

## AEON 1% Club Foundation

# Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

## Thank You for Applying to the 2nd Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

Hiroshi Yokoo, Chairman of AEON 1% Club Foundation



In Japan, where we live, we have two wonderful phrases that we use whenever we eat.

Our meals start with the word “Itadakimasu”, (“Let’s eat”) and putting our hands together. And then after the meal, we express our gratitude for being able to eat with the phrase “Gochiso-sama deshita” (“thank you for providing for me”).

These words convey our gratitude to the people who grew the rice and vegetables, the person who cooked the meal, and for the lives of the animals or plants that we consume; our joy at being able to eat every day, and our delight at receiving delicious food.

AEON 1% Club Foundation launched the first “Essay Contest for Junior High School Students” last year with the wish that you will think about these feelings of gratitude in relation to a meal or dish that you have special memories of, or about someone important to you.

This time, we changed the application period from winter vacation to summer vacation, and held the second Essay Contest.

The essays we received from our applicants expressed things like your joy at being able to cook together as a family and gather around the table, your feelings towards your mothers who cook meals and make lunchboxes filled with their love for you, and your connections to your grandparents and great-grandparents through food. There were also essays that wrote about food allergies, and essays that considered food through the experiences of times of illness or hospital meals. We were able to read about a variety of observations about food from the perspective of junior high school students, from your experiences in all kinds of situations within your lives.

The AEON 1% Club Foundation was established in 1989, and received the Prime Minister’s authorization in 2015 to transition into a Public Interest Incorporated Foundation . We carry out social contribution activities with three main themes: Sound Development of the Next Generation, Promotion of Friendship with Foreign Countries, and Sustainable Development of Regional Communities.

One of the various activities implemented by the AEON 1% Club Foundation is the “AEON Cheers Club”, where you can learn about the local environment in the regions where you live. The Club’s members are elementary and junior high school students, and we receive applications to join at any time nationwide. We also carry out the “Food and Agriculture Support Program” with the aim of promoting Japanese agriculture, which is facing a major turning point due to the aging of famers and dwindling numbers of producers.

We will continue to hold the Essay Contest for Junior High School Students in future, as part of our initiatives connecting agriculture to food. We are looking forward to receiving many applications from junior high school students next time, too.

# AEON 1% Club Foundation

## Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

### The People who are Important to Us, and Saying “Thank You”

The Second Essay Contest for Junior High School Students: List of Prizewinners

10 Gold Prizewinners, 10 Silver Prizewinners

\*Both gold and silver prizewinners are listed in North-to-South order of the locations of their schools.

### Gold Prize

#### **Turnip Soup**

Kurumi Sugiura

1st Grade, Sapporo Nihon University Junior High School, Hokkaido

#### **A Half-Bowl of Smiles**

Kou Hatakeyama

2nd Grade, Ofunato Municipal Daiichi Junior High School, Iwate Prefecture

#### **Memories of Rice Balls**

Hikaru Takahashi

3rd Grade, Furukawa Gakuen Junior High School, Miyagi Prefecture

#### **My Grandfather and Sweetcorn**

Daichi Kuriyama

1st Grade, Edogawa Gakuen Toride Junior High School, Ibaraki Prefecture

#### **The Joy of a Family Gathering Around the Table**

Arisa Kunugiyama

3rd Grade, Isumi Municipal Misaki Junior High School, Chiba Prefecture

#### **The Flavors of Wartime, Passed Down the Generations**

Tomoki Yoshikawa

2nd Grade, Hongo Junior High School, Tokyo

#### **Omelet Rice on Saturdays**

Kumiko Kou

2nd Grade, Kyoto Municipal Okazaki Junior High School, Kyoto

#### **Baba’s Café: The Shape of Love**

Chiharu Uesaka

3rd Grade, Sakai Municipal Gokasho Junior High School, Osaka Prefecture

#### **Eating What You Want to Eat**

Tomoka Sakai

2nd Grade, Hiroshima Municipal Gion Junior High School, Hiroshima

#### **The Saturday Promise**

Atsushi Igasaki

2nd Grade, Munakata Municipal Jiyugaoka Junior High School, Fukuoka Prefecture

### Silver Prize

#### **Thank You, Mom**

Shinta Kasai

1st Grade, Sapporo Nihon University Junior High School, Hokkaido

#### **With Feelings of Gratitude**

Sayaka Hayashi

1st Grade, Sapporo Nihon University Junior High School, Hokkaido

#### **My Mom’s Satisfying Flavors**

Mizuki Takino

2nd Grade, Saitama Municipal Oyaba Junior High School, Saitama Prefecture

#### **Grilled Eel with Rice**

Syuri Kubota

3rd Grade, Iida Municipal Junior High School, Nagano Prefecture

#### **The Importance of Food**

Kanon Asai

1st Grade, Kasamatsu Municipal Kasamatsu Junior High School, Gifu Prefecture

#### **A Message from My Mother**

Kokoro Kitamura

1st Grade, Gero Municipal Kanayama Junior High School, Gifu Prefecture

#### **Thank You, My Beloved Ecchan**

Mika Fujimori

1st Grade, Yamatokoriyama Municipal Koriyama Nishi Junior High School, Nara Prefecture

