

↓ LANGUAGES

New teacher energises Japanese language study at Muswellbrook High School

Stephen Grant was appointed as teacher of Japanese at Muswellbrook High School in February 2005. Stephen holds a range of qualifications including a BA (Japanese) and DipEd from Australian universities. He also has accreditation in two martial arts, Karate and Iaido, and was graded in Japan. Stephen lived, studied and taught in Japan for over 8 years, and has a Japanese wife and two children who were born in Japan. He has a love of Eastern culture, which began when he grew up having close contact with Chinese people in Newcastle.

At the beginning of Semester Two 2005, Stephen established the Japanese Cultural Society (JCS) as an alternative to the regular Wednesday afternoon sports activities conducted at Muswellbrook High School. The JCS combines Japanese language and culture in the matrix of a Japanese traditional martial arts system. This system is based mainly on Karate and Iaido but also requires students to be tested on Japanese linguistic proficiency as well as their knowledge of Japanese history, religion, and general culture. Successful completion of each test allows students to wear a different coloured belt to mark their stage of advancement.

As students are awarded a higher belt, those students of lower rank are expected to bow lower as a sign of respect. Students are expected also to bow as they enter and leave the training hall. The significance of bowing is explained as not so much a religious practice but the essence of being always conscious of others. Natural response to the demands of a vertical society such as that of Japan cannot be easily conditioned in the standard classroom. In the training hall, however, students become accustomed to hearing commands and delivering appropriate utterances in Japanese and automatically acknowledging the place of self in relation to fellow members and visitors.

Recently, with a number of parents, Stephen escorted the members of the JCS to the Edogawa Japanese gardens in Gosford. In the gardens, they trained and later participated in the Japanese tea ceremony in a tea room on site. Following the tea ceremony, students were given a guided tour around the garden and received explanation of the relevance and significance of the various aspects of the traditional landscape. The day was concluded with a guided tour of an art exhibition featuring three contemporary Japanese artists at the adjoining Gosford Regional Gallery before enjoying a traditional Japanese



Stephen Grant Sensei with members of the Muswellbrook Japanese Cultural Society at Edogawa Japanese Commemorative Gardens in Gosford.

meal at the Nagisa Restaurant in Newcastle. The students were well mannered and enthusiastic, and all hosts were appreciative and complimentary of the attitude of the students.

Benefits of the Japanese Cultural Society approach

Apart from serving as a model of citizenship, the JCS also bridges faculties within the school community. It provides links to PDHPE, Social Sciences, English, Creative Arts, and even Mathematics. It promotes positive behaviour and discipline in a creative, cultural, and caring environment. The martial arts format also reminds students that Japanese learning is equally relevant to both males and females. The program is highly inclusive and provides an ideal context in which to develop all elements of quality teaching and learning.

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