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# REPRESENTATION & PARTICIPATION IN ANIME

by

D.R. Lasseter

Under the Direction of Dr. Melanie Davenport, PhD

## ABSTRACT

*Anime, also known as animation, is a style of Japanese film and television animation, typically aimed at adults, as well as children. One of the popular uses for anime—aside from entertainment—is its potential to create powerful messages and address social issues. Despite its huge popularity among diverse audiences, anime is almost entirely devoid of Black and Hispanic characters, as well as social justice themes.*

*After examining the literature, I attempt to provide a model for how a person of one ethnicity can create an authentic character of a different ethnicity, by presenting my character, Ninurai. As a Black artist, I show the stages of character development and share reflections as I work toward accurate representation of an Asian phenotype. This work serves as a model for art educators interested in character development and racial representation.*

INDEX WORDS: Animation, Equity, Representation

REPRESENTATION & PARTICIPATION IN ANIME

by

D.R. Lasseter

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Art Education

in the College of the Arts

Georgia State University

2021

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2021

PARTICIPATION & REPRESENTATION IN ANIME

by

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August 2021

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to future animators and art educators.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to thank my committee members and instructors, Melanie Davenport, Susan-  
Sojourna Collier, and Kevin Hsieh.



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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“If comics and anime are modern mythology, then Black participation and representation are crucial.” – Reginald Hudlin (2012)

At my core, I am an artist. My voice as an artist is informed by my lived experiences as a Black man in America. I have immense respect for teachers and while I am not one I am aware that the images we see in visual culture are educative, and this is the perspective I take in this project. I am a storyteller, a creative, a maker and it is my passion to create stories and make worlds. Through this passion of creating stories and making worlds, I have fallen in love with anime. I believe anime is the perfect format to tell stories and build worlds. Anime, which is a shortening of the English word animation, is used in Japan as a blanket term for all animated works, regardless of where it's from. The rest of the world defines anime as Japanese animation, however in Japan, anime is the Japanese word for animation. Combining my development in Art Education and professional passion leads me to present this thesis proposal, which will explore the challenges of representation in anime and provide an example of how to represent and celebrate cultures in animation because of the influence of this medium on people of all ages. Finally, I will note that while my topic is representation in animation, I am focusing exclusively on race. This is an intentional and deliberate decision. Discussions of gender, sexuality, ability, and other marginalized groups should be areas for further study. However, as my work demonstrates, the lack of or problematic representation of race in anime is both of critical importance to our society today and to me as a black man in America.

### 1.1 History of Anime

Representation of people in animated poses has been found in cave drawings but what is thought of as *anime* today originated likely in 1916 or early 1917 in (insert title of piece?) by

Shimokawa Oten. Made with chalk and no more than 5 minutes long, his short films introduced the new artform of animated moving pictures to Japan. Time and television brought anime to a larger audience with *Astro Boy* in 1963, *Mobile Suit Gundam* in 1979, *Dragon Ball Z* in 1989 and other shows (Cooper, 2020). The progression of anime has provided a growth of content, variety, and styles. Anime is not without its challenges and flaws, which this research seeks to address, suggesting ways to fill that void. My research is a tool for art educators and creators alike to understand the need for critical examination of how race, identity, and experience are presented.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

I am a passionate fan of anime because through anime I'm immersed in vivid colors as I learn new things about a different culture, and exercise my imagination engaging with meaningful concepts. Though I am a fan of anime, I am disheartened by the ways that the accurate representation of race and cultures is not a standard. As a Black man in America I am familiar with racism and like others turn to the arts as an escape. But when I see it within my form of escape it truly is a terrifying thing. Which leads me to explore why it's so powerful to see yourself represented in pop culture.

There are not many images of positive Black characters on TV, let alone in the world of anime. Anime has a huge Black following and yet there are hardly any characters speaking to this audience. Why is that? In my thesis, I explore racism and racial identity issues in anime using literature, media, and critical race theory to inform my critical review. Media is a key area where race, gender, and identities intersect to represent oppressed identities, which currently fails to represent the dynamic nature of marginalized racial groups.

Representation of characters in anime is informed by the society and social constructions around race. Hu (2010) studied the medium of anime generally in *Frames of anime: Culture and image-building* where the author documents nine years of research into the medium anime in Japanese culture and the Asian perspective of anime. His intensive fieldwork explores the growth of anime, using interviews, historical analysis and qualitative and quantitative methods as the importance of anime continues to increase, which furthers the need for racial identities to be represented accurately (2010). The variety of analysis provides a multi-layered perspective to understand the way anime is a key part of education in culture. The racial diversity, or lack thereof, is an integral part of my thesis project and what my work is designed to change. When I compound that study with a conversation of Critical Race Theory, there is a powerful opportunity to examine and change the medium.

Critical Race Theory was developed by Kimberly Crenshaw and for over two decades has been an important tool for countless fields. Her work focused on the ways that race and racism show up in society. Her work allows us to deconstruct problematic ideas about race, acknowledges it is part of the systems we exist in, and is socially constructed. (Crenshaw, 2011) The whitewashing of characters in anime is a critical area of need that this work will examine as I look at the influences of race and racial identity in anime. The show is a prime example of white-washing, which is defined as “the practice of using only white actors, models, or performers, especially the practice of using a white actor to play a character who is not white (dictionary.cambridge.org). Critical Race Theory is a key theoretical foundation for my work and is supported by discussing cultural appropriation. The ethics of cultural appropriation and appreciation rely on the creators of content to view issues from multiple perspectives so a contextual review of material will be key (Young & Brunk, 2009). The ethics of animation do

not specifically address authentic representation, but I assert the inauthentic representation of cultures in anime is an aspect of cultural appropriation due to the lack of appreciation of the visual nuances of various phenotypes. While the first contemporary anime was likely released in the 1910's by Shimokawa Oten, jump ahead to 2020 and a quick review of Netflix will have hundreds of hours of content in the anime category. What you will not find is a large offering of content that is racially accurate, representative of the diverse makeup of our world, or content that celebrates the unique contributions of cultures across the world. As an artist and a creator, I plan to contribute to a more inclusive medium where an audience can see themselves in the cartoons they watch. This project will provide a roadmap for other creatives.

### **1.3 Statement of Purpose**

To accomplish this goal, my creative thesis contains three unique elements, including a review of literature setting the stage to understand the history, needs, and research around the lack of representation in Anime. The remainder of my thesis is dedicated to an anime that I am developing called *Ninurai*, which will more accurately and appropriately engage with and attempt to represent the diversity of the world surrounding anime. *Ninurai* is created and developed to showcase the racial, cultural, and contextual realities of anime audiences in the United States. I approach this project by researching the representation of race in anime, as well as the ninja and samurai traditions so that I can find intersections between different forms of cultural expression and create characters and a storyline that might speak to a diverse audience through the phenotypes, physical traits, clothes, and scenes it is set within.

The development of characters that are racially and culturally representative are key to creating the character *Ninurai*. Creating a character in a way that is representative and appreciative of cultural diversity is critical. This thesis project serves to be an example of how as

creators we can create content that celebrates and represents the cultures we take on in our work. To further create the world of *Ninurai*, I create a short script providing history, setting the scene, and vocalizing character perspectives. Throughout this project I intend to document my work, to provide insight into the process of creating anime that is cognizant of cultural representation.

#### **1.4 Looking Ahead**

Creators have a responsibility to critically examine the ways we reproduce and develop content. Even the way we consume content. The pervasive nature of blonde hair and blue eyes as a commonality in anime illuminates the ways that racism and racial identity dismisses culture and perpetuates white privilege. The reproduction of whiteness at the expense of cultural representation harms our appreciation of culture. It is crucial that as educators, creatives, and industry professionals working with future generations we instill a critical consciousness of how art can replicate and reinforce oppression. In the following chapters, I review the literature on representation in animation, critical race theory, and outline the details of my proposed project.



## 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Anime in its most basic form, refers to animation. Interestingly enough, the name itself is an abbreviation of the English word animation. Anime, is how you say “animated cartoon” (written アニメ) in Japanese. To a Japanese viewer, anime is any cartoon, whether it’s made in Japan or not. Outside of Japan, however, the term anime has come to mean any animated show or movie that uses signature aspects of Japanese-style animation, like vibrant colors, dramatic panning, and characteristic facial expressions. In that medium, the lack of authentic representation is a key issue for me to address through this project.

I research this topic of anime and a lack of racial authenticity because I have been a fan of anime since I was a child. I did not notice it at first, but as I grew older, I observed more problematic or flawed representations that informed by my understanding of archetypes and tropes and how stories are structured. I gained a better insight into what I was watching. I noticed that the majority of anime is created by Asians. These Asian creators then give these characters Asian names like Goku or Naruto then draw them to look white, with blonde hair, and blue eyes, while setting these characters in Asian environments. Although these environments or characters are fictitious, they are based on some form of reality. If these Asian creators drew the characters to look white and give them European names then placed them in European environments, that would be a more authentic representation. To explore this aspect, I provide examples from contemporary anime.

### 2.1 Representation in Anime

To fully understand what might be happening, one must ask oneself where are these expressions of racism coming from? Why are these images being portrayed? What are the animators trying to say? To explore this aspect of my topic, I curated a collection of articles that

discuss the racism in Japan and how that influences the discussion of authentic representation. The discussion of race and racism I provide discusses the representation of both Asian and African American individuals to provide multiple examples of the lack of authentic representation and the impact it has in society.

## **2.2 The History of Racism in Japan**

Racism is a reality in American life, which is represented in various forms of media. However, when we focus on the origination of anime then the culture of Japan and racism in that culture are critical areas of discussion. For instance, the Black Lives Matter movement in Japan emphasizes the racism that is apparent in Japanese society and that there are efforts occurring to change the culture (Hongo, 2020). The Black Lives Matter movement's embrace in Japan speaks to the systemic and social stratification regarding race. The whitewashing of characters in anime speaks to the way that the society celebrates European appearance and culture.

The history of Japan's society has reflected discrimination against indigenous residents, other Asian groups, and other communities of color. Incidents of Black face and racial discrimination against ethnic minorities, shows that, like other developed nations, Japan has a problem with racism, which explains why the whitewashing of anime occurs. (Jarvis et al., 2020; Nerea, 2019; Lee, 2015; Park, 2017). My contention is that the lack of authentic racial representation is informed by the systemic racism in Japanese society. Japan's documented history of racism is apparent through its own human rights violations, including torturing thousands of prisoners of war and raping millions of Korean "comfort women." (<https://www.history.com/news/comfort-women-japan-military-brothels-korea>). These examples demonstrate the racial challenges that impacts the way characters are represented in animation.

As the home of anime, the standards set by Japanese creators can be seen permeating through content created everywhere else. Arudou (2015) discusses at length how signs only allowing Japanese individuals to enter and the approach to “foreigners” as the *other* feed ideas of problematic ideas of race. The whitewashing of characters in anime shows a tension between a celebration of Japanese culture and a promotion of white features like those that Hitler promoted as ideal during World War II.

