

'After Class'

Enter the Clearing the Mind Abode

A Taste of Tea with Janet Ikeda

Season 1, Episode 4

[music]

Ruth Candler

Welcome to the W&L After Class: the Lifelong Learning Podcast. I'm your host, Ruth Candler. In every episode we'll have engaging conversations with W&L expert faculty bringing you again to the colonnade even if you're hundreds of miles away. Just like the conversations that happen every day after class here at W&L, you'll hear from your favorite faculty on fascinating topics and meet professors who can introduce you to new worlds and continue your journey of lifelong learning. Thanks for listening. Today we'll be talking with Janet Ikeda. Janet is Associate Professor of Japanese at W&L. In the past, she has served as head of the East Asian Languages and Literature department, a Fulbright Program advisor, the Associate Dean of the College for student academic support, and president of Phi Beta Kappa Gamma of Virginia. She is also on the board of the joint National Committee for languages and is a past president of the Association of Teachers of Japanese. Prior to graduate school, Janet spent three years studying the Way of Tea at Urasenke Chadō Institute in Kyoto, Japan. She was heavily involved in the creation of Senshin'an Japanese Tea Room and the Watson Pavilion, and her English translation of a 16th century tea master. Janet, thank you so much for being with us today.

Janet Ikeda

Thank you so much for asking me to join you.

Ruth Candler

So we are currently in stage three of reopening Virginia as of this recording, and with the exception of coming to work and going to the grocery store, I'm pretty much still sheltering in place. So to be here in the tea room with you today is extra special.

Janet Ikeda

Thank you. Isn't it beautiful? I have some things that I want to share with you and talk about, but I'm hoping they'll be time when we can open up all these buildings and people can join us for tea.

Ruth Candler

Yeah, it's not the same without a lot of people, is it?

Janet Ikeda

No, there's a strange echo in an empty room.

Ruth Candler

There is! It always relaxes me to be here and that in the tea room. It's inviting and serene in every way, from the tatami mats and the sliding paper doors to the smells and the sounds. And whenever I'm in here, I realize that we probably wouldn't have this space if it weren't for you and your courses on tea. How did you decide to study tea?

Janet Ikeda

I would say it all started because of an extraordinary high school teacher, and maybe you didn't expect that answer, but I love high school teachers. You know, I grew up as a third generation Japanese American in Ohio. But by the time I attended high school, I was in Montgomery County, Maryland, which is right outside of Washington DC. My high school French teacher Jean Morton, who I adored as a ninth grade French student, well, she had been a Navy way during World War Two and had been trained at the Boulder School. And lo and behold, in the 1970s, she said, "I'm going to start a Japanese language class here in a public high school." And I didn't know any better. So I went from French to Japanese. I didn't know much Japanese except for a few words that had to do with food. You know what I loved about her and what made me pursue the study of Japanese which led me to Japan, which led me to the study of tea, was her sheer enthusiasm for the learning process.

Ruth Candler

A true teacher!

Janet Ikeda

She was a true teacher, but you know what I loved about her in the class? She was the embodiment of the of the great student. She was the one who was more tickled and delighted with a word or a lesson or something that came up in clas. And I can see her, she has passed away, but I can still see her in my mind almost dancing in front of the class with excitement. So she's my model as a student, what a gift it is. And you know, I have her photograph in my office and she looks down on the every day, every teaching day. And so there I was, I took two years of high school Japanese that I headed off to University of Hawaii at Manoa. My mother was from Hawaii, and I had a grandmother there then and lots of relatives. I was taking Japanese and there was a tea club at the University of Hawaii because they have a beautiful tea room called Jaku'an. You're going to like the translation: the treasure hunt of tranquility. Oh, yes. And of course, it's a tea house in the East-West Center Garden, beautiful tea facility. And that's where I started studying tea sort of as a university student. And I just want to say in that beautiful Japanese garden is a meandering stream, and it's in the shape of a castle. Character cocotal or Sheen, which means heart. So I never forget that beautiful setting and learning tea there in Hawaii. So there are a lot of firsts in this story is that the University of Hawaii, they offered the first credited Way of Tea course. So I was in the tea club, and I said, "Oh, take this Way of Tea course." It was taught in the history department. And it was just a wonderful entry to Japanese culture that I had not experienced before. And what I learned right away is that life is not a straight trajectory. And I try to share that with students because they want to have a straight line to graduation. And I'm gonna say, you know, it's not always going to be straight. And so I took the four year gap plan, and I don't recommend it to everyone. But you know, after my junior year, it's typical to study abroad, so I went. The Crown Prince Akihito scholarship

to study language at the Stanford inter University Center. Very good. You know, I said to myself, my plan was the typical one year study abroad after junior year period. But while I was in Tokyo, I said, "Wouldn't it be wonderful to study more?" And so I applied for a Chi fellowship that had really come out of this course. This course, I was in the inaugural course, and there was a Seijo no Shiro fellowship named after the Grand Master, the 15th Grandmaster. And I was fortunate to receive that fellowship. So I went from Tokyo, to Kyoto. So that was the plan for year two, boom, study tea on scholarship. Well, what happened is that I stayed for another two years. So I was there for four years.

