

Indigenous Wisdom: Helping us Help our Environment

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“For all of us, becoming indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it.” Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*¹

Introduction/Rationale

In order to be a well-rounded person, we need to interact with the past to learn from it and use it in our own life. I have always wanted my students to be well-rounded and informed about their community and their environment. At my elementary school in New Castle we created a small butterfly garden to complement our science unit on insects a few years ago. This past year we added a chicken coop with six laying hens. My goal was to have our second graders experience the joy of caring for plants and animals, hoping they would carry this with them through life and hopefully spark an interest. Our plans, which became a little side-tracked this past year, was to enhance the garden to grow plants and shrubs that would be a benefit to the chickens and to the environment. I would like to expand on this in the coming year to research and locate native plants that would be a great benefit to our flock but also beautify our outdoor area near the second-grade classrooms. A great resource that was suggested by my seminar leader shared with me was the Native Plant Nurseries serving Delaware, which has a list of places that have native plants that are native to Delaware.²

My school, Wilmington Manor Elementary School, is located in New Castle, Delaware. It is part of the Colonial School District. This is a small school, with about 334 students in grades K-5. There is a very high population of English Language Learners (ELL). 28% of students at Wilmington Manor are classified as ELL. Many of our students are their family’s only English speaker. Many of my students’ parents cannot read my notes or information/instructions that are sent home in English, and they are unable to help their students with work that is sent home in English. Within my own classroom 18% of students are labeled Special Education. They are serviced within my classroom by me. 82% are Regular Education students that are also in my classroom, although many of these “regular” education students are reading below grade level. With such a diverse group of students my unit will include activities for all different levels of learners. Those students that work above grade level, on grade level, and below grade level all have equal opportunities to work toward proficiency in this unit.

Content Objectives

Delaware has adopted the Common Core State Standards for ELA and Math, Delaware state standards in Social Studies, and the Next Generation Science Standards. I will be addressing CCSS ELA and Writing standards for Second Grade within my unit along with Social Studies and Science standards. This unit will address the following standards:

Reading Informational Text: RI 2.10- By the end of year students need to read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 2-3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range, **Social Studies Geography Standard 3: K-3a** the students will identify types of human settlement, connections between settlements, and the types of activities found in each, **Social Studies Geography Standard 4: K-3a** the students will use the concepts of place and region to explain simple patterns of connections between and among places across the country and the world, **Social Studies History Standard 2: K-3a** the students will use artifacts and documents to gather information about the past, **Science 2-LS2-1 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics** students will plan and conduct an investigation to determine if plants need sunlight and water to grow, and finally, **Science 2-LS4-1 Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity** where students will make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.

Background Information

Taking care of our earth needs to be something that we all do. Children who learn that caring for the earth is important can then care for it in ways that actually help everyone. Traditional Ecological Knowledge, or TEK, is the evolving knowledge acquired by Indigenous and local peoples over hundreds or thousands of years through direct contact with the environment.³ This knowledge would be specific to the location includes the relationships between plants, animals, natural phenomena, landscapes and timing of events that are used for lifeways, including but not limited to hunting, fishing, trapping, agriculture, and forestry. It has been said that the knowledge of Indigenous peoples from different tribes has happened over thousands of years and they have been able to tune in to the environment unlike many non-native people.⁴ The lessons that they have learned are needed more today than at any other time in history. We can learn lessons of adaptation and survival from Indigenous people and can learn how to live in a relationship with our environment and with each other. However, it has been said that

Mother Earth has been suffering from the care the people have given her. The Indigenous tribes have learned how to live, in harmony with our environment. People must learn a sense of connection that isn't only physical but also emotional and spiritual. In the Indigenous communities, unlike the Western ideal of survival of the fittest, community is fostered through common goals and more of a sharing community.⁵ By creating this idea of community, each member of the tribe feels taken care of and protected. They live more by the idea of treating others the way they want to be treated. Everyone who cares about the earth need to explore the idea of an empathic connection with the earth so that we can take care of the land that we live on.