While these articles have pointed out the way racism has originated and been present, it is important to note the ways that the influence of Nazi Germany influenced the issue further. I think this might stem from the days of Nazi Germany during World War II. Hitler and his team of scientists began to understand the science of identity through eugenics and constructed his idealized version of blonde hair and blue eyes, which is seen within anime. The proximity of Germany & Japan and their alliance in World War II must be understood. The question is just how much of an impact Germany and the West had on Japan. And the rhetoric that came out of Nazi Germany was that blonde hair and blue eyes was the highest form of human being. Hitler promoted the German race as superior and emphasized the blonde hair and blue eyes as the ideal. (<https://www.sahistory.org.za/article/how-did-nazis-construct-aryan-identity>). These characteristics show up in animation often when representing what would otherwise be assumed to be an Asian character. These representations often accompany transformation sequences when a character gains new power.

An anime called Dragon Ball Z showcases main characters that come from another planet. The characters have Asian names like Goku, Yamcha, and Master Roshi. This is where the racial identity comes in; while their names are Asian the entire show focuses on their journey to become Super Saiyans, which have blonde hair and blue eyes as dominant features (see Figure

1). Asian phenotypes are abandoned in favor of Eurocentric ideals when the characters evolve. The characters have Asian names, and the show is set in what is represented as similar to Japan, yet they strive to be Aryan. These figures were originally created for consumption in Japan and their audiences. It wasn't until much later that they were exported to the West so they were not designed to appeal to Western audiences from their origination. This illustrates the disconnect I am addressing with this thesis. The shift and changes to me speak to a level of self-loathing and the influence of systemic racism on individual beliefs in anime.

### Figure 1

*Goku from Dragon Ball Z in regular form and Super Saiyan*



*Note.* This figure shows that a character in many ways of Asian heritage striving to achieve a form that is quite literally blonde hair and blue eyed as the most powerful form.

In anime, whiteness and representations of white features, even when culturally inaccurate, is the dominant representation in anime. Several series lack African-American and Hispanic-American characters entirely; themes related to social justice, equity, or inclusion are absent. In an anime called *Naruto*, the creators of the show actively embrace elements of hate between groups. The image below is of *Naruto* (see Figure 2), the main character of the show. He is depicted in an obviously Asian environment drawing on culture, yet he has blonde hair and blue eyes. The question then is why he is portrayed as white. The story of *Naruto* is about a young shinobi and his journey to becoming a Hokage with cultural references to Japan and its history and legends. He is obviously Asian due to his quest to become a Ninja, which historically is a sub-culture within Japanese society, and yet he is represented as a white boy with blonde hair and blue eyes. Is *Naruto* drawn this way to appeal to a specific demographic? Is this a decision to make sales or an unconscious decision made due to racist ideas and beliefs engrained in society?

**Figure 2**

*Naruto from Naruto*



*Naruto* touches on many ideals such as honor, dignity, even loyalty but none seem to touch on authenticity of representation. Yet the show is deeply rooted in ninja culture, while the anime *Bleach*, which is deeply rooted in samurai culture, also represents characters as white. In the show, the protagonist is Ichigo Kurosaki (see Figure 3), a 15-year-old high school student. He is represented with strawberry-blond hair, an image that stands in stark contrast to the deep roots and connections to Japanese culture. One could say he looks like a character from Scotland; however, he is from Japan, according to the show.

**Figure 3**

*Ichigo from Bleach*



The idea of celebration, representation, and accurate representations of racial identity is possible and can be done well. An anime that does it and does it well is titled *The Dragon Prince*. This anime series showcases an authentic representation of all races (Black, white, Asian, etc.) as well as interracial and same-sex relationships. This anime is a step in the right direction and might be the first of its kind because of who and how the characters are represented (Richmond, 2019). It is a true reflection of the world with a touch of magic due to the fact that the genre is fantasy, hence the title *The Dragon Prince*. Its protagonist is a young Black boy who has a white half-brother. The two human princes forge an incredible pact with an elf assassin sent to kill them, plunging them into an epic quest to bring peace to a warring land by reuniting a

baby dragon with its mother. This anime is more inclusive and should serve as a template to every anime made after it.

This is a positive example of representation, which is key as we consider the ways media portray Black men in America. While Black men are represented in the media, they generally are negative and skewed representations. Kumah-Abiwu (2020) discusses the ways that negative representation is the result of systemic racism and the narrative constructed about Black men. The intentional and unintentional messages within media have an impact on society, which is further impacted by the lack of authentic representations of race and culture in animation.

### **2.3 Authentic Representation is Possible**

In this section, I discuss at length these concepts, as well as the language of appreciation and appropriation: taking and using without context or intent versus celebrating the works of people and their unique cultures. Animation should be a place to celebrate the diversity of cultural identities and expressions (Han, 2019). Cultural appropriation is the act of taking from a culture by another in a way that ignores the significance and meaning within accurate representations. From historical analysis or viewing current day animation, the ethical impacts of cultural appropriation require an acknowledgement of the implications, impacts, and responsibility by those representing the culture or using something of significance (Young & Brunk, 2009). Creators of animation have an ethical responsibility to ensure that it is true to the culture and context. If we consider *Naruto*, the creators leveraged concepts represented in Asian culture, yet the characters in multiple scenarios are represented with white features. The disconnect between the cultural references and the representation takes an aspect of Asian culture and makes it white in appearance. The whitewashing of characters eliminates the possible value of seeing themselves on tv for children of various racial groups who are marginalized by



society. Cultural appropriation is problematic, and the inauthentic representation of a marginalized group is a tool of oppression (Matthes, 2019). The reality of that representation and impact on those communities is a key reason to move to authentic representation.

Nieguth (2015) reinforces the importance of critical viewing of film, tv, music, and video games. These can be tools to help individuals understand that pop culture is an integral part of how representations in the media support systemic racism and oppression. *A Short History of Race in Animation* (Watson, 2010) shares insights from the producer of *The Princess and the Frog* that the “first Disney princess” wasn’t created to be a first Black princess, instead it was designed to be an American fairytale in New Orleans (2018). These articles emphasize that historical representation is not always positive. *The Princess and the Frog* film provides examples of how representation of characters can be done well, though the examples of problematic representations are more common. While it is a positive representation, it is important to note that intentionality and choices made illuminates that gaps can persist even when authentic representation is shown.

### **2.3.1 Representation Matters**

In a pluralistic global society, we have a responsibility to respect and represent each other as authentically as possible. Keys (2016) found that while representation in animation has improved, the problematic representations have remained. A lack of representation is compounded as a concern when the existing representations are inaccurate or whitewashed.

*Race and Ethnicity in Animation* (Sammond, 2017) shows that immigrant groups and other racial minorities were created as characters to entertain and simultaneously replicate problematic beliefs. Throughout the history of animation, you can track the way that the medium has been used to represent a skewed idea of a group who has been vilified and

positioned as other (Sammond, 2015). While some progress can be seen through animation, the number of creators of color, and overall diversity of identities individuals see in the media remains small. The process of creating more authentic representation centers writers and artists who are able to utilize their voice and experience to discuss power, oppression, inequality, and the way we understand racial identity (Sohn, 2014). My work is focused on articulating the need and power of representation in both the art and the artists. This thesis supports the larger notion that representation and voices of creators are critical to addressing the lack of representation in art, including anime.

Klein & Shiffman (2009) discuss “underrepresentation and symbolic annihilation” (p. 55) in animated cartoons. They focus on the ways that underrepresented groups are excluded, how they are presented when they are shown, and what has the trend been over time. The authors focused on gender, age, race, and sexual orientation and found that cartoons have historically excluded marginalized groups within the art. This is a primary reason why discussing representation and racism in anime are crucial. Animated cartoons are a medium to expose children at an early age how race is presented and misrepresented. Klein & Shifman (2009) provide a view into overt acts of racism, race-related content, and the characteristics associated with groups by race. The authors found that over the last 50 years racist representations have decreased overall (2006). The study did find that in early representations racist ideas were displayed though the Civil Rights Movement and after that point there was a decrease in the problematic representations. However, that coincides with the decrease in representation for those same marginalized groups, which is troubling as it points to the representation that existed was based on problematic beliefs. My contention is that the decrease of racist representations led to a decrease of the representation of racial minorities. This void is something that much be

addressed. In considering the future of animation, the documented understanding of race and racism in anime allow us to understand the impact of this medium.

### ***2.3.2 Racial Diversity in Anime***

A general review of content highlighted on Netflix in their anime section will show mostly white faces even in scenes and settings that are obviously Asian inspired. To illustrate this point, I conducted two searches on Netflix. The first was of “anime” and of the top 24 shows that came up, 19 of them appeared to be set in an Asian context with main characters drawn with European or white features. I then specifically searched “Japanese anime” and of the 36 shows listed, only 2 showed characters that appeared authentically Asian on the preview for the show. The reality is that the racial diversity in anime does not represent the truth of society and authentic representation is even less prominent and is impacted by constructed ideas of whiteness as discussed earlier in the concept of whitewashing.

Dobrow et al. (2018) provides insight into the way that race has started to be presented and highlights the success of *Black Panther* and *A Wrinkle in Time*. A key insight from their study was that from a 1983 analysis of over 1,100 animations and cartoons that saw only forty-two characters were Black and only 47 were non-white in total. While racial diversity in cartoons is improving, representation still does not reflect U.S. demographics. The issues of stereotypes and flawed representation continue, but children need to see representations of themselves and others as part of their development. The key takeaway is the importance of children seeing a diverse universe of characters but also that these characters have diverse characteristics.

Demel and Kowner (2015) use “race, racism, nationalism and gender” as a lens to view contemporary constructs of race. They discuss East Asian culture and how race is understood,

highlighting the contemporary issues that contribute to how race is represented within anime, which was driven by the concept of race, which “was introduced by European missionaries during the nineteenth century when Western thought began to seep” into Asian cultures (p.124). The introduction of race by Westerners does provide context and insight into the construction of race in animation as representing western ideals. In Lehman’s (2007) *The Colored Cartoon: Black Presentation in American Animated Short Films, 1907-1954*, the author provides a critical examination of how white animators portrayed their interpretations of the culture of African Americans. The use of stereotypes and problematic narratives drew on ideas rooted in slavery. The article goes on to discuss the ways that as technology progressed so did the ways that white animators exploited Black culture for entertainment. The article further states that as society changed and white characters in animation became popular, they moved away from Black characters. The problematic representation continues and must be discussed and addressed.

