

# LONG VALLEY STUDENTS EMBRACE CULTURAL DIVERSITY THROUGH ONLINE LEARNING

BY JEANNETTE EZETA AND HER STUDENTS



## MIDDLE SCHOOLERS TEACH ONE ANOTHER POLISH AND CHINESE

As we all began to transition and adapt to the new remote learning experience, I realized it was key to keep middle school students involved and motivated. During one of my Spanish classes I brought up the idea of giving students of different backgrounds an opportunity to share their language and culture with their classmates. Enthusiastically the students accepted the idea.

With my guidance, the students created a plan that did not interfere with the school schedule. The new learning experience was enriched by the attendance of elementary and high school students. The student-led program would begin an hour prior to the regular school day.

None of this would have been possible if we did not have the support of our administration. The atmosphere at the Long Valley Middle School

gives the opportunity for learning and teaching to transcend the walls of our building. Creativity is an important tool that ignites amazing adventures for teachers and students alike. Our building administrators, Mark Ippolito and Danielle Schweitzer, along with the staff at Long Valley Middle School welcome different cultures and languages while enabling students to gain a more profound understanding of their own cultures.

The students were eager to continue learning and excitedly waited for the new school year to begin. I continue to support a world where a multitude of cultures exists. It is of utmost importance to provide environments that foster appreciation and respect for others, for that is what truly makes us human.

## THERON WANG TEACHES CHINESE

I'm delighted to have an opportunity to teach other students and watch them learn. We went over many different Chinese characters throughout the class, and it blew my mind how fast they learned what I taught. Even though I only taught twice a week for about two months, I learned many things through this extraordinary experience.

I was in Spanish class, learning about family members when my teacher, Señora Ezeta, asked me how to say 'grandma' in Chinese. She asked later that day if I could teach a class, and I agreed. I had absolutely no idea how to teach a lesson, so I just made a basic Google Slide about Pinyin (the Chinese phonetic alphabet) and the numbers one, two, and three.

The second week was better after I received some feedback from my teacher. She recommended that I teach numbers. I made another slide and put numbers 1-10, 100, and 1,000. I taught my

classmates the numbers, but they all struggled with them.

The third class was when it started to improve. I added English pronunciation guides, which helped them a lot. They were able to pronounce all of the different characters by the end of the class, but they still struggled with remembering which characters went with certain words. I tested them with Gimkits, a live quiz learning game, so I could see what they were struggling with. I helped them practice for a few weeks before moving on.

By the end of the month, the students could identify numbers and read them out loud with little to no accent. I asked everyone what they wanted to learn next, since I wanted to make it enjoyable. I had learned Chinese characters by reading articles and learning new characters within the text, which, I have to say was boring and put me off from wanting to learn it. I used Google Slides to teach, since it was effective in my opinion.

We were able to learn about the topic in just two weeks. We couldn't continue through the summer because our school accounts were not active, but we planned to start again when the new school year began.

I have to thank my amazing Spanish teacher Sra. Ezeta, who organized and started this entire class. I also want to give my thanks to the students who stayed in this class, since learning Chinese can be tough and sometimes boring.

Of course, I wouldn't be able to teach Chinese if I hadn't learned it from my parents and Chinese teachers. I hope that someday I can teach more people who are willing to learn so that I can help spread awareness about the rich Chinese culture.



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*Jeannette Ezeta is a sixth-grade Spanish teacher at Long Valley Middle School in Washington Township, Morris County. She can be reached at [jezeta@wtschools.org](mailto:jezeta@wtschools.org).*

## VICTORIA KRAKOWSKI TEACHES POLISH

From a young age I was exposed to foreign languages. At home, I speak Polish with my parents. I also attend Polish school on Saturdays. During quarantine, I was having Spanish classes.

One day I told Sra. Ezeta that I spoke Polish. That is when it all started. I was so excited that I would be teaching my classmates. I began teaching my teacher and some students Polish. I felt as if I were the teacher of the class. I would make lessons that would be fun and interesting!

I really enjoyed teaching, and I think that at my age it is very easy to master these languages. I love learning other languages, and I think it is very important for us to get this knowledge. I am very happy that my school system gives us an opportunity to learn unfamiliar languages. I adored this participation, and I learned a lot from this!



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## STUDENTS RESPOND



**Jack LaBar**

This year I was included in a club that taught Chinese and Polish. At first, I was skeptical about joining because it seemed so different. I have only been exposed to Latin-rooted languages, such as English, Spanish, and French. Polish and Chinese did not seem to be in my wheelhouse. And the fact that I would have to wake up 30 minutes earlier than usual did not make the classes any more appealing. I did it anyway, deciding to give it a shot. The first virtual lesson I went to was a Chinese lesson on numbers. At first, all of the symbols and words were overwhelming, but after a little practice, I started to get the hang of it. With Polish, the same thing happened, but with the days of the week. The words were confusing, but again, with practice, I got better. It was evident that the teachers of both languages put in a lot of time and effort into their lessons. In the end, it all paid off. I have yet to master a lot of each language but like everything else in life, nothing comes easy.

This experience has helped me gain a perspective on the world around me and all of its cultures. The vast difference in languages and cultures is a concept many people still strive to comprehend. People have a mindset that whatever they are used to, is the “right” thing to do. I am very grateful for this opportunity to enrich my understanding of the world and its cultures.

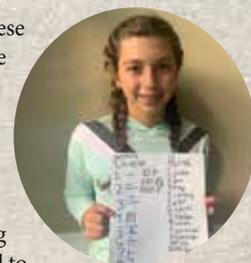


**Lucia Pulido**

It is very important to learn a different language such as Chinese or Polish. Did you know that Chinese is one of the most spoken languages in the world? Chinese is a fun language to learn. It is very different from English—from the way it is written to the way the words are pronounced!

**Elisa Castro**

For weeks, I would wake up and get on a computer to meet for Chinese or Polish lessons before the distance-learning day. I started with little knowledge of either one of the languages. In a couple months, I was able to pronounce words and read some of the characters. During the pandemic, we all had a lot more free time, so it was a great opportunity to learn these languages. I think it is really fun and interesting learning a new language. It's also very helpful and important, especially when visiting a new country. Additionally, I enjoyed learning about numbers and animals in Chinese and Polish, and I look forward to participating in more of these lessons!



**Maya Condron**

Chinese class was a great addition to the online learning experience. It helped make learning at home much more fun and interesting. It gave me something to look forward to every week.

Theron was a great teacher. He did not go too fast or too slow—it was the perfect tempo for learning a new language. He made cool Gimkits to review, informative Google Slides and Docs. It was a great experience.

I can't wait to keep learning Chinese and maybe even move on to learn other languages from students who are either fluent in the language or are learning it themselves. Experiencing foreign languages gives me a glimpse into their cultures and opens new opportunities for everyone involved.