



Grade 12 Literacy Assessment

SAMPLE ASSESSMENT



Ministry of
Education and
Child Care



PART A

“Thinking Critically About the Texts”

Suggested Time: 65 minutes



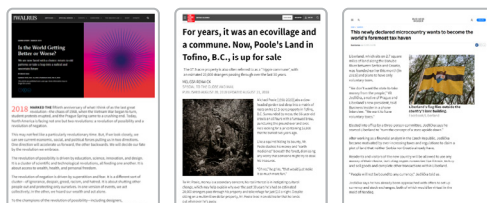
Context for Critical Thinking

In the purest forms of democracy, all members of a community participate in the decision-making process. Picture the following idealistic scenario: people gathering to debate an issue, all listening to other points of view, eventually making a decision that benefits the community as a whole. As democracies have evolved over time and become increasingly complex, many citizens appear to be disengaged from the formal political process, struggling to see its relevance to their daily lives. In response, some people are seeking revolutionary ways of decentralizing existing political structures, ranging from living in self-governing eco-communes to declaring newly-independent countries.

To what extent can revolutionary approaches shape the ways people view governance?

In this section you will:

- read and analyze a variety of texts
- answer selected response questions worth ten points
- complete a graphic organizer
- respond critically to the texts in a multi-paragraph composition





In the following text

Two revolutionary movements have profound implications for the future.

COVER STORY / MARCH 2019

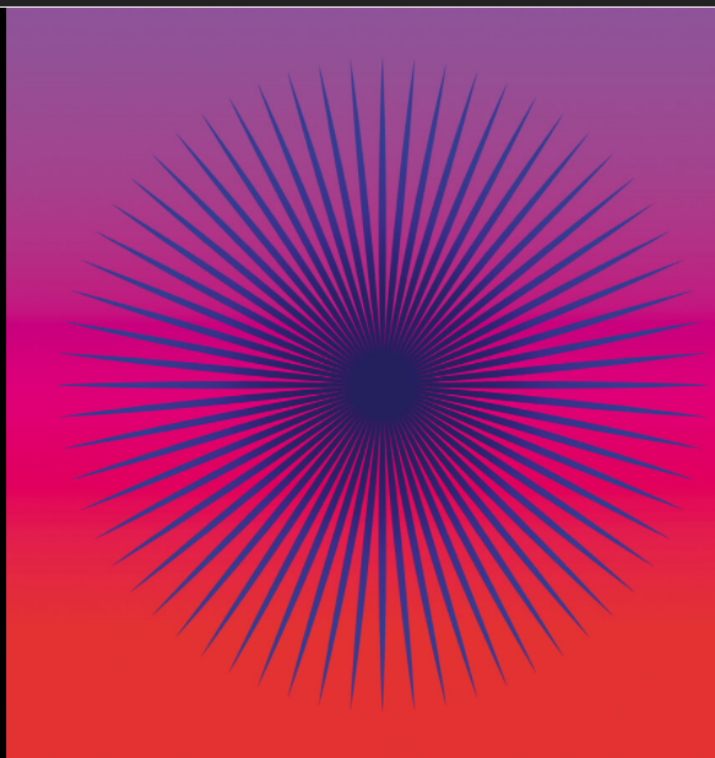
Is the World Getting Better or Worse?

We are now faced with a choice: return to old patterns or take a leap into a radical and uncertain future

BY BRUCE MAU

Updated 14:52, Nov. 14, 2019 | Published 14:45, Feb. 6, 2019

This article was published over a year ago. Some information may no longer be current.



2018 MARKED THE fiftieth anniversary of what I think of as the last great revolution—the chaos of 1968, when the Vietnam War began to turn, student protests erupted, and the Prague Spring came to a crushing end. Today, North America is facing not one but two revolutions: a revolution of possibility and a revolution of negation.

This may not feel like a particularly revolutionary time. But, if we look closely, we can see current economic, social, and political forces pulling us in two directions. One direction will accelerate us forward, the other backwards. We will decide our fate by the revolution we embrace.

The revolution of possibility is driven by education, science, innovation, and design. It is a cluster of scientific and technological revolutions, all feeding one another. It is about access to wealth, health, and personal freedom.

The revolution of negation is driven by superstition and fear. It is a different sort of cluster—of ignorance, despair, greed, racism, and hatred. It is about shutting other people out and protecting only ourselves. In one version of events, we act collectively; in the other, we hoard our wealth and act alone.

- 5 To the champions of the revolution of possibility—including designers, programmers, artists, innovators, and entrepreneurs—nothing is more exciting than a world improving itself. Our daily lives can be smarter, faster, easier, lighter, greener, more equitable, more open and accessible, and more beautiful. From the energy we use to the products we buy, from the food we eat to the ways we interact with our environment and with one another, everything is being redesigned to better meet our needs.

The revolution of possibility is exponential, and it is accelerating. Everything is unstable, dynamic, transformational—a condition that is deeply unsettling for many people. “If you’re anxious, imagine how the folks who aren’t in this room are feeling,” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told a group of business leaders at the World Economic Forum’s annual meeting in 2018. “Workers, people who aren’t

seeing the benefits of economic growth, regular women and men who are trying to grab a rung on the career ladder, never mind climb it—for them, technology is a benefit to their personal lives but a threat to their jobs.” Technological change is destabilizing—one recent report concludes that automation could displace an estimated 400 to 800 million people by 2030. No one knows which jobs will exist in fifteen years. But we do know that the revolution of possibility is also accomplishing feats beyond our imagination.

Over the last 200 years, we have seen a positive inversion in almost every measurable trend that matters. Grand challenges, from managing the spread of infectious diseases to providing free public education, have been confronted. We landed on the moon. Now we have a workforce in space on an international space station, we drive a rover around on the surface of Mars, and big freaking rockets take off and land themselves. Collectively, many of the world’s countries have organized efforts to confront polio, malaria, HIV/AIDS, Ebola, climate change, poverty, and hunger. We built a global infrastructure of manufacturing, transport, air travel, and telecommunications. More than 4 billion people now have access to the internet, providing them with opportunities and enormous amounts of information, and agricultural output has more than tripled since 1961.

Somehow, many commentators are convinced that we are falling behind. “Trust is collapsing in America,” *The Atlantic* announced in January 2018, noting declining trust in government, media, and businesses. In an Ipsos poll in 2017, more than half of the Canadian participants agreed that young people today will be worse off than their parents’ generation. We are convinced that we are not succeeding, that our institutions are failing, that we are not capable of putting global welfare ahead of personal or nationalist gain, that we are not willing to learn and change our behaviour to ensure the advancement of human society.

In 1820, an estimated 94 percent of all global citizens lived in extreme poverty. The difference between rich and poor was profound. It was the difference between king and pauper. Today, Warren Buffett is one of the richest people in the world, but while he has access to opportunities I do not, we live more or less the same way. We both have access to education, we fly in airplanes, we travel for pleasure, we have cell phones, we have computers, we have the internet, we drink Starbucks, and we use Google. As Andy Warhol once pointed out, the president (and, in this case, Warren Buffett) drinks the same Coke that I do. Technology—air travel, international shipping, consumer electronics, the internet—has allowed billions of people to share the same experiences. The revolution of possibility is radically egalitarian and built on a platform of open connection; it should be accessible to everyone. This access to possibility for billions of people worldwide is the defining quality of our time.

