



U.S. Department
of Education
Office of
Indian
Education

2024 STUDENT ARTIST COMPETITION

Writing Edition - Middle School





How My Language Connects Me to My Family

by Hayden Antonio, Navajo

I am Navajo. I live with both parents and four siblings. We are all Navajo. My father is the one that speaks more Navajo than my mother. I live by my great-grandmother and she only speaks Navajo. We are a traditional family.

I can understand and speak a little of our language. When I speak to my great grandmother, she describes and uses hand gestures or points for me to understand. I love spending time with her and my family. She is 90 years old as of April 1st.

I love my Native language because I get to spend quality time with my great grandmother. by talking and listening to her. She makes me laugh. We watch TV together sometimes. I hug her every morning. My dad tells me when I come back from school to go to my great grandmother's house and visit with her. So, I do that. It makes her happy when she sees me, and I am always happy to see her. My great grandmother is in a wheelchair so, her daughters are the ones that show us what to do and not to do especially, in ceremonies. If it is not done correctly, my great grandmother gets mad and tells them how it should be done. She makes sure it is done correctly whatever the task. We all must listen to her because she is our wise person. She has much knowledge, and she tells us stories. In the winter, she tells us coyote stories. When my sister was running for princess, she had to learn Navajo. It was hard for her but, she practiced. She got the title at the time. Now, she goes to Navajo Prep., and she is speaking the Navajo language to her friends and others at school. My dad was the one that taught her what to say and what the meaning was in the beginning. My dad is also teaching me, too. He works out of town and comes home for weekends only for couple of days. I listen to my dad.

I envision that if we do not start speaking our Native language, it will disappear. We do not want that because it was given to us as Navajo people. We were given our language, land, values, and culture to use to heal people, help family, live a life in beauty, be successful, provide for our family, and use our clan and Ke' to know our relatives. This is the importance of knowing and keeping our language strong.

Importance of My Native Language

by Jaytasha Yazzie, Navajo



I live in Cousins in Vanderwagen, NM with my family. I am Navajo. My family are fluent Navajo speakers. I can understand the Navajo language and I know some phrases and words that are spoken to me all the time. Sometimes, for me to understand, my family speaks both Navajo and English to me.

Navajo language is very important to us since it was used in the war. My grandfather and my uncle are veterans. My brother is also currently serving and stationed in New York. Being able to be recognized as a tribe to have our language be the main code in winning the war by our Navajo veterans and getting recognition is wonderful. We have the most Code Talkers from here and so, we should keep using our language and teaching to the younger generation to keep the language alive.

If we do not do this, our generation will be all “Americanized.” They will not be able to speak the language no more, practice the traditional cultures, and know their grandfather’s and grandmother’s way of life. Also, we would not be able to know who our relatives are from the clanship system. All will be lost like some of the tribes.

My grandfather talks to me and my brother in Navajo on what life is about and how to live a good life. He tells us what we need to do to be successful. My aunt sometimes tells us what he is saying if we do not understand. Families should pass down teachings in Navajo that can benefit them in their life journey.

My favorite word in Navajo is “da hidi ghal” meaning let’s fight. I tease my family with this word. It is funny. They just reply to me jokingly. Navajo words have humor and like my family and I, you can use it to make someone laugh and the words are meaningful. I will continue to learn and use my Navajo words daily because it is important to me and my family.

Navajo Language

by Raja Johnson, Navajo



Navajo language is a good thing to learn. You can talk to your family. I hear my grandmas speaking Navajo to one another all the time. I am raised by my grandmother, who speaks Navajo and English. I speak Navajo and understand it but, I would not consider myself fluent. I am still learning.

My favorite word in my Navajo language is “Ya'at'eeh.” This means hello and it is a greeting. I like this word because it opens communication and shows respect to who I speak to. Non-native also know the meaning of this word if you live around Gallup. It is easy to say. You can shake hands with this greeting. I hear my grandmother say this to her family and others before she goes into a deep conversation.

I think it is important to save my Navajo language because the younger generation can learn. Also, for me it is to communicate and understand my grandmothers and family. We also practice our traditional culture where; our language needs to be spoken. Usually, the elders are the ones that speak the language.

