



# Our Living Languages Exhibition

## VISITOR FEEDBACK 2015–2017

In 2013, the First Peoples' Cultural Council partnered with the Royal BC Museum to develop a language exhibition entitled *"Our Living Languages: First Peoples' Voices in B.C."*

The award-winning exhibition opened on June 21, 2014. The exhibition showcases the diversity of the 34 First Nations languages in British Columbia. It celebrates the communities who are working hard to ensure these languages continue to be vital. By telling this important story, we can better support, enhance and encourage these efforts by increasing understanding of the complexities of language revitalization.

One component of the exhibition invites visitors to respond to what they learned and experienced. Visitors are able to fill out a small comment card to share their thoughts and impressions from the exhibition and respond to the language champions in B.C.

### CHEER US ON!

Leave a message of hope and encouragement for language activists.  
Help us continue the work needed to revitalize our spoken languages.



**FIRST PEOPLES'**  
CULTURAL COUNCIL

NOVEMBER 2017

COMPILED BY ADAR ANISMAN FOR FPCC

## WHO VISITED THE EXHIBITION? WHAT DID THEY LEARN?

This report summarizes the comments left by visitors to the exhibition, to gauge the reactions and impact of the exhibition on museum goers. The data for this report is taken from 5,044 comments left by visitors between 2015–2017.

My son enjoys this exhibit so much. I am so proud to show him the strength and resilience of first nation cultures. Thank you for your hard work. I look forward to the day Indigenous Languages are taught alongside French in schools.

♡ Sarah + Stanley

**5,044**  
COMMENTS

## DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

### AGE

Of the 5,044 visitors, 416 were explicitly mentioned to be children, with ages ranging from 2–18. Overall, visitors aged 2–77 mentioned their ages in their comments.

### COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

While not all visitors to the exhibition wrote comments, and not all visitors mentioned where they were from, we do have partial information. Out of 5,044 comments left, 973 visitors mentioned where they came from.

Of those 973, **316** were Canadians, from almost all of Canada's provinces and territories (only Nunavut and Prince Edward Island were not mentioned by Canadian visitors). The largest number of visitors came from BC: 192 visitors.

The next largest group of visitors were from the US, with **273** visitors from 28 states.



**2–77**  
AGE RANGE

## THE REST OF THE 465 VISITORS CAME FROM 57 COUNTRIES:

Argentina	Denmark	Iran	New Zealand	Switzerland
Australia	Ecuador	Ireland	Panama	Taiwan
Austria	Fiji	Israel	Peru	Thailand
Belgium	Finland	Italy	Philippines	Turkey
Bolivia	France	Jamaica	Poland	United Kingdom
Bosnia	Germany	Japan	Romania	Ukraine
Brazil	Greece	Kenya	Russia	Uruguay
Chile	Guam	South Korea	Saudi Arabia	Venezuela
China	Guatemala	Malaysia	Singapore	Zimbabwe
Colombia	Hungary	Malta	Slovenia	
Croatia	India	Mexico	Spain	
Czech Republic	Indonesia	Netherlands	Sweden	

## LANGUAGES

Visitors wrote 476 cards in 59 languages other than English:

Amharic	French	Japanese	Portuguese
Anishnaabemowin	Gaelic	Korean	Punjabi
Arabic	German	Ktunaxa	Russian
Catalan	Gitxsenimx̱	Kwak'wala	SENĆOŦEN
Chinese	hənq̓əmin̓əm̓/ Halq'eméylem/ Hul'q'umi'num'	Latin	Serbian
Chinook		Łingít	Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Snichim
Cree	Hawai'ian	Loruba	Sṁalgyax
Croatian	Hebrew	Lushotseed	Spanish
Czech	Hindi	Māori	Swedish
Danish	Hungarian	Maya	Telugu
Dene	Icelandic	Mohawk	Thai
Dutch	Indonesian	Navajo	Walmajarri
Farsi	Iñupiaq	Nt̓eʔkepmxcín	Welsh
Fijian	Irish	Nuu-chah-nulth	
Filipino	Italian	Nsyilxcən	
Finnish		Polish	