Whaley (2016) spotlights the growing number of Black female artists, writers, producers in pop culture from video games to film. Her focus is on telling the story of representation in the medium of anime and the contextualized challenges related to race and national identity in anime. She researches Black women in comic culture and the treatment of the Black female subject. This qualitative study used interviews of content creators to create the first investigation into Black women in comic culture and the ways that art is used as a representation of Black female identity. Exploring the involvement and representation of Black women in the industry enriches the conversation of how diversity might be constructed in anime.

A key point of my research is to demonstrate the lack of representation in multiple facets of the industry impacting the ultimate product. Lopez (2016) discusses representation in media focused on the Asian American experience to demonstrate the intersectional nature of the lack of

representation. The article points out that while some representation exists it is too often problematic and simplistic. The article provides a historical overview of Asian representation. The goal was to reframe the narrative and the work Asians have done to be represented and acknowledged in the media (Lopez, 2016). This piece helps to inform the work I am doing in exploring and understanding race in anime. The use of a historical lens showcases that while pockets of representation exists, the overall narrative of authenticity is still lacking. To inform my perspective, I draw on Afrofuturism and Critical Race Theory to illuminate the ways that race can be critically viewed in anime.

## **2.4 A Discussion of Race Through the Lens of Afrofuturism and Critical Race Theory**

I am disheartened by the subtle and not so subtle racism that finds itself drawn in the fantastic world of anime. Race and the impacts of systemic racism are felt by marginalized groups every day. There are not many authentic images of positive representation of Asian or Black characters on TV, let alone in the world of anime which compounds the impact of systemic misrepresentation. While my project is a creation of an Asian anime, it's important to understand how multiple marginalized identities are not authentically represented. Anime has a huge Black following and yet there are hardly any characters speaking to this audience. My future work will address these issues while being informed by Afrofuturism and Critical Race Theory. I think it is critical to focus this project on *Ninurai* because as a Black creator I can demonstrate that you don't have to be of a race to authentically represent a race. Below, I discuss these theories and how animation can be used to discuss critical social issues.

### **2.4.1 Afrofuturism**

Womack, (2013) introduced the concept of Afrofuturism that sprung from a rejection of the lack of media representation and when you view the work in conjunction with Whaley's

(2016) work on representation of Black women in animation, it is apparent there are voices working to make change. This project will further the efforts of creatives of color to shape media to celebrate Black and brown bodies, instead of erasing us or creating problematic narratives. Additionally, it is my hope that artists and educators will find that this work offers a roadmap for future creators to consider racial representation in their own work and professional development. A prime example is *Black Kirby* which is a collaborative that takes the legacy and work of Jack Kirby regarding pop culture and adds a perspective on race to emphasize the power and importance of representation (*Black Kirby: An Afrofuturist Homecoming*). The existence of *Black Kirby* and other creatives working to challenge the narrative is a sign of change and my thesis project will illuminate the need for change in authentically representing characters regardless of race. The work is informed by Critical Race Theory and the critical examination of anime as an art form and medium for delivering content. By centering a critical theory grounded in examining our world, I can apply a critical review of the process to create change.

#### **2.4.2 Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory operates off of five core tenets-- racism is ordinary, interests converge, race is a social construct, narratives and storytelling are important, and White people have been the primary beneficiary of civil rights legislation-- which all provide a critical lens to understand White exceptionalism and the way the system is setup to benefit those with power (Crenshaw, 2002). In applying these concepts to my work, each tenet of CRT allows us to understand the how, why, and what I am trying to address. Racism is part of everyday life and that results in the lack of representation in animation while the studios benefit from the lack of representation.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerges from scrutinizing white privilege, applying concepts from post colonialism to race, gender, and class. CRT also draws from continental social and political philosophy (Khan, 2016). CRT is a key theoretical framework I apply to the discussion of race and representation in Anime which currently fails to represent the dynamic nature of marginalized racial groups. CRT informs the creation of my work as it helps me understand how failing to represent identities authentically perpetuates problematic systems.

In my project, CRT will be applied to each step of the process. In creating the background of my character, I will develop a critical understanding of my unintentional biases and lack of understanding not being from Asian cultures to authentically represent the characters I create. In drawing characters, it will be critical to scrutinize the phenotypes I create to ensure that accurately represent the individuals' culture being drawn. Finally, when writing the corresponding story using CRT to review any potential biases from the creators. The thoughtful application to my process builds upon the other insights gained from understanding how others use anime to understand race and representation.

### ***2.4.3 Theory to Practice***

Cappiccie, A., et al., (2012), suggested that analyzing the animation produced by Disney can help educators better understand problematic elements of representation in animation. Introducing critical consideration through familiar works of media can serve as a starting point for this crucial conversation. The classroom is a space to discuss the content that students view and begin to imagine how they might add their voices and visions to challenge the problematic representations that exist. As an artist and a creator, I believe that media is a form of representation that can help everyday individuals come to understand and appreciate the authentic representation of cultures.

Resources exist to help individuals appropriately draw racial profiles, such as *How to Draw Black People* (see Figure 4) that suggests techniques and details to enhance authenticity of representation when drawing Black individuals. This is incredibly important to “teach others to avoid tired and hurtful stereotypes and clichés in favor of learning new techniques for rendering dark skin, textured hair, drawing Afrocentric faces, and challenging limiting gender norms” (White, 2020,).



**Figure 4**

*An excerpt from How to Draw Black People.*

## CHAPTER TWO: DISMANTLING STEREOTYPES

History is overflowing with racist stereotypes and clichés, many of which are still in use. Few ever stop to ask why the Black masculine characters are often designed to be beasts of burden or why Black femme designs are typically sexually provocative. Unlike typical tropes that categorize a repeating motif, or theme, black stereotypes have been used to shape the perception of Black people. To avoid unintended offenses or contributions to offensive themes, let's examine these tropes and their origins.



FIGURE 9 LEFT TO RIGHT: THE STRONG BLACK WOMAN AND BLACK BRUTE. CLICHED TROPES TO AVOID.

The representation being discussed in the excerpt of sexualizing Black women and presenting Black men as large and aggressive speaks to the problematic representation in not representing individuals authentically. This is especially troubling because a quick search on Pinterest will show dozens of tools to use to help artists and creators represent variation in representation (Val., 2016). The misrepresentation provides challenges for many of the reasons already discussed. This lack of authentic representation perpetuates problematic ideas, racial stereotypes, and false narratives about communities of color. In how faces are presented there is a nuance that is required to acknowledge the cultural and geographic variety of individuals. For instance, the characteristics of someone from Japan, China, and Korea all have variations that can be lost or ignored in a generalized representation of someone who is Asian (*Drawing Asian Faces*, 2020). Let's apply that same standard to how individuals who are Black are presented with specific characteristics with a general disregard for the nuance of the geographic and historical nature of how what is understood as an African American phenotype was created. Slavery, racism, interracial relationships and other historical factors influence the characteristics, yet those nuances are often not represented in animation.

Through this research, I recognize the importance of representation and the impact of the lack of it. Anime was primarily created by Japanese animators, but this art form has become global and must speak to the sensibilities of its diverse audience. I believe that any creator of any race can and must accurately and authentically represent their subject matter. I demonstrate that a person of one race can carefully consider authentic aspects of another racial group when creating a character. My methodology section discusses the ways that I create a character called *Ninurai*. My research illuminates the need for us to critically create characters regardless of our identities. However, in this current climate, it seems more pertinent than ever to create authentic Black

characters. Just as feminism and the struggle for women's rights led to the portrayal of more positive female characters, now is the moment to expand representation of Black characters. The creation of *Ninurai* for my thesis is important to demonstrate how someone of a different race can authentically represent a culture, though it is not the only idea I have. For example, *Adventure Africa* is an emergent idea which I intend to pursue in the future, in which I will apply the same critical process I have described for creating *Ninurai*. My goal for *Adventure Africa* is to represent accurately and authentically a Black character set in what we know as the Sahara during a period of time before the continent became Africa. I will be better prepared to develop *Adventure Africa* after working through the process of developing *Ninurai*. Kofman (2015) stated the "challenge for writers, in my view, is to manage to '*inhabit*' the people we create. The best writers literally get under the skin of their *characters*, imbibing their wounds, the messiness of their daily confusions, associations and impulses, the rhythms of their external and internal language" (para 1). This is the same challenge that I take on as a creator and assert that anyone creating anime representing an ethnic or cultural group must also own in their process to do justice to the characters we create.

Ultimately, while representing other identities is not always easy it takes some research and effort to learn so that a creator of anime can represent characters from a different culture with more authenticity. This leads me to my project that demonstrates how a creator of anime from one culture can create characters from a different culture with a higher degree of authenticity by conducting research and due diligence.

## 2.5 The Process Ahead

The literature I have reviewed provides and illustrates the problem I seek to address: the lack of authentic racial representation in media generally and animation specifically and the challenge of creating characters across cultures while avoiding appropriation and cliched tropes. Authentic representation is not just a lofty ideal that sounds timely; it is a key component of addressing systemic racism, of accurately representing cultures, and ensuring that the media is a tool for the promotion of a socially just world where individuals are celebrated, accepted, and appreciated for the individual and cultural representations they bring. To this end, my project accomplishes three goals. It documents a process of creating art that authentically represents the culture my creative work is set in, establishes a guide for other creatives to use, and provides an example of how the process of authentic representation can be discussed in curriculum. My methodology is discussed in the following chapter to outline the steps I take to complete this project.

### 3 MY PROJECT AND PLAN

My thesis contributes to the important conversation about how characters in anime are created and portrayed, and how that impacts society. To this end, I proposed a creative project to demonstrate the process of developing authentic representations in anime. The literature review above emphasized the importance of this topic and the process I describe serves as a model for others to follow. My overall intent is to demonstrate the way to authentically represent cultures and ethnicities in animation. I developed an original content idea called *Ninurai* for this project. *Ninurai* is a story about the son of a Ninja and a Samurai and the world around him. The script, the character from the story and the creative work provides an example for others to follow. My project serves to answer the following questions:

- How can creators/animators apply concepts of authentic representation to accurately represent characters from cultures other than their own?
- What processes and considerations must be made throughout the drawing and design process to authentically represent individuals?
- How does utilizing concepts related to authentic representation impact the design and creative process?

My research questions are addressed through the intentional and thoughtful process I execute. To facilitate my creative work, I use the following process. First, I create original anime characters, aiming for authenticity including their name, traits, and physical features. I include a backstory for that character, *Ninurai*, and his mother and father. The second step I craft three renderings of the character I create. Finally, use the character and the drawings to create a short script for that original character and bring all the pieces together. The intentional process I went through demonstrates the power of authentic representation and provides a structure that any animator could integrate into their process. The following is a discussion of each step at length for my thesis project.

