



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

Chinuk Wawa¹

ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- History
- Identity
- Language

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Student will be able to:

- Connect the importance of language to culture.
- Understand the history and importance of Chinuk Wawa to the Native American tribes of Oregon.
- Use Chinuk Wawa to develop a script/dialogue.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can language be powerful?
- What is the relationship between language and culture?

LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?
In the classroom with a variety of whole class and partner work for engagement.
- How are the students organized?
 - ☑ Whole class ☑ Teams: 3 – 5
 - ☑ Pairs ☑ Individually

TIME REQUIRED

60–90 minutes

Overview

The Indigenous languages of many Native American tribes have been decimated due to decades of colonialism and forced assimilation. Some of those languages have not survived, but many have endured. Indigenous languages connect tribal people to their place, their culture, and their ancestors—they are a direct conduit to important aspects of traditional and modern tribal life. A language carries more than words; it carries worldviews, ways of being, and ways of knowing.

In traditional Native American culture, each tribe had its own distinct language, which might include several dialects, and each dialect was an expression of that tribe or band’s unique identity. Tribes from different parts of Oregon spoke languages and dialects that could be very different from one another. To communicate and conduct trade, they had to create a simplified and practical language—what is often referred to as a pidgin language.

This lesson gives students the opportunity to learn the history and importance of the pidgin language known as Chinuk Wawa. They will also reflect on the power of language and the relationship between language and cultural identity.

¹ In the past, Chinuk Wawa was frequently referred to as Chinook Jargon. The tribes that still speak and teach it refer to it as Chinuk Wawa. This lesson is going to use the modern nomenclature; historical documents may refer to the language as Chinook Jargon.



Background for teachers

NATIVE LANGUAGES

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. In addition to being forcibly removed from their ancestral homeland, Native American people have faced systematic cultural suppression. Beginning as early as the 17th century, Euro-American government officials, teachers, and other authorities actively discouraged Native American and Alaska Native people from speaking their native languages and even physically punished Native children for doing so at boarding schools. This continued well into the 20th century. As a result, the amazing diversity of languages once spoken by Indigenous people in North America has been depleted, with many languages becoming extinct. Oregon is a case in point. According to the National Geographic Society:

Oregon was probably the most diverse region of [Indigenous] languages in the U.S. California might have the claim, but it is much larger, so the award for density of linguistic diversity goes to Oregon. 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.²

² Braun, D. M. (2009, November 15). Preserving Native America's vanishing languages [Blog post]. Retrieved from National Geographic Society website: <https://blog.nationalgeographic.org/2009/11/15/preserving-native-americas-vanishing-languages/>

STANDARDS

Oregon social sciences standards

4.7 Explain the interactions between the Pacific Northwest physical systems and human systems, with a focus on Native Americans in that region.

4.10 Describe how technological developments, societal decisions, and personal practices affect Oregon's sustainability (dams, wind turbines, climate change and variability, transportation systems, etc.).

4.11 Analyze the distinct way of knowing and living amongst the different American Indian tribes in Oregon prior to colonization, such as religion, language, and cultural practices and the subsequent impact of that colonization

4.14 Examine the history of the nine federally recognized Oregon tribes.

Oregon English language arts standards

4.RI.2 Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

4.RI.7 Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears

4.W.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.

4.SL.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

4.SL.5 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 4 topics and texts, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly



Due to systematic policies to destroy tribal nations, most native languages are moribund, but many tribes are making efforts to revitalize their languages. To support student understanding of these efforts, refer to the ODE Grade 4, health lesson: Language Revitalization.

CHINUK WAWA

The modern Chinook Indian Nation consists of the Clatsop and Kathlamet tribes of what is now Oregon and the Lower Chinook, Wahkiakum, and Willapa of Washington state. These five tribes have existed since time immemorial in their aboriginal territory in the Lower Columbia River region and along the coast at the river's mouth. It is here that Chinook families welcomed Lewis and Clark to the Pacific Ocean and helped them survive the winter of 1805/1806.

