ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE PICTURE BOOK "WHAT MAKES US HUMAN",
BY VICTOR D.O. SANTOS AND ANNA FORLATI
(EERDMANS BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS & UNESCO, 2024)

*To access the Main Discussion Guide, created by Eerdmans Books for Young Readers, please click here. The ideas present in this Additional Discussion Guide are not present in the Main Discussion Guide but may be of use to many educators, parents, and others.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Bilingualism
Language loss
Cultural diversity
Linguistic diversity
Multiculturalism
Multilingualism
Indigenous peoples
Indigenous languages and cultures
Language and Identify
Sign Language
Writing systems
Alphabets

VOCABULARY USE AND ACQUISITION

‒ The words below are all found in *What Makes Us Human.* Those in italics are found in the backmatter, whereas the others are found in the main text of the book. Do you know what these words mean? If not, does locating each of them in the book and reading the sentence where they appear help you guess their meaning? Can you create a sentence with each of them to show you have understood their meaning?

Centuries
Harsh
Forms
Culture
Unique
Diverse
Invention
Extinct
Precious

Core
Botanical
Philosophical
Encoded
Cherished
To document
To preserve
To guarantee
Estimated
Writing system
To vanish
Endangered
Tapestry
Homage
To revitalize
Indigenous
*Multicultural*
Multilingual

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

- Do you speak any other languages besides English? Do you know anyone who speaks another language besides English? What languages are those?

- Did you know that many words that we use in everyday English come from other languages? Can you think of some? If you can, do you know what language it comes from? Here are just a few:

Banana (Wolof language – Senegal and Gambia, in West Africa)
Karaoke (Japanese)
Ballet (French)
Paparazzi (Italian)
Guru (Sanskrit)
Penguin (Welsh)
Beef (French)
Hamburger (German)
Piñata (Spanish)
Origami (Japanese)
Chocolate (Aztec, an ancient indigenous language of Mexico)
Kung fu (Chinese)
Lemon (Arabic)
Ketchup (Chinese)
Sofa (Arabic)

Flamingo (Portuguese)
Taekwondo (Korean)
Llama (Quechua, an indigenous language of Peru)
Cookie (Dutch)

– Do you think that some languages have more speakers than others? Why would that be the case? In fact, 40% (roughly 2,867) of the world's languages are in risk of disappearing forever and most of these have fewer than 1,000 speakers, sometimes less than 5 speakers. Can you guess the 10 most spoken languages in the world? *This could be a group activity where each group comes up with a list of 10 languages and for each language on their list that is also on the official list of 10 most spoken languages provided below, they get a point. After the teacher reveals the official list and ranking, the group with the most points wins. Now, can students guess how many people (out of the estimated 8 billion people in the world) speak each one language? The group that guesses the closest number for each language wins a point and the group with the most points wins.*
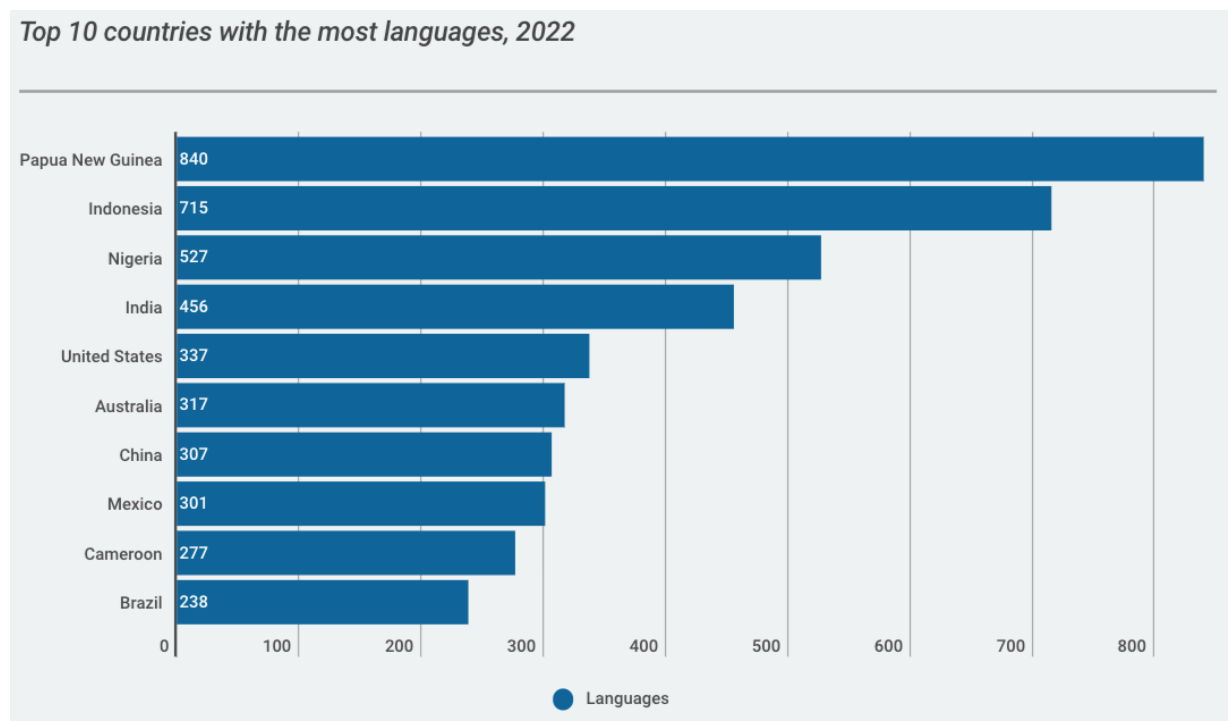

