



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

# Introduction to Dee-ni Wee-ya'

## ESSENTIAL UNDERSTANDINGS

- Language
- Identity
- Lifeways

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will begin to understand the importance of language to ways of living and cultural identity.
- Students will be able to identify common animals using Dené (Athabaskan).

## ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- Why is language important?

## LOGISTICS

- Where does the activity take place?  
*This lesson could take place in the classroom, the library, or outdoors. Gathering during circle time would support new language acquisition (i.e., direct instruction with students physically seated to easily see/hear in a sitting or standing position).*
- How are the students organized?
  - Whole class
  - Teams: 2 – 4
  - Pairs
  - Individually

## TIME REQUIRED

Approximately 60 minutes of total class time. The lesson can be extended across multiple days. Activities 3 and 4 can also be extended by practicing the routines for 5 to 10 minutes daily across multiple days.

## Overview

This lesson provides young students with an introduction to Dee-ni Wee-ya'—one of the heritage languages of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. The lesson begins with a short activity that encourages students to think about and discuss the importance of language as it relates to aspects of culture and identity. Next, students learn the names for common animals in Pacific Coast Dené (Athabaskan) or Dee-ni' Wee-ya' (the People's Words), using illustrated slides with audio recordings created by members of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. Students then practice the names of animals through an interactive game.

## Background for teachers

Language and culture are intertwined, as language tells a story about how people view the world and important aspects of their traditions and beliefs. The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians comprises multiple Tribes of Native Americans from Western Oregon, Northern California, and Southwest Washington who were forcibly removed from their ancestral homelands to the Coast (Siletz) Reservation beginning in the mid-1850s. The peoples who make up the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians each have their own unique history and culture. In fact, the ancestors of Siletz people spoke languages from 10 different language families when they



arrived at the Coast (Siletz) Reservation. In many families, Chinuk Wawa (an Indigenous trade language developed primarily from Chinuk became a standard form of communication well into the 20th century). While boarding schools and other forced assimilation policies have diminished the number of speakers, Native languages remain a vital part of the culture and identity of Siletz people.

Today, the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians is working to revitalize Dee-ni Wee-ya', a Dené (Athabaskan) language originally from Southwest Oregon and Northern California. This lesson is an opportunity for young students to learn about this work and develop an appreciation for language diversity and difference.

It is important to approach this lesson with humility and respect. Knowing that the people of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians had their languages forcibly repressed, students should be provided with the opportunity to engage with learning the language as an act of respect and cultural perseverance.

### To prepare for this lesson teachers should:

1. Read chapter 16 of "The People Are Dancing Again: The History of the Siletz Tribe of western Oregon" (Wilkinson, 2010). (Also provided in the appendix.)
2. Visit the [Siletz Tribal Language Project](#) and read about the project, then watch the video "[Dee-Ni Practical Alphabet](#)"
3. Prepare classroom audiovisual technology to display the PowerPoint slides and videos listed in the "Materials" section.

## STANDARDS

### Oregon English language arts standards

#### *Vocabulary Acquisition and Use*

**K.L.5c/1.L.5c** - Identify real-life connections between words and their use.

#### *Speaking and Listening*

**K.SL.6** - Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.

## MATERIALS

### What will be needed for students to engage in this activity?

- Slide\_Deck\_De-ni Animals
- Classroom writing surface (i.e., blackboard, whiteboard, chalkboard, chart paper and markers)
- Classroom audiovisual technology to display PowerPoint slides and videos (see next items)
- Ball/beach ball/talking stick



## Helpful references

- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. (n.d.). *History of the Siletz*. <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CTSI-Comprehensive-Plan-2005-2015-History-Pt1.pdf>
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. (n.d.). *Our heritage*. <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/heritage/>
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. (n.d.). *Our history*. <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/introduction/>
- Wilkinson, C. (2010). *The people are dancing again: The history of the Siletz Tribe of western Oregon*. University of Washington Press. [This lesson is based on chapter 16, which is also provide in the appendix.]
- Berg, L. (2007). *The first Oregonians*. Oregon Council for the Humanities.
- Donvan, J. (June 18, 2013). When a language dies, what happens to culture? [Audio podcast episode]. In *Talk of the Nation*. National Public Radio. <https://www.npr.org/2013/06/18/193135997/when-a-language-dies-what-happens-to-culture>

