Afternoon Session (12:30-6:00)

Open Beginner Division

Entry 1: Yu Lam

Same Kitty, Different Me
同じキティ、違う私

Why does Hello Kitty have no mouth? In this speech, I explain why: because Kitty has no mouth, everyone can see their own feelings in her. I talk about how the Kitty I liked changed as I grew up, and how no matter the phases I go through, Kitty was always by my side, just a different version each time. Through this, I share what I've learned: even something everyone shares can have a meaning that is only yours.

Entry 2: Joshua Eckhardt

Making the Unfamiliar Feel Like Home
アウェイゲームを、ホームに変える

This speech is about my experience in facing difficulty in life, and the switch in mindset from seeing difficulty as one step to overcome, to something that has to constantly be faced, and learning to be comfortable in uncomfortable situations, both in life in general and especially in my Japanese language learning journey. This has coincided with my growth into an adult and has helped to shape me into the person I would like to become.

Entry 3: Aaron Seru

The reality of a mature aged student
社会人学生の現実

In my speech, I will talk about my experiences as a mature, aged student. As a 28-year-old student, I talk about the challenges I face and some of the difficulties I experience. I talk about the pressures of society and how certain expectations hindered me from achieving my goals. I contrast themes of judgement and acceptance as well as reality versus illusion. My speech is deeply personal and within it I open up about the struggles of a mature age student particularly with regard to comparison to others. I explore themes of feeling behind in life, anxiousness and overcoming difficulty.

Entry 4: Bonn Lyssa Soth

Has the world changed, or have I?
変わったのは世界か、私か

As I revisit the things I once loved, I begin to see them in a different light. Through childhood memories, familiar stories, and everyday moments, I reflect on the changes that come with growing older. This speech explores my journey of reconnecting with the past and discovering new meanings within experiences I thought I already knew.

Entry 5: Paul Tam

Arcades: Where Memories Come Together
思い出をつなぐゲームセンター

My speech is about Japanese arcade culture and why it has become much more than a place to play games. Growing up in Macau, I often visited arcades with my friends, where I enjoyed Japanese games such as Taiko no Tatsujin, Initial D, and Wangan Midnight. These experiences inspired me to dream of visiting a real Japanese arcade one day. When I finally travelled to Japan, I was amazed by the lively atmosphere, the wide range of people enjoying the games, and the unique culture surrounding arcades. I also introduce the history of Japanese arcades, their development over the past decades, and how rhythm games have helped popularize famous songs around the world. Although many arcades have closed in recent years, I believe they remain special places where people can share experiences, discover music, and create unforgettable memories. To me, Japanese arcades connect people, cultures, and childhood dreams.

Open Background Speaker Division

Entry 1: Haruku Nishikawa

Let's Build the Future Together: Australia and Japan's Partnership in the Space Industry
日本とオーストラリア、一緒に宇宙産業の未来をつくろう!

This speech explores the growing opportunities for collaboration between Japan and Australia in the space industry. It argues that as the global space sector shifts towards greater private-sector involvement, both countries have complementary strengths. Japan offers world-class manufacturing, engineering expertise and space technology, while Australia provides vast launch sites, a rapidly developing commercial space sector and strategic geographic advantages. Drawing on my experience as a Mechanical Engineering student and member of a university rocket team, I explain how space technology extends beyond exploration to support communications, disaster response and economic development. The speech concludes that closer cooperation between Japan and Australia would not only strengthen their space industries but also create new opportunities for innovation, manufacturing and mutual understanding between the two nations.

Entry 2: Emily Ng

My experience during semester exchange in Japan
日本での交換留学の経験

I will be talking about my semester exchange in Japan, challenges I faced and what I learned from this program.

Open Division

Entry 1: Tate Mendes Da Mata

The Confidence Language Learning Gave Me
言語学習がくれた自信

My speech explores how learning a foreign language helped me build confidence and overcome my fear of failure. As the child of an immigrant, I realised that language barriers made it difficult to communicate with my father, whose second language is English. When I began studying Japanese, I discovered that learning a new language opened the door to a new world. During my first trip to Japan, I struggled to communicate with my host family and became afraid of making mistakes. However, their patience taught me that mistakes are not failures, but valuable opportunities to learn and grow. Inspired by the Japanese proverb *naseba naru* ("where there is a will, there is a way"), I now see mistakes not as failure, but as opportunities. Now, I will carry this mindset into my future study-abroad experience in Japan and aim to learn Portuguese so I can improve my communication with my father.

