

Thoughts on honoring Indigenous wisdom from Jane Straight

As an elder, I believe it's important to acknowledge those who walked this path before us, such as the Coastal Miwok people whose territory many of us inhabit.

A few good ways to familiarize students with the Coast Miwok lifestyle would be to visit one of the sites that have recreated villages and boast native plant gardens. Consider a field trip to Olompali State Park. It is within the land and territory that the Coast Miwok inhabited for 8,000 years. It opened to the public in 1990 and now hosts a reconstructed Miwok village, native plant nursery, and trails with native plant identification. The park has tremendous ethnobotanical significance because of the abundance of vegetation utilized in the traditional life of Indigenous Peoples.

Or go to Point Reyes National Seashore. The Bear Valley Visitor Center has a replica of a Coast Miwok village and "Indian Trail" with traditional plants that are identified by name and how they were utilized.

Explore reciprocity through the wisdom contained in the book "Braiding Sweetgrass" by Robin Wall Kimmerer, and its adaptation for young adults. These excellent books explore the reverence between Indigenous Peoples and the earth, guiding us in our unique expressions of gratitude. How can we show our appreciation for the gifts we receive from the land?

Consider having a classroom discussion around the questions: "How did Indigenous People know what plants to use?", "Did they dream about them?", "Were they guided in some way?".

Create a seasonal garden mandala that is posted in your classroom. Each month will show the diverse tasks to be accomplished. March is for seed planting, etc.

Consider creating greeting cards using the Hapa Zome eco-printing method with seasonal botanicals.

Fall is also the time of year to plant California natives and there are many resources for acquiring them to enhance your gardens. A few native plant nurseries in Sonoma County include: California Flora Nursery, Hallberg Butterfly Nursery, and the California Native Plant Society's nursery at the Laguna Foundation Environmental Center. A consciously planted and cared for native habitat garden can be an extraordinary classroom as well as a sanctuary that soothes our souls.



Jane Straight is a devoted Mother, Grandmother, plant woman, teacher, and friend. Her history of impassioned plant work spans over 40 years, including preserving species collected in Central & South America. In the 1990's she was instrumental in empowering students with the first school gardens in West Sonoma County. While in semi-retirement now, she is writing a much-requested cultivation guidebook. Jane is honored to share her understanding of the deep, mutually beneficial relationships that exist between plants and people and the importance of keeping sacred traditions alive.

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