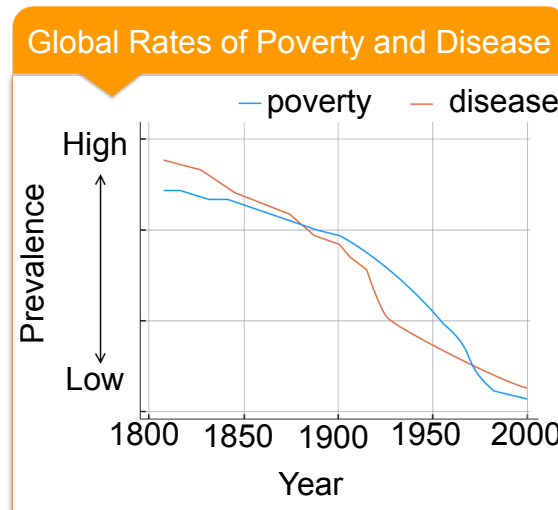
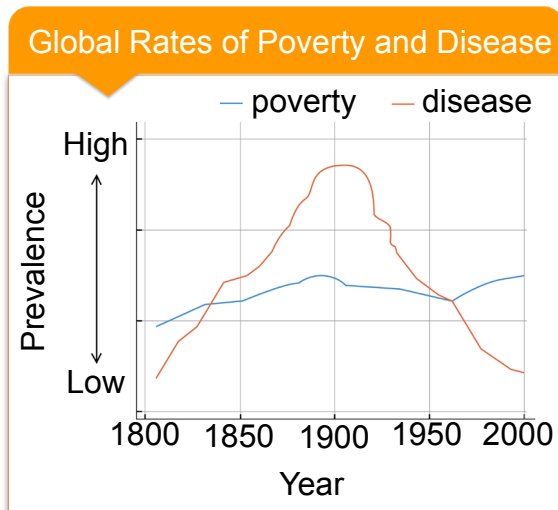
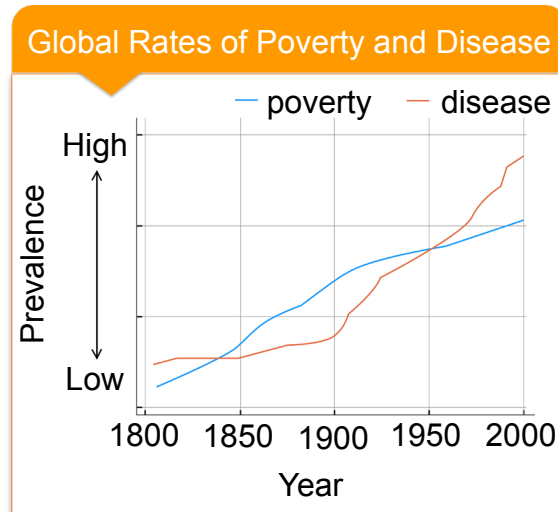
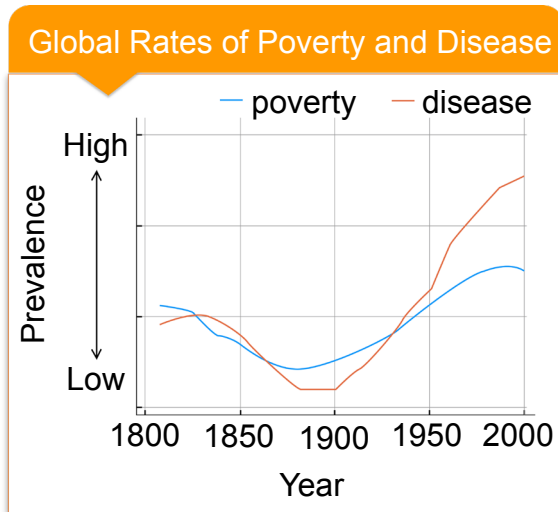
- 10 Yet some of us are actively denying it, cutting the rungs off the ladder we climbed. There is a risk that the benefits of our highly connected age will go only to the lucky few. I believe we are faced with a choice: return to the familiar patterns of our past or take a leap into a radical and uncertain future.

“Is the World Getting Better or Worse.” As originally published in *The Walrus*, March 2019.

Question A-1 (1 point)

Is the World Getting Better or Worse?

Which line graph illustrates Bruce Mau's claim that the world has "seen a positive inversion in almost every measurable trend that matters"?



Question A-2 (1 point)

Is the World Getting Better or Worse?

According to Mau, which key factor influences why citizens feel that their lives are getting worse?

A key factor is



- media reports.
- statistical analysis.
- scientific research.
- geopolitical trends.



*“Yet some of us are
actively denying it,
cutting the rungs off
the ladder we
climbed.”*

What insight into human nature does this quotation offer?

Some people skip steps when seeking financial success.

Some people climb over others to improve their social standing.

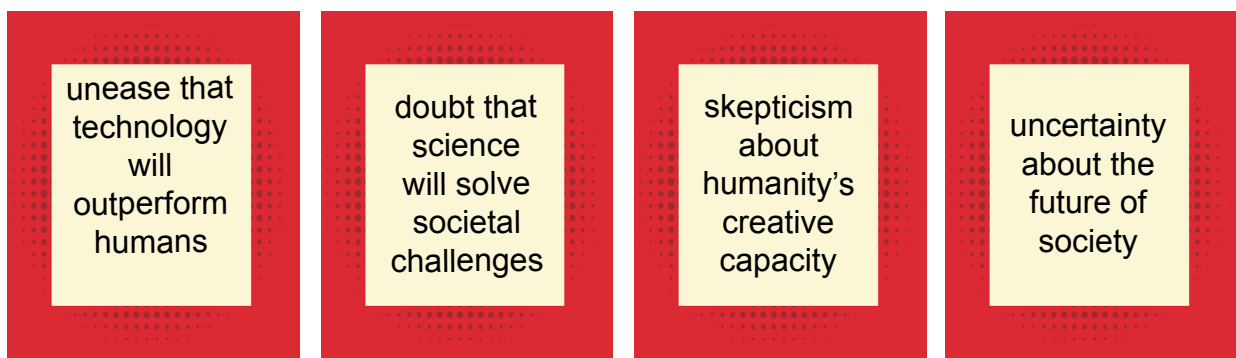
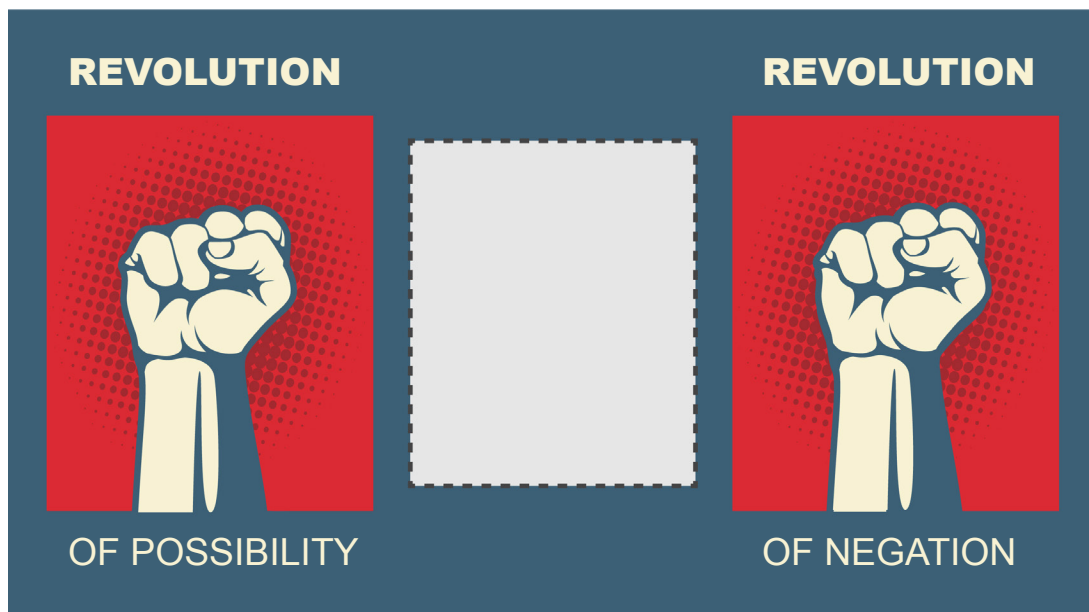
Some people ignore their personal safety because they distrust authority.

