

## Languages in the News

### *Willmar's Chinese Language Classes Underscore Trend*

This article from Minnesota Public Radio focuses on Willmar High School where students have had the opportunity to learn Mandarin since 2006. The Mandarin program is growing in this rural Minnesota town and students now have the opportunity to apply their language skills as the program offers them the chance to go to China. Unfortunately, the popularity of learning Mandarin has led to the demise of both the French and German programs at the school because of a decline in enrollment.

According to the Minnesota Department of Education, between 2000 and 2011, Chinese language enrollment in Minnesota's K-12 schools grew 586 percent, to over 5,700 students. However, Spanish is still by far the favored language and continues to grow.

Nancy Rhodes, the director of world and foreign language education at the Center for Applied Linguistics in Washington, explains that, historically, there has usually been a connection between language learning and foreign policy, asserting that learning Arabic is also becoming more prevalent in schools. She notes that with growing political relations between the United States and China, students understand the important role China plays globally both now and in the future, and that results in their desire to learn the language and culture.

Click here to read [Willmar's Chinese Language Classes Underscore Trend.](#)

### *Pakistan's Sesame Street: Can an Urdu Elmo Aid a Blighted Nation?*

Did you know that Elmo is multilingual? This article reports that he is fluent in Chinese, German, Spanish, Hindi, Arabic, and now Urdu, a common language spoken in Pakistan. The set for Sim Sim Hamara (Sesame Street in Urdu) reflects the native culture with ripening wheat, banyan trees, and a village snack shop overflowing with exotic fruits and vegetables.

In an effort to promote tolerance in Pakistan, the show's characters have skin tones from brown to pale orange that represent the variety of ethnicities living there. Supported by a 20 million dollar grant from USAID, the goal, according to Sesame Street producer, Joan Cooney, is to promote early literacy education for Pakistan's children. Around 60 percent of the 66 million Pakistani children are unable to read or do basic math and only 22 percent of female children attend primary school. With an attempt to elevate women's status in a male-dominated society, the lead character is a six-year old female, Rani, who is passionate about science and reading.

Sim Sim Hamara has been accepted in Pakistan, especially among educators, with the authors mindful of presenting topics that could be culturally sensitive. Current estimates say that Sim Sim Hamara is reaching more than 3.5 million Pakistani children who have no other access to preschool education.

Click here to read [Pakistan's Sesame Street: Can an Urdu Elmo Aid a Blighted Nation?](#)

# Tips and Tools for Early Language

## Maya Adventure

The Science Museum of Minnesota has created a "Maya Adventure" which includes cultural information and photos of many ancient and modern Maya cultural sites. Participants can read about different facets of Maya culture, including textiles, architecture, geographical features of the region, and Maya traditions. There are instructions to make a logbook (with a printable cover from the site) to keep track of facts. While the site is older and does not include a lot of interactive features, there are many photos of cultural sites and objects from the museum's collection that could support a lesson on Maya culture.

Click here to access [Maya Adventure](#).

## Shutterfly

Shutterfly is a free on-line photo storing and sharing service. You can upload digital photos and videos and organize them into albums and folders to identify particular events or time periods. Once your photos are uploaded, you can share them by creating a personalized website for your photos that others can access. The customized 'share' site can function as a classroom webpage: you can control privacy settings to allow only invited email addresses to view the material. Other features of a classroom share site allow you to manage volunteer sign-ups and communicate announcements or homework assignments with parents. Explore Shutterfly and click on the 'Share' tab to learn more about possible classroom applications of the site.

Click here to access [Shutterfly](#).

## National Geographic Travel and Cultures

This user-friendly site can help teachers and students learn more about culture and languages. The online magazine helps visitors learn beyond the headlines.

The Travel Quiz link includes division by country, continent, city and national parks. Visitors can take the quizzes, which give immediate feedback and provide a rationale for the answer.

Click here to access [National Geographic Travel and Cultures](#).

This issue of *Newsworthy* was compiled by Tammy Dann. Send any comments, questions, or information for future issues of *Newsworthy* to Tammy Dann at [tdann@nnell.org](mailto:tdann@nnell.org)

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