



EXPLORING LANGUAGE

‘A different language is a different vision of life.’

Federico Fellini (film director)

‘Language and culture cannot be separated.
Language is vital to understanding our unique cultural
perspectives. Language is a tool that is used to explore
and experience our cultures and the perspectives that
are embedded in our cultures.’

Buffy Sainte-Marie (singer and songwriter)

IDEAS TO EXPLORE WITH YOUR CLASS

There are over seven thousand languages in the world. As Ireland becomes home to people with diverse cultures, our surroundings change in a variety of ways to reflect new communities living here. As Sanjay and his father travel through Dublin city to the information centre, we can see a small selection of different languages incorporated onto shopfronts.

LOVE FOR LANGUAGES

- Carry out a class survey about how many languages the children in your class speak. This may include first/second languages and may also include phrases that children know from holidays/friends/family/television programmes etc. Create some phrase posters to represent the languages spoken in your class or school.
- Translation challenge: children might work in groups, using the internet to look up words, eg 'friendship', 'equality', 'respect' or 'peace' in as many languages as they can find. The group that finds the most translations is the winner! The children might find an online translator a useful tool: <http://babelfish.yahoo.com/>
- Label areas in the classroom using the languages spoken by children in your class/school from minority ethnic groups.

CHANGING DIRECTION

Children will be familiar with the concept of different languages, so why not take their understanding to a deeper level?

In the English language, the written word is read horizontally from left to right. Arabic script is read from right to left and is known as a segmental script in that the symbols represent consonants only. Are there any parents in your school community who speak Arabic? Why not invite them into your classroom to help the children learn how to write a number of simple words in Arabic? Changing the direction in which they write and using a different script will develop children's empathy when understanding how others need to adapt to the English language and script.

Chinese script is logographic in that the glyphs represent words or morphemes. If the characters appear horizontally, they are read left to right, and if they appear vertically, they are read from top to bottom. The celebration of Chinese New Year provides a perfect opportunity to explore the Chinese language: a Chinese alphabet exists alongside the logographic symbols, and the children could write their names using it. You can find a copy of the alphabet at: <http://www.chinese-tools.com/characters/alphabet.html>.

Greeting Cards

- The class might make birthday cards for their friends using several of the languages of their school community.

Morning Greetings

- The children might nominate a particular language for their morning greeting for each week. They might also learn the verse of a song in that language, or they might learn to sing 'Happy Birthday' in that language and sing it on any class birthday during that week.

LANGUAGES WITH NO WORDS

There are a number of non-spoken forms of language practised around the world. Have a 'suggest-fest' about how people may communicate without using the spoken word: written word – whistling – sign language – drums – non-verbal communication – flags – Braille – Morse code. You might experiment with the effectiveness of communication in class using these forms.

- Watch an extract from a television program with no sound. Can the children infer how the conversation is progressing based on non-verbal cues such as eye contact, body language, hand gestures and facial expression?
- Children could create a short dialogue using a form of non-verbal communication, eg whistling/drum beats etc.
- Research the history of Morse code, and learn how to implement this form of communication for some common words.