

Kanenon:we - Original Seeds Lesson

Grades: 3rd - 5th Grade

"Our people carried over a number of seeds when we were removed here to Wisconsin. On that journey, these are seeds that they could have eaten because you know they were hungry. We came here in the Winter time and fortunately, our people kept enough of those seeds to plant in the Spring."

— Rebecca Webster, *Kanenon:we - Original Seeds*



Lesson Overview

This lesson was developed as an introductory activity to support ***Kanenon:we - Original Seeds*** (pronounced Ga nah-seed, ooh we-original), a documentary short that tells the stories of three Indigenous women from different Native Communities who are reversing this attempt of erasure. They are reclaiming their ancient role as seed keepers, regenerating, protecting, and rematriating sacred and endangered heirloom seeds for future generations. The film offers an opportunity to listen and learn from Indigenous women sharing their practices of seed stewardship and their work to rebuild and strengthen Indigenous food sovereignty by sharing knowledge and restoring their ancestral ecosystems.

Students in third, fourth, and fifth grades will have the opportunity to watch the documentary and explore the role and connection of storytelling to seeds, the earth, and the food we grow. Bringing this documentary into the classroom invites all students, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to understand, appreciate, and honor the importance of heirloom seeds and apply this new knowledge and practices to sustain and celebrate Indigenous ways of life. In doing so, we move one step towards returning ancient wisdom and agricultural practices to our planet. As Angela Ferguson shares in the film, "I think part of our healing is through the foods, sharing the seeds, sharing the knowledge. We want to help bring it back to the forefront or else we won't survive."

Essential Questions

- Why do we tell stories?
- What role do stories hold in different cultures?
- Why are seeds important in Indigenous communities?
- Why are seeds important to your community or heritage?
- What stories have you heard about seeds in your community?
- What do you learn about seed collecting and seed saving from

Kanenon:we - Original Seeds?



Activity

Length

3-4 days

Standards

Refer to the Educator Handbook for a complete listing of Next Gen Science and Common Core Standards for ELA/Social Studies.

Materials

Day One

- Seed Speaking Story
- Handout
- Seed Speaking Image Deck
- Access to the documentary **Kanenon:we - Original Seeds**
- Reading Handout: Three Sisters
- Paper towels
- Seeds (some suggested variations)
 - Choose different large seeds such as beans and have students compare germination rates based on the size of the seed, light conditions, moisture, etc.
 - Choose one heirloom and one non-heirloom bean seed and have students compare sprouting rates based on the size of the seed, light conditions, moisture, and heirloom or non-heirloom
- Tape and Water

Day Two

- Large container/pot with holes in the bottom and tray for under the container
- Topsoil to fill the container

Day One

1) Assemble students in a circle and begin the class by asking these essential questions:

- Does anyone have a garden?
- Have you ever grown something you have eaten?
- Why do we tell stories" and allow time for students to share their responses.

If students are hesitant, approach the question by asking them to share an important story, if they recall who told it to them, and why it is important.

2) Explain to students that they will be learning about seeds and seed keepers and exploring the role of storytelling. Ask students to use their background knowledge and context clues to describe or define what is a seed keeper and what they may do.

3) Transition and share a short reading called the "[Seed Speaking Story](#)" which comes from a documentary film **Kanenon:we - Original Seeds**. Read the handout to students and project the pictures using the [Seed Speaking Image Deck](#).

4) Help students make the connection to this story by sharing the first 6:30 of the documentary **Kanenon:we - Original Seeds**. The film follows three Indigenous women from three different Native communities who have returned to the sacred responsibility of seed keeping. *Note: Do not go past the sentence "Their ancestors faced many hardships so that we could be here today."*

5) Debrief using these guiding questions:

- What did you learn about the role of seeds in these women's lives?
- What is a seed keeper? Why do they keep seeds?

6) Distribute (or project) the **Reading Handout: Three Sisters** and read it aloud. Explain this is another example of a seed story, but in this instance, explains intercropping, or planting two or more crops simultaneously on the same field. Three Sisters is the planting of squash, beans, and corn.

7) Organize students into small groups of 3-4 per table. Have assembled on tables different seed packets.

