



LiteracyLinks

The Newsletter for Volunteer Tutors

Peggy L. Murphy, Editor
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**See you in
September.**

LiteracyLinks will be on hiatus during the summer.

I Won't Give Up on Learning English, and Neither Should You

by Fernando Macias

Why should you learn to speak English? There are a lot of reasons; one of them is that it is the language of the country in which you are living. In order to make your life easier, you need to learn English; otherwise, you are not going to be able to communicate directly with your children's teachers at the school. You also won't be able to communicate with the doctor, and when you have emergencies, you will have to wait until you find somebody to translate for you. Sometimes that is not easy.



Fernando Macias at the 2013 TutorConference

Another reason why you should learn to read, write and speak English is that you will find better jobs. You would also be able to be outside in the community with a lot more confidence in yourself.

Remember that knowledge is power, and power can help you to succeed; in other words, you should never give up trying to learn English. Remember that this is the commercial language of the world, and it means that wherever you go around the world, you are always going to find people to assist you, whether in hotels, restaurants, tourist areas, and other places.

I know that some of you might say, "It's easier said than done." Well, at the end, the one who makes the decision is you. You can decide if you want to remain silent, watching the people that are learning and succeeding, or you can stand up and join them in succeeding together.

I have been in this country for many years. I came as an adult, and I might confess that it hasn't been easy to learn English. It surely has been a bumpy road for me. Sometimes I am so frustrated, but little by little, I have been learning and I continue to do so. I am far from being where I want to be, but I am not giving up, and I am not planning to do so at any time soon.

See "Learning English" (pg. 2).

Learning a Sense of Place at the John Tigard House

by the Beginner II English Class, Tigard Senior Center

Our class read a newspaper article about Curtis Tigard's 105th birthday party, and watched an interview with him about his life. In the interview, he was sitting in the living room of the Tigard House. His family lived there many years ago. Now it is a museum of Tigard and Tualatin history. One student asked if we could go see the house. The teacher called and made an appointment for a group tour.

Wilson Tigard came west from Arkansas on the Oregon Trail in 1852. The house was built in 1880 by Wilson Tigard for his son John. In 1979, the house was going to be demolished, but the Tigard Historical Association moved it up the street to the place it is now.

Our tour guide, Martha Worley, told us many interesting stories about the history of the house and the town. We saw how they lived in that time without washing machines, electricity, or indoor plumbing. They had to wash their clothes in the kitchen. There was a big wood stove in the kitchen. Wilson Tigard's second wife died because her skirt caught on fire at the stove. The house was very small for a large family. (One student said that maybe they had so many children because there was no TV!)

The small table in the living room was the first Post Office for Tigardville. There was a chair in the kitchen that Wilson Tigard made from a wheel of a covered wagon. It is the most valuable piece in the museum.

The garden has the same plants the family had in the 1800s. There were roses, fuchsia, irises, and five apple trees. Rhubarb and sorrel were new to many of us. We picked small sorrel out of the grass and ate it. It is bitter but we liked it!

The tour is great for families, too: one student brought her eight-year-old daughter along and she enjoyed it a lot. If you want to go, call 503-747-9856 to make an appointment. If you want to watch Curtis Tigard's interview, type "Curtis Tigard Interview" into a search engine like Google[®]. He was 101 when he did it but he looks 70 or 80. He speaks slowly and clearly. It is very interesting and worth your time if you like learning the history of where you live.

***Editor's Note:** Carolyn Talarr, the class teacher, notes that the tour developed spontaneously from the students (Carolynn had suggested a library visit). To recap their experience, her students came up with pages and pages of word-web words from their memories of the house.*

Carolyn strongly encourages tutors to go with the flow and work with students' interests. Following students' interests works better than teacher-led activities every time. In this case, the students actively wanted to go to the Tigard House, and were completely engaged the whole time!

Learning English (from pg. 1).

