

Theme: Language Revitalization

Authored by global oneness project

“There is a pressing need to build support for language communities in their efforts to establish meaningful new roles for their endangered languages.” UNESCO



From the Global Oneness Project film *Karuk*. Karuk elder Julian Lang meets with Maymi Preston-Donahue every Monday to converse solely in Karuk.

Many Indigenous speakers of Indigenous languages work hard every day to protect their languages from continual pressure to speak one of the dominant world languages. World languages are spoken by populations around the globe, in numbers exceeding 100 million. The following eleven world languages are spoken by the greatest number of people: Mandarin, English, Hindi, Spanish, Russian, Bengali, Arabic, Portuguese, French, German, and Japanese. These stories exemplify ways in which Indigenous speakers and communities are advocating for language revitalization so that their languages and cultures do not disappear. Language revitalization can be defined as learning activities, including language immersion schools and programs that cultivate new speakers, especially where intergenerational transmission of the language has been disrupted.

Access the Google Earth tour [Celebrating Indigenous Languages](#). Divide into pairs or small groups. With your partners or group members, explore the tour through the theme of language revitalization. Answer the following questions and use this [note-taker](#) to write down your observations, insights, and evidence from *Celebrating Indigenous Languages*.

Questions

1. “It takes a community to raise a language,” said [Wayne Jackson](#), speaker of Plains Cree from Goodfish Lake, Alberta, Canada. Describe some of the efforts taking place in communities to promote more speakers of Indigenous languages.
2. How is technology being used to strengthen language preservation efforts? Find two examples.
3. [Yves Heifara Doudoute](#), speaker of Te Reo Tahiti from Tahiti said, “The language is not spoken on the street anymore, and we need to encourage people to talk in our language.” What are some additional challenges the speakers are facing?
4. “Children learn the language at a young age to ensure it is passed down to future generations,” said [Raden Gedarip](#), speaker of Petung Bayan Sasak from Lombok, Indonesia. Why is it important for Indigenous youth to learn their Native languages? How might this support the future of their languages?
5. “I feel proud, honored even, that after so many years of our language sleeping I am able to speak the words my old people once did,” said [Rosetta Thomas](#), speaker of *palawa kani*, the language of Tasmanian Aborigines. A sleeping language is when a language has no fluent speakers. What do you think becomes lost when a language is no longer spoken? What might be gained when a language is revived?
6. Why might it be important for non-Natives to learn about language loss and language revitalization efforts taking place worldwide? In what ways can non-Natives become advocates to support this work?

Reflecting and Projecting

In one paragraph, write a response to the following questions.

1. Anthropologist Keith Basso asked, “What can the study of spoken languages reveal about the shapes and contours of other cultural worlds?” What do you know now about the relationship between language and culture? How did your perspective shift? In what way(s) do the Indigenous language speakers provide you with a new way of seeing the world? In what ways do their stories add to a more comprehensive global story of humanity?
2. What new insights or reflections do you have about your own connection to the natural and living world? Describe the land in which you live and why it is important to you.
3. Do you know which Indigenous people are the original stewards of the land you live on? Conduct research to find out the following:
 - The name of the tribe, territory, and language. (Note: In North America, students can use the website resource [Native Land](#).)
 - Learn a local Indigenous or Native word. What did you learn?
 - Ask students to share their findings with the class.