

# Sharing languages in the classroom helps build new friendships

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Acacia WoodsChan leads an introductory exercise in ethnic studies class for two new students at Castlemont High School in Oakland, California, February 4, 2019. Last year, WoodsChan had her students create a video dictionary to help them learn words in Arabic, Spanish and Mam, an indigenous language from Guatemala. Photo by: Anne Wernikoff/The World

Acacia WoodsChan teaches an ethnic studies class. In her ethnic studies class, students learn about how different groups of people live. They learn about different beliefs and the languages people speak.

WoodsChan teaches at Castlemont High School in Oakland, California. Many of her students have recently arrived in the United States. They come from many different places. They speak different languages. Many are just starting to learn English.

Some of WoodsChan's students speak Spanish. Some speak Arabic. This is a language from the Middle East and North Africa. Others speak Mam. This a language from Guatemala. Mam is a Mayan language. It is similar to languages spoken by the Mayans thousands of years ago.

Some students have not been in the U.S. long. They arrived only weeks or months earlier. Some are from Yemen. This country is in the Middle East. Many are from countries in Central America.

They include Guatemala as well as El Salvador and Honduras.

### **Students Teaching Each Other**

Last year, WoodsChan became upset. She started hearing the Spanish-speaking students laugh at their classmates. They laughed when other students spoke Mam or Arabic. The Spanish speakers would make fun of how these languages sounded.

WoodsChan saw this was very hurtful. Her students who spoke Mam and Arabic felt picked on.

WoodsChan tried something new. Students started teaching. They taught a little of their home language each day. Students taught classmates to count to 10. Students taught others how to say hello. They taught each other how to say "cool." Then, students recorded videos. They heard themselves speaking a new language.

WoodsChan said her students liked teaching their classmates. They could now talk to each other. They all started becoming friends. They saw every language as important.

### **Speaking Two Languages Is A Plus**

WoodsChan's classroom is not rare. Many U.S. classrooms have more students from other countries. These students often must learn English. They're also getting used to a new home. This can make school hard.

The new students have many strengths, though. One strength is speaking their home language.

Studies show students from other countries do best when they keep speaking their home language while learning English. These students finish high school more often than those who stop speaking their home language. More of them go to college. Their chance for higher-paying professions is better, too.

Knowing both English and their home language can help WoodsChan's students beyond the classroom, too. Some become interpreters. This is a very important job. Interpreters help people communicate in schools, hospitals and courtrooms.

## Quiz

1 What is the MAIN idea of the paragraph below from the introduction [paragraphs 1-4]?

*Some of WoodsChan's students speak Spanish. Some speak Arabic. This is a language from the Middle East and North Africa. Others speak Mam. This a language from Guatemala. Mam is a Mayan language. It is similar to languages spoken by the Mayans thousands of years ago.*

- (A) Some languages are thousands of years old.
- (B) WoodsChan's students speak many different languages.
- (C) Arabic is spoken in many different countries.
- (D) Sometimes students have to learn a new language at a new school.

2 The main idea of the section "Speaking Two Languages Is A Plus" is that speaking two languages can help students succeed.

Which key detail from the section supports the section's MAIN idea?

- (A) WoodsChan's classroom is not rare. Many U.S. classrooms have more students from other countries.
- (B) They are also getting used to a new home. This can make school hard.
- (C) The new students have many strengths, though. One strength is speaking their home language.
- (D) More of them go to college. Their chance for higher-paying professions is better, too.

3 Which event happened FIRST in in the article?

- (A) WoodsChan let her students start teaching their home languages to their classmates.
- (B) WoodsChan noticed that some students were making fun of other students' languages.
- (C) WoodsChan's students recorded themselves speaking a new language.
- (D) WoodsChan's students started talking to each other and becoming friends.

4 How did Acacia WoodsChan's students change because of teaching each other?

- (A) They learned how to speak English.
- (B) They stopped speaking their home languages.
- (C) They began to accept their classmates.
- (D) They started getting better grades.