The Chinookan people living along the Lower Columbia River were traders long before Euro-Americans invaded the Pacific Coast. The Chinookan people traded with many other tribes that did not speak Chinookan dialects. To make it easier to conduct trade, the tribes developed a simplified version of verbal communication that included elements from many Indigenous languages in the Pacific Northwest. This trade language is known as Chinuk Wawa, a Native American pidgin language.

When Euro-Americans invaded the Pacific Northwest, elements of both English and French were incorporated into Chinuk Wawa which became an important trade language throughout the Pacific

MATERIALS

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

- Chinuk Wawa PowerPoint presentation
- Chinuk Wawa Words and Phrases handout³ or
 - Chinuk Wawa App (<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/chinuk-wawa/id908108231>)
 - Chinuk Wawa Trade Script–Student Copy
 - Chinuk Wawa Trade Script–Teacher Copy

VOCABULARY

Pidgin – Simplified means of communication that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common: typically, its vocabulary and grammar are limited and often drawn from several languages.

Jargon – Special words or expressions that are used by a group.

Lingua franca – A language that is adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different.

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

Creole – A pidgin language that becomes the formal language of a group of people. Chinuk Wawa was “creolized” by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

³ Chinuk Wawa uses a modern standardized spelling.



Northwest and as far north as Alaska. Chinuk Wawa has survived for many generations among the Native people of the Lower Columbia. It remains a testament to the rich cultural traditions of Native Americans in the Pacific Northwest and is a source of pride and intertribal identity.

Resources

Teachers should become familiar with the origin and history of Chinuk Wawa. In addition, teachers should learn about the revival of this language in and around Native American communities in Oregon.

Chinuk Wawa Dictionary Committee. (2012). *Chinuk Wawa: As our elders teach us to speak it*. Grand Ronde, OR: Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde.

Gibbs, G. (1863). *Dictionary of the Chinook Jargon, or trade language of Oregon* [Abridged]. Retrieved from University of Washington website: https://www.washington.edu/uwired/outreach/cspn/Website/Classroom%20Materials/Curriculum%20Packets/Treaties%20&%20Reservations/Documents/Chinook_Dictionary_Abridged.pdf

Holton, J. (2004). *Chinook Jargon: The hidden language of the Pacific Northwest*. Retrieved from <http://www.rjholton.com/>

I Love Languages. (2019, April 8). *The sound of the Chinook Jargon language (numbers, greetings & story)* [Video]. Retrieved from YouTube website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8lyjwlobmQ>

SUPPLIES

- LCD projector or another type of computer projection device
- If possible: Classroom access to iPads with the Chinuk Wawa App (one per group of 4-6 students)



- Jones, L. (2016, February 21). The Chinook people & language survive: When did Northwesterners stop speaking Chinook Jargon. *KUOW Seattle News & Information*. Retrieved from Chinook Nation website: <https://www.chinooknation.org/justice/2016/Q1'16/day192.html>
- Szczepanski, C. S. (2019, March 6). *Chinuk Wawa: Native American Indian language* [TEDx Talk video]. Retrieved from YouTube website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKMSTkbtPBk>
- University of Montana, Regional Learning Project. (n.d.). *Language: Lower Chinook and Clatsop*. Retrieved from TrailTribes.org website: <http://www.trailtribes.org/fortclatsop/language.htm>
- Zenk, H. (2018). Chinook Jargon (Chinuk Wawa). In *The Oregon Encyclopedia*. Retrieved from Oregon Historical Society website: https://oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/chinook_jargon/#.XTDAh-hKiUk
- Zenk, H. B., & Johnson, T. A. (2013). Chinuk Wawa and its roots in Chinookan. In R. T. Boyd, K. M. Ames, & T. A. Johnson (Eds.), *Chinookan peoples of the Lower Columbia* (pp. 272–287). Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

Considerations for teachers

Assessment

- Students will engage in a substantial amount of classroom and group discussions. The teacher should actively monitor student discussion for correct understanding and should intervene when there are misconceptions or biases that could inhibit authentic engagement with this topic.
- Students should be assessed both formatively and summatively. The formative assessment will consist of teacher observation of student participation in classroom discussion. The summative assessment will include a final script developed by small groups of students using Chinuk Wawa.



