

Bering Sea Arctic Adventure
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Overview

In the land of ice and snow at the top of the world a village sleeps- all but two elderly people. They are elders who are charged with keeping the traditions of their people alive. They appeal to young people for help as they strive to keep their subsistence lifestyle and educate the next generation in the rich cultural tradition of their people.

The Bering Sea Arctic adventure online game will be a vehicle for education and information and enjoyment. Targeted to youth ages 9-11, the game intends to simulate the experience of Bering Sea life by presenting fun and challenging activities that players will be tasked with. While entertaining, the information contained in the game will be an accurate account of the survival techniques that have evolved over many generations in a land that can be unforgiving to both man and beast.

Background

The Bering Sea Arctic Adventure will take users to the far north, a land of ice and cold. The *Bering Sea* covers over 2 million square kilometers of the northernmost region of the Pacific Ocean. Its borders are defined to the north by Alaska, the Bering Strait, and northeastern Siberia, and to the south by the arc of the Alaska Peninsula, Aleutian Islands, and Commander Islands. The Bering Sea can usually be traversed by ship only from June to October. The area encompasses over 880,000 square miles of the northern *Pacific Ocean* and is one of the richest and most diverse sub-*polar* and polar marine

ecosystems in the world. The Bering Strait connects the sea to the *Arctic Ocean* through a narrow neck of water fifty-three miles wide. It is a critical area for *marine life* migration to the summering grounds in the Chukchi Sea to the north and elsewhere in the Arctic region. Hundreds of species of birds, marine mammals and fish inhabit or migrate through the region during the year. It is the home for eighty percent of the United States sea bird population and the primary home of the northern fur seals, and large populations of Stellar sea lions, walrus and whales.

Sea ice is apparent in all but the southern reaches of the Bering Sea. It begins forming as late as November and can remain well into June. The ice floats on the surface and moves with the wind and storms that can occur every few days. The sea ice helps define the *ecosystem* of the region and in the habitat of much of the marine life and the polar bear.

Climate variation and *global warming* have affected the ice coverage and thickness over the past several decades, and scientists monitor it closely. Indigenous communities are especially concerned with the impact of the changing climate on *subsistence harvesting* that is closely connected to their culture. (*Italics above indicate hyperlinks to information about the Bering Sea accessed by clicking a button on the home page. The information is displayed in text, maps, and/or pictures*).

Back Story

A pall has been cast on the village of Uniqui on Saint Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea region of Alaska. The adult villagers are in some kind of deep sleep. Only grandfather

and grandmother are awake and they are hungry! The storeroom is nearly empty. Grandfather and grandmother can't hunt and gather. In order to survive they need help. They send a postcard announcing the emergency and ask you to come north. Now!

Target Audience

The Bering Sea Arctic Adventure game is designed to be an immersive educational experience for elementary students, in grades 4 and 5. The purpose of the game is to educate students about the life of the people of the Bering Sea. They will adopt the lifestyle of the people in order to understand it and be tasked with hunting and gathering. The overall goal is to keep grandfather and grandfather alive!

The appeal to young people is in the exploration of another world, a strange mysterious environment that most will not know directly. Players will gain points as they amass provisions that will keep grandmother and grandfather safe from starvation. There will be an area of the game that keeps track of the provisions gathered and a scorecard that marks progress. They will be challenged because as each day passes food and fuel will be attained or lost. The game starts with two days of food and fuel. The tasks will be ordered from relatively easy to more complex and dangerous. The weather is always a factor- there is risk of freezing and of high winds and thin ice. The altruistic tendencies of youth can be expressed in this game. When users have filled the storeroom the sleeping villagers wake up and praise and congratulate them. A celebration called a potlatch will culminate the game.

Look

Bering Sea Adventure is an online game. The home page will be designed with a title at the top, the main play area in the center and buttons on the left and right side of the playing area with links to information about the Bering Sea; climate change and its effects on the region; a text based discussion area; a scorecard which tracks the players success and links to others players scores; a help feature that explains the game; and a ticking clock feature measured in “days”. A panel at the bottom of the screen will allow users to text questions and comments to the grandparents. Above the text panel will be a horizontal thermometer with a color range from blue to yellow that displays the temperature of the day. The temperature of the day will be illuminated. The scale of temperatures will range from -40 to 80 degrees.

