Indigenous Languages
Retention &
Revitalization

Compendium of
Poems: FOUND POETRY

These poems were written as part of
EDEL 412: Teaching Language Arts in
First Nations, Métis, & Inuit Contexts
Fall 2015

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Compendium of Poems: Found Poetry

These poems represent the personal, professional, and passionate thoughts of a group of preservice teachers who reflected on the state of Indigenous language loss in their homes, communities, and schools. They ring clearly of a call to action and also speak to the profound loss of languages.

This “Found Poem” activity was part of an online course, EDEL 412: Teaching Language Arts in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Contexts, where the students became informed about the local and timely issue of Indigenous language and cultural identity. The students watched several language-preservation videos, read articles by many authors on the topic (see references at the end of the compendium), and worked to frame and articulate the levels of personal, spiritual, historical, and educational repercussions where language and identity converge. The students then compiled this gleaned information into their own personal ‘found poem’: a collection or collage of significant phrases, words, and images from the readings and videos that resonated with them. As part of this online class, they worked through their poems in a writer’s workshop and read and gave feedback to each other on their poems in a small online discussion forum. They received feedback from their instructor and the teaching assistant and then revised their poems to send to a small new online group of their classmates for further input. The authors then decided on the final form and content of their individual poems and voluntarily submitted them for this compendium.

From our perspectives, we believe that these poems work very well to distil the essence of both Indigenous identity and language and the classroom-teacher-to-be impressions of that, as seen through the eyes of this group of northern preservice teachers, into rather moving and powerful expressions that can be read from several levels. We hope that in reading these poems, you find a space where they resonate with you as well.

Part of the professional side of teaching practice requires us all as teachers to be aware of and sensitive to the culture of our students. This is an especially vital task in the area of language and literacy, particularly with young learners. In these formative years, the use of and access to a variety of languages, both at school and in the community, have been evidenced as very strong predictors of cognitive and academic achievement. However, across the world and in our country, the languages and cultures indigenous to this geography have lost their vitality through oppression, assimilation, and subsequent marginalization by the powerful political, religious, and education forces and the effects of Canadian colonialism. In turn, and especially in communities such as those in which these preservice teachers will soon be working, substantial language shift has occurred over the past decades as extended families gradually lose access to their Indigenous heritage through both choice and lack of exposure and, consequently, to the roots of their cultural identity. These found poems speak to that history and personal loss as they demonstrate a voice for a renewed awareness and effort for language revitalization.

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Death of a language
Who am I?
Gradual Death of a Language
Burning, burning, through my heart, my soul, my being
The language disappears quickly
Linguistic changes
Colonial powers primacy of one language
Bottom-to-top-death
Assimilation
Phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, or lexical
Fluent speakers who eventually die
Domination and subordination in language loss
Traumatic
Linguistic genocide eradicate Indian languages
Who can tell me who I am?

References
Fishman, J (1996) What do you lose when you lose your language? In Cantoni, G (Ed) Stabilizing Indigenous Languages, Northern Arizona University, p 80-91
Where There Are Always Wild Strawberries

Ethel B. Gardner
Stó:lō Nation

"Where there are always wild strawberries" is a personal reflection on what revitalizing our Halq̓eméylem language can mean in the context of a Stó:lō person’s life and illustrates how our language, identity, and place are inextricably interconnected, reflecting an important aspect of Stó:lō world view. The presentation draws on the author’s personal life experiences using narrative style and metaphor to illustrate Stó:lō conceptual systems: “Where there are always wild strawberries” was presented as a keynote talk at the conference. The revitalization of Aboriginal societies: Land, language, philosophy, arts on July 9, 2000.

O Chích̓eč̓ h Siyám, P里斯 te Sq̓éyq̓etst
O Chích̓eč̓ h Siyám, Chíthómetstlám kw’e Mew/stam
Éy kwé stas.

O Creator, Bless this gathering.
O Creator, we thank you for everything.

Amen.

Éy Siyám mi gaye
Greetings my dear friends. Welcome. Welcome to our Coast Salish Territory, to a land where there are “always wild strawberries.”

This story is about my own personal journey to my homeland to this place “where there are always wild strawberries.” I think I’ve always been in this place, though far away for a really long time. It’s been a journey of blacks, whites, and grays, not quite being able to see and experience the wonderful juicy, tasty redness of the berries. I’ve been looking for these berries all my life. And now I feel like they are just about within reach. I can see them, almost feel them and even almost taste them.

My story is a story about our Halq̓eméylem language and is told in the context of this Stó:lō person’s life experience. My story aims to get at what it means in the life of one Stó:lō person to participate in the revival of a nearly extinct Aboriginal language.

I am learning that it is the responsibility of each and every one of us who is concerned about our Aboriginal language to explore the deepest recesses of our soul to know what it means for us personally to be committed to the renewal effort. In my explorations I look back in time to my childhood, to my family, to my Stó:lō roots, to my Stó:lō country, to South Temsast, to a place where there are always wild strawberries.

My burning question throughout my life has always been “What happened to us? Why are we in the state we are in? What happened to our
What is Lost?

What is lost when a language is lost?
Relationship between language and culture,
culture has lost its language.