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY

**Language** – How we express our ideas and feelings.

**Sleeping language** – A language spoken by those who have passed on (or are no longer living today). Or a language that is no longer spoken because a people were forced to use English in school, work, and daily life.

**Ancestors** – Our family members who came before us.

**Tradition** – The handing down of information, beliefs, and customs from one generation to another.

**Culture** – The way of life for a certain group of people, including their language, food, clothing, shelter, and traditions.

## DEE-NI LANGUAGE VOCABULARY

**Fish/salmon** – LHUK

**Pileated woodpecker** – CHAA-XEE-NI

**Seal** – SRI'-SREE-NVSH

**Butterfly** – CH' VS-K'I

**Coyote** – SK'WII-TS'E

**Bird** – CH'EE-YASH

**Raccoon** – K'WVN-SHAN'

**Deer** – MEE-CHAN-TR'VLH-NI

**Black bear** – SV-GHVS

**Raven** – DA'-TS'AS

**Rabbit** – GAA-MA'SR

**Flicker/yellow hammer** – TR'U~K

**Whale** – TEE-LA~

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### Links to useful websites that add more detail or context

- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians website: <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/>
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians brochure: <https://www.ctsi.nsn.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CTSI-Brochure-2017.pdf>
- Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians Tribal Language Project: <http://www.siletzlanguage.org> This project focuses on the development of a formal curriculum to strengthen and revitalize one of the heritage languages of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

### DEE-NI LANGUAGE VOCABULARY

*(Continued)*

**Pronunciation key:** Listen to the recording “**Dee-Ni Practical Alphabet**” at the Siletz Tribal Language Project for the pronunciation of the alphabet and special sounds of Athabaskan. Also, review the handout in the appendix, “Dee-ni Practical Alphabet and Special Sounds.”

**Note:** *Historically, Dené (Athabaskan) dialects were not written. Various spelling and pronunciation strategies have been developed by historians, linguists, and Tribal communities that may differ from the Practical Alphabet depending on the source and time period.*

### Children’s books about overcoming the loss of Indigenous languages

- Florence, M. (2017). *Stolen words*. (G. Grimard, Illus.). Second Story Press.
- Robertson, D. A. (2016). *When we were alone*. (J. Flett, Illus.). Highwater Press.
- When We Were Alone by David A. Robertson, illustrated by Julie Flett. <https://seattle.bibliocommons.com/item/show/1669958082>



## Considerations for teachers

### Assessment

Student understanding will be measured through observation of student participation.

### Practices

- Teachers should understand the correct pronunciation and intonation of the target language Dee-ni Wee-ya’.
- Teachers should be familiar with using educational games and activities to increase engagement and make teaching student-centered.
- All school staff members should be encouraged to familiarize themselves with the Dee-ni language and the Siletz Tribal Language Project.

### Learning targets

- I understand the importance of language to ways of living and culture and cultural identity.
- I can identify common animals using Dee-ni Wee-ya’.

### Options/extensions

Gather students for story time/read aloud. Encourage students to share personal experiences with language by reading a story or poem about kids and families who are bilingual or multilingual (see the resources section above for a list of suggested books). Facilitate classroom sharing by asking the following question(s): *Do you speak more than one*

### ADAPTATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING



This lesson is structured around teacher oral presentation and small-group and whole-class discussion, but much of the content can be implemented for distance and independent learning purposes. Following is a suggested sequence.

Be sure all students have either print or electronic access to the lesson materials.