I envision that if we do not teach the Navajo language, it would disappear. Some schools do not teach Navajo. Other schools only teach a little bit of the information mainly history of the language and some commands. It is not taught fully because testing requires you being proficient in English and to understand it. Some people believe that English must be priority to be successful in education and in life. I believe that this is not true. You need both English and Navajo. Even if schools teach some of the basics of speaking, that could help keep the language alive.

In conclusion, the power of Navajo language is it gives us respect for our culture and our people. We connect with our relatives, beliefs, land, animals, and values. Our people suffered but, our language was never lost in the Long Walk and in the Boarding School Days. We must continue to speak it and keep it strong.

My Language

By Kyle Alexius, Navajo

I am a 6 th grader and I live with my parents. We live near my dad's mom and his aunts. I mainly stay home all the time to take care of our pets and do things around the house with our family. Once in a while, we will go camping and go fishing. My parents do speak Navajo but, mainly English to us.

Navajo language to me is important. At home, two of my grandmas speak Navajo mainly. They speak "broken" English to my brother, my sisters, and I for us to understand when they babysit us. My younger sister in 5th grade knows how to speak Navajo good. She is close to my grandma and goes to their house. My grandma, Rose, says, "Shi yazhi" to me and I always give her a hug. I feel good when I hug her. She smiles at me and so, I know that makes her happy.

I can say mom, grandma, goodbye and hello. My favorite saying is "Shima! Give me food!" My mom tells me to wait, and I repeat it until she gives me food, drink, or snack. I think I can say my mom because I say it all the time. So, if you speak words or phrases all the time, you can memorize and start to speak it.

I feel like I am crazy because I can not speak and understand Navajo. I get annoyed trying to see what it means. I do get curious and ask my sister what people are saying when they speak Navajo. She sometimes tells me what is being said. I think that Navajo is important for talking with the elders because some do not speak English and understand it. So, you must tell them what is going on or what is being said.

In conclusion, I think that Navajo language should be saved. Navajo should be taught more at school so, we can learn. I want to learn to speak more Navajo because I can talk to my grandmas more in Navajo. They probably have stories that they can tell me about our family history. It would be good to know to tell others.

WINNER

AhMaTaza "Courage"

By Shem YaSharal, Tickanwa'Tic

I was an illiterate ten-year-old that could not speak any languages. Born into an unstable home environment, I did not grow properly during my childhood stage. My thinking and language skills were not developed, and I did not realize it. I thought every time I opened my mouth to speak people could understand the words I was thinking in my mind. Many people ridiculed, teasing me that I would not make it in life. When I stopped caring about life at sixyears-old, my self-esteem started to fall quickly.

Things got rougher. My siblings and I were removed from our home several times, in and out of foster homes and many different schools. That's when I started to reject all education. We landed with a relative that cared less for us than any other people we had ever lived with. In distress my speech condition worsened, and I was drowning. Gratefully, Our Creator threw me a lifesaver moving me into a peaceful, balanced home where I live this very day. Through all that trauma, I learned an important lesson about AhMaTaza which means courage in English. It took courage to do what I thought was impossible -learn to read and speak clearly.

Currently, I am a thirteen-year-old adolescent, reading well and speaking my American Indian tongue and the English language.

If life seems overwhelming, allow me to inspire you to have AhMaTaza and face your fears. Be willing to receive help from people who care about you. It will make you stronger and lead you in the direction to a better life.

In conclusion, I look forward to learning more things in life so I can make an impactful contribution to the world. I invite you to join me and change the world together having AhMaTaza to respect yourself, one another and each other's cultural lifestyle and language so all Nations can live in peace.

Important to Speak Our Language

By Dalayna Joe, Navajo



I am Navajo and Caucasian Pueblo. My father is full Navajo and my mother is Pueblo and Caucasian. I live with my father on Cousins Road in Vanderwagen with my sister. My grandma and grandfather lives near us and my aunt and her family, too.

I personally speak a little of my Navajo language as well as my sister. I mainly say commands like no, yes, come here, good, hello, etc. I understand some words that are spoken by my grandmother. My father speaks fluent Navajo to my grandmother and grandfather all the time.

