

Introduction:

Title: Superhero Plant Trading Cards

Subject/Course: Visual Arts, Grade 3/4

Developed by: Jaime Koebel,

Curriculum editor: Doug Dumais

Time: 130 Minutes

Description:

Jaime Koebel's contemporary art practice is rooted in her environment. Her Métis heritage, her experiences growing up in Alberta, and her artistic practice in Ottawa indicate a focus on how place and environment shapes one's identity. Her project *Super Hero Plant Trading Cards*, the inspiration for this workshop, is meant to encourage and inspire youth to learn about the physical and medicinal properties of plants that can be found around them. Students will have the opportunity to learn about the importance of place and traditional knowledge in Métis culture.

The workshop begins with an exploration of Koebel's work in order to help students understand how place is an important factor in the development of identity. Students will have the opportunity to research a plant to discover the particular characteristics of the plant they choose. Students will then be tasked with finding or inventing healing properties that the plant, weed, or flower has, and turning these properties into superpowers for their own superhero plant trading card! The key takeaway of the workshop is for students to not only discover something about the healing properties of familiar or unfamiliar plants, but also to develop a sense of place and identity within their immediate environment.

Desired Results:

Fundamental Concepts/Lesson Objectives:

- For Students to understand the approach of a contemporary Métis artist to her world.
- To learn more about traditional Métis knowledge and plant-based medicine.
- To develop a strong sense of place and a sense of identity that they turn into superpowers.

Ontario Curricular Expectations:¹

Creating and Presenting:

- D1.1: Create two- and three-dimensional works of art that explore feelings, ideas, and issues from a variety of points of view. Their superhero plant trading card can offer the viewer a glimpse of an issue that is important to them.
- D1.2: demonstrate an understanding of composition, using selected principles of design to create narrative artworks or artworks on the theme of identity and nature.
- D1.3: use elements of design in artworks to communicate ideas, messages, and understandings. Use line, shape, space, colour, and value to communicate information about the content. Use line, shape, space, colour, and value to communicate information about the content.

Reflecting, Responding, and Analysing:

- D2.1: Express their feelings and ideas about artworks and art experiences. For example, describe the feelings evoked by the use of colour in your superhero plant trading card.

¹ Ontario Ministry of Education, *Grades 1-8: The Arts* (Ottawa, Ontario Ministry of Education: 2009 Revised), retrieved from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/curriculum/elementary/arts.html>.

- D2.3: Demonstrate an awareness of plants and symbols in their daily lives. For example, what are some examples of plants you use frequently for medicine?

Exploring Forms and Cultural Contexts:

- D3.1: Identify and describe visual art forms that they see in their home, at school, in their community, and in visual arts experiences. For example, plants in their backyard or near the school, looking through provided books or on the internet.
- D3.2: Demonstrate an awareness of a variety of works of art from diverse communities, times, and places. For example, traditional knowledge of Métis people, as well as artworks by local Métis artist Jaime Koebel.

Background Knowledge:

- Jaime Koebel’s artistic practice.
- Traditional Métis knowledge.

Instructional Strategies:

- Analyzing bias/stereotypes
- Discussions (led by teacher)

Materials:

- Business cards (or any small cardstock)
- Laminating machine, laminating sticker-paper, or clear individual plastic baseball card sleeves. Laminating machines may prove cost prohibitive. As an alternative, the authors of this book recommend contact paper, or even single-card protective sleeves for trading cards.
- Graphite and colour pencils
- Books for reference about plants and their medicinal qualities
- Computers or iPads for reference if students have access to them
- Markers (optional)
- Pens (optional)

Teaching and Learning Process:

Section 1 — Warm up and discussion (30 minutes)

Worksheet

A worksheet is available at the end of this document. It includes additional prompts and a short for students to think through their *Superhero Plant Trading Card*. You have the option to scan this page as a hand-out to your students. Feel free to encourage students to bring it home as homework after introducing the project.

Introduction

Begin by showing students the video of Jaime Koebel discussing her background and practice. This video is available in the online resources toolkit on the Ottawa Art Gallery’s website.

- Prompt:
 - o What is your initial reaction to Jaime Koebel’s work?

Main question: What does “Métis” mean?

Métis means to mix. It is not just any individual who has mixed European and Indigenous heritage who is considered Métis. Rather, it is specifically the mix of Europeans from England, France, Scotland, and

Ireland who started families with Cree, Ojibway, and Soto First Nations in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba during the 1800s and 1900s.

The Métis people call themselves *Michif*, which is the name of their people as well as their language. They identify themselves by their floral beadwork clothing, their unique and rich artistic expression, their music and dance, as well as a traditional knowledge of plants and animals, which is the focus of our workshop today.

Prompts:

- What is culture?
- What makes you a part of your culture?
- What is something that is a part of your culture that you enjoy?
- What is something from another culture that you enjoy?

Takeaway: The definition of Métis and culture.

Main Question: What is Métis Traditional Knowledge?

The health and well-being of Métis people is based on the health and well-being of the land. According to the Southern Ontario Métis Traditional Plant Use Study, “Métis live, work and harvest throughout these territories and rely on them for their individual as well as their community’s overall cultural, social, spiritual, physical and economic well-being.”² Traditional knowledge of plants is an important part of this well-being. The information on how to use plants is passed down through generations, or shared by Elders with youth in an apprentice-relationship.³

Learning about plants and medicines takes a lifetime of learning and trying new things. In the traditional way of thinking, all plants have a spirit, and permission is always asked before removing a plant, flower or part of a tree. Elders and helpers only take what they need and seek never to waste anything.