#### **A Meal in Just Three Bites**

Mioko Nakagawa

3rd Grade, Shitennoji Junior High School, Osaka Prefecture

#### **“Delicious” and “Thank You”**

Kouta Matsumoto

1st Grade, Fukuyama Junior High School Attached to Hiroshima University, Hiroshima Prefecture

#### **A Happy Family Gathering**

Arisa Miwa

1st Grade, Saiki Municipal Saiki Jonan Junior High School, Oita Prefecture

## AEON 1% Club Foundation

# Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

Ninety-one essays were received from applicants nationwide for the “Essay Contest for Junior High School Students”, expressing their particularly memorable dishes and their gratitude for meals. The application period for this event, the second Essay Contest, was held from July to September, which includes the summer vacation period. The gold prizewinners attended an award ceremony held in Tokoname City, Aichi Prefecture, and today (November 24th) participated in a dietary education tour of the region where traditional seasoning ingredients such as mirin, sake, and soybean miso were developed.

### Overview of the 2nd Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

**Theme:**

The People who are Important to Us, and Saying “Thank You”:  
Memorable Dishes and Gratitude for Meals

**Application Period:**

July 20, 2018 (Friday) ~ September 12, 2018 (Wednesday)  
\*Postmark deadline

**Qualifications:**

Applicants must be resident in Japan, and be a current junior high school student of 1st to 3rd grade as of July 2018

**Gold Prize:**

Award Certificate, Supplementary Prize (30,000 yen value Book Token) for 10 winners, Invitation to Award Ceremony and Dietary Education Tour (1 night stay)

**Silver Prize:**

Award Certificate, Supplementary Prize (10,000 yen value Book Token) for 10 winners

**Participation Prize:**

Book Token (1,000 yen value) awarded to 100 participants other than the above prizewinners  
\*Selected by lottery if there are more than 100 non-prizewinning participants

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Organizer: AEON 1% Club Foundation

Sponsor: Mainichi Shogakusei Shimbun, News for 15-year-olds (Mainichi Gakusei Shimbun)

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****Turnip Soup**

Kurumi Sugiura

1st Grade, Sapporo Nihon University Junior High School, Hokkaido



Every year, when summer comes, one of the dishes my mother makes is “Turnip Soup”. It is a very simple dish, where turnip is boiled until soft, and seasoned only using salt, pepper and consommé powder.

When I was younger, I caught colds easily, and especially when I caught a summer cold I was left with a persistent cough, which worried my family. At that time, we used to visit a pediatric clinic close to our home, where the doctor was an elderly lady. My cough wouldn’t go away even after we changed my medication several times, so my parents were very worried. That doctor said to my mother, “Children catch colds a lot. Your daughter is tough, so you don’t need to worry so much. Don’t give her any more medicine, but instead, how about changing her food?” She took down an Iwanami Shinsho book from the shelf in her consultation room, and said, “Look, it says here that turnips are good for healing coughs. Try to boil them until they are soft, make a soup or something, and feed it to her.”

My mother bought turnips straight away on the way home from the clinic, made a soup and gave it to me. Apparently, by that evening my cough was significantly better. Since that time, my family has started eating that soup often, when I have had a lingering cough, or when turnips are at their tastiest season in summer. It has a gentle flavor, is truly delicious, and I think it is a soup that revives both your body and mind. I loved that doctor, who considered my health not only from the perspective of medication and injections, but also from various aspects such as food, environment, and lifestyle.

When I was in my final year of kindergarten, my doctor’s health worsened and she often closed her clinic. Although I actually hated hospitals, I was sad, because I wanted to see her. One day, we heard that she had returned to the clinic, so I went there with my mother. The doctor was sitting in her usual chair wearing her white coat, and had lost a great deal of weight.

“Kurumi, I’m glad you’ve come”, she said, gazing at me intently. She looked at me for so long that my mother was worried that I would burst into tears. That was the last day I ever saw that doctor.

Now, I am a junior high school student, and I still think about her sometimes. I wonder if she is looking down on me from heaven. I want to thank her for healing my colds when I was little, and teaching us about the delicious soup.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****A Half-Bowl of Smiles**

Kou Hatakeyama

2nd Grade, Ofunato Municipal Daiichi Junior High School, Iwate Prefecture



One thousand, eight hundred and forty-two grains. The year before last, that was my entire harvest. When I was little, we discovered that I have various food allergies. One of those is rice. To be precise, I am allergic to the pesticides used in rice cultivation. So my mother searched for organically farmed rice that I could eat too, and along the way we became good friends with a rice farmer. That farmer let me experience rice-planting and harvesting, which led me to have a vague idea that I want to have a future career that is related to rice research.

