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SHOULD AMERICAN STUDENTS BE REQUIRED TO LEARN A SECOND LANGUAGE?

Word Generation - Unit 2.14

Focus Words

economic | multicultural | attribute | facilitate | distinct



WEEKLY PASSAGE

What are the benefits of knowing two languages? Many scientific studies show that growing up bilingual is great for kids' brain development. Being bilingual may also be good for getting a job. Many businesses want to hire people who speak more than one language because they consider this skill a valuable **attribute**.

But most Americans do not know a second language, and those who do typically do not know the second language very well. Children who come from homes where English is not the family's native language often forget the language their parents speak.

How did we become so monolingual? Some say it is because we are a **multicultural** nation and it would be too confusing if every group were to use its own language. Unlike educated Americans, most educated Europeans, Asians, and Africans speak several languages, often including English. In Europe, students are required to take two **distinct** foreign languages in school. Most people around the world think that knowing several languages is critical; multilinguals can participate in the political and **economic** activities taking place globally.

Even the U.S. government and the U.S. Armed Forces are constantly looking for speakers of other languages. Today they are seeking Arabic speakers, but very few Americans (unless they come from Arabic-speaking families) study Arabic in school or university. In 2004 the State Department reported that of the 1000 staff members at the US Embassy in Baghdad, only 10 were competent speakers of Arabic.

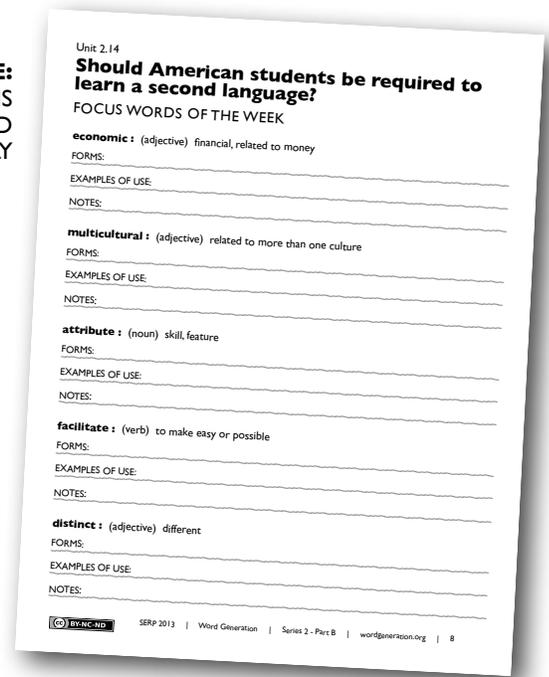
Knowing more than one language seems to be good for learning, employment, and maybe even national security. So how can parents, schools, and society **facilitate** opportunities for learning languages? Should American students all be required to learn a language in addition to English?

TEACHER

Reading Comprehension/Discussion Questions:

- ▶ What are some of the benefits of knowing two languages?
- ▶ What are the differences between the US and Europe in language study and language use?
- ▶ Should Americans be required to learn a second language other than English? Why?

PLEASE NOTE:
THE STUDENT VERSION OF THIS
PAGE IS FORMATTED
DIFFERENTLY



Unit 2.14

WORD CHART FOR TEACHERS

This chart is not in the student book. It is a resource for teachers to support students in the use of the focus words each week. Students are provided one page in each unit immediately following the weekly passage with a basic definition printed and space for taking notes.

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
economic	(adj.) - financial, related to money	economical economically	economy	economics economize economizing uneconomical	ecology
multicultural	(adj.) - related to more than one culture	multiculturally	culture	multiculturalist multiculturalism cultural	agriculture cultivate
attribute	(n.) - skill, feature	attributes (pl.) attribute (v.) attributes (v.) attributed attributing		misattribute misattribution	tribe tribute tribunal
facilitate	(v.) - to make easy or possible	facilitates facilitating facilitated		facilitation facilitator facilitative	facile
distinct	(adj.) - different	distinctly		indistinct distinctness distinctive distinction	distinguish



Should American students be required to learn a second language?

PROBLEM OF THE WEEK

In the United States, being bilingual is an **attribute** that can **facilitate** getting a good job. Today, the U.S. has many political, **economic**, and military connections with other countries. The U.S. is also full of immigrants from around the world who speak different languages. In a **multicultural** country like the U.S., speaking more than one language is a **distinct** advantage.

Option 1: In 2006, only 33 of the 1,000 U.S. employees at the U.S. embassy in Iraq spoke Arabic. Of these 33, only six were fluent. What percentage of embassy employees spoke fluent Arabic?

