



Medicine Wheels and Health

Students will engage in learning about the concept of the Medicine Wheel through the lens of health and wellness education. Students will discover the many uses of the Medicine Wheel, how to connect the Medicine Wheel to their own health through food, and make a Medicine Wheel garden as a class.

Subject Levels/ Suggested Grade

Grade 5 Social Studies



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Grade and Subject	Curricular Competencies	Content Connections
Grade 5 Social Studies	<p>Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions</p> <p>Develop a plan of action to address a selected problem or issue</p> <p>Construct arguments defending the significance of individuals/groups, places, events, and developments</p> <p>Ask questions, corroborate inferences, and draw conclusions about the content and origins of a variety of sources, including mass media (evidence)</p> <p>Sequence objects, images, and events, and recognize the positive and negative aspects of continuities and changes in the past and present (continuity and change)</p> <p>Differentiate between intended and unintended consequences of events, decisions and developments, and speculate about alternative outcomes (cause and consequence).</p> <p>Take stakeholders' perspectives on issues, developments, or events by making inferences about the beliefs, values and motivations (perspective)</p> <p>Make ethical judgments about events, decisions, or actions that consider the conditions of a particular time and place, and assess appropriate ways to respond (ethical judgment)</p>	<p>The development and evolution of Canadian identity over time</p> <p>The changing nature of Canadian immigration over time</p> <p>Past discriminatory government policies and actions, such as the Head Tax, the Komagata Maru incident, residential schools, and internments</p> <p>Human rights and responses to discrimination in Canadian society</p> <p>Resources and economic development in different regions of Canada</p> <p>First Peoples land ownership and use</p>

Teacher Background

Rationale

“Food is medicine.” What we put in our body helps us to energize, to grow, and to fulfill our needs... Conversely, what we put in our bodies can slow us down or even harm us. As our students develop and come to an age that they are making their own decisions about what kinds of food they are eating, where it comes from and how much they consume, it is beneficial for educators to take some time to help them develop healthy habits, and explore the various ways that we are interconnected with one another, with nature, with suppliers and with farmers.

The healing quality of food is often explored in Indigenous teachings and the medicine wheel is a way in which we can share this practice with our students. Whereas, Western “medicine” has established the idea that once you are sick, you should take a pill (medicine) in order to feel better, the Indigenous belief in a whole self approach to one’s health, allows the individual to take an active role in promoting one’s own well-being. This unit will explore this whole-self approach as we explore the medicine wheel and traditional foods and practices.

This unit was created to target grade 5 Social Studies curriculum, however, it could be modified to suit any grade. Moreover, this unit draws on the First Peoples Principles of Learning. The unit is not only directly focused on an Indigenous perspective, it includes lessons that recognize that “Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place)(Such as our first lesson on the medicine wheel)...Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one’s actions (such as our second lesson on Traditional Indigenous Foods)...Learning recognizes the role of indigenous knowledge (such as our third lesson on Indigenous Food systems)... and Learning involves patience and time (such as our final lesson where we plant our own medicine wheel).

Through a process of learning about traditional Indigenous foods and food systems, as well as about traditional Indigenous culture, which is interconnected with food, we can move towards a larger Canadian culture of eating locally grown, non-processed foods. By so doing, we will move towards a healthier society: individually, collectively and environmentally.

Any of the following lessons would be greatly enriched by the presence of an elder who may be willing to share their stories and experiences. I encourage all educators to get in touch with local Indigenous communities to see if they might be able to guide or support your teachings.

Lesson 1: Medicine Wheel

Materials:

- Computer and projector or Smartboard
- Poster paper (one per group)
- 1 red marker, 1 purple marker, 1 green marker, 1 blue marker, 1 orange marker per group
- Tape

Introduction:

Discuss: What do we do when we are sick? Are there ways that we can help prevent ourselves from becoming ill? Who can help us when we are sick?