Ruth Candler

Why study tea so deeply?

Janet Ikeda

Well, I tried to explain that to my very practical parents who are second generation Japanese Americans. I think I remember explaining to them because they have the exact same question. Oh, yeah, just come home, especially after year two was over. Right. And I think I remember always telling them, it was the tip of the iceberg. "You know, Mom and Dad, I've only seen I'm studying tea every day. 24/7, in a traditional tea school in Kyoto." And it was hard for them to understand all of this. Remember, they were born and raised in this country. And I said, I'm only seeing the tip of the iceberg. I've got to stay another year. And then I stayed one more year. And then finally I decided I better go back. But it was the feeling of being on the team. It was the academic side I had the language. I had the history and culture, but it was the sheer sensation of of working and the tea room because you are working and wearing kimono every day.

Ruth Candler

And the feeling I mean, I get the sense of that just by being in the moment here. So, you've mentioned before that you love the poetry and tea. Is it the poetry found in the rituals of a tea service?

Janet Ikeda

I think so, I think but I think it's also what you just mentioned earlier, or being in the tea room. I think there's a whole poetry to being in the tea room. So I think about what the word poetry means that you can look up any standard definition. You know, it's some kind of special texts, in which there's a special intensity given to the expression of feeling and ideas, and I want to jump on the word intensity, because that's what I thought every day. For the three years I was in the tea school. And so I think my whole life was sort of poetry. But more practically speaking, yes. Let's look in the tea room. The poetry you can see here, there's a writing. Oh, there's a scroll in the in what we call the alcove or the tokonoma. Right. And I love the scrolls because they can come from classical Japanese poetry. They can come from Zen sayings, these paradoxical sort of puzzles. They can come from the Chinese classics, the wonderful, you know, things from Confucius.

Ruth Candler

And the scrolls change daily is that correct?

Janet Ikeda

Daily, or should I say with each tea gathering would always change it. And so for our meeting today, I just changed that scroll about 45 minutes ago because I had a scroll up for commencement. Oh, but now I put up this scroll and this one of my favorite scrolls, and it says Sesa Takuma. I learned about it in Japan four characters. Let's look at the characters and what they mean. The first one is cutting, cutting. Second one chipping away. The third character is grinding. And the last character there means polishing. What does it mean? It is a well known phrase in Japan in general, but it really comes I think, from the Zen tradition. And again, I'm going to refer to a colleague and I would say a friend and acquaintance that I made over the years. It. I like the translation from Victor Hoody, who was in the diagnoses and training monastery and now as a professor at McGill University, mutual publishing all those characters. So what does that mean? You have all your students, they're all rough stones, you're going to put them in a tumbler or tumbling machine. And they're going to learn from each other by rubbing against each other chipping away and grinding. And in the end, they're going to end up as more polished individuals. I took the professor out of the equation, they're the teacher. And that's what's important. Students need to remember they're here to learn from each other. So I love this scroll.

Ruth Candler

That's beautiful. And for our listeners, I'll take a picture and we'll post it to our podcast notes for today.

Janet Ikeda

That'd be great.

Ruth Candler

So how did you decide to teach a course on a tea ceremony at W&L?

Janet Ikeda

Well, it all started out in 2002 when Spring Term was six weeks, and I was wondering what could I teach because Spring Term was the time to do something kind of innovative and different. I took a tea course as an undergraduate, but I'm not in history, so I was going to make it more literature and culture. And so there I was 2002 I'll never remember it seemed very, very hot that spring term. I had received funding from the Dean, Dean Betch, and I had all these basic utensils, which I still use today, many of them and there we are. We were in a regular classroom. And first of all, of course, we're doing the typical classroom activities. We're doing the the lectures and the discussion and we have readings and yes, we have quizzes and tests and papers, but one day a week, I would have a lab. So before I had a tea room, it was basically me and cardboard boxes. So I had all my utensils in cardboard boxes, I would bring them downstairs, we used to be in the Red House, and I would put them all out just wonderful memories of everyone sitting around actually doing the procedure at a table.

Ruth Candler

Enjoying tea and understanding the ceremony of it. The Debbie W&L Tea Room is a masterpiece of traditional Japanese architectural design and artisan ship. How did this project come about?

