

Trip to Japan has youngster thinking in Japanese

Ten-year-old Riley Olmstead of Lake Oswego put his language skills to the test on a two-week class trip to Japan in March.

The fifth-grader traveled to Japan with his classmates, teacher and parent chaperones as part of the Japanese immersion curriculum at The International School in downtown Portland. He spent one week living with a host family and attending school with his peers. The second week, Olmstead and his classmates visited cultural and historical sites around the country.

"The home stay was really fun, and they took me to a lot of places," said Olmstead. "Like Ninja school, where I took a beginner class. I also noticed differences like when walking to school the cars don't stop, so you have to find the right time to go through. I think the thing I enjoyed most was playing with both of the sisters.

"I thought that there would be more differences between us, but it was surprising how similar we were."

While in Japan the students also conducted research for their international baccalaureate study of how shared values and beliefs influence people's daily lives. Olmstead developed a questionnaire about sports and collected data from students at his host school. He is now administering the same survey in Oregon and will compare the results with what he learned in Japan.

Olmstead thinks the trip got him to think completely in Japanese.

"When I returned to my dad after the home stay, I started speaking Japanese to him," he



SUBMITTED PHOTO / LARRY OLMSTEAD

Riley Olmstead, who attends The International School in Portland, spent two weeks in Japan in March. He visited cultural and historical sites and stayed with a Japanese family during his trip.

said. "He would say 'Wait, say it in English!' Before the trip I would get in trouble in class for not speaking in Japanese. When I came back, I got in trouble because I spoke too much Japanese!"

English is Olmstead's native language. He has attended The International School since preschool and learns all subjects in Japanese from natively fluent Japanese teachers.