Unit: Native Plant Knowledge

Activity: Native Plants & People

Developed by: Heidi Bohan
Activity time: 15-30 min. Prep time: 0 Review materials: 10 min.

Guiding Questions: Why are plants important to people? What is ethnobotany?

Brief Description of Activity: Interactive discussion about importance of plants in our modern world, introduce and/or reinforce terminology related to native plant and ethnobotany.

Materials: World map showing ecospheres; World ethnobotany materials

Teacher Provided: Drawing board, (optional)

Activity

Ask students the following and discuss:

• **Who is wearing seeds or bark today?** If you are wearing blue jeans or a T-shirt you are wearing cotton seed; or perhaps linen, which is made from the bark of flax.
  • **Show** cotton and flax fiber, cotton and linen.
  • **Who**... ate seeds for breakfast/lunch? (grains). washed their hair in herbs? ...is sitting on a tree? (even plastic seats are made from oil from ancient forests), sitting inside a tree? Travels in a car run by oil from ancient forests? Etc.
  • **What other plants have you used today?** (medicine, vitamins, lotions, cosmetics, foods of all kinds)
  • **Why aren’t we aware of this??** Discuss (i.e. who has harvested cotton seed, spun it, dyed it (from the indigo plant), woven, and sewn a pair of blue jeans??

• **What is Ethnobotany?** (Botany= study of plants, Ethno= people/culture: the study of how cultures/people use plants) Not just historically, we could do an ethnobotanical study of this classroom and we would learn about sugar cane, where coca cola comes from, etc.

• **What is an ecosphere?** Show world map and distinguish clear geographic areas. Discuss different plants, wildlife and human cultures that developed separately in this geographic areas. These are ecospheres. What ecosphere do your ancestors come from? (students can use ‘stickys’ with their name on it to label their ancestral ecosphere, if they know). Discuss different plants that might grow in these different ecospheres.

• **Show ethnobotany materials** from different ecospheres: cotton fiber and cloth, flax fiber and cloth, handmade paper, indigo dye and indigo dyed jean material, baskets, oat stalk, seed and meal.

• **Discuss further...**