

Blueberry Exercise, by Jacky Vallée (Anyone is free to adapt and use in their classes)

Notes:

- Any kind of fruit can be used, but preferably something that grows locally.
- Preferable to have a few options since there are some people who have an intolerance to or an extreme dislike of any given food.

Goals:

- The blueberry exercise allows students to reflect on the relationship between living beings, including plants or anything else that becomes a source of food, and how mainstream capitalist Western society disconnects people from this relationship. It can also be used to discuss how the effort involved in obtaining something changes our relationship to it.

Context:

- This exercise was developed for The Human Experience: An Introduction to Anthropology to introduce the topics of cultural adaptation and subsistence (ways of getting food, water, and other resources). The idea was to discuss how adapting to the environment and getting essential resources is not just about surviving – humans give meaning to everything!
- The exercise can be adapted to a variety of contexts and courses: economics, sociology, geography, religious studies, philosophy, humanities.

Reference to local Indigenous worldviews:

- I work in Tio'tia:ke (Montreal), and start every semester in all my classes by recognizing the Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk) nation as traditional custodians of these territories (along with a more in-depth land acknowledgement and statement of accountability, of course). So I refer back to that acknowledgement as often as possible in my classes. So part of this exercise includes references to Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), of which the Kanien'kehá:ka is a part, worldview and practice. This should be adapted to your local context.

Delivery: I put the instructions on PPT slides, but one could do it on a worksheet. My PPT is available upon request: valleej@vaniercollege.qc.ca

Slides:

1. Discussion prompt
 - a. Content warning (re: dead animal).
 - b. [Tanya Tagaq's "Sealfie"](#) (note: I put this as a hyperlink rather than have the image on the slide to give students a chance to look away if they need to after the content warning).
 - c. "Does this bother you? Why?" (Allow for 2 or 3 minutes of discussion or journaling, then give [context](#) and explain that mainstream Western society teaches us to view our relationship to the things we consume in a particular way that is not universal.
2. Active Learning Activity: Instructions
 - a. Today's work is interactive, reflective, and inquisitive.
 - b. Please work on a sheet of paper that you will hand in at the end of class for participation marks.
 - c. Write your name on top next to "Modes of Subsistence Activity".
 - d. You can answer all the questions on the same sheet.

3. Opening Questions (to answer on sheet)
 - a. What is one basic need that all living things share?
 - b. How do YOU obtain this?

Pass around a couple of bowls of berries (or whatever you are using). Note: Post-covid, this may need to be adapted to sanitary measures.

4. Reflection (to answer on sheet)
 - a. Hold a berry in your hand.
 - b. What is your relationship to the berry, if you have one?
 - c. How would this relationship change if you had travelled to gather the item or cultivated and harvested it yourself?
 - d. Go ahead and eat it if you like!
5. The Meaning of Nurturance (to answer on sheet)
 - a. What are meanings of food that go beyond survival?
 - b. Other than food and water, what or who else gives you life and nurturance?
6. The Cultural Value of Food (I show the videos and mention that text descriptions are available)
 - a. Haudenosaunee and Giving Thanks*
 - i. [The Ohen:ton Kariwatehkwen \(Words Before All Else\)](#) (Video)
 - ii. [Ohenton Kariwa'tek:wen, Thanksgiving](#) (Text)
 - b. Haudenosaunee Creation Story: The Three Sisters
 - i. [Verbal recounting](#) by Haudenosaunee Elders and knowledge carriers (Video)
 - ii. [Text version](#) by the Wabano Centre
 - c. Cultural maintenance and revitalization
 - i. [Welcoming the Three Sisters at Mohawk College](#) (Video)

*I explain that this is something that traditionally happens at the beginning of gatherings, and is usually done by an Elder or Knowledge Keeper. It can take a few minutes or a lot longer, depending on the context. I also let students know that even if they don't understand that language, they may still understand the main message because of the imagery and some of the English sub-titles.

7. Reflect and Discuss (on paper or verbally)
 - a. Is access to food and other resources only about survival? If not, what else is it about?
 - b. What are similarities and differences between the ideas expressed in the videos and texts we just viewed and the ideas expressed in your family (family of origin or chosen family) in relation to the value of the land and the food that it provides?