I used to see my mother's mom a lot before she passed away. She used to live in Gallup. I used to help her at her house. She spoke English only. I sometimes see my grandma's sister occasionally now and she also speaks English only as well as my mother. This may be the reason I speak English more.

I have a hard time saying words and it sounds confusing for me. I learned my clan this year for my Navajo class with the help of my dad. Now, I can say it in front of the class. My dad helps me to say some words, but he also encourages me and if I'm not ready to say a lot more, he is okay with it. He is patient with me.

I think it is beautiful to speak and listen to the Navajo language. It is important to our people, and no one can take it away. The Navajo language was used as a code to help our country to have freedom. People should continue to speak and teach others to speak the Navajo language and all other Native languages. We are all different and our language is all different.

Lastly, our elders see the importance of our language. My grandmother speaks to me in Navajo at times and explains what it means to me. She pronounces it out and has me copy her. This shows that knowing Navajo is important.



Speak Your Native Language

By Lusanna Arviso, Navajo

I am a Navajo girl that lives in Jones Ranch area. I come from a family that practices the “old” traditional Navajo ceremonies. Unlike my mother, father, aunt, and grandmother, I can not fluently speak my language. I have a hard time speaking and saying the words. I hear it every day and I understand it a little. Speaking it is my problem.

I go to school at Chichiltah. From 4th grade through now, Navajo has been taught. I learned to say my clan this year. I can say it now. My oldest sister is the one who helped me. We practiced saying it. It was one of my test grades in class.

Knowing my clan, I know who I am related to. In class, I saw that I was related to almost everyone of my classmates even, my teacher. I know this because we put everyone’s clan on the board. Then, we saw who had what clan that were the same then, using the Navajo chart list we saw who we were also related. I am glad that I learned my Navajo clan because now, I know who is related to me in my class.

My favorite word in Navajo is “yadilah.” This word is funny. My mom and my sister say that to me. It is a slang. To me, it means I’m not doing something correctly or I should know better.

Navajo language needs to be spoken so; we can say what we need to. Some people do not know how to speak English like, my grandmother, who is my mom’s mom. My dad’s mom is trilingual. She can speak Spanish, English, and Navajo. She speaks to me in English mainly and my older sister in Navajo. I feel awkward when other languages are spoken besides English. I feel this way because I do not understand. I am trying hard to be able to speak Navajo so, I can converse with them and not feel left out.

In conclusion, I think that everyone needs to try to speak their Native language. It is hard but, with practice it can be learned. It can be learned in schools and at home.

My Navajo Language

By Brent Graymountain, Navajo

Navajo language is spoken at home only in short responses and commands. I understand some words like no, yes, come here, I don't know, eat, and go to sleep. I learned these words when I googled it.

My mom speaks some and my dad speaks rarely. My grandma on my dad's side is the only one living and she lives in Phoenix. My grandfather on my mom's side is the only one living and does not speak it to us only to my mom and her siblings. My mom once heard his biological father say that he wanted his kids to make sure his grandchildren speak English fluently because he does not want them to be like him where, when someone talks to him in English, he just puts his head down and feels ashamed with his "broken" English words. My mom was raised by her grandma and speaks fluently but, she mainly speaks to her older relatives and sisters in Navajo.

My favorite Navajo word is dooda for no. This is because it is an easy answer and most of the time that would be my answer. Dooda is easy to say than some of the words. Hearing the Navajo language makes me feel happy. I try to understand it. The words that I hear come out slow. I must really listen to what is said to understand the phrases I know.

I have Navajo class at school. We do some speaking, and I learned my clan. I can say it and I know where my clan comes from. It is very important to know your clan so, you know who you are related to and who you can marry when you get older. I learned colors, animals, numbers, and months. I like to learn Navajo words so; I can use it to show my nephews and nieces what to say.

This Easter, my aunties had a game that was about naming animals and numbers in Navajo. They also had the adults make rhymes in Navajo. Now, they think it is important to learn. My cousin told his mom (my aunt) that she should have taught him Navajo, and I think that is why she is trying to make up by playing these games during our gatherings with the family. I think that this will help the family learn the Navajo language together.



