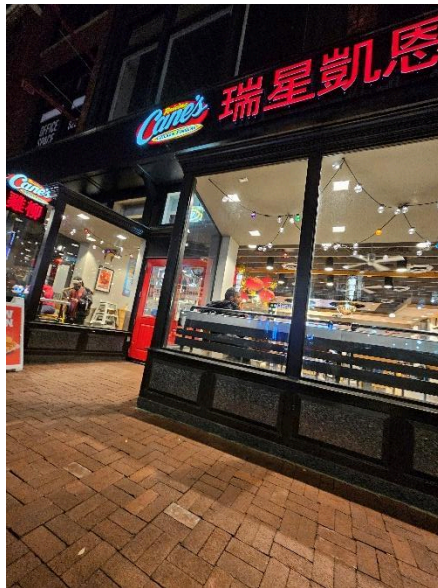


# 一か八か

*Ichi ka bachi ka: Sink or Swim*

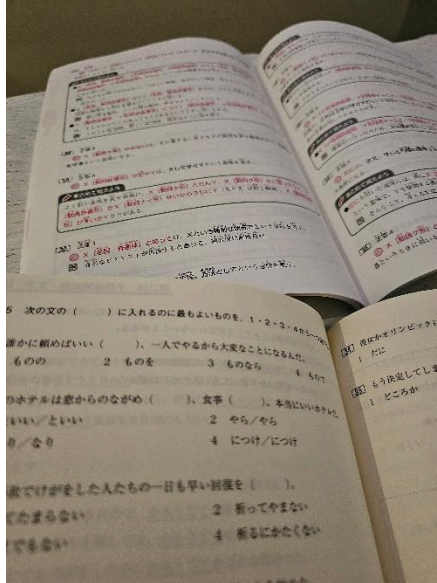
**Engaging with other cultures through language is a passion so central to my identity that I can't imagine life without it.**



*(and through food, too)*

*Israel (Computer Engineering, World Languages '28) really, really, really likes language. Learning about how information is conveyed between humans and machines alike has become something of an obsession for him--but when he's not doing that, you can find him playing table tennis.*

The Japanese Language Proficiency Test is the most widely recognized standardized exam for assessing ability in Japanese reading and listening comprehension. Taking the JLPT had been a far-off dream of mine for years. In middle school, it's a hard sell to get your parents to agree to you traveling on your own to a major city in the middle of exam season. I considered that door to be all but shut. Until...



*My POV the night before the big day*

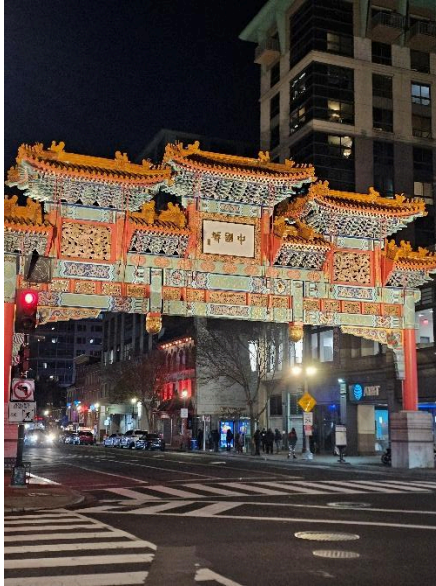
I was at a loss as to what to put my ELG towards. Never had a resource like this been at my disposal. After spending a few nights on Google Maps planning everything (and I mean EVERYTHING) out, I submitted my proposal and was elated to see it accepted. This would be my first time travelling alone, and to do something middle school me had only daydreamed of!

The exam is held annually in the United States and is divided into five levels labeled from N5 to N1, each increasing in difficulty. To make a long story short, I ended up registering for the N1. Bad idea? We'll see. But lighting a fire under myself was the only way I could guarantee that I'd try my absolute hardest. During the months leading up to the exam, I collected new words like amulets.

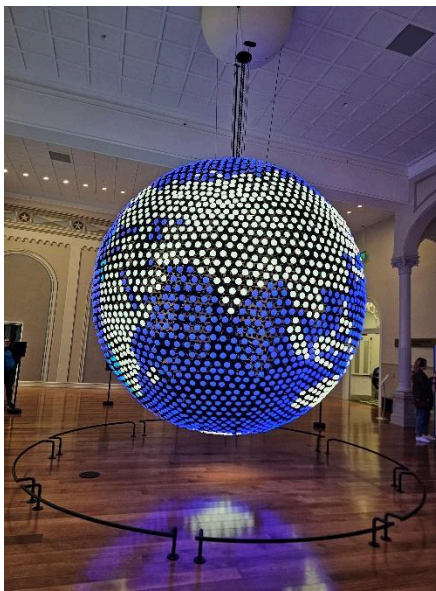


I arrived in D.C. late Friday night. Getting there was an ordeal. My flight was delayed by nearly six hours, which gave me ample time to people-watch. I'm no frequent flyer, but I've always loved the airport. A location without place, the airport makes you feel like you're everywhere all at once. Like the only baggage you have to worry about is your carry-on luggage. The air is charged, and everyone seems to be on their own mission. It was an exciting feeling to know that I had my own mission, too.

Taking the metro into the city, I stepped out from the station and was struck by a stunning visual: a paifang built to commemorate the city's sistership with Beijing, known as the Friendship Arch. As it turned out, the hotel I booked was in the very heart of D.C.'s Chinatown. There was no better place to immerse myself in our capital's multicultural background.

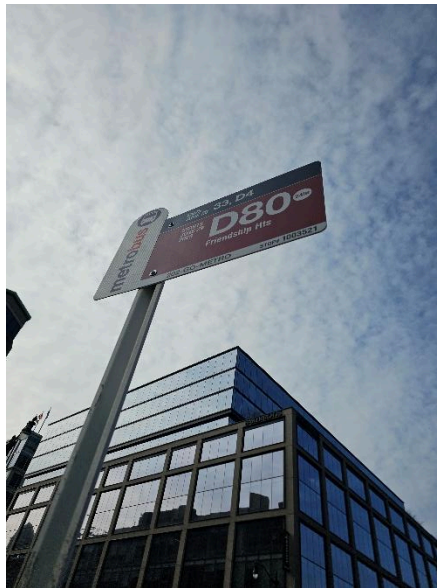


Being able to extend my intercultural experience beyond the exam was incredibly fulfilling. To distract myself from Sunday's exam, I spent Saturday at Planet Word, a free-to-visit museum all about linguistics. Immersing myself in the quirks of language families from around the globe (literally, globe pictured below) and learning more about how we use our words across time, place, and medium was fun like no other.



*Kiosks around the room introduced languages like Korean, Farsi, and Iranian Sign Language*

Sunday morning came and went. Running on iced coffee and a bagel sandwich, I departed for Georgetown University's campus. The exam was exceedingly difficult, and I can't say for sure whether I passed or failed. (Several times throughout the exam I felt as though they were making new words on the fly to quiz me on!) I wouldn't have had it any other way, though. All I could think as the exam began was "it's either sink or swim." It's strange how even something like an exam can be fun when you've worked so hard to get there.



*(I wish Fayetteville had public transport so reliable.)*

Should I pass, I'll receive a valuable credential that opens the door to international work and service; should I fail, I'll still have made immense progress in my journey towards fluency. I can't overstate my gratitude for the chance given to me by the Caldwell Fellows to pursue this opportunity for intercultural and professional development. Further, I owe my progress in Japanese largely to the Japanese department at NC State, as well as to the kind folks at the Japan Center. On the plane back to campus (to take my less exciting final exams), I felt that my world had grown a few sizes yet again.