

2024/2025 J-LEAP REPORT



By Maho Sampei

Coeur d'Alene High School

Coeur d'Alene, ID

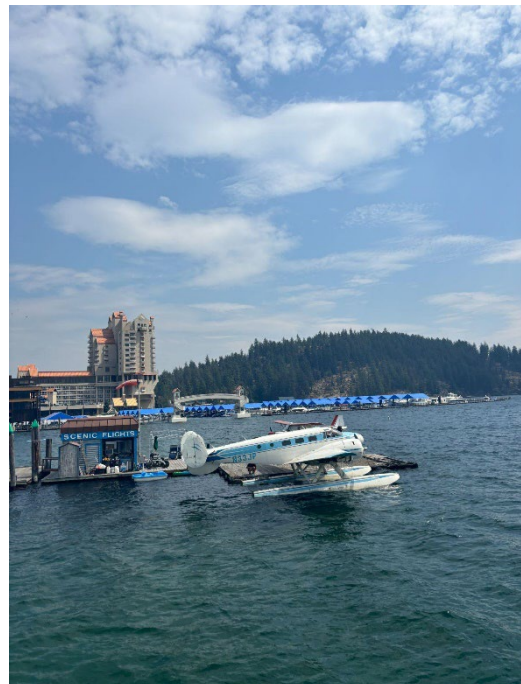
Who am I?

Hajimemashite! My name is Maho Sampei. I work as an assistant Japanese teacher at Coeur d'Alene High School in northern Idaho. Before joining the JLEAP program, I worked in the restaurant industry after graduating from college. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I decided to pursue a career as a Japanese teacher and enrolled in a training course. After completing the course, I worked at a Japanese language school for about a year and a half before coming to the U.S. I've had a deep interest in languages and cultures since I was a child. I first came to the U.S. as a student, spending six months studying in Portland, Oregon, where I learned not only English but also the flexibility needed to navigate a different culture. This is my first time living and working abroad for an extended period, so each day brings new and exciting learning experiences.

About Idaho and Coeur d'Alene

What do you think of when you hear "Idaho"? Many people might imagine potatoes, which the state is famous for. Indeed, Idaho's potato production is iconic. The state is also rich in mineral resources and has a long history of mining. Metals such as gold, silver, lead, zinc, and copper were mined here, fueling economic development in the 19th and 20th centuries. Idaho is also known as "The Gem State" because of its gemstone production, especially rare gems like star garnets, which can only be found in Idaho and parts of India.

Coeur d'Alene, located in northern Idaho, is



about 6–7 hours by car from the state capital, Boise, and about 5 hours from Seattle, Washington. Spokane, Washington, is just an hour away. Coeur d'Alene is known for its beautiful lake of the same name, which attracts many tourists during the summer with its clear waters and scenic views. Popular activities include boating, fishing, hiking, and golfing, with the lake even featuring a renowned golf course. The area is perfect for outdoor activities year-round, including skiing and snowboarding in the winter. Though it's a relatively small town, Coeur d'Alene has been growing in popularity as both a tourist destination and a place to live.

About Coeur d'Alene High School

Go Vikings! Coeur d'Alene High School has about 1,500 students. The school offers AP (Advanced Placement) and Honors classes in subjects like English, History, Physics, and Math for students aiming to pursue higher education. The semester system allows students to earn one credit per semester.

In addition, all seniors must complete a “senior project,” which involves research, presentations, and mentorship. Students can participate in various activities such as football, basketball, swimming, soccer, music, drama, debate, and a wide range of clubs.

About Classes



Coeur d'Alene High School is the only school in the district that offers Japanese language classes, with four levels ranging from Japanese 1 to Japanese 4. Just under 70 students are currently studying Japanese. Since foreign language study isn't a graduation requirement in Idaho, students who are interested in the Japanese language and culture take the classes for various reasons. Dual

enrollment at North Idaho College (NIC) is also available, and students who complete all four years of Japanese can earn 8 college credits.

A Miracle Match This is the first time that the JLEAP program has been accepted in Idaho. My lead teacher, Callister-sensei, is a very experienced teacher with over 30 years of teaching under his belt. He's a wonderful mentor, with a great sense of humor and an openness to new challenges. Callister-sensei participated in the Japan Foundation's “U.S./Canada Primary and

Secondary Japanese Teacher Training Program” in 2001, and during that time, he visited the elementary school I attended! I am so grateful for the connection we've built as lead teacher and assistant teacher in Idaho, 23 years later.

In the Classroom, Callister-sensei and I spend most of our prep time together during prep period, lunchtime, and after school. We co-teach dialogues and skits from the textbook to introduce new topics. Callister-sensei explains the grammar in both English and Japanese, while I help by checking in with students and offering support as needed. To make learning more engaging, we incorporate activities like singing, using physical movements to reinforce vocabulary, and creating opportunities for students to connect Japanese words with images instead of relying on English. For instance, when the teacher says, “Please write,” students make writing gestures.



Since Japanese 3 and 4 students are taught together, despite being at different levels, I team-teach Japanese 4 students in a special session on select days. Initially, I was unsure about my role in the classroom, but with Callister-sensei's guidance, I've found my place, and we continue to work together to make the class a success.

About My Daily Life



I'm really enjoying life in Coeur d'Alene. When I arrived in the summer, the days were long and sunny, perfect for activities like floating and paddle boarding on the lakes and rivers. I also attended various events like farmers' markets, fairs, and outdoor art festivals. My host family is very friendly and loves going out on the weekends, so they often invite me to join them. With winter approaching and plenty of snow on the way, I'm looking forward to experiencing what the colder months have to offer.

Big picture for JLEAP

Over the next two years, my goal is to show students how fun and rewarding it is to learn a language. I hope to inspire them to find joy in communicating with others in Japanese and

experiencing the satisfaction that comes from using a new language. While technology like translators and AI make communication possible even without language skills, I believe that nothing can replace the sense of accomplishment and connection that comes from speaking a language yourself. I also hope that by learning about Japanese culture, students will develop a greater respect for other cultures while gaining a deeper appreciation for their own.