When I was in sixth grade of elementary school, I tried my hand at “bucket rice”. I set up six buckets on the balcony at our house, and filled them with soil and rice plants that the farmer had given to me. My morning chore was to water them and pull out weeds every day. When I say water, it’s completely different to sprinkling water from a watering can on some vegetables. I had to fill a bucket with water six times, taking it back and forth. It was pretty hard work.

As the rice plants grew, my battle with the weeds began. When I examined them, I discovered that more than twenty species of weeds were growing every day. If it was this much work to grow rice in a bucket, how hard must it be for a real rice farmer? As I experienced that hard work, my feelings of gratitude grew afresh towards the farmer who grows organic rice that even I can eat.

The hard work paid off, because my rice plants grew vigorously. There were two rice plants in each bucket, making twelve in total. When grown successfully, one plant can apparently produce one thousand grains. Which means that I should be able to harvest twelve thousand grains. Since a bowl of rice is supposedly around three thousand grains, my buckets should produce four bowls of rice. I found myself breaking into a grin when I imagined the sight of my family smiling and eating those bowls of rice.

However, no matter how much time passed, my plants showed no signs of producing grains, even though the rice fields I passed on my way to school were full of plants sagging with the weight of grains. I wondered if they weren’t getting enough sunlight. Or maybe I didn’t give them enough fertilizer. I was relieved when grains finally started to appear, but there were never enough for my plants to sag downwards. The amount that I eventually harvested was 1,842 grains. It wasn’t nearly enough for my family of four to eat; it wasn’t even enough to fill half a bowl. I was very sad.

But my mother really praised my harvest of 1,842 grains. She said I had worked hard for a whole year. She said that I had physically understood the hard work of farmers. That my failures would lead to something in the future. She said that all of those things would become assets of mine.

Then, one month later, on my father’s birthday, we milled the rice grains that I had harvested and cooked them. We shared the half-bowl of rice between the four of us and ate it. In mere terms of flavor, it was a weak taste that could not compare with the farmer’s rice, and there was a slight addition of a poorly developed bittersweetness. Even so, my father, mother and sister ate the rice with faces full of smiles. It was exactly the happy scene that I had pictured when I was growing the rice.

I strongly felt how wonderful agriculture is: it delivers smiles like these around Japan and around the world. How much hard work and passion do the producers put into their harvests so that we can eat our food with a smile? I want to make sure that I always think about that, and never forget my gratitude to them.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****Memories of Rice Balls**

Hikaru Takahashi

3rd Grade, Furukawa Gakuen Junior High School, Miyagi Prefecture



When I was asked at my birthday party at nursery school, “What’s your favorite food that Mommy makes?”, I answered cheerfully without hesitation: “Rice balls”.

Rice balls were the main dish in my family’s lunchboxes that we ate on special days like field trips or sports day. Both my parents worked full-time and were really busy, so we didn’t often eat meals together as a family of three. So when my parents both came to attend nursery events, the rice balls that we ate outdoors tasted especially delicious. I have a photo in my album of my father and me happily stuffing our mouths with rice balls back in those days.

I have another unforgettable memory linked to rice balls. That took place eight years ago. The time of the Great East Japan Earthquake.

Emergency rations of cooked rice were handed out at my mother’s workplace, and she and all of her coworkers made rice balls together. These were just simple rice balls flavored only with salt, but for me, who had not eaten anything for a whole day, the wonderful taste of just one mouthful was deeply moving. I ate that rice ball slowly and carefully, chewing and tasting each mouthful thoroughly, with gratitude. When I had finished, I was filled with thankful emotions. I think that was the first time I truly meant the words “Gochiso-sama” from the bottom of my heart.

I also think that my experiences of the disaster enabled me to really understand the importance of food. I aim to always say “Gochiso-sama” from the heart from now on, without forgetting how I felt at that time.

Now I am a junior high school student, and I bring a lunchbox to school with me. My mother gets up early every day to cook my lunch herself. There is always a small, triangular rice ball included in my lunchbox. It is for me to have as a snack. I’m not good at getting up early, so I eat that rice ball during morning break time instead of breakfast. I eat together with friends who are the same as me. My friends who have a long commute to school are unable to eat breakfast because of their train or bus times. I really enjoy those morning break times, when we cram rice balls in our mouths and chat with each other.

One day, one of my friends said to me, “Hikaru, your rice balls are always in such a neat triangular shape. They look so yummy.” Actually, the rice balls my mother makes really do have a perfect shape. She makes them with a subtle amount of pressure in her grasp, and I can confidently say that they taste even better than any rice ball on sale in a shop. She also makes a truly diverse range of fillings. My favorite of all her variations is the grilled rice ball. I hope that one day I will be able to make rice balls as beautifully as she does.

I’m in third grade of junior high school now. I’m getting busier every day lately.

At dinnertime, my mother always asks me “Are you enjoying school?”. And I always reply, “Yeah, I am! Of course!”