Janet Ikeda

Well, I'd say it's a miracle. You know, and that's the miracle of W&L. It's not as if I would even think to ask for something like this. It really is just the the miracle and the the wonder of teaching here. I think it started with a man coming into my office one day, he had been hired as an outside consultant for the Reeves Center. He later became the Reeves Center director and I owe a lot to Peter Grover who just jumped on this idea of teaching tea engaging students sort of in a hands on way with art objects? He loved that idea. And so he's the one who advanced the idea. And of course, you know, I tried to provide him with as much, you know, description and the meaning of the tea room and how I would use it. But just look here in the Watson Pavilion, we sell these beautiful other objects unrelated to the tea room that are in glass cases. Now, are we going to open those glass cases and touch them? I don't think so, though, right. That's what I love about tea. We are handling all these objects. We're handling in the tea room, a very safe environment, and students are learning how to move and to handle objects. But they're, it's the most intimate way to engage with art is to bring up a wonderful table to your lips. So I really owe him that, that credit and then 2006 I was just looking at photographs of the Tea Room construction because I've been putting on Facebook. I think it was finished July 25. But look at the door right there, the door to the Watson Pavilion. Mr. Suzuki, one of the best Tea Room builders I would say, in the United States. He is Japanese. Born and of course Japanese trained in Tea Room design and construction. He basically pulled up in front of that door in a white van and I thought what my team our tea room is in that van and it was it was now some of the larger components. The mats had already been sent from Japan. The cedar ceiling boards that you see there had already been set for Japan. But this man basically jumped out of what I call this magical van and just started bringing components some he had already made, but some of them he actually constructed here and he was here for about a month.

Ruth Candler

I understand that the name of the tea room is very special to you. Would you share how the Tea Room got its name?

Janet Ikeda

Well, as I said the Tea Room constructed in 2006. I started teaching 2006 fall. It was dedicated at a board of trustees meeting in winter 2007. But it was in 2011 that we received this tea name. You can see it right there as a gift from the 15th Generation Grandmaster of the Urasenke school now this is the lineage of tea. It's one of the three major tea schools and of course, the tea school where I studied. And I studied on the scholarship of the 15th generation grand master. He's now known as di social. He just turned 97.

Ruth Candler

Wow. And I think he must be healthy.

Janet Ikeda

Yes, that's what he says. So make sure you drink your tea. And it's a wonderful gift. Not all tea rooms have table names, but I am so appreciative of his recognition of what I'm trying to do here at W&L. And

cinching on is the name he chose. You could see it there I have it on a beautiful scroll. But it is also he chooses the name in his own calligraphy he writes a scroll, it's mounted beautifully we received that as a gift. And it's also put on a wooden plaque in the same. If you looked at the scroll, it would look exactly like that plaque. It's read from right to left there are three characters cinching on, and then his so called signature. Send means to purify or to cleanse or simply to clean Sheen, his mind or heart remember I talked about that beautiful garden. And here we have mind or heart and on which is my favorite character is hermitage or hot so translated it as clearing the mind abode. We are here to clear our minds. If there's any place that w/ where you need just a moment to yourself, I hope people will just duck into the Watson Pavilion. When it's open usually there are docents right there at the front door and just sit here on these benches and and take in the tea room. Think about the meaning of the characters because we are so distracted. All of us students, professors, everybody alike.

Ruth Candler

You've said before that your course on the tea ceremony lines up very well with a W&L education and that it's changed your teaching and helped clarify your ideas on a liberal arts education. Do you think students stepping outside their comfort zones and your class helps them learn better not only in your class but for their rest of their time at W&L?

Janet Ikeda

I think college is all about getting outside of your comfort zone. When students come to W&L, I want them to have, I want them to have the best learning experience. Yes, I want them to feel comfortable and safe. But it's not like sitting on a couch petting your dog. comfortable, right? I want them to be able to challenge themselves, challenge each other, care about each other care about themselves and look for opportunities to get outside their comfort zone. So that might be taking a unique class. My biggest worry is that students sometimes come here and are box-checkers. I know a lot of the faculty use that word, and we promoted in many ways there you are sitting with your first year advisees and you've got all the list of the FDRs the required courses, and we're like, okay, you could check this box, and you could check this box, and I have to pull back and say, "But remember, yes, you should check the boxes. Yes, I want you to get your degree here. Don't forget that last PE course. But you have to get out of your comfort zone. You have to take a course that maybe that's not doesn't have a box by it." Right? Maybe you should study abroad. Maybe you can't study abroad so that's why I think the tea course is a little bit like study abroad when we're in that tea room look when we're sitting in that room or not in Lexington anymore feel so that's what I've come to see that the tea room has made me reflect on how I teach and not be consumed about what I teach what I what material I need to cover. I think one character that I like to a Chinese character that I talk about in first year Japanese is the character to teach as you know, the the Japanese adopt they have three writing systems but one writing system are the characters from China. The character I talked about is the word to teach. And you know what it is a picture of like some some of the characters are sort of illustrations. And the character to teach is a person holding a stick over a child. Sounds terrible, terrible. But you can see that was the traditional way in China, probably the traditional way in the United States a few decades ago. And, again, I'd like to throw away the sticks. But I think the students need to sort of hold the stick over their own head, guide their own education. And that's the tea container I have in the tea room today. It has the first poem. I love poems in the tea room.