Entry 2: Kai-Lin Chen

What do you want to say?
言いたいことはなんですか？

Many people have experienced public speaking some time or another. Despite how scary it is, there must be something valuable that we gain from those experiences. In my speech, I will explore how public speaking is a reminder that it takes more than just confidence to speak up about what is important to us. When we prepare to speak in front of other people, what do we say? Why do we say it? And how do we say it? This framework helps us to see that talking about the things that matter requires us to understand ourselves, engage in critical thinking, and takes a surprising amount of practice.
Everyone has something valuable to say. What's yours?

Entry 3: Lucy Grimes

Human Connections
人間関係

The small moments that we have with others are what make us human. We must cherish these moments, and never forget how we may impact others.

Entry 4: Churong (Clare) Cao

The True Meaning of Staying True
初志貫徹

Can anyone really stay true to one original intention? *Shoshi kantetsu* (初志貫徹) is a four-character idiom often understood as staying true to one's original intention from beginning to end. Yet as we grow, our motivations naturally change—and language learning is no exception. I began learning Japanese because of anime, continued for an exchange program, and later pursued it for academic achievements. Does this mean I failed to embody *shoshi kantetsu*? Through my own Japanese-learning journey, I explore whether changing motivations truly contradict staying true to one's original intention, and what it really means to remain committed to a deeper purpose.

Entry 5: Lois Jiang

Seeing the World Through New Names
世界のもう一つの名前

This speech is about how learning Japanese changed the way I see words. Some Japanese words, such as *kinoko*, *takenoko*, *komorebi*, and *oyashirazu*, are not only names for things. They also carry small pictures, stories, and feelings. Through these words, I began to realise that language can change the way we see the world. For me, learning Japanese is not just about vocabulary and grammar. It is also about discovering a softer and more beautiful way of looking at everyday life.

Entry 6: Kevin Xue

My journey of learning Japanese
日本語勉強の旅

A reflection on how I approached Japanese in high school and became utterly immersed in Japanese culture. Most significantly, it was the highs and lows of my experience in my school's Japanese immersion program that cemented my passion for Japanese. Above all, it taught me the importance of perseverance and dedication. My first science classes in Japanese were far from easy, however, they allowed me to get to know myself more than I could have known. For example, how desperately I needed to work on my katakana. In addition, there were the lockdowns that followed from the occurrence of the pandemic. However, my journey through the program gave me more opportunities than it had taken away, and made me appreciate Japanese culture and its authenticity. If there is anything to ascertain from my speech, it would be to believe in yourself no matter what stage of the journey you are in.

Entry 7: Sophia Bowden

The Importance of Inspiration
インスピレーションの重要性

In life, we are faced with many trials and tribulations, with these challenges sometimes making it feel difficult to continue to do the things we love. The academically driven can experience a slump in school, an artist can struggle to create, and in general it can at times be difficult to get past hardships. Inspiration, in these cases, can help people continue through hard times, as well as lead them to create new and interesting things- sometimes even as a result of hardships faced.
In my speech I want to place an emphasis on the importance of inspiration in our lives and the positive impacts it can have- as well as what has personally inspired me through my own challenging experiences, and how it has further enriched my life.

Entry 8: Silvia Wu

Holding Hands with the Monsters Within
心の妖怪と手をつなぐ時

This speech explores how Japanese *yōkai* culture changed my understanding of negative emotions. Inspired by works such as Natsume's Book of Friends and Spirited Away, I discovered that many yōkai are not simply frightening monsters, but beings that reflect human emotions and invisible fears. Through researching Japanese folklore, I came to see yōkai as a way of giving shape and meaning to feelings that are difficult to explain. This idea resonated with my own experience of struggling with anxiety about my future. By imagining my anxiety as a "*yōkai*," I learned to stop blaming myself and instead face my emotions with greater kindness. My message is that we do not need to eliminate our weaknesses. Like the wisdom found in Japanese yōkai culture, we can accept our imperfections, make peace with ourselves, and live alongside our emotions.

Entry 9: Yutong Yao

I Wanted People to See Me as "Someone Who Speaks Japanese" —Beyond Being Told "You Sound Japanese"
「日本語ができる私」を見せたかった ——「日本人みたい」の先にあるもの

This speech explores how my understanding of "good Japanese" has changed. At first, I wanted people to say that I sounded Japanese, so I learned slang, copied different dialects and speaking styles, and even changed the way I dressed to make my Japanese ability visible. However, I later realised that although people could see my Japanese, they could not always see who I really was. I had learned how to sound natural, but not always how to express my own thoughts and experiences. Now, rather than simply sounding Japanese, I want to speak as myself in Japanese and make my ideas truly understood.

