

Theme: Songs

Authored by global oneness project

“We are part of an old story, and involved in it are migrations of winds, of ocean currents, of seeds, and songs and generations of nations.”

Joy Harjo, Member of the Mvskoke Nation
First Native American Poet Laureate of the United States (2019)



From the Global Oneness Project film *Marie's Dictionary*. Marie Wilcox is the last fluent speaker of the Wukchumni language; she created a dictionary in order to keep her language alive.

Songs—or oral storytelling—often reflect cultural values, ethics, and beliefs. In Indigenous cultures, songs are passed down from generation to generation, and many are under threat of disappearing. Songs can be stories that honor ancestors and the living world, water, rivers, the earth, and animals. Many Indigenous songs do not translate directly into another language, a reflection of how the messages are unique and specific to people and place.

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 Indigenous songs. You will need to read the translations of the songs. Answer the following questions and use this [note-taker](#) to write down your observations, insights, and evidence from *Celebrating Indigenous Languages*.

Questions

1. Listen to three songs from three different speakers. Describe the sounds you hear.
2. How do the songs communicate qualities of care and love towards family and community? Find two examples.
3. In what ways do the songs celebrate the living world, including plants and animals?
4. In what ways do the songs express respect and gratitude towards life?
5. “This song is a greeting to all living creatures — grandpa, the sun and the grandma moon, the blue whales in the seas and all the beings in the Andes. This chant thanks all of them,” said [Francisca Calfin Alcapan, Mapuche, from Araucania, Chile](#). In which ways do the songs reflect kinship, or relationship, with nature? Do these songs change your perspective? If so, how?
6. Many of the songs shared are passed down from generation to generation through lullabies. Find an example and describe what the song is about. Why might lullabies be an important way to preserve and revitalize a language?
7. Why do you think we remember songs?

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 songs from your own culture? What is your favorite family song? What song do you remember most from when you were young? Describe what the song is about 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.