speech contest (for secondary students), which will again take place in June 2007.

Tom translated an extract from Tachihara Erika's 'Yuki no hi no Orugooru'