Mom, thank you for my delicious rice balls and lunchbox today, too. Gochiso-sama.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****My Grandfather and Sweetcorn**

Daichi Kuriyama

1st Grade, Edogawa Gakuen Toride Junior High School, Ibaraki Prefecture



To be honest, I've always been awkward around my grandfather. Everyone asks me why. My grandfather isn't one of those kindly old granddads who give you pocket money at New Year's with a twinkly-eyed smile. He's a bit different. He does things like make fun of me with silly lies, gets drunk and messes around with my hair or something without caring if I'm tired, says unreasonable things, and also, since he's a farmer, he's kind of smelly. So I always felt like I didn't want to talk to him very much.

In the evenings, my grandfather always drinks beer and watches the TV while muttering swear words. A scene unfolds before my eyes which makes me think, was this what Japanese families looked like back in the old days? "Hey!" he said. Uh-oh, he's saying something to me. What a pain, I thought to myself. "You're a lucky boy to be eating my food!", he told me. He's getting all condescending on me again, I thought. Just leave me to eat my dinner in peace. But I didn't know how to reply, and I couldn't be bothered to engage with him, so I ate my food in silence, intending to leave the table as quickly as I could.

That was the day that the sweetcorn grown by my grandfather was served at our lunch at elementary school. I didn't really want to go to school that day. It was the day of "local production for local consumption" in our dietary education program. I was a shy kid, and I was embarrassed when the announcement went out on the school's speaker system that "this is the sweetcorn grown by Daichi Kuriyama's grandfather!". But I watched everyone eating it, saying over and over again how delicious it was, and my grandfather's face flickered into my mind. Somehow, he was smiling. I remembered that as I sat down at our dining table as usual. Was it really that delicious? It just tasted the same as always, I thought, as I ate in silence.

It was when I started going to junior high school, and I often woke up early, that I had a realization. It was something I'd naturally never noticed. While I knew that my grandfather started work early in the morning, I didn't know that buyers from the supermarkets and grocers visited our house. Those buyers were competing to place orders for my grandfather's vegetables. I talked to one of them, and I understood. Namely, the fact that my grandfather grows first-rate crops, and makes his customers happy. Local people and my classmates' mothers used to tell me how lucky I was to eat his food every day. I realized how mistaken I had been to take it for granted.

After entering junior high, my grandfather said the same thing at one dinnertime during the summer vacation. That time, I answered him, just with "yeah". I didn't feel as dismayed that he was engaging me in conversation again. He works so hard on his farm that his clothes change color with his sweat. I still don't much like getting close to him, but now when I eat in silence, I feel grateful deep down for being able to eat his delicious food every day. I don't leave a single grain of rice behind.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****The Joy of a Family Gathering Around the Table**

Arisa Kunugiyama

3rd Grade, Isumi Municipal Misaki Junior High School, Chiba Prefecture



“Granny, what’s wrong?” When I came home from cram school in my mother’s car, my grandmother’s face was bright red, and she looked to be in extreme discomfort. My mother had been at work since morning and came straight to meet me at cram school, so she knew nothing about this sudden change in my grandmother. Although my grandmother herself had noticed that something was wrong, she had refrained from contacting my mother. The reason for her reluctance was her fear of being hospitalized again.

Three years ago, my grandmother had undergone an operation on her hip joint. But after the operation, the joint was dislocated twice while she was in hospital, and she needed further surgery straight away. So my grandmother had been constantly saying, “I’ve had enough of operations”. When I thought about that, I understood why she had let herself get in such a terrible state. My mother, who was worried, held out a thermometer, saying, “Isn’t it your hip? Is it the wound?” When we looked at her surgical wound, the area around the wound was swollen and bright red, and oozing a great deal of pus. “We have to go to hospital immediately” said my mother, half-forcing my grandmother into the car. “Arisa, are you coming too? Or..?”

“I’ll stay at home. I have school tomorrow, after all”, I answered, while thinking to myself, what shall I do? I’m scared to be on my own.

When they arrived at hospital, my grandmother underwent examination after examination. Before long, it was already 2am. Around the time the dawn light started to glimmer, my grandmother was told by the doctor that she would have another operation. “Let me go home. I don’t care if I die. Don’t make me have a third operation. Please”, my grandmother begged, in tears. But of course the doctor’s answer was “no”.

My mother needed to return home temporarily to check on me, so she entrusted everything to the doctor and left the hospital. In the event, I had hardly been able to sleep at all. I was afraid, but there was one reason bigger than anything else. My brother, who had died six years previously, had suddenly become unwell, and my mother had taken him to hospital in the middle of the night. He never came back alive. This situation was just as it had been at that time; I was reliving a nightmare. Just as I felt I would be crushed under my anxiety, my mother returned home. “How’s Granny?”, I asked, with great fear. “She’ll have another operation”, my mother replied in a trembling voice as she started to prepare breakfast. In my shock, I found myself unable to eat any breakfast. While I was worried about my grandmother, I also felt the footsteps of my life as a “latchkey kid” coming back to me.

