

Comments on the 2024 Composition Contest

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Tokushima Prefecture held the 2024 annual composition contest for high school students on October 13th. Unlike the speech contests, where students recite a pre-written speech, competitors in the composition contest create original compositions on the spot. The topic is top secret until the contest commences, and the only resource that students can bring is a paper dictionary. I was delighted that many competitors took up this challenge again this year. The competition was as stiff as ever, and it was very difficult to select the winners. I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to all those who participated.

This year, the question was: “Does money really make us happier?”. Students were instructed to choose one side and make an argument to support their answer, including specific examples to support their ideas. The topic was probably a bit lighter than in previous years, and hopefully the participants enjoyed writing about this common topic of debate. The compositions were evaluated based on length and appearance, organization, content and English.

There is truly no correct answer to the question of whether money can buy happiness, and students had great points regardless of the direction of their arguments. Those who argued that money *can* buy happiness often focused on the opportunities that are afforded to people with money. We can enrich our lives personally, through travel and experience, and it allows us to realize our full potential by providing educational opportunities. This, in turn, can lead to the overall betterment of society. Others pointed to the stresses that result when we are struggling to get by. It might be challenging to convince readers that luxuries can buy happiness, but clearly having a basic level of comfort makes life easier.

Around half of the participants argued that money is irrelevant to happiness. True happiness, it was suggested, can only be found in our relationships with friends and family. Some contestants went further to argue that money is detrimental to happiness. Meaning comes from our pursuits like hard work and contributing to society. Financial reward is not the end goal, but if it is achieved through hard work, only then will we truly appreciate the things that money can buy. Suddenly gaining wealth, for example by winning the lottery, strips our life of meaning.

As always, I really enjoyed reading the entries for the 2024 composition contest. It is a delight to see what high school students are thinking on topical matters, and I enjoyed reading opinions on a somewhat lighter topic this year. Finally, I would like to stress that all participants contributed to a larger discussion and that everyone’s opinion is valuable. I sincerely hope that all of you will continue to exercise your voice in the future. Congratulations again to all participants.