Some people sabotage the opportunities of others.

Question A-4 (1 point)

Is the World Getting Better or Worse?

Which sentiment do both revolutions share? Drag the answer in the space below.





In the following text

An ecovillage welcomes strangers in an attempt to create a utopian society.

For years, it was an ecovillage and a commune. Now, Poole's Land in Tofino, B.C., is up for sale

The 17.5-acre property is also often referred to as a “hippie commune”, with an estimated 20,000 strangers passing through over the last 30 years.

MELISSA RENWICK

SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE AND MAIL

PUBLISHED AUGUST 20, 2018 UPDATED AUGUST 21, 2018



Michael Poole (1951-2020) jabs a claw-headed garden tool deep into a matrix of roots on his 17.5-acre property in Tofino, B.C. Surrounded by moss, the 66-year-old crawls on all fours with a furrowed brow, puncturing the ground over and over. He's looking for a jar containing \$3,000 that he buried two years ago.

Like a squirrel hiding its bounty, Mr. Poole stashes his money and “earth medicines” beneath the forest, dismissing any worry that someone might try to steal his treasures.

“Oh no,” he grins, “that would just make it so much more fun.”

To Mr. Poole, money is a secondary concern; his real interest is in instigating cultural change, which may help

explain why over the past 30 years he's had an estimated 20,000 strangers pass through his property and take refuge for just \$10 a night. Despite sitting on a multimillion dollar property, Mr. Poole lives in an old trailer that he lends out whenever he's away.

- 5 “This profiteering at any expense to the people and the earth is wrong,” he says. “And so, I'd be a hypocrite to do anything differently.”

Famously known as Poole's Land, it is often referred to as a “hippie commune,” or an “ecovillage,” but Mr. Poole describes it as an “anarchist experiment.” “It has become a Tofino mainstay, a travel destination passed down through generations. But as Mr. Poole is confronted with aging, he says he can no longer go on and is finally ready to sell.

Mr. Poole bought the property in the eighties, hoping to create a communal living area free from any corporate structure.

Having spent his last dollar purchasing the land, he couldn't afford to pay anyone to help him build roads, composting toilets or boardwalks. So he decided to let people camp in exchange for labour.



Jessie Tremblay Lemieux, 25, first heard about Poole's Land from a friend. She stayed for ‘the sense of community’ and sharing of happiness.

“We’re talking about the poorest people in our society,” says Michael Goodliffe, 48, who helps manage the property. Because there are no limitations on who is welcome to stay, the promise of utopia draws quite the cast of characters. On any given day, you can find travellers, transient workers or homeless people scattered about the property.



After landing in Vancouver and finding the city to be too fast and noisy, Fumiya Kaneko (left), 31, originally hailing from Saitama, Japan, was recommended to travel to Tofino and has since taken refuge on Poole’s Land. ‘You could come and meet a bunch of weirdos and not like it and leave, or you could come and meet a bunch of really good friends and stay – it depends on the time of year,’ says Chris Holmes (right), 25, who is originally from Massachusetts.

- 10 Any place such as Poole’s Land, where people have chosen to live in a different way than the rest of society, “is something that really confronts our perceptions and our biases about lifestyles and the way people choose to live,” Tofino Mayor Josie Osborne says.

Poole’s Land is legally entitled to have two dwellings, Ms. Osborne says, but “everybody knows it has more than two.”

“We’re in such a critical housing shortage right now,” she continues. “If people are living safely in a dwelling – that may or may not be legal – it’s not going to rise to the top of our list.”

With a population of only 1,932, the town receives 800,000 visitors each year, Parks Canada estimates. This spike has created a housing crisis, which flares up every summer when the municipality’s long-term rentals transition to short-term accommodation for tourists. The continuing trend leaves seasonal workers and locals with nowhere to stay, forcing



One of the more permanent structures on Poole’s Land sits tucked away near the back of the property and serves as a home to a rotating cycle of transients.

many to sleep in their tents or campers on Poole's Land.

Housing crisis aside, thousands of people have travelled to Poole's Land from across the world in search of something a little different. They weren't forced there out of necessity, but came by choice.

- 15 But Poole's Land's future is unknown. Ever since Mr. Poole bought the land in 1988 for \$50,000, he's led various groups of people to believe he'd sign the land over to them for a communal living area or a new development project – always pulling the plug at the last minute.

Like his buried treasure, Mr. Poole is a difficult man to unearth.

"Trouble," Mr. Poole says, "is my middle name."



Michael Poole shaves outside his motorhome, which he lends out to friends and transients whenever he's away traveling. 'I'm a homeless person,' he says. 'I don't really claim this as my home. I'm just another traveler who just happened to get lucky with a purchase of this particular place.'

<https://www.theglobalandmail.com/canada/article-pooles-land-a-modern-day-anarchist-experiment/>

Question A-5 (1 point)

For years, it was an ecovillage...

What was the overarching purpose of Poole's Land?



Question A-6 (1 point)

For years, it was an ecovillage...



How does this photograph represent the prevailing attitude at Poole's Land?

**IT HIGHLIGHTS A
STATE OF DEFIANT
FREEDOM.**

**IT FEATURES A
CONDITION OF
CALCULATED
NEGLECT.**

**IT EMPHASIZES A
HUMBLE ATTITUDE
TOWARDS NATURE.**

**IT ILLUSTRATES AN
IDEALIZED VISION OF
COMMUNAL LIVING.**



How does Melissa Renwick approach her story?

with compassionate understanding

with underlying motives

with journalistic objectivity

with legalistic insights



In the following text

Leaders of a self-declared microcountry embark on a radical experiment in governance.

HOME > MARKETS

This newly declared microcountry wants to become the world's foremost tax haven

Ryan Gorman Apr 22, 2015, 2:45 PM



Liberland, which sits on 2.7 square miles of land along the Danube River between Serbia and Croatia, was founded earlier this month [in 2015] and plans to have only voluntary taxes.

