

OJIBWE LANGUAGE

PUBLISHED BY ST. LOUIS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
WITH GUIDANCE FROM THE SLCHS AMERICAN INDIAN ADVISORY COMMITTEE

What's inside this educational guide:

GRAMMER - 2

ORAL TRADITION - 3

THREATS - 4

REVITILZATION - 5

ACTIVITES-6,7



Ozaaweshiinh (yellow/gold finch) is one of the spiritual keepers of the Ojibwe language (above). A prayer tie is made to resemble the language keeper and ask for its help by language learners (right).



OJIBWE LANGUAGE

Boozhoo! (Hello!) Ojibwemowin (the Ojibwe language) is an American Indian language that is part of the Algonquian family of languages. It is spoken throughout North America with different regions having different variations.

Ojibwemowin has been written in various ways. Three of the most common ways today are syllabics used farther north and also used by the Cree, the double vowel writing system which is used by many teachers and writers, and the third is an English phonetic system with varies from person to person. Ojibwemowin is primarily a spoken language, and that is why there are many important efforts underway to learn from elder speakers, and to keep the language alive and spoken amongst the younger generations.

Ojibwemowin Grammar

Ojibwemowin Alphabet

A, aa, b, ch, d, e, g, h, i, ii, j, k, m, n, o, oo, p, s, sh, t, w, y, z, zh, and the glottal stop which is written as '.

What's the glottal stop?

The glottal stop is a sound that cuts off your flow, it is written with an apostrophe. Practice making this sound with the English expression "oh oh"

Abinoojiinyensi-makizinensan igaye bapagoneyaawanoon.

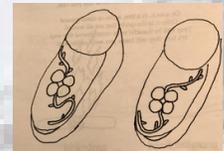
Dibishko bapagosidood minnawaa da-bakaan-ozhichigaadeniwan ani-nooishkang o'o akeyaa ind-izhi-ganawenimaanaan.

In the baby's moccasins we put a hole.

To show the spirits that baby will grow. He's worn them out and will need a new pair. This is another way to show we care.

Nursery Rhymes of Anishinaabe Children and Their Families

Written by Rick and Cheryl Gresczyk/illustrated by Roger Gresczyk c.2002 Eagle Works



OJIBWE VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

Black

Makadewaa

Red

Miskwaa

white

Waabishkaa

Blue or Green

Ozhaawashkwaa

Nouns & Gender

In languages like French or Spanish, nouns are either masculine or feminine. However, in Ojibwe there are two types of nouns: animate and inanimate. Nothing is neutral, so if the noun you are using is animate, the rest of the sentence has to match. And if the noun is inanimate, the entire sentence has to be inanimate.

Animate nouns are living things, and their plurals end in -g, -ag, -iig, -oog, -wag, -yag. Meanwhile, inanimate nouns are non-living things, and their plurals end in -n, -an, -iin, -oon, or -wan.

For example, the Ojibwe word for raspberry is miskomin, and from the ending of the word, we can see that it's an animate noun.

Oral Tradition

Oral tradition is a community's cultural and historical traditions passed down by word of mouth or by example from one generation to another without written instruction. These traditions come about when a culture either doesn't have a written language system or uses it very sparingly. Oral traditions amongst the Ojibwe discuss the origin of the people, tell stories of different clans, and the world, and act as a way to emphasize religious values and cultural norms.

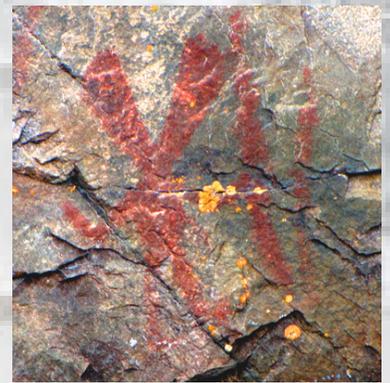
Story Telling

Within Ojibwe society, the storyteller selected an apprentice to learn the stories so they could be passed on to the next generation. The apprentice selected was someone with a good memory, and an ability to tell the story with great accuracy. Birchbark scrolls or pictographs were made as memory aids for history and stories.

Good storytellers were celebrated for their skills as dramatic entertainers, and their reputations traveled far, creating a level of fame. Some of the stories told were very long, often taking many hours to relate, and were often full of repetitious phrases that were well known to the listeners. It's fairly common for a story to come to an abrupt halt rather than a finished ending, occasionally with the use of a phrase such as, "That is as far as the story goes," or "That is the way they tell it."

Nanaboozhoo, trickster and teacher from sacred storytelling, is often depicted as a rabbit.

Pictogram of Nanaboohoo on Mazinaw Rock, Bon Echo Provincial Park, Ontario



By D. Gordon E. Robertson - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11634446>

Threats to language

Only around 100 languages are taught at large throughout the world at colleges and universities, but there are about 6,700 languages that are spoken worldwide. Of these languages, 2,500 are in danger of going extinct. In Canada and the U.S. the number of languages before European contact was around 500, but today only 150 of those still exist. Only 4 of those indigenous languages have a large base of speakers and are not at immediate risk of being lost. In the U.S. there are 573 federally recognized tribes and many others without federal recognition. The languages spoken by these tribes vary in health, with some nearly extinct, while others have over 100,000 speakers.

The key to understanding Anishinaabeg people is to understand our language. Our values, ethics and worldview are all in there.

