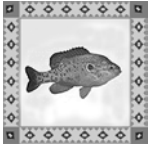


## Standard One – Lesson Three

**Achievement Goal:**  
Prepare a list of “gifts from nature” and  
present a photo/drawing essay about  
these gifts.

**Time:**  
Two class periods

**Core:**  
Cultural Arts, Science



**Grades:** 3<sup>rd</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup>



### Background:

In this lesson, students will be asked to think about the useful items or materials nature provides to people and animals.

In the past, American Indians were very innovative in how they survived by relying on their environment. They observed nature very closely and they became extremely knowledgeable about wildlife, plants and natural resources. They knew the life cycle patterns and characteristics of plants and animals. They knew where to find food and medicinal plants. They knew the correct seasonal times to harvest plants for medicinal use and for food. They harvested plants where they grew in abundance and harvested the plants only after the seeds were scattered into the wind. To ensure the survival of a species they took from nature only what was needed for survival. This knowledge and care ensured the welfare of the tribe and the continuation of the plants animals they relied upon.

They relied so much on the environment for their survival that they considered the items, materials and foods they reaped from the environment as gifts from nature. In turn, many American Indian groups were reverent towards nature, respected the forces that produced the gifts they used, and gave thanks for these gifts in the forms of celebrations, such as the Green Corn Festival celebrated by Creek, Cherokee, Seminole, Yuchi, Iroquois and others.

The following passage illustrates this relationship well. It is written by a member of an Eskimo tribe in Alaska called the Yupiaq (the full citation for this passage is found in the resource section at the end of this lesson.)

Products of nature extended to [the Yupiaq] ideas for developing their technology. The spider web provided the idea for a net; the snowshoe hare's feet and tracks, their snowshoes; the mouse's chamber lined with grass, their houses; the moon's phases, their calendar; the Big Dipper and the North Star, their timepiece at night; wind directions, their indicators of weather; flint and slate, their cutlery.

Certain plants and herbs gave them their healing powers and they discovered that certain living things were adapted to live in certain areas, while others were able to make physical adjustments through changes in coloration, forming a heavier coat for winter, hibernation, estivation, all under trying conditions. They noticed change across time and conditions,

and they recognized that they too would have to change with time and conditions to survive.

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### **Preparation:**

- Contact a member of the tribe's Natural Resources office or a biologist/ecologist familiar with plants and wildlife in the area. Ask them to come to the class to conduct a nature walk and speak to the children about some "gifts of nature" that come from the local environment.
- Review and prepare for the lesson plan listed in resource (2) that enables children to create natural dyes from plants.

### **Student Activity:**

- Read the Yupiaq passage above to the students. Conduct a class discussion on the meaning of Angayuqaq's writings and what makes something a gift from nature.
  - Have students create a list of indigenous gifts of nature from their own region of the country. Remind students that these gifts can include food, medicinal plants, sources of water, materials for art work and adornment, etc.
  - Recruit a person from a tribal natural resource office or a plant and wildlife biologist to guide the students on a nature walk at a nearby location.
  - Have students bring a note pad to write down what the guide identifies as an indigenous gift of nature. Look for birds, insects, types of trees and plants, seeds and water sources. Take photographs or make drawings of these gifts.
  - Return to the classroom and conduct a class discussion about the students' observations and drawings and why each item presented during the walk is a gift of nature. Make a list of these gifts on the board.
  - Make a display of the photographs or drawings from the field trip. Identify each of nature's gifts.
  - Assign students the task of writing a short essay about one of their favorite gifts.
  - If dye plants were collected during the nature walk, show the children how to create dyes from those plants.
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### **Evaluation:**

- Evaluate students in their overall participation in discussions, activities, and nature walk.
  - Assess their understanding of the teachings of the Yupiaq.
  - Assess their understanding of what makes something a gift from nature as expressed in their essay
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### **Resources:**

1. "Alaskan Native Education: History and Adaptation in the New Millennium", Alaskan Native Knowledge Network, <http://www.ankn.uaf.edu/YER.html>
2. "Plant Dyes", The Educator's Reference Desk, <http://www.eduref.org/cgi-bin/printlessons.cgi/Virtual/Lessons/Interdisciplinary/INT0056.html>