

Bibliobattle

I know this is sudden, but when you read the word “bibliobattle,” what do you think? As for me, you can get the gist of it even if seeing it for the first time, and I dig the “b” alliteration, so I would say it’s a charming wasei-eigo word. (Wasei-eigo, or Japanese-made English, is Japanese words made by combining originally English words, often with interesting results. Some gems include “pipe cut” for a vasectomy or “skinsnip” for physical affection.) Just from a glance, we know it’s some sort of battle of books.

And what kind of battle, specifically? To start, each participant brings a book they want everyone to read, introduces that book in five minutes, and does two to three minutes of Q&A. When all the participants have finished, everyone, including both presenters and spectators, votes for the book they became most interested in reading. Whichever book receives the most votes wins. That’s right, the book wins. Rather than calling the winner a “champion,” we call the winning volume the “champ book.”

Bibliobattle was created in 2007 at Kyoto University, but despite being rather new, there are already national middle school, high school, and university tournaments. I’m sure you’ve already guessed, but some students from Yamada High School participated in a bibliobattle tournament.

The national high school tournament has preliminaries in each prefecture. Kochi prefecture’s tournament was on November 23rd and held at Otepia, a beautiful library opened a few years ago in Kochi City. Three members of the literature club participated, with “The Summer of the Ubume,” “The Will to Keep Winning,” and “Eve of Paradise Lost” in hand. (As of writing this, the first two have English translations.) In addition to this, the literature club’s advisor, six other club members, and three teachers including myself went as spectators to cheer them on.

In total, there were sixteen participants. Participants and spectators were divided into A and B sections for a preliminary round. First and second place in both sections would advance to the final round.

Ranging from mystery to self-help, all the way to children’s books, a wide variety of books were on display. And excepting the “I know this is sudden, but…” intro I heard four times, there was also a variety of speaking styles, from a gentle, intellectual style that drew in the audience to a style composed of passionate, actor-like appeals.

At any rate, after hearing eight presentations, it was time to vote. Since “became interested in reading” has barely a shred of objectivity as a standard, it was an unsure vote, but more than just hearing about new books, that completely different reactions can emerge from the same book or presentation is surely one of bibliobattle’s interesting points. In the end, one Yamada student from section A and one from section B advanced on, so Yamada High School alone made up half of the finals.

There being two students from our school, it was not an easy vote, but in the end, “Eve of Paradise Lost” was crowned champ book (1st place), and “Summer of the Ubume” received the Otepia Prize, equivalent to third place. With that win, “Eve of

Paradise Lost” was headed to the national tournament.

Throughout December and January, I went to some practices and gave advice. While “wanting to read the book even more” wasn’t something I could measure, that the speaking style and script became gradually more polished is for sure.

And at last the national tournament was on January 28th. Since it was held in Tokyo, I was not able to see it in person, but there was a live stream of the eight person final round. Unfortunately, “Eve of Paradise Lost” was eliminated in the preliminaries. Despite this, because of skilled speakers drawing laughs out of the audience, a mystery written only in conversations, a book that you have to flip the orientation as you read, and more, it was definitely worth watching as someone who loves books.

Returning to my original question, when you read the word “bibliobattle” now, what do you think? As for me, I think it’s a great way to celebrate a shared love of books, and it would be neat if it became popular outside of just Japan.



The 16 participants of the Kochi tournament and their books.

突然ですが、「ビブリオバトル」といいう言葉を読んでもいいですか？

私も観ました。淡々と訴えるのが口調で、聞き手に刺さるような表現が特徴的でした。...