

RESOURCE LIBRARY | ACTIVITY : 50 MINS

The Languages of Europe

Students read about language families and languages of Europe. They compare and contrast a map of dominant languages in Europe to a political map of Europe and discuss similarities and differences.

GRADES

6, 7, 8

SUBJECTS

English Language Arts, Geography, Human Geography

CONTENTS

4 PDFs

OVERVIEW

Students read about language families and languages of Europe. They compare and contrast a map of dominant languages in Europe to a political map of Europe and discuss similarities and differences.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://www.nationalgeographic.org/activity/the-languages-of-europe/>

DIRECTIONS

1. Have students read a passage about languages of Europe.

Introduce the vocabulary term *language family*. A language family is a "group of languages with a common ancestry and similar words." Tell students that Indo-European is the largest and most widespread language family. It is the primary language family in the United States.

Divide students into pairs. Distribute a copy of the handout Languages of Europe to each pair. Have partners read the passage and sketch a diagram of the Indo-European language family tree. Answer any questions they may have.

2. Have students compare and contrast maps of language groups and political boundaries.

Distribute copies of the worksheet Mapping the Languages of Europe and the maps Country Borders in Europe and Dominant Languages of Europe. Have students complete the worksheet by comparing and contrasting language groups and political boundaries. As you walk around the class, check for student understanding of language groups.

3. Have a whole-class discussion about the languages of Europe.

Regroup as a whole class and discuss what students noticed as they compared and contrasted. Ask:

- *Are there more or fewer language groups than you expected? Explain.*
- *Within each language group, there are many dialects of each language. So even within the groups there are differences. Do you think these divisions within groups are also important? Why or why not?*
- *Why do you think language is important to groups and regions?*
- *Is a common language necessary? Why or why not?*

Modification

You can also use this activity in English Language Arts classes to focus on word origin, word families, spelling, and related vocabulary skills.

Informal Assessment

Have students apply these ideas about groups and regions to the issue of human migration. Ask students to write about what it would be like for a group of people to move into a region where the rest of the population spoke a different language. Have them include details about the difficulties the new group would face and what choices the people within that region could make about how to handle the newcomers.

Extending the Learning

Remind students that language diversity in Europe is steeped in the history of the region. Discuss the past and growing language diversity in your local area or state and the United States. Ask: *What are the pros of increasing language diversity? What are the cons? How does ethnic diversity impact our state and our community?*

OBJECTIVES

Subjects & Disciplines

- English Language Arts
 - **Geography**
 - Human Geography

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- name and describe languages spoken in Europe
- analyze maps to identify regions where languages and country borders do not correspond

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Reading
- Writing

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Understanding
- Geographic Skills
 - Acquiring Geographic Information
 - Analyzing Geographic Information
 - Answering Geographic Questions

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

IRA/NCTE STANDARDS FOR THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

- Standard 9:

Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

NATIONAL COUNCIL FOR SOCIAL STUDIES CURRICULUM STANDARDS

- Theme 1:

Culture

- Theme 5:

Individuals, Groups, and Institutions

NATIONAL GEOGRAPHY STANDARDS

- Standard 1:

How to use maps and other geographic representations, geospatial technologies, and spatial thinking to understand and communicate information

- Standard 10:

The characteristics, distribution, and complexity of Earth's cultural mosaics

- Standard 13:

How the forces of cooperation and conflict among people influence the division and control of Earth's surface

• **Standard 4:**

The physical and human characteristics of places

Preparation

What You'll Need

MATERIALS YOU PROVIDE

- Pencils
- Pens

REQUIRED TECHNOLOGY

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

PHYSICAL SPACE

- Classroom

GROUPING

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group instruction

RESOURCES PROVIDED: HANDOUTS & WORKSHEETS

- [Languages of Europe](#)
- [Mapping the Languages of Europe](#)
- [Country Borders in Europe](#)
- [Dominant Languages of Europe](#)

BACKGROUND & VOCABULARY

Background Information

Although small in area, Europe has been a world interaction zone of people and cultures. A key cultural component that shapes national and cultural identity in Europe is language. There are over 30 languages spoken in Europe today. Most Europeans speak an Indo-European language. Indo-European languages developed during the Neolithic times in the Middle East. Through immigration, they spread into Europe and displaced/drove out the languages that were originally spoken on the continent. There are six Indo-European languages spoken by millions of people in Europe today, including: Hellenic (Greek); Romance (Latin-based languages of the Mediterranean and Romanian); Celtic (largely extinct, but Gaelic, Welsh, and Breton); Germanic (Scandinavian languages, modern German, Dutch, and English); Balto-Slavonic; and Illyrian-Thracian (Albanian). There are also several prominent non-Indo-European languages in Europe. These languages belong to their own language families, including the: Uralic family (Finn-Ugric); Semitic family (Arabic and Hebrew); Altaic family (Turkish); and Basque (unknown origin).

Languages are evolving in Europe at an incredibly rapid rate—just as English is evolving in the United States. Developments such as text messaging and the Internet are creating new methods of communication in all languages. Many European languages have seen an influx of English words due to the rise of the Internet and diffusion of technology with English names. For example, since the rise of the Internet, Hungarian has adopted the words *email* and *Internet*, as well as added verbs that mean to email and to go on the Internet (*emailezik* and *internetezik* respectively).

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
border	noun	natural or artificial line separating two pieces of land.
country	noun	geographic territory with a distinct name, flag, population, boundaries, and government.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
dialect	<i>noun</i>	distinct variation of a language, usually marked by accents and grammar.
diversity	<i>noun</i>	difference.
ethnic	<i>adjective</i>	having to do with characteristics of a group of people linked by shared culture, language, national origin, or other marker.
fluent	<i>adjective</i>	able to speak, write, and understand a language.
human migration	<i>noun</i>	the movement of people from one place to another.
language	<i>noun</i>	set of sounds, gestures, or symbols that allows people to communicate.
language family	<i>noun</i>	group of languages descended from a common ancestral language.
population	<i>noun</i>	total number of people or organisms in a particular area.
region	<i>noun</i>	any area on Earth with one or more common characteristics. Regions are the basic units of geography.

For Further Exploration

Articles & Profiles

- [National Geographic Education: Europe—Human Geography](#)

Maps

- [NG MapMaker 1-Page Map: Europe](#)
- [National Geographic Education: Europe MapMaker Kit](#)
- [NG MapMaker Interactive: Europe](#)

Websites

- [National Geographic Education: National Teacher Leadership Academy \(NTLA\)](#)

