

**Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA/USJETAA Grant Report**  
**Jet Alumni Association of New York**  
**2017 Japan-a-Mania Evaluation**  
**March 3, 2017**

On Saturday, February 25, 2017, twenty-six volunteers from the Jet Alumni Association of New York (JETAANY) successfully conducted its annual Japan-a-Mania event with Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City (BBBS). Through engaging activities, the volunteers taught children aged 7-16 years-old (Littles), as well as their mentors (Bigs), about Japanese food, crafts, language, and culture. Through participating, the children broadened their understanding of another culture and deepened their positions as global citizens.

Thirty-six pairs of Big/Little matches (or seventy-two participants total) walked through the BBBS recreation room to experience Japanese dance, try on kimono and happi, make onigiri and origami, learn Japanese writing, and test their dexterity using chopsticks. In addition to trying these new activities, the children had to answer different Japanese trivia questions. After completing the questionnaire and visiting each station, the Littles earned a prize.

The \$1500 grant from the Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA and USJETAA allowed JETAANY to improve this event in many ways:

- **Karate Demonstration**
  - This year, some lucky participants experienced a Japanese karate demonstration conducted by Tetsuya Sato of Shinkyokushin Karate in New York City. Unlike previous years, JETAANY was able to offer an honorarium to Mr. Sato for his time and expertise. During his demonstration, Mr. Sato talked about the history of karate in Japan (differentiating it from other martial arts), demonstrated many techniques, and got the kids to try some movements.
  - The participants were all very enthusiastic after the demonstration. Many kids came up to ask questions after it ended. One of the Littles even took home a baseball bat that had been broken as part of the demonstration.
- **Stations**
  - **Chopstick Challenge**
    - Using chopsticks can be frustrating for those who are not familiar with them. In previous years, some of the children struggled and gave up during this activity. This year, because we were able to purchase training chopsticks, many more of the kids were able to try the activity, and find enjoyment out of the challenge.
    - It was a good learning/sharing moment for the Bigs who had to help their Littles use the chopsticks. A number of the kids kept coming back to try to beat their previous score. One kid got his time down to 7 seconds!
  - **Japanese Writing**
    - This station was so popular that there were not enough volunteers assigned to it. But the volunteers managed by moving around some

floaters. Part of its popularity was due to the additional items purchased for this activity. The coasters were a good addition, lots of kids liked writing on them, as were the calligraphy brushes.

- There were several kids who spent a lot of time practicing their writing or learning kanji, especially for Anime.
- **Kimono (Yukata, Jinbei, + Happi Coats)**
  - This station is always very busy because putting on and removing the traditional clothing is very time-consuming. It was extremely helpful to have the pre-purchased yukata sets. At the peak busy time all six yukatas and a set of male happi were being used. The pre-tied obi were a great time-saver.
  - The variety of happi coat this year was great for both girls and boys. In previous years, there were fewer options for the boys to try on, so the addition of the male jinbei and happi allowed them to be included.
- **Onigiri**
  - This station is great because preparing food is a wonderful way to learn about a new culture; and the kids enjoy the ability to eat the finished product! In previous years, the rice usually ran out before the end of the event leaving a few participants unable to make the onigiri. But this year, there was just enough for everyone.
  - Additionally, the nori punches really allowed the kids to have even more fun with this activity. It helped them be more creative and decorative while adding a “kawaii” touch.
- **Origami**
  - This station is usually pretty popular. This year, the purchase of extra origami paper meant Littles (and their Bigs) could make as many as they wanted. The most popular items to make were the dog/cat and later on in the day the shuriken ninja star.
  - A few kids seemed less than thrilled about origami at the beginning and only came to the station for the stamp, but then those same kids always ended up really enjoying themselves and staying longer to make more origami.
- **Yosakoi Japanese Dance**
  - The dance station can be daunting for introverted or self-conscious kids (and their Bigs, too). This year, the activity was much more inclusive and interactive with the addition of the new naruko (clappers). Being able to hand them a brightly-colored noise maker made it visibly easier on these kids because even if they lost the steps, they could just make some noise and have some fun moving around. The activity became more about connecting with the culture, and less about perfecting the steps in a short time.
  - The naruko are an essential part of Yosakoi dance, but in past years there weren't enough to lend to every Big and Little dancer, so some of

them had to trade or try the dance without them. This year, each participant could use at least one. When everyone was using their naruko together, it sounded like a true Yosakoi dance team!

- **Additional Elements**

- This year, **the projector** allowed JETAANY to showcase photos from the volunteers' experiences in Japan. The kids all reacted to the photos and asked some questions about the pictures they saw projected on the screen. It was a nice way to bring some Japanese scenery into the room to surround all the activities.
- The **easels** made it easy to quickly mark each of the stations; each activity was easier for the children to find, which improved the overall flow of the afternoon.
- This year, JETAANY was able to purchase plenty of **prizes** for the Littles to choose from after completing their activities/questionnaires. The colorful Japanese folders were very popular, followed by the ninja and food-shaped erasers. The kids seemed really excited about getting them.
- JETAANY was able to purchase a combination of sweet and salty **Japanese snacks**. This was a final element which helped bring the entire event together.

Based on word-of-mouth assessments from the Bigs and Littles as well as from the BBBS staff, the 2017 Japan-a-Mania event was an unmitigated success. There was not a clear consensus about which station the kids enjoyed the most, but some favorites included the Chopstick Challenge, origami, and onigiri stations. The participants also thoroughly enjoyed the karate demonstration. This event helped these kids understand that learning about a foreign culture can be fun and exciting. It helped spark an interest in the previously uninitiated, and increased enthusiasm among those who had already experienced some aspects of the culture. The Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA/USJETAA grant was instrumental in this success.

Please [view these photos](#) to get a better understanding of the afternoon's activities.