



HEALTH

# Language Revitalization

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Language

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students can describe language revitalization and identify one or more revitalization tools or practices.
- Students can describe why tribes in Oregon want to revitalize and/or maintain their ancestral languages.
- Students can connect language revitalization to restoring cultural pride and the benefits of that pride for group and individual well-being.

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- What is language revitalization, and what are some ways people revitalize languages?
- Why do the nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon feel it is important to revitalize and/or maintain their ancestral languages?
- How can language revitalization support well-being for individuals and groups?

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## Overview

This lesson explores the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages—why it’s important and what tribes in Oregon are doing to keep their ancestral languages alive. This is important for many Native American tribes, who are attempting to save their languages from “linguicide” caused by decades of colonialism and forced assimilation. Language revitalization can help restore and strengthen cultural connections and pride, which in turn can promote well-being for both tribes and their members.

## Background for teachers

Language is an essential part of human identity and shapes how we view the world. For many Native American tribes, however, language is a complicated and even painful subject. Euro-American government officials, teachers, and other authorities discouraged Native American and Alaska Native people from speaking their native languages and even physically punished Native children for doing so at boarding schools. As a result, the amazing diversity of languages once spoken by Indigenous people in North America



## LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?  
*Classroom*
- How are the students organized?
  - Whole class    Teams: 3 – 5
  - Pairs    Individually

## TIME REQUIRED

50 minutes

has been depleted, with many languages becoming extinct. Oregon is a case in point. According to National Geographic:

*Oregon was probably the most diverse region of [Indigenous] languages in the U.S. ... At the time Lewis and Clark arrived in what's now Oregon 200 years ago there were 14 language families, more than in all of Europe combined. Today only five families of languages exist, and most of them have only a handful of speakers.*

The nine federally recognized tribes in Oregon are working to preserve and revitalize their ancestral heritage, culture, language, and customs. Connecting to their ancestral past enables them to thrive in the present day. At least five tribes have active language revitalization programs. Growing evidence suggests language revitalization is beneficial not only for tribes, but also for promoting health and well-being for individual tribal members and desirable academic outcomes for Native students.

## STANDARDS

### Oregon health standards

**HE.1.4.3** – Describe ways in which safe and healthy school and community environments can promote personal health including but not limited to respect for diversity; safe routes to school/bike and walk; school gardens; and other school policies and programs that promote healthy literacy.

**HE.2.4.1** – Describe the influence of culture on personal health practices and behaviors.

**HE.2.4.2** – Describe how the school and community can support personal health practices and behaviors.

### Oregon social sciences standards

**4.13** – Give examples of changes in Oregon's agricultural, industrial, political, and business development over time, and the impacts on the people of the state (including people of different socioeconomic status, ethnic groups, religious groups, and other traditionally marginalized groups). (History, Multicultural Studies)



## Resources

Brodie, N. (December 13, 2013). Chinuk Wawa: A local Oregon tribe's efforts to save a dying language. *The Corvallis Advocate*. Retrieved July 31, 2019 from <https://www.corvallisadvocate.com/2012/1213-chinuk-wawa/>

Lewis, D. G. (March 25, 2018). Surviving Oregon native languages; online sources and links. ND-NHistoryResearch.com. Retrieved from <https://ndnhistoryresearch.com/2018/03/25/surviving-oregon-native-languages-online-sources-and-links/>

Northwest Indian Language Institute, University of Oregon: <https://nili.uoregon.edu/>

Richards, K. (December 19, 2018). *Ancient Oregon languages being nudged awake*. KLCC. Retrieved from <https://www.klcc.org/post/ancient-oregon-languages-being-nudged-awake>

## MATERIALS

**What materials are needed for students to engage in this activity?**

- PowerPoint presentation – Load the slides prior to the lesson to ensure they are displaying properly
- Poster paper and markers
- Classroom writing surface (i.e., blackboard or whiteboard)
- Internet access (if showing linked videos)

## VOCABULARY

**Dialect** – A form of a language spoken by a group of people.

**Language immersion** – Teaching someone a new language by surrounding (“immersing”) them completely in the language.

**Linguist** – A person who studies human languages.

**Multilingual** – Being able to speak more than one language.

**Revitalize** – To put new life or vitality into something or someone. To breathe new energy into something or someone to make it/them strong and healthy.



## Considerations for teachers

### Assessment

Students should be assessed formatively. The formative assessment will be teacher observation of student participation in class discussions and group work. Summative assessment can be provided by having students complete an exit ticket or a writing exercise in which they answer the essential questions for the lesson.

### Practices

The teacher must be prepared to activate engagement strategies, such as think-pair-share and group projects.

### Learning targets

- I understand why tribes in Oregon are revitalizing their languages.
- I can share an example of language revitalization.
- I can describe how language revitalization helps people and groups be healthy and well.

