

By Krystal Sato

国際交流員コーナー

CIR's Corner

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Hello everyone! "CIR's Corner" is my monthly article about international exchange and cultures around the world. I will introduce a variety of interesting international topics.

This Month's Topic: Prom

In Japan, May is a time when students are finally getting used to the new school year. In America, however, high school halls are filled with anticipation and excitement for prom. Prom is an end-of-the-year party held for students before their graduation in June. You have probably seen it in American movies and TV shows. For Americans, attending prom is a rite of passage on the same level as graduating or getting married. This month, I will explain prom, introduce some of my favorite prom movies, and tell you about my own experience at prom.

What's "Prom"?

Prom is short for "promenade," which is originally what formal university dances were called in the late 19th century. These "proms" gradually made their way down from university to high school in the 20th century, and they grew bigger and more extravagant.

American high schools are generally on a four-year system. First year students are called freshmen, second years are sophomores, third years are juniors, and fourth years are seniors. The senior prom is the biggest event before graduation, and only seniors and their dates can attend. Some schools also hold a junior prom, but in this article, I will explain the senior prom.

First, you have to decide who you're going to prom with. If you already have a boyfriend or girlfriend, then naturally you go to prom with them. However, if you are single, and you like someone, then prom is an excellent chance to confess your true feelings. Typically boys invite girls to prom, but recently it's not uncommon for girls to

invite boys. Same-sex couples are also not uncommon anymore. You can invite a date from another school, but many schools have rules that you can't invite anyone over the age of 21.

You've probably heard of a proposal, but have you ever heard of a *promposal*? For high school students, asking someone to prom is quite heavy, so in recent years, students ask in elaborate and carefully planned ways. These promposals are often posted on social media.

Even if you don't have a date, you can still go to prom. If you are going alone, we say you are *going stag*. A stag is a male deer, and the word used to be used for only boys, but now it can be used for girls, too. If you don't have a date, but you don't want to go alone, you can go with a group of friends. Or, you can skip prom entirely.

Once you have a date, you have to decide what you're going to wear. Boys rent suits or tuxedos, while girls buy dresses. Prom dresses can be expensive, and sales start around January or February. Normally couples coordinate their attire for a cohesive prom look.



Girls in prom dresses

In addition to buying a prom dress, many girls spend money to get their hair and makeup done at a salon. Manicures, pedicures, eyelash extensions, facials, and other beauty treatments are also popular. Girls with skills, or girls with limited funds, can follow tutorials on YouTube to achieve their perfect prom look.

It's usually the boy who provides the ride. Since Americans can get their driver's license at 16, many high school students have their own cars. If a boy drives his own car to prom, then it's a must to have it washed beforehand. If he doesn't have a car, he can borrow his parents' car or rent one. It's important to reserve a car early, because the coolest ones are booked fast. Boys generally pick up their date at their house. When going to prom in a group, it's common to rent a limousine or a party bus.

At the girl's house or at the arranged meeting place, promgoers exchange corsages and boutonnieres. It's like a ritual. Bouquets are traditional gifts for a date, but since they get in the way when dancing, boys generally give girls a corsage when going to prom. It's made from fresh flowers and is worn on the wrist like a bracelet. Girls then give their date a boutonniere, which is a flower that is pinned to the lapel of the boy's jacket. The color and type of flower used for the corsage and boutonniere are coordinated between the couple ahead of time. And of course parents ask the happy prom couples to pose for tons of pictures!



Girls showing off their corsages

Students usually go out to eat before prom. Each couple and group makes their own arrangements. Since everyone is all dressed up, most promgoers choose a fancy restaurant, and they borrow money from their parents or work hard at their part-time jobs to afford it.

After dinner, it's finally time to go to prom. At smaller schools prom is held in the school gym, but I think many schools hold prom in hotel banquet rooms or wedding reception halls. DJs play the latest hits, and students hit the dance floor. There is no formal ballroom dancing; students dance however they like. Many students worry about not being a good dancer, but nowadays with YouTube, they can practice some moves at home beforehand. Teachers monitor the dance floor to make sure there is no inappropriate behavior.



The dance floor

At prom, the "Prom King" and "Prom Queen" are crowned. They are decided by votes leading up to prom, and usually the most popular students win.

Prom lasts for around three hours. After prom, many students hold after parties at their homes or in a hotel room. In order to prevent underage drinking and other kinds of trouble, some schools host official after parties at arcades or amusement parks.

For Americans, prom is an unforgettable event. It is similar in significance to the Japanese Coming-of-Age Day. It is a time to celebrate the end of high school and becoming an adult. America doesn't have as many school events as Japan does, but prom is definitely the biggest and most important one.

My Favorite Prom Movies

There are so many movies about prom! They're popular with teens, but adults who want to relive their youth can enjoy them too. I'll introduce you to three of my favorites.

① ***Grease* (1978)**

This musical came out before I was born, but my mom and I often watched it together. It's set in California in 1958. Sandy, a girl from Australia, and Danny, the leader of a local greaser gang, meet at the beach and fall



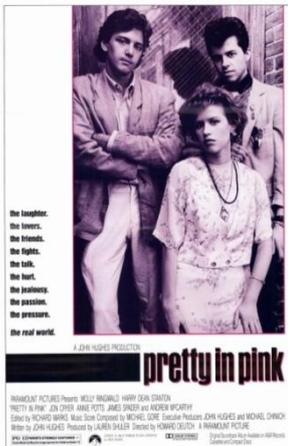
in love. Sandy is returning to Australia at the end of summer. When Sandy asks if it's the end of their relationship, Danny answers, "Of course not! It's only the beginning."