They're not only on the scroll, there's a poem on that tea container, and it's the first poem of the 16th century tea master INSERT NAME; he wrote 100 didactic poems. And I'll just paraphrase it for you because I always use it the first day of class, this poem On the container is when you enter the way of tea. You are your own best teacher.

Ruth Candler

You don't only teach a course on tea, you're also a scholar of Japanese literature and an accomplished translator. What kind of courses have you been teaching recently?

Janet Ikeda

So I teach first year Japanese, which I love, because there's so much energy enthusiasm with the beginning class of anything. I teach advanced Japanese, the last term of fourth year Japanese, which is literary translation, and then I teach all the literature and translation courses, and I love all of those courses. And they're all very different in many ways. The literature in translation courses one, of course, is the tea course. Another one I teach on poetry and drama. There's another course which I call the great books of Japanese literature. And we go from pre modern, to modern times. And that's a, you could call it a survey course. But I really want to call it the great books. And then, of course, I just thought this past winter was animals in Japanese literature real and imaginary. And it was a lot of fun. And I had a fun class, even though the last three weeks were online, right? But who doesn't want to talk about Japanese animals not only you know, magical creatures that can transform themselves like Tanuki which are like raccoon like animals, or foxes, which the Japanese feel transformed. But also, you know, Hello Kitty. Godzilla. Die mon Pokemon. So we talked about all sorts of things. And it was it was, it was fun. It was fun.

Ruth Candler

What What is it like teaching Japanese literature and translation and what part of teaching this do you especially enjoy?

Janet Ikeda

First of all, so I teach two kinds of courses, the the courses of literature and translation where the students have, do not have to have a background in the language. I just want them to always remember that they are reading it through a veil, they are at the mercy of the translator. And that works can be translated several times. You know, the best example is the monumental work The Tale of Genji, you know, written in the 11th century by a court, aristocratic court woman. Yyou know, such a long work of 54 you know, booklets I don't even like to use the word chaplet chapters. But you know, why are there multiple translations, at least for I can think of, and just to get students to think about that we're just reading one translation, almost one person's interpretation. Now in the fourth year Japanese class, were we are actually translating, and I always choose works that have not been translated I have a lot of fun reading a lot of contemporary fiction is that you immediately realize that translation is always a work in progress. And it that's a lesson in life, I think constant change, nothing is set in stone. And I realized that students are like you and me. They're looking for the permanent. They want the fortress, they want the stone, they want to something to cling to in a storm. That's not our job here. We're going to weigh them

down with those stones. If I give them stones, and stones can crumble. So I think the best thing I am trying to convey in all my classes by talking about translation, or reading a work of literature set in another time in another place, is how to deal with change and interpretation and uncertainty and permanence. And maybe this is the Japanese part in it is to see the beauty and all of it.

Ruth Candler

So you talked about your your first year translation courses and then your your fourth year. Does enjoying Japanese literature require an appreciation or understanding of the Japanese language?

Janet Ikeda

No, it doesn't. Right? Because then we offer many different courses literature in translation. For students who haven't studied the original language, it helps, certainly. But no, you don't because the purpose of a translation even though I did say it was an interpretation, it is the personal work of a translator is that it does open a different world to an audience who would not otherwise have had access. And I will say in my literature and translation class, sometimes the students who don't have Japanese background language background gives some of the most insightful comments.

Ruth Candler

So why do you think that is?

Janet Ikeda

They're close readers, their sensitive readers, they pick up on the nuance

Ruth Candler

You mentioned to me earlier that translation is complicated for more reasons than we might think. And you compared it to looking at a complicated rug or tapestry from the back. Can you explain that in a little more detail?

Janet Ikeda

That's a quotation I talk about all the time and it's not mine. It comes from another work is coming from the Book of Tea by Okakura Kakuzōn. And just to give you a little background, he wrote it in 1906 in English for an English speaking audience and for his patron Isabella Gardner and her group of high society women in Boston. He was trying to explain INSERT WORD. But again, I took this quotation about translation to heart for all my classes. And he talks just to paraphrase a little bit, is that translation is always a treason. He says, translation can add it's best only be the reverse side of a brocade, all the threads are there, but not the subtlety of color, or design. And I really want students to think about that. Right? When we read in a translation, the threads are there. We can we can read closely read the story and look for the plot and other themes and themes and, you know, imagery, but not the subtlety of color design. And that's not that should not be a feeling of despair. It's just a feeling of humility, that I'm not reading it in the original language and so I may not see everything that's there.

Ruth Candler

So it's all about the interpretation of meaning and not just definition of words. And that makes sense. It reminds me of those books that have phrases from other languages that cannot literally be translated into English like the idea of *hygge* in Danish culture, which translates to a mood of coziness and comfortable conviviality with feelings of wellness and contentment. Or one of my favorites, as you know, the the word *komorebi* and Japanese, which roughly translates to the light that filters through the leaves of the trees. Can you give us an example of a phrase that wasn't straightforward to translate?

