



Endangered Languages

Reading Worksheet — Level F | tahricteaches.com

Of the roughly seven thousand languages spoken today, linguists estimate that nearly half could vanish before the end of this century. A language is considered endangered when children no longer learn it as their mother tongue, and **moribund** when only a handful of elderly speakers remain. The pace of loss is unprecedented in human history, with one language reportedly disappearing every two weeks.

The causes are complex and often interconnected. Globalization has accelerated the **dominance** of major languages such as English, Mandarin, and Spanish, which offer economic and educational advantages. Government policies have historically **suppressed** minority tongues, forcing children in residential schools to abandon their heritage languages. Urbanization, intermarriage, and migration further dilute small linguistic communities.

When a language dies, the loss extends far beyond grammar and vocabulary. Each language encodes a unique worldview, containing **intricate** knowledge about local ecosystems, medicinal plants, oral histories, and cultural rituals. Indigenous languages often preserve botanical and ecological information that scientists have only recently begun to document, knowledge that may be irretrievable once the last speakers pass away.

Fortunately, revitalization efforts are gaining momentum across the globe. The Maori in New Zealand pioneered language nests, where elders immerse toddlers in their ancestral tongue. Wales has integrated Welsh into school curricula, while Hawaiian has experienced a remarkable resurgence through dedicated immersion programs. Digital technology now plays a crucial role, with mobile apps, online dictionaries, and social media enabling **dispersed** communities to practice and transmit their languages.

Nevertheless, the challenges remain formidable. Sustaining a language requires more than classroom instruction; it demands intergenerational transmission within families and meaningful use in daily life. Policymakers, linguists, and community members must collaborate to create environments where minority languages can **thrive** rather than merely survive. The question is whether humanity will recognize linguistic diversity as the irreplaceable cultural treasure that it truly is, before another generation of voices falls permanently silent.

A. Vocabulary

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|------------------------|--|
| 1. moribund ____ | a. grow, develop, or flourish successfully |
| 2. dominance ____ | b. impossible to recover, restore, or get back |
| 3. suppressed ____ | c. forcibly stopped, restricted, or prevented from being expressed |
| 4. intricate ____ | d. originating naturally in a particular place; native |
| 5. dispersed ____ | e. act of passing something from one person or generation to another |
| 6. thrive ____ | f. near death or extinction; on the verge of disappearing |
| 7. revitalization ____ | g. power, control, or influence over others |
| 8. indigenous ____ | h. very detailed and complex, with many interconnected parts |
| 9. transmission ____ | i. spread over a wide area; scattered in different locations |
| 10. irretrievable ____ | j. process of bringing something back to life or active use |

B. True or False

- ___ 1. Linguists estimate that nearly half of the world's languages may disappear by the end of this century.
- ___ 2. A language is classified as moribund when children stop learning it as their first language.
- ___ 3. One language is reportedly lost roughly every two weeks.
- ___ 4. Government policies have always actively protected minority languages throughout history.
- ___ 5. Indigenous languages frequently contain detailed knowledge about local plants and ecosystems.
- ___ 6. The Maori in New Zealand created language nests to immerse young children in their ancestral language.
- ___ 7. Hawaiian has continued to decline despite immersion programs.
- ___ 8. Digital technology has had no meaningful impact on language revitalization efforts.
- ___ 9. Welsh has been integrated into school curricula in Wales.
- ___ 10. Classroom instruction alone is sufficient to sustain an endangered language.

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: moribund, dominance, suppressed, intricate, thrive, indigenous, revitalization, transmission

1. Many _____ communities preserve ecological knowledge that scientists are only beginning to document.
2. The economic _____ of English makes it attractive to learners worldwide.
3. When only a few elderly speakers remain, a language is considered _____.
4. Successful language _____ requires both policy support and grassroots community involvement.
5. For a minority language to _____, it must be used meaningfully in everyday family life.



D. Comprehension Questions

1. According to the passage, what is the difference between an endangered language and a moribund one?
2. Why is the loss of a language considered more than just the loss of words and grammar?
3. What examples does the passage give of successful language revitalization efforts?

E. Discussion Questions

1. Should governments be obligated to fund the preservation of minority languages, even when very few people still speak them? Why or why not?
2. If your own native language were endangered, what steps would you personally take to help keep it alive for future generations?

Answer Key

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A. Vocabulary: 1-f, 2-g, 3-c, 4-h, 5-i, 6-a, 7-j, 8-d, 9-e, 10-b

B. True/False: 1-T, 2-F, 3-T, 4-F, 5-T, 6-T, 7-F, 8-F, 9-T, 10-F

C. Fill Blanks: 1-indigenous, 2-dominance, 3-moribund, 4-revitalization, 5-thrive

D. Comprehension:

1. A language is endangered when children no longer learn it as their mother tongue, while a moribund language has only a handful of elderly speakers left.
2. Each language encodes a unique worldview and contains irreplaceable knowledge about local ecosystems, medicinal plants, oral histories, and cultural rituals.
3. The Maori language nests in New Zealand, Welsh integration into Welsh schools, and Hawaiian immersion programs are cited as successful revitalization efforts.

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