

# Activity ideas for International Mother Language Day



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## **If the Walls Could Talk! Decorate the School**

Enlist the parents association, or allow the students to paint 'hello' and 'welcome' in their native language on a designated wall in the school. You can paint over it once the celebration is over, or maybe it will become a permanent feature!

## **Mother Tongue Languages and the Library**

Make a display of books in your school library, featuring popular books representing the languages in your school. If your school has a mother tongue collection in the library, consider showcasing these books. If not, invite the students and families to bring in books for display and, if appropriate, they could donate them afterwards for the school to start its own mother tongue collection. Invite the students or parents to write a brief review of the book, in their own language with an English-language translation.

If books are not feasible, invite students and parents to prepare displays for a notice board about popular authors from their home culture. Even without books, the display can feature laminated photographs of the author, including one or two of their famous books. The student could do a short (age-appropriate) biography about the author and his or her books, written with parental assistance in the home language, with an English translation.

## **DEAR! (Drop Everything And Read ...or Write - in your Mother Tongue)**

An international school I visited in the Caribbean instituted a weekly DEAR session, but with the variation that students were expected to read in their mother tongue. Periodically, the students would be invited to share with their classmates, in English, a brief synopsis about the book, and any special comments from the students about the story, the plot or the characters.

Parents may be invited into primary classrooms to read extracts from these popular mother tongue books. Alternatively, the activity became Drop Everything and Write (in your mother tongue), where students either did mother tongue assigned work (for students with IB mother tongue classes), kept journals or wrote letters to friends and family 'back home'.

## **Mother Tongue Language Books**

It is not unusual to see primary classroom doors decorated to replicate a book cover or to celebrate a famous author. This activity can also become a fun school-wide activity with different classes working collaboratively to choose a famous book or author representing the mother tongue languages in the school community. The mother tongue speakers can prepare a biography about the author and their books together, to laminate and post next to the door with an English translation. This way everyone in the school can begin to learn about famous authors as part of a world literature programme.

I have seen this activity extended to a World Language Book Day, where students have dressed up as their favourite characters from popular books representing their mother tongue.

### 'What we speak' Language Displays

While it is not unusual to see display boards with photos of the students in the entire school, or in primary classes to be displayed along with a flag depicting their nationality, it is less common to see their languages shown. This is a nice way to illustrate the multilingual nature of the community.

### It's Elemental: Periodic Tables in Mother Tongue

Nothing says 'our school values mother tongue' like a display of periodic tables in the chemistry lab, with the mother tongue languages represented. This is a great project that can serve young EAL Chemists throughout the year.

### Language Research Survey - Maths Data Collection

Upper Primary or Lower Secondary students can do a language survey by preparing a simple questionnaire to circulate; it could be students in a year group, students and parents in a year group, or an entire section of the school or faculty (or any combination of these), to learn about first languages and prepare graphs or pie charts to display. This would enable the entire school to learn more about the school's language profile.

### Bilingual Authors

As part of a Writer's Workshop, children can become bilingual authors. Depending on the age of the student, this can take the form of a collaboratively-written class book (a story written by all of the children in the class), then typed up in English with each student being assigned a 'page' of the book to translate into their mother tongue and illustrate. The translation can be typed by the child's parents, and then when the class book is published, the English and translated pages are alongside one another. For older students who are able to write longer stories, they can translate all of the pages independently. Published books can be laminated and bound for the class library, and it is possible for a copy to be given to each child as a class memory.

### Birthday Book Club

Schools wishing to develop or build up a mother tongue book collection can enlist the Parent Association to organise a Birthday Book Club, where children are invited to donate to the library a copy (used or new) of one of their favourite books in their mother tongue. Bookplates can be designed in a school-sponsored competition so that books can be dedicated to the school. These would record the student's name, home country and language, and the book would become part of the school's collection. During school assemblies (weekly, termly or monthly), time is devoted to the Birthday Book Club with students presenting their book, explaining what they feel is special about it.

(Parents leaving the school to relocate will often be happy to donate nice books their children have outgrown, and this can really help the school build up its collection of mother tongue books.)