### Options/extensions

- Have students do additional research on one or more of the following and write brief reports to share with the class:
  - The examples of tribal language revitalization efforts that are highlighted in this lesson or others they can find online.
  - Language revitalization efforts of other Native American tribes in the United States.
- Successful language revitalization efforts elsewhere in the world (such as Hebrew, Native Hawaiian, Gaelic, and Welsh).
- Obtain a copy of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) video, “The Linguists,” and watch it or segments of it with your class. This documentary chronicles two ethnographers’ endeavor to record endangered languages

around the world. More information and resources can be found on the PBS website <https://www.pbs.org/thelinguists/>

- Invite students to record an interview with an elder in their family and then share the interview or an excerpt with the class. If the elder speaks a language other than English and both the elder and student are comfortable doing so, they can record the interview in their native language and the student can translate the interview when sharing with the class.

## Reflection/closure

Sum up the lesson by reviewing the learning targets. Have students write, say, or share with a partner two or three sentences describing what they learned.

## Appendix

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

- Slides.PPT

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## Activity 1

# Activate Prior Knowledge

*Time: 15 minutes*

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### Step 1:

Write the word “linguist” on a classroom writing surface and ask volunteers to describe what they think the word means. Add to or clarify their responses using the definition provided above. Tell students that for this lesson they get to be linguists.

### Step 2:

Ask students to respond to the following prompts and record a few of their responses on chart paper or a classroom writing surface:

*Why is language important?*

*What do languages help you do?*

### Step 3:

Describe for students that a language is not simply a collection of words but also a way of understanding the world and how people should relate to it and to each other. A language is tied to people and place: Each language spoken today began or evolved among a group of people living at a specific time in a particular place in the world.

Share the following examples (and/or others you are familiar with) of how languages embody particular knowledge or beliefs about the world:

- Spanish and French have different words for “you” depending on whether you are talking to a stranger or someone older than you or to a friend or family member. For example, if you wanted to thank someone for serving you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich in Spanish, you would say “Gracias a usted” if it was a waitress in a restaurant and “Gracias a ti” if it was your

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**Activity 1** *(Continued)*

cousin. (English used to have this also—it’s why you see or hear “thee,” “thou,” and “thy” or “thine” in old writings or prayers—but now we just use “you” and “your” regardless of who we are speaking to.)

- The native Hawaiian language distinguishes between two types of lava seen during a volcanic eruption. A’a (pronounced “ah-ah”) is rough, rubbly lava, and pahoehoe (pronounced “pa-hoey-hoey”) is smooth, ropey lava that looks like a sticky river when flowing.
- In Korean, there is not one word for uncle or aunt, but many words depending on who is saying it and which side of the family the “uncle” or “aunt” is on. For instance, a child will have one word for his mother’s sister and a different word for his father’s sister.
- Northern Paiute tribal bands referred to each other by “eater” names that drew attention to the distinctive food resource of each band’s territory: Hunipuitōka (“Hunipui-Root-Eaters”), Koaagaitoka (“Salmon Eaters”), Wadatika (“Wada-Seed Eaters”) and Tagotokas (“Tuber Eaters”).

**Step 4:**

Invite students to share examples of languages other than English they currently speak at home and/or languages they know their ancestors spoke. If you have students who currently speak other languages in the home, invite them to share examples (if they are comfortable doing so).

**Step 5:**

Display the slide showing Native American tribes in Oregon and language groups and give students a few minutes to study it. Help students orient themselves to the map and invite questions to confirm their understanding using the following prompts and possible answers.

- What is the map showing us? (Native American tribes in Oregon and the languages they spoke.)



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## Activity 1 *(Continued)*

- What do the different colors represent? (Different groups or “families” of languages.)
- What do the numbers represent? (Different Native American tribes in Oregon.)
- Why do some colors have more than one number? (Several tribes spoke the same or similar languages.)
- What do the words in the colored areas of the map represent? (Different bands or subgroups within a tribe, some of whom spoke their own dialects of a language. [Define “dialect” if needed using the definition above and/or an example, such as how the primary languages in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States are all dialects of English.]

### **Say:**

*There were many Indigenous languages spoken in Oregon before European-Americans arrived. There were more families of languages spoken in Oregon than in all of Europe! With all of those languages around, Native people were often multilingual [define using definition above]; they learned several languages so they could trade and get along with their neighbors. Now there are only five language families left, and only a few people are able to speak most of them.*

### **Step 6:**

Ask students to respond to the following question, and record a few of their responses.

