



## **Social Studies Exemplary Text Student Handout**

A medieval fisherman is said to have hauled up a three-foot-long cod, which was common enough at the time. And the fact that the cod could talk was not especially surprising. But what was astonishing was that it spoke an unknown language. It spoke Basque.

This Basque folktale shows not only the Basque attachment to their orphan language, indecipherable to the rest of the world, but also their tie to the Atlantic cod, *Gadus morhua*, a fish that has never been found in Basque or even Spanish waters.

The Basques are enigmatic. They have lived in what is now the northwest corner of Spain and a nick of the French southwest for longer than history records, and not only is the origin of their language unknown, but also the origin of the people themselves remains a mystery also. According to one theory, these rosy-cheeked, dark-haired, long-nosed people were the original Iberians, driven by invaders to this mountainous corner between the Pyrenees, the Cantabrian Sierra, and the Bay of Biscay. Or they may be indigenous to this area.

They graze sheep on impossibly steep, green slopes of mountains that are thrilling in their rare, rugged beauty. They sing their own songs and write their own literature in their own language, Euskera. Possibly Europe's oldest living language, Euskera is one of only four European languages—along with Estonian, Finnish, and Hungarian—not in the Indo-European family. They also have their own sports, most notably jai alai, and even their own hat, the Basque beret, which is bigger than any other beret

Kurlansky, M. (1997). "The Race to Codlandia" *Cod: A Biography of the Fish That Changed the World*. New York: Walker.

This is an example of exemplary text found in *Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects: Appendix B Text Exemplars and Sample Performance Tasks*. Retrieved from [http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix\\_B.pdf](http://www.corestandards.org/assets/Appendix_B.pdf)

## Social Studies Exemplary Text Teacher Resource

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**EFL 5**  
**Word Count 259**

*Teacher introduces the text with minimal commentary and students read it independently. Teacher then reads passage aloud. Give a brief definition to words students would likely not be able to define from context (underlined in text). Teacher guides the students through a series of text-dependent questions. Complete the performance task as a cumulative evaluation of the close-reading.*

### Text-Dependent Questions

1. What was astonishing about the talking cod, besides the fact that it could talk?
2. What is the scientific name of the Atlantic cod mentioned in the text?
3. What makes the Basques "enigmatic?"
4. What are a few of the geographic locations mentioned in the text?
5. What does the text say is possibly Europe's oldest living language?
6. Are the origins of the Basques well documented or just theories? What examples in the text support your answer?

### Performance Tasks for Informational Texts

Why do you think so little is known about the Basque people? Use evidence from the text to support your claims. [RI.9-10.1]

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