



THE HEALTH ARTS
RESEARCH CENTRE

The Birch Hearts Project: Envisioning Careers in Health and Wellness



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Introduction

The Birch Hearts Project was developed through Health Arts Research Centre by Marion Erickson for use in Dakelh Territory for teachers. Its purpose is to use art and Dakelh mediums of expression to assist young people to envision themselves in health and wellness careers. The original project used real birch, though we recognize that harvesting birch isn't feasible for everyone, so this module includes an adapted version. For those interested in harvesting their own birch, there is an appendix that includes how to properly do that.

About the Author

Marion Erickson is the Daughter of Susan Erickson and Lawrence Paul Yuxwulpton. She is a Dakelh woman with a Bachelors of Public Administration and Community Development from the University of Northern British Columbia.

Marion Erickson was raised to understand much of the Dakelh traditions through her family who have a strong connection to culture. She was also taught Traditional Ecological Knowledge while attending Nak'albun Elementary School and also through her work as a Traditional Knowledge Researcher for Nak'azdli Band.



Marion would like to thank Tania Solonas for her generous input into this project. Snachaliya Tania Solonas.

Traditional Dakelh uses for Birch

Dakelh people used to make various items from birch, including various types of baskets, shields, canoes, cultural ritual items, and syrup.

Birch is one of the first things that is ready to harvest in the spring time, it is nice to the trees to harvest in the spring because the sap is running and it allows the tree to heal all summer.

Dakelh people know the medicinal uses of various tree's, and believe that a tree, including Birch, has a spirit. In Dakelh mythology, there is a story about the trickster Ust'as and how the trees used to walk on the earth. Ust'as is a trickster, and a shape shifter, he is also what some might consider a god. He is responsible for various shapes of the land and many of his stories end with important morals.

Ust'as, the trickster, had to leave and told the trees to watch his fire. At that time all the trees had long leaves, or long needles and the shrubs were all nice and tall. All the trees started arguing about who could keep the fire better. They ended up having a big fight and the fire burned some of trees and the shrubs were flattened by the bigger trees rolling on them. When Ust'as came back he asked the trees what had happened and no tree would answer, so Ust'as made sure they would never talk again, and stuck their roots in the ground. To this day the trees no longer walk the earth and only certain people, with strong medicine, can talk to the trees¹.

This story details the virtues of trees including how well they burn, how long they burn, and if they burn hot and cold. It also describes the details of the trees so people can remember the names of the trees and what they look like. The end of this story also includes a lesson of why you shouldn't fight amongst each other, and why you should talk about why you are fighting amongst each other or maybe you too will become stuck in one place and silent.

One of the most important use of birch is to harvest bark to make baskets. Birch bark baskets are generally made from a sheet of bark that is cut in a pattern, folded, and stitched using spruce root. A red willow rim is added to support and strengthen the top and then lashed with spruce roots. Baskets are sometimes decorated with designs by either etchings or quill embroidery. Birch bark baskets were used to prepare for the future. People would fill the baskets with their winter supplies.

¹ Elder Edith Fredrick tells a more detailed and far more engaging version of this story and has generously allowed me to share this for this project. Here is the link to Edith Fredricks Story. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySWqQJYHJB0>

The goal of this project is also to prepare for the future, but instead of making a basket this project will allow participants to envision or appreciate a health or wellness career of their choosing using birch bark and art.

The Birch Hearts Project

You will need

This birch hearts project utilizes a Dakelh medium to plan for a future career in wellness utilizing tools that have been made available by Provincial Health organizations in British Columbia. To create this project, you will need:

- Printouts of the PDF's listed in the links below:
https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA_health_careers_guidebook.pdf
https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/career-and-skills/toolkit/careerzones/careerzone_health.pdf
- Printouts for the birch heart page on page 6 of this guide (preferably colour copies)
- Print outs of medicine wheel section.
- Card stock or thin cardboard (pop boxes would work great)
- Branches from willows or aspens no more than ½ inch in diameter. (these should be brought in fresh during spring make sure they do not dry out so they can bend easily to turn into a hoop).
- Poster or acrylic paint
- Access to youtube

if you would like to use real birch see the appendix section II for instructions on how to properly harvest

Lesson Plan Steps:

1. Begin by reading your group the introduction and/or watching the Edith Fredricks Youtube video.
2. Introduce and facilitate thinking about a health and wellness career
3. Create the Birch Heart
4. Reflect on the Birch Heart through completing the Creating Resilience by Envisioning Wellness Worksheet

Envisioning a Health or Wellness Career

1. The first step of this project is to choose a health and/or wellness career that interests you or that you are interested in becoming one day. If you are not interested in a health career than choose one that you are thankful for. (perhaps someone you love had their life changed due to a x-ray technologist, or you are thankful for your dental hygienist, or an Indigenous healer has helped you).

Here is a list of resources that goes over various healthcare careers to choose from and how to get there:

https://www.fnha.ca/Documents/FNHA_health_careers_guidebook.pdf

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/education/administration/kindergarten-to-grade-12/career-and-skills/toolkit/careerzones/careerzone_health.pdf

There are also some private sector wellness careers to consider:

Herbalist

Yoga Instructor

Fitness instructor

Fitness Centre operator

Traditional Medicine Maker

Indigenous Language Instructor

Doula

Art Therapist

Wellness Instructor

Creating Resilience Through Envisioning Wellness:

By envisioning wellness children can create wellness for themselves. Once the students have chosen a career for which they are interested in they can then work towards envisioning a future of wellness. This step in the lesson plan involves printing out the Medicine wheel and instructions from the appendix.