### 3.1 *Ninurai*: Creating an Authentic Character

My process involves developing a character. The first aspect, to establish the backstory. For example, creating a name to begin with and building from there. *Ninurai*'s backstory will demonstrate the way historical or contextual understanding of characters supports the creation of authentic characters. For me, *Ninurai*'s context is the Edo period, which is 1603-1868, specifically the 1850's in Japan during Tokugawa Shogun rule. The selection of the period is important as that was the historically accurate period when the Samurai culture was at its highest period of prominence in Japanese society. The selection of *Ninurai* is an intentional decision to demonstrate that creators, regardless of their race, can accurately represent their subject matter.

A thoughtful creator takes the time to research and understand the timeline and the ways that the content appears in culture. Combatting inaccurate representations through a process of character development will address several problematic issues mentioned in my review of literature about how characters are created and then impact the representations of groups in media. Writing the background of a character whose name, traits, and features all align with the geographic and historical context of the story is central to authentically representing groups. Setting *Ninurai* in this period shows a thoughtful review of Japanese history, applying historical analysis to content creation, and a process to authentically construct characters and stories. In addition to the historical context informing the character's name and traits, I must also account for the physical features of the time. This is where using resources like those shared in Chapter 2 and others will be incredibly important in creating the foundation of a character. In this project, the character *Ninurai* will be created through this process to be an example for others. The next step in this process is to use the various insights from research in creating the character.

### ***3.1.1 Drawing an Authentic Character***

The next process for my thesis, create drawings that represent an authentic character. The thorough creation of a backstory is an important foundation for drawing the character. While some could argue this additional step is unnecessary, I argue the omission of well-researched backstory has contributed to the negative representations of identity in media. As noted by Lehman (2007), Lopez (2016), Whaley (2016) and countless others, failing to this will result in continued media that lacks authentic representation and supports problematic systems. My process is developed using the practical applications included in Chapter 2, my personal insights, and a thoughtful review of the culture and phenotypes related to the characters during the specific era. For this project, I include a list of steps any creator could apply to their work, create a simple framework for artists to apply in their creations, and showcase a final product that represents the steps outlined in this chapter.

The creation of the character, development of backstory, writing of script, and ultimately drawing *Ninurai* showcase a comprehensive, thoughtful, and generalizable process that can be used to inform creating authentic representations in animation. Once this important work is complete, then the corresponding story can be written.

### ***3.1.2 Developing a Story***

The construction of a character is a key step, but those same levels of attention must be applied to creating a story. I demonstrate that process through a beat sheet and turn that into a script. While some may argue this creates an additional time intensive step, the intentionality in creating a character results in much of that work being completed already. Upon developing and

illustrating these characters, I build a world in which they exist. I started to write one using a beat sheet. A 'beat sheet' is a precursor to a script outline. It defines the important moments in an episode or feature film and lays out what needs to happen in each act of the story. The protagonist of this story is a boy named 'Ninurai'. In addition to the original character drawings, I incorporate a beat sheet and a seven-page screenplay to show how with proper research you can have authentic representation in animation and storytelling, especially if it is created by an outsider.

The Edo period was determined earlier in the development of *Ninurai*'s character and provides the context needed to create the scene, the scenery, and the dialogue. The story is represented by the era, accurately portray Japan in that period, and support the overall authentic representation that is key to support content that represents diverse identities and experiences accurately. This entire process is to show that characters can be created authentically regardless of race, ethnicities, or cultures. The creation of the script is to bring the character *Ninurai* and his story life and emphasize key contextual areas that creators should pay special attention to whether creating a scene in 1850's Japan or modern-day.

### **3.2 Combining Art & Theory in Practice**

This project is important not simply because of the passion I have for it, but as we reflect on contemporary understanding of race & ethnicity, racism, and identity, this is a critical area for focus. I start this proposal stating that anime was an important part of my development and then examine the impact of flawed and inaccurate representations in anime. The literature shows that representation, or the lack of it in most cases, creates negative views of self. It also shows us that when representation is done poorly, it can impact the perceptions of both individuals and



societies. These realities combined with my passion for this topic are the core of this project. My project is separated into three crucial steps, where each build upon the last to support the authentic representation that anime needs. By completing this research and the project, I address a contemporary social issue in a way that is informed by research, lived experiences, and a creative commitment to authentic representation.

## 4 PROCESS FOR PROJECT

Based on my research on how to accurately represent different ethnicities and cultures, I illustrate accurately Japanese characters that I developed by studying and observing Asian people as a reference. To further illustrate the importance of authentic representation I provide a step by step “how to guide” for educators on drawing your own authentic characters. This process is all about taking your time making careful and precise observations of the details.

Step 1. Start by researching your character’s phenotypes and collecting references. For example, if you want to draw an Asian character you need to research Asian phenotypes.

Step 2. Gather your materials and sketch an ovoid shape that approximates the head, keep in mind general proportions.

Step 3. Next mark the proportional divisions. Place a center line and brow ridge where you feel it should be, then mark the base of the nose, creating your division of thirds.

Step 4. Use the thirds division to adjust the bottom of the chin and mark the hairline above the brow ridge. Keep in mind the top of the skull is slightly above the hairline. Then mark the mouth division.

Step 5. Now develop the main forms of the features. Once you find your head plane, place the ears, and refine the head shape based on your observations.

Step 6. Begin observing the details, subtle forms, and shapes of the features and head shape, block in the hair and make sure to accurately illustrate the texture.

Step 7. Continue your observations refining and resolving areas as you go. This is about research and observation to achieve authentic representation and participation in animation.

How to portray differences in the characters you draw and drawing people of different races is imperative to authentic representation. For example, no visible eyelid and slightly angled eyes are a sign of Asian phenotypes. Understanding the differences between the anatomical structure of Asian eyes from let's say Caucasian or Hispanic eyes is a true distinction that should be made by any animation creator for authenticity.

As you will see these characters are original characters, I created using pencil, pen and markers on drawing paper informed by the step-by-step guide outlined above. I chose this medium as an homage to the traditions of hand drawn animation. By using pencil, I was able to go through an iterative process in shaping the important details of my characters until I reached a final form. An asset of using paper and pen is you can explore many ideas in a short period of time. And not only can you explore different versions of ideas you can outline plotlines and combine writings and drawings.

#### **4.1 The Initial Design**

Character design can often be a complex creature to get correct. A lot of creative thinking is needed to create your own original character. There are a few things that need to be considered for your character design. Aside from clean lines and easily readable features, there is knowing what to exaggerate and what to minimize and what to do to develop personality.

My process early on developing and designing Ninurai and the idea of the character was forming in my mind. I started sketching out what he might look like, as noted in Figure 5. As I

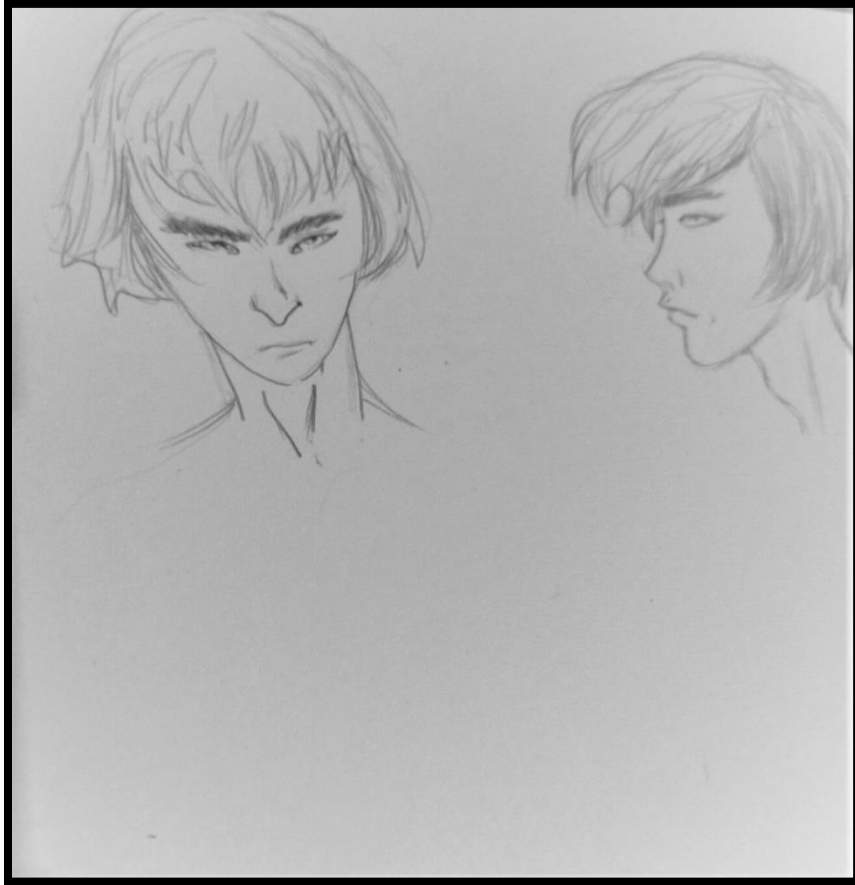
continued my research on drawing Asian phenotypes you can see how Ninurai evolved. My research informed me how to draw my character. As I have been developing these drawings the story of Ninurai is also developing. The creation of the story through the beat sheet helped me to further refine the authentic representation of Ninurai.

## **4.2 Refining the Character**

This section includes photos of the drawings I completed (see Figures 5 – 10). These drawings represent the intentional process I used for achieving authentic representation in animation. As you will see the sketches show a progression and refinement of the character Ninurai, using Asian phenotypes. This process was completed using the steps I developed and outlined for creators to authentically represent characters in animation. My research and acute attention to the details of the distinct phenotypes informed my vision of the character Ninurai, which allowed for a relatively easy process. As I shared in the earlier chapters, it is critical to shape the character and the corresponding world, which resulted in the creation of a beat sheet which then became a short script for Ninurai. The importance of this project is reinforced by the conversation recently facilitated by the National Art Education Association, which presents a webcast that talks about creating diversity through character development.

