Title of Session: Social Studies Forum - Beyond the Fire
Moderator: Michael Hutchison
Guest Speaker: Sesh Kannan
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LeticiaA: well let me introduce myself I am a student teacher in an elementary school

DavidWe joined the room.

MichaelH: David, meet Sesh Kannan; who's here tonight to discuss the "Beyond the Fire" site with us

MichaelH: You might remember Sesh from sessions we did last year

DavidWe does his best to remember

MichaelH: Sesh was scheduled for Carnival 2004, but we had to postpone until later in the fall

MichaelH: BJ, should I go ahead and get rolling?

MichaelH: Welcome, all, to tonight's Social Studies Forum

MichaelH: I've been looking forward to this session for some time, and it should be a great session this evening.

MichaelH: rarely have I received as many e-mails regarding a resource we are featuring as the number of e-mails I received regarding "Beyond the Fire"

MichaelH: This powerful resource is the focus of our session this evening.

DavidWe: Nothing against Sesh, of course

MichaelH: but, first, let's open with some introductions

MichaelH: would everyone like to let us know who you are, where you're located, what you teach, etc?

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler. I help teachers learn more about educational technology. I'm in New Jersey, near New York City

BJB2: I'm an art teacher in Pennsylvania and a helpdesk volunteer for Tapped In

LeticiaA: I am in Houston, Tx and I am currently a student teacher in an elementary school

MichaelH is Michael Hutchison, a social studies teacher in southwestern Indiana... I worked with Sesh on Beyond the Fire as the educational consultant

SeshGst18: I am Sesh Kannan, a documentary producer in Washington Dc. I produce for tv-radio and the web

SeshGst18: ...and beyond the fire, affectionately known as BTF is my creation

BJB2 applauds

MichaelH thinks everyone has said hello... Sesh, would you like to tell us how the concept for BTF was developed... was this an idea that interested you for some time?

MichaelH cheers

SeshGst18: yes

DavidWe finds Sesh's web site for the film

SeshGst18: In brief, I have been interested in the immigrant/refugee problems and was involved in some teaching since 96

MichaelH: To me, the concept was unique and interesting when I was approached to help a few years ago... the site is very visual and intriguing

DavidWe listens avidly

SeshGst18: I wanted to reach teens and talk about war and felt the best way to do so was to hear from their peers

MichaelH: Very cool idea, Sesh

SeshGst18: teenage war refugees who have lived thru war

SeshGst18: the site is really very audience driven

SeshGst18: in that it is created with the teen attention span and web behavior in mind

SeshGst18: there is a game concept behind it without crossing the line

SeshGst18: and also allowing teens to do multiple things while on the flash site, for eg see what other teens are saying about a story

SeshGst18: there are 60 short films from 15 teens from 7 war zones

MichaelH: Sesh, let me know when you are ready, and I can show everyone the URL for the website

SeshGst18: you can navigate the site without a passport but grabbing a passport ties u into the interactive features.

SeshGst18: lets chk it out

MichaelH: Ok, I'll show everyone the URL...

DavidWe smiles

MichaelH: http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/

LeticiaA: yes

BJB2: worked for me

DavidWe: Good job, Michael

KarenGst1: I got to it fine

MichaelH: can everyone see the site?

SeshGst18: yes

LeticiaA: yes

MichaelH: Sesh, I didn't start with the flash intro... is that ok?

BJB2: are you still in contact with the teens in the story, Sesh?

SeshGst18: yeah... u must have seen it earlier and it's in cache

SeshGst18: yes I am in contact with many of them. It has been great to follow up with them.

DavidWe: When did you first start this project, Sesh?

SeshGst18: it has been very gratifying to hear their positive feedback

SeshGst18: we started the project in 2003 and it came to reality thanks to its selection in a competitive grant competition by ITVS for an online documentary project aimed at teens

DavidWe nods

DavidWe: cool

KarenGst1: Can any social studies class get to this or is it by membership only?

SeshGst18: are u past the main page

SeshGst18: Karen, it is open to anyone and everyone.

SeshGst18: the site comments are moderated keeping in mind that this is aimed at a school audience

KarenGst1: This is a great site for time line, compare/contrast, information, and real people telling the story.

SeshGst18: also passports are only accessible to the individual owner, and the passport upload feature is therefore secure

MichaelH: and students can enter and exit the site whenever with their passport information intact, right, Sesh?

