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I. The historical context and place-based history education:

In 1942, 22,000 Japanese Canadians were uprooted from their homes, stripped of their human rights and interned in camps throughout the interior of BC. The third largest camp and the only one remaining at the end of WWII was in New Denver, BC.

Telling the Stories of the Nikkei documents in a series of films how understanding this history deepens our present-day understanding of human rights and our appreciation of diversity in Canadian society. **The project incorporates nine student-created films, a documentary of the making of the student films, and six interviews with Japanese Canadian elders interned during WWII.**

In 1994 the **Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre** was created in the Village of New Denver as a national memorial to the internment of Japanese Canadians. This museum, now recognized as a **National Historic Site**, hosts educators and school groups each year. Visitors tour the intact internment shacks, view the historic photos, and learn firsthand about this tragic chapter of Canadian history from one of the elders who was interned. The Nikkei Centre and **New Denver Kyowakai Society** members who maintain it are a significant piece of this living history and key partners in the project.

Telling the Stories of the Nikkei adds to the exploration of historical thinking with a view of Canadian history seen through the eyes of young people, while it also records the voices of six Japanese Canadian elders who experienced the internment and endured its consequences.

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II. An overview of the project: capturing the voices of youth and elders as they each “tell the stories of the Nikkei”

Grade 11 and 12 students at Lucerne Elementary Secondary School, a K-12 school in New Denver, BC, created nine short films after studying the internment. **Telling the Stories of the Nikkei** began in the spring of 2010 when a Social Studies and English teacher along with their UBC-WKTEP student teacher decided to work together. In this rural school in the West Kootenay region of BC, the team of three teachers collaboratively planned and team-taught a cross-curricular unit about the Japanese internment. The student films created are a summative project of this cross-curricular study and express the students' personalized synthesis of the internment of Japanese Canadian citizens.

Two professional filmmakers, Moira Simpson and Catrina Longmuir, were integral partners in the project. Mo and Catrina taught the students skills in creating digital stories and assisted them in producing their short films. In addition, Moira Simpson shot a documentary film of the students as they worked on their projects, capturing the story behind the students' historical understanding and their artistic visions. Finally, Catrina and Mo interviewed and filmed six elders as they each told their story of the internment.

All of these films are available for use by educators, students and the public.

Telling the Stories of the Nikkei: a partnership between schools, educators, universities, museums, filmmakers, arts organizations, Canada-wide websites, and the Nikkei of New Denver, BC

III. Building a structure for historical understanding in the classroom – the story behind the student films

In the project, thirty-five Grade 11 and 12 students from **Lucerne School in New Denver** studied the Japanese internment under the tutelage of their Social Studies and English classroom teachers, Gary Parkstrom and Terry Taylor, and their **UBC – West Kootenay Teacher Education Program** student teacher, Laura Stanek. With the guidance of this team of teachers, Lucerne School students visited the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre, heard personal narratives from an elder who was interned at the New Denver camp at the age of 14, researched archival images from the Japanese Canadian National Museum in Burnaby, BC, and conducted online research in the school library.

The students reflected on their learning about the history of their own community, and created their own short documentary films and thoughtful artist statements. They distilled their learning about history into art. With **award-winning documentary filmmaker Moira Simpson**, and **talented producer and digital media artist Catrina Longmuir**, the students created nine 60-90 second student film shorts. A public screening of the student work took place in June 2010 to an enthusiastic crowd of community members, elders, and students and their families.

IV. Exploring the history of the internment of Japanese Canadians in a cross-curricular unit in the classroom

The classroom practices that scaffolded student understanding and learning about the internment:

1. A simulation of discrimination

The team of teachers strategically designed learning activities meant to educate and engage students' interest in this disturbing period of Canadian history. The unit began with a simulation game where students were unknowingly selected (or not selected) on the basis of factors they had no control over: the colour of their eyes. Students debriefed this experiential activity and made connections as they explored the issue of racism and discrimination. They made connections to current events and their knowledge of history.

2. Gallery Walk of artifacts

To build understanding of the internment and expose students to a range of primary historical sources, the teachers set up a Gallery Walk of eleven key artifacts: original black and white photographs from interned families, CBC archive video from WWII, an interactive "Jeopardy" quiz game based on facts about the internment, a video of Brian Mulroney's 1988 redress apology to Japanese Canadians, letters from Japanese internees to the Canadian government, and graphic tables and text showing facts about the dispersion of Japanese Canadians during the WWII internment period. Students reflected on the Gallery Walk artifacts in dual entry journals as they processed these diverse sources of information.

3. Viewing and discussion of films and videos

In subsequent lessons, students viewed NFB films such as *Enemy Alien*, *Sleeping Tigers: the Asahi baseball team*, and *Minoru: Place of Exile*. As students viewed the films, they processed both the historical content and the range of views and perspective in telling stories. They explored bias and discussed the contrasts and ironies between our current view of the internment of Japanese Canadians during WWII, the government of Canada's 1988 apology to Japanese Canadians, and, by contrast, the racism and fears that fuelled Canada's policies to intern its own citizens of Japanese heritage during the war years and for years afterward.

Students watched the feature film *The War Between Us* which was filmed in New Denver, and compared their growing understanding of history to the portrayal of events in this drama, based so closely on real events. Students wrote in their journals from the point of view of one of the characters in the film, trying to gain a deeper understanding of human responses to the historical context. They reflected in their learning journals, and discussed their understanding and wonderings in class. They began the process of posing questions through framing their learning and research, and initiated the creation of their documentary filmmaking.

