

Venezuela: YANOMAMI COUNTING



Courtesy Ed Andrade Jr (taken in Brazil)

- the **Yanomami** live in the Amazon rainforest in the region along **the border between Venezuela and Brazil**
- **The Yanomami only have three numbers:** 1 = **moni**, 2 = **polakae** and many = **jar(e)h(e)**

– They use their **fingers and hands** for counting: one finger = **imi**, all fingers on a hand = **imik**

COUNTING THE YANOMAMI WAY IN CLASS

1= **moni imi** (literally: pointer finger)

2 = **polakae imi** (two fingers)

3 = **polakae ky k ai moni** (two fingers and one finger) 4 =
polakae ky k ai polakae ky k (two fingers and two

fingers)

5 = **moni imik** (all the fingers on one hand)

6 = **moni imik ai moni imi** (all the fingers on one hand and
another)

7 = **moni imik ai polakae ky k** (all the fingers on one hand
and two on another)

8 = **moni imik ai polakae ky k ai moni imi** (all the fingers
on one hand and two and another finger)

9 = **moni imik ai moni imik xahomai moni imi** (all the
fingers on one hand and all the fingers hiding the thumb
on the other hand)

10 = **polakae imik** (two hands)

Venezuela: YANOMAMI COUNTING for teachers



Introducing Yanomami counting

The Yanomami live in the Amazon rainforest in the region along the border between Venezuela and Brazil. Despite a number controversial visits from anthropologists, most Yanomami still live in almost complete isolation from modern society. The Yanomami only have three numbers – 1 = moni, 2 = polakae and many = jar(e)h(e) – so to count beyond two they have to get creative. To help, they use their fingers and hands for counting: one finger = imi, all fingers on a hand = imik.

How to teach Yanomami counting in class:

Step 1:

Make sure you have printouts with the Yanomami numbers ready (included in this file). You can teach this lesson without the printed pages but having them on hand will really help.

Step 2:

Introduce your students to the Yanomami and to their system of counting.

Step 3:

Call up a student who will help you demonstrate the fingers and hands as you count from number to number. Go through each number one at a time, with the student showing the numbers.

Step 4:

Have all your students count with you from 1-10, using their hands and the Yanomami words if they can – they'll trip over them while counting, as will you, and that's fine –

Follow-up for classrooms:

Introduce your students to the concept that there are different systems of counting – not just different words for numbers, but entirely different approaches to the concept of numbers.

Project idea:

Break your class into small groups and task each with coming up with an entirely new way of counting. The more creative the better! Have every group share its invention.

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one finger)

4 = **polakae ky k ai polakae ky k** (two

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5 = **moni imik** (all the fingers on one

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6 = **moni imik ai moni imi** (all the fingers

on one hand and another)

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fingers on one hand and two on

another)

8 = **moni imik ai polakae ky k ai moni imi**

(all the fingers on one hand and two and another finger)

9 = **moni imik ai moni imik xahomai moni**

imi (all the fingers on one hand and all the fingers
hiding the thumb on the other hand)

10 = **polakae imik** (two hands)