Entry 10: Jingtong Zhai

The Seat That Waits for Me
待ってくれる席

My speech explores the relationship between language, loneliness, and belonging through my experience of living in Tokyo to study Japanese. Before moving to Japan, I believed that language learning would happen naturally through daily life. However, I soon realized that speaking a language is not only about grammar or vocabulary, but also about courage, timing, and the desire to be understood. Through an unexpected encounter in my neighborhood, I began to discover a different side of Tokyo: one filled with patience, warmth, and human connection. My speech reflects on how Japanese became more than a subject I was studying. It became a bridge that helped me find a place where I felt accepted, and changed my understanding of what "family" can mean.

Entry 11: Naomi Tung

Koshien, a place of aspiration for high school baseball players
甲子園、球児たちの憧れの場所

Baseball is more than competition—it's a journey of growth. Today's MLB stars like Ohtani and Yamamoto all began with this: chasing a dream called Koshien. But what exactly is Koshien, and why has it captivated Japan for over a century?
Koshien has long been a sacred ground for Japanese baseball players. It is not just a baseball ground, but a place where reaching it as a team requires three years of relentless dedication, effort and team spirit. The tournament resonates far beyond the players themselves, also touching the hearts of an entire nation.
Through 高校野球, I learned that baseball's true purpose isn't just winning—it's the character built through struggle. This is why players like Ohtani and Yamamoto still inspire people of all ages to love this sport, both on and off the field.

Entry 12: Sienna Au

Life with my Oshi
推しのいる人生

Can someone you've never met change your life? For many people, their *oshi* - a favourite person, idol, or character, has done exactly that. While fans passionately support their *oshi* by attending concerts and buying merchandise, they also integrate their oshi into their everyday lives. Whether it's through Japanese studies, making new friends, and finding motivation through difficult times, I will explore how my *oshi* has helped me to grow into who I am today.

Entry 13: Tzu-han chou

Until I can say "I'm not okay"
「大丈夫じゃない」と言えるまで

For a long time, I believed that asking for psychological help was something to hide. During high school, I struggled with severe stress and insomnia, but I was afraid that others would judge me if they knew I was seeing a psychiatrist or taking medication. Even when I visited the school counselor, I would tell my classmates that I was meeting a math teacher instead. After coming to Australia, I experienced a different environment where mental well-being is openly discussed, counseling services are accessible, and seeking help is encouraged rather than stigmatized. This experience made me reflect on how culture shapes our attitudes toward mental health. Through my personal journey, I realized that true self-understanding means acknowledging our inner struggles instead of denying them. Seeking help is not a sign of weakness but an act of courage, and I hope to encourage others to care for their mental health just as they care for their physical health.

Entry 14: Yumeng Yang

What is 'Normal'?
『普通』とは何ですか

In my speech, I explore the question, “What does normal mean?” I realised that although I use the word “normal” frequently, I could not clearly define it. Through observing the different lives of university students and experiencing cultural differences between China and Japan, I discovered that what feels normal to me may not be normal to someone else. I also consider why we feel such a strong need to fit in and suggest that being normal gives us a sense of acceptance and security. Ultimately, I believe there is no single correct version of “normal.” Instead of worrying about whether I am normal, I want to focus on making choices I genuinely believe in and living as myself.

Entry 15: Jasper Hui

Reflections on a Moonlit Lake — and the Self That Rises From It
鏡花水月と自己実現

The Japanese idiom, *Kyoukasuigetsu* (mirror, flower, water, moon) means that everything is a fleeting beauty or an illusion, like a flower reflected by a mirror, or the moon’s reflection on water. What if our identities, desires, and emotions are no different, all passing in an instant? However, what if it’s exactly this fleeting instant, that allows us to fulfill our potential to be our true self?

Entry 16: Linda Ye

In the Age of AI
AI 時代だからこそ

As AI continues to advance, I found myself questioning why I still spend time learning Japanese when technology can easily translate everything for us. However, an attempt to speak Japanese with a restaurant worker changed my perspective. While AI can translate words instantly, it cannot feel emotion or build warm, authentic human connections. In this age of AI, I want to learn Japanese to truly connect heart-to-heart with others through my own voice.