Players will login to the site. On the first login an animated postcard will appear with the image of the village. There is text on the postcard that reads “Wish You Were Here! The postcard depicts a quiet village with the whites of waves of the Bering Sea churning behind it. A soundtrack of wind and waves will be heard. An illustration of grandfather and grandmother look out from the postcard.

Click their image and they speak:

Grandfather: Hey how are you? It’s been a long time since you’ve visited and we’d really like to see you! It’s gotten kind of lonely up north what with all the sleeping villagers...

Grandmother: What he's trying to say is we need you! You see there has been a visitor and now that guy's gone and all our friends and neighbors and relations are asleep. We'll explain more when you get here. We've got just a couple days of food and fuel left and so you see we really need help. Come quick!

An icon on the post card prompts: Accept the Challenge

After users click Accept the Challenge the post card will display a message from grandmother thanking them:

“Hi “username”, I'm so glad that you'll be visiting. There is a lot to do but with help we'll get it done. You know I've been here all my life and worked very hard but lately my limbago is bothering me. I'll show you all you need to know about women's tasks and grandfather will teach you about the rest! You can use the text box at the bottom of the screen to communicate with us.” Grandmother

The postcard will display a button to Start the Game

After users click Start the Game the screen will change and they will be prompted to choose an avatar. Avatars will be animated characters with features of Bering Sea native people. They will choose an avatar- a boy or a girl and select an outfit. Girls wear a quaspak- a traditional dress and a select a pair of boots. This is the daily wear for indoors. Boys wear traditional tunics shirts and cloth pants. Players will also have the option of choosing an animal helper that accompanies them in their tasks.

Interactivity

After players choose their avatar and animal helper they will be transported to the home of grandfather and grandmother. Grandfather will ask the user if they would like to hear the story of the recent events of the village. When the user types in yes, or tell the story, grandfather will begin and grandmother will add to it. All of the dialogue will be spoken/narrated with audio. At any point in the game players can text questions. If a question is asked, the speaker will answer. Players will access spokes of the game from the grandparent's home in the main playing area and through side bar buttons to the left and right.

Setting & Style

The game will be designed in a graphic style that will appeal to 9-12 year olds. Figures of characters and animals will have a whimsical but accurate depiction. The tone of the home page and linked pages of the site are depicted in colors seen in the natural environment of the region- deep sea green, golden and burnished dirt, white caps, and bright berry purple blue and red.

The most prominent location is the interior great room of grandfather and grandmother. It is a semi-subterranean structure that uses the ground for insulation. The home is built of sod blocks laid over driftwood and whalebone. Inside is a large room with three windows that present a view of the tundra, the cliffs and the ocean- three areas that sustain the survival of the people.

Inside the home are the tools that support the subsistence lifestyle of the Bering Sea people. There are shelves where tools and an old photo album are placed, an aged wooden chest that holds the materials to make clothes, mittens, parkas and boots. There is a hearth where wood is burned to heat the home and a stack of wood next to it. There is also a stack of interesting shaped wood- tools in the making. These may include wooden visors and goggles, handles for ulus and axes, spears, and atl atls. Not all of the objects in grandparents house are used in tasks but they all do have a story that relates to the cultural traditions of the people. Players can click on the artifacts and the grandparent will tell the story. All stories will be brief, from 30 seconds to two minutes.

The windows look out on the world of a persistent universe. As the morning sun rises each scene is clearly defined. The light shifts as the day progresses illuminating the deep green blue color of the Bering Sea, river water that reflects the sky, gray brown and green brush and chocolate rock. The nights are dark with a blanket of stars visible through all three windows, the blanket that protects all areas when night falls. If a player logs into the sight at night the grandparents will offer to tell a story, as the story finishes it will be daylight and the player can choose a task.

Soundtrack

Grandfather and grandmother animated characters will speak in audible clips.

Additional audio assets are crackling fire inside the home, crunch of footsteps as users traverse the tundra and ice, waves of the ocean, bird calls and wind.

