

LESSON SIX

PLANTS



Objective/Goal:

Children will develop a relationship with plants and green growing beings of Mother Earth. Create awareness within the children that plants are living, growing things/beings. Assist children to be responsible for caring for a plant.

Setting the stage for learning

Play soothing music as the children are gathered for Circle Time. Tell a regional tribal plant story. Use classroom areas to extend play by adding materials such as plants, dirt, seeds, gardening tools, pots for planting.

Storytelling

A plant story from the Great Lakes region will be used as an example for this lesson. Source: Bruchac, Joseph & Caduto, Michael. "Waynabozho and the Wild Rice" Native Plant Stories. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1995. Used with permission from Keepers of the Earth by Michael J. Caduto. (c) 1988. Fulcrum Publishing, Inc., Golden, Colorado. All rights reserved.

"Waynabozho and the Wild Rice"

One day, when Waynabozho was out walking around, his grandmother called him to her lodge. "Grandson," Nokomis said, "it is time for you to go to some distant place in the forest and fast. Then a dream may come to you to help the people yet to come."

But Waynabozho did not like the idea of walking so far.

"I will go in my canoe," he said. Then he began paddling along from lake to lake.

Waynabozho had not gone far when he saw tall grasses growing from the shallow waters at the edge of the fourth lake he entered. He liked the way that tall grass looked. There were many seeds on that tall grass, and he took a big piece of birch bark and made it into a basket. Then he used a stick to knock off many of those seeds into his bark container. When he was done, he took the seeds back to his grandmother.

"Look what I have found," he said. "The tall grass that held these seeds is very fine to look at. Let us plant these seeds along the shores of our own lake so we will have those grasses to look at from our lodge."

Nokomis did as Waynabozho asked. She helped him scatter the seeds along the edge of the lake. "Now Grandson," she said, "you must continue on your way. You must go out and fast and hope that something good will be given to you."

So Waynabozho set out again in his canoe. He went from lake to lake and then he just leaned back in his canoe and let the boat drift. "I can wait here for a dream," he said. "Why should I trouble myself to walk?" He went without food all the rest of that day.

"This fasting is easy," Waynabozho said. "I will surely have a strong dream come to me soon." But no dream came and he fell asleep as he drifted along in his canoe.

The next day came and when Waynabozho woke up he was unable to think of anything but food. He felt hungrier than he had ever felt before. As the canoe drifted along he saw some plants growing along the shore.

"Boozhoo, Waynabozho," the plants said. "Helloo! Are you hungry? You can dig one of us up and eat the root. Then you will no longer be hungry at all."

“Ah,” Waynabozho said, paddling his canoe quickly to the shore. “This must be the vision I was waiting for. I have fasted a very long time. I must do as these plants tell me to do.” Then he began to dig up the plants. He did not just dig up one; he dug them all and ate their roots.

But when Waynabozho was finished eating, he began to feel very sick. Just as the plants have said, he was no longer hungry at all. He became so sick that he could not move. He lay there for three days and three nights. Finally, on the fourth day, he found enough strength to drag himself back to his canoe and paddle weakly toward home.

But when he was within sight of their lodge, he saw new plants growing from the shallow water of the lake.

“Waynabozho,” these new plants said, “sometimes we can be eaten.”

Waynabozho picked some of the seed heads of those plants. He sprinkled some of the seeds back onto the water before he ate. Those plants tasted good and he no longer felt weak and sick after eating them.

“What are you called? He said.

“We are manomin,” said the wild rice plants. “You are the one who planted us here. Do you not remember?”

Then Waynabozho collected many of the seed heads of the wild rice, leaning the plants over and scraping them gently with a stick as he had done before. He made sure to let some of the seeds go into the water as he did this. That is how wild rice is gathered to this day by the Anishinaabe. And as Waynabozho paddled home he knew that he would have much to tell his grandmother. He had succeeded in his quest. He had found something good for the people yet to come.

"The Bitterroot"

It was the time just after winter in the valley in the mountains. There was no food and the people were starving. The fish had not yet returned to the streams and the game animals had moved far away into the mountains. The men had gone out to seek game and they had been gone a long time. It was not yet time for berries to ripen, and the women had gathered what plants they could find that could be eaten, but the ones that were left from the winter were tough and stringy.

In one of the lodges, an old woman was grieving because there was no food for her grandchildren. She could not longer bear to look at their thin, sad faces and she went out before sunrise, to sing her death song beside the little stream which ran through the valley.

"I am old," she sang, "but my grandchildren are young. It is a hard time that has come, when children must die with their grandmothers."

