

Lesson 1

The Wheel of Wellness: The Four Directions and the Four Sacred Medicines

Specific Expectations:

By the end of the course, students will:

- identify facts and myths related to the use and abuse of alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs (e.g., cannabis)
- identify the school and community resources involved in education, prevention, and treatment with respect to alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs

Materials:

- The Wheel of Wellness- The Four Directions, the Four Sacred Medicines (1.1 H/REF)
- Traditional Wellness and the Sacredness of Four 1.2 H/REF

Teaching/Learning Strategies:

- Some strategies have been adapted from Beyond Monet by Barrie Bennett and Carol Rolheiser, 2001 and Think Literacy Cross Curricular Approaches, 2004

Activity #1

(30 minutes)

- Display “The Wheel of Wellness- The four directions, the four sacred medicines” (1.1 H/REF) on the overhead. Ask for volunteers to read each paragraph, stressing the importance of the traditional names for the sacred medicines.
- Distribute the handout “Traditional Wellness and the Sacredness of Four” (1.2 H/REF). Ask students to read this article in their groups of four. Using the information provided in the article as well as the overhead, each group should come up with a list of KEY questions they would like to ask an Elder with regards to traditional Aboriginal medicine. They should write these questions on strips of blank paper and tape them to the wall or blackboard.
- Together as a whole class conduct an open sort of the key questions raised. The teacher should use the student input to group questions which touch upon the same or similar topics. When the sort is complete, students should re-examine the questions raised and synthesize concepts by creating new questions which combine the ideas of all of the groups.