The Earth nurtures life, and Indigenous communities have always referred to the Earth as our “mother”. They based their connection to the Earth on the idea that if you take care of the Earth then the Earth will take care of you. Scientists have found that even “though Indigenous people make up less than 5 percent of the global population, they however inhabit 80 percent of the most biodiverse regions.”⁶ They have learned to practice land management and conservation methods which scientists believe is crucial for tackling the climate crisis and enriching biodiversity. Nature offers the greatest climate solution because plants draw down the greenhouse gases. “It is a tried-and-tested method from Mother Nature herself that, when coupled with Indigenous ways of preserving ecosystems like forests, wetlands or savannas, can greatly contribute to solving the climate crisis.”⁶ Cultures that have survived for many, many years within their bioregions have much to teach us. Many different cultures have the same perspective that the world is alive and we must create a relationship with nature that is one of participation, communion, and co-creation. The majority culture has lost its ability to consider the wisdom of others and to appreciate the insights that we can gain from Indigenous peoples’ experience and knowledge “Some unifying principles we could learn from indigenous tribes would be an understanding of the connection and interdependence of everything, a respect for the land and reverence for the sustenance it provides, and a vision that sees beyond the present needs and a desire to preserve the land for future generations.”⁷ Humans are the caregivers of the earth and it is our responsibility to serve the Earth. We must learn to work in harmony with it and learn from the Native American tribes so that there is some sort of balance.

Once we learn from the Indigenous communities of people we need to use that knowledge when working with the land. The idea of TEK or Traditional Ecological Knowledge refers to the knowledge that is evolving by the Indigenous and local peoples over hundreds or thousands of years.⁸ This knowledge would be specific to a location and includes the relationship between the plants and animals and how those relationships

influence the hunting, fishing, trapping, agriculture, and forestry of that location.⁹ In recent years TEK has been used to recognize that this knowledge can contribute to conservation and and enhancement of the knowledge to enhance wildlife and land management.

Students need to then learn about good gardening we need to learn about the importance of pollinators. We need to learn the important relationship between pollinators and flowering plants. We need to explore ways we can help the pollinators and then in turn help the land and animals that benefit from what the pollinators do for our gardens. One site that I have found is called Kids Gardening. This site is a wonderful resource to use with children to help them understand the importance of gardening. Their mission statement is “Gardening changes and improves kids’ lives, their communities, and the planet.”¹⁰ They offer inspiration and support to educators and families by offering grants, resources, and by cultivating a community that practices what they teach. “In 2019, KidsGardening reached an estimated 1,000,000 kids across the United States through our grant programs, curriculum, and activities.”¹¹ They have guides that help with creating and maintaining school gardens which in turn become outdoor classrooms. Learning from the Indigenous communities of people allows us to learn their wisdom and techniques for creating efficient, sustainable crop production and finding ways to adapt to our changing climate.

One of the techniques Indigenous people use is called the “Three Sister’s” companion gardening which incorporates planting several crops together (sometimes called mixed cropping) so that each provides benefits to the others. The Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash) is what Indigenous farmers call a classic form of mixed cropping and these three crops have been grown together for almost 5,000 years. For example, corn provides support for bean plants, and squash grows low to the ground, shaded by the other two crops and keeps weeds from affecting the other two plants. The Oneida Tribe talks about the importance of companion garden and how there are many benefits to using it. For example, the bean roots capture nitrogen from the air and release it back into the soil to help the corn. Beans also keep pests away from the other plants and the squash discourages weed growth, plus as the corn stalk grows it then provides support for the beans.¹² Creating a companion garden to provide food for our chickens and ducks at Wilmington Manor would help our students learn about the effectiveness of having a garden and animals that provide for their families and community. Being able to research the Three Sister’s and read and watch videos on this type of companion gardening would help students understand why it is important to use them in our school gardens.

Delaware ethnobotany is the study of the relationship of plants to people in the state of Delaware.¹³ This article was part of a research project done by George Hill while attending Oklahoma State University. He gathered plant usage information in the Delaware Tribe of Indians. This was originally published in 1971 but was re-edited in 2015 to correct any errors and to add more of the Lenape names for the plants. Plants and plant material played an important part in the life of the Delaware tribe of Indians. It gave them food, gave them materials to create baskets, toys, and medicines. Medicinal teas and salves were known to be used by the Indigenous people. Many of the plants were used in their religious ceremonies, too. Many of the tribes that gathered a plant for illness purposes always asked the Creator to give his/her blessing to the plant. Interestingly enough it was stated that “the plant is handled according to the location of the pain in the patient’s body. For example, if the patient is experiencing pains in the abdomen, one does not shake the root too hard but instead shakes off the dirt as gently as possible. In other words a sympathetic relationship is recognized between the handling of the herb and the handling of the patient.”¹⁴ They have many types of plants that can be divided according to their function such as medicinal plants for internal and external use, food plants, ceremonial plants, and domestic plants. Some of the plants used for external medicines included Bee Balm, Black Walnut, and Jimson Weed. Plants used for internal medicines included Wild Black Cherry, Watermelon, Corn Silk, Yarrow, and Elderberry. Some of the plants used for foods are: onion, Water Lily, Dandelion, and Milkweed (plus many more). Ceremonial plants that are used are: Eastern Red Cedar, Wild Sage, and Bee Balm. Some of the plants used for Domestic uses are: Cardinal Flower, Tobacco, Pokeberry, Hickory, and Dogwood.

