

Nisenan Language Review



Séekas'in! Hello! This is a brief review of the SSBMI Summer Youth Intern Program's class with the SSBMI Language Department on July 17th, 2024.

The Tribe has ancestral ties to the Nisenan language through the Tribe's Matriarchs, Pamela Cleanso Adams and Annie Hill Murray Paris. Pamela, Annie, and many of their close relations spoke Nisenan and shared their language with researchers in the early 1900s. The knowledge they shared provides us a pathway to reconnect with the Nisenan language today. The Tribe also has significant connections to ancestral Nisenan villages like Pusúune and Yáales, where the Nisenan language has been spoken since time immemorial.

To listen to the Nisenan language in this handout and to learn more, visit the Language Day Camp 2024 site by visiting <https://bit.ly/ssbmilanguagedaycamp> or by scanning the QR code above.

Vocabulary

Haan	'Yes'
Wiin	'No'
Emúl	'Black Bear'
Haw	'Fox'
Koowáwa	'Butterfly'
K'ut'	'Deer'
May	'Salmon'

Phrases

Esak'mením ni min.	'I don't understand you.'
Hábene kan.	'Please say it again.' (said to 1 person)
Hésmisébe mi?	'What group are you in?'
Emúlmisémi ni.	'I'm in the Black Bear group.'
Háwmisémi ni.	'I'm in the Fox group.'
Koowáwamisémi ni.	'I'm in the Butterfly group.'
K'út'misémi ni.	'I'm in the Deer group.'
Máymisémi ni.	'I'm in the Salmon group.'
Meep hedée.	'Take this / these.' (said to 1 person)
Meewá hedée.	'Take this / these.' (said to 2 or more people)

Olém Ham ‘Coyote Says’

We learned to play *Olém Ham* ‘Coyote Says’, which is like the English game Simon Says. Here are the commands we learned. They are all addressed to 2 or more people.

Pettuywá.	‘All of you, turn around.’
Iskitwá.	‘All of you, sit down.’
Dəkəwá.	‘All of you, stand up.’
Yatapwá.	‘All of you, clap.’
Dəəwá.	‘All of you, laugh.’
Hatiwá.	‘All of you, stop.’

To use them in the game, we use this sentence ‘frame’:

Olém _____ ham. ‘Coyote says _____.’

Here are the commands repeated in this sentence frame.

Olém “Pettuywá!” ham.	‘Coyote says, “All of you, turn around!” ’
Olém “Iskitwá!” ham.	‘Coyote says, “All of you, sit down!” ’
Olém “Dəkəwá!” ham.	‘Coyote says, “All of you, stand up!” ’
Olém “Yatapwá!” ham.	‘Coyote says, “All of you, clap!” ’
Olém “Dəəwá!” ham.	‘Coyote says, “All of you, laugh!” ’
Olém “Hatiwá!” ham.	‘Coyote says, “All of you, stop!” ’

How to play Olém Ham ‘Coyote Says’

One person acts as *Olé* ‘Coyote’. When *Olé* gives a command in the frame sentence *Olém* _____ *ham* ‘Coyote says _____’, the players have to obey the command as quickly as possible.

Anyone who doesn’t perform the correct action is out. Anyone who obeys a command given without the frame sentence *Olém* _____ *ham* is out. The last player standing wins!

Neetíp min henimihí ‘Grow your language’

You can say more in the Nisenan language than you think! Recall the question and answer pair below:

Hésmisébe mi?	‘What group are you in?’
_____ -misém ni.	‘I’m in the _____ group.’

The question *Hésmisébe mi?* can also be translated as “Of what people are you?”, and Nisenan speakers ask this when they want someone to identify themselves.

Here we learned how to identify ourselves as members of teams named after animals. But you can also use the names of places, like the Nisenan villages of *Pusúune* or *K’ademmá* for example, to talk about where you come from and who your ancestors are.

Here is one way to identify yourself as coming from some of the Tribe’s ancestral villages.

Hésmisébe mi?	‘Of what people are you?’
<i>Pusúune</i> misém ni.	‘I am of the people of <i>Pusúune</i> .’
<i>K’ademmá</i> misém ni.	‘I am of the people of <i>K’ademmá</i> .’
<i>Wóllok</i> misém ni.	‘I am of the people of <i>Wóllok</i> .’
<i>Yáales</i> misém ni.	‘I am of the people of <i>Yáales</i> .’

This is not a complete list of the places your Nisenan ancestors have come from, and there are other ways to talk about yourself and your heritage in the Nisenan language. This is just a small example of how you can build on what you learned in this class.

If you have questions or want to learn more about the Nisenan language, you can reach out to the Language Department at language@ssband.org.