Janet Ikeda

Well, there are so many, but what I've been thinking of more recently is just a word that used to come up when I was an undergraduate, you know, in a reading or, or when I was in Japan, and the word is *sunao* and the Japanese see it is an attribute and certainly the tea school they thought that to be *sunao* was an attribute. And so, a lesson to students, if you go to the first definition alone, you're going to be a little surprised. So what's the first definition of *su now*, to be obedient, meek and docile, I know that the look on your face, the look on your faces a little bit like the look on the students faces and how I felt when I first compliment, no. And the second but, and that's what students often make the mistake of in translation, there'll be five definitions, and I'm sorry, you've got to look at all five, because it's not going to be always the first one. And the second definition in a typical dictionary would be to be honest or frank, or to upfront with one's feelings, but I'm going to take it to another plateau. And I'm going to point at some tea towels that I have here in front of you, and think of the bamboo. Now students who have taken the class will smile because they know I love this. There's a wonderful triad in East Asian art of the pine, pine tree. You can see that on a table there, the bamboo which you can see on a tee container there. And then do you see that ceramic sort of looks like a napkin ring? Yeah, that's the bamboo design. That's it. That's a beautiful lid rests from the Grand Master. And then plum blossoms. It's called *show Chiku* INSERT WORD by it's just a triad throughout East Asia. But it's telling us to live like those like the pine to live like the bamboo to live like the plum blossoms. So just in relation to *sunao*, I always think of bamboo. The Japanese love bamboo. You see it in Asian ink brush painting across East Asia. But why do they like the bamboo is because it's a beautiful plant, but it's so resilient. The idea that it bends in the wind and I have bamboo in my back backyard. I've been growing it. And you know, a wind comes along and they bend, and sometimes they've been completely over. But they don't break. They don't just snap easily. In fact, it's hard to snap them, especially you know when they're green. And so isn't that a lesson in life? And especially right now, we need that resilience. And so we're not we're being obedient, but we're being we're being flexible. And we're adapting to the situation. So I say we all have to be like bamboo right now.

Ruth Candler

Yeah. Don't we, though. Well, and for our listeners, I'll take a picture of what Janet was referring to beautiful tables. And they're really works of art, aren't they?

Janet Ikeda

They are.

Ruth Candler

So in a minute, we're going to talk more about W&L, but before we do, do you have any recommendations of great Japanese literature and translation that we could share with our listeners?

Janet Ikeda

You know, there are so many, but I've got one here with me. Now this is a really old book. I mentioned my high school teacher, Jean Morton. I had her in the 70s. She gave me this book. I still have the handwritten card that she gave me. What did she give me? I think I was a year out of high school. I would always go back and visit her when I came back home to Maryland. And here she gives me a great classic of Japanese literature, *The Pillow Book* by Sei Shonagon. I, I love it. I love it. I still read it. I still have this old copy of hers. I do read it in my great books. It was written by court lady of the 11th century and what how could that possibly relate to our allies? Because it is anecdotal. It has lists, lists, things that are beautiful things that are ugly. They that make me feel unpleasant. Yes, some of them are a little bit remote in time and culture, but some of them will just make you laugh out loud. And I think it's, it's just a series of it's not a narrative. Some of them are little stories in themselves, right? Some of them focus around a poem, because poetry was very important to the, the aristocrats of the Heian Period. But I think I would recommend that.

Ruth Candler

So it sounds like it's a book that you could pick up, read some and put back down.

Janet Ikeda

Absolutely, at any time.

Ruth Candler

Good recommendation for what we're experiencing right now and sheltering in place a book that you can pick up and put back down. So if we're interested in learning more about Japanese tea ceremonies, where where should we start?

Janet Ikeda

You know you there are so many books on INSERT WORD or the tea ceremony. The one I use in class I like very much it is maybe oriented more towards an academic class, but I think there are gems in there. I really do. It's *Wind in the Pines*, and is a collection of translated essays, and also essays by someone named Dennis Hirrota. And I would really recommend that but there are introductory books to channel you. And of course 1906 *The Book of Tea*. Yes, there are, it's dated, but there are still just these sections in there that relate to our lives today. And one is in the book of tea, they talk of the tea room as the abode of vacancy. I'm using his archaic language and he wrote it in English. And you look at the tea room. It is all about minimalism. Right? Tomorrow, if I was going to talk to someone else, I would take down the scroll and put a different scroll. Right? I may or may not have flowers. I happen to have a rose of Sharon, they are from my garden today. But it's pretty much an abode a vacancy. It's like a vacuum. We fill it for the moment. And then we take the things away.

Ruth Candler

Right? Like, is it a serene feeling? It is.

Janet Ikeda

Yeah, it is and the sense of impermanence. It's not like your living room where you have the same painting, usually there for years and years. How many people rearrange their furniture every other day? We don't.

Ruth Candler

Well, thank you for those suggestions. You've been at W&L since 1999. When you look back over your time teaching here, what are you most proud of?

