

Important Dates in March

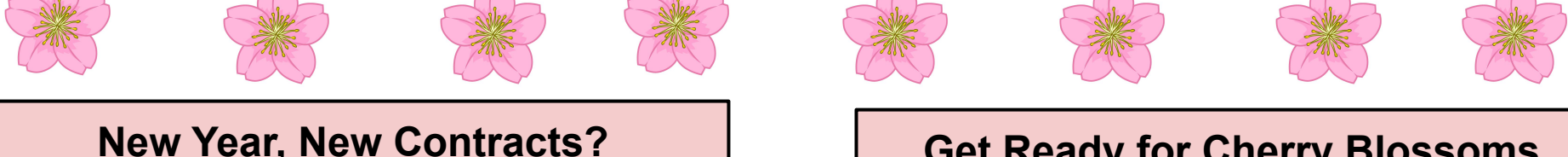
- 7th - Otsu Block 'Shigaraki Pottery Challenge'
- 14-15th - Omi-hachiman Sagicho Festival
- 20th - Vernal Equinox (holiday)
- 28th - Round 1 Games Night

Important Dates in April

- 18th - AJET Shigaraki Pottery
- 29th - Showa Day (holiday)

The Shiga Situation

Say goodbye to winter's exorbitant heating bills and hello to fine spring weather. Even though your apartment will finally be a comfortable temperature, don't fall prey to the temptation of staying indoors! If you've been hibernating all winter now is your chance to get out and explore Japan's abundant nature before the oppressive heat of summer makes its inevitable return.



New Year, New Contracts?

You may have heard through the grapevine that JETs all over Japan will be seeing changes to their contracts come the new fiscal year. This stems from a change in Japanese law to provide more benefits to certain types of workers, and, for some reason, JETs have been included.

Unfortunately, there is no way for us to tell exactly what will happen at this point. Contracts are the responsibility of each contracting organization. That being said, your Japanese PA has been working hard on building a Shiga Model for them to follow, and we have heard that things will mostly stay the same. If the Model is applied, you might even get more types of special leave!

Since we can't say what changes will apply to you as of yet, if any, here are some things you can do before the new contracts come into effect in April:

- Don't panic!
- Ask your CO when you will have access to the new contract, to see what, if anything, has changed.
- If you don't have one, ask for a copy of your current contract for comparison.
- Check if your pay day will change, and figure out how that might affect your March, April and May budget.
- If you have a train pass, check when you will be receiving your reimbursements.

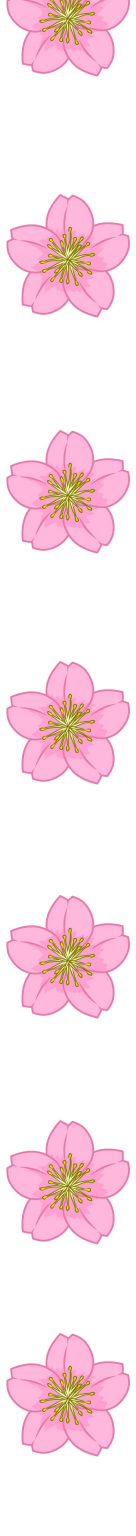
Get Ready for Cherry Blossoms

As winter winds down, we can look forward to one of the most beloved times of year in Japan - the appearance of cherry blossoms across the country. Hanami (cherry blossom viewing) is one of the best ways to experience the arrival of spring.

Groups of people will gather in parks, seated upon tarps to sip sake and picnic under the flowering trees. If you've never experienced the joys of hanami, I'd definitely recommend putting this at the top of your to do list. For the seasoned JETs who've never missed the opportunity to partake in the revelries, why not show the new JETs in your area why this time of year is so famous?

There's a number of places to enjoy the sakura around Shiga, some notable spots being Hikone Castle, Nagahama Castle and Kaizu Osaki. Of course there are any number of other places around the prefecture to discover. Get together with some friends and make sure to get to where you're going early. The best locations will be staked out with tarps faster than you might expect!

Estimates put Hikone's blossoms opening on March 25th and peak bloom being on April 2nd. Kyoto and Osaka's trees are expected to bloom a bit earlier than this though, so plan accordingly!

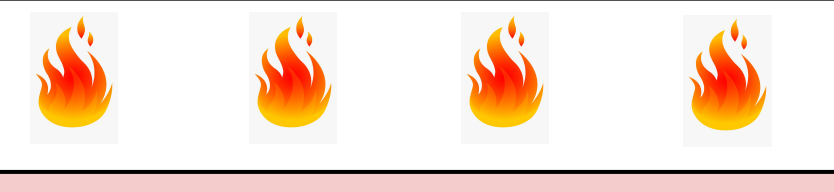


Sagicho Festival: Burn Baby Burn

You might know that summer is the main time to catch a festival in Japan, but it's certainly not the only time to do so. One of my personal favorites, Sagicho, is being held March 14th and 15th in Omi-Hachiman where you can see more flames than a Guy Fieri shirt.

