

Name: _____

Date: _____

Aboriginal Use of Plants

Aboriginal People maintain a special connection and certain respect for the plants, trees, and roots that were developed by the Creator. In fact, Aboriginal People harvested many plants, roots and berries for medicinal and spiritual purposes. Respect for nature combined with traditional knowledge of the many uses for foliage is an important aspect of Aboriginal spirituality.

Pioneers and Aboriginal peoples had different ideas about how land should be used. The pioneers believed they had the right to own land and change it by clearing the forest for their settlements and building villages. The Aboriginal peoples believed that the land was for everyone to use and share. The pioneers learned important things from the Aboriginal peoples.

Farming

Aborigines showed the pioneers that planting different crops each year in a field would help keep the soil rich. This is called crop rotation. They showed them how to plant corn, beans and squash together so they helped each other to grow. These were known as the "three sisters". The corn provided support for the beans, the beans as they grew, provided nitrogen for the corn and the large prickly squash leaves shaded the soil, preventing weed growth and keeping away pests.



Medicine

The Aboriginal peoples knew how to cure some illnesses using plants and herbs. A very serious problem for the settlers was illness. When they first arrived in Upper Canada, many people were ill from the long journey and lack of proper food. The Native people helped the settlers by sharing food, food preparation ideas, knowledge for gathering and producing food and also medicines. At first



some people were nervous about taking the medicines of the Native people but they grew to realize that the knowledge of these people was excellent. Barks of spruce and juniper trees were used to make tea that was very healthy and contained vitamin C which helped to prevent scurvy. The inner bark of the poplar tree was used in the spring to make a healthy tonic. Many people drank the sap from trees, which was also healthy and nutritious. Berries and plants were picked and used as remedies for many things. Many of these natural products are still used today by millions of people.

Exploration

The Aboriginal peoples showed the pioneers the trails they had made across the land. To walk those trails in the winter, they showed them how to make snowshoes. They also showed them how to make birch bark canoes so they could travel along the rivers.



Discussion

You have just read about how Aboriginal peoples helped teach the pioneers how to use plants. But, do you think the pioneers took the teaching with open ears? The Aboriginals thought they were helping, what do you think the pioneers were thinking. In the space below, write what a pioneer may have been thinking as they learned from the aborigines.

If you finish, find a partner and have a conversation about plant use, one of you being an Aboriginal, the other a pioneer.