

Pokemon - The Journey Begins

“The first time we showed off some Pokemon in the U.S., we were told they were ‘too cute’. The staff in America submitted their ideas for replacement designs, but we just couldn’t believe the kind of stuff they were proposing,” Ishihara said in an interview with Nintendo in Japan. “They turned Pikachu into something like a tiger with huge breasts. It looked like a character from the musical, *Cats*. When I asked, ‘How is this supposed to be Pikachu?’ They said, ‘Well, look, there’s its tail right there.’ ... Seriously, that was the kind of stuff being proposed.” President of Nintendo of America, Minoru Arakawa decided that the original art style would remain intact. At this point, the anime, movie, trading cards, and merchandise that was already successful in Japan had the original art style. “More important than the art style was making the series ‘culturally neutral,’ meaning that no matter who you were or where you played the games, you connect with it immediately. To an extent, Pokemon already is,” wrote Dockery. “Pokemon’s core ideology of friendship, adventure, and collecting monsters resonates with anyone willing to accept it.” Still, the Japanese games need to be translated into English, and the Japanese Pokemon names needed appropriate English counterparts. Bill Giese and Sara Bush (then Sara Osborne) were localizers who pitched ideas about what each of the 151 creatures should be called. “We had gotten info from Game Freak, and they’d tell us the genesis of these creatures and what they meant, and what they were inspired by Giese told Dockery. The team worked to honor the origins of the monsters, and often that came down to “literally smashing two words together, writing on the wall, and trying to say it fast and keep going, ‘Is that a word?’” Giese said. “Articulo, Zapdos, and Moltres. I remember those vividly because we were struggling with these legendary ones. And once I had it in my head ‘Uno, dos, tres,’ I wrote it down on paper, and I just put three elements together. And I thought ‘Oh my god, this might

work!’ Not because it was creative, but because it meant I had solved the problem and could now go home and have dinner.” The games would be renamed *Pokemon: Red Version* and *Pokemon: Blue Version*, keeping the monsters found in Japanese *Red* and *Green*, respectively. The decision to change the name and color was thanks to Hiro Nakamura, an integral member of the U.S. team for localizing the games. “It was his kind of experimenting with people and understanding that blue is the most important color of America and starting with *Red* and *Blue* would be better than starting with *Red* and *Green*,” Tilden said of Nakamura’s work. “It wouldn’t matter in the triangulation of water-fire-grass which all led.” The games placed Charizard, the final evolutionary stage of flame-tailed Charmander on the cover of *Red*, and Blastoise, the tortoise-like behemoth and final evolutionary stage of turtle Squirtle on the cover of *Blue*. “Kids would not only trade between themselves, but instantly understand the inherent competition going on,” Dockery wrote. “Which one did you get? *Red* or *Blue*? Both of these questions would be the prime opening line for elementary school cafeteria arguments for months and years to come.” “Gotta Catch ‘Em All. “Gotta Catch ‘Em All.” Anyone familiar with Pokemon will remember this phrase. “Invented for the English-language *Pokemon* debut, this phrase was eventually slapped onto nearly everything related to Pokemon outside of Japan and was repeated frequently during the *A Sneak Peek at Pokemon* promotional VHS tape.” Dockery wrote. Promotional tapes were mailed around the country to the Nintendo Power mailing list. According to Dockery, the sneak peek includes two adult narrators: One is a professor who explains what a Pikachu and a Pokedex are and introduces to Ash Ketchum, the game’s main character. The other narrator is Ketchum’s Aunt Hillary, who alternates between calling them “Poke-uh-min” or “Poke-aye-mon” things, but is still very excited for her nephew’s endeavors to catch them all.

With each new generation, Game Freak and Nintendo decide on how to retain the core feeling of Pokemon without feeling like it is repeating the same thing over and over.