There are three of us in my family: my grandmother, my mother and me. If my grandmother were hospitalized, there would be no-one to greet me when I come home from school. I would return to that life again. I would eat my evening meals all alone. I would say “Itadakimasu” only to myself. I honestly couldn’t even taste the food. I’d turn on the TV in my loneliness, but I couldn’t even hear the sounds. When I noticed, I’d mutter to myself, “you didn’t say “Gochiso-sama” today, either”. There is nothing that makes you feel loneliness as deeply as eating meals alone. We enjoy food or feel its delicious taste because the people we love, the people who are important to us, are with us.

A few days ago, my grandmother was finally released from hospital. She has more trouble with walking than before, but in any case, she’s doing well. That’s okay. That’s enough. Our family can gather around the table together and say “Itadakimasu” and “Gochiso-sama”. Just that is enough to bring me happiness.



**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****The Flavors of Wartime,  
Passed Down the Generations**

Tomoki Yoshikawa  
2nd Grade, Hongo Junior High School, Tokyo



In my family, every year on August 15, the anniversary of the end of the war, we eat suiton made by my grandmother and grandfather.

Suiton is a kind of soup with dumplings that are made with flour mixed loosely with cold water then boiled and shaped in hot water. It is a dish that was eaten as a staple food instead of rice, when food supplies were scarce during the latter stages of World War Two and for some time after the war's end.

At the time, suiton was eaten plain, with barely any seasoning or toppings, since even kombu kelp and bonito flakes for making soup stock were unavailable. People sometimes used the parts of vegetables they used to throw away, like sweet potato leaves, as toppings, or even used seawater to give a salty taste.

This year, I decided to make the dish together with my grandmother. The ingredients were different to wartime: we used various vegetables and pork, and plenty of soup stock and toppings. It was very easy to make.

When the suiton was ready, the National Memorial Ceremony for the War Dead was broadcast on TV. My grandfather stood formally in silence for the moment of silent remembrance held at noon.

My grandfather experienced the war himself. He spoke about his wartime memories as I ate the suiton together with my grandparents. My grandfather was in third grade of elementary school when the war finished. He said that at that time, food was so scarce in Tokyo that it was impossible to live well. So his family did things like buying food from illegal black markets and stealing vegetables from farms.

Moreover, he had a hard time in the town of Kusatsu, where he was evacuated with a group of other children. He said the suiton they ate there tasted wonderful, but he could barely eat any as it was taken from him by senior students.

Until now, my knowledge of wartime came only from the TV or books, but hearing my grandfather talk about it in detail made me realize that those times were much harsher than I had thought. My grandfather said that he started eating suiton every year on the anniversary of the end of the war from the 1970s onwards so that he would never forget how much he had suffered due to the lack of food in wartime.

I want to express my gratitude to my grandmother, who has made suiton every year for me since I was little, and to my grandfather, who has taught me about the suffering of war and how thankful we must be for peace.

I was born in a time of peace, and I have never suffered from lack of food. I took those things for granted every day, but through suiton, I now feel grateful for food.

Every time I said "Gochiso-sama" until now, it was no more than a phrase, but with this "Gochiso-sama", I truly felt gratitude from my heart.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****Omelet Rice on Saturdays**

Omelet Rice on Saturdays

2nd Grade, Kyoto Municipal Okazaki Junior High School, Kyoto



“Don’t stuff food in your mouth like that”.

That’s what my mother always says when we have omelet rice, called omurice in Japanese. But, I can’t stop cramming it into my mouth. Because when I eat omurice, I get carried away by my sheer delight and joy.

My mother is the breadwinner in my family. Even though she’s physically frail and even just doing the housework would be exhausting for her, she works hard at her job to provide for me without complaining. I have always loved the way my mother works hard and constantly thinks about me. At the same time, I always hated the way she goes beyond that to take on everything by herself. I didn’t want her to push herself too hard; I wanted her to talk to me freely about things. That was the one thing that troubled me when I was in elementary school, although I never told anyone.

“I’ll help out, so please count on me”.

No matter how often I said it, she never turned to me for help. However, an opportunity for her to start confiding in me appeared all of a sudden. It was around the time when I had entered junior high school, and she had started to get Saturdays off work, so we were able to have lunch together and talk about all sorts of things. One of those Saturdays, she started to tell me about her work, little by little. I couldn’t find the words to express how delighted I was. The dish we were eating that day was omurice. I was already happy to be eating one of my favorite foods, endlessly delicious with its sweet onions and juicy chicken rice enveloped softly in fluffy omelet. Every time we eat omurice, I remember how pleased I felt that day, and I can’t help but stuff it all into my mouth. Starting from then, we have developed the habit of my mother telling me about the troubles she has had at work that week when we eat together every Saturday. During those times, I tell her a little about my own problems, too, and I am glad that we understand each other’s feelings more than before. My mother even started to ask me to help out with the housework, and stopped pushing herself too hard.