## INDIGENOUS VISITORS

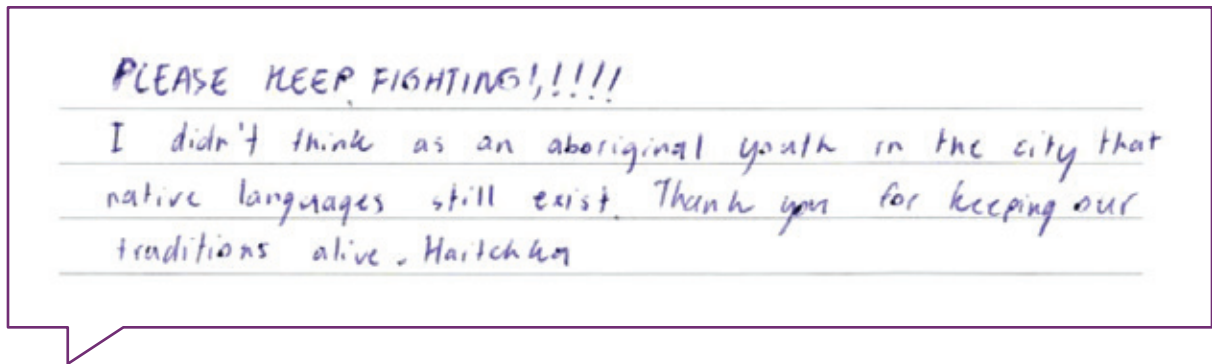
Out of 5,044 visitors who left comments, 273 identified themselves as belonging to the Indigenous people of Canada: First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.

An additional 43 visitors were Native American from the USA. 24 other visitors were Indigenous people from another area of the world, most often Australia, New Zealand, and South America.

**273**  
**INDIGENOUS  
VISITORS**

## COMMENTS' CONTENT

The visitors to the *"Our Living Languages"* exhibition left many different types of comments in their 5,044 cards. The cards asked for a message of encouragement to language activists, and visitors interpreted that open instruction in different ways. Many visitors left short messages, such as "Thank you" or a heart symbol (♥). Others left longer messages, offering words of hope, support, their opinion of the exhibition, or their personal experience. The comments were overwhelmingly positive, both of language revitalization work, the exhibition, and Indigenous people, with the number of negative comments in the single digits.



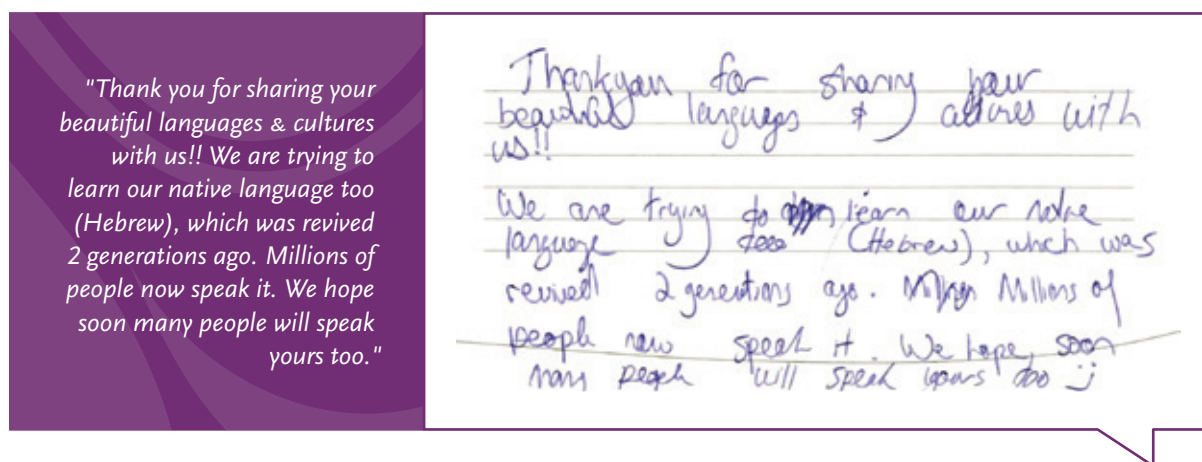
An analysis of the comments identified 9 distinct themes: encouragement of the language activists; feedback on the exhibition; thanking the activists; languages and language learning; education; colonialism and reconciliation; language and identity; universal aspects of language revitalization; and heritage language and personal histories.

Many visitors touched on more than one theme in their comment: 1,669 comments included two themes, 398 comments included three themes, and 45 comments included four or more themes.

**The next section briefly discusses each theme.**

## THEME #1: ENCOURAGING THE LANGUAGE ACTIVISTS

This theme is the most popular, with over half of the cards (2677 comments) including it. The visitors to the exhibition were very eager to express their appreciation to the language activists' work, to ask them to continue in their work, and to tell them not to give up. This theme was very commonly found with all other themes, especially thanking the activists.



## THEME #2: FEEDBACK FOR THE EXHIBITION AND THE MUSEUM

The second most common theme in the comments was feedback on the exhibition and the museum, which appeared in 1,599 comments. Visitors often said how much they enjoyed the exhibition, how educational it was, and mentioned specific elements of the exhibition that they enjoyed most — most often the interactive aspects of the exhibition, and especially the ability to hear the languages in the welcome forest and in the cradle theatre. Some museum goers expressed a wish for the exhibition to become permanent, or for the exhibition (or a similar exhibition) to be shown in other cities and their own home towns. Visitors from Victoria often mentioned that the exhibition is an important addition to the museum.