**Figure 5**

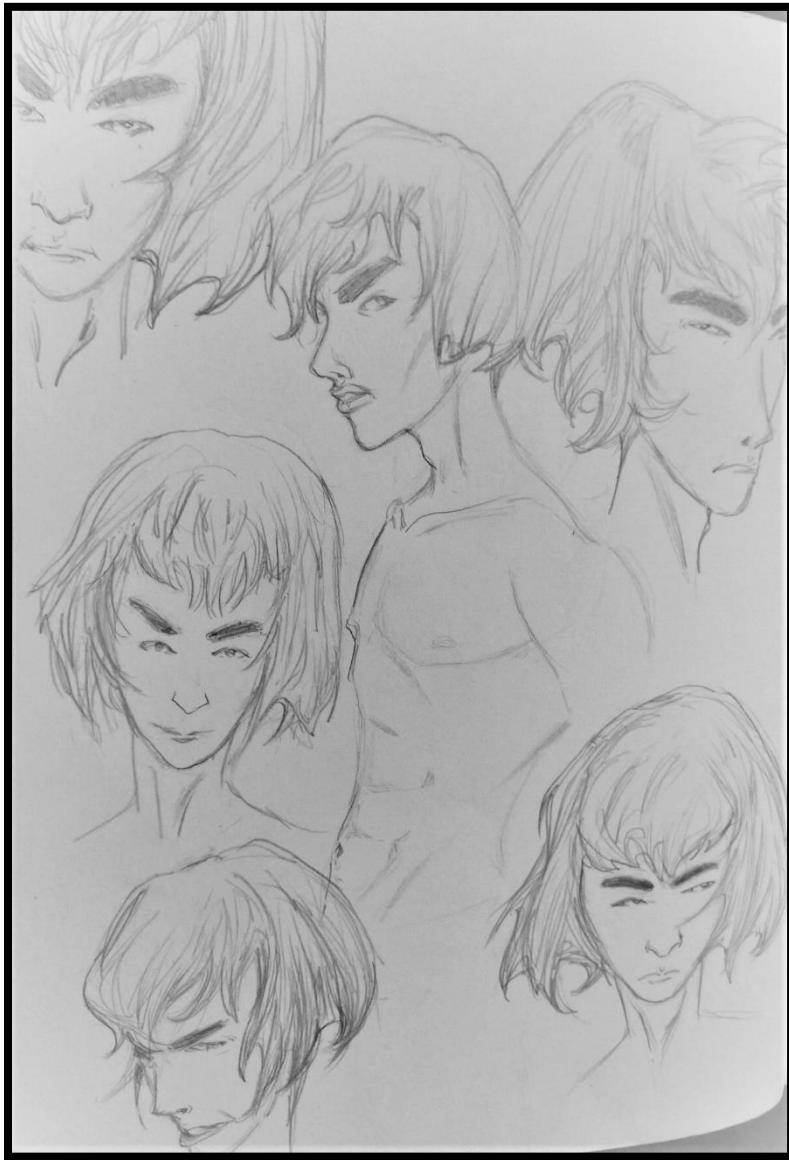
*Initial concept sketch of Ninurai*



This sketch is the initial sketch of the character. Here is where I developed the characters features and outward appearance based on research of Japanese phenotypes.

**Figure 6**

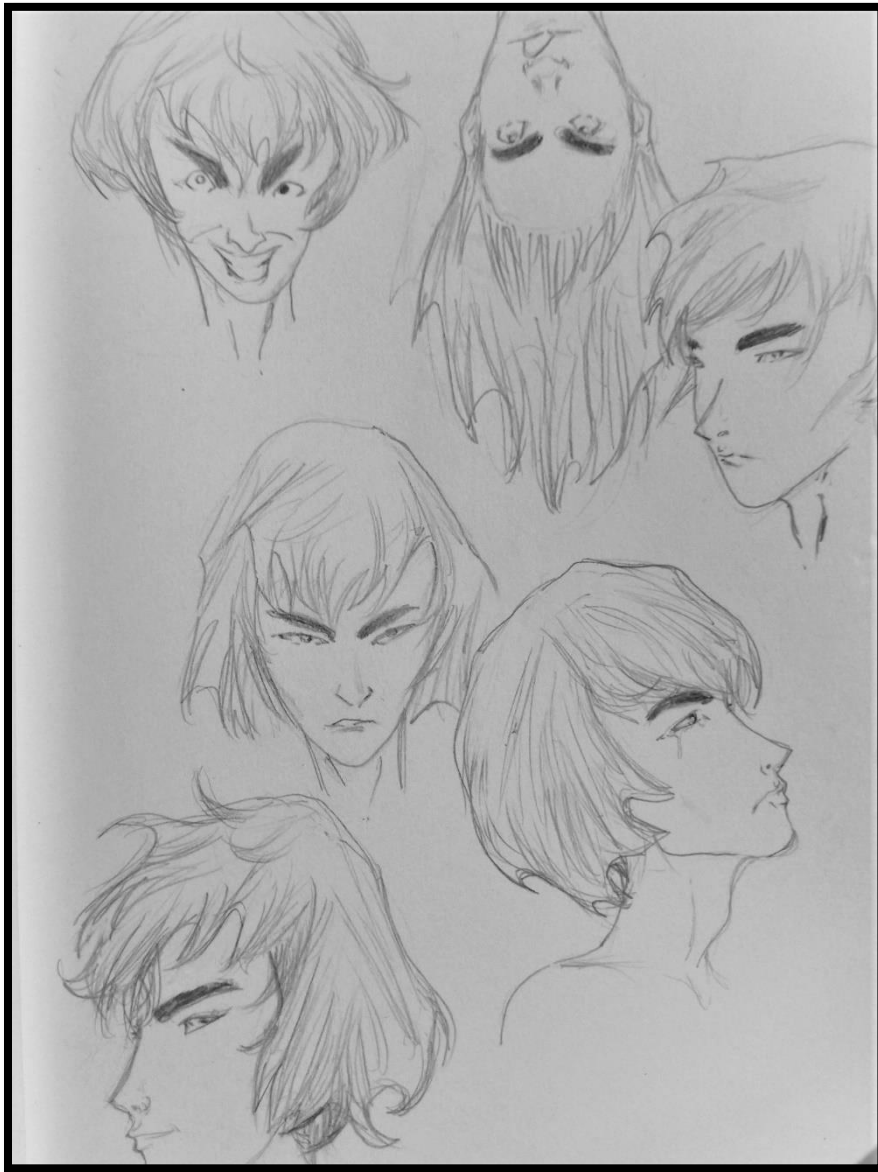
*Iterations of Ninurai refining phenotype*



This sketch is a continuation of developing the characters features and outward appearance, poses and expressions the character might have.

**Figure 7**

*Continuation of Ninurai refining phenotype*



This sketch depicts developing and figuring out the characters accurate and authentic phenotypes, while incorporating personality for the character.

**Figure 8**

*Sketch of Ninurai in hooded cowl*



This sketch is an early stage of developing how the character would dress, which also captures personality and backstory.



**Figure 9**

*Sketch of Ninurai in ninja yoroi*



This sketch is of the character in Ninja gear, Ninurai is fearless, strong, and passionate. Here I am creating an outward appearance that matches the character's inward personality.

**Figure 10**

*Sketch of Ninurai in ninja armor, hooded jacket, trousers, and sandals*



This sketch depicts a more developed appearance of Ninurai, presented in a strong pose in ninja gear which gives way to the character's backstory.

### 4.3 Beat Sheet

In creating a beat sheet, I was able to brainstorm the story of Ninurai. The beat sheets helped with the development of the script. I wanted to show the draft and the final beat sheet as part of my process for developing a character. This provides a holistic perspective of developing an authentic character in their world. If you're creating an Asian character and giving them an Asian name and setting them in an Asian geographical location, then that character shouldn't look like a Caucasian person with blonde hair and blue eyes. These beat sheets are an example of creating an authentic Asian character and placing them in an authentic Asian geographical location. The first beat sheet you see below is a draft that reflects edits and changes while the final beat sheet follows.

#### Beat Sheet **STORY STRUCTURE GRID**

<b>STORY STRUCTURE BEATS</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF SCENES</b>
Protagonist's Normal World Describe the Protagonist's normal life and what's important to him/her.	Ninurai (10 years old)  Senshi wakes up Ninurai. Its 5am. Senshi looks out window and the sun is rising on the small village. Ninurai yawns and stretches. Senshi is packing fishing equipment in the kitchen.
Inciting Incident This is the interruption in the Protagonist's life that brings the change. This is the event that motivates the Protagonist's to the conflict.	Senshi leaves the house to go fishing, Ninurai wants to join but Senshi tells him to tend the garden. From the garden Ninurai looks on. 4 young boys are playing with a young ox in the field. One of the boys is Ninurai's best friend. A band of Ronin swarms the field capturing the young boys, tossing them in a wagon. Ninurai hides behind a tree.
Conflict What does the Protagonist want?	Ninurai wants to learn more about these Ronin. He sneaks into the wagon while the Ronin are asking the villagers "are there any more boys here?"
Intro to the Antagonist Who or what is stopping the Protagonist?	On top a hill in the distance Riko Akiko the General of the Ronin sits a top his horse in approval of the new captures.
Protagonist Action	Ninurai trades places with his friend, free's him and says, "tell my Mom, she'll find us."

<p>What does the Protagonist DO [the action] to attain the conflict/goal?</p>	
<p>Antagonist Action What does the Antagonist Do to STOP the Protagonist?</p>	<p>Ninurai and other boys from the village are taken to the Ronin encampment where they are held captive.</p> <p><b>Reiterate Conflict with urgency</b> The boys are told by the Ronin “if you become Ronin you will be trained in the way of the Samurai and be part of General Riko’s army, if not, execution.</p> <p><u>Raising the Stakes/Urgency</u> **General Riko has sick boys killed in front of the new captures. Ninurai accepts his fate and learns the way of the samurai but does not forget the way of the ninja.</p>
<p>Protagonist Action#2</p>	<p>At night when everyone is asleep, Ninurai practices breathing techniques and ninja hand signs that his mom taught him.</p>
<p>Antagonist Action #2</p>	<p>After 3 days of holding the boy’s captive and starving them, one of them dies from starvation. They are released to start their samurai training.</p>
<p>Protagonist Action #3</p>	<p>Ninurai naturally excels at his samurai training and is moved along the ranks rather fast.</p> <p><b>Reiterate Conflict with urgency</b> <u>Raising the Stakes/Urgency:</u>10 years passed, Ninurai is 20 now and a captain in Riko’s army.</p>
<p>Turning Point What is the change in the Protagonist? Either the Protagonist: -does not need the conflict any more -has an emotional revelation [the truth] -makes a BIG action.</p>	<p>Ninurai overhears 2 captains and discovers that General Riko is responsible for the death of his father. Ninurai has a flash back: Senshi tells Ninurai about when she met his father and how he was wounded from a battle with a General.</p>
<p>Resolution &amp; Cliffhanger Did the Protagonist achieve what they wanted? What is the cliffhanger [question or new conflict]?</p>	<p>Ninurai challenges General Riko to a battle.</p> <p><u>Raising the Stakes/Urgency:</u> Threat is changed: Will Ninurai expose his secret during the fight?</p>

