

Building knowledge block by block: Building Histories 3.0

By TOMO HIRAI
Nichi Bei Weekly

Recognizing that learning about the World War II concentration camp experience solely through books and lectures may be difficult for children, a Los Angeles-based filmmaker gathered a team of educators to develop an innovative way to teach the Japanese American wartime experience through a multi-media curriculum centered around a video game.

The Building History 3.0 Project tasks participants with learning about the experience of some 120,000 Japanese Americans who were imprisoned in concentration camps by the U.S. government during the war. Students in elementary through high school watch short films and other resources as they build their own version of the Manzanar, Calif. camp inside Minecraft, a computer game. The lesson, which project managers said has been used by thousands of students and their families, is available for free online and has recently been refitted to be done as shorter exercises at home with family in light of the pandemic.

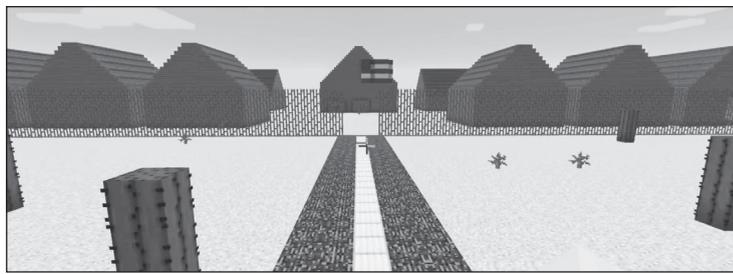
These exercises may take an hour to 90 minutes, whereas the elementary school curriculum takes approximately seven hours and the high school curriculum takes three to four weeks.

"One of the biggest benefits of using games like Minecraft in an educational program, is the active learning that goes on in gaming," Randall Fujimoto, the project's curriculum designer, said. "In a game like Minecraft, you have to be active 100 percent of the time or you're not playing. So that makes it an ideal learning medium, because there's no real learning without being active."

Fujimoto created the curriculum with filmmaker Renee Tajima-Peña in 2011 after they met during a gaming development conference held at the University of California, Los Angeles. Tajima-Peña, a professor of Asian American studies and director of the university's Center for Ethno-Communications, introduced the concept to Fujimoto by showing him her son's recreation of the Heart Mountain concentration camp in Minecraft. Her son, Gabriel, started the project while on a family pilgrimage to Heart Mountain, Wyo. Tajima-Peña said her son is a kinetic learner and was not drawn to the traditional exhibitions and programs they viewed during the pilgrimage, but he expressed interest in trying to recreate the camp in Minecraft.

"So for fun, he started to build a Minecraft Heart Mountain on the laptop I had brought along on the trip," Tajima-Peña said in an e-mail to the *Nichi Bei Weekly*.

The side project convinced her son to explore the camp and speak with family members about their experiences during the war to inform his recreation of the camp in the game. And



Virtual Manzanar in Minecraft courtesy of Building History 3.0 Project

while Tajima-Peña said she was wary of letting her son play video games, she saw that Minecraft more closely resembled the experience of playing with Legos, and recognized the game's educational aspect.

"It was pretty much a fun activity until we eventually met Randall Fujimoto," Tajima-Peña wrote. Fujimoto had worked for the Go For Broke National Education Center, and studied game-based learning in graduate school. The two teamed up to present a pilot summer program at the Gardena Valley Japanese Cultural Institute.

"At the time, Minecraft was, and it still is, a force in education," Fujimoto said. The game-based educator said his research focused on having schools adopt Minecraft as an educational tool. "So, when Renee mentioned that Gabe, her son, built a replica of Heart Mountain inside Minecraft, I thought this would be something good to bring to local community centers."

Following the pilot's success, Tajima-Peña said she and Fujimoto raised funds to do additional programs and developed the initial curriculum further with funds from the National Park Service's Japanese American Confinement Sites Program and the California Civil Liberties Public Education Program. From there, Janet Chen, assistant director of the Center for EthnoCommunications, joined the project as its project producer and manager.

"The project has been going on for a few years now and we really do hope that it can reach as many families as possible," Chen said. "We now are done with our grants, so we're really just kind of pushing it forward as much as we can. I think the biggest appeal to me is that ... this is so personal to Renee and her family. And that personal story I think also is ... relatable to people. So I hope that that's what pulls people in."