As she knelt by the stream, singing and weeping, the Sun came over the mountains. It heard her death song and it spoke to that old woman's spirit helper.

"My daughter is crying for her children who are starving," Sun said. "Go now and help her and her people. Give them food."

Then the spirit helper took the form of a redbird and flew down into the valley. It perched on a limb above the old woman's head and began to sing. When she lifted her eyes to look at it, the bird spoke to her.

"My friend," the redbird said, "your tears have gone into Earth. They have formed a new plant there, one which will help you and your people to live. See it come now from Earth, its leaves close to the ground. When its blossoms form, they will have the red color of my wings and the white of your hair."

The old woman looked and it was as the bird said. All around her, in the moist soil, the leaves of the new plant had lifted from Earth. As the sun touched it, a red blossom began to open.

"How can we use this plant?" said the old woman.

"You will dig this plant up by the roots with a digging stick," the redbird said. "Its taste will be bitter, like your tears, but it will be a food to help the people live. Each year it will always come at this time when no other food can be found."

And so it has been to this day. That stream where the old woman wept is called Little Bitterroot after that plant, which still comes each year after the snows have left the land. Its flowers, which come only when touched by the sun, are as red as the wings of a red spirit bird and as silver as the hair of an old woman. And its taste is still bitter as the tears of that old woman whose death song turned into a song of survival.

Story: "The Bitterroot" page 127

Source: Bruchac, Joseph & Caduto, Michael. "The Bitterroot" Keepers of Life: Discovering Plants Through Native American Stories and Earth Activities for Children. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 1994. Used with permission from Keepers of the Earth by Michael J. Caduto. (c) 1988. Fulcrum Publishing, Inc., Golden, Colorado. All rights reserved.

Lesson Six: Plants

Plans and Procedures

Circle Time Questions

- Where did Waynabozho get his seeds from?
- Why did Waynabozho get sick?
- What kinds of things grow from seeds?
- What is a plant root?
- What do plants need to live and grow?
- What kinds of plants do you use for food?
- Where do plants grow?
- What happens to plants in the winter time?
- Can all plants be eaten?
- What color are most plants?



Mother Earth and Creation Mural

Using green construction paper, children will make a collage of plants (i.e. from pumpkin, corn, beans, squash, and other seeds) to add to the curriculum mural. Draw outlines of plants on the paper and let students glue the beans onto the outlined shapes. Different types of plants could include: corn, flowers, vegetables, trees, etc. When the children are done, line the collages around the bottom of the mural to represent the plant nations. If children have planted seed, place the plants on a table along the mural to represent Mother Earth. Ask a group of children to paint a ball or balloon yellow to represent the sun, to give light to the plants. Explain the importance of having sunlight for plants to grow and explain the importance of giving thanks to the sun for the life it provides.

Nature Walk

Take students to the park or an outdoor area with an abundance of plant life. Let them explore the different types of plants they see. The students could also draw these different plants as part of the mural.

The children could also do the following planting activity:

Materials: Lima beans or other seeds, paper towels, clear glass or jar, small clay planters. Children will plant their own seeds and care for them as they grow. The plants may be specific to the regional culture. Line the inside of the jar with a paper towel. Stuff in more paper towels to hold the paper towel around the inside of the glass. Wet the towels. Have children listen to, look at, and feel the beans. Place lima beans (which have been soaked in water overnight) between the towels and the glass so they are easy to see through the outside of the glass. Keep towels moist. In a few days, you should be able to see the

roots growing. Watch for the first roots (primary roots) and the branchlings (secondary roots). Help children transplant sprouted seeds into small clay planters. They will be responsible for caring for their plant throughout the school year. At the end of the school year the plant(s) can be taken home to be placed in the family garden. Encourage the students to enter whatever is grown in their gardens into the local fair garden contest. If space is available a class garden can be a year-long project with unlimited learning potential. Sacred plants such as sage and corn can be planted to provide children with the experience of caring for the plants and the patience of watching them grow. Children can take some plants home to care for and the family can transplant them into the family garden.

Music and Movement

After a brief discussion of how seeds grow into plants ask the children to imitate the process. Play soft soothing music in the background and show the children how to begin as a seed on the floor and slowly begin to grow to full size. Use descriptive words that will help the children perform their seed dance.

Vocabulary

Green	-	tozi	Forest	-	cannahmela k'el
Plant	-	wahpe	Six	-	sakpe
Sun	-	anpetu wi	Grow	-	icaga

NOTES FOR LESSON PLANNING: