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This Week at Fleet Activities Yokosuka



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SEED Project: Fostering Japan-U.S. Student Friendships in Yokosuka

**Story by Garrett Cole,
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The Student Educational Exchange and Dialogue (SEED) Project, a collaborative effort by Yokosuka City, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA), recently brought together 20 Japanese and American students for a two-day cultural exchange.

This unique event, featuring 10 students from local Yokosuka City schools and 10 from Kinnick High School onboard Commander Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY), provided a platform for these young individuals to share their cultures, learn from each other, and build lasting friendships.

Kotaro Ohno, a 15-year-old Sakamoto Jr. High School student, shared his enthusiasm for the program. "I was drawn to the SEED Project after seeing it in Yokosuka City's public relations magazine. The relaxed atmosphere of American classes and the open discussions were a new experience for me. I could communicate and express myself more freely than in a typical Japanese school setting," he reflected.

Aoi Hashimoto, 17, from Tsukuihama High School, expressed her initial apprehensions and subsequent revelations. "I joined the SEED Project to overcome my fear of interacting with foreigners and to prepare for my future overseas career. The kindness and patience of the American students were heartwarming, and the program has helped me gain a new perspective," she remarked.

For the American students, the experience was equally transformational. Leon Laigo, 15, shared his insights. "The SEED Project was an opportunity for me to delve into Japanese culture. I was fascinated by the diverse personalities and daily lives of the Japanese students. The common ground we found in pop culture, especially anime, was enlightening."

Jillian Heidingsfelder, 17, participating in her last year in Japan, sought to deepen her understanding of Japanese culture. "The differences in the school systems and traditions, like the graduation ceremony, were eye-opening. I enjoyed sharing common interests in music, soccer, and travel with the Japanese students. This experience has inspired me to integrate Japanese culture into my life back in the U.S.," she said.

The SEED Project at Yokosuka is a testament to the power of cultural exchange in fostering mutual understanding and respect. By encouraging open dialogue and shared experiences, the project has sown seeds of friendship and collaboration that these young individuals will carry into the future.

For more than 75 years, CFAY has provided, maintained, and operated base facilities and services in support of the U.S. 7th Fleet's forward-deployed naval forces, tenant commands, and thousands of military and civilian personnel and their families.



Students posing for a group photo with Capt. Les Sobol, Commander, Fleet Activities Yokosuka (CFAY) during the Student Educational Exchange and Dialogue (SEED) project at Kinnick High School onboard CFAY. SEED is a two-day event where students partake in activities designed to foster diverse perspectives, promote mutual understanding, bridge language barriers, and form deeper cross-cultural connections.