Importance of Navajo Language

By Farlayn Thomas, Navajo

Our Navajo language is in use everyday and is very important to my family. We speak and practice our Navajo culture and language daily. My grandmother is an herbalist. She makes medicine from plants, weaves, shears, cooks traditional meals, plants, and our daily activities that involve our Navajo way of living. My grandmother is fill with Navajo stories and knowledge that she passes down to us.

Navajo language needs to be spoken in our family because that's how I connect and understand my grandmother. She speaks only Navajo, and I help her daily with house chores and work that needs to be completed around the house and with our animals.

My grandmother shows me how to make medicine from plants. She has a plan for each of us on how to continue her ways of living from the land. She describes and informs me on what to do and when to make herbs to help and heal people.

Our family embraces our Navajo culture. We have a medicine man in our family. Also, we have some of my family members that are gifted with the hand trembling gift to help people. I help with these ceremonies once in awhile when told by my grandmother so, I must understand what I am doing and be able to know what I am saying. If not, I get in trouble by my grandmother.

Navajo language is very intense. The meaning cannot be fully translated, I think. It is hard for some people to speak it and I am very glad that I speak it. I live the Navajo way of life and I am very glad that I am fully immersed in it. I will continue to incorporate what I learn in my life and continue my grandmother's legacy.

My favorite word in Navajo is ch'iyáán. This means food. I love to eat, lots of food. I love mutton, stew, beans, blue corn mush, Navajo burger, blue corn pancakes and thin bread, and all native food. These are very delicious to eat. Being a Navajo child growing up in knowing my identity as a Navajo person is awesome. I am grateful for my family especially, my grandmother. She is our foundation.

Why I Love My Language

By DeSean Donias, Navajo



My Navajo language is mainly spoken in my home. I live with my family on my mother's side. My grandfather lives with us as well. We practice traditional beliefs and, believe in Christianity.

Speaking my language is important to me. It identifies me as a native man. This was not always so, when I was growing up. I spoke more English to everyone. I do remember speaking some phrases and words in my language when I was in 5th grade. Then, in 6th grade, I saw myself speaking more of my native language. I took a Navajo class that year. The teacher for that class only spoke in Navajo and she was implementing full Navajo instruction with no spoken English and responses. This was a turning point for me. I had to go home everyday and really practice conversing with my grandfather in Navajo. I began to talk more and understand more. This was exciting because we talked about many things and went to Gallup just for fun. He is the only one that really speaks to all of us in Navajo all the time so, he is my inspiration and role model. He teaches me about life skills.

I love my Navajo language. My conversation with my grandfather creates a close connection with him. I believe that speaking my Navajo language has more meaning to who I am talking to. All words can not be translated. Our language is in our blood and we need to use it to empower our people.

Our language was given to us to use from the Holy people to survive. It was also used to win the war. How they came up with the codes was smart knowledge. Being able to speak, understand, and think in two languages helps me to excel in school and to learn new things everyday. When asked a question at times in English, I sometimes process the question in Navajo then, respond in English. This helps me a lot. Navajo Language is a necessity for me.

Preserving our Navajo Language is Crucial

By Brooklyn Graymountain, Navajo



Navajo Language is hardly spoken at home. My mom sometimes speaks to my siblings and I once in a great while. It is usually commands like come here, eat, sit down, etc. When, my mom speaks to my dad, he makes one-word responses or nods but really, he does not know what my mom is saying. My mom also, talks to her sisters in Navajo and other older people from the community. Listening to them speak makes me want to know what they are saying.

I attend Navajo Language at school and the class is not just about speaking but, also learning and expanding our knowledge about different concepts that are built into our language. This includes the importance of my four clans that determines my identity as a Navajo, female person. It also helps me to know my relatives. Every where you go, when you introduce yourself, someone is related to you though, they are from another state or community. But the connection is there and that's where K'é is important.

My grandfather was a medicine man and he helped people heal. I remember my grandfather always jolly and was very talkative. He greeted everyone with a stern handshake and acknowledge them by relation to his clan.

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He also did his traditional Navajo ceremonies with what they would give like in the old way of exchange with food, jewelry, material, and what money they can give. He helped them no matter what and did not turn them away.