The "Cradle of Language"  
experience is truly wonderful!  
I sat for a long time listening  
to the songs & words of the  
mothers & grandmothers.  
Such a blessing,  
thank you!!

"The 'Cradle of Language'  
experience is truly wonderful!  
I sat for a long time listening  
to the songs & words of the  
mothers & grandmothers.  
Such a blessing. Thank you!!"

I think this is a wonderful installation,  
and so very important. Non native  
people typically have little knowledge  
of these languages, and this will  
go a long way to help educate them.  
Please let this be a permanent installation.

### THEME #3: **THANKS AND GRATITUDE**

Many visitors expressed their gratitude to the language activists and the museum for the exhibition and the work that is being done. This theme appeared in 1,063 of the comments, and often appeared with another theme. Many visitors chose to express their thankfulness by using words from their own language, other languages that they know, or the words they have learned in the exhibition from B.C.'s First Nation languages. First Nations visitors often used their own languages' words to express their thanks.

Thank you for this amazing  
experience!!!! I learned sooo  
much. Keep doing what you  
do!! MM

"Bozho! It's inspiring me to see the people across Turtle Island learning their language. I've been learning Neshnabe, my people's language. Migwetch for learning your language!"

Bozho!  
It's inspiring me to  
see people across Turtle  
Island learning their language.  
I've been learning Neshnabe  
my people's language. Migwetch for  
learning your language!

## THEME #4: **LANGUAGES AND LANGUAGE LEARNING**

The exhibition made many visitors think of the role of language in our world and in their lives, the languages that they know, or their attempts to learn languages. Many visitors spoke of the importance of communications between different peoples, of the benefits of diversity and diverse languages, and the benefits of multilingualism. This theme appeared in 615 comments.

Hi im Kelly 7 years  
im learning my  
muscovian language  
éy swayel

VISITORS WROTE  
CARDS IN

**60**  
LANGUAGES

Language is important because it helps  
people ~~go~~ communicate with different  
countries. Keep language alive!

## THEME #5: **EDUCATION**

The theme of education and educating the public was often present in visitors' comments, with 389 comments referring to it. This theme was expressed in two main ways: the first, often combined with feedback about the exhibition, was the appreciation of the educational role of the exhibition.

Many visitors felt that they had learned from their time in the museum and from the exhibition, both about the importance of languages in general, and about the languages, cultures, and history of First Nations Peoples in B.C. in particular. Visitors often mentioned a second theme, their wish that First Nations languages and cultures would be taught in the public school system in B.C. or in their own province or territory. These visitors often highlighted the connection between language education and reconciliation.



so informative love  
learning about my heritage  
-Thantje

THE EXHIBITION  
SHOWCASES

34

FIRST NATIONS  
LANGUAGES IN BC

Thank you for carrying on this  
critically important work

We should have all schools in BC  
teach at least one of these amazing  
languages.

## THEME #6: COLONIALISM, DECOLONIZATION, AND RECONCILIATION

Many visitors addressed the history of colonialism in Canada and elsewhere in the world, and the devastating effects of colonialism on Indigenous people. First Nations and other Indigenous visitors often discussed the importance of language revitalization work in decolonization, reconciliation, and the empowerment of Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous visitors, in addition to recognizing the importance of language revitalization, often expressed their sorrow and horror over the history of Canada and colonialism, and expressed their wishes to engage in the reconciliation process and become a part of the decolonization movement. This theme appeared in 339 comments.

"Chii-miigwetch (thank you, in Anishinaabemowin) for your hard work. UNDRIP must be implemented in Canada if we seek reconciliation — you guys are true warriors."

Chii-Miigwetch (Thank you, in Anishinaabemowin) for your hard work. UNDRIP must be implemented in Canada if we seek reconciliation - you guys are true warriors.  
Blue-eyed Owl Woman

To everyone doing the work of language revitalization, I want to express my sincere support & encouragement. You are doing amazing, important work. With all I am, I'm sorry that my ancestors tried to forcibly take your language from you, yet I know my apologies will never be enough. I also want to pledge a sincere commitment to being an ally, and to support the work you do. Thank you for the chance to experience "Living Languages" and for a renewal of my heart.  
With love, admiration, and enthusiasm.

## THEME #7: IDENTITY

The connections between language and identity, and language and culture, were common in the visitors' comments and appeared in 294 comments overall. Museum goers expressed appreciation of the strong link between language and culture, and the role of language and culture in creating a sense of identity. Indigenous and non-Indigenous often spoke of the importance of their language in maintaining their identity.