“We don’t want the state to take money from the people,” Vít Jedlička, a native of Prague and Liberland’s new president, told Business Insider in a phone interview. “We want to have voluntary taxes.”

Elected into office by a three-person committee, Jedlička says he started Liberland to “turn the concept of a state upside down.”

After working as a financial analyst in the Czech Republic, Jedlička became motivated by ever-increasing taxes and regulations to claim a plot of land that neither Serbia nor Croatia already have.



Liberland’s flag flies outside the country’s lone building. [Facebook/Liberland](#)

- 5 Residents and visitors of the new country will be allowed to use any money of their choice, including crypto currencies like Bitcoin, to buy and sell goods and complete other transactions within Liberland.

“People will not be bound to any currency,” Jedlička told us.

Jedlička says he has already been approached with offers to set up currency and stock exchanges, both of which would be virtual in the mold of Nasdaq.

The only functions of government will be to defend the republic, which will be a representative democracy, and to maintain law and order, according to Jedlička, who’s a Libertarian.

LIBERLAND: “LIVE AND LET LIVE”

Liberland, a **2.7-square-mile** micro country between Serbia and Croatia, was founded this month with plans to become the world’s foremost tax haven.



Source: [liberland.org](#)

BUSINESS INSIDER

“These two things we consider the most important roles of the state,” he said, adding that drugs will be illegal “to maintain good relations with neighboring countries.”

- 10 There will be no social welfare programs like healthcare and pensions, and the government will not be allowed to run with a deficit. Any law can be vetoed by referendum.

Right now, the plot of land is largely undeveloped but Jedlička insists that multiple architects have contacted him about planning the infrastructure and buildings of Liberland.

Initial build-out would be funded through investments, which Jedlička insists are pouring in, and basic services like roads and utilities would eventually be privately funded.

The microcountry will thrive even if none of its residents volunteer to pay taxes because of the investments that are coming in from “all over the world, everywhere,” according to Jedlička.

“We will have so much money that we will not know how to spend it,” he added.

- 15 More than 260,000 people have already applied for citizenship in the fledgling republic, Jedlička said. The initial wave of citizens will be selected based on how they can help build the country.

First preference goes to businesses or wealthy people who “feel threatened by regulations imposed on them,” he said.

“Economic freedom makes the country work, we see that around the world,” he continued.

“Now we are doing it for real.”

Jedlička brushed aside concerns Serbia or Croatia might disagree with his claim to the land or want to take over the territory — the way China acquired Hong Kong — should it become successful.

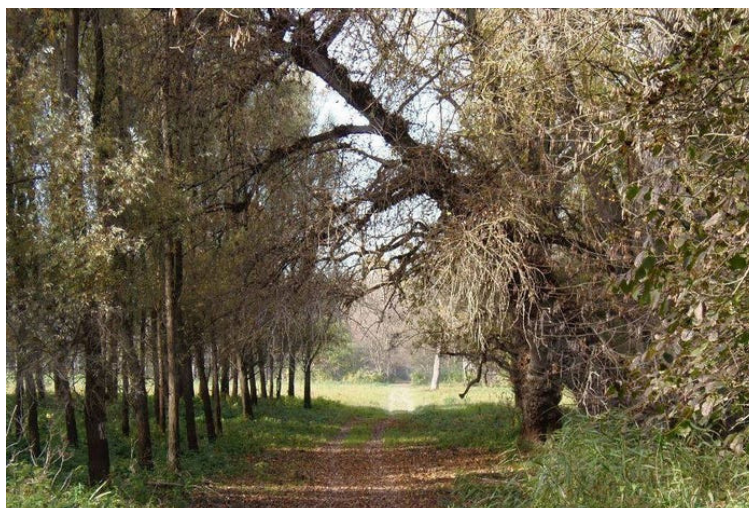
- 20 “We are a nation, now, that will be an attack on a sovereign nation,” he said.

Neither Croatia nor Serbia has responded to a letter declaring Liberland’s independence, he admitted. But the country’s first diplomatic missions to its neighbors will occur in the coming weeks.

“We hope to bring a lot of prosperity to the region and good relations with our neighbors,” he said.



A beach along the Danube River, one of many in Liberland, according to Jedlička. [Facebook/Liberland](#)



The undeveloped plot of land is larger than Monaco. [Facebook/Liberland](#)

The city-state might seem tiny, but it's bigger than Monaco — which is less than one square mile.

“It's a really nice piece of land in the shape of a heart,” Jedlička said, referring to his new country. “Nice river and sunny beaches. It's also a nice place to set up a tax haven.”

<https://www.buinesinsider.com/liberland-this-newly-declared-microcountry-wants-to-become-the-worlds-foremost-tax-haven-2015-4>

Question A-8 (1 point)

This newly declared microcountry...

How does Liberland's proposed structure of government "turn the concept of a state upside down"?

Select the two that apply:

- ☐ Citizens choose to pay voluntary taxes.
- ☐ Population density corresponds with landmass.
- ☐ Legislation can be repealed in nationwide votes.
- ☐ Corporate investments underpin economic productivity.
- ☐ Independence is ensured by diplomatic relations with other nations.



How is the name Liberland a contradiction?

While it claims to be a land of freedom, this freedom is only offered to those who

▼

are financially prosperous.

embrace strict regulations.

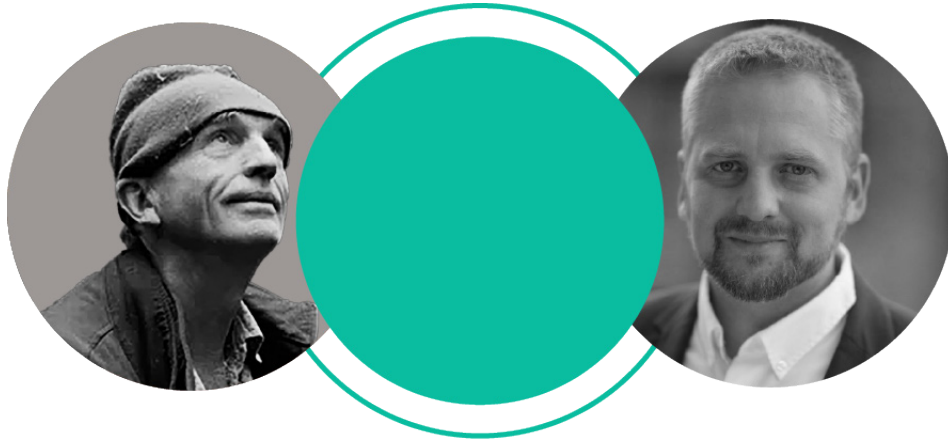
are granted diplomatic immunity.

accept rule by presidential decree.

Question A-10 (1 point)

For years, it was an ecovillage...
This newly declared microcountry...

Which core value do Michael Poole and Vít Jedlička share?



an open-mindedness towards all who wish to join the community

a belief in a financial system based on the informal exchange of goods and services

the expectation of freedom from excessive government control

the duty to comply with local regulations and national laws

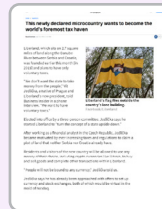
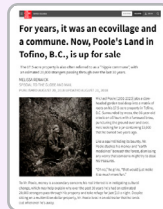
Graphic Organizer (A-11) (6 points)

Is the World Getting Better or Worse?
For years, it was an ecovillage...
This newly declared microcountry...

