

*Arlene Blackdeer:* When I am driving to work, I feel like maybe my ancestors are there cheering me on. I'm sure they are. Obviously, they want their language to go on, they want our language to go on.

My name is Arlene Blackdeer. I am a Ho-Chunk language apprentice. The Ho-Chunk Master/Apprentice Program is basically made up to create younger speakers that will go on teaching the language and culture. I work with Waxopinisgaiga. That's Aurelia Hopinkah. She grew up in the Dells area. She was raised by her mom and dad and she was also sent to her grandparents' house.

They were sent to the elders to be taught what the elders know, so they can carry on those stories and those ways. We work on anything and everything. When I first started my apprenticeship, we were together all the time. That was my idea of the best and the most that I've learned. Everything that she knows, she shares with me, like why we do stuff that we do. You know, why are the different stories told and why do they tell that story? I think that's pretty amazing.

I remember hearing from my elders, and even now to this day, that when our language dies, that's gonna be the end of our world. When I was younger, I really did not understand that. Now that I'm older, I see that. I see it, because it's so close coming to an end.

So I thought, out of respect for my elders and everything they've gone through, that's the least I can do for them. I think that it's almost too early to tell, but when we had the immersion daycare, that's where I saw the results. That's where the speakers came from. So I think it's too early to say I don't see anything happening in the 4K or in the high schools.

And what's tomorrow?

I usually say it when I say, "See you later."

What is it? Anybody remember October? Or what it means, without looking.

It's like the season of the Deer hide. So how do you say deer?

I do see us raising awareness to the high school students, so that at some point they can go on to further their learning. We're building their language and giving them the basics so they can go out on their own and possibly become an apprentice. Are they gonna be fluent after they get done with high school? No.

Will they know a lot more than they what they went in there with? Probably.

We have family fun nights, just to get the community involved. It's really to raise awareness of what the language division is doing. Our goal, in my mind, is to bring back our Ho-Chunk language. Bring it back to the communities, bring it back to the workplace, bring it back to more family events, and just have it revitalized. Bring it back to life again. I guess if I wanted to say anything to anybody in any Native community, is get involved. Get involved in your language. Get involved in your culture. It makes you who you are as a person or as a community.

Don't let it get to where it's almost to the point where you can't bring it back. I feel like we're nearing that. But with the efforts that we're making I feel, in my heart, that we can actually do it.