

Pokémon 101  
Summer 2011 B-Term

The success of the Pokémon franchise is a testament to the culture industry of Japan and the far reaching effects of globalization. Although Pokémon are most commonly associated with youth, Pokémon are both serious business and, as this focus group will show, a serious topic of academic inquiry. This focus group therefore seeks to problematize Pokémon in a variety of ways. While seemingly innocuous, a deeper examination of Pokémon beyond their cute façades reveals a series of important issues that range from animal rights to Japanese identity. Throughout this course, readings and discussions will unpack some these issues. In addition, focus group participants will also explore how Pokémon is situated within specific cultural contexts—in this case the United States and Japan. The goal is to get students to think more critically about videogames in general and to examine the relations of power and representation inherent within Pokémon. The intention is that in studying Pokémon in a serious way, participants can identify “real world” issues that are manifested in seemingly inconspicuous ways. This focus group isn’t just for players of Pokémon; it is for anyone interested in learning more about game-studies, animal-studies, or Japanese popular culture.

July 21-Aug.19

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:50 A.M.-1:00 P.M

Structure of Class:

This focus group will be based heavily on discussions between students. The facilitator will begin each class by drawing examples from the Pokémon videogames and the readings. For each session, one student or a pair of students will be asked to review that weeks readings and share their thoughts. Each student is also asked to bring in questions that they would like to discuss based on the readings to help foster discussion.

Syllabus:

Week 1

*21<sup>st</sup> century Bakémono*

The first session entails getting to know the other focus group participants and their relationships to Pokémon if any. Participants are encouraged to bring any Pokémon paraphernalia and to share their experiences with this products. The focus group will discuss two short readings and see how they relate to their own experiences, and comment on the history of Pokémon from its creative inception to part of the current consumption of Japan cool.

July 21<sup>st</sup>

Anne Allison, “The Japan Fad in Global Youth Culture and Millennial Capitalism” in *Mechademia* vol. 1

Douglas McGray, *Japan’s Gross National Cool*

## Week 2

### *Pika Pika Suru to Getto Suru: Pokémon, Culture, and Youth*

The topic of this week is to look at how Pokémon are socially meaningful to those that play the game, and to understand the more complex social and cultural forces operating behind this game. Questions to consider are how the American experience with Pokémon is similar and different from Japan, and how is culture transmitted through and critiqued by such products.

July 26<sup>th</sup>

Stephanie Strom “Japanese Family Values: I Choose You, Pikachu!”

Anne Allison, Chptr. 8 “Gotta Catch’ Em All The Pokémonization of American (and the World)” in *Millennial Monsters*

July 28th

Kiochi Iwabuchi, “How Japanese is Pokémon?” in *Pikachu's Global Adventure : The Rise and Fall of Pokémon*

Anne Allison, “New-Age Fetishes, Monsters, and Friends: Pokémon Capitalism at the Millennium” in *Japan After Japan*

## Week 3

### *Videogames and Values: Pokémon as Pedagogy*

The readings for week three are designed to introduce participants on how to think critically about videogames. Using Pokémon as a guide, we will consider how videogames espouse certain values through their narratives and gameplay and consider the impact of Pokémon as a pedagogical tool. We will also be watching episodes of the Pokémon T.V series and engage in critical analysis of these cartoons.

Aug 2nd

Ian Bogost, “Procedural Rhetoric” in *Persuasive Games: The expressive Power of videogames*

Screen Shots from Pokémon Black

Watch Pokemon Episodes

Aug 4th

Anne Allison, Chptr 7 “Pokémon: Getting Monsters and Communicating Capitalism” in *Millennial Monsters*

Vivian Vasquez, “What Pokémon Can Teach Us about Learning and Literacy”

J.P Porcaro “The Pokémon Generation”

| Week 4

*The Virtual Animal*

The goal of this week is to complicate notions of what constitutes an animal and to think of how virtual relationships with animals reflect real world relationships with animals and how Pokémon serves as such an example. We will also contemplate the question of cloning as a form of virtualization.

Aug. 9<sup>th</sup>

Gail, Davies, “Virtual Animals in Electronic Zoos : The Changing Geographies of Animal Capture and Display” in *Animal Spaces, Beastly Places*

| Steve Baker, Chptr. 5 “Is it Real or is it Disney?: Unraveling the Animal System” in *Picturing the Beast*

Aug. 11<sup>th</sup>

Gary Walsh, “Taming the Monster: Violence, Spectacle, and the Virtual Animal”

Susan McHugh, “Bitches from Brazil: Cloning and Owning Dogs through the Missyplicity Project” in *Representing Animals*

| Grant Morrison “We3” and Matthew Chrlew “THE BEAST-MACHINE FABLEAUX” in *Antennae*, Issue 9

Week 5

*Representation and Power: Who Speaks for the Pokémon?*

This week is designed as a culmination of the preceding weeks. We will continue drawing parallels between the Pokémon games and “real world” interactions with a focus on power relationships. We will also consider animal advocacy and how Pokémon complicates notions of animal welfare. Our final session will review what we have examined over the course and we will consider whether our perceptions of Pokémon have changed or not, asking if Pokémon is useful in considering the issues we have discussed throughout the course.

Aug. 15<sup>th</sup>

| Optional: Visit [www.JapaneseBugFights.com](http://www.JapaneseBugFights.com)

“Mushi” by Erik L. Laurent

Anthony Bannon “Why look at animals?”

Nathanael Johnson. 2006. “Swine of the Times: The Making of the Modern Pig.”  
*Harper’s Magazine*. May.

| Aug. 18<sup>th</sup>

Andrew Balmford, Lizzie Clegg, Tim Coulson and Jennie Taylor “Why Conservationists Should Heed Pokémon”

Gary Steiner, “Postmodern conceptions of the human-animal boundary -- Rethinking the moral status of animals” in *Anthropocentrism and its Discontents*

Visit: <http://www.dragonflycave.com/animalcruelty.aspx>