



Science Unit: *Soils, Plants, and First Nations*

Lesson 4: *Western Red Cedar*

School year: 2007/2008
Developed for: Britannia Elementary School, Vancouver School District
Developed by: Catriona Gordon (scientist), Mary Anne Parker and Nicola Robinson (teachers)
Grade level: Presented to grades 1, 2 and 3; appropriate for Grades 1 to 5.
Duration of lesson: 1 hour and 20 minutes
Notes: This lesson requires extra adults for younger children.

This lesson is an extension to Lesson 8, *Comparing Deciduous and Evergreen Trees – Extension* in the Temperate Forest unit; available from the Scientist in Residence Program website <http://www.scientistinresidence.ca>.

Objectives

1. Explore the First Nations uses of Western Red Cedar tree.

Background

Western Red Cedar, abundant on the west coast of Canada, was called the ``the tree of life`` by First Nations Peoples. It was considered to be one of the most useful of all native plants due to its strong, light, rot-resistant wood, and its fibrous bark. It was also regarded as a sacred tree, important in many spiritual ceremonies and in its healing properties. First Nations people used Western Red Cedar wood to make longhouses, canoes, totem and mortuary poles. Its fibrous bark was collected, then soaked and beaten before it was used to weave baskets, clothing, ropes and mats. Cedar was considered the cornerstone of aboriginal culture on the northern Pacific coast.

Materials

- Red cedar stump with the bark intact
- First Nations items made from Western Red Cedar such as paddles, small totems, dolls, woven baskets, headbands, bentwood boxes, bowls, masks, etc.
- Wide crayons with no paper covering
- Masking tape
- Paper

Introductory Discussion

Brainstorm with students as to what we use in the classroom and at home, that is made from trees (eg. Desks, shelves, paper towels, toilet paper, books, paper, cubbies, pencils,). Brainstorm what First Nations people used that was made from trees.

Allow students to look at the cedar stump and observe the bark's stringiness. Talk about why red cedar was so useful to First Nations peoples. Bring in First Nations items made from Western Red Cedar. Let students smell the items and feel them.



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Science Activity/Experiment

Compare and identify 4 conifer species. Go on a nature walk around the school grounds to find pine, hemlock, cedar and Douglas fir trees. Do bark rubbings and needle rubbings.

Closure Discussion

Review similarities and differences between the 4 common conifer species. Review their identification.

References:

Pojar, Jim and Andy MacKinnon. 1994. Plants of Coastal British Columbia. B.C. Forest Service. Lone Pine Publishing. Vancouver.

Silvey, Diane. 2005. The Kids Book of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada. Kids Can Press. Toronto.

Extensions

Plan a field trip to Vancouver's Museum of Anthropology.

Count rings of a tree stump or tree "cookies" if available. See: Lesson 9, *Tree Birthdays*, in the Temperate Forest unit; available from the Scientist in Residence Program website <http://www.scientistinresidence.ca>.