Chen invited Kim Bathker, the project's educational technology specialist, to examine accessibility issues with the curriculum. Bathker said students begin with a blank slate of Manzanar, featuring the entry gate, the guard towers and rows of barracks. They then learn more about the camp to reconstruct objects and scenes they learned about through class. Bathker said it is especially poignant for students to hear first-hand accounts from survivors.

"(The survivor) told them too, that, you're doing what we had to do. When we arrived at camp, it was empty. There were no gar-

dens. There were no basketball, baseball fields, there was nothing. And so, you are sort of doing what we needed to do," Bathker said.

Getting the curriculum into schools, however, has been its own challenge, according to Chen. Various schools and homes possess different levels of technology, and Chen said the project has to consider how accessible their curriculum is for teachers and students alike. She noted, for example, how the Los Angeles Unified School District mostly used Chromebooks in class, but Minecraft's education edition is not currently available on Chromebooks. To help with accessibility, Chen said Building History developed other resources, such as a timeline and a series of activities to supplement the curriculum.

Tajima-Peña said the project incorporated short documentary videos to present additional context for students, including her family's fateful pilgrimage to Heart Mountain and a segment on her mother reuniting with her Japanese doll collection.

"(The teachers) were all very drawn to the films, so that's how we recognize that the films really are the gateway into the project, even though, the cherry on top is the Minecraft component," Chen said.

In light of the pandemic, with students staying home, Chen said based on some of the feedback they received from teachers, they retooled Building History 3.0 to add an @Home component. While Minecraft remains the main draw for students due to its popularity, Bathker said the retooled project for use in the home also encourages families to participate with the students.

"I think that the intergenerational component of the project has really been key from the very beginning," Bathker said. "They encourage families to sit down and look at stuff together to discuss, because so many families with children who are interested in this will have a personal history with it."

Tajima-Peña said her son has since moved on from the game and is now a college student following his own passions, but she remains invested in the project. Up until recently, she was busy producing a new documentary for PBS, but Tajima-Peña said she is anticipating getting back to Building History to promote its use in more schools and programs. She said she had hoped to share the

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Adapting to pandemic, pilgrimages find a virtual home

By RYAN NAKANO
Nichi Bei Weekly
Contributor

To say "*tadaima*" is to say "I'm home." In Japanese, it is an acknowledgement that one has arrived here and now.

In March, all annual pilgrimages to wartime sites of Japanese American incarceration were suddenly cancelled. For up to more than 50 years, members of the Japanese American community have returned again and again to these historic and sacred sites to learn, heal and honor those in their family who were survivors of the camps.

Minidoka. Tule Lake. Jerome. Rohwer. Manzanar. Heart Mountain. Poston. Granada (Amache). Topaz (Central Utah). Gila River.

All pilgrimages to these sites were postponed due to the health risks and concerns associated with the global COVID-19 pandemic. People were being told to stay home, to acknowledge the current conditions of the here and now.

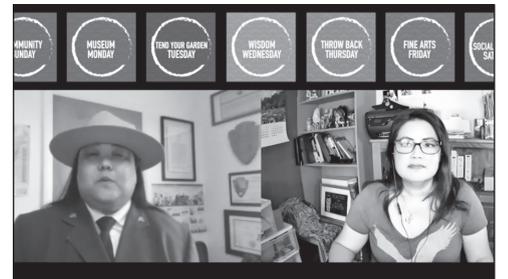
To say "*shikataganai*," is to say "It cannot be helped." To say "*gaman*," is to say "persevere in spite of everything."

On March 25, Hanako Wakatsuki, the chief of education and interpretation for the Minidoka National Historic Site, and Kimiko Marr, the co-founder of Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages (JAMP), began to dream up their own version of the ideal "JA pilgrimage," one which would cover not only the history of Japanese American incarceration and immigration but also the narrative of Japanese civilians from outside of the U.S. who were incarcerated.