Pre Lesson:

1. Work in groups of 4-5 students with one poster paper per group.
2. Have groups discuss what can cause people to become sick. Use a red marker to write down all the things you can think of (Food? Environment? Stress? Genes?)
3. Now consider what steps you take when you are sick to get better. Record your answers on the sheet in purple marker. Who takes care of you? Do you take any medicine? Do you go to the doctors?
4. Now use a blue marker to record things that you can do to help prevent yourself from getting sick in the first place.
5. Use a green marker to record things that are in the environment that might prevent you from getting sick.
6. Share your responses with the class.

Lesson:

1. Has anyone ever heard of a “medicine wheel”? Encourage responses and guesses.
2. Introduce the medicine wheel to the class. Put an [image of a medicine wheel](#) on the screen, or draw a large circle on the board and use it to illustrate as you teach about the meaning behind each section.
3. A medicine wheel can represent many different aspects of the self, life and balance. The medicine wheel is a circle split into four quadrants with everything being pulled towards the center. The center represents balance in life. Different Indigenous communities will vary on the different meanings of each of the quadrants, but we will discuss some common beliefs about each of the quadrants.
4. Show students [Peggy Pitawanakwa Medicine Wheel Video](#).
5. When we explore and create our own medicine wheels, we are going to focus on foods, how food can help our own well being, physically, emotionally, mentally and spiritually.

Post Lesson Activity:

1. After learning about the medicine wheel, are there any things that you want to add to your posters about health and wellness? Are there any stages of life where your wellbeing is more or less connected to others?
2. Add any new ideas to your posters using an orange marker. Provide students with tape to hang their posters throughout the classroom and then let students look at one another's work.
3. Wander with the students and ask questions to check for understanding.

Evaluation/Assessment:

The teacher will look for active participation- classroom contributions, writing ideas on their posters, and speaking with classmates in their small groups.

Extension/Homework:

- Encourage students to teach their parents about medicine wheels

Lesson 2: Traditional Indigenous Foods

Materials:

- Computer and projector or Smartboard
- Device to access the internet (one each or share with a partner)
- Handout: Medicine Wheel Template
- Felt markers

Introduction:

1. Review what was learned last lesson about the medicine wheel. What did each quadrant represent? What quadrant would they say they are best represented by? Do they have people in their lives that are represented by the different quadrants?

Lesson:

1. Today we are going to learn about traditional Indigenous foods. What does that mean?
2. Brainstorm together what foods the students believe are traditional indigenous foods. Write them on the board.
3. Distribute devices and ask students to go to the website:
https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/Traditional_Food_Fact_Sheets.pdf
4. Explore the various headings, but explain they will need to read more carefully on their own.

Activity:

1. Distribute markers and Medicine Wheel Template to each student.
2. Draw an example medicine wheel on the board and place one food item from the website in each of the quadrants. Ask students to place all of the different traditional foods into the different quadrants. They can use their own reasons to place each food in the various places, such as colour of food (Yellow/Red/Black/White), time of year it is grown (Spring/Summer/Autumn/Winter) or eaten, area in BC the food item can grow (East/South/West/North).
3. After students are mostly done, show students [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide First Nations, Inuit and Metis](#).
4. Ask: What does this look like? Why do you think the colours are different in this medicine wheel than the one we have been exploring? Would you find it easier to change the colours of your own food medicine wheel?
5. Ask students to write why they placed the different food items in each quadrant. They can add this to their medicine wheel if space allows, or write on the back of their page. Ask students to hand in their completed food medicine wheels.

Conclusion:

