

International Mother Language Day February 21

Overview and Purpose

This lesson is designed to teach children about International Mother Language Day and the specific rights of children highlighted by this UN Day; their right to practice their own mother language (CRC Article 30), and their right to a name (CRC Article 7).

Background Information for Teachers

International Mother Language Day
un.org/depts/dhl/language/
Profile of Cultures in Canada
12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/index-eng.cfm

Grades

4 – 8

Materials

Book entitled *Marianthe's Story: Painted Words and Spoken Memories* by Aliko
Charade cards (teacher and/or student-generated)
Artist Statement worksheet (printable copy attached)

Activity One

- Begin by introducing February 21st as International Mother Language Day; a UN Day celebrated around the world. The day has special significance in Canada because we are a multilingual society with more than 100 different first languages spoken. Record all the languages spoken in class.
- Ask the students why it might be important to have the right to speak their own language. Ask how language is important to culture.
- Regardless of what language we speak we are all similar. Ask the students what this means.
- Read aloud from *Painted Words*, the first part of the book by Aliko. Discuss the rights of the child (CRC Articles 30 and 7) in relation to the book.
- Ask the students what Mr. Petrie means when he says, "There's more than one way to peel an orange." Ask the students how Mari communicated even though she was unable to speak the same language. Ask how else people can communicate with each other when they don't share the same spoken language (gestures, facial expressions, music, drawing, etc.).

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Global Themes

- Images and Perception
- Interdependence
- Conflict and Conflict Resolution

- Divide the students into groups of four. Give each group a set of charades cards. Have one student act out the word on the card, and have the other students in the group guess the word.
- When each student has had a turn, ask the students what was challenging about communicating without using words. What would it be like to be unable to speak the same language as those around you? Ask again why it's important to have the right to speak in their first language.

Activity Two

- Read aloud from the second half of the book, *Spoken Memories* by Alikei.
- Explain that everyone's life is unique and we each have a special story to tell. Art can be used as a way to share unique stories. Refer to the page in *Painted Words* when Mari draws a picture of her family.
- Ask the students to think about an important and/or significant time in their life.
- Have the students paint a picture to represent this significant time. Ask them to add a title and write an artist's statement. An artist's statement allows the students to explain what their artwork is about and what they learned through the creative process.
- Give each student an opportunity to briefly share the "spoken memory" that corresponds with his or her picture.

Discussion

David Crystal, a world authority on the English language, debates the potential of English as the international language of communication. How would you respond to this statement? What could be the possible consequences of this statement for every child's right to practice his or her own language?

A November 20, 2008 transcript from National Public Radio reads:

Since the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, the Rwandan government has worked to unify the country's conflicted Hutu and Tutsi heritages and rebuild the economy. As part of that effort, the Rwandan government says that schools must begin to conduct classes in English, an effort to help Rwanda become a part of the global economic community. To listen to the whole story or to read the full transcript, go to npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97245421.

Do you support the Rwandan government's decision? Why? Why not?

Extensions

What are the official languages in each country of the world? Have the students explore how these became the official languages, and identify the history of the languages. Were there any languages that you feel were omitted as official languages? Why do you think they were omitted?

Have the students create their own language and write a journal entry in that language. Ask the students to translate their journal entry.

Have the students draw a comic strip and write the conversation in a created language.

Additional Resources

Picture book: *Mr. Lincoln's Way* by Patricia Polacco

Mr. Lincoln is the coolest principal ever! He knows how to do everything, from jumping rope to leading nature walks. Everyone loves him... except for Eugene Esterhause. "Mean Gene" hates everyone who's different. He's a bully, a bad student, and he calls people awful, racist names. But Mr. Lincoln knows that Eugene isn't really bad—he's just repeating things he's heard at home. In his own special way Mr. Lincoln finds a way to help Louis and to show him that differences are what make us special.

Artist's Statement

1. Briefly describe your work as if you were talking to someone who has not seen it.

2. Explain what you were trying to accomplish or portray.

3. Describe what techniques you used and why.

4. Highlight what is the most important part of your art.

5. What is the most important message of your work in terms of children's rights?