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4. Field trip to the Nikkei Internment Memorial Centre – Guide and guest speaker Nobby Hayashi

The field trip to the Nikkei Centre was a highlight of learning, as 85-year-old elder Nobby Hayashi, who had been interned in the New Denver camp at age 14, was the museum guide. Nobby's engaging stories and firsthand experience captivated the students and they spent hours asking him further questions, interviewing him, and recording his stories on video.

Nobby had been a bat boy for the Asahi Tigers and proudly wore his ball cap throughout the filmmaking week. His tender, warm recollections without blame or judgment about the events which had uprooted his family and robbed them of all they had worked for provided an interesting perspective for the students to weigh.

They noticed evidence throughout our community of this legacy left by the Japanese Canadian families who were interned against their will in the tiny mountain village of New Denver yet generously contributed to society. Indeed, students were struck by the irony that the beautiful lakefront park and the Kohan Gardens were gifts of land granted to the village by former residents of the internment camp in New Denver who gave up their tiny houses and lots for the public good. The class grappled with how this history and the contribution of Japanese Canadian citizens who formed the Kyowakai Society during the internment may have helped frame the current ideology of the village as a place of tolerance and deep respect for all, despite differences in ethnicity, gender or class. Kyowakai means "peacefully working together" – and it was abundantly clear that this ethos for harmony had framed the way Japanese Canadians interned in New Denver had lived their lives. Not only had the internees used this collaborative practice of peacefully working together to help themselves survive injustice, poverty, and hardship, but the same values underlie their presence and contribution to the community in all the years since.

V. The student filmmaking process – personalized inquiries towards deeper historical understanding

In April 2010, the team of filmmakers joined the students. Regular classes were suspended for a week as the filmmaking process was the prime learning activity. After viewing demonstrations and exemplars of short documentary films, and learning key elements for shooting quality video and recording audio, the students formed groups of three or four.

Each group framed the core message they wanted to communicate in their film project and wrote scripts and storyboards. The groups then "pitched" their story to the team of filmmakers, teachers, and the student teacher. Feedback on their story ideas from the teachers and filmmakers refined each group's thinking and then the fun part began. The entire town bubbled with excitement as thirty-five student filmmakers hit the streets with video cameras, microphones and still cameras, beginning to capture content for their films. The elders opened their hearts to the young people, and the Kyowakai Society that manages the Nikkei Centre opened its doors wide to allow filming of the exhibits and the use of the centre for interviews.

Some students read haiku poems that had been written years earlier by Mrs. Kamegaya, a well-loved Samurai elder who died a decade ago, but left behind her beautiful poems, translated by local poet, Diana Hartog. Some students studied the traditional Japanese plants in the Kohan Garden on the lakeshore, begun by the Kyowakai Society in our village. And each day, the class met to talk about the learning that was taking place for them, and reflected on how their thinking about the internment of Japanese Canadians was changing or growing. As the projects came together, each group wrote an artist statement about their project, identifying the core message that they wanted to communicate, and the key ideas about the internment that stood out for them. It was a deep experiential process of transformation for all.

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The **Telling the Stories of the Nikkei** project captures and shares the unique perspectives of local youth from Lucerne School and of the few remaining Japanese Canadian elders in New Denver. In all sixteen films were created by the students and the professional filmmakers – nine short student films, one documentary about the students’ process of inquiry into place-based learning about the internment, and six interviews of Japanese Canadian elders. As a result, Telling the Stories of the Nikkei captures the essence of place-based education and seizes the opportunity to create rich learning in the community in which students and teachers live, making sense of history for a new generation.

Telling the Stories of the Nikkei is a partnership between a small school in a rural community immersed in the history of the Japanese internment; two talented filmmakers committed to social change and experienced in using film to bring history and culture alive; an innovative UBC rural teacher education initiative; a university professor committed to place-based education; two arts organizations; two national museums; a national website dedicated to youth, digital storytelling and social change; and a cadre of 21st century learning approaches.

A summary of our project partners and the learning products we created to share across Canada.



BC Social Studies 11 PLOs. *Telling the Stories of the Nikkei* will address:

- Assess Canada’s role in WWII and the impact the war had on Canada – “enemy aliens”
- Assess the development and impact of Canada’s social programs related to immigration and minority rights (the internment of Japanese Canadians)
- Apply critical thinking including questioning, comparing, summarizing, drawing conclusions and defending a position – to make reasoned judgements about a range of issues
- Demonstrate effective written, oral and graphic communication skills

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Quotations from student documentary artist statements:

“Our short film uses small snippets of interviews that tie together to create our core message (“let this never happen again”) for our audience.”
Dahv, Yuki and Michael

“We decided to do a black and white film. ... sad violins, show how horrible the living situations were for Japanese Canadians. Black and white felt like a powerful way to show our feelings about the darkness of this time in Canadian history, but also the light and strength of the Japanese Canadian people.” Chelsey, Jessica, and Chris

“Our group wanted to make the audience recognize the freedom that numerous Japanese Canadians lost during the internment. We portrayed this through claymation, making a cherry blossom fall from the tree to symbolize how alienated they were in their own country.”
Sadye, Ashely and Michelle

Website at <http://tellingthestoriesofthenikkei.wordpress.com/telling-the-stories-of-the-nikkei-10-student-films/>.

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