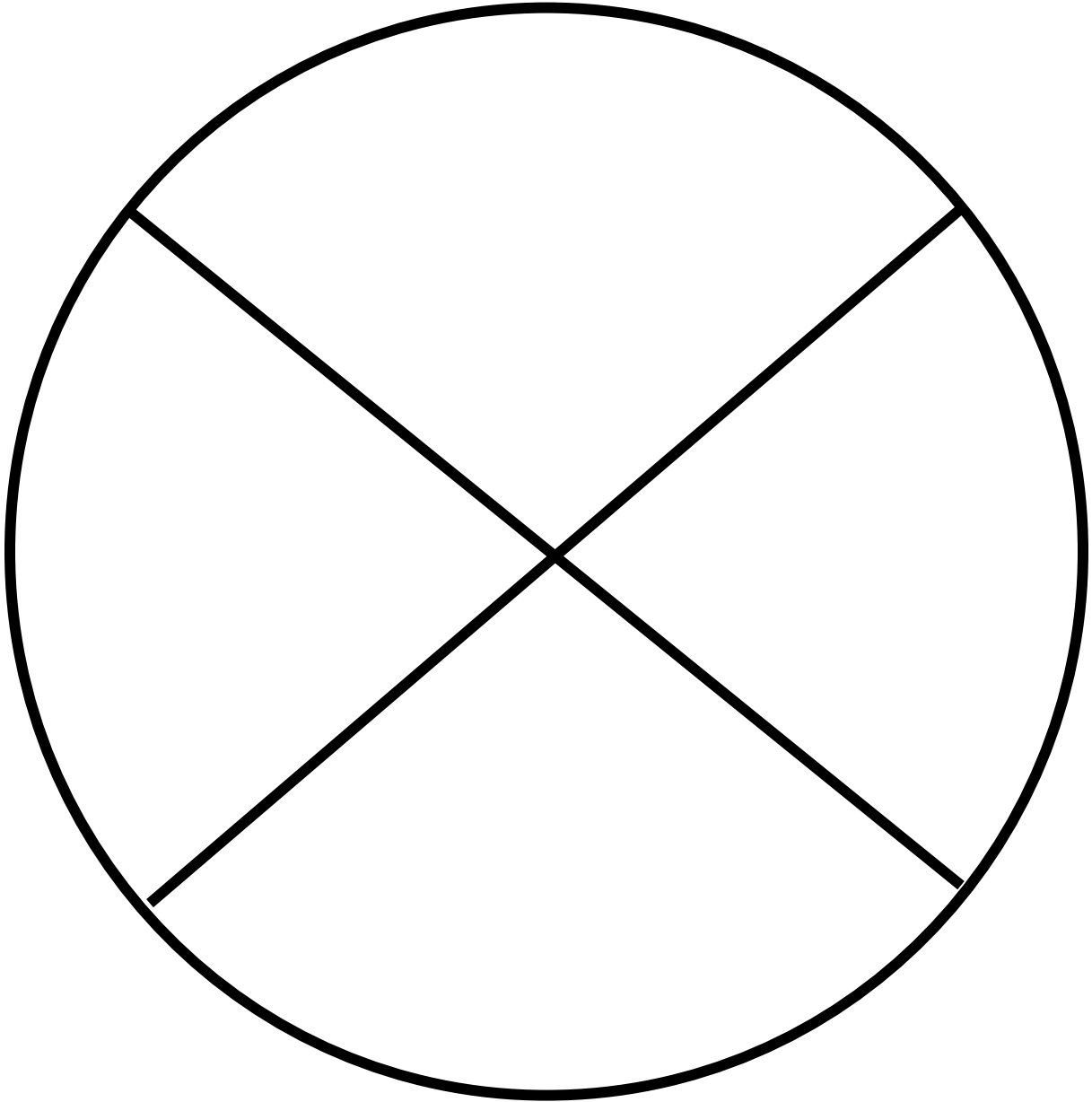
1. Then ask: What is happening in the center of the food medicine wheel? (people are hunting, gathering, fishing and preserving food).
2. This is showing various ways Indigenous communities have gotten their food both traditionally and still to this day. Is this how your family gets their food? Discuss.

3. Next lesson, we will compare different ways to get food: traditional Indigenous ways, European ways, and some modern and technologically advanced ways as we head into the future.

Evaluation/Assessment

Teacher will check for understanding by looking for active participation and checking the students completed medicine wheels.

