Inquiry Guide

Our Living Languages exhibition

While you are in the gallery:

THINK   As a group, think about the questions posed in this guide.
LOOK    Find any connections to the questions in the gallery.
TALK    Talk about what you have found.
DO      Record what you find out on the inquiry page.
FEEL    Find your own personal connection to the messages.
Our Living Languages: Welcome

KEY QUESTION
When visiting the Royal BC Museum, who’s traditional territory are we standing on?

Spend a moment watching the Lekwungen welcome video.

You probably noticed that there were words floating up at the beginning of the video. These are some of the original place names of this area now called Victoria. While these place names still have meaning for First Nations people today, why do you think new place names were given, such as James Bay and Fernwood?

My name is Siemthlut (Michelle Washington) and I can welcome you into witness the work here in Our Living Languages, but like most others who call Victoria home, I am a visitor from another nation. Our ancient teachings are very clear that I cannot welcome you to this territory because I am in the land of the Songhees and Esquimalt peoples who have spoken the Lekwungen language connected to this place for thousands of years.

FACTS

NOT JUST A SINGLE WAY
More than half of all Canada’s Aboriginal languages are spoken in British Columbia. There are 34 distinct languages and 61 dialects.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT
The languages in British Columbia cross the US and Alberta boarders because they existed thousands of years before provincial and international borders were in place.
Our Living Languages: Diversity

KEY QUESTION
What makes one language different from another?

Look at all the different Welcome posts. Spend some time pressing the greetings and find ways that each is unique.

Now pick one post that you connect with. It could be because it is your language or a language from your area. It could even be that you like the way the greeting sounds.

Write the greeting and language in the box below

Is the greeting hard or easy to say?
Greet someone beside you.
Remember it and use it later.

Do you notice how all of the Welcome posts are different colours? Each colour represents a specific language family. Each language is distinct within a language family, but connected through a shared history.

What language family is your post part of? _____________________________

Find your chosen language on the exhibit map. Explore the map to find out how many communities speak this language. __________ 

FACTS

ORTHOGRAPHY
You’ll notice that language groups have their own writing systems.

CONNECTIONS TO THE LAND
First Nations languages are the original languages of this land. They contain critical information about the history, ecosystems and geography of the region.
The disruptions to First Nations language are not all in the deep past. Most First Nations in Canada still live under separate Indian Act legislation; the Crown still holds title to reserve lands; sacred sites continue to be destroyed; the last residential school closed in 1996; a staggering over-representation of First Nations children are in foster care and First Nations adults are in prison.

Isn’t this all ancient history?

The disruptions to First Nations language are not all in the deep past. Most First Nations in Canada still live under separate Indian Act legislation; the Crown still holds title to reserve lands; sacred sites continue to be destroyed; the last residential school closed in 1996; a staggering over-representation of First Nations children are in foster care and First Nations adults are in prison.

What is respectful terminology when addressing First Nations?

Terminology in reference to the First People’s of North America has changed over the years. Let’s break it down. **First Nations** and **First Peoples** are terms unique to Canada and refers specifically to established groups of people indigenous to place and territory through distinct nationhood, language, political structure and culture over thousands of years. **Aboriginal** also includes Inuit and Metis.

**FACTS**

Many people today still recall arrests for practicing culture, not having the right to vote and segregation in public establishments and transportation.

**SELF-IDENTIFICATION**

Most individuals today identify themselves as being from the specific nation they have descended from and not the generalized terms used by historians and governments of the past.

**DID YOU KNOW**

Many people today still recall arrests for practicing culture, not having the right to vote and segregation in public establishments and transportation.

**MISNAME**

Indian is a term retained from when early explorers mistakenly thought they landed on the subcontinent of India. This archaic word is still legally used by the federal government to enact legislation for those registered as status Indians. It is not a preferred reference in any other instance and is considered derogatory by many.
This exhibition incorporates the work of many cultural experts from around the province who gave their time and knowledge to transmit their culture to current and future generations.

**Below are a few examples from the exhibition:**

How would you describe this to a friend?

How does this make you feel?

Why do you think this was created?

What connection can you make from your own life?
Our Living Languages:
Call to Action

KEY QUESTION
How can we all find ways to be respectful to each other’s culture?

Envision Here!

How would you express and communicate this message of a respectful and inclusive society to your own circle of friends?

Before you go!

Choose an animal on the animal wheel, and then find out how to pronounce that word by using the First Voices computer station.

Time is the most precious gift that you can give to another person. Thank you for sharing your time and teachings with us on this journey together.