

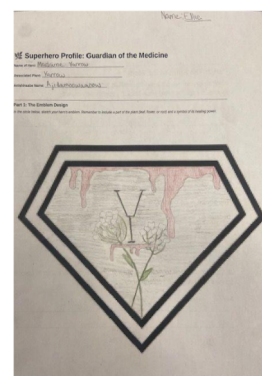
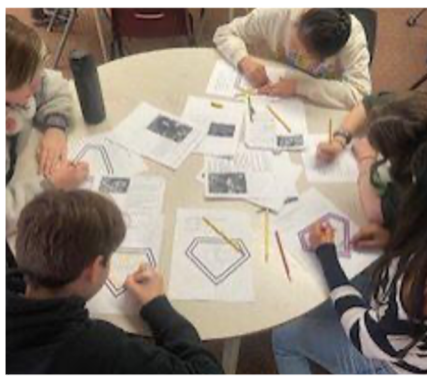


Stories of Climate Change Education

Toronto District School Board - Climate Literacy & Leadership Program 2026

Garden Avengers!

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Gr 1-7 Arts & Physical Education



Learning Outcomes:

Students will:

- deepen their appreciation for the outdoors
- demonstrate their learning of indigenous plants
- apply their understanding of Indigenous plants in a creative way
- be highly engaged in drama activities focused on the garden

Climate Concepts:

Interconnections & Interdependence

We do not exist apart from nature; our health, economies, cultures, and futures depend on the health of the ecosystems we live in, and planting Indigenous plants is one way to honor and strengthen that interdependence.

Nature as Teacher: Indigenous plants are not just resources, but rather relatives within living systems that are uniquely adapted to local conditions and relationships. Understanding their attributes through Indigenous knowledge systems offers important teachings about relationship, reciprocity, and stewardship in a changing climate.

Storytelling as Climate Action: Stories, art and culture shape how we understand and respond to our natural world as well as inspire empathy and collective action

Learning Activities:

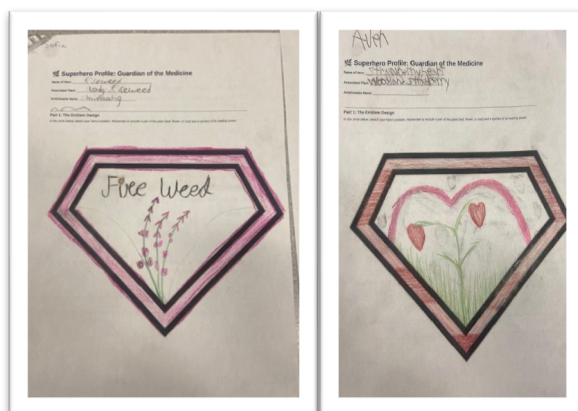
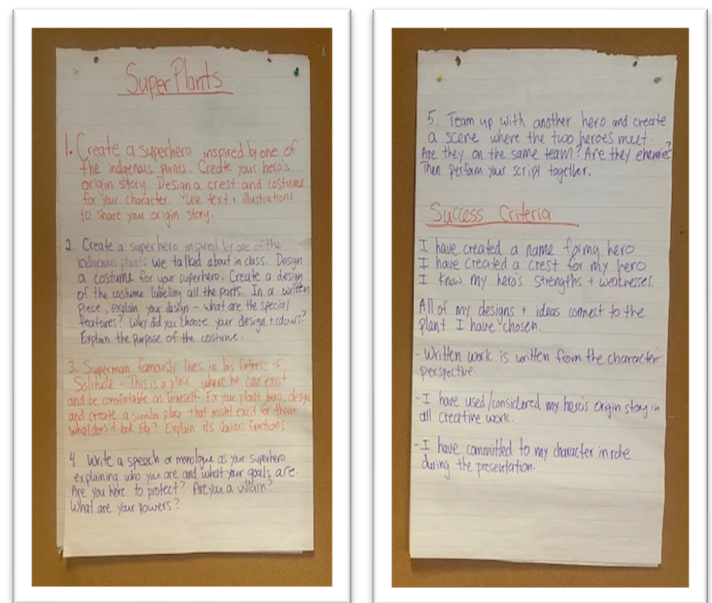
Collaborative Inquiry Question: *How might I use an Indigenous garden to deepen students' connections to the land through drama and/or music lessons?*