When doing the medicine wheel portion of this lesson plan teachers can do this section either collectively as a class, individually for each student or a mixture of both.

Medicine Wheel:

In this section you can put notes around the medicine wheel to answer the questions in the above section:

Making a Birch Heart

If you would like full instructions on how to make a birch heart you can follow this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7H6vSgcbR24>

1. Once you have chosen a health career, write down the name of that health career onto the paper birch heart using either a pencil or pencil crayon, you can use stencils if you have them.
2. The next step is to cut the out the birch heart and glue it onto a piece of card stalk or thin cardboard. This will make the paper birch heart a similar texture as real birch.
3. Cut out and punch holes in the birch bark heart.
4. Tie your stick to form a loop with string
5. Tie a long piece of string to the stick, and begin fastening the birch heart by zigzagging the string through the loops and the stick as shown in the picture below



6. Once you are happy with the position of the birch heart, tie off the end of the string and cut the remainder.
7. Once you are finished your birch heart should look like the following picture



Appendix:

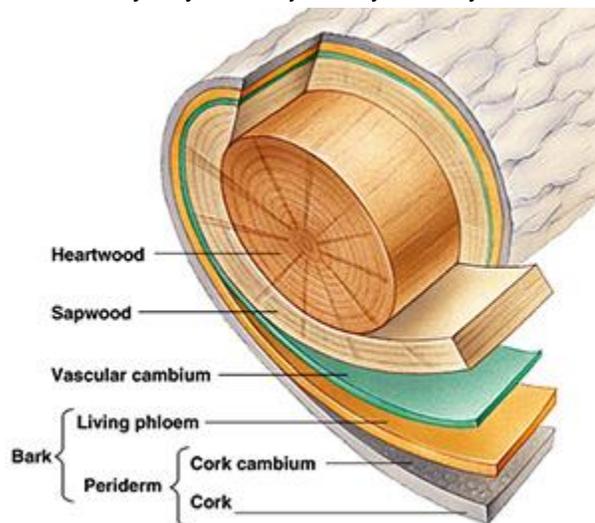
Included in this section:

- 1) Harvesting Birch Bark
- 2) The Birch Heart
- 3) Creating Resilience by Envisioning Wellness: Worksheet

Harvesting Birch Bark:

There are various resources available on youtube that show how to harvest birch bark yourself. Some of the resources go all the way around the tree and doesn't give good information on how to harvest. Here are some key considerations if you would like to harvest your own birch to do this project.

- (1) Birch is best harvested in the early spring or summer when the sap is running. This will give the birch all summer to heal. This will also make the birch bark easier to harvest.
- (2) It is best to not go all the way around the birch tree. This will ensure the tree will heal easier.
- (3) Note that there are various layers within the birch tree as seen in the image below, you do not want to cut right sown to the heartwood, or sapwood, and you should try to avoid cutting into the living phloem. You only need the cork and cork cambium as it makes a nice colour for the birch hearts. If you have cut into the vascular cambium make sure that you only cut a small piece that you need and try a different tree.
- (4) In the Dakelh culture we believe, like the story of the trees being able to walk and talk that everything has a spirit. Out of respect we put some tobacco down in a show of thanks. If this does not align with your cultural values maybe you can just say thank you to the tree.



Michael Wojtech (2013)

The Birch Heart



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Creating Resilience by Envisioning Wellness: Worksheet

When planning a goal often times people focus on planning how to meet that goal they often question: How they are going to get where they want to go? What steps they have to take to get there? How they will financially plan? These steps are great for planning and completing a goal. What is often not considered is how to plan for personal wellness. By envisioning wellness, we can develop resilience. We are going to think about the personal wellness strategies that folks can do to complete their goal successfully.

In this part of the project you will think about the health career you want to undertake or the health career you admire and decide how either yourself or the person you envisioned will get to that goal. In doing this step you will think about how to find balance in the mental, physical, spiritual and emotional wellness. To do this part of the lesson we will use the Medicine Wheel. The medicine wheel was originally used by more eastern tribes such as the Blackfoot people and was brought to Dakelh country in the early 80's during the healing movement of the time. The medicine Wheel, though not traditionally part of Dakelh culture, fits well into the types of balanced wellbeing that was traditional taught through stories shared by elders which is why is widely used by many Dakelh people today.



When looking at this medicine wheel in the previous page consider the following:

Mental

What kinds of things can I do or does the person I admire in their health career do for mental wellness? Maybe they have a hobby that they do on the weekend or maybe they see a counselor and talk about their problems?

Physical

What kinds of things can I do or does the person that I admire in their health career do for physical wellness? Maybe they play a sport they like? Or eat a certain type of food? Or do a certain workout routine?

Spiritual

What kinds of things can I do or does the person that I admire do for spiritual wellness? Maybe they are Buddhist and pray to Buddha? Maybe you believe in science and like to read science books and watch science documentaries, maybe you are spiritual and like to smudge your house? Maybe you are Christian or Catholic or Jewish, or Jehovah Witness and like to go to church with your families?

Citations

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