

AN UNUSUAL LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT

Elgin high school's language department, headed by Ms. Cheryl Dezell, offers many language opportunities for high school students. They offer the usual foreign languages that most high schools offer, Spanish and French. However, what is unique are the other languages. They offer American Sign I and II and Native American Studies.

The students who take American Sign Language are taking them because a family member is deaf, or one of their friends, or they may want to major in Deaf Education at the University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma in Chickasha. Ms. Kristen Molloy, who teaches American Sign Language, said, "the students love going over to the elementary building to read to the deaf students or they may sign at a ceremony like graduation. The classes fill up fast because so many students want to learn this."

The Native American studies offer the Kiowa language and the Comanche language. The students learn not only the language, but the culture. In the culture emphasis, students focus on the art expression of the Native Americans. This might include bead work, leather work, and media art work. They learn the Native Americans express their feelings through their art work; whether happiness, grief, or appreciation of life. Included in the cultural studies are the dress styles and protocol. Mrs. Rita Gaddy, the Kiowa teacher, said, "We teach the students manners for different situations, from a formal meal to a ceremony. The Comanche teacher, Mr. Johnathon Poahway, and I teach the students "when to be Indian and when to be white." It is so important for them to not forget their heritage, so we teach the languages by phrases and phonics. The students learn respect for the Comanche and Kiowa elders and they are expected to listen and learn from the elders. We do not have a textbook, but we do cover the PASS objectives, and we are fully accredited by the State Department of Education of Oklahoma." It took 10 years of gathering materials and writing booklets to build these studies for the students. Mr. Poahway has a Comanche dictionary that took the Comanche elders 5 years to put together. Many graduates have come back and told Mrs. Gaddy and Mr. Poahway how much they appreciate all they taught them.

Mrs. Gaddy is a state certified teacher and has been to many workshops throughout the U. S. that were taught by linguists, so she could learn how to effectively teach the language. Students can earn a foreign language credit for the entire Language department studies offered at Elgin High School.



