

English Teacher

Name: **Jennifer Carey**
Profession: **English Teacher**
Number of years in this line of work: **3**
Native Language: **English**
Other Language(s): **Spanish, French**

1) What languages do you know? How did you learn them? (At home, At school, etc.)

I speak French and Spanish. I learned some French, mostly conversational, at home on my dad's side of the family is French. The developmental learning was reinforced in public school from age 13 through college. I have visited France every year or two years in college. I began at the 101 level, consistently took classes for a year and a half before taking a few more classes, but I became more involved in community related work and planning. I continue to use Spanish for these purposes, and I am pursuing my Spanish proficiency.

2) What is your profession?

My primary profession is as a 10th grade English teacher in a public high school, with various professional obligations. I also intern at a non-profit in the summers.

3) Describe a "typical" day as an English Teacher. How do you use your language skills?

At my school, I use my Spanish speaking skills on a daily basis.

Part of our custodial staff speaks Spanish, so I'm able to build stronger collegial relationships in the morning. Speaking Spanish with them has helped our community to grow. I know that we build greater respect for each other, which the students notice, but also which helps me complete tasks, be it large or small like unlocking a room.

As students arrive, my Spanish again becomes important. I have worked closely with students on their language and am willing to listen to them. As such, I sponsor the Hispanic Leadership Initiative in my classroom, because many students are learning Spanish (but also tying in their own words and vocabulary word origins by making comparisons to the Latin root words).

I am also in charge of the Hispanic Youth Leadership Initiative as part of a community outreach program. My colleagues use my linguistic skills to help me translate in conferences between students and Spanish speaking parents, and help translate for parents who come into schools. Being strongly linked with academic achievement, I have demonstrated greater student growth in students who speak Spanish.

My French skills have been less influential in my work as a teacher. More than anything, my immigrant background has allowed me to earn the respect of my students. In a school where there is a greater respect for me because of my linguistic abilities and my first-hand experience in a non-American environment that was not purely "American."

4) What do you enjoy about it?

I enjoy getting to know more of the community. If I didn't use my language skills or not use them, I wouldn't seem as "human" to parents, students, or other faculty or staff. My knowledge and experience to draw from and to share. I enjoy sharing food and trying new things about. I also enjoy the respect I earn and the professional opportunities I've earned. Being able to help others. To understand language, you have to be sensitive and open to culture, which helps me teach you.

5) What language do you think in?

I think in a combination of English, Spanish and French. I tend to mix them in sentences. A lot of this depends on context and idiomatic expressions.

6) What do you think helped you the most in mastering the foreign/second language?

Linguistic and cultural immersion helped me the most. I was also helped by putting myself in an environment of or representative of diversity. Being in an environment where it is difficult to define languages and cultures.

7) What opportunities have knowing another language provided in your life, or otherwise?

I've worked extensively with the Latino community because of my Spanish speaking skills. I have worked with national advocacy groups for Latinos, developed local initiatives, researched immigration issues, and provided support for the community.

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8) If you had the time to learn another language now, what language would you choose?
Probably an Asian language or Arabic—it would be useful for communication purposes and access to the community.

9) How do you think your life would have turned out if you had never learned Spanish?
It would have been very different. I don't think I would be so interested in cultural differences. I don't think I would have chosen to teach in a community dominated by immigrants. I don't think I'd be as good at explaining things as I am now. I'm as invested in immigrant rights. I don't think I'd be as good at explaining things as I am now. I value education as much because my dad has explained to me many of the cultural differences and how to value the American system, which is why I teach in it.

10) In your opinion, are there more career opportunities for people who speak Spanish?
Yes, absolutely.

11) What do you think you would be doing if you weren't an English Teacher?
A community organizer or youth leadership programmer either in a community based organization or a non-profit.

12) What advice would you give to somebody who wants to be an English Teacher? What languages should they learn?
I would suggest Spanish, Korean or Vietnamese, Urdu, Farsi, Arabic—in that order, depending on the community they are teaching in.