Practices

The teacher must understand the value of Chinuk Wawa and the central role it played among the Native American Tribes in Oregon

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

Learning targets

- I can connect the importance of language to culture.
- I can understand the history and importance of Chinuk Wawa to the Native American Tribes in Oregon.
- I can work with a partner to create a script/dialogue using Chinuk Wawa.

Options/extensions

- Students will read the following article and then write a one-page summary about the revival of Chinuk Wawa today.
- Jones, L. (2016, February 21). The Chinook people & language survive: When did Northwesterners stop speaking Chinook Jargon. *KUOW Seattle News & Information*. Retrieved from Chinook Nation website: <https://www.chinooknation.org/justice/2016/Q1'16/day192.html>
- Students read the book *Good Night Grand Ronde*. Ordering information is available from the CTGR Education/ Language Department at https://www.grandronde.org/media/1571/ctgr-language-program-book-order-form_pdf.pdf
- Students can watch Crystal Starr Szczepanski's Ted Talk on Chinuk Wawa: Native American Indian language at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eKMSTkbtPBk>. In this talk Szczepanski teaches us about one of the traditional Indigenous languages of the Pacific Northwest. She shares her personal journey in helping revitalize and heal Chinuk Wawa. This talk was given at a TEDx event using the TED conference format but was independently organized by a local community.



Reflection/closure

- Review the learning targets.
- Have students think-pair-share about questions they might have as a result of their learning. Prompt for two or more questions from each group, and then let a few groups share their ideas with the whole class.

Activity 1

Hook (Think-Write-Pair-Share)

Time: 15 minutes

Step 1:

Ask students to think for a few minutes about the following questions:

Why is language important?

What do languages help you do?

Step 2:

After students have had a few minutes to think, direct them to write down their thoughts in a journal or on a piece of scratch paper.

Step 3:

Ask students to find a partner and discuss their thoughts for three or four minutes.

Note: The teacher can either allow students to select their partner or can assign pairs. 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.

Step 4:

Once partners have had enough time to share their thoughts, expand the "share" to a whole-class discussion. Record the class discussion on poster paper or a white board.

Step 5 (Optional):

If there is time, have students return to their pairs to talk about how their thinking may have changed as a result of the classroom discussion.

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

Step 6:

Show slides 1 and 2 with the following text: Each language spoken today began or evolved among a group of people living at a specific time and place in the world.

Say:

Language and culture are intertwined. Language is not simply a collection of words but also a way of understanding the world and how a specific group of people relate to it and to each other. When learning a new language, you are also learning about the culture (customs and traditions) tied to a group of people and a place.

Step 7:

Using slides 4-6, share the following examples of how languages embody knowledge or beliefs about the world. (Feel free to use your own examples also.)

- 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 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.

Activity 1 *(Continued)*

- In Korean, there are many words for uncle or aunt 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 Indian 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 8:

Invite students to share examples of languages, other than English, that 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).

Say:

The purpose of our next activity is to learn about the history and importance of the language known as Chinuk Wawa. You will have the opportunity to experience how Chinuk Wawa was an effective means of communication between groups of people who spoke different languages.

There are many place names in Oregon that are derived from Chinuk Wawa words, such as Sahalie Falls, Tamolitch Blue Pool, and Moolack Shores.

As you learn about Chinuk Wawa, think about how the words and phrases of this language represent multiple cultures.



Activity 2

Chinuk Wawa

Time: 45–60 minutes

Step 1:

Review slides 7–13 on the history and status of Chinuk Wawa.

(4–5 minutes)

Say:

The Chinookan people living along the Lower Columbia River were traders long before Euro-Americans invaded the Pacific Coast. The Chinookan people traded with many other Native tribes who did not speak the same language.

To make it easier to conduct trade among many different tribes speaking a variety of languages, a simplified version of verbal communication was developed from a combination of the languages used by the Native tribes of the Pacific Northwest.