In 1986 an article was written about Lenape Indian Medicines by Glenn McCartlin and Jim Rementer. This article was based on some of the Indian Medicines used by a respected member of the Lenape or Delaware Indian Tribe in Dewey, Oklahoma. They believed that each plant had its own spirit. The Indians make use of barks of trees to treat different illnesses. What is interesting is that they had plants to stop vomiting, induce vomiting, cures for dysentery, bark used for bad colds, plants to cure face breakouts, different plants for different insect or snake bites, cures for bad dreams, plants used for an aching tooth, and barks and leaves to relieve colds and stomach troubles.

Indigenous people have a wealth of information to share and learn about. “The importance of nurturing relationships in communities through sharing is at the heart of this approach, alongside the understanding that our planet is a living entity that must be cared for and preserved for future generations.”¹⁵ Learning from these cultures will only help us in the long run. They have much to teach us.

History of the Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware

The Lenape Tribe of Delaware is mostly located in Kent County, Delaware. It's "mission is to protect the cultural identity of the Lenepe people of Delaware."¹⁶ They formed a constitutional Tribal Government in March of 2010 and is member of the Confederation of Sovereign Nentego-Lenepe Tribes which is an intertribal union between the Lenape Tribe of Delaware in Cheswold, Delaware, the Nanticoke Tribe in Millsboro, Delaware, and the Nanticoke Lenni-Lenepe Indian Tribe in Bridgeton, New Jersey. The Lenape Tribe of Delaware's chief is Chief Dennis Coker and Chief Lisa Coker Hurd. They have an Elder's Council which is the core of their community and a Youth Group. They have many committees established to help forge partnerships with many different people and groups. One of the committees is currently working on a cultural mapping project that has members talking to Elders, ancestry research, video interviews, and food and fiber arts.

In 2007, The Rev. Dr. John R. Norwood wrote a book titled: "We Are Still Here! The Tribal Saga of New Jersey's Nanticoke and Lenape Indians". In this book, he talks about the history of the Nanticoke and Lenape people pertaining to the ones remaining in the three interrelated tribal communities in Southern New Jersey and Delaware. He places an emphasis on the legacy of the ancestors in each community and continues among the people today. He goes on to explain that while Americans mostly think of the mid-Western tribes in the United States, there were still the eastern tribe interaction with the European colonists that predate the formation of the US by almost 250 years! Even though the general public does not know a lot about the tribal community, it has been well documented historically.

The Lenape and Nanticoke are two distinct tribes, but the Nanticoke originated from the Lenape in ancient times. However, because of intermarriage between the tribes, it has produced many interconnected families and bloodlines. The Nanticoke Lenni-Lenape are governed by a nine member Tribal Council, and all must be enrolled members of the tribe.¹⁷ Each of the interrelated Nanticoke and Lenape communities in New Jersey and Delaware are made up of the interrelated descendants of historical tribes and have maintained a continuous community within a contiguous geographical area for numerous generations.¹⁸

The Lenape are considered the "tree trunk" of the North American Indian Nations of the Algonkian language family. These tribes are said to have migrated from the northwest and settled along the Delaware River in the Woodlands of New Jersey, southern New York, Eastern Pennsylvania, and Northern Delaware. The Lenape call themselves the "common" or "original" people.¹⁹ They were honored by their neighboring nations as peacemakers and mediators, but were feared as fierce warriors. In the early 1700's a village of Lenape and Nanticoke families settled in Kent County Delaware in the area of Cheswold. Interestingly enough the New Jersey Lenape, and the Cheswold community

are genealogically indistinguishable meaning that their descendants are equally distributed among all of the communities. In 1977, the Nanticoke Indian Association in Millsboro, Delaware was able to hold it's first powwow since 1936. The new generation of leaders in New Jersey and Delaware have become very unafraid of publicly celebrating their Indian heritage and also having a constitutionally elected governing councils with restored tribal chieftaincies.²⁰

