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## Abstract

War Stories, a digital project created by Gabrielle Atwood Halko of West Chester University, seeks to frame the narrative of World War II (WWII) through the stories of children, particularly children in internment or under occupation. Halko starts with the assumption that visitors to the website are unaware of these stories, and the site largely frames itself as an educational tool that aggregates primary and secondary sources related to children during WWII. [excerpt]

## Keywords

Digital Humanities, World War II, children, digital project review

## Disciplines

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**Reviews in Digital Humanities**

# Review: War Stories

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**Project**
War Stories

**Project Directors**
Gabrielle Atwood Halko, West Chester University

**Project URL**
https://kidsandwar.com/

**Project Reviewer**
R.C. Miessler, Gettysburg College

## Project Overview

### Gabrielle Atwood Halko

A multidisciplinary website that focuses on children's experiences of incarceration, internment, and occupation during World War II (WWII), War Stories grew out of my research on missing voices in historical accounts. War Stories is the only site that aggregates multiple events from WWII to present a comprehensive, global view of children's experiences. Content begins with Japanese American internment but expands well beyond that to highlight children's lives on multiple continents and in both hemispheres. The site includes original scholarship, such as transcriptions of oral history recordings by former child incarcerees, published articles, reading lists, and teaching resources, combining my own work with a wide variety of materials from archives, museums, encyclopedias, survivors' organizations, and other informational sources.

War Stories was built in Wordpress, chosen because it is a user-friendly platform for both audience and creator (my expertise lies in the content and not in the technology). When I made my first visit to the Reading Rooms at the Imperial War Museum in 2009, I had no idea a website would be the end result. However, as I continued to painstakingly locate and transcribe oral histories of Allied child internees in the Pacific, it became clear that a vast amount of WWII history remains unexplored or relegated to the sidelines. When I taught works such as Karen Hesse's verse novel *Aleutian Sparrow* or Graham Salisbury's searing novel *Eyes of the Emperor*, my students were hungry to learn more. This was the kind of history that they found

compelling and often infuriating. "Why was I never taught this?" was a common refrain in our discussions.

I am the primary creator and maintainer of War Stories. I've applied successfully for three West Chester University graduate assistants and funded an undergraduate research assistant out of pocket; all of them helped find, vet, and add content on the site. My research assistant and I spent the summer of 2020 creating an asset inventory as we prepared to add Dublin Core metadata to the site. I have sought informal feedback on both content and structure from a range of peers, including historians, digital humanities scholars, and families of Japanese American internment survivors.

War Stories is meant for multiple audiences, including anyone interested in lesser-known experiences of WWII, especially those of children; scholars of alternate or counter-narratives within larger cultural stories; researchers in childhood studies, trauma studies, and war studies; and teachers who seek engaging historical and literary resources, including youth literature. To date, War Stories has been an independent scholarly project through which I focused on locating, building, and organizing content. Next steps include raising the site's profile and increasing user traffic with the goal of engaging new audiences and widening existing ones. In doing so, my aim is to ensure that more people learn about the crucial stories of kids who endured childhoods of deprivation and dislocation all over the world.

## Project Review

**R.C. Miessler**

War Stories, a digital project created by Gabrielle Atwood Halko of West Chester University, seeks to frame the narrative of World War II (WWII) through the stories of children, particularly children in internment or under occupation. Halko starts with the assumption that visitors to the website are unaware of these stories, and the site largely frames itself as an educational tool that aggregates primary and secondary sources related to children during WWII.

War Stories is built with the WordPress platform, with no apparent additional plugins or external digital tools. There are several transcriptions of extant oral histories from the Imperial War Museum in Microsoft Word documents; curiously, two of these rendered in an unreadable font but were easily switched to something readable. The website primarily curates links to extant content, from sources including the Imperial War Museum, the Smithsonian, and the Library of Congress. The result is an excellent

mix of primary sources, scholarly secondary sources, and news and popular websites, which all speak to the wide audience the website attempts to reach. The site navigation is divided into four sections: 1) the Americas, 2) the Pacific, 3) resources for teaching internment in the classroom, and 4) the representation of Japanese American incarceration in popular culture. The bulk of the content focuses on resources related to the internment of Japanese Americans and Canadians, which is understandable given the large amount of scholarly and popular work on their incarceration. The classroom section appears to still be under construction, as a few dead links are present.

While filled with valuable resources, the project offers little context to explain why particular websites were selected. Reworking these lists of websites into something more closely resembling an annotated bibliography, with headings and brief descriptions, would allow for ease of scanning and selecting appropriate resources to view. Additionally, many images used on the website do not have captions or attributions, making it difficult to place the context in which the original photo appeared or to trace its provenance. A particularly striking example is the "Aleutian Internment" page of the website, which uses images of Inuit to highlight the suffering of Aleutian children. Beyond more robust captions and credits, this page would be strengthened by the addition of alternative text to improve accessibility, as well use of higher quality images for easier zooming and viewing of details. Halko should also consider reaching out to Aleutian scholars and community leaders to partner with them on telling this sensitive story.

Halko embraces the collaborative and collegial nature of digital humanities projects, giving credit to her graduate research assistants. A noted area of future growth for this project, and one that is currently being undertaken by a research assistant, is the addition of metadata to the website, which will be valuable to scholars with similar research interests. Overall, War Stories is a promising start for a contribution to public history narratives that bring the effects of war, internment, and occupation on children to the forefront.