Integrating First Nations and Metis Content and Perspective

Grade Pre-Kindergarten

Plants:

Flowers, Grasses, Vegetables, Trees

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**Incorporating Medicine Wheel Philosophy**
Things in a First Nations immediate environment were respected and used with gratitude as needed for survival. Plants symbolize transformation. They are relied on for medicines, shelter, and food, and also recognized for their beauty.

**Spiritual**
The students will become aware of the plants in their environment and their many uses.

**Physical**
Students will observe the natural world and learn about different plants growth and life.

**Emotional**
Students will be able to analyze the different plant types: flowers, grasses, vegetables, trees.

**Mental**
Students will learn to respect and take care of plants in their environments.
Engaging Activities

- Invite a caregiver in to make jam, juice, or pie from the berries that are in season (Appendix 4).
- Go on a nature walk and have students choose plants. Identify what the plant is and how it could be used (Appendix 7).
- General activities – The following are a few ideas and invitations that you may set out for students. With books and pictures to guide them, they will create wonderful things. These thoughts are not meant to be teacher led and could take an unexpected turn at any time!
  - Gardens – soil, seeds, watering cans, shovels, rakes
  - Flowers – soil, seeds/seedlings/bulbs, water, pots, ziplock bags
  - Greenhouse dramatic play – pots, fake plants, water cans, cash register, gardening gloves, kneeling pad, flower foam
  - Tree things – balance scale, pine cones, acorns, nuts, etc

Places to check out

http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0006333

http://www.forestshop.com/MEDICINE.html about medicinal plants
**Outcome**

A great resource for these topics in *Keepers of Life* (Bruchac M. J., 2007). This book is a great reference about discovering plants through native stories and Earth activities.

**Flowers**

Flowers represent a relationship with the sun. They can be used for medicinal purposes. Flowers are very important because they are needed in order for plants to produce fruits. The Metis people through their Roman Catholic Missions contact developed beautiful floral designs that they used for beadwork and embroidery. These designs became one of the distinctive symbols of the Metis people.

- Flowers have some defining characteristics. The following legends tell how those characteristics came to be.
  - How the Wild Rose Got its Thorns (Knight, 1978)
- Flowers are beautiful things that grow on mother earth. The following legends and stories are about the creation of flowers.
  - The Legend of Indian Paintbrush (dePaola, 1988)
  - The Legend of the Lady Slipper (Preus, 1999)
- Flowers can be used for pure enjoyment.
  - Daffodils are For You (Adams L., 2003)
  - Picking Flowers (Adams L., 2004)
- Métis people are well known for their flower beadwork patterns. The following books teaches about these designs.
  - The Flower Beadwork People (Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2009)

**Grasses**

Grasses are important because they feed most animals. Some grasses are also very important for medicinal uses and ceremonies.

- Sweet Grass is very important to First Nations peoples. It is used for many ceremonies and cleansing purposes. The following books deal with the uses of sweet grass.
  - Grandmother, what is smudging? (Samatte, 2009)
  - The Big Storm (Pelletier, 1992)
  - Empowering the Learner 2 (Hawker, 2005)
  - Cultural Teachings: first Nations Protocols and Methodologies (Saskatchewan Indian Cultural Centre, 2009)
- Grains are an important staple to the First Nations diet.
  - I Can’t Have Bannock but the Beaver has a Dam (Wheeler, 1984)
  - The Best Bread (Adams L., 2003)
  - Bannock and Tea (Trembach, 1992)
  - Big Books for First Nations “B is for Bannock” (Trembach, 1995)
- Grasses are important to our ecosystem.
  - The Bulrush Helps the Pond (Carriere, 2002)
Vegetables
Traditionally women planted and took care of the crops and gathered other plants, berries and nuts. All plant life was treated with respect and gratitude when taken from Mother Earth (Appendix 3).