#### Activity 1: What Is Language?

1. Facilitate steps 1–8 as a teacher presentation and whole-class discussion using your learning management system (LMS) or online classroom platform.
2. Replace pair share in step 8 by giving students one to two minutes to brainstorm on their own at home, then ask students to physically raise their hand or use the LMS “raise hand” to share out.

#### Activity 2: Languages of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

1. Provide students with a paper or electronic copy of the “Languages” map prior to this presentation.
2. Facilitate steps 1–8 through teacher presentation with the whole class. Use on-screen writing tools to highlight key points on the “Languages” map.
3. Have students respond to discussion questions verbally (if teaching synchronously).

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language? Do you have parents or other family members or friends who speak more than one language? Are there languages that your ancestors spoke that your family no longer speaks?

- Have students practice the vocabulary with family members or others in the school.
- Have students create a picture book that tells a story by or about one of the animals they learned how to identify in Dee-ni.

## Reflection/closure

- Review the learning targets.
- Discuss with students what they believe is important about the language and lifeways of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians (and all people).
- Encourage students to use the names of animals in Dee-ni Wee-ya'.

## Appendix

Materials included in the electronic folder that support this lesson are:

- Slide\_Deck\_De-ni Animals
- Handout\_De-ni Alphabet and Special Sounds
- Chapter 16 of "The People Are Dancing Again: The History of the Siletz Tribe of Western Oregon"



## ADAPTATIONS FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

(Continued)

### Activity 3: Name That Animal

1. Make sure each student has a hard copy or electronic copy of the slides with each animal name and picture.
2. Gather students for an online facilitated listening and speaking activity. Tell students that they are going to learn some Dee-ni words for animals that live on the ancestral homeland of the Siletz Tribes.
3. Share slides 7–19 one at a time using the following steps.
  - Click to play the audio of the animal's name.
  - Teacher repeats the name.
  - Ask all students to repeat the name in unison.
  - Then ask students to share the name with a parent or sibling, or in a mirror.

### Activity 4: What's That Animal?

1. As an independent homework project, ask students to make flashcards, one for each animal. On the front, have students draw a picture of the animal, on the back have them write the Dee-ni word for the animal (students who are not ready to write can simply draw the animal).
2. Gather students for an online facilitated listening and speaking activity. Tell students that they are going to learn some Dee-ni words for animals that live on the ancestral homeland of the Tribes of Siletz.

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## Activity 1

# What Is Language?

*Time: 20 minutes*

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### Step 1

Ask students to move into their assigned seating space on an area rug/ floor space (or your storytime space or an outdoor space). Assign students a thinking partner.

### Step 2

Share the slide, “What is language?”

### Step 3

#### Say:

*This morning we’re going to talk about language. Language is the words used by a group of people called a community, and it includes how those words are said. Language is made of sounds (and even hand or body movements) that have a meaning. What am I saying when I make this gesture?*

### Step 4

Wave your hand as if to say “hello/goodbye.” Allow students to share out the answers.

### Step 5

Next, share the slide “What words do you like to say ...” and read each question aloud. Then ask students to voluntarily “pop up” from their seated position and give an answer or comment about one of the questions. Each student’s response should be short (one to two words). When finished, the speaker sits down, and this signals the next student who wishes to share to “pop up.”

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## Activity 1 *(Continued)*

### Say:

*What word do you like to say when you see a friend on the playground?*

*What words do you like to say when you are meeting a new friend?*

*What words do you like to say when you want to tell someone how you feel (happy, sad, excited, and so on)?*

### Step 6

#### Say:

*Now I'm going to give you a question that I want you to first think about, then talk about with your thinking partner, and then share with our whole group.*

### Step 7

Show the slide "Why is language important?" and ask the question.

### Step 8

Provide students with one or two examples from the list below. Next, give students approximately 30 seconds to think about an answer on their own. Use a classroom sound or signal to end individual thinking time, then ask students to find their assigned partner and share their ideas.