Janet Ikeda

I think what I'm most proud of is my attempts to be a bridge, and you'll notice I have a tea room out here with a bridge. I have several tea rooms with bridges. This idea that I am a bridge that I am trying to bring to my course to this tea room facility, another culture to the students and sharing it with them. And what I also enjoy is having the students be a bridge to the community being an outreach. And so that's why we try to do teas for the community. But we also have origami demonstrations for the community. We also do you know write your name in Japanese I have the Japanese ta but it's getting the students to share their knowledge not me per se. I'm usually in the background as you know washing tables is training the students to share and so I'm most proud that I hope in some way I've been able to be a bridge and to just add to the rich curriculum at W&L.

Ruth Candler

What do you most enjoy about teaching W&L?

Janet Ikeda

Creating opportunities for students. We've got incredible resources here. Incredible. I'm very proud to teach here, using those resources wisely. And being able to help students study and develop their thinking in very unique ways. What I often tell students why I love teaching at W&L now is a ANB. So what's a ANB? It's above and beyond I'm sure I didn't share I didn't coined the phrase but I use it all the time. I want to see them soar above and beyond. on a practical level. Yes, I write a lot of letters of recommendation, but I tell students writing a letter simply about, "Oh you did well in class and you know, you participated etc." That's the bare minimum That's the bare minimum. And it doesn't have to do with grades. I want to know something where you went above and beyond maybe helping someone maybe contributing to the class in a very different way, not just showing off knowledge, but really incorporating the mission of the liberal arts in your life. I know that's a pretty lofty idea. But I want to see that growth. And that's what I love about being in a Japanese program is that you see them as first years and you just follow them. We all do, we all do, and you follow them and the type of person they are when they leave here.

Ruth Candler

When you take in many groups of students to Japan for spring term, when the students finally board that flight home to the United States, how would you say they've changed?

Janet Ikeda

They've changed. Some of them know it, some of them don't know it. Some of them won't know it until 10 years out. That's just the way study abroad works. It's just the way it works. I like meeting up with them actually a few months later in the fall. And when they come back with Oh, remember when we did this, or Oh, I just had an email from my host family. And I feel I've been a bridge that I've helped create a connection for them. And one thing I've learned on spring term abroad is to hold back. I am not a professional guide. I'm a professor. And I think we forget the difference. I'm not a tour guide. And so I've learned to hold back I want to see their reactions. I want to see their impressions before I go on and on and give my impressions and actually, that's less important than what they're feeling right now. Sure. I, I love I love to lecture and to share what I know. But what I learned about Spring Term is hope that hold back, give them give them time to discover and explore. I remember what it was like as a as an undergraduate going to Japan, on my own through their eyes.

Ruth Candler

Well, you and I were actually supposed to travel to Japan in April with a group of alumni travelers. And that was right when the world was closing down due to the pandemic. It would have been my first time in Japan and I was really looking forward to being immersed in that culture and learning about the different areas we were supposed to visit. And frankly, seeing the cherry blossoms and full bloom. Was there something that you were particularly looking forward to traveling with alumni learners instead of student learners?

Janet Ikeda

I was looking forward to it so much, so I was disappointed. And I think what I was looking forward to was their impressions and reactions. Yes, I had my lecture ready to go. I knew what we would be talking about. But I cannot anticipate their questions and their impressions and reactions as older as adults. And I think that would have added so much to my teaching here at W now, it is always so incredible to see Japan or something that you study so closely through someone else's eyes, because then you start to look at it in a different way. You can't get kind of jaded or saturated.

Ruth Candler

So it would have been a learning experience for you as well.

Janet Ikeda

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think we could have had so much fun and...

Ruth Candler

Well, we will have fun. We're still planning to go next March. So

Janet Ikeda

When the world reopens.

Ruth Candler

Yes, yes. Thinking of our future travels together makes me realize that while so many of our alumni know about your wonderful professional life, but they may not know as much about your life outside the W&L campus. What do you enjoy doing when you're not in class?

Janet Ikeda

When I'm not in class I would say my husband and I really enjoy classical music. And so all the wonderful concerts again at W&L these incredible groups that they bring in or our resident, our own our residence, a lot of talent here, and I think you might know my my husband makes musical instruments. He makes cellos and violas and violins and I am trying to learn the cello.

Ruth Candler

How's it going?

Janet Ikeda

Going terribly. I am the worst student. I wish I had learned as a child, but it's that has also been very good to always when you teach to always put yourself in the sea of the learner.

Ruth Candler

Where's your favorite place to go and Lexington or Rockbridge County, and what do you love about it?

Janet Ikeda

Well, I love living in a non urban environment. I did grow up in a small town in Ohio. But I you know, I then I went to high school in a suburb of Washington D.C., and I've lived in huge cities. Since then, it is being in a kind of rural setting. We're not great hikers or campers, so my husband and I often will just take a very quick trip, I think it's in Rockbridge County, to the George Washington National Forest.