I admire my mother for slaving away at her job for my benefit. But, I prefer her when she shows me her true self, including her weaknesses. My mother, who usually doesn’t tell me her real feelings, now talks about them only during mealtimes. I now suspect that she didn’t only start making omurice because it’s one of my favorites. Maybe omurice, which has a lot of different ingredients in it, also gets made with a lot of her thoughts put into it too. I think that the amount of fillings in the omurice is as plentiful as my mother’s feelings. I’m looking forward to next Saturday’s omurice too.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****Baba's Café: The Shape of Love**

Chiharu Uesaka

3rd Grade, Sakai Municipal Gokasho Junior High School, Osaka Prefecture



We eat meals every day. Meals do not only give us vitality, help us to build our bodies and create energy. Meals create memories. Everyone has flavors that are unforgettable to them. For me, the first thing that comes into my mind as a memorable meal is “Baba’s Café”.

“Baba’s Café” isn’t the name of a real restaurant. My sister and I call our grandparents “Jiji” (grandpa) and “Baba” (grandma). When our mother was too busy to cook for us, we went to our grandparents’ house and ate with them. My sister and I gave it the name “Baba’s Café”.

The dining menu was extremely ordinary. While it wasn’t luxurious cuisine, Baba often made my sister and my favorite dishes. She made rice balls with freshly-cooked rice. I guess she wanted her granddaughters to have rice balls that are still warm. I remember clearly how bright red her hands were after making the rice ball. She also had a special way of making German potato fries, one of our favorites. She used freshly-harvested potatoes that my grandfather grew in his field. I remember my grandfather smiling at the sight of his granddaughters joyfully stuffing their faces with this much-loved dish. Also, the amount served on our plates was pretty big. “Go on, have some more”, the two of them would say, with their affection for us beaming out of their faces. Even foods I disliked, I could eat up when I tried them at Baba’s Café. Peas and dried tofu were transformed into two of my favorites at Baba’s Café. Perhaps my grandparents’ love for us cast a spell on the food. I felt like I could see the shape of love in a physical form.

There were special Baba’s Café-style phrases at mealtimes, too. When we said “Gochiso-sama”, my grandparents would always say in unison “Yoroshuu o-agari”, a local dialect reply thanking us for eating their food. They would smile to see our sparkling empty plates, without even a single grain of rice left behind. We had satisfied smiles too, with our bellies full of delicious food. Baba’s Café was not only a place to eat. It was a place for smiles to grow and flourish.

But now I am at junior high school, I’ve become busy, and I don’t go to Baba’s Café anymore. There are fewer opportunities now for me to even talk to my grandparents. However, my taste buds vividly recall the flavors of Baba’s Café even now. When my studies are difficult or I’m tired from my sports club, I often feel that I want to eat Baba’s rice balls or stir-fries, and see the smiling faces of my grandparents. At times like that, just remembering the shape of love at Baba’s Café makes me smile automatically. My heart is warmed by the realization of how much love my grandparents poured into us.

Meals have a lot of power. I think the greatest of those is the power to make people happy. Not only for one moment; as a memory, the joy lasts forever.

## AEON 1% Club Foundation

# Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

### Gold Prize

## Eating What You Want to Eat

Tomoka Sakai

2nd Grade, Hiroshima Municipal Gion Junior High School, Hiroshima



I was shocked when I saw a particular commercial one day. The girl in the commercial had a wheat allergy, and couldn't eat bread. The story in the commercial showed her gazing at the food her friends were eating, and her concerned mother cooking using recipes without wheat. I felt so sorry for the girl. Being unable to eat everything that contains a specific ingredient means you need to have so much more self-control than those around you. I think that for small children, it must be impossible to understand why they aren't allowed to eat something. I can't imagine having to endure that for my whole life.

In fact, I myself had an egg allergy when I was little. I never ate eggs at all, and my mother had a hard time cooking without using them. Fortunately, by the time I was old enough to be aware of it, the allergy completely disappeared, and I became able to eat eggs. But since I saw that commercial, I sometimes wonder what it would be like if I was still allergic. I love sweet foods. I eat cakes and omelet rice often. But if I was still allergic to eggs, I would not be able to eat all those foods I love. I would probably have to have had a different school lunch menu to everybody else, and have mine brought to me separately on a different tray. I wouldn't have been able to eat pancakes when I went out with my friends. When I think like this, I keenly feel how blessed with fortune I am to be able to eat what I want to eat, when I want to, and as much as I like. It's something that I surely wouldn't normally consider, but I gained a fresh realization that being able to eat delicious food, the same food as our family and classmates, is a truly priceless joy.

Recently at supermarkets and other places, I often notice curry roux or other dishes on sale that are free from particular allergenic ingredients. If we cook using these, people with allergies can eat the same meals as the rest of their family. Allergies are nobody's fault. So I really feel that it is a great thing that people with allergies are becoming less restricted. I hope that companies will bring out more and more products that will enable people with allergies to feel as little difference as possible between themselves and others.

From now on, we need to be more grateful for our food and the current environment than we do now. I hope to never forget how fortunate I am to be able to eat what I want, when I want to, and as much as I like.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Gold Prize****The Saturday Promise**

Atsushi Igasaki

2nd Grade, Munakata Municipal Jiyugaoka Junior High School,  
Fukuoka Prefecture

We have a little bit of a rule in my family, which is that “we all eat dinner together on Saturdays”. So each of us try as much as possible not to make our own plans for Saturdays. On weekdays, my mother decides the menu and makes it herself, but on Saturdays, before we know it, one of us starts putting forward options for what we want to have for dinner. Eventually, we hold a major discussion between all members of the family on what we want to eat.

