

English Language Learning Classes Thrive at San Juan Island Library

by Anthony Morris, Assistant Director

The latest semester of English Language Learning (ELL) classes at the San Juan Island Library was a resounding success, drawing record attendance and filling up the library this past winter and spring. These free community sessions have proven to be a vital resource for non-English speakers looking to strengthen their English skills in a welcoming, supportive environment.

Led by Gabriel Méndez, the Library Outreach Coordinator, a team of dedicated volunteers teach classes focused on practical language use, helping students improve their speaking, listening, reading, and writing abilities. More than just language instruction, the program fosters a sense of belonging among participants, many of whom are new to the island or the United States.



Many students, such as Maria, a level 1 student, are excited by what they learn, and hungry for more: "I can read some English. I can go to the store. I can go to the hospital. I can speak a little. I want more reading. I want more speaking. I want more writing." As Emma, another introductory student says, "My dream is that I can speak English."

The impact of the program extends beyond the classroom. Students gain confidence and independence as they develop stronger communication skills, which help them in everyday life, from navigating local services to building relationships in the community. Many students have expressed growing confidence in being able to navigate vital community tasks such as shopping or going to a doctor. Volunteers, in turn, say they are deeply rewarded by the connections they make and the shared spirit of learning and cultural exchange.

The consistent turnout and enthusiasm for the program highlights its importance to the San Juan Island community. As the classes flourish, they stand as a testament to the power of

education, inclusion, and volunteerism. The latest semester ended in late May 2025, with another semester planned for later in the year.