Entry 17: Allan Wang

Inextinguishable passion
あふれるパッションが消えない

My speech engages with the insecurity of having a 'diverse' passion, an interest one may call unconventional, which in turn makes people feel self-conscious and fearful of standing out for having an uncommon interest or passion in something. I use a personal anecdote to illustrate how I dealt with feeling insecure about my passion, hiding it from others out of fear of judgement. I ultimately discussed how one should not feel self-conscious about their interest, no matter how weird it may seem to others, and that they should embrace it if it is truly something they love or enjoy. To further this, I argued that one's passion should be viewed as a strength, and that it is something that ultimately breathes life into one's way of life. No one should feel ashamed of what they are interested in, because fulfillment does not come from doing what people admire, but instead from what makes them feel 'alive.'

Entry 18: Chloe Chiu

Does Happiness...Grow from Rice?
幸せは、お米から育つ？

Reflecting upon noticing the way a man appreciated eating a bowl of plain rice, I came upon the realisation that lasting happiness doesn't come from fleeting, explosive highs from external stimuli. Instead, it is grown from the conscious act of giving value to ordinary experiences by thinking deeply about what it represents to us, internalising this deep, personal gratitude to create a memorable and unique fulfillment.

Entry 19: Thomas Soundias

The history of Japanese cinema and my personal experience
日本の映画の歴史と自分の経験

Since I have gotten interested in watching movies and going to the cinema, I have become particularly interested in Japanese cinema, both old and new. On my recent trip to Japan, I went to the National Museum of Film in Japan and began to learn about the history of it as well. But Japanese cinema can be very unique and influence western movies which I never thought about up until I started watching these films and learnt about it. I also feel like the life lessons in these films are very unique and can only be found there.

Entry 20: Erica Ea

Beyond the Guidebook
ガイドブックの、その先へ

When travelling, a guidebook can tell you where to go, what to see and what's popular – but it can't tell you what you'll discover. Before visiting Japan, I believed its greatest attractions were its famous cities and landmarks. However, an unexpected visit to the quiet town of Nakanojo in Gunma Prefecture completely changed my perspective on what makes travel truly meaningful. Through the simple moments, warm encounters and slower pace of everyday life, I realised that the most memorable journeys aren't always defined by famous must-see destinations, but rather by the people, places and experiences that no guidebook can ever recommend.

Entry 21: Julian Cheung

Keep Doing Art, Even If You Are Not Famous
有名人にならなくても、アーティストを辞めないでください。
Over the years of reflection I have come to realize that I am a creative.
I enjoy writing and producing hip hop songs.
I enjoy literature and writing.
I enjoy expressing myself through my art as an artist.
However, does my art mean anything if I don't become famous through it?

In this speech I will explore my own experience in being an "artist" (whatever you'd like to call a creative). And the identity crisis many struggle in finding motivation to keep going and finding meaning in their own art.

I will revisit what it means to create something to call your own, and the value it lies beyond social recognition, mainstream success and fame.
It is the value of the art itself.

Entry 22: Ryan Chang

The Sound that Spanned a Thousand Miles
一音千里

My speech is a reflection of my experience at MyGO's (band) 9th Live in Japan last July and the message I have taken with me after listening to their performance live. I plan to share their underlying motif that it's okay to be lost in life, and that it may actually be a blessing in disguise. I want to encourage my audience to seek out new experiences and to be lost as it was through being lost I was able to personally grow and gain the confidence to seek out challenges. My main motivation in writing this speech is to show how MyGO's music has managed to change the direction of my life in the best way possible, in the hopes that Tomori's lyrics can reach and inspire people from the other side of the world.

Entry 23: Irvin Ka Wo Yeung

Why Are We Drawn to Stories?
なぜ人は物語に惹かれるのか？

This speech explores why people continue to be drawn to stories across time, cultures and forms. It considers how stories can reflect human experiences, society and the questions people face in their own lives. The speech will focus on the continuing importance of storytelling and why it remains meaningful to us today.

Entry 24: Xinyan Ji

A Spark for Change
きっかけ

Have you ever looked at someone and thought, "I should try harder too?"
That happened to me after I met a Japanese teacher who is passionate about learning and teaching Japanese. Watching his dedication made me realise that I wanted to become a more active learner myself. When I thanked him, he simply said, "I was only a catalyst." Those words stayed with me and made me reflect on other people who had inspired me in similar ways.

In my speech, I share how someone's passion can quietly influence another person, and how a single moment of inspiration can become the beginning of change.