Personally, I can tell you that learning English has helped me a lot. When I came here, my first job was working in the field, but I didn't like that at all. In the beginning, I was reluctant to learn English, but when I started going to school, I noticed that it was not as difficult as I thought. To make a long story short, I can tell you that, after 2 years here in this country, I was having my first job interview in English. Only God knows how I did it, but I was hired, and from there I really can tell you that my life has turned out to be easier.

Please don't do what a lot of people do, which is to say, "Why do I need to learn English? Anyway I am going back to my country soon. I am just going to

be here for a little time." But, then it is 10, 15, or more than 20 years and they are still here with their kids already grown up and speaking good English, but they still think that soon they are going back to their country.

Even if you are planning to go back to your country, it will not hurt you to have learned some English. You can always take it with you to your country, and you don't even have to pay any fees when taking it with you.

I really wish for you to learn as much as your capacity allows you to learn. Good luck.

***Editor's Note:** Fernando wrote this essay for his English class at Sisters of St. Mary of the Valley, Beaverton.*

What's in Your Tutor Toolbox?

It's Not About What It's About
by Patrik McDade (patrik@pptpdx.com)
Founder and Program Director,
[People*Places*Things](#)

One of the most frustrating things new teachers and tutors experience is the inability to explain what something means. Truth. Elevator. Hopefulness. Powder. More than likely, you've found yourself waving your arms all over the place, trying to mime an abstract concept.

Meaning is seductive for language learners and teachers. Language learners desperately want to understand the environment of meaning around them, and are highly motivated to directly translate when that option is available. Teachers and tutors live for the moment when a picture, gesture, or short explanation creates the Light Bulb Effect, and the learner clearly "knows" something they didn't know before.

But understanding what a word or sentence means is not necessarily an indicator that language acquisition has taken place. If it were, all we would need to do is translate/interpret everything and we'd be done. In fact, we could argue that presenting/explaining the meaning of a word or phrase to a learner too quickly can impede learning because the learner doesn't have a chance to construct the meaning from the context.

Your learners are in an overwhelmingly rich linguistic environment. They struggle with understanding all day long. And yet, they go to the store, pay their bills, and more or less function on a day to day basis. Rather than cultivating dependence on word/phrase level meaning, develop their awareness of patterns and the ability to hear and interpret language in their environment with the following strategies:

- Say a sentence, learner repeats
- Say a sentence, learner writes
- Say a sentence from a page of written text, learner locates the sentence.

By focusing on the form instead of the meaning, learners can practice important skills that rapidly improve acquisition and further engagement with language and the people who speak it.

Editor's Note: Patrik regularly presents at the Annual Tutor Conference. We thank him for sharing his expertise.

For Your Calendar

Tutor Training

Look for the new schedule on the [Portland Literacy Council website](#). Online registration opens six weeks before each training session.

Opportunities

Citizenship Classes

[Registration](#) is now open at Multnomah County Library for Citizenship classes in June and July. Each session meets weekly for six weeks. Classes at Kenton and Holgate Branches begin on the following dates:

- Kenton Branch, Monday, June 2, 5:30 p.m.
- Holgate Branch, Monday, July 28, 5:45 p.m.

English in the Real World

English language-learners can learn to use English and participate in volunteer opportunities through the Portland ESL Network program, Learning English in the Real World. See the [Portland ESL Network website](#) for information on connecting student volunteers with volunteer opportunities through the following organizations:

- Center for Intercultural Organizing
- Portland ESL Network
- VOZ Worker's Rights Education Project/ MLK Worker Center
- Hands On Greater Portland
- Write Around Portland
- Free Geek
- Know Your City
- Educate Ya!
- Friendly House
- Consonare Chorale
- Latino Connection/Easter Seals

See [February 2014 LiteracyLinks](#) article (page 2) for more about Learning English in the Real World.

Correction

The March 2013 LiteracyLinks omitted the names of Les Rivera and John Runcie from the list of Presenters, Moderators, Facilitators who volunteered at the annual conference. Our apologies for the oversight.