

Why Save a Language? – Facilitator’s Guide

The film you’ve just seen addresses a difficult subject. Please ask everyone to find a partner, someone sitting nearby, and briefly tell each other something they were struck by in the film – something that they found surprising or moving. If the group is small, you can take a few minutes to have people share what they discussed.

Here are some guiding thoughts to help you lead a discussion about the film:

1. Languages are issues for everyone on this continent. *News in 2006* addresses the debate between those who believe the Pledge of Allegiance must be spoken in English and others who believe they can make the pledge in their native language, such as Spanish. What are the issues here?
2. Why is it important for us to review what happened to cause languages to die out? The intention is not to make people feel guilty, but to open a door for compassionate response for the struggles of today.
3. How does language serve as cultural glue? You might brainstorm about the best English-speaking authors. Why are they important? What did these literary giants write about? What if these writers were forced to learn and to only use Chinese in their communications? What would be lost?
4. What do you see through your language; in other words, what does your language shape you to see? How might the cultures of noun-based languages differ from verb-based languages?
5. The film presents native languages as storehouses of ecological wisdom, giving the example of Mt. Baldy vs. “I’m sitting by the water”, feeding water from snowmelt to everything around it as it flows to Lake Coeur d’Alene. Is it important to learn from these names and stories?
6. What do you think about the concept of “cultural blanks”? How can this problem be lessened?
7. Do you think native languages should be taught in public schools on and near reservations? Should they be offered in addition to French or German, for example, or instead of them?

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