

Japanese Studies Liaisons Encourage Penn Japanese Language Learners to “Take Time for Tadoku” in Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center

Originally published on the *PennLibNews* blog (January 14, 2019) by Molly Des Jardin

Traditionally, reading practice has been one of the most difficult areas to tackle in Japanese language education, with little opportunity and few level-appropriate “real world” materials to read during class time. Japanese Studies Librarian Molly Des Jardin and Coordinator of Area Studies Technical Services Michael Williams have been working closely with Penn’s Japanese language instructors to integrate Japanese reading practice (*tadoku*) into classes by providing the students with tailored collections and welcoming practice spaces in Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center.

Three years ago, Molly and Tomoko Takami, the director of the Japanese language program, began brainstorming about how to have *tadoku* activities centered in the library as a part of the Japanese language curriculum at Penn. Working together to identify materials and a home for them in the East Asia Seminar Room, Molly and Michael began the *tadoku* collection with newly published graded readers for Japanese learners of all levels. The collection soon expanded to three series of these readers as well as popular magazines with short articles and interviews accessible to learners, contemporary literature, illustrated books on anime, and a new East Asian comics section in Van Pelt-Dietrich Library Center—all next to the *tadoku* practice space. Molly also created an [online orientation](#) to the collections for language learners.

Students have been visiting the seminar room for *tadoku* several times per semester as a class session and using the readers, magazines, and comics for their reading practice. According to Tomoko, the students who used to be hesitant to challenge themselves with intimidating texts are now enthusiastically embracing the chance to try out their developing reading skills, and the upper level students go beyond the basic graded readers to try advanced comics and short stories or novels. Molly and Michael conduct a tour for the fourth-year students every year (all in Japanese) to orient them to the collection with a focus on using Penn Libraries’ materials for language study. The students have even been [writing reviews](#) of the books they’ve enjoyed for the Japanese Language Program website.

Before *tadoku* began, students learning Japanese at Penn didn’t think of Penn Libraries’ Japanese collection as something intended for them, but rather for advanced majors, graduate students, and faculty. With Tomoko’s help, Molly and Michael have created a welcoming and enriching space for language students to enjoy the Japanese materials at their own levels, from beginning to advanced and professional competencies, as well as to challenge themselves to grow further by taking advantage of Penn Libraries’ collection and spaces.