

**Question 1:** What did you feel before you came to Japan? Were you nervous about anything in particular?

Before coming to Japan I felt the normal fear of moving far away from my family but also relief because I did know some Japanese before moving here. I think the two main things I was worried about was if my coworkers would try to pressure me to drink alcohol and if my coworkers and students would harass me for my afro textured hair/Black hairstyles. However, after coming to Japan I found out that many other Japanese people chose not to drink and that some of my students actually looked forward to seeing what hairstyle I'd come to class with!

**Question 2:** Did you deal with any stereotypes or micro aggressions towards you or your country?

A couple stereotypes I faced were that my coworkers expected me to drink a lot of alcohol because that was their image of Americans. They were also surprised that I could use chopsticks and could eat Japanese food.

I often told people that since I was mixed Black-Japanese American I grew up with the same food & culture as they did, but my coworkers would always make comments like "Oh! You're just like a Japanese person!" I would often reply "Yes, because I am." I found that even after telling them I was Black-Japanese they would forget immediately. I often wonder if I was more Asian-passing or White-Japanese, would they be more accepting of my mixed Japanese-ness. In the media here I only see monoracial Japanese and White-Japanese people, with the exception of tennis star Naomi Osaka, which people called me by her name for about half a year when I first arrived, including people I didn't know on the street.

Another microaggression was with how people handled my hair. Whenever I wore my hair in an Afro my students and even some workers at my BOE, even people that I didn't know, often tried to touch my hair without my permission. And when I wore my hair in locs I got comments about them being like snakes. Although I think Medusa is cool, I'd rather not have my students thinking of them as snakes. My students would also try to touch or pull my hair as I walked around class trying to help them with their work.

Another problem I had recently was to do with my skin color. I'm obviously brown compared to my coworkers and students but one time I had an elementary school girl tell me not to touch her, while we were all playing outside. I asked her "Why? What's wrong?" and she replied "Because you're dark." I was honestly shocked in the moment because she was so young to have already internalized colorism.

**Question 3:** What were some hardships you had that you were able to overcome?

One of my biggest hardships that I'm still overcoming is handling my hair. Back in California the air was dry so I often wore my hair in an Afro, straightened it occasionally, or went and got braids put in. But here in Japan it is very humid so I can never straighten my hair. This has led me to find alternate ways to do my hair. Now I often wear my hair in an Afro or put in faux locs, which is my favorite style now! Another thing is that Black hair products are pretty much non-existent here. Sometimes you can find products being sold by people on Facebook, but I use AliExpress now to get the hair products I need.

**Question 4:** Are there any advantages you have experienced as a POC ALT?

I feel that as a ALT of color, I have always experienced racism and microaggressions throughout my life and because of that I actively try to inform my students about different cultures and experiences. I'm more aware of certain nuances in history and try not to shy away from them because it will only hurt my students' understandings and also help reinforce incorrect views of histories and cultures. I've done presentations on the Martin Luther King Jr. and the Civil Rights movement and have done English Boards on LGBT history as well and plan on doing more culturally informative projects in the future.

Another thing is that when teachers talk with me about America, I am quick to call out their assumptions of America that are usually based on the White experience.

**Question 5:** Any good stories/experiences you've had with your students/coworkers?

My 3rd year classes that just graduated this past spring wrote me all little notes thanking me for helping them in English. And one of the girls had said she really loved my hair and that she was excited to see what hairstyle I came to school with next! Reading that I felt really happy & felt more confident about my hair here in Japan.

**Question 6:** Is there any advice that you would like to give to any ALTs coming into the prefecture?

I think that microaggressions will not disappear anywhere you go, but in Japan I have felt accepted by my coworkers and students for the most part. I think that it is important to make friends with people that you can share your experiences and struggles with who will not downplay or deny your feelings or negative experiences as an ALT of color.

***A 3rd year JET***