

Other Homework and Classroom Exercises for Students

In addition to the interview and the 24-hour inventory provided, try these homework assignments:

1. Ethnobotany in popular media:

Have students go home and find articles in popular media: newspapers, magazines, and books etc. that are related to ethnobotany. Have students write up a summary and discuss its relevance to ethnobotany, and have them discuss their articles in class.

If your students struggle with this, here are some examples of where students can find articles: Better Homes and Gardens magazine or other gardening magazines, the Tropical Life section of the Miami Herald Sunday paper, cooking magazines, vegetarian magazines, National Geographic magazine, even beauty magazines on occasion. These are just a few examples of periodicals that may publish articles about plants or plant products which are used for food, medicine, beauty or ornamentals etc. in people's daily lives.

2. Essay and presentation exercise:

Have each student research one plant of their choosing (or if you like, make a list of plants and assign a different one to each student). The only requirement is that the plant must have a use. It can be anything from oranges and bananas to aloe, ginkgo or lesser-known plants that their parents grow in their home garden. Have students write a one or two page essay about their plant including: the common name(s) and scientific name, details about its habitat and native range, descriptions in detail of all its uses, descriptions of the physical characteristics of the plant (leaf shape, flower shape, size and color, fruit etc). They should be able to find all of this information in encyclopedias and/or on the internet. Encourage them to download pictures of the plant if they can and credit the sources. Have students then present their essay to the class – formally or informally. This way, all members of the class will learn about the different plants that their fellow students studied.

3. Survivor: South Florida

After teaching your students about the uses of different South Florida plants, from the materials provided, divide the class in to two-four "tribes," depending on the size of your class. They are to pretend there is no civilization in South Florida. Give each tribe a creative name if you like. Make a set of ten 3x5 cards for each tribe, with the tribe name on one side and the other side blank. You will then ask a series of ten questions, about what plants they would hypothetically use for food, specific illnesses, shelter etc. Ten example questions with answers are listed below (feel free to create

some new ones as well). Re-emphasize to your students that this is just a game and they should not actually try to use any of the plants, unless they want to risk death from poisoning. Emphasize that people have died from ingesting plants that they don't know much about. If you like, list the names of the eight plants that they have learned about on the board. All of their answers should come from this list. Each tribe will have one minute to consult quietly and write what they think is the correct answer on their 3x5 card and hand it in when they are ready. Keep score on the board. The tribe with the most correct answers will win the survivor challenge. No one gets voted off, it's just a fun ethnobotany trivia game!

Sample questions:

Scenario: It is the 1600s and your tribe is stranded in South Florida. You have to survive, and to do that you must know enough about the local plants so that you can eat, build shelter, and have medicine.

1. Nutrition comes first for the survival of the tribe. What are three plants you can eat, assuming you know how to prepare them all correctly so that no one gets poisoned?

Answer - Plants that have edible parts that they should know include:

- Coontie (underground stem or tuber, must be cleaned properly or is toxic)
- Saw palmetto (palm heart and fruit)
- Cabbage palm or sabal palm (palm heart and fruit)
- Prickly pear (Fruit and flesh)
- Lignum vitae (fruit – survival food, must be cooked)
- Black mangrove (Sprouting seeds – survival food, must be cooked, toxic if raw)

Note: there are a number of other edible plants native to South Florida, including cattails, sea grapes, wild papaya, strangler figs, coconut and red mulberry. If your students happen to know about any of these and use them as an answer to the question, it could be considered correct, though they should try to stick to what they have learned in class.

2. Where could you get salt to flavor your food (Note: do not answer “the ocean”)?

Answer - From the leaves of the black mangrove, which exude salt.

3. If you got poisonwood rash, what would you treat it with?

Answer - Gumbo limbo bark or leaves

4. What plant would you turn to if you wanted to go fishing or hunting, to stun the fish or poison your arrows?

Answer - Jamaica Dogwood



5. What would you use to make a thatched roof chickee for shelter?

Answer - Cabbage Palm

6. You may be a survivalist, but you still want to be clean! Where would you get shampoo when you were ready to wash up?

Answer - Juice of the prickly pear

7. There are lots of mosquitoes in the everglades, especially in summer! What is a plant that could be used as insect repellent?

Answer - There are two correct answers here: the fruit of the Black Mangrove and/or extract of Jamaica Dogwood.

8. Someone in your tribe has asthma. What might you use to treat it?

Answer - There are three correct answers to this:

Lignum vitae (tea made from leaves)

Jamaica dogwood (dried root bark)

Prickly pear (fruit)

Note: of these, only Jamaica dogwood has been tested scientifically and proven to have real medicinal qualities, including anti-spasmodic action. The others may work, but they have not been tested by science. However, any of these three can be considered a correct answer.

9. What wood would you use to make a boat?

Answer - Jamaica dogwood is best. If they answer lignum vitae, tell them their boat will sink – lignum vitae wood is denser than water and is one of the few woods that will sink!

10. **Bonus question** (worth 3 points): A member of your tribe has a fever. What would you use to treat the fever and how would you prepare it?

Answer - an infusion of the bark and leaves of the gumbo limbo tree.

