We the Ancestors.

The Japanese Language School, also known as the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Washington, is the oldest cultural center and language school in the region. Built in 1912 in what was Seattle’s “Nihonmachi” or “Japan Town”, the Japanese Language School has persevered through decades of anti-Asian legislation and massive neighborhood displacement.

Originally established as a language school, the Japanese Language School also served as transitional housing for Japanese American families returning from WWII incarceration, and now hosts a variety of educational, arts, and cultural programs for the community, a karate and judo dojo, a taiko drum space, historical exhibits, gathering space, and a Japanese resale store.

This permanent public art piece seeks to preserve, honor, and celebrate the Japanese Language School’s legacy, and the stories of Washington’s larger Japanese American community. This project aims to do this by:

- Creating a strong visual and cultural marker for the Japanese Language School which sits on a busy 4-lane urban street in the rapidly gentrifying Central District neighborhood of Seattle
- Conveying the perseverance, resilience and strength of the Japanese American community and story
- Preserving stories that mark Asian American history
- Drawing inspiration from the voices in the Japanese American community and the artists’ personal connections to the space, and provide inspiration for the generations to come

The design was informed by community feedback and sought to speak to the wide spectrum of backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences that make up our community. The resulting image for the mural became a
literal and metaphorical landscape of our community’s history, that pulled inspiration from local landmarks and movements, to traditional Japanese art forms like ukiyo-e, noboribata, and to work from prominent local artists like Frank Shobo Fujii and Roger Shimomura.

- The Japanese Language School, also known as the Japanese Cultural and Community Center of Washington, is located at 1414 S. Weller St, Seattle, WA 98144.