Medicine Wheel



Lesson 3: Indigenous Food Systems and Farming

Materials:

- Computer and projector or Smartboard
- Lined paper
- Pencils

Introduction:

Families tend to have different traditional things that they eat. These foods might be something that the parents grew up eating in their country of birth, or it may just be foods that they have grown to love. It might also simply be foods that they can afford to buy. In groups of 3 or 4, discuss foods that your family enjoys to eat together.

Lesson:

1. On the projector, show: [Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide First Nations, Inuit and Metis](#). Direct the students' attention to the activities happening in the center of the Food Guide.
2. Explain: Some Indigenous communities in British Columbia and Canada are experiencing food insecurity. This means that it is difficult for them to get enough food for themselves and their families. Food in remote Indigenous communities can be extremely expensive due to the difficulty in transportation and supply. Historically, Indigenous people would hunt, gather and plant crops. As Indigenous peoples have been allotted restricted areas of land on which to reside, this practice has become increasingly difficult. Nowadays, it seems that a blending of traditional ways and non-traditional farming could co-exist in order to provide more food for such communities.
3. Read [Splatsin Hunting Trip – September 2009](#) to share what one might experience when going for a hunt. (*You may not want to read the sentence in the sixth section about what people should avoid doing the night before a hunt, as it is slightly explicit in nature*).
4. Discuss: Why do people still hunt? What is the difference between hunting animals for their meat and farming animals for their meat? Do you think hunting is still important?
5. Introduce [Traditional Food Systems Video](#), as a representation of how Indigenous peoples also farm their food. It also lets students see how farming in Indigenous communities occurred in the past and why it's important to re-establish farming in Indigenous communities for the future. (This video is American).
6. View [Buy BC: Indigenous Chefs](#) Video to see some examples of Indigenous cooking.

Activity:

1. Students will write a journal response to the question: Is it important that you eat food that your family values and sees as traditional?

Evaluation/Assessment Teacher will check for understanding by looking for active participation and checking the students completed their journal response thoughtfully.

Lesson 4: Shi-shi-etko

Materials:

- Shi-shi-etko written by Nicola I. Campbell
- One large smooth rock per student (approximately the size of a softball)
- 4 colours of paint (black, white, yellow, red)
- Paintbrushes
- Newspapers (to protect surfaces from getting covered with paint)

Introduction:

Walk through the school garden (or a community garden if your school doesn't have one). Let the students know that you want them to notice how food is grown in the garden. How is it planted? When does it grow? Who takes care of the garden? Who is allowed to eat from the garden?

Lesson:

1. Review what we learned about the medicine wheel. What did each quadrant represent? Show [medicine wheel](#) from the first lesson.
2. Explain that you are going to read a story and ask the students to try and think about any connections that they can make with a medicine wheel. Think about location, time of the year, stages of life, elements.
3. Read Shi-shi-etko.
4. Discuss any connections that the students were able to make with the medicine wheel.
5. Ask what quadrant on the medicine wheel the students think Shi-shi-etko would belong? The response might be that she is moving from the yellow quadrant (baby/young child), towards the red quadrant (youth).

Activity:

1. Explain that the next lesson we will be beginning to create our own medicine wheel so we need to prepare.
2. Distribute one rock to each student. Make sure the paints, brushes, water and newspapers (to protect their desks) are distributed.
3. To begin, have each student paint a rock in a colour found on the medicine wheel that appeals to them. They can choose any of the four colours (yellow, red, black or white) or your class can choose to use different agreed upon colours. The colour they choose does not need to represent themselves, it simply can represent some person, thing or event in their life. Remind them about what each of the quadrants represents.
4. Once they have painted their rock, they can choose to explain to the class why they chose the colour they did and what their rock represents to them, or they can choose to write a paragraph about it as a homework assignment.

Assessment:

Check for understanding by listening to each of their explanations or reviewing their paragraphs.

Extension:

Students can volunteer to paint more rocks to add to the medicine wheel

Lesson 5: Create a Medicine Wheel

This lesson will occur over several days. The class will create their own medicine wheel garden. This requires collaboration with school administration in order to determine an appropriate location to create the wheel.

