Major Languages of the Americas

How are languages distributed across the Americas?

Overview

Students identify major languages spoken in the Americas, map them, and discuss the relationship between the distribution of languages and the colonial history of the countries.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit: http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/major-languages-of-americas/

Program

Directions

1. **Have students identify major languages spoken in the Americas.**
   Distribute the worksheet Major Languages of the Americas and have students work together to create appropriate symbols for each language; for example, E for English, D for Dutch, Da for Danish, and CH for Caribbean Hindustani.

2. **Have students map major languages spoken in the Americas.**
   Have students use construction paper or paper, crayons, and markers to make the symbols, cut them out, and place them on the appropriate countries on one of the large maps of the Americas from the Americas MapMaker Kit.
3. Have a whole-class discussion about the relationship between the distribution of modern languages and the colonial history of the Americas. Have students look for relationships and patterns on the large map of the Americas. As a class, discuss the relationship between the distribution of modern languages and the colonial history of different countries in the Americas. Ask: What influences, other than language, did colonial powers have on the culture of each country? What characteristics can you identify in a country’s culture that shows its history was shaped by more than one colonial power?

Extending the Learning

Have students research the many languages spoken within their own communities and discuss the reasons why there are so many. Create a display showing how to say “hello!” in each language.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Geography
- Human Geography

Social Studies
- World history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- identify major languages spoken in the Americas
- illustrate where different languages are spoken by placing symbols on a large map of the Americas
- discuss the relationship between the distribution of languages in the Americas and the colonial history of those countries

Teaching Approach
Teaching Methods

• Discussions
• Hands-on learning

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

• 21st Century Themes
  • Global Awareness
• Critical Thinking Skills
  • Analyzing
  • Understanding
• Geographic Skills
  • Analyzing Geographic Information
  • Organizing Geographic Information

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

National Council for Social Studies
Curriculum Standards

• **Theme 1:**
  Culture
• **Theme 3:**
  People, Places, and Environments

National Geography Standards
• **Standard 1:**
How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

• **Standard 9:**
The characteristics, distribution, and migration of human populations on Earth's surface

**Preparation**

**What You’ll Need**

**Materials You Provide**

- Construction paper
- Crayons
- Drawing paper
- Markers
- Scissors
- Transparent tape

**Required Technology**

- Internet Access: Optional
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per classroom

**Physical Space**

- Classroom

**Grouping**

- Large-group instruction
Other Notes

Before starting this activity, assemble the Americas Mega Map.

Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- Languages of the Americas

Resources Provided: Maps

- National Geographic Education: Americas MapMaker Kit

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

Geographers use maps to convey information to others. You can display physical, political or cultural information, or use maps to illustrate specific themes and topics. Maps are useful in helping to see patterns or relationships between layers of information.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

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<th>Term</th>
<th>Part of Speech</th>
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<tr>
<td>colonial</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>country, nation, or territory that controls large or important colonies.</td>
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<td>power</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>learned behavior of people, including their languages, belief systems, social structures, institutions, and material goods.</td>
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**For Further Exploration**

**Articles & Profiles**