Usually, we have hotpots, barbecued meat, fried dishes, and around once a month we go out for dinner. My parents don’t drink alcohol on weekdays, but they do on Saturdays. While we gather round the hotpot or barbecue the meat, we talk about school or about interesting things that happened during the week. On weekdays we have a kind of “set meal” dinner served individually on one plate per person, but on Saturdays we gather around the hotpot or hot plate, and all eat together. That has been our custom since I was small, and I saw it as completely natural.

I started to have doubts about our custom when I was in fourth grade of elementary school. I was in a higher grade of school now, and invitations from friends started to increase. In particular, invitations for the perfect time slot of Saturday afternoons. I objected to being unable to play with my friends as I wanted, and once whined petulantly, “But why can’t I go out on Saturdays?”

My father answered me with one sentence. “While you’re a kid, do you really have something more important to do than eat with your family?”

At the time, I felt only dissatisfaction and doubt about his answer, but as I grew older, I started to understand my father’s words.

Nowadays, each member of my family’s lifestyle is changing. I have become a junior high school student, and I increasingly arrive home late because of club activities or extracurricular studies. My siblings, too, each come home at different times due to their own extracurricular activities. My father works in shifts, and during weeks when he is on night shift we don’t even see his face until the weekend. It has become rarer and rarer for us all to eat together on a weekday.

It is our Saturday promise that brings our family together. We decide together what we want to eat, and in the evening we do the dinner preparation all together. When we have barbecued meat, we cook it together, maybe burn a piece, then bicker about who has to eat that one. This constant scene is the only thing that remains unchanged since my childhood.

Right now, I am nearing the latter half of second grade of junior high. My lifestyle is sure to change again in major ways a year and a half from now. Not only me; I can’t even imagine how my brother, my sister and even my parents will have changed. Will our Saturday promise still survive by then?

The other day, I remembered something my father had suddenly said. “I wonder how much longer we’ll be eating together as a family”.

At the time I laughed, thinking we’ve still got a long way to go. But how many chances do I have left to say “Itadakimasu” with this family all assembled? How many times will we laugh together and say Gochiso-sama”?

I wonder what we’ll have for dinner this Saturday. No doubt we’ll launch into a huge debate about it again. I hope we’ll have chicken hotpot.

**AEON 1% Club Foundation****Essay Contest for Junior High School Students****Judge's Message**

After the judging was complete, we received feedback and comments from the judges after reading the essays.

**Adults Shouldn't Selfishly Rob Children of their Own Experiences!**

Mr. Takashi Komatsu

Director of Chiba Nature School, Specified Nonprofit Corporation



In my job at nature school, I plan and manage camping trips for children. In summer vacation, we hold a week-long camp in Otari Village, Nagano Prefecture. In recent years, a considerable number of children among our camp participants have food allergies. At the camp, most of the meals are cooked outdoors by the camp leaders and children themselves cooperating in groups.

Food allergies include a wide range of items: wheat, eggs, fruit, buckwheat, seafood, and more. Just one misstep can even lead to death.

The children light the bonfire, chop the vegetables with knives, and cook the meal. Children with allergies get involved in the outdoor cooking too, together with everyone. The finished dish is seasoned with the invisible spice of hard work: the roles of each person, cooperation, and experience.

Children with allergies cannot eat foods that contain specific allergens. They need to eat dishes with the item removed or substituted. Although the end result differs from our original purpose of enjoying and eating up a delicious dish that was prepared through group cooperation, if we refuse to let a child participate in the camp trip because of their food allergy, we would rob that child of all the other experiences they would gain through attending the camp.

I intend to make use of adult understanding and creative solutions so that we can continue to provide nature school experience activities to children with food allergies from now on.

## AEON 1% Club Foundation

# Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

## Vivid Depictions of Food Left a Deep Impression

Professor Yukari Takemi,  
Nutrition Ecology Research Laboratory, Kagawa Nutrition University



Eating meals is a process that we generally repeat three times a day, every day, for the whole of our lives. Since a year is 365 days, we have 1,095 meals a year. Because this is such a high-frequency lifestyle behavior, we are inclined to conduct it without much conscious consideration.

I thought that the vast majority of the submitted essays clearly expressed that the students have grasped the aspects of dietary education that we hope they will feel and learn, from this everyday process of eating.

In other words, the essays expressed things like the delicious taste and enjoyment of meals, the connections formed between people through food, and gratitude towards people and the natural environment. In particular, the prize-winning essays were bursting with feelings of kindness, warmth, and joy, and the vivid depictions of food left a deep impression on me.

I hope that even when you become adults, you will not treat food as a daily habit that requires only loose attention, but continue to hold onto the abundantly sensitive emotions and attitudes you have right now.