This exhibit made me realize how important it is for me to learn my own language - Cree.

I am a Japanese, so I can speak only Japanese. If we lost our language, Japanese, I think we can't do anything and will be in a difficult position in the world. I hope you can speak your language forever. Thank you.

"I am a Japanese, so I can speak only Japanese. If we lost our language, Japanese, I think we can't do anything and will be in a difficult position in the world. Hope you can speak your language forever. Thank you."

## THEME #8: UNIVERSALISM

Many museum goers expressed support for the work of language revitalization through a universal point of view, emphasizing the importance of diversity and the value of preservation of Indigenous knowledge for all people. Many visitors also felt that First Nations values and attitudes towards the land and the environment can be beneficial for non-Indigenous society and expressed a wish to learn such values from Indigenous people. This theme appeared in 243 comments.

"Your work is vital to the preservation of culture for people everywhere. Keep up the good work."

Your work is vital to the preservation of culture for people everywhere. Keep up the good work.  
- Shelby R. 13

"Beautiful representation — so much diversity of languages which **MUST** be preserved. Our First Nations peoples have so much to teach us about respecting one's environment and knowledge of our land. Thank you all for not giving up!"

Beautiful representation - So much diversity of languages which **MUST** be preserved. Our First Nations peoples have so much to teach us about respecting one's environment and knowledge of our land. Thank you all for not giving up!

## THEME #9: HERITAGE LANGUAGES AND PERSONAL HISTORIES

Lastly, almost 200 comments included personal histories and mention of non-Indigenous visitors' heritage languages. Visitors who did not learn their heritage language from their parents often mentioned a wish to learn them; other visitors, who did not pass on their language to their children, expressed regret and newly found determination to teach their languages. Visitors whose heritage languages are also vulnerable often mentioned the revitalization efforts in their own communities, and expressed solidarity with and encouragement to First Nations language activists.

Da iawn diolch - That's Welsh for thank you very much. Keep fighting for minority languages.

"Da iawn diolch —  
That's Welsh for thank you very much. Keep fighting for minority languages. "

"I was born in Kuwait and left at age 2. Father: Iraqi. Mother: Cyprus. I learned English, French and Greek growing up. Was not taught Arabic. Decided to take it in school. I understand a bit what it is like to learn "your language" later in your life. I speak German as well. I love languages and appreciate the culture and mental framework each language transmits. Keep your languages alive. They are beautiful flowers."

I was born in Kuwait and left at age 2. Father: Iraqi. Mother: Cyp. I learned English, French and Greek growing up. Was not taught Arabic. Decided to take it in school. I understand a bit what it is like to learn "your language" later in your life. I speak German as well. I love languages and appreciate the culture and mental framework each language transmits. Keep your languages alive. They are beautiful flowers.



## OTHER COMMENTS

Most of the constructive feedback that appeared in comments were suggestions regarding the structure of the exhibition: asking for additional videos, more information on local First Nations, pamphlets that can be taken home, or having the videos shown throughout the exhibition available for purchase at the museum shop. A small number of comments highlighted the need to extend Indigenous language revitalization efforts to the home and the parents, as well as the children.

A few Indigenous visitors responded to the disruption piece, expressing sorrow and mourning for language loss in their families, as well as their lack of resources to learn their language. However, most visitors, including those Indigenous visitors who do not speak their language, expressed positive attitudes towards the language activists and the exhibition. As one visitor said,

*"As someone who doesn't know my native language, I hope your project is successful."*

## CONCLUSION

While *Our Living Languages* was originally intended as a 3-year exhibition, we were pleased to announce in 2017 that it will not close but will remain open for the foreseeable future. As shown by the visitor feedback through these comment cards, *Our Living Languages* is a valuable tool for sharing the remarkable story of the richness, beauty and diversity of First Nations languages in B.C., and the resilience of these languages and efforts to revitalize them through hard work and perseverance. If you have not yet been able to experience this visually stunning and moving exhibition, we encourage you to visit it now to find out more about Indigenous languages in B.C.

Visit the **virtual version of OLL**: [learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/our-living-languages](http://learning.royalbcmuseum.bc.ca/pathways/our-living-languages)



**FIRST PEOPLES'**  
CULTURAL COUNCIL

### FOR MORE INFORMATION:

**First Peoples' Cultural Council**  
Language Programs  
1A Boat Ramp Road  
Brentwood Bay, B.C. V8M 1N9

T (250) 652-5952  
F (250) 652-5953  
E [info@fpcc.ca](mailto:info@fpcc.ca)  
[www.fpcc.ca](http://www.fpcc.ca)