

Lesson Plan: Savoring: Making Connections with Plants, Trees, Land and Self

Grade band: 9th – 12th Grade

Subject: SEL (Possible Integration with English Language Arts)

Duration: 110 minutes (spread over 2 meetings)

Montana ELA Content Standard, IEFA Understanding, and Whole Child Competencies

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- **RL.9-10.2.** Determine a theme or central idea of a text, including those by and about American Indians; analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; and provide an objective summary of the text.
- **EU3.** Understand that ideologies of Native traditional beliefs and spirituality persist into modern day life as tribal cultures, traditions, and languages are still practiced by many American Indian people and are incorporated into how tribes govern and manage their affairs. Additionally, each tribe has its own oral histories, which are as valid as written histories. These histories predate the “discovery” of North America.
- **MTSEL.9-12.4.c.** Independently seek and maintain healthy relationships with the intent of demonstrating kindness, gratitude, and helping others (e.g., set boundaries, express needs, and recognize warning signs)

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Explore their surroundings to make connections with their environment
- Analyze central ideas of a text and connect its theme to their daily life contexts

Materials:

- *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* book
- iNaturalist App
- Picture This Plant Identifier App
- “MT Trees and Wildflowers” book
- “MT Native Plants of Early Peoples” book
- montana.plant-life.org website
- fieldguide.mt.gov website

Lesson Outline:

Meeting 1

1. Initial Engagement: (10 minutes)

Show a picture of local landscapes and guide students to savor the photo.

Some guiding questions:

- What time of day or year was this taken? Do the colors (e.g., golden hour light, harsh midday sun, cool twilight) provide clues about the conditions?
- How does the light interact with elements? Notice how the light dances on leaves, highlights the rugged texture of a rock, or creates shadows.
- How do the colors make me feel? Are the colors vibrant and saturated, or muted and calm?
- What sounds or smells do I imagine experiencing in this place? Use your senses to further immerse yourself in the image.
- Does this photograph remind you of anything? Does it spark a memory of a place you've visited or a feeling you've had?

2. Explicit Instruction: (5 minutes)

Briefly explain to students what savoring means and emphasize the importance of engaging all five senses to become fully present and immersed in the experience.

3. Guided Practice: Literature Circle (40 minutes)

- After independently reading *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* as a pre-class assignment, students will engage in a collaborative literature circle. During the discussion, they will practice savoring the text: slowing down to notice meaningful passages, vivid imagery, emotional responses, and sensory details that stood out to them.
- Divide students into multiple groups. Each student in each group will take on a specific role for a discussion. Common Roles:
 - Discussion Director: Develops open-ended questions to get conversations started
 - Literary Luminary: Selects significant passages to savor, read aloud, and discuss
 - Vocabulary Enricher: Identifies and clarifies important or interesting questions
 - Connector/Illustrator: Makes a connection between the book themes and life or other texts and creates a visual representation.
- Each group will present briefly and share their thoughts on the book themes and messages. Presentation guidelines:
 - Share phrases, sentences, or short paragraphs that your group members savor
 - How does reading those sentences or paragraphs make you feel?
 - Share the visual representation the Connector/Illustrator in your group created to connect the book messages to other texts/ daily life.

3. Independent Application: (5 minutes)

Assign students to explore their community's parks, recreational areas, or different landscapes around them and neighboring areas. Some prompts to use:

Utilize the iNaturalist or Picture this Plant Identifier apps while savoring the environment. You can check out the MT Native Plants of Early Peoples or National Audubon Society Field Guide to Trees books to help with identification. You may take pictures, draw sketches, journal, write a poem, etc. as you work through the identification and connection and reflection process of this lesson.

As you take time to get to know your natural environment, let these words from the novel guide you in your self-discovery. Spend 5 minutes sitting and connecting with your new discovery!

**“Names are the ways humans build relationships,
not only with each other but with the living world.”**

Use this guideline to reflect on your connection with nature:

- Identify your type of connection: physical, spiritual, scientific, and personal

Location-
Identification-
Reflection-How did this make you feel? Why do you choose to connect with what you identified?

Meeting 2

1. Initial engagement: (10 minutes)

Briefly asked students about their main takeaways from the *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* book

2. Guided practice: (25 minutes)

- Fishbowl Discussion

Set up two concentric circles: an inner circle (the "fish") and an outer circle (the "observers"). Students in the inner circle share their pictures, sketches, or journal entries from their outdoor walk, describing how they experienced and savored their surrounding environment. Students in the outer circle listen, take notes, and prepare questions. At any point, an inner-circle student who feels ready can invite an outer-circle peer to swap in. Continue until all students have had a chance to share.

- Three Good Things and deeper reflection

Once the fishbowl wraps up, introduce the "Three Good Things" practice and its connection to wellbeing. Ask students to recall three good things that happened during their walk or while exploring their community, and to consider *why* those moments felt meaningful or wonderful. Give them a minute to think quietly before moving on.

3. Independent Application: (10 minutes)

Now ask students to apply the same practice to their recent lives: write down three good things from the past 24–48 hours and briefly note why each one happened. Once they've written, invite them to share with a neighbor.

4. Closing: (15 minutes)

Close the lesson by returning to *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults*. Ask students to identify one theme or idea from the book that stuck with them, then write or create a visual showing how it connects to their own experiences of exploring and savoring the landscapes or community spaces around them. This brings the lesson full circle: from the book, to their walks, to their everyday lives.