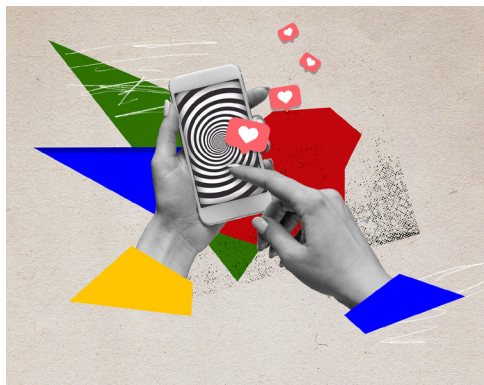


Native American Influencers

Anne Fountain focuses on the relevance of Indigenous languages of the Americas for teachers of Spanish and Portuguese



Spanish and Portuguese project linguistic unity and cohesion in the Americas. At the same time, they are neighbors to enormous linguistic diversity. In Mexico, Central America, and Brazil and across South America, millions of speakers of hundreds of Indigenous languages make Ibero-America one of the most linguistically diverse regions in the world.

How can teachers of Spanish and Portuguese include the first peoples of the Americas in their classes?

The first step is to acknowledge the linguistic and cultural resilience of those who preserve Indigenous languages and cultural traditions.

Latin America's Indigenous languages are of increasing relevance in the US. Many thousands of Indigenous families are part of migration from Latin America, and they are bringing their languages with them. In 2018, I interviewed a high school student in San Jose, California, whose family is from Puebla, Mexico, and who speaks Nahuatl; he is the kind of student that Spanish teachers in the US now find in their classrooms. In April 2024, I joined a native speaker of Zapotec for a presentation at California State University, Monterey Bay, about Indigenous languages in the community.

A recent workshop at Stanford University, designed for instructors of Indigenous languages, included native speakers of Nahuatl, Quechua, and Mam (a Mayan language), as well as other languages. It was a microcosm of Latin

American Indigenous presence in the US. While instructional circumstances for the workshop participants varied, several were teaching their native languages in US communities. I attended the workshop, much of which was conducted in Spanish, and came away envisioning the potential of those bilingual instructors serving as guest speakers or providers of resources for Spanish classes, even as they are anchors for Indigenous language. In 2024–2025, an alliance of Latin American studies programs at Stanford, the University of California, Berkeley, the University of California, Los Angeles, and the University of Utah will partner to offer a fellowship program for teachers of Indigenous languages of the Americas—a confirmation of the growing interest.

Instructors of Spanish and Portuguese can look to the National Resource Centers on Latin America and the Caribbean (often called Title VI centers) at universities throughout the nation as prime sources of information about Native American languages. The US Department of Education website maintains a current list of Title VI–funded institutions. In addition to finding materials and information at Latin American and Caribbean resource centers, there are many ways that teachers of Spanish and Portuguese can bring Indigenous languages and cultures into their classes. Here are some examples:

- Google Earth Voyager is a portal to many educational resources. The Culture category includes a section called Celebrating Indigenous Languages. The Latin American languages in the table of contents include Quechua, Mapuche, Chatino from Oaxaca, Sanöma from the Amazon, and Qom from Argentina. Typically, in each selection a native speaker, who is pictured, gives a greeting, answers a question, and may sing a song. In some cases, information about the language and what has been said is given in English. Like many websites, this one has

evolved and may continue to evolve, so searchers should be persistent.

- The government of Chile maintains multiple resources about Mapuche culture. An internet search for the government of Chile (*gobierno de Chile*) or simply *gob.cl* leads to an official site where teachers can find reports like one on Indigenous recipes from the Aymara and Mapuche groups.

In addition, the Chilean Ministry of Education (*Ministerio de Educación*) (www.curriculumnacional.cl) section “*Lengua y Cultura de los Pueblos Originarios Ancestrales*” [Language and Culture of the First Peoples], features attractive books combining Spanish and Indigenous languages on a variety of topics. All these books can be downloaded.
- The National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) has two locations in the US, one in Washington, DC, and one in New York, and entrance to either is free. Both feature permanent and changing exhibits. The museum store in Washington, DC, presents a wide array of resources with emphasis on the Native Americans of the US. NMAI's online exhibitions and resources include several distinctive connections to Latin America's Indigenous cultures. A resource called *Táino: Native Heritage and Identity in the Caribbean/Táino: herencia e identidad indígena en el Caribe* offers a bilingual overview of resurgent interest in the Indigenous people of the Caribbean, with information about Táino housing, foods, and a game played with a rubber ball. The resource guides, poster-like information sheets, can be downloaded.

The Great Inka Road: Engineering an Empire is an NMAI online exhibition available in Spanish as well as English. It presents the founding of the Inca


(Inka) Empire, the engineering of roads to connect the vast expanses of the empire, and its surrender to the invading Spanish. *The Great Inka Road* website's four sections, "Ancestors of the Inka," "Inka Universe," "Invasion," and "Inka Road Today," all have sub-units and a variety of embedded videos. One video likely to capture students' interest details the annual communal manufacture of a rope suspension bridge using traditional Andean methods. A bonus in *The Great Inka Road* online exhibition is that words in Quechua are pronounced when touched on screen. The items under the Menu heading in this exhibit are helpful for teachers of younger students. One click leads to a lengthy bilingual Children's Activity Guide full of ideas and written in easy-to-understand Spanish.

The activities include learning counting and colors in Quechua and much more. Another resource among the menu options is "The Chaski: A Teacher's Guide," designed for grades 4–12; this guide is only in English but is visually attractive and very informative.

An example in Spanish that connects the Indigenous past with the present is modern Mexico's 100-pesos bill of 2010. It has an image of the Nahua poet Nezahualcōyotl, along with poetry attributed to him. The verses, which appear in tiny print on the paper money, are in Spanish and are part of popular culture, but they represent the Mexica/Aztec culture that flourished before the Spanish arrived. In Spanish, the lines read: "*Amo el canto del cenxontle / Pájaro de cuatrocientas voces. / Amo el color del jade / Y el enervante perfume de las flores. / Pero amo más a mi hermano, el hombre.*" [I love the song of the cenxontle / The bird of four hundred voices. / I love the color of jade / And the enervating fragrance of flowers. / But I love even more my brother, mankind.] This is an easy-to-understand example of the beauty and sophistication of Aztec poetry. Students can learn about the *cenxontle* [mockingbird]. What makes it distinctive? Teachers can ask students which senses are evoked. Sound? Sight? Smell? How does the closing line provide unity?

For classes in Portuguese, teachers can ask students if they know words that come from Brazil's Indigenous people. Examples are *piranha* and *capibara* (a large rodent). *Capoeira*, now associated with Afro-Brazilian culture as a dance and martial arts form, originated from Tupi, where it meant an area of new growth or low-growth vegetation, a place where escaped slaves might hide.

In the 21st century, modern media platforms are dramatically showcasing the visibility and accessibility of the languages and cultures of Indigenous Americans. Their voices, past and present, can be and should be an essential part of the teaching of Spanish and Portuguese.

Anne Fountain is professor emerita at San José State University, where she taught Latin American studies and Spanish American literature. She led study abroad programs to Yucatan for teachers and students from 1992 to 2004. Fountain is the author of *Indigenous America in the Spanish Language Classroom* (2023). Anne.fountain@sjsu.edu. 



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