On the first day, groups of participants can be seen carrying huge mikoshi (wooden floats) on their shoulders and marching around town. The second day of the festival is where things get really interesting. Again, participants will march around town, but this time when they encounter another group, they'll battle. This involves two groups of people carrying incredibly heavy wooden structures and running into one another. Various battles will take place over the course of the afternoon. In the evening all of the floats will gathered at the base of Mt. Hachiman. Cheering crowds can enjoy the many snacks on offer from the festival's vendors while looking on as the losing floats are set aflame.

Hachiman-bori (the old town) found at the base of Mt. Hachiman is a really lovely place. If you've never been, this is the perfect excuse to go experience it.



Coronavirus

At this point, even if you don't regularly watch the news, I'm sure you'll have seen one of the countless stories discussing the current outbreak of COVID-19, the new strain of coronavirus which is believed to have originated in Hubei, China. The virus has spread fairly rapidly. There are currently over 200 confirmed cases in Japan (excluding cases from the cruise ship docked in Yokohama), though so far none have been discovered in Shiga.

It's prudent to follow some simple precautions while work is being done to contain the spread of the virus. First off, wash your hands regularly with soap and use alcohol rub after you've been out in public. It has been reported that virus can live on surfaces for more than 2 hours. If you touch a surface where the virus is present it can then enter your system via any mucous membrane (eyes, nose, mouth) so avoid touching your face.

It should be common sense, but if you develop a cough, do not cough into your hands. Coughing into the inside of your elbow is best practice. It's common to wear a face mask when you are sick in Japan. Although the effectiveness of these masks is debatable, you may be expected to wear one. If you choose to wear a mask, be sure not to touch it afterwards, if you do you might as well be coughing into your hands. If you need to remove or adjust the mask make sure to handle it from the strings that go over your ears.

The symptoms of the virus seem to be a fever and a cough that leads to a shortness of breath, and may be accompanied by headaches, and tiredness. If you feel unwell or develop mild symptoms you should contact your school and stay home from work. If you develop a fever that lasts for more than two days, or your symptoms become more serious you should probably go see a doctor. Be aware of the sick leave allowed in your contract and make sure to use it if you fall ill (but please tell your school!). It's not great being absent from work, but it's worse to make others sick.

Overall, try to not worry too much. Most ALT's fall within the 20-40 age range, and as such it's very unlikely that you will be seriously affected if you contract the coronavirus. Even if you get sick, there's a very high likelihood that the virus will run its course and you will recover. Our main concern should be preventing the spread of the virus to populations who are at-risk by continuing to practice proper preventative measures.



Golden Week: Weak?

Golden week is a much loved string of holidays and usually one of the busiest times of the year for travel. The looming worries about coronavirus have a good chance of affecting this year's travel season however.

If you've already made plans to travel abroad, first off, make sure you submit your overseas travel notification 30 days before your trip. Also be aware that there are travel restrictions in place in some countries and as the virus continues to spread new restrictions may be put into effect. If you find yourself unable to travel but have already paid for flights, hotels, etc. please check your travel insurance (if you purchased any) to see if you are eligible to recover any money you may have already spent.

If you're still considering travelling but are worried about possibly cancelling, you might want insurance that lets you cancel for any reason as the coronavirus is now considered a known event.



Short Story Contest Winner

Subane Abdi has been selected as the winner of the March-April Short Story Contest. The prompt was 'growth'. Thank you to everyone who submitted a work, and I hope to receive more submissions from you for future contests!

Growth – Subane Abdi

In the midst of winter, I was caught reminiscing about the past. I remembered the letters; the scribbles of nonsense that made us giggle and laugh. The mundane that made us cry. The uneventful that led to fights.

In the midst of winter, I was entranced. By memories, sorrowful and regretful, blissful and content. The letters you wrote, the past we shared, were gentle and warm. Moving onwards one step at a time, I hope for the thaw that will let the past blossom, to a springtime of a more hopeful future for us both.