Prayers are meaningful and cannot be translated into English. I believe it is more effective that way. The words and songs are not as meaningful as it is in our own language. These traditions were passed down and now since, many of our elders including my grandfather have passed, it is hard to get traditional ceremonies performed. New generation medicine man asks for materialistic items and prices for ceremonies have soared through the roof. In the old way of life, medicine man helped people with what they could afford and K'é was a big part of the exchange of ceremonial services. Ke' is starting to fade.

Our language, our words, and our connection is what we need. That is our foundation to who we are as Navajo people. Our language has gotten recognition to win the war and it has been through many heartaches with the Long Walk and boarding school days, where our people suffered. We still stand strong. We must remember and ask for guidance from our elders to teach us what they know so, we can live a bountiful life on our lands with pride as we take what we are given and continue to teach the next generations to come.

Our schools and community need to make a commitment to provide resources and include our elders to help in preserving our language. It can be done. The desire to understand our language is within us newer generation, we just need guidance.

Being Trilingual

By Megan Zunie, Zuni

I am both Zuni and Navajo. My father is Zuni, and my mother is Navajo. I speak both of my Native languages. I would say that my Zuni language supersedes my Navajo language. This is because I speak more when I go to Zuni to see my family. My relatives in Zuni do not speak and understand English and for me to communicate with them, I must speak Zuni fluently. I learned my Zuni language from my family and, from my other school that I attended, St. Anthony. Then, I learned my Navajo language from my mother's aunt and my grandmother.

We moved to Phoenix, AZ when I was in kindergarten, and I moved back to my mom's area when I was in 2nd grade. Looking back, I would state that I spoke more English than my Native languages during that time. I had to converse with my teachers in English and at home, majority of the time, English was spoken by my parents. Now, I travel to Zuni to see my family on weekends only unless there are traditional ceremonies being performed.

My favorite word in Zuni is "mootsana" which, means little bread. That is my nickname from my family in Zuni. I think that speaking and translating Zuni is easier than Navajo. In trying to comprehend information in English, I have a better understanding if I put the information in Zuni and sometimes Navajo to determine the meaning.

When I envision the future of Native Languages, I think equally the English language is dominating and will take over. Younger generation that does not speak the Zuni Language need interpreters to speak to the elders or family, who can not speak or understand English. I think that there is still a connection between them because they are related by blood but, the person being interpreted for may feel embarrassed and sadden by the fact that they do not understand.

I love my languages. I think we need to preserve our languages so; we can teach the next generation after us. We need to keep our Native language alive without it being corrupted by English.

Shima'

By Lex Alexius, Navajo

My native language is Navajo. I remember the first word that I learned. It was shimá for my mom. My mom is a very important person to me. She takes care of my siblings and me. She works hard alongside my father to provide a good home and be supportive of our education.

She does beadwork. She is a patient person. She can work all day and most of the night beading. She taught me how to do beadwork. I make earring with seed beads. This helps me to save money for things that I need. It is hard work, but patience is key.

My mother to me represents food for strength and nourishment. She makes the best Navajo taco. This is a delicacy in our home. She makes us food so; we are ready for the day. I help her by washing dishes, getting food for her from our storage, wood hauling and chopping wood, feeding animals, and helping take care of my sisters and brother.

In the Navajo culture, the society is matrilineal. The first clan is my mother's clan Dibe Lizhini (Black Sheep). I do not really speak and understand my Navajo language but, I know some words that include names of animals, my four clans, and some commands that my mom speaks.

My father on the other hand uses Navajo and English together to speak to my mom and grandma. This is called code switching. I have caught on to some of the Navajo words in their conversation. Due to my father using English and Navajo, I can comprehend.

I don't really practice talking Navajo but, I think that if I try, I am able to speak my language. I feel that words that are important to me like shimá would be words that are easy to learn. Right now, my mom speaks to me in Navajo, and she tries to allow me time to tell her what it means. When I need help with translation after trying to interpret what she asked or said, I asked her, and she tells me. Like she has taught me with other things and encourages me to do well in school, I will listen to her and do my very best. She is my teacher as well. I am learning slowly, and I will continue to build upon my Navajo vocabulary.

Thank you!