What is lost when a language is lost?
The soul of the people, the mind of the people,
the spirit of the people.

The loss of a language ends in the loss of people.

By: Jocelynne Belyan

Reference


Picture retrieved from this website on October 6, 2015-
http://chris-photo.deviantart.com/art/Gloomy-Sunday-186974634
Relationship between Language and Culture

Every Language Grows; Every Culture Changes

Some words hang on; the soul, the mind, the spirit of the people

We are tied to each other through Language

It is recognizable: family building... culture building

Bond with Language = Language Revived

Reference

Raven Cardinal

A language is no longer used by any speech

Gradual death of a culture

Linguistic genocide

Culture is in the language

Why so many gone forever?

We must gather into the circle all the knowledge, wisdom, and energy we possess to ensure their survival.

Otherwise it will all be lost forever.

References

Fishman, J (1996) What do you lose when you lose your language? In Cantoni, G (Ed) Stabilizing Indigenous Languages, Northern Arizona University, p 80-91


Our Stories

We make sense of our lives through story; we narrate our lives.

There is some kind of central story that everybody has.

Stories attract me because I think that is where everything resides.

Each culture carries its own stories, its own lessons.

A storyteller has the responsibility to tell the stories at the right time and in the right place.

If we change the stories we live by, quite possibly we change our lives.

You will remember the stories.

References

The Buffalo symbolizes subsistence strength and the ability to survive (Cantoni, 2015).

Saving the Language

References
In Cantoni, G (Ed). Stabilizing Indigenous Languages, Northern Arizona University, p 80-91.communications.usask.ca/templates-and-guides/aboriginal-symbols.php

https://tagul.com/my-clouds
Languages

All Indigenous Languages are powerful

Dominant Languages invade homes

Languages being wiped out worldwide

The Battle of Languages for survival

Languages depend upon warriors, like you and me

Our Mother tongue (First Language) is who we are.

Reference

Reference


https://eclass.srv.ualberta.ca/pluginfile.php/2353320/mod_resource/content/1/Heit%20article%20Oral%20Traditions%20good.pdf
I am Cree

You may think my words are not important

When I speak my language you may say it is rude.

When I speak my language you may say I sound funny.

But this is who I am!

My words define my identity

This is me, this is my mother tongue

It’s all I know, my life, my ways.

To lose language that identifies you

Is to lose wisdom and purpose in life.

My purpose is to acknowledge my identity,

My identity is my language.

This is me, I am Cree!
Reference


The importance of language as an expression of culture, of who we are as a people, must be upheld by each individual, each family, each community, and each nation. If we lose our language, we are essentially losing a way of life.

To save our languages, there is a need to ensure that our people know why our languages are nearing extinction and why our languages are so important to our lives and to who we are.

Language is the ultimate symbol of belonging.

“The more you get into language, the more you get to the very heart of the culture and spirit.”

native languages

The language being the spirit of the people.

References


Fishman, J (1996) What do you lose when you lose your language? In Cantoni , G (Ed) Stabilizing Indigenous Languages , Northern Arizona University , p 80-91


**LANGUAGE DEATH**

Tragic  
Language obsolescence  
Loss of ideas  
Loss of one's identity  
Loss of a family member  
Loss of the one of the greatest treasures of humanity  
Hundreds have disappeared  
Indigenous languages obliterated  
Linguistic Genocide  
People don't know what to do  
Mourned

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**References:**


Languages

The importance of language...

Language is the mind...
Language is the spirit...
Language is the soul of a people...

Language is what gives us our identity...

Language expresses our unique worldview...
Language is a way of life...
Language is our way of thought...

Language is a way of valuing...

Language is a particular human reality...
Language is the ultimate symbol of belonging...

References

Kirkness, Verna, J. The Preservation and Use of Our Languages: Respecting the Natural Order of the Creator.
References


Bonnie Rhoades

References


Native Languages could be...

Ruin, lost, supressed, fumbling, dislocated, hazard.
Just a little sum of what language and culture gather.

“Oh it sounds so harsh and it sounds so cruel.”
The Great Creator, tell people, the soul, the mind, the language, the spirit is
what pervades people in life.
Love, nurturance, connection, kinship, revive, strengthen are successes to
language in cultures.

References

Fishman, J. *What Do You Lose When You Lose Your Language?*. Stabilizing Indigenous Languages symposium. *(1994).*
Trina Willier

PEOPLE OF CANADA

Know how the oppressors “stole” Indigenous language and culture
Stripped Indigenous people of any power to control their own lives
Forbid the use of the Indigenous languages
Intentionally destroyed Indigenous identity

People of Canada...

The effects of colonization
Left severe reduction in Indigenous populations
Indigenous communities were decimated
Beothuk people of Newfoundland
Huron of Ontario
Now extinct

People of Canada...

Save our languages
Preserve them immediately
Capture the purest oral forms
Give us integrity
Positive self-image
Ownership

People of Canada...

Language gives us our identity...
Language expresses our unique worldview
Language is the mind, spirit, soul of a people

People of Canada...
Indigenous people are a nation and a nation needs its language

References:

Blair, Heather “Do not go gentle into that good night, Rage, rage against the dying of the light. Anthropology and Education Quarterly 26(1):27-49.

References