Ruth Candler

Yeah, , you'll be the only person there; people don't go there. I feel very alone there. Yeah, wonderful feeling.

Janet Ikeda

And then of course, just the Chessie Trail because I like the sound of the water. I just love the sound of the water. And then I'm just gonna say this my front porch. I really I just even before the world turned upside down, we just love sitting on our our front porch.

Ruth Candler

Your for the porch seems like it's the in the middle of a wildlife refuge. So do you have a favorite Lexington area restaurant? And if you do what do you order?

Janet Ikeda

I have actually two that I want to mention there's so many good ones yeah they're you know they're gonna be ones that I don't mention. But yes, you're gonna anticipate this it is Sushi Matsumoto. I do, and I we like Mr. Matsumoto and know him and are so glad he came to our small town to open this sushi restaurant. But you're going to be surprised at what I love to order. Okay, so I know sushi fairly well, right? I've eaten very good sushi in Japan and in restaurants in large cities here. But I love the Rockbridge Roll. Everybody order the Rockbridge Roll.

Ruth Candler

What is the Rockbridge Roll?

Janet Ikeda

So my department once had a like a student gathering, and we ordered a platter of sushi and there is this you know, there was the Rockbridge Roll. I actually had to call the waiter and say what was that sushi? You just have to order it. It has sort of shrimp tempura but it has a lot of toppings crunchy toppings on. It just has the best taste. It's a little spicy, a little crunchy. But I think it has so many unexpected kind of textures and tastes.

Ruth Candler

And what is that Japanese word, umami?

Janet Ikeda

He does have a lot of umami, and who would think something called the Rockbridge.

Ruth Candler

It doesn't sound very Japanese.

Janet Ikeda

My second restaurant is a confession. And I don't think anyone's ever heard this. But whenever we have a big tea event, and you know these take hours set up and clean up and like we parents family weekend where we're allowed to have a parent family weekend tea we're serving 60 people and I'm running around with the students that we're all putting our hearts into the event. There's only one thing I want to eat on the way home to eat is a Pure Eats hamburger.

Ruth Candler

It's a great hamburger. I really enjoy being friends with you on Facebook and you post the most amazing bird pictures and the hot picture of yesterday. Have you always loved bird watching?

Janet Ikeda

No. I grew up in the country and as a child I saw birds of course living in Ohio, but I can't say that I you know, had my camera on them but of course now digital photography. I call myself the barstool naturalist because you know, those pictures I take I'm like sitting inside with a cup of coffee in an air

conditioned room. You know, I'm not out in a little tent, you know, in the elements. But there's just so much going on. I live only five miles outside of Lexington, but the birds and the building of the nest and the nurturing of the young. Our last swallow is going to fledge today and I took a photo before I left. But I also realize how impermanent nature is getting back to the idea of impermanence and beauty, but also impermanence and sadness, because as you know, some of the photos, the nature can be very harsh. And these and I take it very hard and I shouldn't because that's part of nature, you know, when the little swallow fell out of its nest, and my husband put it back, but I didn't show the picture on Facebook of two days later, I did find it on the lower deck. I don't know. There was a reason for that. I don't know if it fell out if again, or if the others pushed it out. But you're, you're humbled by nature and entertained by nature, but it is an ending the story outside our window.

Ruth Candler

So what are you reading right now?

Janet Ikeda

What I'm reading right now is by Jane Tompkins. It's an all book. I'm sorry, I I'm trying to think of the title now. It's I think it's a day in the life of a teacher. She's a she was a Duke University professor of English literature. And I'm rereading it, I read it years ago and there's a reason why I read it rereading it but it's, it's an old book, but it speaks so much to what I think I see is lacking in the university today and it's the blocks checking and, and the sort of fragmentation of education, that we're not looking at the students as whole beings. And I know that sounds very new age years ago, she wrote this book in the 90s. She was accused of being like a new age guru, right talking about, you know, students as holistic beings and, and educating the whole student. But I keep coming back to that over and over. It's not new. But it's something I think we have to remind ourselves over and over and over, because we are so consumed by what we have to cover, in what time period how to adapt all this new technology or, but but we forget that we are helping to nurture the development of young lions.

Ruth Candler

So on that note, if you had all of your W&L students in front of you right now, sitting in one of the auditoriums, what would you like to say to them?

Janet Ikeda

You know, that's a really hard question in many ways, because there's so many things. Well, first, I'd like to hug each one. I couldn't do that now. But um, trying to think of a few things that I hope they will remember from what I said. And I always say to students in class, I hope you leave with one or two things from this class. And it's not going to be on the test or quiz that you're going to mention to me as your 10 year reunion. Like, you know, I remember this incident, I remember this quotation, and I hope that is something that will stay with them. But I can think of three and one is that you have to meander, and it goes back to that life is not a straight trajectory. And you know, I think myself getting used myself is the crazy example. And again, I take it from poetry, Japanese poetry, and also from the tea room and from Zen sayings, but you have to be like clouds and water, you have to learn to flow. You know, yes, we

want to be like the mountain. We want to be like Mount Fuji. We want to be solid, but you know, that's going to take them years. Yeah. takes us years to really know who we are.

