

Lesson 2.2

WHAT DID YOU SAY?

Objective: Students will experience the difficulties of communicating without a common language by simulating the experience of the Indians and the Europeans when they first met.

Timing: One class period

Background Reading: Chapter Two

Procedure:

1. Introduce today's lesson in gibberish. In order for this to work well, the gibberish must sound like a real language. End with: "There will be a quiz on this material at the end of class." Ask students if they had any idea what you said.
2. Now introduce the lesson by only using your hands and body language. Use the following as your script as you try to communicate it without words:

When the Wabanaki Indians and the Europeans first met, they had no common language. When they tried to speak to each other, they had a very hard time understanding each other. How do you think they were able to communicate? Often, they resorted to using body language and acting out what they meant. In trade, for instance, they might hold up an item they wanted to trade, point to it, and raise their eyebrows in a questioning look, as if to say, "What can you offer me for this?" Still, it was very difficult to communicate. This was complicated by the fact that what they were talking about was crucial to the lives of both the Indians and the Europeans. How do you think the French Catholic priests talked about such a complex topic as God and religion with the Indians? They often misunderstood each other. It is easy to see how conflict could arise from this kind of a situation.

Ask students what they think you said through your body language and hand signals. Did they understand any more of what you said? Was it still difficult to communicate?

3. Now tell students what you were trying to communicate to them in English. Were their guesses close?
4. Instruct students to try this with each other. Split the class into two groups: European explorers and Wabanaki Indians. Have them pair up with each other, one from each group. Give them the following scenario, or one like it:

Those of you playing the Europeans are French Jesuit priests who have come to the New World in order to convert the Indians to Catholicism. You are carrying a

cross in your hand. Those of you playing the Wabanakis are interested in two things: finding out who the Europeans are, and trading with them. You are carrying a quiver of arrows and a ceramic bowl in your hands. You do not speak the same language, and the only way to communicate with each other is through signs. **YOU MAY NOT USE ANY SPOKEN LANGUAGE.** Accomplish your respective missions.

****Note:** French Jesuit priests often learned the language of the Indian tribe they were ministering to. This took some time, however, and their first encounters with the tribes were rife with misunderstandings.

5. Have the students enact the role-play in pairs for several minutes. Then, ask for volunteers to act out their role-play in front of the class.

6. Conclude by holding a discussion as a class:

- How did it feel to be unable to communicate in your own language?
- Did the members of either pair complete their missions? Were the Europeans able to convert the Indians? Were the Indians able to trade with the Europeans or to find out who they were?
- The stakes were much higher during the real thing than in this activity. Both groups were afraid of violence. Both groups wanted different things from each other. How do you think that would change the way you felt, as an Indian or a European? Would it change the way you tried to communicate?
- How do you think language and communication affect relationships between people and groups of people?
- What are some of the consequences of poor communication?

7. As homework, have students write a 1- to 2-paragraph response to the activity, describing their reaction. Were they able to communicate at all? What made communication more difficult? Easier?

Follow up activity:

- Have the students learn a sentence of their own choosing in a local language (i.e. French, Passamaquoddy, Vietnamese, American Sign Language) or bring words in a language they already know to class. Have them teach the class their sentence.

Alignment with Learning Results:

Grade Level: **SECONDARY GRADES**

Content Area: **HISTORY**

Standard: **HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, CONCEPTS, AND PATTERNS.**

Students will develop historical knowledge of major events, people, and enduring themes in the United States and in Maine, and throughout world history.

Performance Indicator: Demonstrate an understanding of enduring themes in history (e.g., conflict and cooperation, technology and innovation, freedom and justice).

Grade Level: **SECONDARY GRADES**

Content Area: **ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS**

Standard: **LANGUAGE AND IMAGES.**

Students will demonstrate an understanding of how words and images communicate.

Performance Indicator: Compare the ways various social, occupational, and cultural groups use language, and comment on the impact of language use on the way people are viewed and treated.

Grade Level: **MIDDLE GRADES**

Content Area: **HISTORY**

Standard: **HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE, CONCEPTS, AND PATTERNS.**

Students will develop historical knowledge of major events, people, and enduring themes in the United States and in Maine, and throughout world history.

Performance Indicator: Demonstrate an understanding of selected themes in Maine, United States, and world history (e.g. revolution, technological innovation, migration).