

### **How did you choose your topic and how does it relate to the annual theme?**

When we first started exploring frontiers in history, we realized we could share a story close to home. 80 years ago, Japanese Americans living on Bainbridge Island were part of an entire population that was suddenly uprooted, exiled in their own country, and forced into relocation centers – really prisons. Labeled as “enemy aliens” in their own country and alienated from their Japanese heritage, they fought to reclaim their identity, a struggle that sowed division even from within. The internment camps thrust Japanese Americans into a frontier which forced them to reconstruct their lives and redefine their identity in the face of hysteria, injustice, and discrimination; a tale of tragedy luminous with hope and resilience, and a lingering memory to *Nidoto Nai Yoni*, “let it not happen again.”

### **How did you conduct your research?**

Early on, this project begged for us to embrace a personal lens and explore the story of those impacted on an intimate level. Alongside our pursuit of facts and context behind the internment camps, we wanted to devote our focus to the fateful changes that transpired within the community and lives of Japanese Americans as a people. Personal narratives were momentous to us. The Bainbridge Island Japanese American Exclusion Memorial provided us with valuable interviews, vignettes, and images, which we combined with online archives, books, and historical research in hopes of re-creating the narrative to commemorate and honor those affected.

### **How did you create your project?**

We produced a website this year, formatting in Microsoft OneNote, a collaborative online notebook that enabled us to share ideas and edit in live time. We created a project outline with multiple sections which allowed us to take individual initiative. Once we moved the process onto NHDWebCentral, we tinkered with visual formatting to create a graphically appealing, informative project that encompassed the interactive advantages of a website, including an amalgamation of text, images, and media.

### **What is your historical argument?**

In the face of brutal discrimination and alienation, Japanese Americans were forced into a frontier where they forged a new identity and redefined what it meant to be both Japanese and American. When their own country unjustly treated them as hostiles and vilified their heritage, Japanese Americans grappled between themselves to discover their ethnic identity; an idea that is everchanging and prevalent today.

### **In what ways is your topic significant in history?**

Identity can be a force to unite as easily as it divides. Yet it is not stagnant, rather, it’s an idea that perpetually changes and evolves. In the wake of COVID-19, Asian hate has become more prevalent, not unlike the violence and blatant racism Asian Americans have historically faced in America. While Japanese internment camps captured one moment of adaptation when faced with oppression and injustice, we see a similar tale of resilience and reshaping of identity today, exploring the question of whom one is – both as Americans and honoring a unique ethnic heritage.