Ruth Candler

I'm still waiting.

Janet Ikeda

A second thing is they pick on this pickup on this very quickly, I covered in the poetry class but also on the tea class is this idea from linked verse poetry of medieval period. I won't go on and on there but shallow to deep and deep to shallow.

Ruth Candler

Okay, what do you mean by that?

Janet Ikeda

So it's the idea that you start from one, you go to 10. But you go back to one. And that's not, that's not a part of our classwork. We're always taking them to 10 and pushing them to 11 and maybe 12 and filling their heads with knowledge and then then testing them on it and then grading them on it. But I think what we should be asking, and I've only thought about this recently, what the question should be on the last day of classes to tell me what you don't know what you don't know. I think the emphasis is so much on, on accumulating knowledge and things. And it's important, I know that I also am trying to resist the kind of linear progression that we have in Western society, you evolve, you go from A to B, and C and D and end up at Z. But again, within the Japanese non Western perspective, issue, always go back to one. And so of course, I have a scroll with the character, one. And the last one is from a scroll, which I don't have up today, which was a gift from the Grandmaster, and it's INSERT WORD, but I'm going to focus on the two first characters, sitting alone on a mountain peak. That's, that's what we need to do. Whether it's clearing your mind, whatever you're doing, and it doesn't have to be physically sitting alone on a mountain peak. But everyone, not only the students, we all have to find a moment likes to sit alone on a mountain peak. And you know, they do love that scroll. Yeah. And so these little bits and pieces that might not be on the final exam. I hope we'll stay with them.

Ruth Candler

That's life lessons. Yeah. Yeah. So if your game I thought it would be fun if we wrapped up our podcast today with a Japanese vocabulary lesson. If I say a word in English, would you give us the Japanese translation?

Janet Ikeda

To the best of my ability because it's situational.

Ruth Candler

Okay. All right. "Hello."

Janet Ikeda

So that depends on the time of day.

Ruth Candler

Okay, so it isn't morning.

Janet Ikeda

So Ohio, Ohio was a mess. Ohio is more casual. Ohio. A little bit more formal when you don't know someone. Ohio design mess. And we save in class every morning and I love it. students see me at night they say oh. INSERT WORDS

Ruth Candler

It works you know, where are you, you know, they're nice to meet you.

Janet Ikeda

So this is typically used for the first time. And the word reflects that is Hajime Mustang, which which talks about beginnings, so nice to meet you for the first time. And you know, the things you teach at the very beginning of the term seem to stay the longest, so that's always a special phrase. INSERT WORDS

Ruth Candler

Right. Goodbye.

Janet Ikeda

Again, this is a very tricky question, because the typical answer which everyone knows is sale nada, that's so tragic. You only use cyl nada if you're not going to see the person ever again. Oh, real or not for a long time. Wow. Ruth, I want to see you again. Yes, I'm going to say da Mata. INSERT WORD

Ruth Candler

Mata, INSERT WORD (good bye)

Janet Ikeda

Right, which is I'll see you again. So it'd be very strange of a student. came to my office as an SEO not I would. I would be like where are you going? INSERT WORDS

Ruth Candler

So you don't say goodbye in Japanese.

Janet Ikeda

You do if you're at the airport sending someone off who's moving to another country or area. You know what's so funny about that is on March 13, Friday, when we didn't know that would be our last day of face to face class. Friday afternoon, I was doing our cultural activity with the whole Japanese program and all the students I had brought a sweet bean dish to class. We had no idea what was going to happen.

We weren't reading our email. The email didn't come out till later that afternoon. And but we knew there was a lot of thought about the pandemic. And at the end of that food session, we all laughed and said So no, we did. We did we did. We didn't ever joke, and I never saw any of the students' faces again.

Ruth Candler

Oh Janet! Thank makes me sad!

Janet Ikeda

I know the irony of that, but they left having a great Japanese dessert.

Ruth Candler

So is there a way to say "best wishes?"

Janet Ikeda

Best wishes I would say oh blankie day. INSERT WORD

Ruth Candler

And thank you?

Janet Ikeda

I thought that was I must end on that note. Arigato gozaimashita. INSERT WORD

Ruth Candler

Janet, I really enjoyed talking with you today and being here in the tea room with you. And thanks as always to you for listening. We hope you discovered something new. To read more about today's podcast with Janet and check out other ways to continue your lifelong learning with W&L, you can head to our website wlu.edu/lifelong. You'll also find W&L's faculty reading list, "Sheltering in Place with a Few Good Books" and information on how to join our new W&L book club. We hope you'll join us back here soon. Thanks again and until then, let's remain together not unmindful of the future.