**Connection to the land**

Plants are the oldest living things on earth. Our relationship to plants is as ancient as human occupation of this earth. In fact, our life on earth depends on the chlorophyll in green plants that takes the sun’s energy via photosynthesis and makes sugars and releases oxygen in the process. Plants are the base of the food chain that sustains all animals, including humans. We eat the sugars and breathe the oxygen that the plants give us. The energy we get from plants is transformed in our bodies and we use it to do work or move about. When you throw a ball you are using some of the sun’s energy. Therefore, our health depends on healthy plants. We all, as citizens of this earth, must do our part to ensure that the conditions necessary for good plant (and thus human) growth exists. What do plants need to be healthy?

The interrelationship between earth, plants, animals and human health plays a key role in First Nation culture. When a plant or animal dies its body goes into the earth and is recycled into nutrients to feed the plants that will grow there. The energy of the dead body is recycled into new life by millions of microorganisms in the soil. Since the energy cannot be created or destroyed, but is recycled, each of us is nurtured, in one way or another, by the life that preceded us on this earth. We are all, including our ancestors, part of one life. Thus the First Nation expression, “all my relations”. By studying the traditional knowledge we learn to respect and appreciate the First Nation culture as well as their knowledge about living on the land.

Check out the video on Two Eyed Seeing- making use of scientific ***and*** First Nation knowledge.

[http://www.uinr.ca/programs/netukulimk/](http://www.uinr.ca/programs/netukulimk/%20)

Historically most people of this land spent a great deal of time gathering food from the wild and cultivating it. Medicines were those leaves, roots, flowers and bark that people identified as having certain beneficial effects on the human organism. Everything came from the land: food, shelter, clothing, medicine and spirituality.

Now we live far removed from the sources of what we eat and use for daily necessities. What implications do these shifts in lifestyle have for the health of people and the health of the ecosystems?

We buy food at grocery stores rather than grow it or gather it, so we are consuming harmful chemicals often used in the food industry like pesticides, fertilizers, growth stimulants, etc. Doctors prescribe drugs which we get in a bottle at the pharmacy and even if the original source was once a plant, they often have side effects. Industry uses large machines that use fuels that pollute the air with too much carbon dioxide and contribute to global warming. We can learn a lot about living on and with the land in order to preserve it and keep it healthy from our First Nations’ neighbours and friends. We only have one earth.

Each student or pairs of students take a hoola hoop and places it somewhere outside. Their task then is to record everything they see inside their little piece of earth. Magnifying glasses could be used, if available. When they return to the class they can compare lists and sort into categories. A follow up lesson may be to go pick up garbage to protect Mother Earth and the plants that we need to survive.

\*Lesson can expanded on by inviting a Mi’kmaq Elder or traditionalist to the school to learn more about the inter-relatedness of Mother Earth and humans.

Lesson adapted from Ethnobotany: Patterns in Relationships written and complied by Illene Pevec, MA