



Disney Opened Up My World

Hi! My name is Mickey. A friend gave me this nickname because I'm a huge Disney fan. I really like the nickname myself ♪

Mickey

17, first-year high school, Kanagawa, Japan

Crazy about Disney

I was first introduced to the world of Disney when I was a baby. My parents took me with them to Tokyo Disneyland.*¹ Of course, I have no memory of the visit myself, but they say that I seemed delighted with it and they took me back many times after that. Apparently, according to a record my mother made, "Mickey" was already among my first words when I started talking after the age of 1. The house was filled with Disney character goods from that time—everything from the curtains, to the dishes, and even the carpet! When I started primary school, everything had Mickey Mouse on it—my pencil case, writing pad (*shitajiki*),*² color pencils, and even my book satchel (*radoseru*).^{*3} Even now, after I have become a high school student, my house is filled with Disney goods. I know I shouldn't add any more to my collection, but when I see something cute, I just can't help myself (^-^)

What Disney Means to Me

Since Disney characters were part of my life from the time I became aware of my surroundings, they are kind of like childhood friends. I would naturally break out in a smile when I met Mickey Mouse at Disneyland, and sometimes I almost got separated from my parents because I wandered off after Mickey instead! Even now, when I go to a shop that sells Disney goods, my friends tell me that I'm grinning ear-to-ear from several meters away from the shop!

Tokyo Disneyland is like a second home, so going there is more like "going home" (*kaeru*) than just going to visit (*iku*).



My desk has completely been taken over by Disney paraphernalia.

These days I go more to just enjoy the atmosphere than to take the rides. Now that I am a high school student and I can use my allowance, I go about once a month. I sometimes go with friends, but usually I go by myself and just watch the shows and parades from morning until night. People say, "Don't you get bored after going so many times?" but I love just being there and since the shows are slightly different every time, I never tire of it.

Disney Opened My Door to the World of English

When we started studying English*⁴ in first year of junior high school, I learned the word "entrance." Up until then, "entrance" meant only one thing to me: the gateway to Disneyland.*⁵ So in school I realized for the first time that "entrance" has a more generally applicable meaning. That year when I went to Disneyland and began to notice all the English words there and what they meant, I was really amazed! The more I studied English, the more I understood of all the English signs, the words written on the paper cups in the restaurants, and so on. I started to really get a kick out of studying English. I could even understand some of the words used and the development of the stories in the shows and musicals that I had not been able to grasp before, including the words spoken by Mickey Mouse himself. I started to enjoy Disneyland even more!

To learn even more English, I started listening to Disney videos with the original sound track. I already knew the Japanese lines practically by heart, so this was a really effective way to study. Maybe because of that, I came in third when I participated in a prefecture-wide English recitation-from-memory



Each year my school invites students from other schools for a "Student Forum" to discuss a certain topic. I'm secretary of the committee for the forum.

contest (*ansho taikai*).^{*6} In high school, I entered the international studies course that has an advanced program in English language, and I hope to continue studying English as well. And, just as Disney is being accepted around the world, regardless of language, I hope I will be able to communicate with people not just of the English-speaking world, but other countries as well.

Toward an Even Wider World

Disney has opened up my world, not just to English, but in many other directions as well. I began studying about the various historical periods represented by Disney attractions; when I learned that some of Disneyland's BGM is jazz, I began listening to jazz; I got hold of the video of *Saturday Night Fever* after finding out that one of the songs in a show I really liked was from that movie. One of the themes at Tokyo DisneySea^{*7} is now Italy, and I've gotten interested in Italy and want to study Italian. I was reading about the business side of Disneyland and that got me interested in economics and stockholding. I found out that because of the avian flu scare, foie gras imports from France have been banned, and I am watching to see what Tokyo Disneyland hotel restaurants will do about the foie gras items on their menus. So my love of Disneyland has actually gotten me interested in various aspects of society and social issues.



Once in the spring of my first year of high school, I participated (far left) in a mock United Nations meeting held in New York involving high school students from various countries.

My Future

It seems to me that Disney characters like Mickey Mouse have the power to make people happy. So I would like to find work

in helping to spread that power in the world. There is the job of Disney Resort Ambassador, for example. One of the members of the Disneyland cast is appointed each year as goodwill ambassador to travel both in Japan and overseas to promote Disneyland and engage in various goodwill activities. They visit children's hospitals and other welfare facilities to encourage and entertain the children there. Maybe through this kind of work, I could share this wonderful world of Disney with people in Japan or other parts of the world who are struggling to get even from one day to the next. Just as Disneyland made me happy, I think it can offer other people a feeling of optimism and something to dream about.

Note

*1 Tokyo Disneyland: See Japanese Culture Now-3.

*2 Writing pad (*shitajiki*): A plastic sheet placed beneath a sheet of paper to make it easier to write neatly is part of standard equipment children take to elementary school.



*3 Book satchel (*randoseru*): *Randoseru* is a loan-word from the Dutch *ransel*, or school satchel. A *randoseru* is a sturdy leather book satchel with straps for carrying backpack-style. There are no explicit rules, but boys tend to have black *randoseru*, and girls to have red ones. Each child has his or her own, and they are expensive—over ¥20,000 each. Most parents buy their children a *randoseru*



when they first enter elementary school, and they use it throughout their six years there. The *randoseru* has thus become a symbol for Japanese elementary school students.

*4 English-language education in Japan: The education ministry's "Guidelines for the Course of Study" make foreign-language study a required subject beginning in junior high school. English is the most common foreign language taught in the schools.

*5 English words used in Disneyland: At the Tokyo Disneyland, words used at Disneyland in the United States, like "entrance" and "cast," are not translated but written in Japanese reading using the katakana syllabary.

*6 *Ansho taikai*: In this event, contestants memorize an English text and are scored on the fluency of their delivery, pronunciation, and quality of expression.

*7 Tokyo DisneySea: See Japanese Culture Now-3.