Teaching Strategies

In this unit, I hope to develop lessons using a variety of outdoor experiences, stories, research, and possibly presenters so that students can learn about native plants in Delaware, what are their uses, and why it would be good to plant in our butterfly garden and for our chicken flock. Lessons will be created for a thirty to forty-five-minute ELA or Social studies/Science block that will last 5 to 8 days, but could easily be broken down into smaller blocks. The activities will include whole-group discussion, small group mini-lessons, and opportunities for independent practice that can be used for both formative and summative assessments. Listed below are some of the different strategies that I will use to help my students understand the information that we will be learning.

Differentiated Instruction: Rotations or Learning Stations

By differentiating the work that students have to do teachers are able to engage each student on their level and with their certain learning style. Rotations or learning stations can be designed to allow students to learn at their own pace and readiness level. Teachers are able to set up the rotation so that students will be able to complete the same task but at their own level.

Inquiry-Based Learning

This type of learning involves getting students involved in the learning process of the subject so that they in turn will gain a deeper understanding of what they are learning. This strategy teaches students to ask questions, investigate, explore, and report what they see. It leads them to a deeper understanding of the content they are learning. This strategy is a great tool in enabling students to answer complex questions and find deeper solutions to problems.

Graphic Organizers

These are simple but effective tools to help students organize their thoughts as they brainstorm a problem. They help students organize information so that it is easier for them to understand. They are great for any lesson!

Think-Pair-Share

This is one of the easiest, most frequently used, teaching strategies. Students get time to think about a topic on their own. Then, they pair up with another student to discuss the topic, during this time they compare and contrast their thoughts, Finally, the pair of students share what they discussed with the whole class.

Classroom Activities

Activity 1: Who are Pollinators and why are they important in our garden? Let's learn about them and why they are important to us.

Who are pollinators that would help us in the garden? The kids will need to know that pollinators are the friends in the garden. They include bees, hummingbirds, moths, bats, butterflies, flies, and beetles. Pollinators are animals or insects that help many flowering plants produce their seeds and help the existence of millions of plant species, and in turn, of most animal species, including humans. My young gardeners will understand the relationship between pollinators and flowering plants and also learn how to love, respect, and appreciate these hard-working animals.

The students will need to know that to make the seeds, the pollen from the stamens must be moved to the pistil. Sometimes the pollen moves from the stamens to the pistil on the same flower and sometimes it moves from the stamens on one flower to the pistils on another flower. In some cases, the pollen moves with the help of wind or water. Other times, animals like bees or butterflies help move the pollen from plant to plant. They will learn that this process is called pollination. Flowers have many features to encourage pollinators to help them move pollen. At the base of the pistil of some types of flowers, pollinators can find sweet nectar to eat. Some pollinators also eat some of the pollen too. The bright colors and eye-catching patterns on petals also help flowers attract pollinators.

We will discuss how pollinators help us in many ways. As these garden helpers gather nectar and pollen for their diet, they move pollen from one flower to another flower. This process, called pollination, helps plants make their seeds. New seeds mean new plants!

New plants mean we will continue to be surrounded by these amazing green living things that make oxygen for our air, provide food for our tables, give us shelter, and help keep our soil healthy and our water clean. We need plants and so we need pollinators!

When we clear natural spaces to build houses, businesses, and roads, we are kicking pollinators out of their homes and taking away their food sources. Pollinators need space to build nests and also lots of flowering plants to collect food from. Sometimes when we kill what we consider bad insects and pests, we can kill good ones too! Sometimes humans apply sprays called pesticides to kill insects that are damaging our favorite garden plants, crops, or lawn areas and these chemicals can also hurt the pollinators in our environment — even if they are not the insects we are trying to remove. Just like us, pollinators can get sick! Pollinators can catch viruses and be impacted by bacteria and parasites just like people. Weather is changing. When weather changes over long periods of time it is called climate change. Our planet is experiencing changes in average temperatures and rainfall. This is impacting where many of our pollinators can live and the timing of their life cycles. Pollinators are in trouble and if things don't change, plants that rely on pollinators to make their seeds are going to be in trouble too. The good news is that we can help.