Entry 25: Gracelyn Hocking

The Fear of Commitment
打ち込むことへの恐れ

For three years, I struggled to commit to university. I changed courses, dropped out, and constantly questioned whether I was making the right choice. Fear of committing to the wrong path and uncertainty about my future made it easier to walk away than to stay. During that time, I also felt like I had no real passion or direction.

Despite that, one thing kept returning: my desire to learn another language. Whether it was trying Japanese again this year or throwing myself into different languages throughout those three years, I always found myself coming back to language learning. Looking back, I believe God was gently guiding me toward something that had always been part of my purpose. Although I was afraid to commit to many things, my love for languages remained constant, eventually giving me the confidence to pursue a path that truly felt right.

Entry 26: Piero Baracchi

Does knowing a language mean knowing a person?
言葉が分かれば、人が分かるのか？

For many years, and even now to some extent, my approach to language learning was shaped by an obsession with perfection: a test driven, academic mindset that I found common among students both in Australia and Japan.

Through personal experience, however, I realised that my perfectionism was actually holding me back from the very reason I had started language learning in the first place: genuine communication.

Language learning is so much more than an academic subject; it is the key to another culture. True understanding happens not when we can speak perfectly, but when we have the courage to embrace our differences and truly connect.

In this speech I hope to reach language learners who may feel pressured by these same expectations I felt, and challenge everyone to move beyond societal pressures and use language for its true purpose: to connect us.

Entry 27: Irene (I-Jen) Wang

Japanese language learners' difficulty: The understanding of abbreviated language
日本語学習者の困難：略語の理解

Kanji and script writing and memorisation often are the deterrents to someone to start learning Japanese if they wish to pursue proficiency beyond speaking. As learners' skills improve, they are faced by more difficulties, not limited to honorific language use, slang or grammar. Abbreviated language is something that has caught my attention recently. In this speech, I would like to share my findings and understanding of abbreviated language in Japanese with you.

Entry 28: Anastasia Yiangoulli

A New Language, A New World
新しい言語で、新しい世界

Learning a language opens opportunities to different worlds, a different culture, different traditions, music, art, film, and people. From making new friends along the learning journey, and discovering different kinds of art, learning a new language provides you with much more than another form of communication. It's grounds for new experiences, and an entirely new way of living. Once you get over the barrier of subtitles on a foreign film, or begin to feel and enjoy a foreign songs regardless of whether or not you understand its meaning.

Entry 29: Bavya Prabhakar

The Vocabulary of Love
愛の語彙

This speech explores how humans across time and cultures have expressed love and how those expressions have evolved.
From birth to death, the need to love and be loved is universal, yet the words and gestures we use to convey it constantly shift. We study this evolution by asking how language has changed, and just as importantly, how silence and the absence of words have come to carry their own meaning in expressing love.
Through personal experiences, I highlight moments where words fell short in crucial circumstances, alongside moments where their absence spoke just as powerfully as their presence. Using this contrast, we explore the futility of language in capturing something as vast as love, while still acknowledging its necessity.
The aim of this speech is to have the audience reflect on their own experiences with love, and to revisit their own ways of expression.

Entry 30: Cheng En Chua

Understanding Japan through Word Play
言葉を掛けて、橋を架ける

Japanese wordplay is often dismissed as simple humour, but it can reveal much about how language functions in everyday Japanese life. In this speech, I will explore forms of wordplay such as *dajare* and *goroawase*, drawing on examples I encountered while studying Japanese and visiting Japan. From playful number readings to puns used in advertising and everyday communication, I will consider why Japanese lends itself so naturally to wordplay. Ultimately, I hope to show that these small linguistic jokes are more than amusing. They offer a creative way to understand the language, culture, and ways people communicate in Japan.

Entry 31: Olivia Jordan

Why Are Japanese Language Exchange Meetups Popular Around the World?
なぜ日本語交流会は世界中で人気なのか

Language exchange meetups played a defining role in my journey to becoming proficient in Japanese while living in New Zealand. They gave me something textbooks and classrooms could not: real conversations, friendships, cultural exchange, and a reason to keep using Japanese. In this speech, I explore why Japanese–English language exchanges have become so successful around the world, and how the unique features of Japanese language and culture create a particularly strong foundation for these communities.

Entry 32: Sean Ling

Hashi, please!
ハシをください！

From asking for bridges instead of chopsticks at a convenience store to almost giving up learning Japanese, did my fear of speaking Japanese really disappear after studying abroad in Japan? This speech reflects on my fears, growth, and realisations while continuing my Japanese language studies in Tokyo.