### **Say:**

*What are some reasons a language might become endangered (why people might stop speaking it)?*



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## Activity 1 (Continued)

### Step 7:

Debrief student responses to the prompt. If needed, add the following: Sometimes people are forced to give up a language, feel they have to do so in order to fit in, or are made to feel embarrassed if they use their own language and not the language others around them are speaking. Native Americans in Oregon and elsewhere experienced all of these, and as a result many of their languages are no longer spoken.

### Say:

*Native Americans in Oregon were forced to be a part of the culture of European-Americans. This is called assimilation. For example, this meant that Native people were forced to speak English and were not allowed to speak their native language. Teachers at boarding schools actually punished Native children for speaking their own language. Government agents forced Native Americans to move to reservations and mix with other Native groups, removing their connection to the cultural homelands that were the source of the heritage and lifeways that cultivated and sustained their languages. It was difficult for elders to teach their languages to their children and grandchildren, and as the elders died, they took their knowledge of their languages with them.*

### Step 8:

Ask students to respond to the following question, and record a few of their responses.

### Say:

*If a language stops being spoken, what is lost with it?*

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**Activity 1** *(Continued)***Step 9:**

Debrief student responses to the prompts. Support their effort to make connections between Native Americans being forced to give up their languages and the resulting loss of cultural knowledge, stories, and traditions passed down through generations. Reinforce this point using one or more of the following examples as time permits.

**Example 1:** Oregon Tribal Elders describe the loss of a language this way: “When a language dies, a library dies with it.”

**Example 2:** Write the word “lion” on a piece of poster paper or blackboard or whiteboard. Ask one or two volunteers to share a definition for the word lion (e.g., “a mammal that lives in Africa.”). This is the denotation (literal meaning) of “lion.” Next ask for additional volunteers to identify what the word “lion” means to them; what do they think of when they hear the word? Examples might include, “fierce,” “courageous,” or “kingly,” or they might recount stories of seeing lions at the zoo, on TV, or in movies. These words, experiences, and meanings are the connotation (symbolic, implied, or contextual meaning) of the word “lion.” Ask students what would disappear if we could no longer use the word lion. Reinforce that not only would our word for the mammal that lives in Africa disappear but all that we think about when we think of the word “lion” would disappear, too. Repeat, as needed and as time permits using additional words you or the children come up with to reinforce the difference between denotation and connotation and the connection between language and cultural identity.

**Step 10:**

Ask students to respond to the following question and record a few of their responses.



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## Activity 1 *(Continued)*

### **Say:**

*What are some reasons for protecting a language that is in danger of dying?*

### **Step 11:**

Debrief student responses to the prompts. If needed, add to the list they generate. Explain that keeping a language alive helps people connect to the past and remember all the useful and interesting things a culture can teach them. It also helps people feel proud of who they are and where they came from. When people are proud of their heritage, they have pride in themselves, which helps them feel better about themselves, make healthy choices, and be strong when they feel sad or have problems to work through.

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## Activity 2

# How to Keep a Language Alive

*Time: 20 minutes*

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### Step 1:

Write the word “revitalize” on a classroom writing surface and ask students to work with a neighbor to describe what they think it means. Add to or clarify their responses using the definition provided above.

### Say:

*Revitalize means to bring something back to life again. Tribes in Oregon have been working hard to preserve and revitalize their ancestral languages. We’re going to learn about some of those efforts. But first, since you are all now linguists, let’s see what ideas you might have!*

*Let’s say a tribe asked for your help in supporting the revitalization of their ancestral language. We’re going to work in groups to brainstorm some ideas for how we might support them in their effort to protect their language.*

### Step 2:

Organize students into groups of four or five using the sorting method of your choosing. Have each group select a leader, a note-taker, a timekeeper, and a spokesperson.

### Step 3:

Distribute a piece of chart paper and several markers to each group. Invite groups to brainstorm together and write down and draw pictures representing at least three ideas for things they could do to help the tribe save its language and teach it to others.

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## Activity 2 (Continued)

### Say:

*OK, linguists! Let's use what we already know about languages and how people learn them to see what support we might be able to give to Native language revitalization. You will have 10 minutes to come up with at least three ideas. Can someone give me an example? [Take ideas from one or two volunteers and/or supply one of your own.]*

*You can write your ideas down in words or draw them as pictures. Leaders and timekeepers, please make sure your group is focused and working. Note-takers, you will write the words down or draw pictures using the paper and markers I gave you. Spokespeople, you will share your group's ideas with the whole class.*

### Step 4:

Allow groups to work for 10 minutes, circulating among them to make sure they are staying on task and answering any questions. After 10 minutes, call time and invite each group's spokesperson to briefly explain the ideas or drawings on their chart paper (try to keep presentations to one or two minutes).

### Step 5:

Congratulate and thank students for their effort and ideas and then transition to the next segment.

