

Native Plants

Lesson Plan

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First Peoples Principles of Learning:

- Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the family, the community, the land, the spirits and the ancestors
- Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge
- Learning is embedded in memory, history and time

Grade 3 Content:

- Biodiversity in the local environment
- Knowledge of local First Peoples of ecosystems

Grade 3 Curricular Competencies:

- Identify questions about familiar objects and events that can be investigated scientifically
- Make predictions based on prior knowledge
- Identify First Peoples perspectives and knowledge as sources of information

Estimated Time Required: 60 minutes

Overview

This lesson will give students insight into the biodiversity of plants on the south coast of British Columbia. Students will learn of the different Indigenous uses of plants native to the south coast of British Columbia.

Activity:

1. Ask the class the following discussion questions:
 - a. What plants do you know that we can eat?
 - i. Strawberries, blackberries, apples, etc.
 - b. What plants or flowers do you think grow in our local environment?
 - c. Did you know that not all plants in your local environment today have always grown here? Plants that have always grown in the local environment are called *native plants*.
2. Ask students the following discussion question:

- a. What ways do you think Indigenous peoples use plants?
 - i. Food, medicine, clothing, ceremonies, art, transportation, etc.
3. Show students the video “Identifying Red Cedar” and “Identifying Yellow Cedar”, found in the *watch* section of the *Native Plants of BC’s South Coast* pathway.
4. Show students the images “Western Red Cedar” and “Yellow Cedar”, found in the *look* section of the *Native Plants of BC’s South Coast* pathway.
 - a. Tell students that cedar is one of the greatest resources to Indigenous peoples along the North Pacific Coast. Ask them: What do you think Indigenous peoples used cedar for in the past and present?
 - i. Indigenous people continue to use cedar trees for transportation by making canoes. They made clothing such as skirts, capes and hats from cedar. They beat cedar bark strips with a rock to make them soft enough to use for baby diapers. Indigenous peoples also wove cedar baskets to carry food and other supplies. If they used a coil weave, these baskets could be watertight, meaning they could be used to carry water over long distances. Cedar is also used in special ceremonies and medicines.
 - ii. If possible, bring some cedar examples in to show the class, for example, a woven basket or cedar strips.
 - iii. You may wish to tell your students the Coast Salish legend of the origin of the Red Cedar tree:

A long time ago there was a man who did all he could to help the other people in his community. He would give the people clothes and food if they were in need. The great Creator saw all the good this man was doing and promised that when the man died, a red cedar tree would grow from where he was buried. This tree would continue to help the people, just as the generous man did.
5. Show students the image “Salmonberry” from the *look* section of the *Native Plants of BC’s South Coast* pathway. What do you think Indigenous peoples use salmonberries for? How do you think they taste?
 - a. “Salmonberries are one of the earliest ripening berries, usually in May and June. Coastal First Peoples picked both the gold and ruby forms, and usually ate them fresh because they are too watery to dry in cakes like other berries. Families or individuals in some groups “owned” Salmonberry patches, as they did other types of plant foods. A Nuu-chah-nulth owner claimed the right to the first and second picking of his berries, sending a party of women from his house to harvest them. After many boxes had been collected, the chief used them to give a feast. Following this event anyone could pick from his bushes.” (*Food Plants* 126–7)
6. Show students the image “Douglas Fir” from the *look* section of the *Native Plants of BC’s South Coast* pathway. How do you think Indigenous peoples used Douglas Fir trees? Do you think they used them the same way they used cedar trees?
 - a. “On Vancouver Island, and perhaps the mainland, the Salish people moulded halibut and cod hooks from fir knots, as well as those of Western Hemlock, by steaming them, placing them in a section of Bull kelp stipe overnight to give them the right curvature, then drying them and rubbing them with tallow to waterproof them.” (*Plant Technology* 96)
 - b. “... the Vancouver Island Salish and the Flathead of Montana used the rotten wood to smoke hides.” (*Plant Technology* 96)

- c. “Many groups within the range of the tree used Douglas Fir pitch to seal the joints of implements such as harpoon heads, gaff hooks and fish hooks, and for caulking canoes and water vessels.” (*Plant Technology* 97)
7. Show students the image “Thimbleberry” from the *look* section of the *Native Plants of BC’s South Coast* pathway. What do you think Indigenous peoples made with Thimbleberries?
 - a. “All coastal aboriginal groups in the province harvested and ate Thimbleberries, and also the young Thimbleberry sprouts as a green vegetable. They gathered the sprouts in early spring through early summer, and ate them raw and peeled; the sprouts are sweet and juicy.” (*Food Plants* 124)
 - b. “... they were the only type of berry dried by the Nuu-chah-nulth, other than Salal. The Nuu-chah-nulth made a special type of berry cake, laying out sticks of roasted clams in parallel fashion on a board, covering them with a layer of fresh Thimbleberries, then another layer of strung clams, and so on. Then they laid a length of plank. They sun-dried the flattened cake, then stored it for later use.” (124-5)
8. Tell students that they will be making seed packages for a plant that is native to their environment. You can use the seed package template at the end of this lesson plan.
 - a. On their packages students can include:
 - i. A drawing of the plant
 - ii. A description of where the plant grows best or where it is native to
 - iii. An explanation of how it is used by Indigenous people
 - b. You may wish to give the students the descriptions of the various plants that are located under the images in the *look* section to assist them.
 - c. If your class is located in the south coast and has access to these plants in their neighbourhood or school grounds and has permission to pick their seeds, they could gather some for their packages. Additionally, there may be nurseries that specialize in native plants located near you that you may wish to contact.
9. Here are some additional questions to ask your students:
 - a. How do you think Indigenous lives would have been different along the North Pacific Coast if they did not have cedar trees or any other of their native plants?
 - i. Would they have had a similar lifestyle?
 - ii. What resources do you think they would have used instead of cedar?
 - b. What are some modern uses of plants?
 - i. Do we use any plants for clothing? Food? Transportation? Shelter?

If you choose to use this lesson plan with your students, share their creations or findings on the Royal BC Museum’s Learning Portal by making a [playlist](#)!

Works cited:

Turner, Nancy. *Plant Technology of First Peoples in British Columbia*. Victoria: Royal BC Museum, 1998.
 Turner, Nancy. *Food Plants of First Peoples in British Columbia*. Victoria: Royal BC Museum, 1995.