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Pre-Intermediate Student’s Book

Life

Saving languages

*Five hundred years ago, Europeans arrived on a new continent.*

They brought new cultures and languages to this place which they called America. However, there were already people living there who had their own cultures and languages. And so a terrible part of history began.

As more Europeans arrived, there was a ﬁght for the land with the native American Indians. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Indian tribes were moved to reservations. A lot of their children were taken away to boarding schools and these children were taught to speak English. By the end of the twentieth century more than half of the Native Americans in the US were living in cities. They gave up speaking their old tribal language and only used English. As a result, many Native American languages disappeared and with them their culture.

Some American Indian languages are still used today but they are usually spoken by the older members of the tribes who still live on the reservations. In North America there are 150–170 languages that have at least one speaker and many of these languages have under a hundred speakers.

One ancient language which is spoken by the Northern Paiute tribe has more than two hundred speakers. This means when the elders of the tribe get together, they still speak it. But for most of the younger members of the tribe, the everyday language is English.

But the good news is that some of these people are keeping their culture and language alive. They are also receiving help from the *National Geographic* *Society’s* Enduring Voices Project. The aim of the project is to help languages around the world which are dying out. Linguists and experts meet these ‘last speakers’. The team interview them and they are recorded with video, pictures and audio. They also tell old stories which are written down in English so people can learn more about the culture.

Recording the language and culture is only part of the project. The next stage is to pass on the language to the next generation. Some children pick up some of the language from their parents or grandparents but many tribes also oﬀer courses in the language. The Salish tribe is an excellent example of how schools can help. The tribe lives in the Flathead Reservation in Montana. Their language is currently spoken by about 50 people who are aged over 75 years. No one under 50 speaks the language. So now, the local people have set up a school. It has 30 students aged two to twelve during the day and there are also courses for adults in the evening. It is schools and projects like these which – hopefully – might save languages for the future.

reservation (n) /ˌrezəˈveƭʃn/ an area of land where Native Americans live

boarding school (n) /ˈbɔːdɪŋ skuːl/ a school where you live, study and sleep

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