## Let's Consider the Everyday Reality Around Us

Mr. Takashi Nishimura  
Mainichi Shimbun Senior Staff Writer  
(Former Editor of Mainichi Shogaku Shimbun)



These were all high-level compositions. By that, I don't mean high-level in the sense of using difficult vocabulary or difficult kanji characters to express difficult concepts. I felt that the way you thought carefully about your own experiences and expanded your imagination from yourselves to your family, from your family to Japanese culture or food-related issues, and then to the world, was of a high level.

Many of you wrote about episodes that had occurred with your grandparents. In the future, when you reread your essay as adults, I believe you will grasp a deep message from your own compositions.

I want to touch on the subject of the knack of essay-writing. There may be some of you who read the prize-winning essays and think, "I haven't had that kind of special experience. So I wouldn't have a topic to write about". You're all around the age of fifteen, so it's natural that you're unlikely to have had exceptional experiences that would draw the attention of others. You don't have to force yourself. Starting from the everyday reality around yourselves, the process of truly feeling things and thinking about them is, in itself, a special experience for each one of you. The order of writing can be visualized like this: start with yourself, then expand the target area of your consideration to a radius of five meters around you, then to ten meters.... and later to your prefecture, your country, and the world.

For those of you who want to brush up your composition skills further, I would like to tell you about an advanced practice technique. The rule is: you are not allowed to use the words of the topic you have been given! For example, in the case of this Essay Contest, you would write your composition without using the words "Gochiso-sama" or "grateful". This technique makes you engage your brain fully to search for different words. The words that you find become an expression that only you could write.

# AEON 1% Club Foundation Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

## Experience Aichi Prefecture's Food Culture in this Dietary Education Tour

### Stay overnight in Himakajima Island, and Try Making Dried Octopus!

In the Chita Peninsula and surrounding area in the western part of Aichi Prefecture, essential Japanese seasonings such as soybean miso (Hatcho miso), tamari soy sauce, mirin, and vinegar have been developed over many years. Visit the birthplace of these traditional seasonings that are indispensable for Japanese cuisine, which has been designated as a World Cultural Heritage Asset, and meet people who persevere in keeping local cuisine alive.

### Taste Nature's Bounty on the Island

Himakajima, an outlying island in Mikawa Bay, is known as "Octopus Island". On this island, the birthplace of "octopus rice", you will experience making dried octopus and learn about the history of octopus fishing and octopus food culture.



### Vinegar

In Handa City, you will visit a museum where you can enjoy and learn about the history of vinegar-making and the particular rules involved in its manufacture. After the visit, you will experience the taste of sushi made with vinegar manufactured by the traditional method.



### Mikawa Mirin

In Hekinan City, you will visit a brewer that continues to manufacture authentic mirin, and learn about how mirin is made. You can also sample kinako mochi (rice cakes coated with soybean flour) and sweets made with mirin.



### Soybean Miso & Tamari

Taketoyo Town, in the center of the Chita Peninsula, is a place where brewers of tamari soy sauce have congregated. You will learn about various types of miso and soy sauce, and hear explanations about the differences in the methods of making miso and soy sauce.



### Cooking

During the final part of the tour, you will cook dishes such as octopus rice or misotama (instant miso soup), using the ingredients and seasonings you have seen in the tour.

Experience the fun of cooking and the joy of eating together.





# AEON 1% Club Foundation Essay Contest for Junior High School Students

## Now Recruiting Elementary and Junior High School Students! Try Out AEON Cheers Club Activities!

### Observing living creatures, experiencing agriculture, green activities: What will you try!?

The AEON Cheers Club carries out activities in accordance with a different theme every year, and fosters children's ability to think, as they learn about social rules and manners. Based at AEON stores nationwide, there are approximately 460 clubs, with more than 7,600 elementary and junior high school student members. (Accurate as of March 2018)

### AEON Cheers Club

#### What kind of activities?

The activity theme, such as "plants", "animals", "water", "sun", or "energy", differs every year.

Club members decide collectively what activities they want to do.

#### When and where do activities happen?

On non-school days, in local areas. (Activity locations, such as rice fields, beaches, or rivers, differ from club to club.)

#### Who is it aimed at?

Club members are aged from elementary school to junior high school age. Even after graduation, you can support our activities as "Cheers Elders".

#### Does it cost money?

There are no annual fees or enrolment fees.

During all-day activities, lunchboxes or tea may be required.



## Every year in winter, we present our year's activities in the "Wall Newspaper Session".

Members representing clubs that win higher prizes at each region's Wall Newspaper Session are invited to the National Meeting, which is held in the summer vacation.

Members receive **hats, T-shirts and special-purpose files at enrolment, free of charge.**



Inquiries: **AEON 1% Club Foundation Secretariat**

Tel.: **043-212-6023** (Weekdays 10:00-18:00)

\*Applications are received at respective AEON stores. \*In some cases, it may not be currently possible to apply due to lack of club provision or high numbers of existing members at the relevant store.

View scenes from current Cheers Club activities online.

<https://www.aeon.info/sustainability/social/cheers/>