8) Write this sentence on the board: "**Every living thing has a different story.**" Ask students to think about this sentence as they sort the seeds by size, shape, or color. After sorting, have each student pick their favorite seed. Give table groups a few minutes to discuss why this seed was their favorite. Can you tell what kind of seeds they are? (eg beans, corn, squash)

9) Next, write this question on the board: "**Do you think your favorite seed has a story?**" In table groups have students spend a few minutes discussing their responses and ask for groups to share a summary of their discussion.

10) Finally, write the final question on the board: "**What would the story be?**" Explain to students that tomorrow they will be creating a story about their favorite seed. Invite students to talk to friends and family about what the story could be. Have students turn in their favorite seed to you in preparation for tomorrow.

Educator Notes

An experiential part of the lesson has students sorting seeds. Often if you call a seed company, go to a local garden shop or botanical garden, and explain you are doing a lesson with young students about seeds, they will send/give you last year's seed packets.

Day Two

- 1) Have students assemble into a story circle.
- 2) Have students get into pairs and distribute their seeds from yesterday.
- 3) Explain to students that for the next few minutes, they get to imagine and create a story about their seed and share it with their partner. Here are some prompts to use to guide their work:
 - Where do you think your original seed came from?
 - Where have these seeds traveled?
 - Who depends on this seed?
 - What food is grown from this seed?
 - What do the shape and color of this seed tell you about it?
- 4) After pairs have shared their stories, transition students from drawing their seed to then collecting supplies assembled on another table (zip-lock bags, paper towel) and walk them through the following steps:
 - Wet a paper towel and fold it to fit inside the bag
 - Place their favorite seed, or a yellow or green bean, on the paper towel, ensuring they are visible through the bag. Insert five staples about halfway up the bag and seal the bag partially, leaving some air space, and place a piece of tape at the bottom of the bag with the student's name
 - Tape the bag to a window with the seeds facing inwards
 - Observe the seeds daily
 - Add water as needed to keep the paper towel moist. If comparing moisture rates instruct students to add different amounts of water
 - If comparing light conditions, have students document their seeds taped in the window versus seeds taped to the wall.
- 5) After everyone has finished assembly their sprout bags share with students that daily we will check in with our seeds to see if any of them sprouted. Encourage students to continue adding ideas to their story about the seed.
- 6) After two weeks of sprouting observations and story writing, have students take their seeds home to plant in their home garden, family garden, or community, or begin a school garden project.

Educator Notes

- About three days after planting the first roots appear
- A few days later, the stems start to push upward
- After ten days the leaves will begin to peek out of the seed coat
- By two weeks, the first true leave will appear while the stem will continue to grow

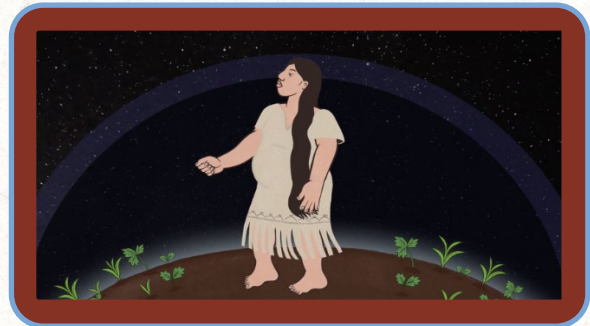
Every Seed Has A Story Lesson

Seed Speaking Story Transcript: Kanenon:we - Original Seed



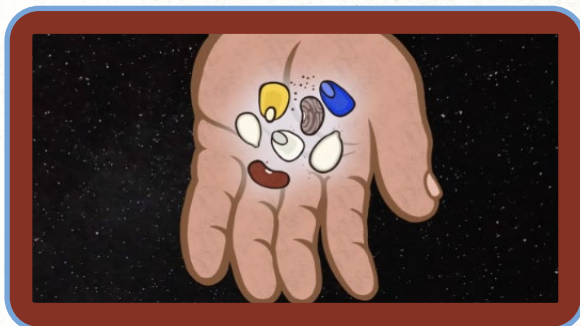
Skywoman carried us here from the skyworld clutched in her hands.

She sang seed songs and danced as she created the earth on the turtle's back.