When users pick berries the sound of the bushes rustling will be heard. When users catch fish the sound of water swishing will be heard

Gaming Elements

Users progress will be tracked in a sidebar area adjacent to the main playing area. After the initial login players will begin subsequent sessions where they left off. The game will keep track of their visits and accomplishments. Their score will increase as the storeroom is being filled.

Player Point of View

Players will role play in the third person POV to accomplish tasks of the game. They will interact with the NPC grandfather and grandmother through text and the grandparents will answer by speaking. Artifacts in the home of the grandparents will be clickable and when selected players will be told what they are and what they are used for. Players will choose to set out with the tool to forage, gather or hunt. They will click one of the areas seen from the window of grandparents house and be transported to an animated landscape where the task is to be accomplished.

Before players set out they go to the closet and choose traditional clothing for the task, such as fur or gut skin parkas and boots, gauntlets, visors and sunshades. These will be selected from the closet inside grandfather and grandmother's home. As players collect provisions they will be added to the storage closet and be congratulated by the grandparents. The storage closet will fill or diminish as players move through the game. Its contents will be represented through graphic depictions of fuel and food.

Characters

Grandfather

He is seventyfive years old and has long dark hair that he wears in a ponytail. He is five feet five inches tall and quite slim. His eyes are brown and he still can see very well. He is quite lucid and loves to tell stories about hunting whales. He sometimes forgets that he is elderly and wants to go out and hunt again, but he is not able to. He believes that boys should do many things and that girls should stick close to home. He is traditional and wants everyone to follow the traditional ways. That means boys must hunt and fish and girls must sew and weave. Grandfather holds knowledge of the people passed to him from his grandfather. He is happy to share the knowledge when the sun has gone down and the stars twinkle in the sky.

Grandmother

She is sixtyeight years old and a bit heavy considering she is five feet tall. She has white hair and a chubby pretty face. She has many women's stories to tell and will, but

grandfather sometimes steals the show with his tales of the sea. She has short fingers and is an expert gut skin article maker- she sews parkas and vessels and boots. She also makes gloves and boots and parkas of animal fur. Old grandmother believes in tradition but thinks that boys and girls should be well rounded and be experienced in all aspects of survival. This sometimes causes her to disagree with old grandfather.

Animal Helpers

Players can choose an animal helper that will accompany them to grandparents home and on their adventure. Animals can be selected for various tasks for instance birds are most helpful with berry and gathering. These graphically represented animals include a Puffin, a Kittlitz's Murrelet or Eagle, Stellar's Sea Lion, Ringed Seal, Northern Sea Otter, Polar Bear, or Sled dog. The animals will speak when texted. They will help with the tasks but sometimes they will get mischievous and work a bit against the user- the Murrelet is quite fond of berries and will guide players through the challenges of the tundra bushes but will also try to eat some while they are being gathered. The animals have a dual nature, helper and possible food source. If many days pass without success with tasks they may need to be eaten.

Icinerraq

The icinerraq are recalled by Bering Sea people as incredibly amazing and intriguing spiritual beings that can transform themselves into many forms. Their power is unbounded. In this game, an icinerraq visits the village in human form and casts the

sleeping spell on the villagers- with the exception of the old grandparents. To them he shows life of the future, a deserted village. He tells them that as traditional ways are lost with each passing generation it results in the extinction of the people and their way of subsistence life. He challenges them to teach the younger generation these ways. This is the purpose of the game. In times of need the icinerraq will make an appearance to players. Times of need are when the storeroom is empty and two days have passed without replenishment of any kind. If this happens the icinerraq will refill the storeroom with two days of food so that players can succeed in their mission of keeping the grandparents alive while learning the traditional subsistence tasks that have sustained the indigenous people for generations.

Structure: Hub and Spoke

Hub

After choosing the avatar users and their animal friend will be transported to the hub of the game. The hub is the cozy home of the grandparents. It is a long room, about 10' x 10' and a fire is burning in the hearth. Grandmother and grandfather sit in their wooden chairs side by side next to the fire. The home contains areas for cooking, mending clothes and tools, and the hearth which is where the grandparents are seated. There is a seat for the user and a place for their animal as well. On one side of the hearth are shelves with a photo album and various tools. Baskets hang on the wall. On the far side of the room is a closet that contains the various clothing that must be worn when going outside. As users prepare for tasks they will need to go to the closet and choose appropriate clothing. Another door leads to the storeroom.

