

The Navajo language

Surviving Against the Odds



All of us know that keeping our heritage alive is extremely important for **0)** maintaining our identity – who we are and what our place in the world is. Heritage is defined as ‘the qualities, traditions and elements of life that have been passed on from one generation to another’. One of the most important of these elements is language. In the USA, there used to be more than 1000 Native American languages, but today there are only 8 left in North America that have a significant number of speakers, and some of these are in **1)** of dying out.

The news is not all bad, however. The Navajo language is making a strong recovery, partly as a result of the Native American Language Preservation Act of 2006. By the **2)** of the 20th century, the number of Navajo speakers was decreasing at such an alarming **3)** that it was widely believed that the language would be extinct within several generations. A rise in Navajo nationalism brought about in World War II by the Navajo Code Talkers, however, gave it new validity, **4)** the self-esteem of its speakers. As a consequence, its usage increased dramatically, a written form was developed and a dictionary and a textbook were published.

In a census conducted in 2000, it was recorded that 50% of Navajo people **5)** the language at home. While this statistic is very encouraging in itself, the census also showed that the highest proportion of Navajo speakers were young people, a fact that seems to **6)** that the Navajo language is no longer endangered, but actually **7)** a great comeback. Many Navajo teenagers today are proud of their heritage and of their language. Most speak Navajo most of the time but admit to being guilty of speaking English in some situations. Overall, they all agree that the ideal situation is to be bilingual and that it simply makes **8)** to keep one’s language alive.

3 Use the underlined words in the text to complete sentences 1-5.

- heritage
- elements
- nationalism
- census
- bilingual

- ?**
- | | | | |
|-----------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------------|
| 0 A continuing | B following | C supporting | D maintaining |
| 1 A danger | B hazard | C peril | D risk |
| 2 A launching | B happening | C opening | D beginning |
| 3 A degree | B rate | C grade | D scale |
| 4 A raising | B pushing | C giving | D progressing |
| 5 A said | B spoke | C told | D talked |
| 6 A express | B point | C indicate | D exhibit |
| 7 A making | B putting | C having | D showing |
| 8 A logic | B aware | C reason | D sense |

- 1** There has been a steady rise in _____ across Europe in the last decade.
- 2** I enjoy finding out about my country’s _____ by visiting museums.
- 3** The results of the _____ will be released at the end of the year.
- 4** One of the main _____ of a good pop song is interesting lyrics.
- 5** Julie spent much of her childhood abroad in Japan and is _____.