

# Native Knowledge

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Grades: Middle and Highschool (6-12)

## Key Words and Definitions

<b>LENAPE</b>	A group of indigenous peoples who, prior to colonization in 1624, occupied territory from New York to Delaware, including land by the Hudson River. Because of forced migration and displacement by European colonizers, many Lenape now live in the Oklahoma area, but some still do live in New York City.
<b>MEDICINAL PLANT</b>	A plant that has historically been used as a curative, whether on its own or in addition to other medicines.
<b>INDIGENOUS</b>	Native to a certain area.
<b>BIODIVERSITY</b>	The variety of different species of organisms, including animal and plant life, within an ecosystem or habitat.
<b>SEED SAVING</b>	The practice of saving seeds from one year's crop in order to preserve that plant for the following year.
<b>HEIRLOOM</b>	A kind of plant species that has not been bred with other plant species or genetically modified, but has been preserved in its naturally occurring state for many generations.

## Pre-Field Trip Activity: Naming Medicinal Plants

*One 20-minute session; pre -visit*

### Learning Objective

Students will begin to develop an understanding of the way indigenous peoples use plants for medicine by studying in-depth local medicinal plants found at Wave Hill.

### Materials

- Printed plant pictures and descriptions (available in resources)

### Procedure

1. Work as a class to create a definition of the term medicinal plant, asking students what first impressions come to mind when they hear that term, as well as any relevant prior understanding.
2. Then ask what the class thinks the significance of a medicinal plant might be specifically for indigenous cultures? Introduce the Lenape and highlight the spiritual connection that the Lenape in particular have with plants, in that every living thing, including plants, is believed to have a spirit. A great deal of work and ceremony goes into the harvesting and subsequent usage of a plant for medicinal or spiritual purposes, and care is taken to avoid disrespecting or overharvesting.
3. Give each student a printed picture of a plant or herb, listed and linked in the resources. Tell the class that almost all of these plants can be found at Wave Hill, and all of them are native and are used by indigenous peoples who lived on this land before us, either for food or for medicinal purposes.
4. Have students study the image of their plant and jot down some descriptive notes and observations about the image—things they notice, something that makes them curious, something it reminds them of.

- Hand out printed descriptions of the plants, linked under resources . Give the class a few minutes to read and familiarize themselves with the plant, now that they have more information about it. Ask students to share one thing about the plant that they found interesting, surprising, or a feature of the plant they particularly liked.
- Ask each student to give their plant an original nickname. This is a great way to get to know a plant better! Say they should keep their eyes out at Wave Hill for these plants. During the trip, if they see their plant, they can share its nickname with classmates and the Wave Hill educator.

## Resources

 [Nk Extension Mid-Highschool Info Sheet](#)

## Post-Field Trip Activity: Seed Saving

*One 20-minute session; post-visit*

### Learning Objective

Students will learn about the interactions between science, culture and history within the practice of seed saving.

### Materials



- Veggies or fruits with seeds
- Paper towels
- Spoons, tweezers or toothpicks
- Plates
- Plastic baggies
- Tupperware and soil (optional)

### Procedure

- Choose some veggies or fruits that contain seeds to distribute to your class—tomatoes, apples, cucumbers, zucchini, etc., are all good options.
- You may want to pre-slice your veggie/fruits of choice, slicing in half lengthwise to reveal the seeds.
- Distribute one half to each student, along with paper towels, a spoon (tweezers or toothpicks also work well), a plate, and a plastic baggie.
- Introduce the concept of seed saving to your class. This is the practice of saving seeds from the past year’s growing season to ensure a plentiful harvest the following year.
- Seed saving is an important part of indigenous culture, as many native plants have been depleted or changed over the years as a result of standardized agriculture and displacement of native peoples—saving seeds ensures the survival of these native plants.
- Saving seeds also contributes to biodiversity, ensuring that native plant species aren’t lost and have the potential to be restored in the future.
- After going on the field trip, how do students think the concept of seed saving relates to indigenous environmental values?
- Ask your students to carefully extract, pat dry with a paper towel, and bag their seeds. They can label their bagged seeds and take them home. If you have a school garden, you can take some time as a class to plant your seeds outdoors.
- If there is time, introduce the word heirloom. Heirloom plants are varieties of plants used for food that have not been genetically modified or hybridized (not crossed with another variety of the same plant). They may have different qualities from the fruits/vegetables we usually find in the supermarket—for instance, they tend not to be as uniform. Harvesting seeds from heirloom fruits/vegetables helps preserve the individuality of that plant species.
- Ask the class if they know what an heirloom plant is. Maybe they’ve seen an heirloom tomato at the grocery store or a farmer’s market before. How might it look different from a standard tomato variety?

11. After defining the word heirloom, ask students what they think the significance of seed saving heirloom plant varieties might be, specifically for indigenous populations. We talked previously about preserving plants for generations to come—why might specific plants be particularly important? Ask the class to remember what was discussed during the field trip at Wave Hill. Certain plants played specific key roles in Lenape culture, for medicinal and spiritual purposes as well as for nourishment. If these plants were lost or changed in some way, an entire part of the Lenape’s culture would have the potential to vanish along with it.
12. Students can read more about seed saving and the specific importance of various seeds in the handout linked under resources.

## Resources

-  [Info sheet about seed saving and seed sovereignty \(includes links to seed saving projects and other resources\): 2015-Fact-Sheet-11-Seed-Saving-and-Seed-Sovereignty.pdf \(firstnations.org\)](#)
-  [Seed saving lesson plan outline/info sheet \(for teachers\): Seed-Saving\\_web.pdf \(learninginplaces.org\)](#)



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