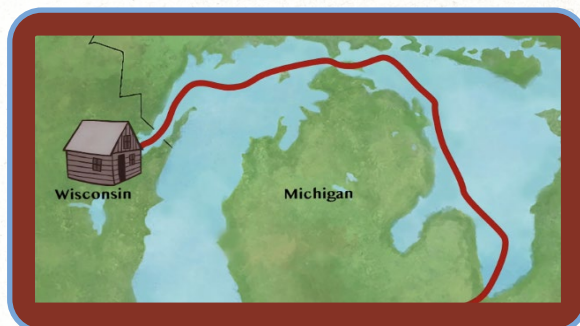
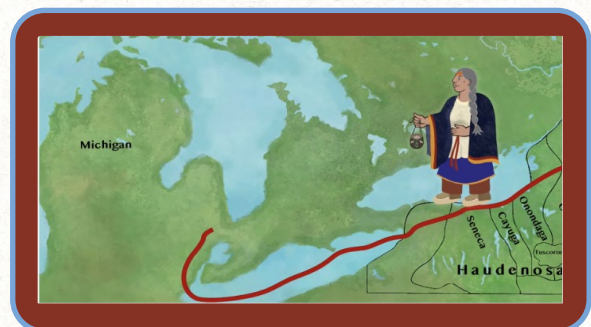


We are Kanenon:we, the original seeds.

We carry the teachings of the universe inside of us.



We are often hidden away and carried by our relatives when they were forcibly removed from their territories.

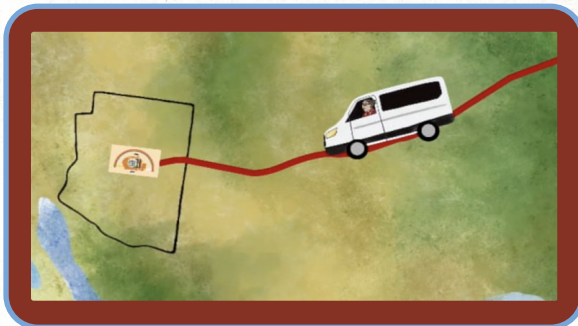
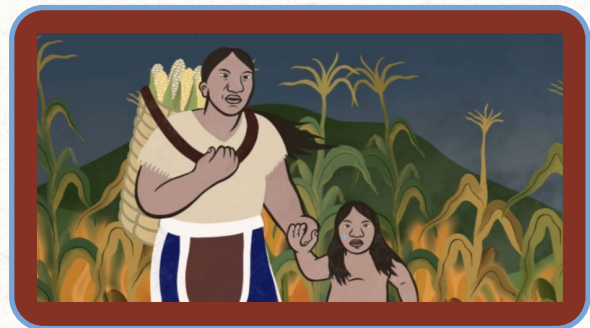


Many Oneida people were removed from their Haudenosaunee homelands and were disconnected from their people, culture, and land. Here we are safe from the big chemical companies who seek to alter or destroy us. Their ancestors faced many hardships so that we can be here today.



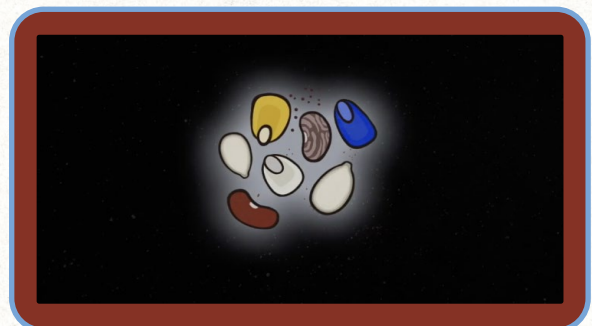
They refer to George Washington as Ronatakariaks the town destroyer. He sent a massive army to destroy the Haudenosaunee through scorched earth warfare.

The soldiers came to villages with torches, we were burnt to the ground. It was horrific.



We are the Diné (Navajo) seed relatives and we have been cared for by many seed keepers throughout the generations including the Haudenosaunee,

and now we are returning home.