"The pilgrimages are important for Kimiko and I because we grew up outside of the JA community, so they were a way for us to feel connected. When all the pilgrimages were cancelling we personally needed them to fill our bucket," Wakatsuki said. "After Tule Lake (Pilgrimage) decided to cancel, Kimiko was like 'I have a crazy idea, we should do a virtual pilgrimage.'"

This started to get the ball rolling.

"I'm excited for the conversations around worldwide incarceration of Japanese civilians because I think we're going to get a lot of different perspectives that people have never heard from," Wakatsuki said. "We have Maurice Yamasaki who was kidnapped from Peru and taken to Panama and eventually the United States in Crystal City. Yuriko Nagata who is from the University of Queensland talking about Japanese Australian incarceration and Mario Jun Okuhara from Brazil who will talk to us about the Japanese Brazilian incarcera-



GOING VIRTUAL — Coordinators Hanako Wakatsuki (L), the Minidoka National Historic Site's chief of education and interpretation, and Kimiko Marr, the co-founder of Japanese American Memorial Pilgrimages, speak at the June 13 opening ceremony of "Tadaima! A Community Virtual Pilgrimage."

tion and how they were seeking redress as well."

The nine-week program, aptly named "Tadaima! A Community Virtual Pilgrimage," launched on June 13 with an opening ceremony hosted by ABC News anchor David Ono and actors Tamlyn Tomita and George Takei, welcoming viewers into the digital community and contextualizing the program within the United States' current socio-political environment.

For two months leading up to the opening ceremony, Wakatsuki and Marr were busy seeing their vision of a virtual pilgrimage through, by organizing a core steering committee with the help of two other executive committee members, Erin Aoyama and Nicole Tanner. Together, the team conducted outreach to representatives of the 10 main War Relocation Authority sites before expanding to Department of Justice sites and other sites associated with the history of Japanese American incarceration during World War II.

With the core steering committee in place, the planning and organizing of "Tadaima!" started to take on a life of its own, with more than 55 other partnering organizations generating content and contributing resources to the program's development.

In the intimate space of peoples' homes, a community virtual pilgrimage had arrived with each week, curated and designed under a particular theme, from "Immigration & Settlement," to "Sites of Incarceration" to "Reconciliation & Identity." Each day also following a theme from Museum Monday to Community Sunday, virtual pilgrims have watched documentaries about Hawaii's first Japanese immigrants, learned to prepare *okonomiyaki*, engaged in live-stream discussions with elders and witnessed live performances from artists during the weekly virtual Nikkei Block Party.

"Because a lot of our programming is pre-recorded we tried to think of ways to keep the community aspect of pilgrimage," executive committee member Erin Aoyama explained.

In keeping with this "commu-

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In Remembrance

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OBITUARIES

Rose Hanako Fujikawa Uyematsu

March 2, 1935 – June 3, 2020

UYEMATSU, ROSE HANAKO FUJIKAWA passed away on June 3rd, 2020 at her home in Anaheim Hills, California.

Rose was born on March 2nd, 1935 in Madera, California to parents, father Kiyozuchi and mother Yaye Kamimura Fujikawa. In the early 1900s, her parents immigrated to the United States from Yamaguchi Iwakuni, Japan and settled in Madera where they worked as farm laborers. Rose was the youngest of 11 children. The family moved from Madera to Wilmington, California when Rose was one year old. The family operated a farm and sold their produce from their vegetable stand on San Pedro Street.

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941 by the Empire of Japan, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066. With the signing of Executive Order 9066 on February 19, 1942 forced 120,000 Japanese Ancestry, 2/3 American born citizens out of the west coasts of Washington, Oregon, California, and parts of Arizona and first placed into one of the 15 assembly

centers until the 10 concentration camps. The 10 concentration camps were all located inland in desolate parts of the United States. Rose's family were incarcerated at Jerome Concentration Camp, and eventually moved to the Tule Lake Concentration Camp. The assembly center and concentration camps had guard towers manned by army soldier with machine gun and rifle. When war with Japan was coming to an end, Rose's family relocated to Brigham City, Utah where Rose attended Central Grammar School and graduated from Box Elder High School. She then enrolled at Henager Secretarial College in Salt Lake City and graduated in 1954. She was hired as a secretary by the State of California Employment/Disability Department. Rose met and married Norio Uyematsu on April 13, 1957 who was also from Brigham City, Utah. With the birth of 3 boys, she retired from the State of California to raise the family. Once the boys were older, she went back to work as a secretary for Autonetics of North America Aviation where she retired after 20 years of service and then worked for the Professional

Golfers Association of Southern California where she retired in 1995. Rose was actively involved with the Kazuo Masuda Memorial Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 3670, South-East Youth Organization, Yamaguchi Kenjinkai, and many other civic organizations.