Suggested time: 10 minutes



Aspects of Critical Thinking



Based on your understanding of the texts, write a statement that identifies your perspective on revolutionary approaches to governance.

Provide evidence from at least one text that **supports** your perspective:

Provide evidence from at least one text that **challenges** your perspective:

Write at least one question about revolutionary approaches that could deepen your understanding of the topic.



Responding Critically to Texts



Context for Critical Thinking

In the purest forms of democracy, all members of a community participate in the decision-making process. Picture the following idealistic scenario: people gathering to debate an issue, all listening to other points of view, eventually making a decision that benefits the community as a whole. As democracies have evolved over time and become increasingly complex, many citizens appear to be disengaged from the formal political process, struggling to see its relevance to their daily lives. In response, some people are seeking revolutionary ways of decentralizing existing political structures, ranging from living in self-governing eco-communes to declaring newly-independent countries.



To what extent can revolutionary approaches shape the ways people view governance?

- You must respond to this question in a multi-paragraph composition.
- You must communicate an argument that demonstrates your critical thinking skills.
- You must support your argument using evidence from at least one of the texts.

Suggested time: 30 minutes

PART B

“Going Beyond the Texts”

Suggested Time: 55 minutes

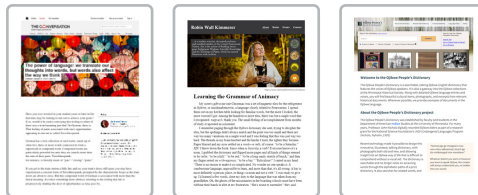


Essential Question

To what extent does language influence the way people perceive the world?

In this section you will:

- read and analyze a variety of texts
- answer selected response questions worth fifteen points
- select a Writing Pathway to complete your extended written response



Writing Pathway



1

Language is an essential aspect of culture.



2

Learning a language is an ongoing journey.



In the following text

Unique aspects of each language influence the way people think.

**THE CONVERSATION**

Academic rigour, journalistic flair

Q Search analysis, research, academics...

Podcasts COVID-19 Arts Business + Economy Culture + Society Education Environment + Energy Health Politics Science + Tech En français

The power of language: we translate our thoughts into words, but words also affect the way we think

Published: February 26, 2019 8:12am EST

Have you ever worried in your student years or later in life that time may be starting to run out to achieve your goals? If so, would it be easier conveying this feeling to others if there was a word meaning just that? In German, there is. That feeling of panic associated with one's opportunities appearing to run out is called *Torschlusspanik*.

German has a rich collection of such terms, made up of often two, three or more words connected to form a superword or compound word. Compound words are particularly powerful because they are (much) more than the sum of their parts. *Torschlusspanik*, for instance, is literally made of "gate"- "closing"- "panic".

If you get to the train station a little late and see your train's doors still open, you may have experienced a concrete form of *Torschlusspanik*, prompted by the characteristic beeps as the train doors are about to close. But this compound word of German is associated with

Author**Guillaume Thierry**

Professor of Cognitive Neuroscience, Bangor University

Disclosure statement

Guillaume Thierry has received funding from the European Research Council, the Economic and Social Research Council, the British Academy, the Arts and Humanities Research Council, the Biotechnology and Biological Research Council, and Arts Council of Wales.

more than the literal meaning. It evokes something more abstract, referring to the feeling that life is progressively shutting the door of opportunities as time goes by.

English too has many compound words. Some combine rather concrete words like “seahorse”, “butterfly”, or “turtleneck”. Others are more abstract, such as “backwards” or “whatsoever”. And of course in English too, compounds are superwords, as in German or French, since their meaning is often distinct from the meaning of its parts. A seahorse is not a horse, a butterfly is not a fly, turtles don’t wear turtlenecks, etc.

- 5 One remarkable feature of compound words is that they don’t translate well at all from one language to another, at least when it comes to translating their constituent parts literally. Who would have thought that a “carry-sheets” is a wallet – *porte-feuille* –, or that a “support-throat” is a bra – *soutien-gorge* – in French?

Linguistic relativity is the idea that language, which most people agree originates in and expresses human thought, can feedback to thinking, influencing thought in return. So, could different words or different grammatical constructs “shape” thinking differently in speakers of different languages?

This begs the question of what happens when words don’t readily translate from one language to another. For instance, what happens when a native speaker of German tries to convey in English that they just had a spurt of Torschlusspanik? Naturally, they will resort to paraphrasing, that is, they will make up a narrative with examples to make their interlocutor understand what they are trying to say.

But then, this begs another, bigger question: Do people who have words that simply do not translate in another language have access to different concepts? Take the case of *hiraeth* for instance, a beautiful word of Welsh famous for being essentially untranslatable. Hiraeth is meant to convey the feeling associated with the bittersweet memory of missing something or someone, while being grateful of their existence.

Hiraeth is not nostalgia, it is not anguish, or frustration, or melancholy, or regret. And no, it is not homesickness, as Google translate may lead you to believe, since *hiraeth* also conveys the feeling one experiences when they ask someone to marry them and they are turned down, hardly a case of homesickness.

<https://www.theconversation.com/the-power-of-language-we-translate-our-thoughts-into-words-but-words-also-affect-the-way-we-think-111801>



What is the stylistic purpose of the first paragraph of the article?

to remind readers that time is precious

to help readers make a personal connection to the subject

to encourage readers to consider learning another language

to prompt readers to reflect on missed opportunities in their own lives

What makes superwords so difficult to translate from one language to another?

Defining the individual parts of a superword does not always determine the actual meaning of the word.

Decoding the abstract associations of superwords may not be accurate without the support of linguists.

Comprehending the feelings conveyed by superwords is not possible without shared cultural experiences.

Which word is the best example of an English superword?

Fingertip

noun

¹ The tip or end of a finger.

Brainchild

noun, plural Brain-chil-dren

¹ A product of one's creative work or thought.

Moonlight

noun

¹ The light of the moon.

adjective

² Pertaining to moonlight.

