



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

# Language Revitalization

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Since time immemorial**
- **Language**
- **Sovereignty**
- **Identity**
- **History**
- **Lifeways**
- **Genocide, federal policy, and laws**

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students will be able to:

- Describe the Siletz Tribe's efforts to preserve the Native language.
- Discuss the individual and collective benefits of learning a Native language for Tribal people.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- What are the individual and collective benefits of keeping Native languages alive?

## LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?  
*Classroom or online*
- How are the students organized?
  - Whole class
  - Teams: 2 – 4
  - Pairs
  - Individually

## TIME REQUIRED

2 hours of class time

## Overview

Despite facing immense pressures from federal policies of assimilation that have sometimes interrupted the transmission of language within Tribal communities, Tribal people continue to fight to document, preserve, and revitalize their speech communities. In this lesson, students will examine efforts of the Siletz Tribal Language Project to revitalize Dee-ni Wee-ya' (the People's Words), a Dené (Athabaskan) language originally from the Southwest Oregon and Northern California coast. Students will develop an understanding of the circumstances that led to the decline of the Dee-ni speech community, and the Siletz Tribe's efforts to preserve and revitalize the language today. Students will learn the importance of languages for Tribal people—both individually and collectively.

## Background for teachers

Tribal languages provide a vital link between Indigenous people today and the cultures, histories, spiritualities, and worldviews that have been passed down through generations since the world began. The contemporary Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians is one of the most linguistically diverse Tribes in the entire country—composed of groups speaking dozens



of languages and dialects from 10 different language families across Western Oregon, Northern California, and Southwest Washington. As those Tribal bands were forced together on the Coast (Siletz) Reservation beginning in the mid-1850s, Chinuk Wawa (sometimes called Chinook Jargon) also became an important tool for communication and a first language for many Siletz people. For members of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians, all of these languages are ties that bind the people of the Tribe to their homelands.

Today, many of these ancestral languages are “sleeping languages” or languages that are no longer actively spoken by Tribal families. Federal policies designed to fragment the Tribal community have played a big role in interrupting the transfer of language between generations, as have a declining land base and pressures to earn a living in the modern economy. For many years, Siletz people faced social pressures that denigrated their languages—including boarding schools that removed Tribal children from their homes and prohibited the use of Tribal languages by students, as well as local discrimination that made Indian people feel embarrassed to speak their languages in public.

## STANDARDS

### Oregon social sciences standards<sup>1</sup>

**6-8.RH.6** - Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s perspective or purpose.

**6-8.RH.8** - Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

### Oregon English language arts standards

**6.RI.2** - Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgements.

**6.RI.7** - Integrate information presented in different media and formats, as well as in words, to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

## MATERIALS

- Paper/pencil
- Internet device
- NPR Student Worksheet Questions
- NPR Teacher Reference for Student Questions
- NPR transcript of Bud Lane interview
- NPR audio recording of Bud Lane interview
- Siletz Tribal Language Project Student Questions
- Siletz Tribal Language Project Teacher Key

<sup>1</sup> Oregon is in the process of revising its social sciences standards. This document references the draft 2018 standards for grade 6.



Despite this history, Siletz people are working to preserve, document, and revitalize their ancestral languages through efforts led by individuals, communities, and Tribes. The Siletz Tribal Language Project focuses on Dee-ni Wee-ya' (the People's Words), a Dené (Athabaskan) language spoken by many of the families removed to Siletz from Southwest Oregon and Northern California. Working together with elder speakers, Tribal educators, neighboring Tribes, and Tribal language learners, the Siletz Tribal Language Project supports language instruction at local schools, Tribal Head Start, and community classes with the goal of reviving the use of Dee-ni Wee-ya' in the Tribal community.

## References

- Bishop, M. (n.d.). *Color me happy: 8 ways to teach colors in English*. Busy Teacher. <https://busyteacher.org/17918-how-to-teach-colors-in-english-8-ways.html>
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. *Siletz Tribal Language Project: Siletz Dee-ni language*. <https://www.siletzlanguage.org/about-siletz-tribal-language.php>
- Donvan, J. (Host) (2013, June 18). *When a language dies, what happens to culture?* National Public Radio: Talk of the Nation. <https://www.npr.org/2013/06/18/193135997/when-a-language-dies-what-happens-to-culture>

## VOCABULARY

**Revitalization** – The act of imbuing something with new life and vitality.

**Dialect** – A form of a language particular to a specific region or social group.

**Culture** – The customs, arts, social institutions, and achievements of a particular nation, people, or other social group.

**Individually** – Personally, in an individual capacity.

**Collectively** – As a group, as a whole.

**Dee-ni Wee-ya' (The People's Words)** – A Dené (Athabaskan) language spoken by many of the people removed to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation from the Southwest Oregon and Northern California coast.

**Language** – A system of communication used by a particular country or community.



Lane, B. (2014, February 21). *Keeping our words alive*. Folklife Festival, Smithsonian Institution. <https://festival.si.edu/blog/2014/keeping-our-words-alive/>

Smithsonian Institution (2013). *Siletz Dee-ni: Giving new life to an ancient language*. Folklife Festival. <https://festival.si.edu/2013/one-world-many-voices/language-communities/siletz-dee-ni/smithsonian>

Wilkinson, C. (2010). *The people are dancing again: The history of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon*. University of Washington Press.

