



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The Role and Revitalization of Oregon Native Languages

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- **Languages and Lifeways**

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student will understand that

- Native American Tribes in Oregon speak many unique languages,
- Native languages play an important role in Native American cultures and traditions in Oregon, and
- Native American Tribes were not always allowed to speak their languages in school and had to find ways to ensure their survival.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why are Native languages important to Native American Tribes in Oregon?
- What are some ways that Native American Tribes in Oregon are working to strengthen and protect their languages?

REQUIRED TIME

- 30 minutes

Overview

In this lesson, students explore the importance of Native languages to Oregon Tribes. Students will learn about the Klamath Tribes as an example of Native language revitalization efforts in Oregon. Through personal videos and stories from the Klamath Tribes' Language Department, students make personal connections to the concept of language and recognize language as part of identity and culture.

Background for Teachers

Each Native American Tribe in Oregon has its own unique language and dialect that they have spoken since time immemorial. Their languages are used for conversation, ceremonies, songs and celebrations. However, during the 19th and 20th centuries, United States policies forced Native American children into boarding schools where they were not allowed to speak their own languages. Today, many Tribes are working to revitalize and strengthen their languages through schools,



language classes, storytelling, digital resources and community programs.

Many Indigenous languages are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts, oral traditions and ways of understanding the world that may not translate easily into written or mainstream forms. These languages often carry meanings, values and relationships that are embedded in the land, community and ceremony. While many Indigenous languages were historically not written, this does not make them any less valid or complex. In fact, oral languages are rich in expression, memory and nuance, passed down carefully from generation to generation. The lack of a written form reflects a different system of knowledge transmission. Educators must recognize that Indigenous languages are complete living systems of communication and that oral tradition is a powerful way of preserving culture, history, and identity.

In this lesson, students learn about the Klamath Tribes as an example of language use and revitalization efforts. The Klamath Tribes are made up of three distinct groups: the Klamath, Modoc and Yahooskin (also spelled Pauskin or Yahuskin) peoples. They share cultural ties and a linguistic heritage rooted in the Klamath-Modoc language.

Considerations for Teachers

Instructional Practices

While teaching this lesson, the following principles can help guide your decision-making and engagement with students.

STANDARDS

Oregon English Language Arts Standards

- **3.W.2:** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

Key Words and Ideas

- **Tradition:** Something people do again and again because it's special to them.
- **Revitalize:** To bring something back to life, restore, and make it stronger.
- **Culture:** A group's way of life, including language, food, customs, and beliefs.

MATERIALS

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

- Slide deck
- Whiteboard
- Writing materials
- Student self-assessment



- Be sensitive to learners' needs and comfort levels. Some students might be sensitive to sharing personal family knowledge and should not be required to do so.
- Focus on teaching the Essential Understanding through an exploration of today's language revitalization efforts.
- When sharing content with students, address the "why" not just the "what."
- Highlight the strengths and struggles of Oregon's Indigenous peoples today while also acknowledging their history and tradition.
- Ensure your teaching practices are accessible and appropriate for Native and non-Native students.

Assessment

During this lesson, observe and listen to students during discussions and as they work independently and collaboratively to determine how their learning is progressing. Actively monitor student discussion and intervene when there are misconceptions or biases that could inhibit authentic engagement with this topic.

Write down what you notice about what students say, do and make in relation to the success criteria. Use this formative information to provide feedback to students and plan next steps.

At the end of the lesson, provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their learning through a self-assessment. Students can indicate their level of learning in relation to specific success criteria. They can also write out an explanation of why they feel they are at that learning stage.

Success Criteria

- Students can explain why Oregon's Native languages are important.
- Students can write a description of how the Klamath Tribes are working to preserve and revitalize their language.



Opener

Time: 7 minutes

Step 1:

Help students make personal connections to the concept of language and recognize language as part of identity and culture. Remember to be sensitive to learners' needs when assigning pairs (for example, reading and writing skills, attention skills, language skills). In addition, some students might be sensitive to sharing personal family knowledge and should not be required to do so.

Ask Students: "How many of you speak or hear more than one language at home or in your community? What other languages do you hear in your family or at the store?"

Record student answers on the whiteboard.

Main Activity

Time: 12 minutes

Step 1:

Explain that Native American Tribes in Oregon speak many different languages and that language helps people tell stories, share knowledge and traditions and stay connected to their culture. (It may be helpful to review the term "culture" and how each of us has a deep culture, language, traditions, beliefs, how we show respect, etc.)

Explain that in the past, United States law did not allow Native American Tribes to speak their languages in schools, and they would often get in a lot of trouble if they were caught speaking their languages. However, many tribes still found a way to speak these languages and keep them alive. Today, they are making efforts to revitalize them. The Klamath Tribes are one example of a Native Nation that is working to revitalize their languages.

Ask students: "What do you think it would feel like if someone told you that you couldn't speak your language anymore?"

Step 2:

Think-Pair-Share:

- Think: Give students 30 seconds to quietly think about the question.
- Pair: Have them turn to a partner and share their answer.
- Share: Invite a few students to share out loud. As they speak, allow students to make personal connections or ask questions.
- Ask students the follow-up question: "What do you think happens when fewer people speak a language?"

Step 3:

Introduce the video. Say to students, "We're going to watch a short video of GeorGene Nelson speaking about the importance of teaching and learning her Native language. She is the Director of the Language Department for the Klamath Tribes. Afterward, we will complete a reflection sheet."

Ask students to listen closely to what she says about why language matters.

Step 4:

Play the YouTube video: "[Our Ancestors Can Understand Us Better](#)" (about 1 minute long).

Step 5:

Explore the [Klamath Tribes' Language website](#). Project the screen and, using your cursor, ask students to shout out other learning opportunities they provide Klamath language learners. For example, they have a Word of the Day, YouTube videos, language lessons, dictionaries, etc.

Step 6:

Discussion Questions (Think-Pair-Share):

Ask students to find a partner and discuss their thoughts for two or three minutes in response to the following questions. Note: You can either allow students to select their partner or assign pairs.



- What does she say about why they are doing this work?
- Why do you think she said, “We were born to speak our tribal languages?”
- What does language have to do with identity?

To transition to the writing portion, record the class responses on poster paper or a whiteboard.

Step 7:

Writing Activity (8 minutes)

Prompt the students by saying, “Please write a few sentences to explain why Native languages are important and how the Klamath Tribes are helping to protect theirs.”

Offer a few sentence starters:

- Native languages are important because...
- A long time ago, Native children were not allowed to...
- The Klamath Tribes are helping their language by...

Closing

Time: 3 minutes

Step 1:

Revisit the Essential Questions:

- Why are Native languages important?
- What is one way the Klamath Tribes are helping their languages?

Step 2:

Bring the class together for a conversation about what they learned.

Step 3:

Ask students to complete the self-assessment. Use this information to inform next steps.

Student Handout: Reflection Sheet

Name: _____

Date: _____

Why is learning the Klamath language important?

What do you notice about the words, accents, letters, and spelling in the video?



What does it mean when a language is endangered?

Why are Native languages important?



Handout: Student Self-Assessment

Directions: Read the lesson success criteria in the first column. Then, decide, did I meet this criterion? Choose Not Yet or Yes. Explain why below.

Success Criteria Can I...	Not Yet 	Yes 
explain why Oregon's Native languages are important?		
write a description of how the Klamath Tribes are working to preserve and revitalize their language?		

What did I do well and what is a next step I can take?