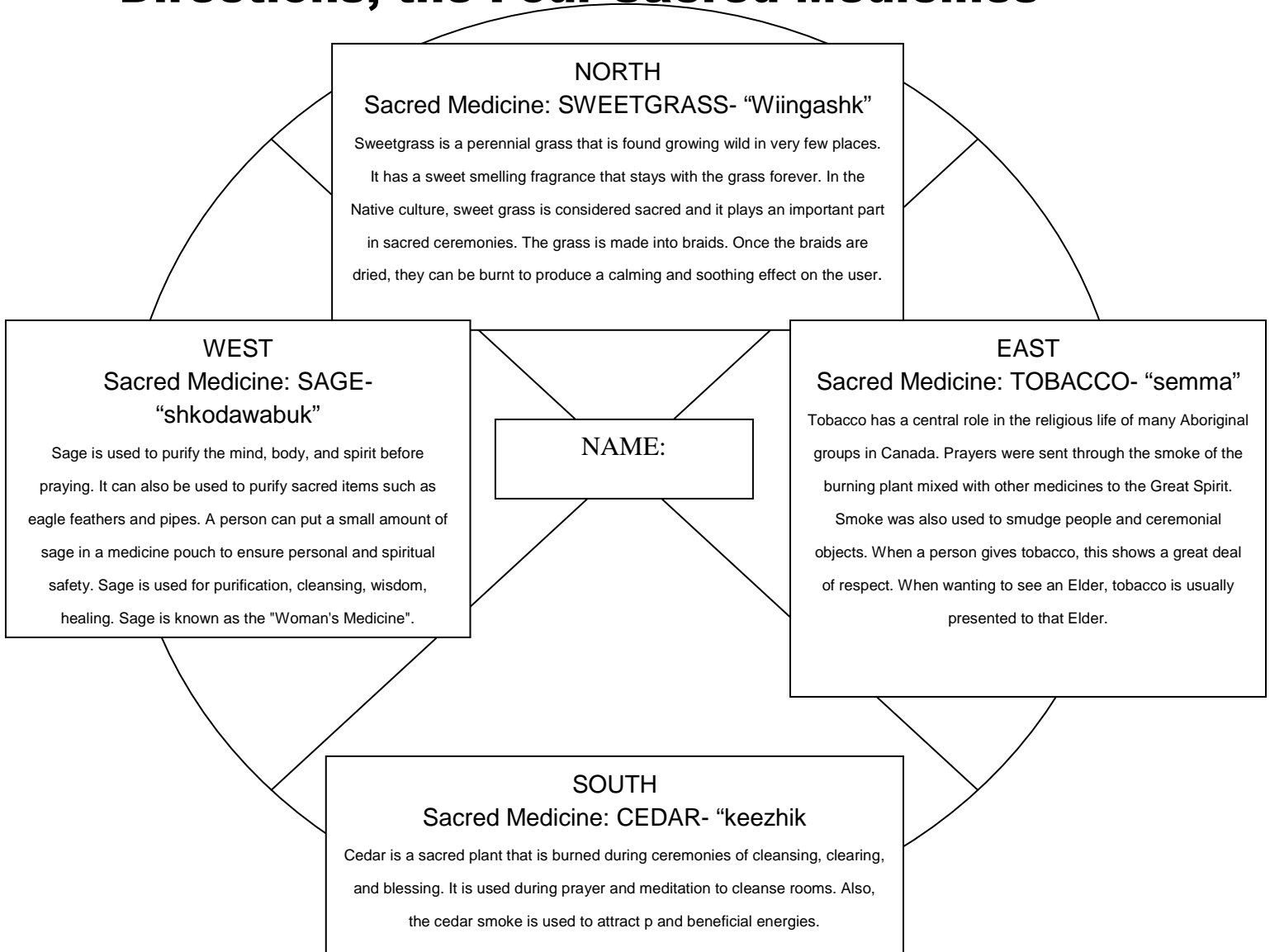
Activity #2

(40-50 minutes)

- The teacher should arrange for an Elder to come in to the class to conduct a sharing/healing circle. During this session students will have the opportunity to ask the questions that they generated in Activity #1. The teacher should provide the Elder with a list of these questions ahead of time to allow them the opportunity to prepare. Also, the teacher should ensure that the Elder is given an offering of tobacco before the presentation in line with traditional cultural practices of respect.

OPTION: There is also an opportunity to invite an Elder into the classroom during the next lessons to discuss issues related to substance use and abuse. Teachers may wish to combine these visits into one longer session and can start lesson 2 activities during lesson 1 to allow for a longer time block for the Elder’s visit.

The Wheel of Wellness: The Four Directions, the Four Sacred Medicines



Sources:

<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/tipicamp/fourplants.html>

<http://www.canadian-health-network.ca>

Mary Lou Smoke, Anishnaabe Nation

Traditional Wellness and the Sacredness of Four

“The circle is very significant to First Nations people. In the old days, when they were a strong and happy people, all their power came to them from the sacred hoop of the nation and as long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished. The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop and the circle of the four seasons nourished it. The East gave peace and light; the South gave warmth; the West gave rain; and the North gave its cold and mighty wind, which gave strength and endurance.

This knowledge came to them from their understanding of the outer world. Everything that the power of the world creates can be thought of as being done in a circle. The sky is round and so is the earth. The wind makes whirls and birds make their nests in a circle. The seasons form a great circle in their changing -- always coming back again to where they were.

Native spiritual life is founded on a belief in all natural things, with primary importance being attached to Mother Earth. The four main sacred plants are Sweetgrass, Sage, Cedar and Tobacco. Burning these is a sign of deep spirituality in Native practices. Cedar and Sage are burned to drive out negative forces when prayer is offered. Sweet grass, which signifies kindness, is burned to invite good spirits to enter. Participants also use these purification rituals to smudge regalia, drums, and other articles before taking part in a pow-wow.

The four plants, sweet grass, sage, cedar and tobacco are used in both individual and group ceremonies. Each plant was originally given to a specific tribe. Now they are used together or by themselves as incense, which is generally ignited in an abalone shell or other type of container, which is passed from person to person in the circle to smudge themselves and clear their thoughts.

An Elder must prescribe medicine pouches. A person seeking the mercy and protection of the spirits of the Four Directions can wear plant material in a medicine pouch. Elders caution natives not to conceal any other substances in their pouches. To do so would make a mockery of their beliefs. The four sacred plants, sweet grass, sage, cedar and tobacco or kinnikinnick (red willow shavings), are often worn in a "medicine" pouch around the neck or pinned onto clothing.

Elders may be either men or women. Their most distinguishing characteristic is wisdom, which

relates directly to experience and age. Elders need not be "old". Sometimes the spirit of the Great Creator chooses to influence a young native. Elders' spiritual gifts differ: some interpret dreams or visions; and others may be skillful in herbal remedies; and others are healers during a sweat lodge ceremony."

Source <http://collections.ic.gc.ca/tipicamp/>