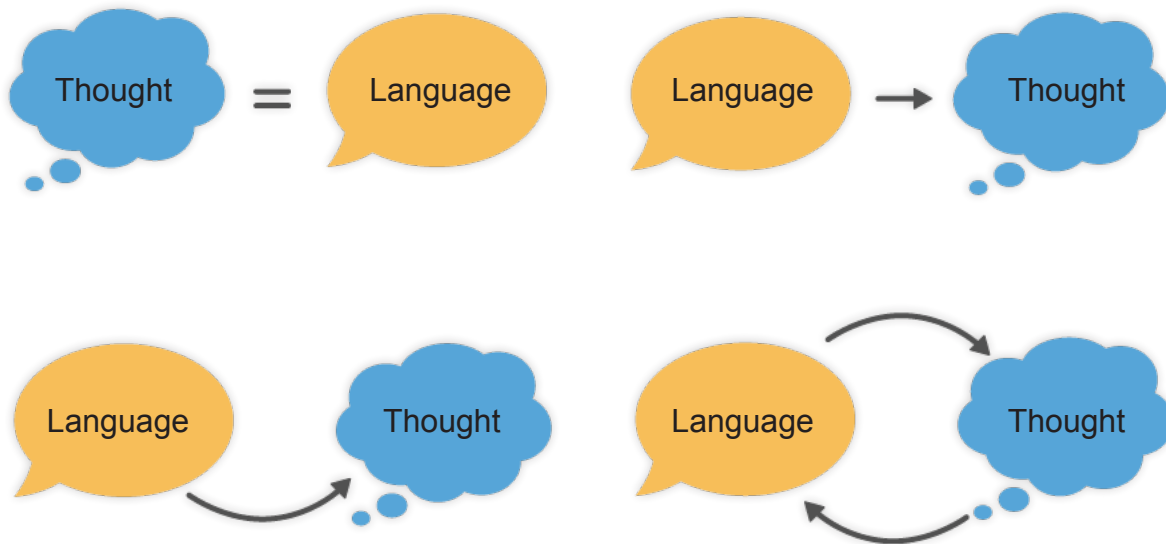
³ Illuminated by moonlight.

Earthquake

noun

¹ A series of vibrations induced in the earth's crust by the abrupt rupture and rebound of rocks in which elastic strain has been slowly accumulating.

Which graphic represents the theory of linguistic relativity?



Question B-5 (1 point)

What is the definition of “interlocutor”?



a language expert

a storyteller

a conversation partner

How does the author's discussion of the Welsh term *hiraeth* support his main idea about language?

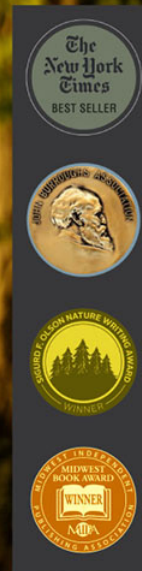
- ☐ He must rely on analogies to explain the meaning of *hiraeth*.
- ☐ He must turn to Google translate to obtain an accurate definition of *hiraeth*.
- ☐ He must draw upon similar words from other languages to replicate the meaning of *hiraeth*.
- ☐ He must admit that English speakers experience no comparable emotions to those expressed by the word *hiraeth*.



In the following text

An Indigenous biology professor reflects upon the way language and worldview are interconnected.

...is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. She is the author of *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*, which has earned Kimmerer wide acclaim.



Learning the Grammar of Animacy

My sister's gift to me one Christmas was a set of magnetic tiles for the refrigerator in Ojibwe, or Anishinabemowin, a language closely related to Potawatomi. I spread them out on my kitchen table looking for familiar words, but the more I looked, the more worried I got. Among the hundred or more tiles, there was but a single word that I recognized: *megwech*, thank you. The small feeling of accomplishment from months of study evaporated in a moment.

I remember paging through the Ojibwe dictionary she sent, trying to decipher the tiles, but the spellings didn't always match and the print was too small and there are way too many variations on a single word and I was feeling that this was just way too hard. The threads in my brain knotted and the harder I tried, the tighter they became. Pages blurred and my eyes settled on a word—a verb, of course: “to be a Saturday.” *Pfft!* I threw down the book. Since when is *Saturday* a verb? Everyone knows it's a noun. I grabbed the dictionary and flipped more pages and all kinds of things seemed to be verbs: “to be a hill,” “to be red,” “to be a long sandy stretch of beach,” and then my finger rested on *wiikwegamaa*: “to be a bay.” “Ridiculous!” I ranted in my head. “There is no reason to make it so complicated. No wonder no one speaks it. A cumbersome language, impossible to learn, and more than that, it's all wrong. A bay is most definitely a person, place, or thing—a noun and not a verb.” I was ready to give up. I'd learned a few words, done my duty to the language that was taken from my grandfather. Oh, the ghosts of the missionaries in the boarding schools must have been rubbing their hands in glee at my frustration. “She's going to surrender,” they said.

And then I swear I heard the zap of synapses firing. An electric current sizzled down my arm and through my finger, and practically scorched the page where that one word lay. In that moment I could smell the water of the bay, watch it rock against the shore and hear it sift onto the sand. A bay is a noun only if water is *dead*. When *bay* is a noun, it is defined by humans, trapped between its shores and contained by the word. But the verb *wiikwegamaa*—to *be* a bay—releases the water from bondage and lets it live. “To be a bay” holds the wonder that, for this moment, the living water has decided to shelter

itself between these shores, conversing with cedar roots and a flock of baby mergansers. Because it could do otherwise—become a stream or an ocean or a waterfall, and there are verbs for that, too. To be a hill, to be a sandy beach, to be a Saturday, all are possible verbs in a world where everything is alive. Water, land, and even a day, the language a mirror for seeing the animacy of the world, the life that pulses through all things, through pines and nuthatches and mushrooms. *This* is the language I hear in the woods; this is the language that lets us speak of what wells up all around us. And the vestiges of boarding schools, the soap-wielding missionary wraiths, hang their heads in defeat.

This is the grammar of animacy. Imagine seeing your grandmother standing at the stove in her apron and then saying of her, “Look, it is making soup. It has gray hair.” We might snicker at such a mistake, but we also recoil from it. In English, we never refer to a member of our family, or indeed to any person, as *it*. That would be a profound act of disrespect. *It* robs a person of selfhood and kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing. So it is that in Potawatomi and most other indigenous languages, we use the same words to address the living world as we use for our family. Because they are our family.

- 5 To whom does our language extend the grammar of animacy? Naturally, plants and animals are animate, but as I learn, I am discovering that the Potawatomi understanding of what it means to be animate diverges from the list of attributes of living beings we all learned in Biology 101. In Potawatomi 101, rocks are animate, as are mountains and water and fire and places. Beings that are imbued with spirit, our sacred medicines, our songs, drums, and even stories, are all animate. The list of the inanimate seems to be smaller, filled with objects that are made by people. Of an inanimate being, like a table, we say, “*What* is it?” And we answer *Dopwen yawe*. Table it is. But of apple, we must say, “*Who* is that being?” And reply *Mshimin yawe*. Apple that being is.

Yawe—the animate *to be*. I am, you are, s/he is. To speak of those possessed with life and spirit we must say *yawe*. By what linguistic confluence do Yahweh of the Old Testament and *yawe* of the New World both fall from the mouths of the reverent? Isn’t this just what it means, to be, to have the breath of life within, to be the offspring of Creation? The language reminds us, in every sentence, of our kinship with all of the animate world.

English doesn’t give us many tools for incorporating respect for animacy. In English, you are either a human or a thing. Our grammar boxes us in by the choice of reducing a nonhuman being to an *it*, or it must be gendered, inappropriately, as a *he* or a *she*. Where are our words for the simple existence of another living being? Where is our *yawe*? My friend Michael Nelson, an ethicist who thinks a great deal about moral inclusion, told me about a woman he knows, a field biologist whose work is among other-than-humans. Most of her companions are not two-legged, and so her language has shifted to accommodate her relationships. She kneels along the trail to inspect a set of moose tracks, saying, “Someone’s already been this way this morning.” “Someone is in my hat,” she says, shaking out a deerfly. Someone, not something.

