

Professor Piccolo's Seminar

The graduation essays produced by this year's seminar students represent a variety of interests ranging from movies, fashion, music and dance to current social issues in Japan and abroad. Along with their secondary-source research and use of primary-source materials, some students' topics were inspired by their own personal experiences.

Almost half of the essays focused on film-related issues. Aoi Suzuki wrote about how the gradual "empowering of female characters" in Disney animated films reflects a changing social environment. Rina Kiriya wrote on a similar issue by tracing the evolving roles for women in American musical films from the 1930s to the early 21st century. Hinako Shimada looked at popular anime movies in Japan and America and showed how a close examination of elements such as the nature of the hero and the setting of the stories can provide a glimpse into the cultures of each country. Arisa Kani discussed gender and racial issues in film by comparing older and current Marvel movies. She argues that although racial and gender discrimination continues to be a problem, the more recent Marvel movies are more diverse and inclusive. Other students also focused on issues of race in film. Taiga Nakazawa researched and wrote about lead roles for black actors in American films and the problematic presence of "white savior" characters in black films. And Ayaka Tsukada wrote about the movie *Freedom Writers* and its relation to

historical events such as the activities of the *Freedom Riders* in the early 1960s and Rodney King and the 1992 Los Angeles riots.

Other students wrote essays on topics related to music and dance. Ryutaro Katade wrote a well-researched essay on the history, evolution, and variety of Hip-Hop and its ongoing influence and importance in Japanese pop culture. In a closely related essay, Moto Honda wrote about the history of Breakdance and how "B-boy culture came to Japan" making use of research on the development of Breakdance and his own experience as a dancer. Shintaro Kubota wrote about the American alternative rock band, Linkin Park. In particular, he focused on the life of lead singer and song writer, Chester Bennington, and how the events of his life influenced his music.

Anna Matsuhira and Soma Ito wrote essays about fashion and culture. Anna wrote about the historical generalizations regarding gender and fashion and how, as the concept of gender became more open and diverse, so did fashion possibilities. Soma researched and wrote about the history of jeans from their origins to their world-wide popularity, evolving styles, and enduring iconic status in pop culture. And three students wrote about social issues. Wako Kaminoshi focused on the issues of euthanasia and death with dignity in Japan and argues for the need of Japanese law to support active, or "positive" euthanasia. Kiyoka Yamamoto compared Japanese and American ideas of "self-esteem" which result from cultural differences regarding family and school. Kaede Imai, in an essay inspired by her teaching practice experience, wrote about the kinds of academic assistance

needed by school children in Japan with "roots in foreign countries" - those who are foreign nationals or with at least one parent who is a foreigner. And, as she shows, with the changing demographics in Japan, this need is only going to increase.

Finally, the award for Best Graduation Essay for 2019 goes to Sayuri Dozaki for her essay about the Australian film director, James Wan. Although Wan is probably best known as a director of horror movies, Sayuri presents a case for viewing Wan as a director who "values story behind the horror" and while working within the horror genre is not limited by its conventions.