Rose is survived by her husband, Norio and her three boys, Michael, Ronald, and Thomas, along with eleven grandchildren, two great grandchildren, and many nieces and nephews.

She is preceded in death by her mother, Yaye, father, Kiyozuchi, sisters, Helen Haruko Masaki, Doris Hisako Okamura, June Miyako Wada, Edith Yaeko Yamasaki, Martha Masako Hirai, Jeanne Toyoko Nagao, and brothers, Sam Susumu Fujikawa, George Jojo Fujikawa, Frank Yoshio Fujikawa, and Harry Kiyoto Fujikawa.

Celebration of Life for Rose will be conducted at a later date.



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FROM PAGE FOUR: Building knowledge block by block: Building Histories 3.0

project in Ashland, Ore. last April, but the pandemic canceled that engagement, along with a second film festival that was originally slated for the summer.

Chen said in lieu of the canceled presentations, however, the project will present Building History to the Japanese American

can Memorial Pilgrimages' online July 24 and July 30.

Aside from the summer presentation, Chen said the project intends to remain in conversation with schools to see how they plan to reopen in the fall and how best to adapt the Building History materials for the students,

come the new school year.

"Because our projects can be done virtually, ... hopefully it made school districts broaden their thinking about what they can bring into their schools," Chen said.

For more information, visit www.buildinghistoryproject.com.

FROM PAGE TWO: During COVID-19, showing solidarity is even more important

so-called "loyalty questionnaire" forced Japanese American families into frantic discussions about which responses could keep them together and which might lead to them being split up, with some family members deported to Japan and others left behind in America.

Even with public health restrictions on mass gatherings, we can stand in solidarity with those trapped in such terrifying circumstances. In April, Tsuru for Solidarity and others used car caravans instead of marches to demand that ICE detainees be freed from the Yuba County Jail in California. And even without leaving our homes, we can press our elected officials to free people from prisons, jails, and detention centers where they face imminent risks of COVID-19 infection. The Tsuru Rising virtual gathering on June 6-7 was an opportunity to hear from national partners in the immigrant rights movement and to build new regional strategies in the face of the pandemic.

These acts of solidarity make a tangible difference. As one

Latinx activist told me last year at Fort Sill in Oklahoma, witnessing our Japanese American movement for immigrant rights provided her with a unique source of hope. When she saw multiple generations of Japanese Americans — with our history of racist mass incarceration and government suppression of dissent — coming out to draw connections between our past and the present-day mistreatment of immigrants, she saw what her family's future, and the future of millions of Dreamers, could look like in a future America. Having this vision in mind, she told me, would help her maintain hope amidst the darkness and fear of the present.

Such hope was badly needed last year, but it's needed even more today. The COVID-19 pandemic has left immigrants even more vulnerable than before. In both New York and California, ICE continued carrying out raids even after stay-at-home orders went into effect. Many feared the Supreme Court will terminate DACA status for Dreamers during the pandemic. And ICE detention

centers are especially dangerous places to be right now, given the combination of crowding, denial of access to basic hygiene products like soap and hand sanitizer and lethally substandard medical care.

This is not the time to retreat into our own fears. It is the time for us all to stand up, offer a beacon of hope, and be the allies that we never had during World War II. Together, we can envision and build a world without cages or concentration camps.

Carl Takei, a Yonsei, is a senior staff attorney at the ACLU, co-chair of Tsuru for Solidarity, and a board member for the New York Day of Remembrance Committee. He now coordinates the ACLU's national strategy on police practices, and previously conducted ACLU litigation and advocacy on prison privatization and immigration detention. You can follow him on Twitter at @carltakei, or reach him at nichibe@carltakei.com. The views expressed in the preceding column are not necessarily those of the Nichi Bei Weekly nor the ACLU.