Beat Sheet **STORY STRUCTURE GRID**

<b>STORY STRUCTURE BEATS</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION OF SCENES</b>
<p><b>Protagonist's Normal World</b> Describe the Protagonist's normal life and what's important to him/her.</p>	<p>Senshi has Ninurai train from the time he is 1. She has him holding his breath underwater and swimming for miles for stamina, walking on branches without them snapping or breaking for stealth, climbing trees, punching trees, and hiking for strength. By the time Ninurai has turned 5 he has been familiarized with weapons and poisons, knows hand to hand combat and has killed a bear, a wild boar, and many poisonous snakes.</p> <p>Ninurai is 10 years old today. And for his bday every year Senshi tells him a little bit about his father.</p> <p>Senshi wakes up Ninurai. Its 5am. Senshi looks out window as the sun is rising on the small village. Ninurai yawns and stretches. Senshi is packing fishing equipment in the kitchen.</p> <p>Ninurai says to Senshi "Please tell me more about my father". Senshi replies, "Ok, where were we last? Your father was a great samurai and fought many battles. The night we met he was severely wounded, covered in battle scars. I did everything I could to heal him. He told me he fought his best friend, a general named Riku or Riko. I will tell you the rest when I return."</p>
<p><b>Inciting Incident</b> This is the interruption in the Protagonist's life that brings the change. This is the event that motivates the Protagonist's to the conflict.</p>	<p>Senshi leaves the house to go fishing, Ninurai wants to join but Senshi tells him to tend the garden. From the garden Ninurai looks on. 4 of Ninurai's friends (Kaito, Yuma, Kazu, and Maki) are playing with a young ox in the field. Kaito is Ninurai's best friend. Senshi makes meals for Kaito and his Mom because Kaito's Mom is sick. A band of Ronin swarms the field capturing the young boys, tossing them in a wagon. Ninurai hides behind a tree.</p>
<p><b>Conflict</b> What does the Protagonist want?</p>	<p>Ninurai wants to learn more about these Ronin. He sneaks into the wagon while the Ronin are asking the villagers "are there any more boys here?"</p>
<p><b>Intro to the Antagonist</b> Who or what is stopping the Protagonist?</p>	<p>In the distance hidden in the shade Riko Akiko the General of the Ronin sits atop his horse in approval of the new captures.</p>
<p><b>Protagonist Action</b> What does the Protagonist DO [the action] to attain the conflict/goal?</p>	<p>Ninurai trades places with his best friend Kaito, free's him and says, "tell my Mom, she'll find us."</p>

<p>Antagonist Action What does the Antagonist Do to STOP the Protagonist?</p>	<p>Ninurai and other boys from the village are taken to the Ronin encampment.</p> <p><b>Reiterate Conflict with urgency</b> The boys are told by the Ronin “if you become Ronin you will be trained in the way of the Samurai and be part of General Riko’s army, if not, execution.</p> <p><u>Raising the Stakes/Urgency</u> **General Riko pulls the new captures out of the wagon one by one from their arms, to inspect them like livestock. Riko sticks his hand in Yuma’s mouth, searching for rotten teeth, any signs of ailment. He tosses Yuma to the ground like a wet chicken. Riko tells his captain, “Kill this one, he is weak and throw his body in the river. Ninurai jumps out of the wagon, runs in front of Yuma, pushes the captain aside and yells, “If you touch him, I’ll kill you” Riko sees this and hits Ninurai on his head from behind knocking him out. Riko says, “Watch this one he has potential.” The captain throws Ninurai and the other boys into a cave. Ninurai wakes up and decides to learn the way of the samurai but does not forget the way of the ninja.</p>
<p>Protagonist Action#2</p>	<p>At night when everyone is asleep, Ninurai practices breathing techniques and ninja hand signs that his mom taught him.</p>
<p>Antagonist Action #2</p>	<p>After 3 days of holding the boy’s captive and starving them, Maki dies from starvation. The others are released to start their samurai training.</p>
<p>Protagonist Action #3</p>	<p>Ninurai naturally excels at his samurai training and is moved along the ranks rather fast.</p> <p><b>Reiterate Conflict with urgency</b> <u>Raising the Stakes/Urgency</u>:10 years passed, Ninurai is 20 now and a captain in Riko’s army.</p>
<p>Turning Point What is the change in the Protagonist? Either the Protagonist: -does not need the conflict any more -has an emotional revelation [the truth] -makes a BIG action.</p>	<p>Ninurai overhears 2 captains and discovers that General Riko is responsible for the death of his father. Ninurai has a flash back: Senshi tells Ninurai about when she met his father and how he was wounded from a battle with a General.</p>
<p>Resolution &amp; Cliffhanger Did the Protagonist achieve what they wanted?</p>	<p>Ninurai challenges General Riko to a battle.</p>

What is the cliffhanger [question or new conflict]?	<u>Raising the Stakes/Urgency:</u> Threat is changed: Will Ninurai expose his secret during the fight?
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#### 4.4 Final Product

In creating and then curating this final product I have gained insights. First, I didn't find it difficult to do research on Asian phenotypes when developing the character Ninurai. Second, through my research I learned Asians having specific phenotypes like their eyelids is a result of more subcutaneous fat, with a pretarsal fat component, is present in Asian eyelids. Asian single eyelids showed fusion of the orbital septum. A clinically known anatomical racial difference in the upper eyelid between Asians and other races is apparent in the upper eyelid crease (Jeong 1999). Third, the acknowledgement and integration of these insights did not significantly increase the time required to complete this project. Finally, this process has shown that with an appreciation for the differences in phenotypes it is possible and not prohibitive to create authentic representation in anime.

In this section I include a seven-page script, which was developed from the beat sheet. The script covers the origin of Ninurai, a young boy who comes from two different worlds. Making him the first half ninja, half samurai. In addition, there are the final three sketches of Ninurai to complete the final product. This final product of the beat sheet, the script, and the drawings are all critical parts of developing an authentic character in a culturally competent way.

Creating the script was an iterative process with drafts and adaptations. The beat sheet referenced above served as the foundation, while the revisions helped to further my work and also shows the process of world building and character development that is critical to creating

authentic stories. Demonstrating the growth and changes allows you to see the work that was done to create the final product. The drafted script below reflects edits and changes while the final script follows.



NINURAI

~~Long ago during the Edo period, when Ninja and Samurai were in their Golden Age, it was taboo for those two worlds to coexist. Ninurai was born of these two worlds. Ninurai is no ordinary child. Senshi has Ninurai train from the time he is one years old. Starting with holding his breath under water and swimming for miles for stamina. By three, walking on branches without snapping or breaking them for stealth. Four, climbing trees, punching trees, and hiking miles for strength. By the time Ninurai is five he is familiar with weapons and poisons, knows hand to hand combat and has killed wild boars and several poisonous snakes.~~

~~Ninurai is ten years old today. For his birthday every year Senshi tells Ninurai a little bit about his Father.~~



INT. HOUSE-MORNING



SENSHI

Wake up Ninurai.

Senshi looks out the window in the kitchen, as the sun is rising on the small village. Ninurai yawns and stretches. Senshi is packing fishing equipment in the kitchen.

NINURAI

Today is the day. Please tell me more about my Father?

SENSHI

Okay, where were we last? HIDO was a great Samurai. The night we met he was severely wounded from a battle and was covered in blood from fresh wounds. I was in a tree collecting moss and mushrooms, when I saw him stumble over the knoll. He fell against a tree and slumped to the ground. After resting for some time, Luna moth began to swarm him and completely cover him. I had a strong urge to help him as if my spirit suggest I had no other choice. I came down from the tree and he was still passed out from blood loss. The Luna moth scatter in to the night sky. I start a fire and made a mushroom broth for him. I clean his wounds and apply some sap and leaves to cover his

2.

wounds. I lay with him to keep him warm. He woke up and told me, "You are as beautiful as the full moon. You must be my spirit guide to take me in to my next life". I laughed and told him that I was only there to help a wounded man. He said, "Destiny has brought us together on this night". I asked him how he got his wounds and he answered, "I fought my bestfriend, we were brothers that shared a dream, both Generals in our own army and wanted to rule in different ways. I am about peace and leadership and he is about ruling with an iron clad fist and as a result, I am laying here before you, due to a betrayal. Take this necklace and sword as a form of payment". Then I gave him my necklace. I think he said his name was Riku or Riko. I will tell you the rest when I return.

Senshi is walking out the door.

NINURAI

Mom I want to come fishing with you.

SENSHI

Stay and tend the garden. Pick daikon and mizuna for the fish I bring back.

EXT. GARDEN-MORNING

~~From the garden Ninurai sees four of his friends (Kaito, Yuma, Kazu and Maki) are playing with a young ox in the field. Kaito is Ninurai's best friend. Last summer they made a blood oath to always be there for each other because Kaito's Mom is sick and both the boys share a birthday and are both only children. Senshi often makes dinner for Kaito and his Mom.~~

~~As Ninurai is done picking vegetables, a band of Ronin swarms the feild his friends are playing in. The Ronin capture the boys, tossing them in a wagon. Ninurai hides behind a tree. Ninurai looks on to the unknown Ronin. He looks in every direction, sees no one is watching him. He sneaks in to the wagon while the Ronin are asking the villagers if there are any more boys.~~

~~Crimacing in the distance, underneath the shadows of the~~

2-

~~trees,~~ Riko Akiko the General of the Ronin hunches over in approval of the new captures.

NINURAI  
Kaito get out of here.

KAITO  
No way I'm leaving you.

YUMA  
What about us?

NINURAI  
I can only free one of you and it should be Kaito because of his sick Mom and he can tell my Mom what happened and she will track these Ronin and find us.

MAKI  
Ninurai is right.

Ninurai pushes Kaito out of the wagon. Kaito runs and hides behind bushes. The Ronin ~~make their way to the~~ wagon. The Ronin take the boys back to their encampment.

RONIN 1  
If you become Ronin you will be trained as Samurai and be part of Genral Riko's army.

RONIN 2  
If not, death!

The boys arrive. General Riko ~~greet the new captures by~~ pulling the boys out of the wagon one by one from their arms, to inspect them like livestock. Riko sticks his hand in Yuma's mouth, searching for rotten teeth and any signs of ailment. Riko tosses Yuma to the ground like a wet chicken.

RIKO  
Kill this one. He is weak. Throw his body in the river.

Ninurai jumps up, runs infront of Yuma.

NINURAI  
Don't you touch him! I will kill you!

Riko ~~sees this and~~ hits Ninurai on his head from behind knocking him out.

4.

RIKO

Watch this one, he has potential. He has the will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach his full potential, he has the keys to unlock the door to my unstoppable army.

A Captain throws Ninurai, Kazu and Maki in to a cave.

INT. CAVE-NIGHT



Ninurai wakes up and the other boys are asleep. Ninurai practices his breathing techniques and ninja hand signs. After 3 days of holding the boys captive in a cave and starving them, Maki dies from starvation. Ninurai and Kazu are released to start their training.

NINURAI

It's just me and you Kazu. We have to get through this. We can not let these men conquer us. He who conquers himself is the mightiest warrior.

~~Because~~ the camp is continuously moving across Japan, it is taking Senshi longer to track Ninurai and the boys.

~~Weeks go by. (Montage)~~

~~Ninurai naturally excels at his Samurai training.~~

EXT. MOUNTAIN SIDE-DAY



KAZU

I can't believe it's been three months already.