Three Sisters

The following story was recorded by Lois Thomas of Cornwall Island, Canada. It is one of a collection of legends compiled by students at Centennial College, Toronto, Canada. Out of respect to native culture, we ask that you share the legend in a spirit of respect.

Once upon a time very long ago, there were three sisters who lived together in a field. These sisters were quite different from one another in their size and also in their way of dressing. One of the three was a little sister, so young that she could only crawl at first, and she was dressed in green. The second of the three wore a frock of bright yellow, and she had a way of running off by herself when the sun shone and the soft wind blew in her face. The third was the eldest sister, standing always very straight and tall above the other sisters and trying to guard them. She wore a pale green shawl, and she had long, yellow hair that tossed about her head in the breezes.

There was only one way in which the three sisters were alike. They loved one another very dearly, and they were never separated. They were sure that they would not be able to live apart.

After a while, a stranger came to the field of the three sisters, a little Indian boy. He was as straight as an arrow and as fearless as the eagle that circled the sky above his head. He knew the way of talking to the birds and the small brothers of the earth, the shrew, the chipmunk, and the young foxes. And the three sisters, the one who was just able to crawl, the one in the yellow frock, and the one with the flowing hair, were very much interested in the little Indian boy. They watched him fit his arrow in his bow, saw him carve a bowl with his stone knife, and wondered where he went at night.

Late in the summer of the first coming of the Indian boy to their field, one of the three sisters disappeared. This was the youngest sister in green, the sister who could only creep. She was scarcely able to stand alone in the field unless she had a stick to which she clung. Her sisters mourned for her until the fall, but she did not return.

Once more the Indian boy came to the field of the three sisters. He came to gather reeds at the edge of a stream nearby to make arrow shafts. The two sisters who were left watched him and gazed with wonder at the prints of his moccasins in the earth that marked his trail. That night the second of the sisters left, the one who was dressed in yellow and who always wanted to run away. She left no mark of her going, but it may have been that she set her feet in the moccasin tracks of the little Indian boy.

Now there was but one of the sisters left. Tall and straight she stood in the field not once bowing her head with sorrow, but it seemed to her that she could not live there alone. The days grew shorter and the nights were colder. Her green shawl faded and grew thin and old. Her hair, once long and golden, was tangled by the wind. Day and night she sighed for her sisters to return to her, but they did not hear her. Her voice when she tried to call to them was low and plaintive like the wind.

But one day when it was the season of the harvest, the little Indian boy heard the crying of the third sister who had been left to mourn there in the field. He felt sorry for her, and he took her in his arms and carried her to the lodge of his father and mother. Oh what a surprise awaited here there! Her two lost sisters were there in the lodge of the little Indian boy, safe and very glad to see her. They had been curious about the Indian boy, and they had gone home with him to see how and where he lived. They had liked his warm cave so well that they had decided now that winter was coming on to stay with him. And they were doing all they could to be useful.

The little sister in green, now quite grown up, was helping to keep the dinner pot full. The sister in yellow sat on the shelf drying herself, for she planned to fill the dinner pot later. The third sister joined them, ready to grind meal for the Indian boy. And the three were never separated again.



Additional Background - Three Sisters Planting

The three are one form of companion planting or intercropping – an agricultural technique where two or more crops are planted together in a single plot. The three function as a unit to provide higher crop yield; they help each other grow by creating fertile soil that resists damage from diseases and insects that would normally consume and destroy them.

First, plant the corn. The stalks provide a pole for the beans to wrap themselves around and help to stabilize the corn in the wind. Beans provide nitrogen to fertilize the soil. The large, spiny squash leaves provide shade, help the soil retain moisture, prevent weed growth, and discourage insects from invading. Each of the three attracts beneficial insects that prey on those that are destructive.

When eaten together, corn, beans, and squash are a complete and balanced meal. Corn is low in protein but provides carbohydrates. Beans are a rich source of protein and have amino acids missing in corn. Squash provides different vitamins and minerals than corn or beans. All three can be dried and used for food year-round.

Seeds are life – and are at the heart of our memory, histories, cultures, and traditions. ~ [Española Healing Foods Seed Library](#)



Kanenon:we - Original Seeds

kanenonweoriginalseeds.com



THE **REDFORD** CENTER

