

Ethnobotany Adventure

Goals: Students will understand some medicinal, edible, and other uses of plants to human beings and their importance.

Time: 30 min.

Materials: EthnoBOB windbreaker and ethnobotany cards. Mock first aid kit (optional)

Procedure: This activity can be done anywhere.

1. Introduction: Explain that wild plants have many uses for humans. What are some ways people can use plants? (food, medicine, clothing, string, soap, fuel (fire), building...)
2. Preparation: Tell students you're going to do a skit in which 2 people use plants to help themselves. Choose 2 students to be Bob and his Aunt Janice. (It works best if Janice and Bob are good readers and a bit of a ham, but not out-of-control.) Give Bob and Janice their scripts (labeled at top right). Explain how to act out their scripts, emphasizing that words in black parentheses are actions (not to be read); also explain how to deal with the blanks (pause and let the instructor prompt the students at the end of that quote). Parts to speak are in red. Then give a plant card to each group of 2 students (other than Bob and Janice). Give students a few minutes to read their script or card.
3. Skit: Read and enact the story. When the story has a blank, whoever has the card of the plant that fits the blank needs to let the class know. [The teacher can prompt the class if needed.] The correct answers are in green parentheses on the narrator/teacher copy.
4. Conclusion: When the story is finished talk about the uses of the plants on the cards. Be sure to tell students that they should not simply go out and try to make medicines from plants – it could be dangerous. Emphasize NEVER to eat anything from nature unless your parents say it's OK. You might also talk about how most medicines from plants are teas, tinctures, and other things which require preparation (and time) and compare this to 'modern' medicine.

Variations & extensions:

1. Make up your own story.
2. Have students find their plant and point it out to the class at the Daniel Bush gardens. If time allows, have them talk about the other uses of their plant as well.
3. Have students find their plant in the Daniel Bush gardens or on the trail. Have the class take a "tour" of the garden, with each student telling and/or showing (like charades) the class about their plant as the class gets to it. This could take quite awhile.
4. Bring the descriptions of medicinal uses of the plants of the SMNHC along on a hike, and point out the plants as you go.
5. Have Janice find the plants needed in Bush gardens instead of her first aid kit. Remind students NOT to actually pick anything from the plants.
6. Show the students the arrowhead from the old ethnobotany kit, which was found off the "Lower Loop" (Mud Spring Trail) by a student in 2002, and have them imagine what life

was like for Native Americans/settlers living around the area of the SMNHC hundreds of years ago.

Background information: Use the medicinal plant use sheet and the Plant guide to the SMNHC for information on medicinal plants.

Other considerations: People do get sick and die from carelessness with wild edible and medicinal plants. There are a lot of factors to consider: season to collect in, part of the plant used, toxins in the soil, etc. Lousewort takes on characteristics of plants it's parasitic on – so if it's near poison ivy, you definitely DON'T want to use it orally as a sedative! There are also a few books with poor or wrong information.