

# LINGUA FRANCA

## Lesson Plan

### *Objective:*

Students can use Plains Indian Sign Language and Chinuk WaWa to communicate with each other.

### *Teacher Background and Notes*

When no other form of communication would work, the members of the Corps had to talk with their hands. In other words, they used sign language. Several of the Corps' French-speaking members, Pierre Cruzatte, George Drouillard, and François Labiche, may have known some Plains Indian Sign Language used by the Plains tribes. This was a general form of sign language recognized by Native cultures and Euro-American traders on the Plains and Plateau areas. Like any other language, it had variations and local "dialects."

The Corps were surprised that the Chinookan-speaking people of the northwest coast knew and used some English words and phrases. Traditionally, the Lower Columbia River people were traders even before Euro-Americans arrived on the Pacific coast in the 1770s. The Chinookan people traded with many other Native cultures who did not speak Chinookan dialects.

A form of verbal communication known today as Chinuk Wawa developed from combining these many Native languages. Chinuk Wawa uses words from the following Native American groups: Bella Bella, Chehalis, Upper and Lower Chinook, Clackamas,

Kalapuya, Klickitat, Nootka, and S'klallam, as well as several Salish-speaking and Sahaptian-speaking tribes. When French-speaking and English-speaking Euro-American traders arrived in the Pacific Northwest, words from their languages were also incorporated into Chinuk Wawa. Some scholars feel Spanish and Russian observations were also assimilated into Chinuk Wawa. Chinuk Wawa was once referred to as "Chinook Jargon."

Today, the preferred phrase is Chinuk Wawa, "wa-wa" being a Chinuk word meaning to talk. It is thought the Corps could not hear the difference between Chinuk Wawa and the various Chinuk dialects spoken among the native people living at the mouth of the Columbia River. None of the journal-keepers mentioned they recognized the two forms of verbal communication used on the Columbia River while they were there in 1805-1806. However, they did record several Chinuk Wawa words in their journals.

**SUBJECT(S):** ELA

**AGE:** Middle and High school

**LENGTH OF LESSON:** 1 hour

### **MATERIALS NEEDED:**

- [The Plains Indian Sign Language Video](#) from Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library
- [Confederated Tribes of the Grand Ronde Chinuk Wawa Language App](#)

### **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

- [The Chinuk Wawa Dictionary Project. \(2012\). Chinuk Wawa: Kakwa nsayka ulman-tilixam laska munk-kemteks nsayka / As Our Elders Teach Us to Speak It.](#) University of Washington Press.

### Explanation of the Activity

Students will research the meaning of "Lingua Franca." Lingua franca is an agreed-upon language used to communicate between people who speak different languages. Is the English language used as a lingua franca today? Explain.

Divide the students into two groups. One-half of the class will work on the Plains Indian Sign Language project, "Talking With Your Hands," while the other half of the class will learn Chinuk Wawa words and phrases.

#### Group 1: Talking with Hands

1. Watch the [video](#) from Maryland Deaf Culture Digital Library to see Plains Indian Sign Language.
2. Learn five signs from the video to teach a friend in the other group.
3. Practice signs until the other half of the class is ready.

#### Group 2: Chinuk Wawa

1. Explore the Chinuk language using the free "Chinuk Wawa Language App" from the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde to learn five words.
2. Learn five new words to teach a friend in the other group.
3. Practice until the rest of the class is ready.

Come together as a whole group. Then, regroup so each partnership has one member of Group 1 and one member of Group 2. Take turns teaching each other the new language learned today: Plains Indian Sign Language or Chinuk Wawa.

### Closing/Assessment

Reflect on the activity by discussing the advantages and disadvantages of using each language. Revisit the idea of lingua franca and discuss what might be today's lingua franca.



App photos from [The Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde](#)