Top 10 most spoken languages, 2023
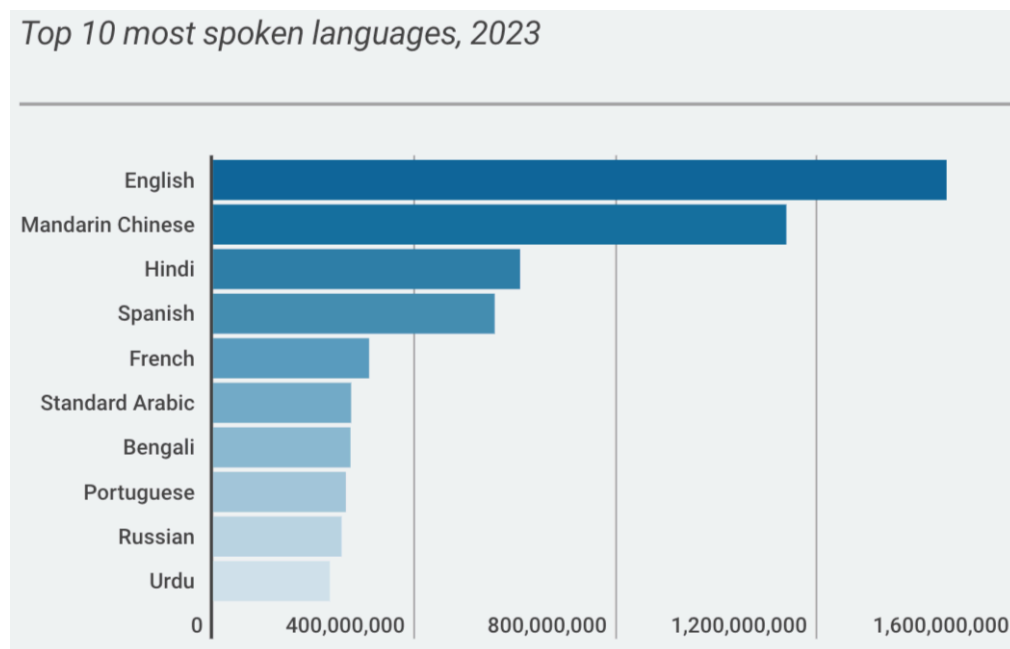
- *The graph above includes native and non-native speakers (source: Ethnologue, 2023)*

https://www.ethnologue.com/insights/ethnologue200/

English: *1.5 billion speakers*
Mandarin Chinese: *1.1 billion speakers*
Hindi: *609.5 million speakers*
Spanish: *559.1 million speakers*
French: *309.8 million speakers*

Standard Arabic: *274 million speakers*
Bengali: *272.8 million speakers*
Portuguese: *263.6 million speakers*
Russian: *255 million speakers*
Urdu: *231.7 million speakers*

– Do you think some countries have more languages than others? Why would that be?
  Can you guess the 10 countries with the most languages in the world? (this could be a
  group activity where each group comes up with a list of 10 countries and if one of their
  languages is on the official list, they get a point). After the teacher reveals the official list
  and ranking, it could be interesting to have students find those 10 countries on a map.
  After that, can students guess how many languages are spoken in each of the top ten
  countries? The group that guesses the closest number of languages per each
  round/country wins a point.