## Considerations for teachers

### Assessment

Teachers will formally assess students' written responses, classroom discussion, participation, accurate research, and analysis. Both written and verbal responses should be supported with textual evidence.

### Practices

Small group activities allow students to share and analyze ideas with one, two, or three other people. This practice can be good for students who do not want to share their ideas with the whole class and/or who may be afraid of others' reactions. The teacher should monitor group discussions to determine the degree to which

### ADAPTATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING



#### With limited focus time, what is the most valuable student information?

- Activity 3: The Siletz Tribal Language Project and the extension activities. This will develop an essential understanding of where and how to access and utilize the Siletz online language materials, lessons, videos, and dictionaries. This could be a continuous lesson to promote Siletz language learning.
- The talking dictionary found on the Siletz Tribal Language Project website is critical for correct pronunciation.
- All included activities can be used synchronously and asynchronously.

## Learning targets

- The student will make an inference about an informational text or texts and identify evidence within the texts that support that inference. (Oregon Department of Education Standards, Reading Historical Text, 11. Reasoning and Evidence)
- I can explain the individual and collective benefits of speaking a Native language.
- I can describe the importance of revitalizing Dee-ni Wee-ya'.
- I can access the Siletz Tribal Language Project website and online speaking dictionary.

## Options/extensions

- *Persuasive writing* – Students can create a persuasive piece—either a newspaper article, public service announcement, or a poster—that promotes the Siletz Tribal Language Project. Their projects should demonstrate their understanding and answer the question, “What are the individual and collective benefits of keeping Native languages alive?”
- *Project-based learning* – Students can create and illustrate a children’s book or dictionary that teaches at least 10 words in Dee-ni Wee-ya'. Students can use the Talking Dictionary to find their words.

## Appendix

Materials included in the electronic folder that support this lesson are:

- NPR\_Transcripts\_Bud Lane.pdf
- NPR\_Bud Lane Audio.mp3
- NPR\_Student Worksheet for Questions
- NPR\_Teacher Reference for Student Questions
- Siletz Tribal Language Project\_Teacher Key
- Siletz Tribal Language Project\_ Student Questions



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## Activity 1

# Importance of language

*Time: 30 minutes*

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Teachers will introduce the concept of language and provide students with an opportunity to consider the relationship between language and culture.

### **Say:**

*Today we're going to talk about the importance of language for Native people living in Oregon. To get started, let's think about the role language plays in our own lives and the way language can impact how people organize their thoughts. Check out this video from a scientist explaining a little bit about the way the language we speak can actually impact the way we see and think about the world.*

### **Show video**

To introduce the concept of individual and collective benefit, show the TED talk video, "How Language Shapes the Way We Think" ([ted.com/talks/lera\\_boroditsky\\_how\\_language\\_shapes\\_the\\_way\\_we\\_think](https://www.ted.com/talks/lera_boroditsky_how_language_shapes_the_way_we_think)). This video demonstrates how language influences thought processes and explains why language diversity is so important.

### **Say:**

*To get familiar with the way our brain processes colors, we're going to play a "swap seats" game. To start, let's review what colors we're wearing. We will then place our chairs in a circle, so each student has their own chair. I will hold up a color card, and everyone wearing that color will swap seats. As we continue, I will remove a chair after I call a color, which will leave a student without a chair. This will mean that you are out of the game. We will play until we have a winner.*

After all students have become comfortable, take one seat away after calling the color so that someone will not have a seat after swapping. That person is out. Play until there is a winner.

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## Activity 1 (Continued)

*Let's regroup and talk about the game. Was anyone wearing a shirt that was difficult to group into a color category—maybe a shirt that some people thought was blue and other people thought was green? As we saw in the video, different languages separate colors into different categories. Some languages have many different words for different shades of blue. Other languages use the same word for both blue and green! Hopefully, this game gives us an idea of how the language we speak interacts with the world around us and how preserving language diversity helps keep these different perspectives (ways of looking at the world) alive.*

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## Activity 2

# Keeping our words alive

Time: 30 minutes

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### Say

*We've heard a little bit about why language diversity is so important to the global community. Now, we will listen to a National Public Radio interview with Bud Lane, a Siletz Tribal elder who started the Siletz Tribal Language Project. In this interview, the host speaks with Bud Lane to understand more about the importance of language for Tribal people and why Tribal communities are working so hard to preserve and revitalize their languages.*

Distribute the "NPR Student Worksheet Questions" for students to write their answers while listening to the interview. The "NPR Transcripts" handout can be printed and ready for students if needed. For more guidance, use the "NPR Teacher Reference for Student Questions."

