

International Languages Week

19-25 AUGUST 2007

WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES WEEK?

Taking place annually in the third full week of August, International Languages Week is designed to celebrate the diversity of languages used in New Zealand and throughout the world. Although it focuses on five key languages taught in New Zealand schools: Chinese, French, German, Japanese, and Spanish, International Languages Week celebrates the teaching, learning and use of ALL languages.

International Languages Week gives schools and communities the opportunity to recognise and value the languages students speak at home or are learning at school (or elsewhere). It provides an opportunity to 'develop students' awareness of the languages around them as well, to highlight the benefits of learning additional languages and to showcase the achievements of those already learning languages – within the school and the community.

These pages provide some activities that could be included in classroom programmes as well as some ideas for celebrating International Languages Week in your school and in the wider community.



THINKING ABOUT LANGUAGES

Some questions for class discussion and debate:

- How many languages are there in the world? What would you guess (as individuals then in groups)?
(Answer: It is difficult to say exactly but experts seem to agree that the number of languages is between 6000 and 7000. Of these:

- approximately 50% are endangered
- 96% are spoken by just 4% of the world's population
- 90% are not represented on the internet
- one disappears on average every two weeks).

- Can students come up with reasons why it is difficult to determine exactly how many languages there are?
- How does a language "disappear"?
- Does it matter?

Some Pacific languages are in danger of disappearing – if you have Pacific Island students in your class or school, you might want to take this question further:

- How many languages can your students name? Draw up a list of as many as they can think of.

- What is the most important language in the world? Ask students to discuss the question in groups and to explain their answer.

Some things to consider in their discussions:

- What makes a language important?
- Is it the language with the most native speakers?
- Is it the one that is used most often?
- Is it the one used by the wealthiest or most powerful nation(s)?
- Is it the one that is the official language of most countries?
- If you speak only one language, which language would you think the most important? Would other people agree?

- English might appear an obvious answer from a New Zealand perspective, given that English is our dominant language. Extend discussion by not allowing students to choose English as an answer.

THE LANGUAGES TOP 10

- What is the world's most widely spoken language? What other languages are in the Top 10? Some languages will be easy to identify but try to get students to think about the question.

DRAFT CURRICULUM CONTEXT

Key Competencies:

- Relating to others
- Participating and contributing
- Thinking and reflecting
- Using Language symbols and texts

Learning Languages

Language – making connections with known language(s)

Culture – making connections with known culture(s)

English: – Increasing vocabulary to make meaning of texts

Social Sciences: – Identity, Culture & Organisation, Social Inquiry

Mathematics: – Statistical investigation.

- What factors might help them find answers? **eg** population, colonisation, tradition, groupings of countries ...

A world map would be a useful aid for this exercise.

- The answer is rather complicated. Estimates of how many people speak a language vary considerably, **eg** estimates for English vary from 341 to 514 million and Japanese from 120 to 277 million.

- One thing that complicates the matter is how to define a "speaker" - this can be very vague. Some surveys of languages give information on native speakers only. Others count both native speakers and secondary speakers (those who use the language regularly or primarily even though it is not their native language).



THE TOP TEN (11 REALLY) ARE:

1	Mandarin Chinese (The undisputed champion with approx. 1 billion speakers)
2-4	English, Hindi/Hindustani, Spanish (order changes according to different estimates, 300 – 550 million speakers)
5-8	Arabic, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian (approx. 200-270 million speakers)
9-11	French, German, Japanese (120-200 million speakers)

- Find out where each of these languages is spoken. Use the information to create a colour-coded world languages map for your classroom.

He taonga nga reo katoa

A Time for Celebration

www.international-languages-week.org

HOW MANY LANGUAGES DO YOU SPEAK?

- Tell students that according to the 2006 census, the number of multilingual people (people who can speak two or more languages) in New Zealand is increasing. In the ten years between 1996 and 2006, this number increased by 43.3 percent, from 468,711 people in 1996 to 671,658 people in 2006.

% Speaking No, One or Two of More Languages		
Number of languages spoken	1996	2006
None	2.6%	2.0%
One language	83.8%	80.5%
Two or more languages	13.6%	17.5%

- What reasons can students give for this increase?
 - What languages do they think are spoken? Can they give reasons?
 - What about your class? Your school? How do they compare with the rest of New Zealand? What languages do they speak?
 - Survey the class (or the whole school, including staff) using the exact question from the 2006 census below.
 - *In which language(s) could you hold a conversation about a lot of everyday things?*
- English Māori Samoan NZ Sign Language
 Other languages, **eg** Gujarati, Cantonese, Greek, Please list.
 None
- Can students think why the last option was included on the list? (*A census form must be completed for every single New Zealander – including those too young to talk yet!*)
 - Do students know in which countries the languages given as examples - Gujarati, Cantonese and Greek - are usually spoken?
 - Tally the results and compare with the national figures in the chart above. What reasons can the students find for any variations?
 - Use the results to draw up a register of all the languages spoken by your class (or school).
 - Find out how to write 'Hello' or 'Welcome' in each of these languages and use these words to make a multi-lingual poster for your classroom or for the entrance to the school during International Languages Week.



IDEAS FOR CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL LANGUAGES WEEK

At school...

Incorporate some of these activities into your teaching programme for the week. (Plan and Run a Cultural Festival – see pages 20-21 of this issue of starters&strategies)

- Hold a languages assembly featuring the language (and other) skills of students and staff; include a mini language lesson; present any languages awards.
- Design posters/bookmarks/bumper stickers promoting language learning.
- Put together and perform (for the school and community) an international concert to showcase international language and cultural performance skill of your students.
- Make your school's language treasures visible with multi-lingual posters and signs.
- Design and wear badges or stickers proudly proclaiming what languages you speak.
- Learn to play a sport or a game from a different country.
- Hold a languages quiz – for staff, for students, for parents
- Try the ultimate "pot luck" lunch – with foods from around the world.
- Have your senior languages students teach or perform for your junior students.
- Teach your colleagues – use staff meetings to teach colleagues to say hello or thank you in another language.
- Share your learning languages stories – the mistakes can produce the funniest moments!!!
- Display flags from countries whose languages are represented at your school.
- Invite parents to share their language and culture with your students – in class or at assembly.

...and beyond

- Produce a languages newsletter for your school for International Languages Week. Include:
 - *A programme of activities for the week*
 - *Language-learning stories from your school and community*
 - *Facts and figures about the languages represented at your school (refer to "How many languages do you speak?" section)*
 - *An invitation to your international concert or assembly*
 - *Some samples of student work in other languages*
- Have an international "pot luck" meal for parents (you could combine it with your concert).
- Have International Cooking Classes for staff and parents (this could even be a PTA fundraiser!).
- Contact local newspapers, libraries, radio stations, bookshops, etc and ask them to focus on International Languages.
- Put students on the look-out for languages in their daily lives – in the street, in shops, at home, in the media, etc
- Speech or essay topic: "Why all New Zealand students should learn (language)". Allow students their own choice of language in the title (Te reo Māori, Mandarin, Latin, Samoan, etc) as long as it is NOT English...or how about a debate on the topic: "English is enough"?

All languages are to be treasured