This trade language is known today as Chinuk Wawa, a Native American pidgin language. A pidgin language is a simplified way to communicate that develops between two or more groups that do not have a language in common.

When Euro-Americans invaded the Pacific Northwest, elements of both English and French also became part of Chinuk Wawa.

Chinuk Wawa became the lingua franca among traders throughout the Pacific Northwest, as far north as Alaska. Lingua franca is the language adopted as a common language between speakers whose native languages are different. Chinuk Wawa is still spoken by some Native Americans in Oregon today and is a source of great pride.

Step 2:

Distribute the Chinuk Wawa Words & Phrases handout and ask students to independently read through all the words and phrases.

Activity 2 (Continued)

Step 3:

Say:

What English, Spanish, French, or Russian words do you see or recognize in Chinuk Wawa? Can you tell anything about the cultures of the people who used Chinuk Wawa?

Step 4:

In order to expose students to the sound of Chinuk Wawa, show the brief YouTube video, “*The Sound of the Chinook Jargon Language (Numbers, Greetings & Story)*”⁴ (3:45 minutes). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8lyjwlobmQ>

Pronunciation: As a trade language, Chinuk Wawa has been useful for people from many different linguistic backgrounds, so an individual’s pronunciation of a given word may depend on their own native language and dialect, be it English, French, Salish, or Hawaiian. It is also important to understand that all published lexicons were created by English speakers and are therefore influenced by standard English spelling conventions, so there is some variety in the spellings of words in Chinuk Wawa.

The best way for teachers and students to learn the pronunciation of Chinuk Wawa is to have access to the Chinuk Wawa App developed by the Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Community of Oregon and its Land & Culture Department. This app includes recorded pronunciations of the different sounds that make up Chinuk Wawa.

⁴ I Love Languages. (2019, April 8). *The sound of the Chinook Jargon language (numbers, greetings & story)* [Video]. Retrieved from YouTube website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8lyjwlobmQ>



Activity 2 (Continued)

Say:

To get an idea of how Chinuk Wawa sounds, we're going to watch and listen to a video that includes the numbers 1-10, some greetings, and a story about Coyote. Listen carefully and respectfully.

Note: You may want to show the video multiple times (or make it accessible to students) to give students a firm foundation in how to pronounce numbers and greetings.

Step 5:

Next, ask students to move into pairs/partners. Then distribute one copy of the Chinuk Wawa Script (Student Copy) to each pair.

Say:

You are going to work with a partner to create a script using Chinuk Wawa. One of you is preparing a big meal for an outdoor family picnic. You have some supplies, but not everything you need. Your partner is a local store owner who has many different products for sale. You will need communicate with each other using Chinuk Wawa. Let's look at an example together.

Step 6:

Using an overhead projector, share the Chinuk Wawa Script (Teacher Copy). Read the script aloud to students. Show students where each Chinuk Wawa word can be found on the Chinuk Wawa Words & Phrases handout. Remind students that they can get creative and use any Chinuk Wawa words and phrases that will help buy/sell together.

Step 7:

Give partners 15-20 minutes to develop their script. Walk the room and answer questions and provide guidance.



Activity 2 (Continued)

Step 8:

When students have completed their Chinuk Wawa Script, group partners in small groups of 4-6. Have these small groups organize their chairs so they are sitting back to back.

Step 9:

Distribute blank pieces of paper, pencils, and clipboards (or something to help them write). Students should also have their copy of Chinuk Wawa Words & Phrases.

Step 10:

Each pair of students will have the opportunity to read their script aloud to the other partners in their small group. The READERS may not translate any of the words to their group members. The group members who are the LISTENERS should attempt to translate in writing (in words or pictures) what is being traded/negotiated. After 2-3 minutes, partners can turn around and compare their understanding.

Step 11:

Repeat until all partners have had the opportunity to be both READERS and LISTENERS.

Step 12:

Facilitate a whole-group discussion using the following questions:

Say:

Did you discover any challenges with communicating using Chinuk Wawa? How did you overcome these challenges? What were the benefits to communicating with Chinuk Wawa?