SeshGst18: if you click on any of the individuals on the map you can get to the story as well as war timelines

SeshGst18: yes Michael, that is correct

KarenGst1: It is so easy to navigate.

MichaelH: One thing I should have mentioned, Sesh... they'll need the flash plug in to navigate the site, won't they?

DavidWe thinks so

SeshGst18: the goal of the passport potability is that for each teen you visit and fill in comments in the travelogue, you get a stamp in the passport

DavidWe: I like that

SeshGst18: yes flash is needed

MichaelH: Sesh, how did you find the students you used in the site?

LeticiaA: this is such a great site it has endless possibilities to use in the classroom especially for older students

SeshGst18: also when u are signed in the left bar of screen tells u how far u have progressed on your journey and how far you have to go

MichaelH: Leticia, my thought would be that this site would work best with middle school and high school students

LeticiaA: yes I agree

MichaelH: Sesh may have some info about elementary students who have used the site

LeticiaA: I think that I could use it for my fourth graders

SeshGst18: I think the content has been aimed for MS and HS but I believe we had some ES teachers in our last session who used it

MichaelH: you would probably be able to adapt it to 4th grade, Leticia...

SeshGst18: I will be very interested in knowing how your students respond to it

KarenGst1: I would think especially by fifth grade. This is great for world geography as well as cultures.

MichaelH: but would probably want to prepare the kids for what they would hear and see

LeticiaA: I agree with that

LeticiaA: this is also a good site to use as a teacher resource

MichaelH: Sesh, do you want to let everyone know some of the awards and recognitions the site has earned?

SeshGst18: the one things I do want to mention and actually the responses from visitors says that I don't need to say it ... these kids on the site are not to be pitied, I think and as you will see, they are amazing individuals

MichaelH: That's a good point, Sesh

LeticiaA: How long did it take you to complete this project

SeshGst18: it was selected for the 2005 Sundance festival, a Webby notable site, a SXSW award winner

SeshGst18: among the top few

SeshGst18: from concept to delivery it took a little over a year

BJB2: wow! Very cool, Sesh!

SeshGst18: thank you

LeticiaA: I must say you have done a great job

BJB2: that's a pretty short time frame for such a complex topic

SeshGst18: a lot went into the user behavior and making things simple yet sophisticated

LeticiaA: I agree with that I thought that it might have taken longer

SeshGst18: thanks... it was an intense learning experience

SeshGst18: but very gratifying and an eye opener

MichaelH: it was interesting to see the site evolve from the earliest discussions we had on it... I wasn't involved in that aspect, but listened in to the discussions

BJB2: what were some of the things you learned, Sesh?

LeticiaA: do you have future projects with maybe other teens from other parts of the world

MichaelH: We'll let Sesh answer BJ's question first and then come back to Leticia's

SeshGst18: I learned a lot about these kids which was quite amazing and I think their experience also helped me understand how refugees are treated in the world

SeshGst18: there is the perception that refugees are a burden which is quite depressing

SeshGst18: I also learned that developing nations host the majority of world refugees and not the developed world

BJB2 agrees...perhaps that is why the displaced people from the Gulf Hurricanes were so upset with being called refugees

SeshGst18: besides the factual info I think the experience has moved me to be more involved

SeshGst18: and in many ways it has influence my upcoming projects

SeshGst18: to answer Leticia

BJB2 listens to Sesh's plans for upcoming projects

SeshGst18: I am finishing a radio documentary called Young European and Muslim which is about civil rights of Muslim minorities in the EU

SeshGst18: and a web doc like BTF that looks at 100 years of surveillance history in the US, from present to pre WWI

MichaelH: that should be a very hot topic, considering the current debate about the Bush Administration's surveillance policies

SeshGst18: the latter is called Tracked in America and features 20 individual stories and five historians who provide context for the time periods

MichaelH: Sesh, when do you anticipate "Tracked In America" will be online?

SeshGst18: yes to Michael... I actually don't take sides on the issue just as in BTF but like people to hear from those who experienced the issue in qs and decide for themselves

SeshGst18: Tracked will be ready in late April

MichaelH: I'll be looking forward to seeing that, Sesh...

SeshGst18: thank you

SeshGst18: will keep u posted

MichaelH: that would make a great Social Studies forum topic as well... for the spring

SeshGst18: we haven't talked about the educational site which Michael developed

SeshGst18: on BTF

MichaelH: Would you like me to introduce that content, Sesh?