- A) .006%
- B) .06%
- C) .6%
- D) 6%

Option 2: The main languages spoken in Afghanistan are Dari and Pashto. The U.S. military's Defense Language Institute is now training 200 soldiers each year to speak basic Dari and Pashto. In 2009, there were about 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. At the rate of 200 per year, how many years would it take to train 100,000 soldiers in basic Dari and Pashto?

Answer: 500 years

Discussions Question: In our **multicultural** world, there are many languages that schools could teach. If more American soldiers knew Arabic, they would have an easier time talking to the people of Iraq. Now that China is an **economic** power, knowing Chinese is an **attribute** that might **facilitate** getting a job. Are these good reasons for teaching Arabic and Chinese in school? Or, should our political and **economic** goals be **distinct** from the reasons we teach languages? Should we choose to teach languages that will help keep our country strong? If not, how should we decide? Explain your answer.

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THINKING SCIENTIFICALLY

Mr. Seemy's students return from their foreign language class full of new words and ideas, but Erik is doubtful about the **distinct** benefits of studying a second language.

"I know learning a new language helps me to appreciate our **multicultural** community, but does it do anything else?"

"Actually," says Chelsea, "learning a second language is **economically** beneficial because it can help you find a job."

"That's true!" chimes in Mr. Seemy. "But did you know that it also helps **facilitate** brain development?"

"Wow, really? Does that mean that speaking two languages can actually physically change your brain?" asks Erik.

→ Erik is interested in this topic and finds an information sheet on "neuroplasticity" of the brain to share with his classmates.

Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity can be described as "the ability to adapt to ongoing changes and to process information efficiently and adaptively."¹ Think of it as mental flexibility. Just as you can exercise your muscles to make them strong, you can exercise your brain to make it work quickly, efficiently, and accurately.

People who are bilingual challenge their brains to function in two distinct languages at the same time, which exercises the frontal lobes of their brain. The frontal lobes are where the brain makes quick decisions, plans, solves problems, and processes language.

Scans of bilingual people's brains show that, on average, their frontal lobes are stronger and more active than those of monolingual people's.¹

	Monolingual	Bilingual
Memory (score out of 10) ²	6.2	7.8
Onset of Alzheimer's (age in years) ¹	75.4	78.6
Response Time (milliseconds) ³	1,437	911
Language Ability (score out of 100) ³	85.8	91.9

Data Sources:

- 1) Bialystock, E., Craik, F., & Luk, G. (2012). Bilingualism: consequences for brain and mind. *Trends in Cognitive Science*.
- 2) Kormi-Nouri, R., Moniri, S., & Nilsson, L. (2003). Episodic and semantic memory in bilingual and monolingual children.
- 3) Bialystock, E., Craik, F., Klein, R., & Viswanathan, M. (2004). Bilingualism, Aging & Cognitive Control – evidence from the Simon Test.

What other everyday activities might a bilingual person potentially be better at because of their efficient frontal lobes?

TEACHER

Students might speculate about bilingual people's advantage in any activity that involves making decisions or plans and solving problems.

What other experiments would you like to see conducted with both monolingual and bilingual people to see if there are additional benefits?

TEACHER

Answers will vary. For example, students might wonder whether experiments would show any relationship between bilingualism and less obviously verbal activities like math; or whether bilingual people find it easier to learn an additional language than monolingual people.

As of 2008, only 58 percent of all middle schools in the U.S. offered foreign language instruction. While over 90 percent of high schools offered a foreign language, studies have shown that students are able to adopt a new language more easily at a young age. Are foreign languages offered at your school and in your district? Discuss with your classmates how you might be able to use this data to convince the administrators in your district to strengthen your foreign language program.

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DEBATING THE ISSUE

Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A Americans should speak English and only English. All immigrants and/or newcomers to the U.S. should learn English and forget their home language.

B Americans should learn at least one language other than English. If a child speaks another language at home, he or she should be encouraged to continue using the home language.

C English should be spoken in school and governmental agencies. Other languages can be used for more informal settings.

D In addition to English, Americans should learn languages that seem important for their economic progress (like Spanish and Chinese) and national security (like Arabic, Urdu, and Farsi).

E _____

TEACHER

Whatever the debate format, ask students to use academically productive talk when arguing their positions. In particular, students should provide reasons and evidence to back up their assertions. It may be helpful to read these sample positions to illustrate some possibilities, but students should be encouraged to take their own positions about the issue at hand.

Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

I believe that...

I agree with you, but...

You make a good point, but have you considered...

Can you show me evidence in the text that...

Should American students be required to learn a second language?



WRITE ABOUT IT

Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples.
Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

Focus Words

economic | multicultural | attribute | facilitate | distinct

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation books as needed.