Top 10 countries with the most languages, 2022

| Country	Languages
Papua New Guinea	840
Indonesia	715
Nigeria	527
India	456
United States	337
Australia	317
China	307
Mexico	301
Cameroon	277
Brazil	238

● Languages

Source: Ethnologue, 2022

#1: Papua New Guinea – *840 languages (more than twice the number of languages spoken in all
of Europe can be found in Papua New Guinea alone!)*
#2: Indonesia – *715 languages*
#3: Nigeria – *527 languages*
#4: India – *456 languages*
#5: United States – *337 languages*
#6: Australia – *317 languages*
#7: China – *307 languages*

#8: Mexico – *301 languages*
#9: Cameroon – *277 languages*
#10: Brazil (the author's home country) – *238 languages*

The map below shows the location of the 10 countries above *(the two overlapping ones in Africa are Nigeria and Cameroon):*
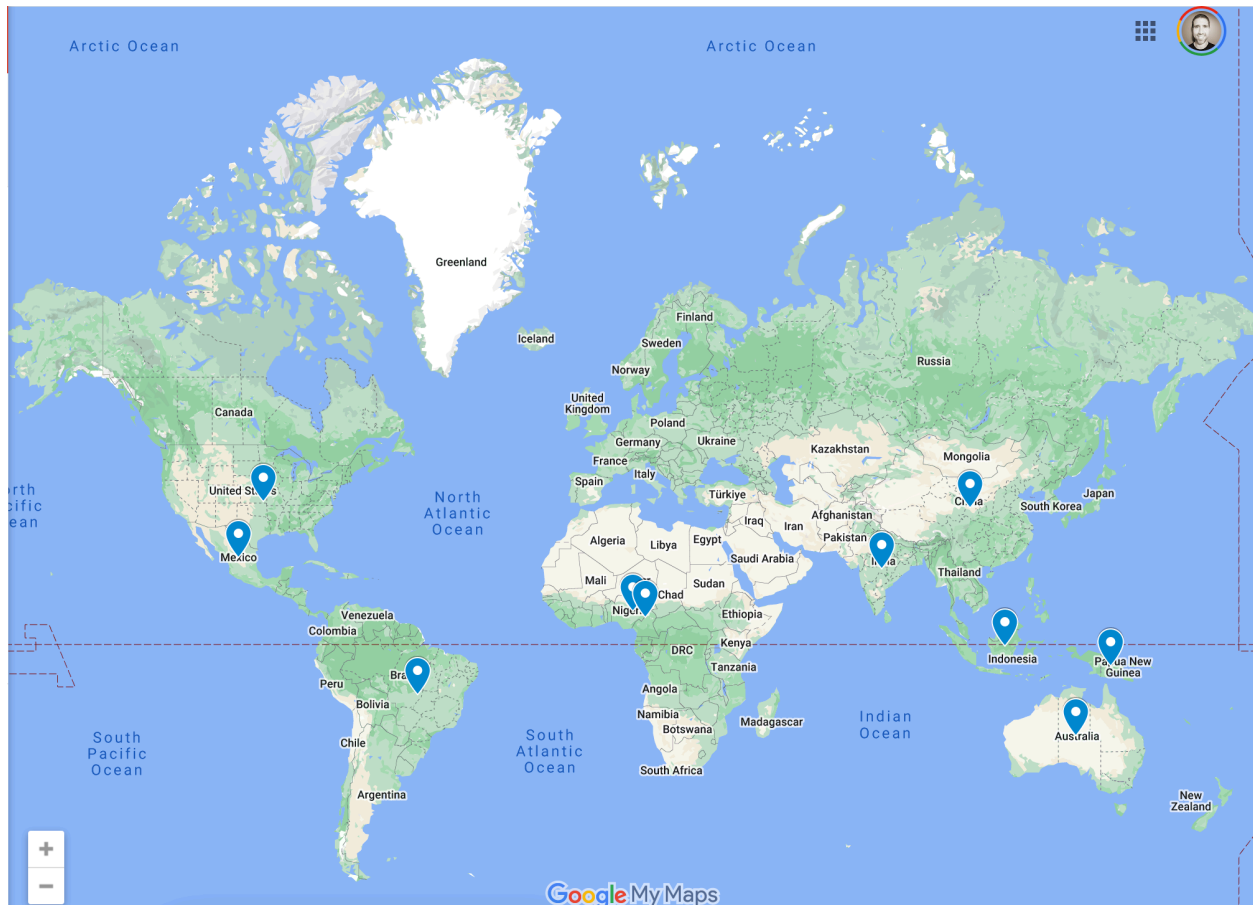
– Do you think that the death of a language is a bad thing? Why? Please justify your opinion by giving reasons why the loss of a language could have a negative (or positive) impact? Who would be affected negatively or positively if a language suddenly became extinct? Some people have compared the loss of linguistic diversity (e.g., the loss of languages) to the loss of biological diversity (loss of animal or plant species). In what ways are the two losses of diversity similar? And in what way are they different?

