

Language Games and You: Reflection Worksheet

Background

Language games, like Pig Latin and Izz Latin in English, a *língua do pê* in Portuguese, and *verlan* in French, are common around our globe. Each of these games has certain rules for how to form the “game language” and also each comes with its own unique cultural associations and historical background.

A língua do pê in Portuguese inserts a syllable starting with “p” after each syllable in the original word. Thus, the word “português” becomes “poportupuguêpês.” It is commonly played by children, or by adults playing with children. It may also be used by adults to talk in front of children without being understood. It’s played both in Brazil and in Portugal.

Pig Latin in English is formed by taking the first sound of a word and moving it to the end, followed by the sound “ay.” Like *a língua do pê*, it is a common game for children, and it is also used between people, often adults, who want to discuss something secret in front of someone else, for example children. For example, a mother may say to a father, “Should we go et-gay ome-say ice-ay eam-cray?” in front of their children.

Izz Latin works similarly to *a língua do pê*, except the syllable that is added is -izz, -ilz, or -izzle. This language game is strongly associated with Black culture in the United States, and has been popularized by rap artists like Snoop Dogg and Jay-Z. Another name for it is “ghetto Latin.”

Verlan in French follows a different sort of rule: a word is broken up into syllables, and then the syllables are reversed. Thus, the word “poulet” meaning “chicken” becomes “lepou.” Like Izz Latin, *Verlan* has specific cultural associations. Beginning two centuries ago, criminals used it to talk about their illegal activities. For this reason, many *verlan* words refer to sex or drugs. The word “lepou” mentioned above is actually slang for a police officer. Some *verlan* words have become mainstream French words, and they are also commonly used in contemporary French hip-hop.

Explore

Now it’s time for you to do some research on the language game you just learned. You might use the Internet, interview people from the culture where the language game is played, or ask your teacher or others knowledgeable about the language game.



What groups of people play this language game? (For example, children, a particular minority group, etc.)

What associations do people in the culture you're learning about make with this particular language game? (For example, telling secrets, hip-hop, child's play, or criminal activity)

What are some examples of this language game finding its way into non-game language? (For example, popular performers who use it, or words from the game language that can now be found in dictionaries)

Viewpoints

Complete the chart below with how different groups of people might respond to your use of the language game you've been studying.

	In-group members of the culture I'm studying (for example, hip-hop fans in France with verlan)	Out-group members of the culture I'm studying (for example, French people who don't like hip-hop music)	Your fellow language learners
potential positive reactions			
potential negative reactions			

Dramatize

In groups of four, role play the use of the language game. One of you will take the role of an in-group member, one the role of an out-group member, and one of you a fellow language learner. The fourth person will say something making use of the language game. Each of the others will take a term saying how they experienced hearing the language game, based on their role.

My role is ...

I feel ... because ...

If you have time, switch roles so that everyone has a turn saying something using the language game and playing each role.

Your Stance

When you interact with people in different cultures, you must choose how to behave based on who you are and how you want other people to perceive you. The more awareness you have of others' perspectives, the more intentional you can be with your choices. Based on your research and experiences so far with the language game you just learned, do you plan to play it with others? If so, with whom? Why or why not? What sorts of reactions can you watch for to help you decide if you should change your behavior. Write your current thoughts in the space below.