Michele Hakala-Beeksmma
SLCHS President, AIAC

What's happening?

The health of the Ojibwe language varies widely. In many parts of Ontario and Manitoba, it is spoken by indigenous people of all ages, while in other parts of North America, those who speak the language are elders. Historically residential boarding schools purposefully oppressed the language and kept it from being learned by the young. Today, it is a cultural battle. Most Ojibwe speakers learned the language at home, but as more and more outside cultures make their way into native communities, the language has is down less and less. Because now most speakers of Ojibwe are past the age of having children, language cannot be passed down in the traditional way. Ojibwe has not historically been written down or taught in schools, but it has become clear that if the Ojibwe language is to continue being spoken, it will have to be taught to the next generation in ways never done before.

OJIBWE VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

Gizhiwe

To Speak Loudly

Nagamo

To Sing

Dadaatabaanagidoon

To Talk Quickly

Nanda-gikendan

Seek To Learn

The Importance of Revitalization

Learning one's own native language can be an incredible act of healing on an individual level as well as for the entire community.

Language
taught and used
in schools

Bi-lingual
books

Immersion
programs

Public Signage

Online classes

Language Tables

"Do not ask for permission. Don't beg."

-Darrell Kipp, founder of the Piegan Institute on Language Revitalization efforts

language revitalization

To ensure that Ojibwe continues as a language spoken within Anishinaabe communities, the language needs speakers to pass it along to their own children. Right now there are over a quarter of a million Ojibwe people living across North America, but only around 40,000 speakers. Because so few of the younger generation are speakers, it is pivotal that language revitalization works to teach young people. Language programs are popping up all over Ojibwe communities, and Ojibwe is now taught in several university programs as well.

OJIBWE VOCABULARY



CLICK EACH WORD TO HEAR IT
SPOKEN BY A NATIVE SPEAKER!

[dibaajimowin](#)

Story

[aadizookwe](#)

Tell a Sacred Story

Your Body

Simon says:

Touch your head/ your elbow/ your ears

Lift your right foot!

Touch your knee / hips

Put your hand on your shoulders!

Scratch your chin!

Don't forget to brush your teeth!

Do I have to wash my hands?

Yes, and your face, too.

I hurt my hand.

Move your finger!

I can bend my wrist OK.

My nose is bleeding.

Let me feel your forehead.

I bit my tongue.

Open your mouth!

Let me see!

Stand up!

Arise!

Turn around!

Walk around inside!

Jump there!

Shake hands with your classmate!

Pat him on the back!

Walk slowly!

Walk fast!

Run in place!

Stop!

Raise your right hand!

Raise your left hand!

Bend your knees!

Stand straight!

Giiyaw

Daanginan gishtigwaan/ gidooskwaan/ gitawagan

Ombinan gigichizid!

Daanginan gigidig / ginooganan

Izhininjiinan gidinimaanganan!

Gizhiibidoon gidaamikan!

Gego wanendangen ji biinaabide'oyan!

Booch ina ji giziibiigininjiiyaan?

Eya', gidengway gaye.

Niwiisagininjiishin.

Mamaadinan gininjiins!

Nimbiskiniken weweni.

Nimiskwiwijaane wiin igo.

Daga inga-godinaan gikaatig.

Indakwandaan indenaniw.

Baakaadonenin! / Daawinin!

Daga inga-inaab!

Niibawin!

Bazigwiin!

Gwekitaan!

Babaamosen biindig!

Gwaagwaashkwanin igo imaa!

Zaagininjiin giiji-gikinoo'amaagan!

Baapaagaw opikwanaang!

Bedosen weweni!

Gizhiikaan bimoseyan!

Bimibatoon bezhigwanong!

Noogitaan imaa!

Ombinan gigichinik!

Ombinan ginamanjinik!

Biskikiinan gidigwan!

Gwayakogaabawin!

From: Ambe, Ojibwemoda Endaayang! by Jessie Clark (Mookewwidamookwe) and Rick Gresczyk (Gwayakogaabaw)
C. 2002 Eagle Works

Ojibwemowin Miijim (Food)

D G U Z M I S H I I M I N R U
 E L T Y A E V J I V E F X K E
 K J Z R N H M A N O O M I N Q
 A Z L K H L S I W F K S X R C
 A J H K U M Y M W P J P I Y N
 G Z F C W H W A A W A N O O N
 B A K W E Z H I G A N R F L O
 Z I I N Z I B A A K W A D E W
 O Y M M E G I C H I O J I N I
 P F I B L V B R Y D L I E X I
 I W I D Z H I I W A A B O O Y
 N M N S E N R N B E Z N P R A
 L U I C J M A N D A A M I N A
 J Z H I I W I T A A G A N N S
 J Q G I T I G A A N E N S C U

ziinzibaakwad

zhiiwitaagan

gitigaanens

bakwezhigan

gichiojin

zhiiwaaboo

mishiimin

mandaamin

manoomin

wiiyaas

waawanoon

dekaag

opin

miin

ziinzibaakwad-sugar

zhiiwitaagn-salt

gitigaanens-vegetable

bakwezhigan-bread

gichiojin-tomato

zhiiwaboo-lemonade

mishiimin-apple

mandaamin-corn

manoomin-wild rice

wiiyaas-meat

waawanoon-eggs

dekaag-ice cream

opin-potato

miin-blueberries