NINURAI

I know, I've been counting the days and the trees I've been leaving marks on for my Mom to find us.

Ninurai and Kazu are scouting the area for resources while Ronin chaperone. Bushes near by shake. ~~A face appears amongst the bushes.~~

SENSHI

I have finally found you. The villagers are worried about you boys.

NINURAI

Yuma and Maki didn't make it.

5.

SENSHI

Well let's get you two out of here now!

NINURAI

Take Kazu with you. I over heard two Captains talking about a sword in a near by Buddhist Temple that they are looking for. That could be the sword you lost a year ago. Dad's sword. I have to see for myself.

SENSHI

I have to get you two home.

NINURAI

Mom there's no time, just get Kazu out of here. I'll catch up with you once I see if it is Dad's sword. And I'm sure the general that took us is the one you talked about fighting dad. For me, the only way out is inward. I must accept that at the center of all of this I will not face the General but myself.

SENSHI

Shhhh! Ronin are coming. Let's go Kazu. Ninurai, I will come back for you.

Senshi grabs Kazu and darts in to the tree tops and vanishes. The Ronin chaperone find Ninurai by himself.

RONIN 1

Where is the other boy?

NINURAI

His name is Kazu!

RONIN 1

I don't care you little shit! Where is he?

NINURAI

I don't know. He said he was going to go piss and hasn't come back yet.

RONIN 1

Well go find him, cause if we find him...

6.

RONIN 2  
You don't want us to find him.

**Here's an example of Slice and Dice.**

SENSHI  
Okay, where were we last?

NINURAI  
The part about Hido being a great  
Samurai and the night you met him - he  
was severely wounded from a battle...

SENSHI  
That's right. And he was covered  
in blood from fresh wounds. After  
resting for some time...

NINURAI  
Don't forget about the part where  
you were in a tree collecting moss and  
mushrooms and when you saw Hido stumbling  
over the knoll.

SENSHI  
You can tell this story yourself,  
Ninurai!

NINURAI  
(laughing)  
Finish the story!

NINURAI  
Okay, okay! Luna moth began to  
swarm him and completely cover him. I  
had a strong urge to help him as if my  
spirit suggest I had no other choice.

NINURAI

EXT. SMALL VILLAGE-MORNING

Sun is rising on a small fishing village in Nagoya. This area is along a trade route to Kyoto. Tucked tightly between the mountains and the bay. This region is filled with trees, fields and hillsides. The houses are small with thatch roof and the walls are made of wood and clay. The people in the village start the day fishing or farming. The men are in long-waisted jackets flared at the sides with long tubular sleeves and baggy pants secured with ties just above the knees. The women wear an upper garment resembling the men's jacket and a dress.

INT. HOUSE-CONTINUOUS

Senshi crosses from kitchen to Ninurai's bedroom. The wood planks in the floor creak.

SENSHI

Wake up Ninurai.

Senshi crosses to kitchen, looks out the window. The sun is rising on the small village. Ninurai yawns and stretches. Senshi packs fishing equipment in the kitchen.

NINURAI

Today is the day. Please tell me more about my Father?

SENSHI

Okay, where were we last?

NINURAI

The part about Hido being a great Samurai and the night you met him - he was severely wounded from a battle...

SENSHI

That's right. And he was covered in blood from fresh wounds. After resting for some time...

NINURAI

Don't forget about the part where you were in a tree collecting moss and mushrooms and when you saw Hido stumbling over the knoll.

2.

SENSHI

You can tell this story yourself,  
Ninurai!

NINURAI

(laughing)

I can finish the story!

NINURAI

Okay, okay! Luna moth began to swarm  
him and completely cover him. You had  
a strong urge to help him as if your  
spirit suggest you had no other  
choice.

SENSHI

That's right, I came down from the  
tree and he was still passed out from  
blood loss. The Luna moth scatter in  
to the night sky. I start a fire and  
made a mushroom broth for him. I clean  
his wounds and apply some sap and  
leaves to cover his wounds. I lay with  
him to keep him warm. He woke up and  
told me...

NINURAI

"You are as beautiful as the full  
moon. You must be my spirit guide to  
take me in to my next life". Smoochy  
smoochy smooch.

(laughing)

SENSHI

I laughed and told him that I was only  
there to help a wounded man.

NINURAI

He said, "Destiny has brought us  
together on this night".

SENSHI

I asked him how he got his wounds and  
he answered, "I fought my bestfriend,  
we were brothers that shared a dream,  
both Generals in our own army and  
wanted to rule in different ways. I am  
about peace and leadership and he is  
about ruling with an iron clad fist



3.

and as a result, I am laying here  
before you.

NINURAI  
Sounds like betrayal.

SENSHI  
That's when your dad gave me a  
necklace and sword as a form of  
payment. Then I gave him my necklace.  
I think he said the Generals name was  
Riku or Riko. I will tell you the rest  
when I return.

Senshi is walking out the door.

NINURAI  
Mom I want to come fishing with you.

SENSHI  
Stay and tend the garden. Pick daikon  
and mizuna for the fish I bring back.

EXT. GARDEN-MORNING

Ninurai is picking vegetables and sees four of his friends  
(Kaito, Yuma, Kazu and Maki) are playing with a young ox in  
the field. Kaito is Ninurai's best friend.

EXT. FIELD-LATE MORNING

Ronin soldiers swarm the field Ninurai's friends are playing  
in. The Ronin capture the boys, tossing them in a wagon.

MAKI  
No! What are you doing?

KAZU  
Where are you taking us?

YUMA  
Don't touch me. Get off of me.

Ninurai hides behind a tree. Ninurai looks on to the unknown  
Ronin. He looks in every direction, sees no one is watching  
him. Ninurai crosses to the wagon.

EXT. HILLSIDE-LATE MORNING

Riko Akiko the General of the Ronin hunches over in approval  
of the new captures.

4.

EXT. FIELD-LATE MORNING

Ninurai sneaks in to the wagon while the Ronin are asking the villagers if there are any more boys.

NINURAI

Kaito get out of here.

KAITO

No way I'm leaving you.

YUMA

What about us?

NINURAI

I can only free one of you and it should be Kaito because of his sick Mom and he can tell my Mom what happened and she will track these Ronin and find us.

KAITO

No I can't! What about our blood oath?

MAKI

Ninurai is right.

Ninurai pushes Kaito out of the wagon. Kaito runs and hides behind bushes. The Ronin cross to wagon. The Ronin leave the small village.

RONIN 1

If you become Ronin you will be trained as Samurai and be part of Genral Riko's army.

RONIN 2

If not, death!

EXT. RONIN ENCAMPMENT-MIDDAY

General Riko crosses to wagon pulls Yuma out of the wagon by his arms, to inspect him like livestock. Riko sticks his hand in Yuma's mouth, searching for rotten teeth and signs of ailment. Riko tosses Yuma to the ground like a wet chicken.

RIKO

Kill this one. He is weak. Throw his body in the river.

Ninurai jumps up, runs in front of Yuma.

5.

NINURAI

Don't you touch him! I'll kill you!

Riko hits Ninurai on his head from behind knocking him out.

RIKO

Watch this one, he has potential. He has the will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach his full potential, he has the keys to unlock the door to my unstoppable army.

A Captain throws Ninurai, Kazu and Maki in to a cave.

INT. CAVE-NIGHT

The cave is dark and damp infested with spiders and centipedes. Spider crawls across Ninurai's face. Ninurai swats at his face, wakes up and the other boys are asleep. Ninurai practices his breathing techniques and ninja hand signs. Ninurai make a third mark on the cave for 3 days.

KAZU

Are they going to feed us I'm starving.

NINURAI

Wake up Maki.

KAZU

Maki wake up!

Maki is dead from starvation.

NINURAI

It's just me and you Kazu. We have to get through this. We can not let these men conquer us. He who conquers himself is the mightiest warrior.

Ninurai and Kazu hold each other for warmth. Propped up against the cave wall they fall asleep.

EXT. MOUNTAIN SIDE-DAY

Ninurai and Kazu are scouting the area for resources while Ronin chaperone. Bushes near by shake.

6.

KAZU

I can't believe it's been three months already.

NINURAI

I know, I've been counting the days and the trees I've been leaving marks on for my Mom to find us. What was that in the bushes?

Senshi leaps out of bushes. Reaches for Ninurai to inspect him and hug him. Ninurai swats her away.

SENSHI

What's wrong? I have finally found you. The villagers are worried about you boys.

NINURAI

Mom not now. Yuma and Maki didn't make it.

SENSHI

Well let's get you two out of here now!

NINURAI

Take Kazu with you. I over heard two Captains talking about a sword in a near by Buddhist Temple that they are looking for. That could be the sword you lost a year ago. Dad's sword. I have to see for myself.

SENSHI

I have to get you two home.

NINURAI

Mom there's no time, just get Kazu out of here. I'll catch up with you once I see if it is Dad's sword. And I'm sure the general that took us is the one you talked about fighting dad. For me, the only way out is inward. I must accept that at the center of all of this I will not face the General but myself.

SENSHI

Shhhh! Ronin are coming. Let's go Kazu. Ninurai, I will come back for

7.

you.

Senshi grabs Kazu and darts in to the tree tops and vanishes.  
The Ronin chaperone find Ninurai by himself.

RONIN 1

Where is the other boy?

NINURAI

His name is Kazu!

RONIN 1

I don't care you little shit! Where is  
he?

NINURAI

I don't know. He said he was going to  
go piss and hasn't come back yet.

RONIN 1

Well go find him, cause if we find  
him...

RONIN 2

You don't want us to find him.