*Let's review the questions that will be discussed in the interview. We will be answering the following questions using supporting evidence from the interview. Although we will be listening to the audio, I have also printed out a transcript in case you would like to read along or highlight or underline the answers as you hear them.*

*It's important to listen for key words and details so you can find answers to the questions. Let's look at the questions and highlight or underline any key words, phrases, or details that will help us get familiar with the flow of the interview.*

### Review the questions below with the class

1. Why do you think it was difficult for Siletz people to speak their language in public?
  - a. (Audio: 2:40) Example answer: Tribal members were discouraged from speaking their Native languages in public.



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## Activity 2 (Continued)

2. What makes it challenging to revitalize the language?
  - a. (Audio: 3:40) Example answer: There must be a need to use the language. English is the primary language used in most public places.
3. Why is it important to be innovative in teaching the language?
  - a. (Audio: 4:50) Example answer: You want to motivate young children to learn the language, songs, and traditional ceremonies.
4. What would you lose if the language vanished?
  - a. (Audio: 7:10) Example answer: You would lose your people's past and present view of the world.
5. What is the importance of place names and mapping projects?
  - a. (Audio: 12:00) Example answer: It is important to know the meaning of place names in the Native language because of the teachings attached to the names.

### Say

*Now that we are prepared for the interview, let's listen! You want to pay close attention to the questions to formulate accurate answers. I'll stop the audio and replay it when you need me to. I'll also give you time to write your answers down and discuss and share with each other.*

Play the NPR interview, "When A Language Dies, What Happens to Culture?" ([npr.org/2013/06/18/193135997/when-a-language-dies-what-happens-to-culture](https://www.npr.org/2013/06/18/193135997/when-a-language-dies-what-happens-to-culture)).

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## Activity 2 (Continued)

### Options for listening include

- The teacher can stop the audio at each question to allow students time to write individually, and then discuss in small groups or as a whole class.
- The teacher can write a class answer together for each question.
- Students can listen independently and come back to discuss in small groups and then as a whole class.

### Say

*Now that we have completed the listening activity and learned about how Tribal people would be impacted if language was lost, let's think more about the positive impacts of keeping a language alive. Let's gather in a circle. One at time, going clockwise, let's share on the following question: What does language diversity bring to a community or Tribe? Use examples from the interview we just heard to support your thoughts.*

Have students go around the circle and share responses to close the activity.

### Say

*Thank you for listening to the thoughts and feelings based on the interview with Bud Lane. Tribal people have been reflecting upon, discussing, and sharing amongst each other many of these same questions—especially in government and education—and are working hard to keep their speech communities healthy.*

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### Activity 3

## The Siletz Tribal Language Project

Time: 40 minutes

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### Say

*Keeping languages alive in the modern world is hard work for Tribal communities. To be successful, everyone in the Tribal community must work together. Today, elders, teachers, and Tribal families work with anthropologists, linguists, and media experts to design dictionaries, curriculum, and other teaching resources that can help document, preserve, and teach the traditional languages and cultures of Tribes.*

*We are now going to learn about the Siletz Tribal Language Project to get a better understanding of the efforts being made to preserve Dee-ni Wee-ya' (The People's Words), one of the languages spoken by people removed to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation from Southwest Oregon and Northern California.*

Students should have internet to access the Siletz Tribal Language Project website: [siletzlanguage.org/about-siletz-tribal-language.php](http://siletzlanguage.org/about-siletz-tribal-language.php). They can work in pairs or individually to read the section, "About the Siletz Tribal Language Project."

Next, hand out the "Siletz Tribal Language Project Student Questions." The "Siletz Tribal Language Project Teacher Key" is also available. Students will be answering the following questions based on the website:

1. What were the five major language families spoken on the Coast (Siletz) Reservation?
2. Explain why Chinook Wawa (Jargon) was created and used.
3. What year was the Practical Alphabet developed? What did the Practical Alphabet make possible?
4. When did the first Athabaskan language classes begin in Siletz?

## Activity 2 (Continued)

5. What was found in the Siletz Tribal-wide assessment to determine the number of Siletz language speakers in 1996?
6. What was the Tribe's response to this finding?
7. What is the hope for sharing language lessons?

### Say

*Next, let's explore the website a little bit more.*

Students can record their observations and thoughts on the back of their paper, on a separate piece of paper provided by the teacher, or they can be shared in a whole class discussion.

### Say

1. *Look under the section, "Start Learning!" First, what do you notice about how the language is structured for learners? Do you see any of your ideas or your classmates' ideas on how you would teach the language?*
2. *Next, click on the section, "Talking Dictionary." In the search bar, type in the word "fish." How many different words come up related to fish and fishing? What meanings might be lost if people stopped using Dee-ni Wee-ya' to talk about fish and fishing? Now try searching for "water." How many different ways to talk about water do you find?*
3. *Finally, click on the section, "Watch Videos." Choose one video to watch and write a short summary.*



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## Activity 4

# Reflection/closure

*Time: 20 minutes*

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Sum up the lesson by having students articulate why the Siletz language is important to learn and use and what would be lost if the Siletz language disappeared.

### **Say**

*Using the information you received about why it's important to teach, learn, and use Dee-ni Wee-ya' (the Siletz Language), please write a response about the individual and collective benefits of keeping Native languages alive. Include at least two supporting details and/or pieces of evidence.*