When I am in the woods with my students, teaching them the gifts of plants and how to call them by name, I try to be mindful of my language, to be bilingual between the lexicon of science and the grammar of animacy. Although they still have to learn scientific roles and Latin names, I hope I am also teaching them to know the world as a neighborhood of nonhuman residents, to know that, as ecotheologian Thomas Berry has written, “we must say of the universe that it is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”

One afternoon, I sat with my field ecology students by a wiikwegamaa and shared this idea of animate language. One young man, Andy, splashing his feet in the clear water, asked the big question. “Wait a second,” he said as he wrapped his mind around this linguistic distinction, “doesn’t this mean that speaking English, thinking in English, somehow gives us permission to disrespect nature? By denying everyone else the right to be persons? Wouldn’t things be different if nothing was an it?”

- 10 Swept away with the idea, he said it felt like an awakening to him. More like a remembering, I think. The animacy of the world is something we already know, but the language of animacy teeters on

extinction—not just for Native peoples, but for everyone. Our toddlers speak of plants and animals as if they were people, extending to them self and intention and compassion—until we teach them not to. We quickly retrain them and make them forget. When we tell them that the tree is not a *who*, but an *it*, we make that maple an object; we put a barrier between us, absolving ourselves of moral responsibility and opening the door to exploitation. Saying *it* makes a living land into “natural resources.” If a maple is an *it*, we can take up the chain saw. If a maple is a *her*, we think twice.

Every word I learn comes with a breath of gratitude for our elders who have kept this language alive and passed along its poetry. I still struggle mightily with verbs, can hardly speak at all, and I’m still most adept with only kindergarten vocabulary. But I like that in the morning I can go for my walk around the meadow greeting neighbors by name. When Crow caws at me from the hedgerow, I can call back *Mno gizhget andushzukwe!* I can brush my hand over the soft grasses and murmur *Bozho mishkos*. It’s a small thing, but it makes me happy.

I’m not advocating that we all learn Potawatomi or Hopi or Seminole, even if we could. Immigrants came to these shores bearing a legacy of languages, all to be cherished. But to become native to this place, if we are to survive here, and our neighbors too, our work is to learn to speak the grammar of animacy, so that we might truly be at home.

I remember the words of Bill Tall Bull, a Cheyenne elder. As a young person, I spoke to him with a heavy heart, lamenting that I had no native language with which to speak to the plants and the places that I love. “They love to hear the old language,” he said, “it’s true.” “But,” he said, with fingers on his lips, “You don’t have to speak it here.” “If you speak it here,” he said, patting his chest, “They will hear you.”

Excerpt from “Learning the Grammar of Animacy” in *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Question B-7 (1 point)

How does the concept of linguistic relativity apply to Robin Wall Kimmerer's learning of Ojibwe?

- ☐ She has to rely on her understanding of scientific language.
- ☐ She has to alter her approach to the study of English grammar.
- ☐ She has to change her thinking about how things are classified.

How does Kimmerer imagine the boarding school missionaries when she renews her efforts to learn Ojibwe? (Paragraph 3)

She imagines them as



phantoms.

remorseful

irrelevant

subdued

intimidating

According to Biology 101 and Potawatomi 101, which of the following is animate or inanimate?

Biology 101			Potawatomi 101		
Glacier	Animate	Inanimate	Glacier	Animate	Inanimate
Chair	Animate	Inanimate	Chair	Animate	Inanimate
Eagle	Animate	Inanimate	Eagle	Animate	Inanimate
Drum	Animate	Inanimate	Drum	Animate	Inanimate

Question B-10 (1 point)

Which image best represents the place where Kimmerer sat with her field ecology class discussing the idea of animate language?



a bay



a forest



a hillside



a stream

Question B-11 (1 point)

Learning the Grammar of Animacy

Why does Kimmerer describe her student Andy's insight into the grammar of animacy as more of a "remembering" than an "awakening"?

- ☐ Many English speakers respect the grammar of animacy.
- ☐ Indigenous peoples have rekindled beliefs about animacy.
- ☐ Humans are conditioned from a young age to disregard animacy.
- ☐ Biology students should already understand the concept of animacy.

Question B-12 (1 point)

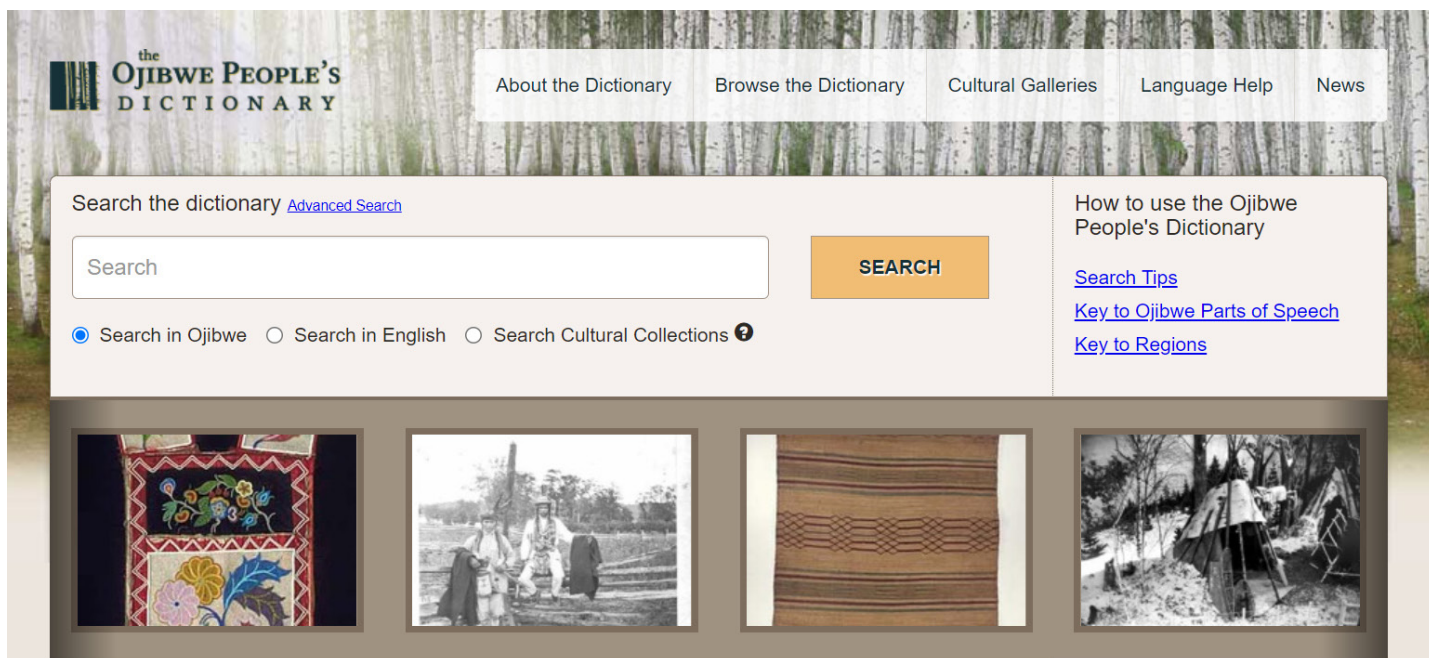
Why does Kimmerer feel a sense of gratitude at the end of the text?