However, due to Sandy's father's sudden job transfer, she moves to California and

enrolls at Rydell High School. This is the same high school that Danny attends. When they are reunited at school, the couple initially rejoices. However, Danny cares too much about his image, and rejects Sandy to look cool in front of his friends. Sandy is heartbroken. She is encouraged by her new friends to forget about Danny, so she starts to date a popular football player.

Danny regrets treating Sandy so coldly, and wants to get back together with her. Will the couple make up? Will they go to the prom together? Watch and find out!

② *Pretty in Pink* (1986)



This is another movie that came out before I was born (just barely), but it was often shown on TV when I was a kid. It was written by John Hughes, who was famous throughout the '80s and '90s for writing, producing, and directing comedies and teen dramas. He also wrote and produced the

Christmas movie, *Home Alone*.

The main character is Andie, an idiosyncratic redhead with a peculiar fashion sense. She lives with her single father in the slums, but goes to school in an affluent area. Being bullied by rich kids is a daily occurrence for her.

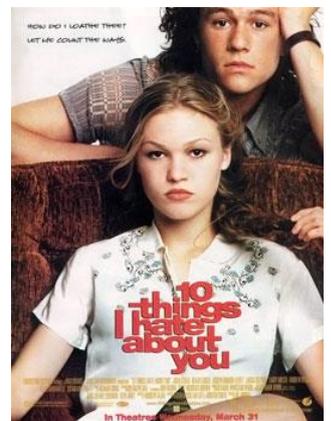
Prom is fast approaching, but no one has asked Andie yet. Her childhood friend, Duckie, has a major crush on her, but she has also attracted the attention of a handsome wealthy student, Blane. Andie likes Blane as well, so the two start to date. Everyone they know discourages them from dating outside their social classes.

Will the couple be able to overcome their differences and go to prom together? Watch and find out!

I really like '80s music and nostalgia, but what I also really like about this movie is how much I can relate to Andie. I was raised by a single mother and my family struggled financially. During one scene in the movie, Blane offers to drive Andie home. Andie insists that he should drop her off near the train tracks, but he can't understand why. She finally shouts at him, "Because I don't want you to see where I live, OK!?" I didn't invite friends to my house for the same reason, so when I first saw this scene, I couldn't help but cry along with Andie.

③ *10 Things I Hate About You* (1999)

I saw this movie at the movie theater with friends on my 13th birthday, and it's a fond memory for me. In addition, this movie was filmed in the Seattle area, my hometown, so it feels very familiar. I like to watch it when I feel homesick.



This movie is a modern adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew*. New student Cameron falls in love at first sight with beautiful and popular Bianca. However, Bianca is interested in Joey, a rich model. Kat is Bianca's rough and tough older sister. Kat and Bianca's father is very strict, and does not allow his daughters to date. Bianca begs her father to let her date Joey, so he comes up with a new rule: Bianca can date only if Kat does first.

Both Cameron and Joey want to date Bianca. While Cameron is tutoring Bianca, she tells him, "I can date if my sister dates." So, Cameron and his friend Michael devise a plan to use Joey to pay someone to date Kat. They recruit Australian bad boy, Patrick, for the job.

It's almost prom. Will Cameron's plan work? Will Bianca go to the prom with Joey or Cameron? What will happen between Kat and Patrick? I won't spoil it for you, so watch this one too!

This film stars Heath Ledger, who tragically died of a drug overdose in 2008 at the age of 28. He was famous for his roles in *Brokeback Mountain* and *The Dark Knight*.

My Prom

When my prom came, I liked someone, but he wasn't a student at my school. He was a 21-year-old bassist of an indie pop-punk band. I invited him to prom, but he had a show that night, so unfortunately he couldn't attend. Therefore, I decided to invite my best girlfriend, a junior who went to a different high school. Neither of us had a car, so I made a deal with a male classmate: my friend and I would accompany him and his friend to prom, as long as they agreed to drive us there.

So with my date and ride set, I headed to the mall with my mother to buy a prom dress. I chose a dress in my favorite color: black. I told my classmate that I wanted a red rose corsage, and I got him a white rose boutonniere. I had my hair curled at the salon on the day of the prom, and I did my own makeup. It was the first time I ever put on false eyelashes. My best friend came over in the evening, and together we waited for the boys to arrive. They picked us up in a huge SUV.



My best friend and me

The four of us met up with other classmates at a restaurant, and we had a wonderful dinner. Once we arrived at the prom, we took photos and hit the dance floor. The room was dark and the DJ booth was lit up with neon lights. I danced a lot. There were many tables and chairs near the dance floor, and there were plenty of soft drinks available. My friends and I socialized there while taking breaks between dances.



My prom group photo. I don't know why all the girls wore black.

When prom was over, my best friend's boyfriend came to pick her up. I decided to go to an after party. Some of my classmates had reserved a hotel room, so around 15 of us squeezed in there. There wasn't much room to sit, and we were making a lot of noise, so I'm sure we were bothering the other guests. Anyway, I had promised my mother that I'd be home by midnight, so I wanted to get out of there before there was any trouble. I asked a classmate with a car to drive me home.

Around that time, my crush finished his show. He called me on the phone, and we talked until 6:00 in the morning. I enjoyed the prom and had fun at the after party, but I was glad that I had gone home early. (By the way, this guy asked me out over summer vacation, and we were together until I came to Japan.)

When I was in high school, I was always against popular and traditional things. I thought that school events were childish and uncool, so I actually wasn't planning to go to prom at first. However, I thought that prom is a once-in-a-lifetime thing, so I didn't want to regret not going in the future. It's been 21 years since my prom, and I am glad that I went. ★



Contact Information

Ebetsu City Board of Education, Takasago 24-6,
Ebetsu, Hokkaido
Tel:011-381-1049 Fax:011-382-3434