Some ways that we can help our pollinators are by adding lots of different kinds of blooming plants to our yard. We need to make sure there are flowers available to be a food source for pollinators from spring through fall. Local pollinators that will visit our garden especially like plants that are native to the area. One thing we will need to do is leave areas of uncut grass and wildflower patches in our school yard. This will provide homes and food for the pollinators. We need to remember that some pollinators like certain butterflies might have specific types of plants that they need when they are in their caterpillar forms too. We will finally need to spread the word! We need to teach others about how important pollinators are in our world. Since pollinators do so much for us each day, we need to make sure to remember that we need to help them too.

Activity 2: Learning about important plants to help our pollinators, chickens, and ducks

Our goal now becomes to create a garden and coop area that incorporates as many native plants that would be beneficial to the pollinators and the animals of our flock. We will be researching some of the native plants from our area and deciding which ones to use. We will use a created chart to pick some of the plants and write/type reasons why they would be beneficial to our garden area.

Some of the native flowering plants and vegetables we will research are: common milkweed, giant sunflower, New England Aster, New York Ironweed, Great Blue Lobelia, Goldenrod, Black-eyed Susan, Anise Hyssop, Butterfly milkweed, Pawpaw, Trumpet Vine, Joe Pye Weed, Marigolds, Bee Balm, Lavendar, Catnip, Nasturtium,

Zinnia, Coneflower, pumpkins, squash, corn, beans, kale, and cabbage. We will also use a 8x10 grid sheet to plan out where we will be adding the plants we choose.

We will research and study the use of companion gardening and how that can enhance the gardens at our school. Looking into the use of the Three Sister's would be beneficial to our flock and the pollinators that will be in our garden area.

Activity 3: Enhancing our Pollinator Garden

This will be gardening days at the school. We will need a day for digging and planning where items will be planted. Then a day to actually plant the chosen items. Finally we will need days to water, weed, and take care of our new gardens.

A schedule will need to be created that has the students going out to care for the plants and the animals in our garden and coop area. The students will have a checklist to follow for each of the days of the week and will learn about how to care for each of the plants but also how to care for the animals that depend on us for their care.

Resources

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Appendix: Implementing District Standards

Delaware has adopted the Common Core State Standards for ELA and Math, Delaware state standards in Social Studies, and the Next Generation Science Standards. I will be addressing CCSS ELA and Writing standards for Second Grade within my unit along with Social Studies and Science standards.

This unit will address the following standards through different activities, readings, and videos in order to understand each of the standards that are mentioned next. **Reading Informational Text: RI 2.10** by the end of year students will read and comprehend informational texts, including history/social studies, science, and technical texts, in the grades 2-3 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range. This standard will allow for the use of informational text that give information about the subjects that we will be researching. Students will also be able to access websites that give them nonfiction information about the plants we are looking into for our garden area.

Social Studies Geography Standard 3: K-3a in this standard students will identify types of human settlement, connections between settlements, and the types of activities found in each. We will look at the Lenape and Nanticoke tribes and research how they use farming in their communities. **Social Studies Geography Standard 4: K-3a** with this standard students will use the concepts of place and region to explain simple patterns of connections between and among places across the country and the world. They will look at different regions across the United States and see what is best for our area that improves gardening and farming in Delaware. **Social Studies History Standard 2: K-3a** in this standard students will use artifacts and documents to gather information about the past which means we will research how the Lenape and Nanticoke use different TEK methods to grow and farm different plants and how this will help enhance how we care for our flock and garden.

Science 2-LS2-1 Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics this standard will have students planning and conducting an investigation to determine if plants need sunlight and water to grow. We will start with seeds started within the classroom and then move them out to the garden to see what then takes place. **Science 2-LS4-1 Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity** in this standard students will make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats. They will find out what is best for our flock and garden in our school communit

¹ Kimmerer, Robin Wall. *Braiding Sweetgrass*, 9

² Delaware Nursery & Landscape Association 2020

³ United State Fish & Wildlife Service 2011

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Bastida, Xiye. *Indigenous Wisdom Can Heal the Planet*.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ United State Fish & Wildlife Service 2011

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¹⁰ KidsGardening.org 2019

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¹³ Miller, George A. *Delaware Ethnobotany*. 1.

¹⁴ Ibid.

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¹⁶ Lenape Indian Tribe of Delaware 2020

¹⁷ Norwood, John. *We Are Still Here*. 7.

¹⁸ Ibid., 7-8.

¹⁹ Ibid., 10.

²⁰ Ibid., 18.