

Kídílyé - Rooted in Tradition

Cultivating Náádaá' and Diné Culture through STEM

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Indigenous Early Childhood Educators Professional Development Fellowship

2025

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Context

Shímásaní was as tough as they come, fearless, strong, and resilient. It is to her that I focus and dedicate my curriculum unit, as a Diné asdzaa, I aim to be just like her and fight for decolonization and work towards cultivating a culturally responsive environment for the students just like me. As an early childhood educator, I teach preschoolers at the NAU Early Learning and Development Center in Flagstaff, Arizona. We are surrounded by Coconino Forest, pine trees, ponderosas, junipers and oak are among a few. Flagstaff sits at the base of Dook'o'osłííd, the San Francisco peaks also known as one of the four sacred mountains to the Diné people. Kínłání, (Flagstaff) sits at an elevation of 7,000 feet with varying temperatures, a wide variety of colors during seasonal changes and snowfalls that vary from year to year. Flagstaff's population currently sits at 76,246, according to World Population Review (Flagstaff, 2025) the community is diverse and serves a large population of NAU's students and families. It serves as a border town for the Navajo reservation that often has an influx of Indigenous families over the course of the week doing their weekly town trips. The town of Flagstaff is very diverse and has a large portion of Indigenous families that have moved here wanting a change from the reservation.

The NAU ELDC center is a few years old that serves student-parents, employees of NAU and the community. The ELDC is a learning environment that is prioritizes inquiry-based learning in a play-based environment. In my current setting, I currently serve thirteen students in a small classroom. On a day-to-day basis, the ELDC partners with NAU through our assistant workers hired from the NAU student database, student teachers, the college of education practicum students and a variety of volunteers that require observation hours. We have also partnered with speech and occupational therapy services for our students as well. The students in the center range in ages from 2-5 years while the preschoolers in my classroom range in ages from 3-4.5. Currently, my classroom consists of an inclusive group of students; I have 5 Diné students, 1 Native Hawaiian student, 1 Hispanic, 1 Chinese student and 5 white students. The ELDC provides an inclusive learning environment that emphasizes social emotional learning, community connections and practicing culturally sustaining practices that respect 100% of our families in our community. My classroom is a constant motion of curious and playful learnings that are curious, capable, and deeply observant. Each student brings unique family values, traditions and languages that are honored and valued at the ELDC.

The curriculum going forward is designed to integrate STEM while fully valuing the Diné ways of the dá'aak'éh to integrate ancestral values through STEM. It is also important to come back and focus on the most basic way of learning, through nature. "True knowing is based on experiencing nature directly. 'Doing' and playing are integral parts of Native learning; apprenticeship is a form of directed learning" (Cajete, 2000). It also allows students to connect to their relatives and k'é through building foundational knowledge based on the dá'aak'éh and naadaá'. The goal of this plan is to help students reconnect with their roots, their culture and implementing traditional Indigenous knowledge system through Kídilyé - Rooted in Tradition- Cultivating Dine Culture through STEM.

Rationale

I am a Diné woman born and raised on the Navajo reservation and call Tółíkan, Arizona my home. Tółíkan is a small, rural community sitting on the base of the Chuska mountains,

surrounded by different landscapes and scenery as far as the eye can see. As a child, my memories can easily define the Chuska mountains outlining the eastern sky, red rocks lying southwest of my parent's home that pointed the direction of Shímásaní's house and open desert landscape in every direction. At night, the sky opened to falling stars and constellations pointed out to me by my dad. The land I grew up on were severe but healing, rugged and sacred, isolated, but intimate. Today, I reflect on these memories to understand the land we live on were both harsh and nurturing, they hold strong to memories left by generations of stories, prayers and footsteps. The environment and memories of Shímásaní shaped my childhood and today, I see hope, resilience, resources and a connection to my land and my people.

I come from a large family, two working parents and seven children. I am the second youngest, despite the hardships, my family held strong to their roots, holding tight to a traditional upbringing and culture. I was fortunate to have been provided a strong foundation in my language and the connections to the Diné culture. Today, I am an early childhood educator with over twelve years of professional experience. During my years, I craved to reconnect with my roots and culture, I wanted to give back to my community and provide an open space for Indigenous students like me to thrive – the rez kids.

As an early childhood educator, I have worked years in an early childhood classroom and longed for a diverse group of children to work with. Previously, I have worked with a school that served affluent families in the city of Flagstaff and decided a changed was needed. I found myself at NAU's Early Learning and Development Center, I serve as a mentor teacher for the preschool classroom. It is in this space I found a home among myself and my people. I walk into my classroom space and can picture myself among my Indigenous students, I can connect with them and understand their culture, their values, and their upbringing.

Many of my student's upbringings often consist of conversations surrounding their cheiis, másanís, and nálís which bring me absolute joy and peace. As a rez kid, I grew up digging in the dirt and making mudpies at Shímásaní's hogan. I can close my eyes and think about the delicious blue corn pancakes she would make for my Mom and I, the glow of her kerosene lamp in the early winter nights, the water basin sitting to the right of her door or the padlock to her door that gave the illusion that her house was locked up but actually was not. Shímásaní is one of the resilient and resourceful connection that grounds me to my students.

As a child, the summer monsoons were followed by my favorite smell; wet, red dirt that was earthy, grounding and in an instant, the smell still floods me with memories to this day. While I never had the opportunity to ask, but the smell and sounds of a rainstorm must have been shímásaní's favorite too. Shímásaní was a gardener, a strong, hardy Diné woman who often ran acres of cornfields singlehandedly. She found balance and harmony among her land to grow and



Figure 1: Navajo woman tossing corn in roasting pit. Photo taken by Marcia Keegan (Shorty, 1999)

sustain her children and grandchildren for years. The magnitude of what she did was often lost on me. It was not until I became a novice gardener a few years ago that I truly valued what Shímásaní did. While she is no longer with us, it has become a privilege to learn what it means to connect with the land, value and appreciate the hard work in providing a nurturing environment, what Shímásaní has accomplished has astounded me to no ends.

