

**Kon Ban Wa
Yamamoto-san
Nakamura-san
Ishida-san
Rogers-san
Quan-san
Hananogi-san
Abe-san
Kato-san**

**Representatives of the Japanese Consulate, Asia Pacific Foundation, Japan Foundation
Staff and Students of Centennial CVI**

Ichigo, ichi e ; one meeting, one chance. Proverbs can have various interpretations; our interpretation is one chance in a lifetime. The Kakehasi project has given students that chance; a 10 day excursion to Japan.

Good evening members of the Canadian Japanese Consulate, parents, teachers and fellow students my name is Christopher Choquette and my name is Annika Lautens and we have the honour of being chosen along with 21 other students to participate in this incredible journey to Japan.

We would first like to thank the Consul-General Yamamoto-san, Director Nakamura-san, Consul Hananogi-san and the representatives of the Japanese Consulate and Asia-Pacific Foundation for honouring our school with this privilege.

You have bestowed upon us not just the opportunity to experience the culture of Japan but also gain insight into its cultural foundations and to build strong relationships between the students of Canada and Japan. We would like to take a few moments to show you what our group is looking forward to in this trip, what we hope to gain from it and to show our gratitude.

Four months ago when it was announced to our school that there would be a trip to Japan, a buzz of excitement quickly spread through Riverdale Collegiate Institute. Now here we are weeks away with the anticipation escalating daily.

Since its opening in 1907 Riverdale has established a reputation of academic excellence. Our school is one of the most diverse schools in one of the most multi-cultural cities in the world. Riverdale offers a wide variety of activities from the drama club to the table tennis team to extra help after school which ensures every student has opportunities to succeed and get more involved.

We strongly believe the students selected for this program are going to make Riverdale proud by representing Canada as cultural ambassadors. Each student brings a new, unique skill and perspective to the table. Our ability to communicate, our enthusiasm and our inter-personal skills will all

contribute to a successful experience with our peers and the new people that we will be meeting in Japan.

As students many of us came into this trip with a limited knowledge of Japan, through pokemon, sailor moon, and other successful franchises. Then, we were given the opportunity to go to Japan. This made us look back and realize how much of an affect Japan had on our society, and how diverse it is. This made us all share one thing in common: the need to further our understanding of Japan. I'm sure I speak for the group when I say that we have all had an irreplaceable couple months learning all we can about Japan, and that it has changed our lives. I've personally learned more about Japanese culture over these past few months than I have any other culture in the world.

For instance, how Japan has several micro cities featuring enormous towers, the concept of meishi, or how Japanese employees will often stay with the same company all their lives, frequently past our average retirement age. These are just a few of the many things we have learned about Japan.

Now that we've learned almost as much as we can through text and videos, we cannot wait to visit Japan and see it all firsthand! For many of us, this trip was the spark to a long journey of developing our knowledge of a culture that contrasts ours; it was almost magnetic.

The President of the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada called the Kakeheshi exchange program a "bridging initiative which aims to deepen people-to-people ties between the youth of Canada and Japan." The students of Riverdale are hoping to gain a great deal of new knowledge and a better understanding of Japan's language, history and its people. Furthermore we hope to create lasting bonds with all the new people we will be meeting in order to continue building bridges between the youth of Canada and Japan.

We would also like to achieve a better understanding of business since Japan is the world's third largest economy, with huge potential as a market for Canadian businesses. In fact more than \$25 billion of trade took place between Canada and Japan in 2012.

The opportunity to learn first-hand about Japanese culture by meeting its people and seeing how they live is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which we are extremely gracious to have given to us.

The Kakehashi Project is the opportunity of a lifetime. Many would be awed by this, and just the chance to go to Japan for 10 days, but for us, it's far more than that. For us this trip is about experiencing a culture we have never experienced before, and are fascinated by. For us, this trip is about seeing a new way of life: it's about spreading the word about one of the world's most interesting and influential countries.

Moreover, we also want to show you our culture as we're sure you're just as excited as we are. We want to make the time when the Japanese students are here the most entertaining and educational time as possible. We want to show them how amazing our culture can be too.

This opportunity of a lifetime would not be possible without the efforts of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan,

Yamamoto-san, Hananogi-san and Kato-san of The Japanese Consulate of Canada,

Nakamura-san, Abe-san, The Asian Pacific Foundation,

and Ishida-san and The Japan Foundation of Toronto.

Ichi go, ichi e, thank you for giving us this chance of a lifetime.

Domo-Arigato.