Grandfather will ask the user if they would like to hear the story of the recent events of the village. When the user types in yes, or tell the story, grandfather will begin and grandmother will add to it. All of the dialogue will be spoken/narrated with audio. Users can text questions during the story. If a question is asked, the speaker will stop and answer, then go on in the direction that the question prompts.

Spokes

Three windows look out on the varied landscape of the area: tundra, cliffs, and sea. The windows act as portals to the spokes or activity areas of the game. The windows present a persistent universe, changing light as the day progresses. The tundra is a coastal region that consists of sedge moss and low-shrub tundra with willows, dwarf birch and berry trees. The cliffs look out over the sea and are located next to a fast flowing river that is frozen. The sea is vast with sea ice moving through it.

There are three doors in the grandparent's home. One leads to a closet, one leads to the storehouse and one leads to a community room. When players click the closet door they are transported to an area that holds all the clothes needed for particular tasks. They can click on an article of clothing and describe it. Grandfather or grandmother will call from their room and say what it is for. They must search the closet for the appropriate clothes for their chosen task. The door to the storehouse leads into a small but well organized room that has shelves for food and a box for wood. The contents of this room will vary

with the success of players. The community room is accessed after the storeroom is filled with food and fuel that will sustain the grandparents for two months. When that happens, accompanied by the grandparents, players will enter the community room filled with the villagers and everyone will give a cheer. The icinerraq will appear and congratulate the entire village on their successful quest.

Tasks

The game presents tasks for players ranging from relatively easy to increasingly more difficult. When tools are clicked, one of the grandparents will tell their story. If a player clicks a tool that is not the primary task one of the grandparent's will tell the tool story but indicate it is not the first task. Players must find the first task and execute it. Tasks areas are accessed through the window portals that take the player to either the tundra, the cliffs or the sea. The first task is to gather firewood, the second to gather berries. Both take place on the tundra, the window portal on the left side of the grandparent's home. Next comes tom cod ice fishing and egg gathering, both accessed through the center window, the portal to the cliffs and river. The most difficult task is seal and whale hunting which is performed on the sea, the window portal on the right side of the home.

The animated areas that are the setting for the tasks- tundra, cliffs, and sea- hold dangers that players will have to surmount. After clicking the portal, players find themselves a fair distance from their destination. They must travel across sedge moss and low-shrub tundra to find wood and berries. They may catch themselves in thorny bushes or sink in

the soft sedge moss if they are not careful. Players must climb the steep cliffs and hang from ropes to gather eggs, there is a danger of falling or being attacked by angry birds. When fishing there are thin ice areas that players may fall into and the temperature may suddenly drop presenting the risk of freezing. On the sea searching for whale high winds can set the kayaks can be swept far from the mainland. Sea ice capped by snow and measuring eighteen inches to several feet in height may drift and collide with the boat. This is when their animal helper can really come in handy!

Engagement

Tasks are designed to be carried out in each area depicted through the window. Users will click on the window and be transported to an animated landscape. As they succeed in their task a storeroom is filled with their bounty. Once the storeroom is filled they have accomplished the goal of survival.

Challenges

The weather is always a factor, there is risk of freezing and of high winds and thin ice. The cliffs are high and to get eggs users must suspend from ropes. There is always the spector of starvation in such a hostile climate. Users may come back to the village without food and fail to provide for the grandparents. Animal helpers may have to be eaten if there is no food.

Summary

The Bering Sea Arctic Adventure endeavors to present an interesting and engaging educational game that will disseminate information about a geographical region and traditional culture that still exists in today's world. It is hoped that if successful, a series of games can be developed about cultures throughout the world will follow. By interlacing digital storytelling in a realistic setting the human cultural experience can be disseminated to the next generation of decision makers and relay important information on the ramifications of human choices as they relate to traditional culture and environments.