- Farming was an important part of Aboriginal culture. The following legends deal with how the farming was done and the importance of it in their lives
  - Corn is Maize (Aliki, 1976)
- Eating healthy foods is very important in maintaining a healthy body. The following stories are about eating proper nutritious foods.
  - Eat, Run, and Live Healthy (Olson, 2005)
  - Native North American (Smithyman, 2006)
- Food is fuel for our bodies. The following stories deal with hunger and food.
  - Nanabosho and the Cranberries (McLellan, 1998)
  - Grandmother, what is a feast? (Samatte, 2009)
  - Picking Blackberries (Adams L., 2004)
- The following legends show the creation of different fruits and vegetables.
  - The First Strawberries (Bruchac, 1993)

Trees
Trees represent the past (roots), present (trunk), future (branches), and goals (fruit/flowers). They also represent old age and wisdom. They are the medicine people of the plant kingdom. (Thunderbird, 1991)

- The book The Sacred Tree (Goodall, 1984) represents the tree as a symbol of protection, and nourishment we need to live and grow. Appendix 6 is an excerpt from the book that explains the trees symbolic meanings.
- Trees are very useful for shelter, transportation, fires, food, games, medicine, and art. The following legends deal with the uses of trees. (Appendix 2)
  - The Cedar (Gujujaaw, 1984)
  - The Giving Tree (Dorion, 2009)
  - Nokum is my Teacher (Bouchard, 2006)
  - Climbing the Apple Tree (Adams L., 2009)
  - The Big Tree and The Little Tree (Tappage, 1986)
  - In the Forest (Adams L., 2003)
  - A Native American Thought of It (McDonald, 2008)
- Trees provide much needed food and shelter for animals as well.
  - The Beavers’ Big House (Whitford, 2004)
  - It’s Moving Day! (Hickman, 2008)
- Trees have many defining characteristics. The following legends deal with how trees received their stripes. Birch Bark was and still is commonly used for constructing and building different structures but also used within the arts (Appendix 5)
  - How the Birch Tree Got It’s Stripes (Ahenakew, 1988)
• Trees can also be used for pleasure. The following stories show how trees can be used for pleasure.
  o **Tree Fort Adventures** (Adams, 2004)
  o **The Tree Fort** (Adams L., 2003)
  o **Stuck in the Tree** (Adams L., 2009)
• The following stories tell about how even small trees and people have great potential
  o **Granny Shoongish and the Giant Oak Tree** (Ducharme, 2005)
  o **The Crying Christmas Tree** (Crow, 1989)
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4. Voices of Our Elders: Berry Picking
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6. The Sacred Tree
7. Examples of Traditional Uses for Common Plants in Local Area
Appendix 1

**Common Foods in different tribes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tribe</th>
<th>Main Vegetables</th>
<th>Main Meats</th>
<th>Region of residence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Iroquois</td>
<td>Corn, beans, squash</td>
<td>Venison</td>
<td>North East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denesuline</td>
<td>Wild berries</td>
<td>Caribou</td>
<td>Subarctic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cree</td>
<td>Berries, turnips</td>
<td>Bison, Deer, Fish</td>
<td>Great Plains</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2  Trees and Their Uses

Cree Uses

Birchbark

- Teepees and wigwams constructed from small birchbark saplings.
- Dishes and utensils such as spoons
- Bows and arrows
- Frame for Snowshoes
- Frame of drum
- Sculptures and carvings
- Carving knife handles
- Masks used usually for ceremonies
- Birchbark biting
- baskets
- Bark use to make containers for dried berries, grains, and meat.
- Canoes

Metis Uses

Pine Trees

- Logs were dried and peeled to use for their log houses
- Split logs where used for wood shingles or sod
- Narrow logs cut into poles and used for drying hides and storing food
- Bed frames
- Floor
- Furniture such as tables, chairs
- Birch bark containers
- Travois
- York Boats
- Red River Carts
Appendix 3  

Protocol for Storytelling and Oral History

The Drum and Storytelling

The drum possesses the sound of Mother Earth and all living things. It is believed by some that certain stories that are shared with the drum must not be told during the summer months out of respect for the animals and plants.

Drums are often used to tell stories, many elders that use a drum with first light some sweetgrass and with the smoke they will smudge the four directions, the drum and himself. Smudging will enable to storyteller to give good, honourable stories. Legends and stories are traditionally told in the cool months as Mother Earth prepares for the long sleep of rest and rejuvenation and as the animals prepare for hibernation and migration.