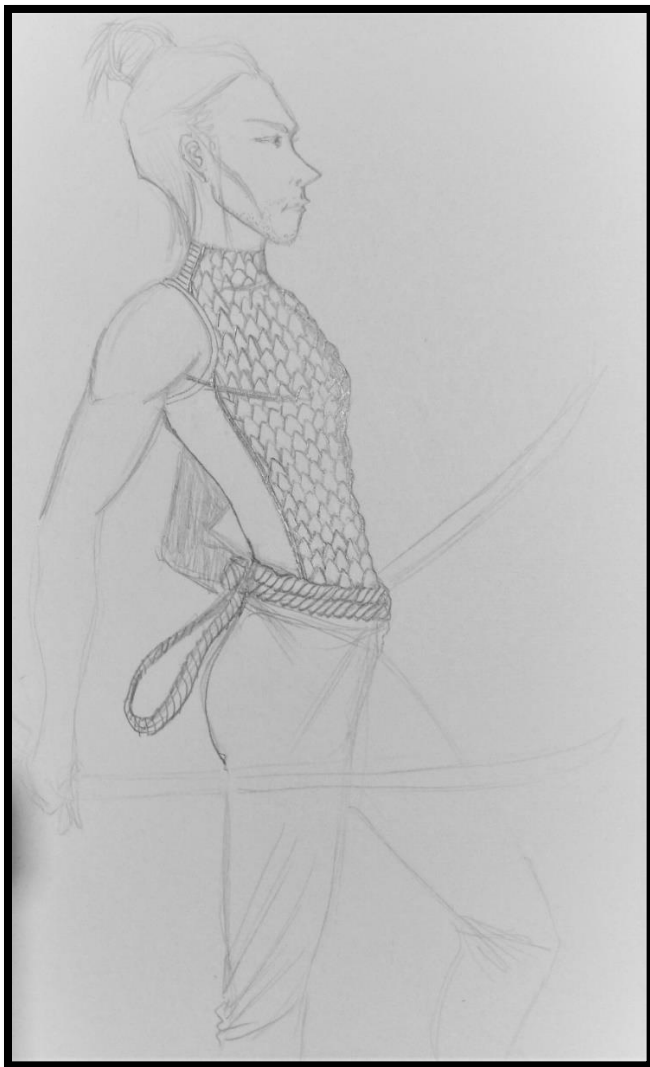
The script helps to understand the key factors that go into creating authentic characters and worlds. I contend that it is critical to create worlds that exist within their proper context and cultural guidelines. If you view a character in isolation strictly on visual appearance you will solely be able to gauge a general adherence to a specific phenotype or region. By providing context through a story, you allow the readers and consumers to view a multi-dimensional perspective that incorporates elements of the culture or time period being discussed. In shaping animation and understanding the way that cultures and characters are presented, having a script informs the ability of artists to tell a story authentically.

## 4.5 Final Character

In this section you will find the last sketches of Ninurai in finished form to complete the final product. These drawings are the culmination of the entire process (see Figures 11 – 13).

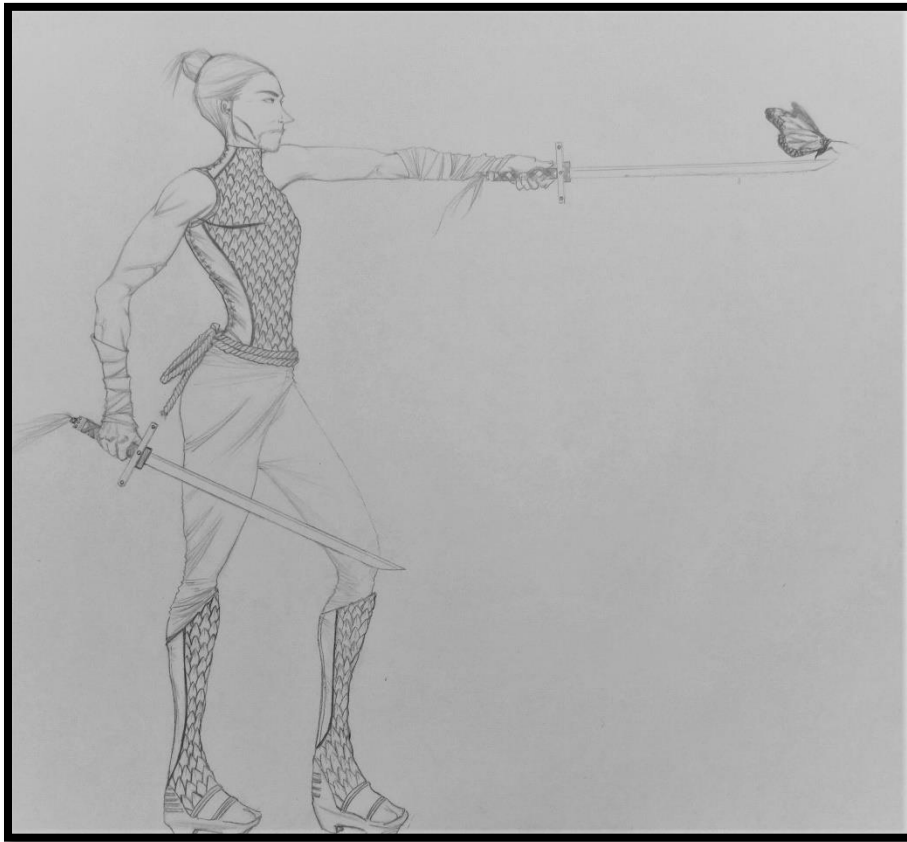
### Figure 11

*Sketch of Ninurai*



**Figure 12**

*Finalized sketch of Ninurai*





**Figure 13**

*Finalized illustration of Ninurai*



In chapter 5, I will discuss what I have learned and the implications for art educational practice. As I have shown in Chapter 4, Art Educators should and must consider the ways that they can work to create authentic worlds by supporting the development of authentic characters by their students. In considering the implications, first and foremost using various mediums (scripts, illustrations, stories) can be powerful tools to shape the ways we talk about and engage in conversations about authenticity. Finally, it is critical that we not only empower individuals to create these stories, but that we create processes and curriculum that centers authenticity and representation.

## 5 A REFLECTION AND A CHALLENGE

As a creator, this project has been a critical way for me to grow, develop, and to refine my work and my voice. The goal of this project was stated early on to provide an example and guide to others to engage in addressing the lack of representation in anime. The work I presented in the preceding chapters is the culmination of a lifetime of consuming content and failing to see accurate and authentic representations of identity. This project began with a quote that said, “representation are crucial” and ultimately authenticity and accuracy are key elements.

The first section introduced the topic and critical importance of authentic representation in animation. The literature review further demonstrated that the lack of representation is prevalent and problematic. The issue of prevalence is demonstrated by the documented limited instances of authentic representation of characters on steaming platforms like Netflix. The problematic nature of the lack of representation impacts the development and understanding of cultures in media. This lack of authentic representation is drawn from bias, my project represents a strategy to address the very issue that the literature points to, a lack of authentic representation. I then provided a plan to address these challenges with specific research questions and created illustrations and content to serve as a model. Moving forward, it is in how both in the education of animators, support of creators of color, and a holistic commitment to providing authentic representation.

### 5.1 Research Questions Answered

In my project, I start with three research questions, which each serves to inform and guide my process. In completing my project, I gain valuable insights and start to create a structure and process to create my own authentic characters and serve as a guide for others. This section is organized with each research question as a subheading and a brief discussion of the

insights learned below it. There are no simple solutions to result in a shift to authentic representation, but there are simple steps that can be taken today to start to make changes in this critically important area. The first step is to identify how to apply the concept of authentic representation.

**How can creators/animators apply concepts of authentic representation to accurately represent characters from cultures other than their own?**

Each research question has broad impact, but this question is at the core of my project. To provide context and an approach for this area, I provided a step by step “how to” guide to drawing phenotypes that first starts with doing a study on the phenotype you plan to draw. Whether through a quick google search or by going to texts, the process is critical to provide accurate representations of cultures. Beginning with an ovoid structure and refining allows for the specific tasks associated with adjusting and aligning to provide authentic representation to occur.

**What processes and considerations must be made throughout the drawing and design process to authentically represent individuals?**

To understand the process, it is primarily about using your references and resources to construct an authentic image. We can use section 4.4 from my thesis to illustrate this point. In section 4.4, a general overview of eye structures is shown to understand the broad characteristics. However, as with any phenotype there are varieties based on geography for instance which require further consideration. It is critical to accommodate for these variations in both your process of drawing and in your conceptual framework to achieve the desired goals. In Figure 6, after having started with a generic shape and refining the eyes took several revisions to

ensure that the intended phenotype was achieved by using pencil and erasers until the correct aspects of the eyes were formed.

### **How does utilizing concepts related to authentic representation impact the design and creative process?**

In my initial proposal, I asserted that the authentic representation of characters would have impacts on the design and creative process. This was very true as at its core, this process adds an additional step to the process in working to identify the appropriate phenotype in advance and then use that as a model for your work. The entire process from identifying phenotype, researching, and the drawing process took a total of 5 hours. One of which was used to achieve the goal of authentic representation by identifying the phenotype and the cultural and historical context of the piece. While that increased the total time to achieve the desired result, the outcomes in changing the challenges presented in the literature review merit an intentional approach to address the challenges. Additionally, as more artists engage this process the resources available will increase making the time needed decrease. In addressing the research questions, the process allowed for a thoughtful and intentional construction of characters that will benefit my work and the work of others.

## **5.2 Implications for Art Educators**

Art educators are an important part of the education system. Teaching students about the way to represent the world, showing techniques, shaping minds, and creating the next generations. It is because of this role that it is critical for art educators to support students understanding the technical skills to represent races authentically, but also must be able to teach the importance of creating content that is an authentic representation of the person and their

heritage. I believe there are lessons for art educators to take from this work. Anime provides a unique educational opportunity for educators to leverage culture and equity.

Students consume and enjoy anime as it is a medium that is becoming more popular as it enters mainstream. This reality provides an opportunity to begin to digest and discuss conversations of race, representation, and authenticity at early stages of development. This will be beneficial in enhancing the quality of the work being done by students, but also allow to have a positive impact on celebrating and valuing difference. This introduction to topics that can be discussed with multiple levels of complexity assists students' development and understanding of others. This practice can influence instruction as well.

In the curriculum and guidance for assignments there are opportunities for both you as an educator in providing instruction, but also in developing key skills for the students. One such opportunity would be to encourage students to create a character for an assignment that wouldn't normally be seen in the genre. This allows them to both explore representation and introduce some of the flaws of media, which as discussed in my literature review have long term negative impacts. The additional area for consideration is when having students create a character there must be an element of conducting research to ensure authenticity and representation. This skill will serve them well long term as they progress as an artist. Art educators are uniquely positioned to have an impact on broader elements of representation and hope this project provides some insights to opportunities.

## Conclusion

Each illustration, argument, and discussion presented tells the story of how someone, regardless of their race, can accurately and authentically create characters and stories. People of color have been misrepresented in many artforms and anime is no exception. This has gone on for too long and now is the time to make changes. This is about properly educating ourselves and holding ourselves accountable as educators and creators. The details on the drawings, the research done to tell the story accurately and authentically are key steps to change the lack of representation. As the literature clearly states there is a crisis that has negative impacts on children from marginalized background, promotes false narratives, and works against fostering an equitable and just society where everyone can see themselves authentically represented in media. Like any medium anime is having to evolve and change. But with educators and creators trying to produce content that is diverse, unfettered, and unpredictable, anime still has a bright future ahead of it.

This project has just been the beginning and as the work continues it is crucial that authenticity is viewed as an opportunity for animators, creators and art educators to make a difference. I challenge future art educators and animators to create authentic and accurately represent diverse identities and cultures in animation. So that we can create a world that authentically and accurately represents who we are as humans and our many wonderful and beautiful cultures. By following the outlined process to achieve authentic representation we can begin to quickly see changes in medias representation of cultures. This authentic representation will foster a socially just world that celebrates the unique elements of diversity.

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