Purpose: Students will learn that language is an integral part of identity and culture then discover the risk that we may lose First Nations and Inuit languages. They will then think of ways they can use technology to help preserve these unique languages.

Estimated time: 90 minutes

Activity:
1. Begin by writing the terms “language” and “identity” on the board. Ask students to explain how they believe the two terms are linked.

2. Tell students that there are currently an estimated 7000 languages spoken around the world. Languages are linked to the identity of people around the world. However, half of those languages are in danger of disappearing. According to a linguist, by the year 2100, 90% of the world’s languages will no longer exist. 
Source: http://news.bbc.co.uk/today/hi/today/newsid_8311000/8311069.stm

3. Provide students with a Canadian perspective: In addition to Canada’s official languages of English and French more than 200 languages were reported as “home languages” in the 2011 census. Of these, 60 are First Nations and Inuit languages. All are a part of Canada’s uniquely diverse country and identity.

4. Of all the languages spoken in Canada, the First Nations and Inuit languages are the most at risk of being lost. Former Governor General Adrienne Clarkson wrote an article about Canada’s identity and the integral part on First Nations and Inuit languages as part of its original fabric. Distribute and read the following excerpts from the article to the class:

When Governor-General, I was visited by Indigenous leaders deeply concerned with the loss of languages and of the ability to transmit their culture through them. Indigenous peoples believe that everything belongs to those not yet born. Language is one of those things. More than half of Canada’s Native languages are spoken in B.C., and almost all are at risk of disappearing. Only about one in 20 Indigenous people in the province are still fluent, and most are elders. It is telling that, in the Northwest Territories, Tagalog, the language of the Philippines, is listed by more people as their mother tongue than us an Indigenous language.

Unless you speak out, you cannot be connected and you cannot make decisions as equals. The freedom to speak in one’s language indicates the equality that marks being a citizen. Democracy is not simply about laws or voting or constitutions; it is a culture of values, hopes, and means of expression and living life. As one Indigenous leader put it so eloquently, it is an invisible line from the heart into the past.

Language is vital to a country like Canada, because it is the basis from which we can act. In Hannah Arendt’s phrase, we are ‘dead to the world’ until we have learned how to express ourselves among other human beings. We cannot act until we tell our own story in our own language—and, in doing so, add to the ongoing experiment that is Canadian life today. We can learn who we are and who we were only by knowing the story of which we ourselves are the heroes. People cannot feel they belong if they do not have access to the languages in which they feel the most comfortable, even if English and French are the official languages.

No longer should Indigenous peoples feel that somehow they and their languages, and therefore their culture have been left behind deliberately in order to favour those who came to live in this land. All of us must be aware and sympathetic to how important language is—not only for expression, but also as a continuing and evolving means of identity and the basis of citizenship. Losing one’s language is like losing all freedom of expression. It is the loss of a human right.


5. Have students discuss the following questions with a partner:
   a. What do you think are the causes of language extinction in Canada?
   b. Do you think language shapes a person’s identity? How?
   c. How can the extinction of a language affect a cultural group (e.g., loss of cultural identity)?
   d. Do you think language unites people? Why or why not? How might it separate them?

6. Ask for volunteers to share their responses with the class.

7. Now that students understand the link between language and identity and understand that Canada is at risk of losing many First Nations and Inuit languages, tell them that they will be using technology to design an electronic device or app that serves to preserve First Nations and Inuit languages. Students will create a proposal that they will share with the class in a short presentation.
8. Divide students into groups of two to three students.

9. Provide students with the framework for the device or app and proposal presentation. The presentation should include the following:
   a. A sketch of the device or app.
   b. The purpose of the device, program or app (e.g., creating new speakers, preserving language, sharing First Nations and Inuit culture and identity, etc.).
   c. A step-by-step explanation of how to use the device, program or app.
   d. An explanation of the creative functions of the device, program or app (e.g., audio recordings to help with pronunciations, video of speakers to connect culture to language, interactive spelling games, etc.).
   e. The intended audience for the device, program or app (e.g. students, government, any Canadian, etc.).

   Students should consider:
   f. Identifying a specific First Nations or Inuit language.
   g. The main location of the language and the approximate number of speakers.
   h. How the language will be captured (is it oral only, is there a written form to be shared and documented, do the speakers speak another language in which they can communicate such as English or French, etc.).
   i. Has the language been documented anywhere before?

10. Set a due date for the presentations.

11. On the due date, have groups present their ideas to the class. After everyone has presented, discuss similarities and differences in methods for preserving First Nations and Inuit languages.

**Extension:** Have students write a letter to the Canadian Government through the local Member of Parliament or a tech company presenting their ideas (or one selected by the class). Ask for their help in using technology to preserve First Nations and Inuit languages.

**Educator’s Note:** While there are many reasons for the decline of First Nations and Inuit languages, the residential school system, where First Nations, Métis and Inuit children were forbidden to speak their languages and were punished if caught, is the leading cause.

BLACKINE MASTER

EXCERPTS FROM, “EXPERIMENTS IN PLURALISM: INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES ARE VITAL TO TELLING CANADA’S STORY”

WRITTEN BY Adrienne Clarkson

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