### Say:

*Great job, linguists! I'm impressed with the hard work and creativity you put into this activity. Many of the ideas you suggested are the same or similar to things tribes in Oregon are actually doing to revitalize their languages. Let's take a look at some of them and compare them to what you came up with.*

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### Activity 3

## Tribal Language Revitalization Efforts in Oregon

Time: 15 minutes

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#### Step 1:

Move through the slides in the presentation, while sharing the following explanations.

#### Show the Language Revitalization: Documenting slide

##### Say:

*Documenting means writing things down or recording videos, sounds, and voices so that we have a record of them that we can save and work with and so that future generations can speak the language. Many tribes in Oregon are working with researchers to capture their languages before they are forgotten or gone. Since Native American languages were mostly passed along orally and not written down, documenting them often means recording interviews with elders to capture sounds and words and to gather oral histories. It also sometimes means inventing a writing system for a language that didn't have one before so that researchers and teachers who are learning the language know how to pronounce sounds and words. On this slide is a page from a website that uses words and sounds to record the Miluk language as spoken by Coquille tribal member Laura Hodgkiss Metcalf in 1953.*

#### Show the Language Revitalization: Creating Language Tools slide

##### Say:

*Many tribes in Oregon are creating tools that help others learn and teach their languages. They are writing children's books, building dictionaries and classroom lesson plans for teachers, and making audio and video recordings and libraries. As you can see on the slide, the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde have even designed an app for Apple and Android mobile devices to teach people the Chinuk Wawa language!*

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**Activity 3** (Continued)**Show the Language Revitalization: Naming (or Re-Naming) Places slide****Say:**

*Native Americans lived all over Oregon and had names for places they lived in and traveled through, just as we do today. Sometimes the names we use come directly from the language or name of the tribe that lived here before us. [Share examples of local place names in your area derived from native languages, if you are familiar with them.] Tribes use these names for places and buildings on their reservations or ancestral lands and also work with non-Native people to name or rename places and buildings elsewhere. This reminds both Native and non-Native people of the history of a place, honors Native heritage, and recognizes that Native Americans were the first to live in and describe the place. On the slide are a few examples. The city of Portland has a park called K<sup>h</sup>unamokwst, (pronounced KAHN-ah-mockst) which means “together” in Chinuk Wawa. Salem named a new elementary school after the Kalapuya tribe. In Roseburg, the Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians worked with Umpqua Community College to name a new building Taphòytha’ Hall (pronounced duh-poi’-tuh). Taphòytha’ means “to prosper or to be blessed.”*

**Show the Language Revitalization: Using Laws to Protect Languages slide****Say:**

*Many tribes work with the Oregon state government and the U.S. government to make sure that their languages are protected, and tribes are allowed to make decisions for themselves about how their languages are used. On the slide are some words from an Oregon rule that says Oregon teachers can be trained to teach Native American languages and that tribes in Oregon get to decide what languages those teachers should teach and how they should teach them. This is significant because in the past both the state and federal governments made rules or did*



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**Activity 3** *(Continued)*

*things that forced the tribes to stop speaking and teaching their languages.* [Read the bolded text for students—or have a volunteer do it—so they understand how the law recognizes the importance of language to tribes in Oregon and their sovereignty over who teaches it and how.]

**Show the Language Revitalization: Language Classes and Events slide****Say:**

*Tribes in Oregon hold language classes and events for tribal members of all ages. These might be at community centers, in afterschool programs, in summer camps, or on special “language” nights. On the screen is an example of a language night organized by the Burns Paiute Tribe.*

**Show the Language Revitalization: Language Immersion for Children slide****Say:**

*The best way to learn a new language is to be completely surrounded by it. This is called “immersion.” [Further define using the definition above, if needed.] For example, if you wanted to learn French, the best way to learn would be to go to France, where all you’d hear would be French and you’d have to learn and use it quickly. Some tribes in Oregon have developed or are developing immersion programs to teach their languages to children in preschool or the early elementary grades. The Tamalúut Language Immersion Project of the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation teaches preschoolers in the Umatilla dialect of the Ichisain language. [If time and technology permit, play the video showcasing the Umatilla project using the link provided on the slide.]*

**Step 2:**

Debrief slides with students. Invite them to compare the examples from the slides with the ideas they brainstormed in their groups earlier.





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### Activity 3 (Continued)

#### Step 3:

Summarize the lesson, reinforcing the connection between language revitalization and cultural pride that helps tribes and their members feel connected to and supported by their rich culture and history.

#### Say:

*These are just a few examples of how tribes in Oregon are bringing their languages back to life. These activities help them connect to their past so they can learn about and feel proud about their heritage. When you are proud of where you come from, you feel good about yourself and your community. When we feel good, we want the best for ourselves and others, and we make choices that help ourselves and the people we care for be successful.*