The Importance of Learning your Native Language

I am learning my native language of Navajo because without it I feel disconnected from my culture, community and myself. I believe learning your native language is important so certain languages don’t vanish. Not learning your language can make you feel empty inside and I know this because I myself have had that feeling before. Especially for communities it’s important to learn your language so you can speak to your elders if they speak the same language as you. It’s also important because if the youth of that community don’t learn their native language than that language will not last as long as most people would hope. All languages are valuable to people’s identity no matter what cultural background you have: Navajo, Apache, Cheyenne, and Comanche, etc. Native languages have been used to win wars, as in the example I will be emphasizing, Navajo Code Talkers. I feel that learning your native language or a language of your heritage can maintain your culture and strengthen your identity.

“The Code Talker’s Story: Background & Boot Camp” is on the official site of the Navajo code talkers, www.navajocodetalkers.org. Most Navajo Code Talkers were between the ages of 15 to 35 years old when they joined WW2. The military started utilizing Navajo as a code in1942. I learned that if you didn’t grow up speaking Navajo then it is a very complicated language to learn. It is possible to learn your language as an adult but it won’t be as easy! I mean even right now my baby cousin Ayden is on his mom’s phone a lot with this game app called “Navajo Toddler”. Ayden is learning how to say his colors, numbers, fruit and so much more. Who says technology is bad for you? You should practice your native language because you never know when you’re going to need it but also to keep your culture alive for future generations.
The official website also has, “The Code Talkers Story: The Code & Code Talking.” In 48 hours alone the code talkers sent 800 perfect radio transmissions in a battle of WW2. The Code Talkers used the Navajo word for “turtle” to describe an enemy tank. They also used the Navajo word for “chicken hawk” to warn of an enemy dive bomber. If you ever need to use your language for something important then you need to be fluent so it can be understood wholly.

In “Meet the Code Talkers” the very few Code Talkers who are still alive tell the citizens of the world their breath taking adventures through World War 2. Bill Toledo was a Code Talker who was given body guards because he was often mistaken for a Japanese soldier. Teddy Draper Sr. was in WW2 from 11/3/1943 to 5/6/1946 and Samuel Tso fought in WW2 from 2/3/1945 to 3/29/1946. Keith Little fought in many places such as: The Marshall Islands, Sai Pan, and Iwo Jima. I think it is important for Navajo people to know their language because it can show respect for those Code Talkers who risked their lives for the U.S.

Talk to your family and your elders about your native languages and cultural history if you don’t already know about it. Find people who speak your native language that you can practice with and see if your community offers classes. You may be able to find study recourses online as well. Once you have learned you can take on the responsibility of passing on the language of your culture to others.

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