Grandfather Drum (Plain, 1994)

Reading and Re-Telling Legends

In most Native communities, stories were told during a special event or time of the year. For examples, the Ojibways of the eastern woodlands would only share stories during the winter. This was because they needed to fill the long winter nights, and because they had respect for the spirits that were with them during the sharing of these stories.

Empowering the Spirit II, pg. 15, (Elliot, 2004)

Inviting Elders to Share Stories

Present tobacco to an elder and ask them to share a story with the learners about a specific event that happened long ago. It is important that your request is specific and detailed. Offer tobacco on the table, do not insist on the elder taking the tobacco without first stating your request. It is important that the elder have time to reflect before accepting the tobacco. The gesture of taking the tobacco signifies the acceptance of the request and the willingness to share his or hers stories. Request permission to videotape or record the story for future reference.

Additional Resource/Websites to learn more about tobacco:

- [http://pcchu.peterborough.on.ca/TUP/TUP-traditional.html](http://pcchu.peterborough.on.ca/TUP/TUP-traditional.html) “traditional tobacco use” accessed on 01/13/10
- See People of the Buffalo, p. 14, by Maria Campbell, last paragraph.
- Empowering the Spirit II: The Sacred Medicine of Tobacco pg. 123 (Elliott, 2004)
Appendix 4  

Berry Picking

I still pick a lot of berries, I could pick berries all summer long. The blueberry patches were dry for the past two years now. The blueberries are smaller than they used to be and the patches are smaller too. I can the blueberries in jars. I freeze the cranberries. In the old days the berries were spread on a tarp and dried. I seen the grandmothers make bags out of leftover tent canvas. That’s where they stored the berries and, of course, dry meat which was pounded into pemmican. We ate it straight from the bag or mixed it with blueberries or cranberries. The bags were tied to the poles of a tipi. We lived in a tipi when I traveled with my grandparents. The poles were taken right from the bush. — Theresa Martell

Voice of the Elders compiled by Marlene Millar (Millar, 2006)
Appendix 5  

Birch Bark Biting

The art of birch bark biting is similar to making a paper snowflake. Artists traced a rough pattern on the back of a piece of birch bark and folded the bark into a small square or triangle. The artists then bit the piece of bark in different patterns. The pattern bitten formed an imprint on each of the sections of the folded bark. When it was opened, a geometric pattern emerged.

*Canadian Aboriginal Art and Culture: Cree, pg.25, (Banting, 2008)*

For more information go to “birch bark biting”:

http://www.canoesaskatchewan.rkc.ca/native/biting.htm (accessed on 05/02/11)

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bFJaa9ndAts (accessed on 05/02/11)

http://www.baribal.nl/educatief/spreekbeurt/birchbarkbiting_en.html (accessed on 05/02/11)
Appendix 6 The Sacred Tree

For all the people of the earth, the Creator has planted a Sacred Tree under which they may gather, and there find healings, power, wisdom and security. The roots of this tree spreads deep into the body of Mother Earth. Its branches reach upward like hands praying to Father Sky. The fruits of this tree are the good things the Creator has given to the people: teachings that show the path to love, compassion, generosity, patience, wisdom, justice, courage, respect, humility, and many other wonderful gifts.

(Phil Lane Jr, 1984)

The Sacred Tree is a symbol of protection. The shade of the tree provides protection form the sun. The tree is a source of material for homes and ceremonial lodges which provide physical and spiritual protection. The tree provides firewood which gives protection form the cold. The bark of the Sacred Tree represents protection from the outside world. The Sacred Tree provides the material from which kayaks and canoes are made. The greatest protection of the Sacred Tree is to provide a gathering place and central pole of unity for the people.

The second symbolic meaning of the Sacred Tree is the nourishment we need to live and grow. This nourishment is symbolically represented by the fruit of the tree. On one level the fruit of the Sacred Tree represents the nourishment a mother gives to her children and all the care children should receive as they are growing up.

The leaves of the Sacred Tree represent people. Eventually the leaves of the tree fall to earth and provide nourishment for the continued health, growth, and future flowering of the Sacred Tree. Symbolically, this represents the passing of the generations and the spiritual teachings they leave behind for the health and growth of those that come after them.