– Many of the world's approximately 2,867 endangered languages (in risk of disappearing) have fewer than 1,000 speakers left and many of these remaining speakers are elderly. How do you think that having so few speakers left can have a very negative impact on such languages? Why are languages with a higher number of speakers in a better position to survive and to flourish?

– Of the world's estimated 7,168 languages, only about 57% (roughly 2,867) are estimated to be written. Why do you think that having a writing system is important for a language? How can it help a language survive?

– **Hands-on activity:** Ask students to head-over to the URL below: https://www.authorvictorsantos.com/wmuh-educatorguide

In the link above, students will find 28 words in 28 foreign languages, with their English meaning and audio pronunciation by a native speaker. The teacher should instruct each student to try and memorize as many words as they possibly can for the next day since there will be a class competition based on those.
They do *not* need to memorize how to pronounce or how to write the words in the foreign languages but they must try to remember which English word refers to which foreign word's writing and/or pronunciation. Then, the teacher can do one (or all) of the activities below:

Activity #1 (PDF, click here): students should identify the English meaning for each of the foreign words based on their form (writing). *Answer key*

Activity #2 (PDF, click here): students should identify which foreign word (written form) is associated with each of the 28 languages. Are some languages easier to identify than others? Why? *Answer key*

Activity #3 (PDF, click here): teacher plays the audio of each of the foreign words one at a time and students must indicate which language was played first (1), second (2), third (3), etc., by numbering the languages names. The teacher must have an answer key of their own for this one since they can come up with whatever order they prefer.

– **Hands-on activity** (PDF, click here). Explain to students that Braille is a writing system used for allowing blind people (or severely visually impaired people) to read using their fingers through a system of raised dots. Introduce the Braille activity in the class *(answer key can be found here)*. Students will not be using their fingers here but this will give them a taste and initial idea of how Braille works. Teacher could also ask students how being blind could affect someone's learning of a language or their day-to-day life when it comes to language.

– **Hands-on activity.** Ask students to look at the last page of the book, in which the name of several languages is shown as it is written in the actual language itself:

Can students identify any of the languages on this page and provide their English name? Once students try to guess some of the languages, give them the WORD SEARCH exercise (click here for PDF) where they have to find the English names for those languages. Once students are done, the teacher can show the answer key to PDF *(click here for answer key)*. Now that students know the English name of the languages on the last page, can they try to match each English name with the native name of the language? After students try this, teacher can show the answer (seen in the image below) and even discuss the main countries where those languages are spoken:

CRAFT AND STRUCTURE

– The text and illustrations sometimes make use of ambiguity, in which a word or sentence is used that could have more than one meaning/interpretation, making the reader think of something other than *language.* In the sentence "My roots go back many centuries" what could the word "roots" refer to? (*answer: tree roots, word roots, or origins*). Can you think of other words in English that can have more than one meaning? *(e.g., bank, tough, tender, sweet, gift, to run, to break, account, etc).* What are the possible meanings each can have? Try to think of a sentence with each that exemplifies each meaning.

– Staying on the topic of the ambiguity of the word "roots" in the sentences *"My roots go back many centuries. Some of them even longer"*, discuss with students the meaning of a word root, which is a basic unit of meaning. For example, the root *-bio* (meaning life) comes from the Greek language and can be seen in the English words *biography, biohazard*, and *biology*. The root *-mater* (meaning mother) comes from the Latin language and can be seen in the words *maternal, maternity, matriarch.* Can students think of English words that may use the roots below? Can they think of words in English that use the same root and what that root may mean?

-hydr (water, from Greek): hydration, hydrate, hydraulic
-logy (study of, from Greek): biology, sociology, psychology
-aqua (water, from Latin): aquarium, Aquaman, aquatic

More examples can be found here:
https://www.readingrockets.org/topics/spelling-and-word-study/articles/root-words-roots-and-affixes

– The text in the pages with an open book with no words reads "I am the greatest invention of all." Do you agree that language is the greatest invention humankind has ever made? Why? If you disagree, what invention do you think would be more important than language and why?

INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS

– What do you believe are some ways to preserve and revitalize endangered languages? What could members of these language communities do towards that? Is there something you believe the government could do to help with the preservation or revitalization of such languages?

– Some indigenous communities in the USA, Canada, and many other countries are doing their best to preserve their language and ensure that children learn the language from a

very young age. Can you use your research skills to identify one of those languages and the types of programs and activities they have in place to ensure that children are learning the language?