- ☐ She has mastered Ojibwe.
- ☐ She has improved her teaching.
- ☐ She has expanded her worldview.
- ☐ She has sparked community interest in Ojibwe.



In the following text

An online resource developed at the University of Minnesota is helping to preserve the Ojibwe language.



Welcome to the Ojibwe People's Dictionary

The Ojibwe People's Dictionary is a searchable, talking Ojibwe-English dictionary that features the voices of Ojibwe speakers. It is also a gateway into the Ojibwe collections at the Minnesota Historical Society. Along with detailed Ojibwe language entries and voices, you will find beautiful cultural items, photographs, and excerpts from relevant historical documents. Whenever possible, we provide examples of documents in the Ojibwe language.

About the Ojibwe People's Dictionary project

The Ojibwe People's Dictionary was established by faculty and students in the Department of American **Indian**¹ Studies at the University of Minnesota. For many years, Professor John Nichols digitally recorded Ojibwe elders as part of a research grant for the National Science Foundation's (NSF) Endangered Languages Program (Nichols, Nyholm, 1995).

Recent technology made it possible to design this innovative, illustrated, talking dictionary, with photographs both old and new, and allowing insight into an Ojibwe way of life that is difficult to comprehend without a visual aid. The dictionary is searchable and no longer relies on accessing words through the alphabetic paths of a print dictionary. It also searches for related words, and includes expanded language information that is often left out due to page limitations. Unlike a book, the talking dictionary will be continuously updated and expanded. Best of all, it allows users to search using the Ojibwe language.

Why we need the Ojibwe People's Dictionary

Ojibwe is the heritage language of more than 200,000 Ojibwe people who reside in the United States and Canada. Ojibwe Country primarily extends from Quebec, across Ontario and Manitoba to Saskatchewan in Canada, and from Michigan, Wisconsin, Minnesota and North Dakota in the United States.

1. Indian: First Peoples; 'Indian' is not the preferred term

“Namanj igo ge-inwegwen a’aw waa-nitaa-ojibwemod, booch igo da-nisidotaagod iniw manidoon.”

Whatever dialect you learn or however you learn to speak Ojibwe, the creator will always understand you, no matter how you sound.



Figure 1: Larry Smallwood (Amik O’Gaabaw) is one of the many Ojibwe speakers who contributed to the People’s Dictionary Project

Ojibwe Name: Amik O’Gaabaw

English Name: Larry Smallwood

Community: Lake Lena district of Mille Lacs

Region: Mille Lacs

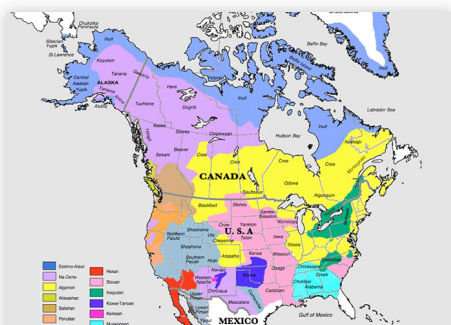
Amik passed away in April of 2017.

- 5 Ojibwe is not a single standardized language, but a chain of linked local varieties, grouped into nearly a dozen dialects. Each dialect (and within dialects, each local variety) differs in details of pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar from the others, with differences between non-adjacent dialects often being great enough to impede understanding between their speakers.

Speakers of Ojibwe consider their language to be precise, descriptive, and visual, and feel that it is among the greatest treasures of their cultural heritage.

<https://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/>

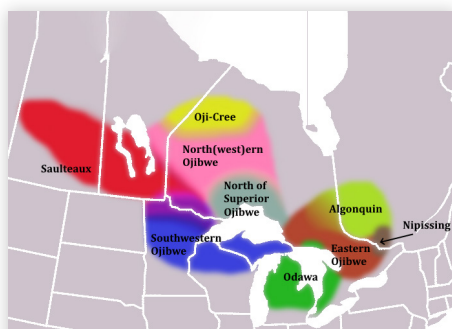
Which map reinforces the information under the subheading, “Why we need the Ojibwe People’s Dictionary”?



Indigenous Languages of North America



Range of Ojibwe Language Use



Ojibwe Language Dialects by Region



Indigenous Peoples Prior to European Contact

Which quotation best matches the beliefs about language expressed by both Cheyenne Elder Bill Tall Bull and Ojibwe Elder Larry Smallwood?



"But if thought corrupts language,
language can also corrupt thought."

--*George Orwell*



"As soon as you have a language
that has a past tense and a future
tense you're going to say, 'Where
did we come from, what happens
next?' The ability to remember the
past helps us plan the future."

--*Margaret Atwood*



"If you talk to a man in a language
he understands, that goes to
his head. If you talk to him in his
language, that goes to his heart."

--*Nelson Mandela*



"Language is an intrinsic part of
who we are and what has, for
good or evil, happened to us."

--*Alice Walker*



Essential Question

To what extent does language influence the way people perceive the world?



Writing Pathway

Click on your preferred Writing Pathway to continue to the extended written response.

1

Language is an essential aspect of culture.

2

Learning a language is an ongoing journey.

Question B-15 (12 points)

1

Writing Pathway

Language is an essential aspect of culture.

- You must express yourself in an extended written format of your choice.
- You must communicate insights that demonstrate your creative, reflective, and/or critical thinking skills.
- You may refer to the texts, but you are not required to do so.

Suggested time: 25 minutes

Question B-15 (12 points)

2 Writing Pathway

Learning a language is an ongoing journey.

- You must express yourself in an extended written format of your choice.
- You must communicate insights that demonstrate your creative, reflective, and/or critical thinking skills.
- You may refer to the texts, but you are not required to do so.

Suggested time: 25 minutes



SELF-REFLECTION

Take a moment to reflect on your experience with the assessment.

Your feedback will provide valuable information to the assessment developers.

**This component is not scored and your responses will be confidential.*

Question 1

In order to get ready for this assessment, I...

(Select all that apply)

- ☐ prepared ahead of time in class.
- ☐ prepared with my peers.
- ☐ prepared on my own.
- ☐ did not prepare.
- ☐ Other

I prepared by...

- ☐ doing the sample assessment.
- ☐ looking at online videos.
- ☐ looking at online scoring rubrics.
- ☐ looking at online student exemplars.
- ☐ Other

Question 2

This assessment let me demonstrate my ability in literacy:

Disagree Unsure Agree



I was able to comprehend the texts:

Disagree Unsure Agree



I was able to communicate in writing:

Disagree Unsure Agree



Question 3

This assessment let me demonstrate the following competencies:

(Select all that apply)

- ☐ Critical and Reflective Thinking
- ☐ Creative Thinking
- ☐ Communication
- ☐ Positive Personal and Cultural Identity
- ☐ Personal Awareness and Responsibility
- ☐ Social Awareness and Responsibility

Question 4

I encountered challenges during this assessment.

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

The challenges I encountered on the assessment were with:

(Select all that apply)

- ☐ the texts.
- ☐ the length of time.
- ☐ the amount of writing.
- ☐ the overall difficulty.

Question 5

A key takeaway for me after completing this assessment is:

Question 6

Do you have any feedback or comments about the assessment?