The third symbolic meaning of the Sacred Tree is growth. The Sacred Tree symbolizes the importance of pursuing life experiences which provide positive growth and development. In another sense the growth of the tree represents cycles of time and of life.

The roots and limbs of the Sacred Tree grow towards the four directions. This also represents growth in the spiritual qualities and teachings of the medicine wheel. The growth of these roots and limbs can also be seen as a representation of these qualities reflected in our life’s work.

(Phil Lane Jr, 1984)

For more teachings and understanding of the Sacred Tree and its teachings read: The Sacred Tree (Bopp, Bopp, Brown, & Lane Jr, 1989)
Appendix 7  Examples of Native Plants and their Uses

Native beliefs stress that it is important to maintain a balance among all things in nature. To maintain the balance, people must treat one another, plants, animals, and the land with respect. Native people show respect by offering thanks for the gifts that they receive from nature. People show thanks with prayers, songs, dances, and offerings. Respecting nature means using all parts of the plant and not wasting.

Saskatoon Berry pg. 47:

- Eaten fresh or canned, syrups, and mixed to make pemmican
- Pemmican is a mixture of bison, deer, or moose meat and fat mixed with the berries
- Used during long voyages as it is rich in Vitamin C and iron
- Would be dried to keep and last through winter months
- Made into formulas for upset stomach
- Boiled berries used to cure earaches

Medicines to Help Us, Traditional Metis Plant Use (Christi Belcourt, 2007)

Stinging Nettle pg. 51:

- Whipping the plant onto achy joints, treatment for arthritis
- Tea made from roots used for stomach aches and related problems
- Tea purifies the blood
- Used to make thread and twine fishnets, blankets and linen.
- As a food steamed with butter; good source of protein, iron, calcium, potassium, magnesium, complex B Vitamins, Vitamin A and C and dietary fibre

Medicines to Help Us, Traditional Metis Plant Use (Christi Belcourt, 2007)

Strawberry pg. 53:

- Food
- Used in ceremonies and feasts
- Leaf and root tea used to purify the blood and to treat diarrhea, kidney and bladder problems
- Used to prevent night sweats

Medicines to Help Us, Traditional Metis Plant Use (Christi Belcourt, 2007)

Wild Rose (rose hips) pg. 61:

- Source of Vitamin C, more than oranges also high in Vitamin A and K and many B Vitamins
- Metis used both the rose and its petals to make jellies and syrups

Medicines to Help Us, Traditional Metis Plant Use (Christi Belcourt, 2007)
Plantain pg.41:

- Used for kidney and bladder troubles
- Used for healing sores
- Seeds and stems used to treat diarrhoea in children
- Crushed leaves used to treat insect bites, burns, and cuts
- Crushed leaves used to treat skin that came into contact with stinging nettle and poison ivy

Medicines to Help Us Traditional Metis Plant Use (Christi Belcourt, 2007)

Dandelions – leaf, flower, root are used

- Dandelion root helps decrease high blood pressure
- Dandelion leaf tea helps clean to kidneys
- Rich in calcium, potassium and iron

Wild Medicines of the Prairies (Howarth & Keane, 2005)

Jack Pine

- inner bark edible and good tasting, usually eaten the spring or early spring as the trees thawed
- burn dry open cones or rotten wood when tanning moose hides

A Guide to 20 Plants and their Cree Uses (Leighton, 1983)

Horsetail

- Parts of the fern-like plant Horsetail has been and is still commonly used today as a tea for kidney and bladder ailments and to ease constipation.
- ashes of the sterile plant can be used on the sores of the mouth
- Cree women used the tea to correct menstrual irregularities

Native Medicines (Keane, 1993)

Uses of Plant Parts

- Stem - building/crafts ex) willow baskets,
- Roots – medicinal uses often to treat colds, fevers, diarrhea, and other stomach problems
- Leaves – tobacco for ceremonies and offerings,
- Petals for tea to help heart troubles
- Flower/seeds – eat used to help stop bleeding and bowel
References


Wheeler, B. (1984). *I Can't have Bannock but the beaver has Dam.* Portage and Main Pr.