Introduction:

Over this unit we have explored the medicine wheel. We have learned about what it can represent for various peoples and we have also learned about Indigenous foods and food systems. We are going to create our own meaningful class medicine wheel.

Materials:

- Plastic, lightweight kiddie pool
- Plastic window screening or newspaper
- Utility knife
- Drill with large bit (optional)
- 4 cubic feet of potting soil or a mix of bagged gardening soil
- Slow-release fertilizer
- Seeds or seedlings
- Painted rocks from previous lesson

Activity:

1. As a class, decide which 4 plants/vegetables/berries you are going to grow in each of the 4 quadrants. These should be meaningful and relate to the teachings about the medicine wheel. They do not need to be Indigenous plants, though it is recommended to include at least one in one of your quadrants.
2. Follow the steps as outlined in the article [How to make a Garden Planter from A Plastic Kiddie Pool](#), to prepare, build and create the class medicine wheel.
 - a. "The first step is to cut drainage holes in the bottom of your kiddie pool with the utility knife. This should not be difficult if you have a sharp blade or if you have a drill. Cut a lot of large holes (approximately one inch) in the bottom of your pool.
 - b. "In addition to drainage on the bottom of your kiddie pool, drill or cut holes into the sides. Ideally, the holes should be about 1/4 to 1/2 inch above the bottom of the pool, just in case the bottom holes are not letting out enough water. If you have plants sitting in soggy soil, it will kill most of them, so having good drainage is key. You can also elevate your pool by putting it on bricks or wood to make sure the water can get out of the bottom..
 - c. "Once you have finished putting in your drainage holes, you will need a barrier to keep the soil in and let water out. You can use plastic window screening or a newspaper. Cut out your barrier so that it is big enough to cover all of your holes. Then lay the screening or newspaper on the bottom and up the sides of your pool.
 - d. "Situate your pool in a sunny spot. If you are growing [herbs](#) or [vegetables](#), you will need full sun at least six hours a day.
 - e. "Fill your pool either with potting soil or a combination of potting soil and garden soil. Mix in a slow-release fertilizer.
 - f. "Smooth out the soil in your garden planter and pat it down gently. You want your soil to be loose, but you also want an even surface."(the Spruce, 2019)

- g. Gather the class to place your coloured rocks in order to create your medicine wheel. Using a stick, draw lines in the dirt on which to place the painted rocks. Remember that if you are using the original four colours, the yellow quadrant will point to the East, the red quadrant will point South, the black quadrant will point West and the white quadrant will point North.
3. Gather in a circle around your wheel. Explain the significance of the medicine wheel that you are creating. Talk about your hopes for its longevity and the community building it will bring to the school. Ask the students to volunteer to place their rocks one at a time, on the appropriate line. Remind them to think about why they chose that rock and what it means to them as they place it.

Day 2 Planting

1. “You can plant any flower or vegetable that doesn’t have deep roots.
2. “One of the biggest mistakes people make when planting seeds are to plant them too deep. Check the information on your seed packet to see how deep and far apart you should plant them. Make rows in the soil according to the directions on your seed packets.
3. “Once you have planted your seeds, you will want to give your garden a deep watering, preferably until water runs out the bottom of your garden planter. It is important, particularly at this point, not to use a harsh stream of water that will disturb your seeds or wash them away. Either use a watering can with a rose attachment or a garden hose with an attachment that will provide a gentle spray.
4. “The fastest way to kill growing seeds is to let them dry out. In the early stages of germination, keep your soil moist at all times. You will probably have to thin your seedlings after they get their first set of full leaves. Follow the space recommendations on your seed packets.”(the Spruce, 2019)
5. Once you have planted and watered your seeds, make a plan with your class. Who is going to water, weed, how often, etc... Remember your medicine wheel garden will require daily attention, so it’s important to figure out the schedule.

Extension Activities

- This is an ongoing lesson that will provide many opportunities for learning across the curriculum, extending beyond Social Studies into Science, Math, Arts, and more.
- The Medicine Wheel Garden can also be a space for students to spend time when they need a break from class.

Credit

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