BJB2 is looking at that now

SeshGst18: yes

MichaelH: Ok... Elizabeth Meyer of ITVS contacted me in summer, 2003 about possibly helping out

MichaelH: I'd done some lessons for their programming on PBS before, and I was honored to have a chance to work with them and Sesh on this project

MichaelH: We did two lessons for the site... which should be easily adaptable for middle/highschool or even upper elementary

MichaelH: I'll show you the first one, and then the second

MichaelH: The first lesson gives students an opportunity to compare their lives with that of children who had experienced war...

MichaelH: to see how their lives were similar, or different

MichaelH: here's the lesson:

MichaelH: http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/Lesson_plan1.html

MichaelH: checks to see if everyone can see the lesson ok.

SeshGst18: yes

LeticiaA: I was able to see it

MichaelH: check this lesson out for a second, and then I will show you the second lesson

MichaelH . o O (remember that all Tapped In members will get a transcript with the links included)

MichaelH: are you all ready to see the second lesson?

LeticiaA: yes

DavidWe nods

MichaelH: the second lesson deals with child soldiers... children who are pressed into military service in one way or another. Of course, this is not a problem that is unique to the last part of the 20th century or first part of the 21st

MichaelH: here's the link:

MichaelH: http://www.itvs.org/beyondthefire/Lesson_plan2.html

MichaelH checks to see if everyone has this one

BJB2 nods

MichaelH: this lesson asks students to investigate the conditions of child soldiers to complete written or oral reports

MichaelH: As I said, I was proud and honored to work with Sesh on this... it means a lot to me to have my name associated with something of his like BTF

SeshGst18: when you have a minute I have a qs regarding usability in the classroom as it is something I am constantly trying to improve...what could make this site more usable in the classroom?

MichaelH: since I haven't been in the classroom since before I worked with you, Sesh, that might be a bit hard for me

SeshGst18: in the current project I am aiming to make all the content completely downloadable from audio to lesson plans...

BJB2: that would be excellent, Sesh

MichaelH: So, in other words, I could go to the site and just print out the materials?

BJB2 . o O (or show them on a computer that wasn't online)

SeshGst18: you can download all the audio, for eg in BTF you would b able to download all the 60 movies

MichaelH: that would be good...

MichaelH: the only thing with BTF, I can think of Sesh... would possibly be a Flash and non-flash site (if possible) for teachers with older machines and older browsers.

SeshGst18: trying to increase the flexibility and access to site materials but also allowing teachers to use as desired

MichaelH: Just thinking here about teachers who don't have newer versions of Netscape or IE

MichaelH . o O (or Firefox)

BJB2: Our time is about up, Michael and Sesh.

SeshGst18: actually that is something I am addressing in this project it will be html with embedded flash instead of a purely flash site

LeticiaA: yes that sounds like something that would help teachers who have older computers

DavidWe: tell their students to upgrade it while the teachers are on break

SeshGst18: ha

MichaelH: in our district, a lot of machines are Deep Freezed, and changes don't stay on the computer on the reboot, anyway

MichaelH: Sesh, is there anything you'd like to mention or bring up as we wrap up?

LeticiaA: I am at an older school so that sounds like a good idea

SeshGst18: I would like to hear your students and your experience with using the site and particular web ideas for use in classrooms

LeticiaA: before I leave thank you for a good and informative session

SeshGst18: you can email me at skannan@flaneurmedia.com

DavidWe: I think for some teachers, Sesh, they just need the pointer to a compelling project and they will make it work

MichaelH: Great, Sesh

DavidWe: For others, there may be some hand holding involved

MichaelH: That's why we did the session, David

DavidWe nods

SeshGst18: Thank you all appreciate your time, patience and interest. Thank you Michael for hosting and BJ for allowing us the space and time

MichaelH: Glad you could join us, Sesh

BJB2: you're welcome any time, Sesh!

DavidWe: Thanks, Sesh. Very interesting. Good luck with your work

MichaelH: I hope you'll consider doing a session when your next project is ready in April!

DavidWe seconds Michael's comment

MichaelH: It'll be a great one, David

SeshGst18: absolutely Michael. Would love to

MichaelH: I'll be getting back to you on scheduling for that, Sesh

SeshGst18: great. thank you and have a good night