

Lesson 8:

Dandelions, Crabgrass and Burrs, Oh My!



Time Allotted
60 Minutes

Target Audience
Grades 5-8 

Objectives

- Students will evaluate which plants are “weeds” in the garden
- Students will name beneficial and/or harmful properties of weeds

Materials

- Magnifying glasses
- Notebooks and writing utensils for note taking
- Weed identification book (region specific if possible) and/or printout of Organic Gardening’s “12 Most Common Weeds” article: <http://www.organicgardening.com/learn-and-grow/12-most-common-weeds>

Summary

Students will become “weed experts” through library and field research.

Background

What is a weed? “Weed” is a general term used to describe any unwanted wild plant, especially when it is in competition with cultivated plants. Ralph Waldo Emerson said of weeds that they are merely “plant(s) whose virtues have never been discovered.” Students will discover properties of weeds, their history, and which weeds can be useful versus which weeds are truly a nuisance.

Method

Ask students the question, “What is a weed?” As a class, discuss and hypothesize how to define a weed. Using the responses students come up with, go into the garden and have the students, either in pairs or on their own, choose a plant/weed to research. Acceptable plants are any that weren’t intentionally planted.

Discussion/Verbal Exploration

Following the scientific method, have students conduct their research using any available resources (books, articles, internet, experts, etc.).

Question: Why is this a weed?

Hypothesis: Make observations about the way the plant looks and grows to determine why it may be a weed (field study).

Research: Identify and research your weed, including its origins, history, uses, and indentifying characteristics.

Analyze: Compare your findings with your original hypothesis.

Conclusion: Do you still think this plant is a weed?

Report: Share your findings with the class.

Following student presentations, go back to the original definition of “weed.” Are there any adjustments to their definition? What were some common characteristics of the weeds that students found? Without knowing something is a weed, what are some things we can look for to determine whether or not it might be considered one?

Extensions

- Students create a weed identification guide for their garden
- Students create “Wanted” signs for unwanted plants in the garden
- Students create an “Edible Weeds” guide complete with recipes

Younger Audience Adaptation

Have printouts and physical examples of weeds they may find in the garden and go on a weed hunt. Using the images and teacher assistance, students will find and identify at least 5 examples of weeds. When students find a weed, they may collect their specimens for the classroom, but be sure to have them confirm their findings as weeds before removing. Show the students how to properly remove weeds by pulling at the part closest to the soil, using gloves or a trowel when needed (spiny leaves or deep roots). When the students have collected set number of specimens, have them record their findings through a combination of illustration and writing (dictation where needed).