The traditional knowledge of the Métis people is also shared among Elders and between regions: “Whether the plants are gathered in people’s backyards, along road sides or in secret locations, many participants spoke of sharing their stories with others.”⁴ There is also trade or exchange between different communities in the country because not every plant grows everywhere. This is so that everyone can have access to the remedies they need, when they need them.

Prompts:

- What is something that was passed down through the generations to you?
- What is the importance of sharing in your life?
- Is there anything you know from your culture or family that you want to share with others?

² Métis Nation of Ontario, “Southern Ontario Métis Traditional Plant Use Study,” *Métis Nation of Ontario*, 2010, http://www.metisnation.org/media/81616/so_on_tek_darlington_report.pdf, 7.

³ Christie Belcourt, *Medicines to Help Us: Traditional Métis Plant Use* (Saskatoon: Gabriel Dumont Institute, 2007), 2.

⁴ Métis Nation of Ontario, “Southern Ontario Métis,” 8.

Main question: What are the medicinal qualities of plants?

These plants are used by elders and healers as medicine in Michif culture. According to Todd Paquin:

“Many of these traditional medicines and remedies involved adding ingredients to boiling water or boiling ingredients together in water (infusions and decoctions) for sipping. Other therapies simply required the ailing person to chew, swallow, breathe in or rub on the medicine. These remedies were used to treat a variety of ailments, from open wounds to headaches and pneumonia.”⁵

Example 1:

- When babies are teething, they can experience a lot of pain, and produce a lot of saliva (or drool). In order to help with the pain, caregivers would take pieces of willow branches, cut them into small beads and thread them on a necklace. The necklace would be placed around the teething baby’s neck. When the baby’s drool reached the willow-branch pieces, it would activate the natural pain relievers in the bark and help dull the pain of teeth growing in.
- Superpower example: The willow branch can heal anyone just by touching them.

Example 2:

- Three-flowered Avens, also known as Prairie Smoke, or Old Man’s Beard, is a plant that can be steeped in water and used as an eye-wash.
- Superpower example: Three-flowered Avens can see in the dark, or see through walls!

More examples of the healing properties of plants are available in the Southern Ontario Métis Traditional Plant Use Study, a link to which can be found in the bibliography of this book.

Prompts:

- Do you know any plants that have medicinal powers?
- Have you seen examples in books, TV or movies of people using plants for medicinal purposes?
- Can you think of an example of a time you used plants to heal an illness? Example: rubbing aloe vera on a sunburn.

Main question: How can you see yourself in your environment?

Think about who you are and where you come from. Where you come from influences all the things you know and the person you are. As a relatable example: ask students to think of someone they know who lives outside of the city. Or if they live outside of the city, think of someone who lives in the city. Those people’s lives and the things they know are completely different because of where they live!

Your environment may shape who you are, but you also have the opportunity to shape your environment. For this activity, encourage students to try and find a plant in their neighborhood or that they know well, and encourage them to think about how that plant plays an important role within their neighborhood or city.

Prompts/worksheet activities:

- What do you want to change in the world or in your environment? **Write this down on your worksheet.** For example: Save the environment, make people happy, etc.

⁵ Todd Paquin, “Traditional Métis Medicines and Remedies.” *Métis Museum*, <http://www.metismuseum.ca/media/db/00721>.

- What is a superpower you wish you had that could make this change happen? **Write this down on your worksheet.** For example: Transform plastic into trees, see people’s emotions, etc.

Section 2 — Activity (60 minutes)

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Students will research a plant’s medicinal qualities, and turn that plant into a superhero with its very own trading card! With the two answers that the students have written in Part 1, students will either research—with the help of computers, books provided, books from the library—or use their own imagination to create a plant with healing qualities that has the power to change the world!

Activity 1: Reflection and research

Using resources available to them, students will find plants that share similar healing properties with what they want to change in the world. Or they can find a plant they like and want to draw!

- Example: A student wrote they wanted to make people happy. They discovered in their research that chamomile, when made into a tea, reduces stress.

Activity 2: Creation

After choosing their plant, the students will draw and colour an anthropomorphized plant on one side of their small cardstock, and write a superhero name and the plant’s superpowers on the back of their card.

Encourage students to include more than one superpower. The sky is the limit! Encourage them to base their powers on the idea of healing, but be clear that students are free to use their imaginations and make whatever they want.

Optional: larger pieces of paper can be handed out in order for the students to make drafts of their plant.

- Example: The student drew an anthropomorphized chamomile plant. The plant’s superpower is that they can release a spray that instantly relaxes everyone around them.
- The student then gives their superhero plant trading card a name: Calmomile!

Activity 3: Laminating

Using a laminating machine or alternatives (as described in the “materials” section), the educator will laminate students’ creation so that their trading card feels professionally made.

Section 3 — Debrief (30 minutes)

Sharing and Trading their Superhero Plant Trading Cards!

In Métis culture, healers or helpers always share their knowledge so people can learn about the importance of their traditions and the land upon which they live. Helpers or healers also share their knowledge with other Elders so everyone can benefit from these remedies. In this spirit, students have the opportunity to share their superhero plant trading card in small presentations. Encourage students to share:

- what they want to change in the world and how their superhero plant trading card helps make that change a reality;
- the name, plant, and superpowers of their design;
- any artistic decisions they made when drawing their plant (colour choice, shape, etc.).

If time permits it, and if students have the chance and the time to make multiple trading cards, encourage them to trade or share with others in small groups.