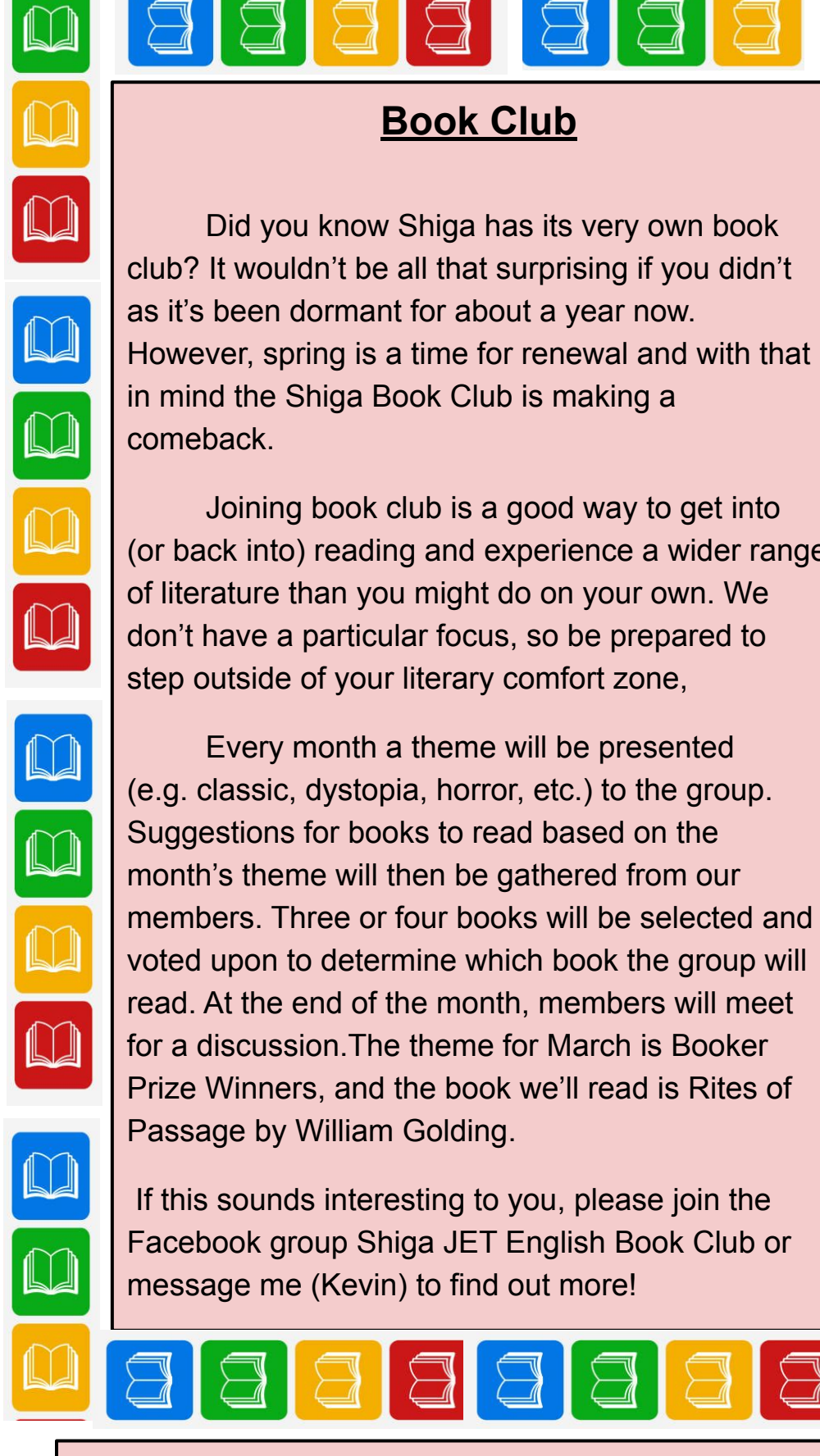
Book Club

Did you know Shiga has its very own book club? It wouldn't be all that surprising if you didn't as it's been dormant for about a year now. However, spring is a time for renewal and with that in mind the Shiga Book Club is making a comeback.

Joining book club is a good way to get into (or back into) reading and experience a wider range of literature than you might do on your own. We don't have a particular focus, so be prepared to step outside of your literary comfort zone,

Every month a theme will be presented (e.g. classic, dystopia, horror, etc.) to the group. Suggestions for books to read based on the month's theme will then be gathered from our members. Three or four books will be selected and voted upon to determine which book the group will read. At the end of the month, members will meet for a discussion. The theme for March is Booker Prize Winners, and the book we'll read is Rites of Passage by William Golding.

If this sounds interesting to you, please join the Facebook group Shiga JET English Book Club or message me (Kevin) to find out more!



Issue 14's Short Story Contest

We'll have another short story contest for the May/June edition of the Shiga Situation. Any composition consisting of 100-words or less can be submitted! It doesn't matter if you're a part-time poet or simply jotting down a stream of thought, we want to see what you have to write! As always there's a writing prompt, the next one is 'blossom'.

Send your piece to kenchopa@gmail.com with the subject line '100-Word Story'. Please include your piece's title and your name as you'd like it to appear.

All Aboard! Uminoko Camp 2020

The second annual Uminoko Camp will be held on Friday August 21st and Saturday August 22nd 2020. 60 lucky students and roughly 25 lucky ALTs will have the chance to participate in a two-day English Camp run aboard the famous Uminoko boat, while camping around beautiful Lake Biwa. Participants will consist of 20 students from ES, 20 from JHS and 20 from SHS. Last year, participating ALTs received daikyu for volunteering. ALTs should expect to see a request for volunteers sometime in April. In the meantime, if you're interested, please keep the dates open!