Our school is in the process of planting and harvesting plants for an Indigenous garden in the front of our school. Students are involved in the planting and caring for the seeds/plants throughout the process. I wanted to come up with a way to connect this exciting project to learning that was happening inside the classroom. I teach Drama, Dance, and Music to students in Grades 4–7 in the mornings, and I wanted to engage them in a fun, creative project where they could produce inspired work and explore some role play. I am also the head of our school's Eco Team and am currently helping to plan and implement an Indigenous garden at our school.



I wanted to bring these two roles together so that the Indigenous garden would not feel like an “extra,” but instead become meaningfully integrated into classroom learning. I was also hoping to build stronger buy-in from our older students. While primary students are often eager to participate in gardening activities, it can be more challenging to engage older students in the same way.

With the support of my Arts colleagues, we developed a project centered on superheroes. Students in Grades 4–7 created original superheroes inspired by the Indigenous plants selected for our school garden, including Cardinal Flower, Yarrow, Joe Pye Weed, Woodland Strawberry, Blazing Star, Fireweed, Butterfly Milkweed, and Mountain Mint.



Students began by researching each plant to understand its significance, including how Indigenous peoples use it for medicine, food, or its symbolic meaning. They then selected a plant they felt had “special powers” that could inspire their superhero. From there, students designed an emblem for their hero (or villain) and developed superpowers connected to the characteristics of their chosen plant. Older students were given a choice board with a range of dramatic tasks. These options included creating a scene with another hero, performing a monologue, or designing a costume or habitat for their character. We are still exploring ways to extend this project into the music curriculum, but that piece has not yet been developed.

I really strongly believe that students need to connect to the land they learn on. Most students want to have fun while they are learning, and these lessons let them have some fun. Because there was fun to be had while learning, the students were able to take more of the knowledge with them. They understand the plant species a little more, they have a connection, not just to the land but to specific individual plants and will likely be able to share that knowledge with others. Hopefully as our garden comes to life, the students involved in this work will take a responsibility of the space and care for it in a more connected way.

Lessons Learned:

- Students applied knowledge of Indigenous plants to create a creative drama project based on a character of their creation. The Superhero framing helped students demonstrate how plants “protect,” “heal,” and “support,” both natural and human systems.
- I wanted to create a unit that would be fun, informative and ultimately garner support and connection to the Indigenous Garden that Duke is building. I think connecting the work to popular shows and movies like the Avengers and Spiderman helped in getting student interest, but it also was a creative way for students to understand how plants, people, place, and cultural knowledge are connected, especially in a climate-changed world.
- This inquiry expanded thinking toward cross-curricular integration in the arts and highlighted that how symbols, costumes, and performance help communicate meaning about plant's ecological roles
- The experience reinforced the importance of student choice, creativity, and land-based learning in Climate Change Education, showing that enjoyment deepens understanding and fosters personal connections to place and responsibility

Key Resources:

1. Geniusz, Mary Siisip, and Wendy Djinn Geniusz. *Plants Have so Much to Give Us, All We Have to Do Is Ask Anishinaabe Botanical Teachings*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2015.
2. Hutchens, Alma R., N. G. Tretchikov, and Natalie K. Tretchikoff. *Indian Herbalogy of North America: A Study of Anglo-American, Russian and Oriental Literature on Indian Medical Botany of North America*. Windsor, Ont.: Merco, 1989.
3. Beauchamp, W.M., "Onondaga Plant Names". *The Journal of American Folklore* 15, no.57 (1902): 91-103. doi:10.2307/533477