## Activity 1 *(Continued)*

### Examples

*Language is important because I can tell a family member or friend that I love them.*

*Language is important because I can tell someone how I feel, and I can listen to someone tell me how they feel.*

*Language is important because I can tell my dog to sit and stay.*

*Language is important because it helps me listen to stories.*

*Language helps us sing our songs.*

*Language helps us learn our history.*

### Step 9

Use a classroom sound or signal to end pair share and bring the whole class back together for a brief classroom discussion.

### Step 10

After a three- to five-minute discussion, wrap up and share the following.

### Step 11

*Great ideas everyone! Language is about who we are as a group of people. It helps us express how we feel (sad, angry, happy), it lets us share information with those around us, and it helps people (like family and friends) connect to each other. Language is part of our tradition, like the songs we sing and the names of foods we enjoy eating. Language helps us express our culture, which is the way we do things that are important to us and how we pass down lessons from one generation to the next.*

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## Activity 2

# Languages of the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians

*Time: 10 minutes*

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### Step 1

#### Say:

*We're going to learn about the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and a language called, Dee-ni' Wee-ya' ("The People's Language")*

### Step 2

Share the slide, Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians and the following key points:

#### Key points

- A confederated Tribe is made up of many different individual Tribes.
- The Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians includes dozens of Tribes and bands of Native Americans from across what is now Western Oregon, Northern California, and Southwest Washington.
- These Tribes were forced by the U.S. government to leave their homeland and move onto the Siletz Indian Reservation—a piece of land where the U.S. government said these Tribes had to stay and live.

### Step 3

Share the slide, "Languages" and tell students that this map shows the ancestral homelands of the many Tribes that now make up the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians.

### Step 4

Ask students how many distinct colors they see on this map.

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## Activity 2 (Continued)

### Step 5

#### Say:

*The ancestors of the Tribes of Siletz spoke many different languages. Each Tribe had their own unique culture and ways of living. On this map, each color represents a different language spoken by the ancestors of the Tribes of Siletz.*

### Step 6

Point out the areas on the map in which Dené (Athabaskan) is identified.

### Step 7

#### Say:

*Ancestors of the Siletz people living in Southern Oregon and Northern California spoke a language from the Dené (Athabaskan) language family. Athabaskan languages on the Pacific Coast are sometime called “sleeping” languages because there are few people alive today who grew up learning and speaking them as children. Along with other Tribal groups, the Siletz Tribe has started to awaken these sleeping languages. They have created an online dictionary of Dené words, and they are writing books and teaching their kids and grandkids the language by singing songs, telling stories, and weaving the language into everyday life.*

*In this next activity, we’re going to learn more about awakening Dee-ni Wee-ya’ by learning words for many animals that have always lived on the ancestral lands of the Tribes of Siletz.*

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### Activity 3

## Name That Animal

*Time: 10–15 minutes daily for one week*

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#### Step 1

Gather students together for circle time/rug time (either inside or outside the classroom).

#### Step 2

Project PowerPoint slides 7–19, one at a time. Complete the following steps with students:

- Click to play the audio of the animal's name.
- Teacher repeats the name.
- Teacher asks students to repeat the name.

#### Step 3

Tell students that they are going to learn the words for each animal by making flashcards and practicing the sounds that create each word.

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## Activity 4

# What's That Animal?

*Time: 10–15 minutes daily for one week*

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### Step 1

Ask students to make flashcards, one for each animal. On the front, have students draw a picture of the animal, on the back (with guidance from the teacher) have them write the Dee-ni word for the animal (if students are not ready to write, they can draw a picture).

### Step 2

Divide students into pairs and give them 5 to 10 minutes to practice identifying animals in Dee-ni using their flashcards.

### Step 3

Next, tell students they are going to play a game in which one student will draw an animal on the whiteboard/chalkboard while the other students guess what it is.

### Step 4

Invite one student up to the front to draw an animal. Have the student select one of their flashcards and give them 10 seconds to try to draw the animal. Encourage all students to guess.

### Step 5

Repeat until all students have had a turn at drawing and guessing.