In my connection to Shímásaní, I want to reframe this for my preschoolers to find an understanding with their home, their clans and their values. Our Diné culture is fighting for preservation and to make a difference, I have learned that that begins with our youth. I strive to find cultural continuity while honoring my relatives by providing meaningful and intentional teaching through Indigenous knowledge. Cajete talks about Native Science and the meaning to its connections through Indigenous ways, ‘Native science is in every sense an expression of the evolutionary interrelationship of Native people with nature’ (Cajete, 2000, p. [Page 58]). He connects this to the tree of life that is often seen as a significant symbol in Indigenous culture that represents the connection between all living things on earth. It is believed to be the source of life and knowledge, representing the interdependence and interconnectedness between humans, animals, plants, and spirits (n.d., 2025).

As a Diné asdzaa, I want to reclaim and honor my upbringing in providing rich learning STEM experiences for my students that are authentic, grounded and connected through Native science and the tree of life. Shímásaní planted and harvested corn, melons, and squash, it has taught me resilience, connection, and a hard work ethic. As a child, I didn’t realize how important the lessons were, or how valuable the language is, nor the science behind it. Today, I want to return these teachings with honor, integrity and intention through Kídílyé - Rooted in Tradition- Cultivating Náádáá’ and Diné Culture through STEM.

Instructional Guide

The heart of my unit lays exposed and bare, missing the connection I crave and miss with Shímásaní, her love language was not just working hard but also providing acts of service for her loved ones like making blue corn pancakes and blue mush. On the days she knew we were coming to visit, she has a stack of cakes waiting under a clear dome. It sat on her rickety aluminum table, sitting next to the repurposed salt and pepper shakers. As soon as I step over the doorframe, my senses are hit with the damp, dusty earth mixing in with scents of cedar and freshly made bread. On the rickety table, the dome covers the stack of blue bread that is bubbled with beads of condensation from the freshly made blue corn pancakes.

Essential Background Ideas and Concepts

As an adult, my guide serves a purpose of understanding the history of Kídílyé, growing corn and using it to nourish our mind, body and soul. Kídílyé - Rooted in Tradition- Cultivating Náádáá’ and Diné Culture is a unit designed to cultivate a deeper understanding to oneself to promote cultural connectivity to one’s relatives and community. The concepts tied around this until will connect and promote the following:

- Utilize and embrace an integration of *inquiry-based approach* that embraces the value of an *open-ended, play-based curriculum*. “This definition considers play, first, as a

demonstration of what children know, and second, a demonstration of what they are currently thinking about. Through play, children actively construct new knowledge about objects, people, and events by integrating new experiences with what they already know. This definition sets the stage for play as a domain. If play is an expression of what children know, then an evaluation of children's play behaviors can be used for an assessment of knowledge. If play is an activity for learning, then interventions in play can be used to help children learn” (Lifter, Foster-Sanda, Arzamarski, Briesch, & McClure, 2011, pp. 227-228)

- Integrate a *Diné language approach* that touches on the importance of *language revitalization*.
- Embrace outdoor activities that connect *holistic views* connected to *Hózhò, harmony and balance*. “The main source of food comes from white, blue, yellow, and red corn, which are sacred. Daily offerings of white corn, corn pollen, and yellow corn to the Holy People for healing and resiliency are the core teachings for health and wellness” (Nelson, 2018, p. para. 5).
- The unit encompasses to strive for *cultural connection and continuity* through efforts of *language preservation, storytelling, cultural knowledge and build familial bridges* to support foundational connections. Armstrong talks about the importance of embracing her diverse group of students through culturally responsive teaching, “...Culturally responsive teaching (CRT), which validates and affirms the cultures of the students and incorporates their cultures in multiple aspects of learning and the environment in meaningful ways. This approach also encourages educators to hold high expectations of the children and their ability to learn content” (Armstrong, 2020).
- In addition, students will also be engaging in experiences that support and enhance curriculum standards that meet the needs of each student working with this unit.

Teaching Strategies and Lesson Sequence

Ałchíní yaazhi aadaaltsíisiyee’, while it is cliché to say they are the future, words could not ring any truer than having a firm grasp in understanding that they are the adults in the future. They are learning from every experience they have and as adults or educators, we should maximize their ability to soak in these learning moments. Raising and nurturing children is no small task. It requires attention not only to their growth and well-being, but also to the nutrition they put into their bodies. Náádáá’ is a traditional food that brings a sacred connection to the earth. It provides sustainability and nourishment that ground our children in culture and health. Bidii Baby Foods founder, Zachariah Ben and his family have successfully implemented a local farming practice within the Navajo Nation. Their farming practice started six generations ago through their da’aak’eeh – cornfields and gardens. Today, they have expanded into a nonprofit business that ties in cultural traditions and sharing knowledge. Their farm now provides nutritious options to infants and young children like cornmeal and steamed corn. They also give back to their community by opening their lands to farming interns, provide land-based learning opportunities, presentations and advocate for our Indigenous lands. It is critical to connect our youth to these practices to provide a healthy balance in lifestyle, but also to continue cultural responsiveness in an accurate setting. Ben also points out the importance of teaching our youth but also providing foods that nature and sustain us, “...to provide and build a better food system and a secure one,

most importantly a sustainable one that our children can grow and eat with into the future” (Bidii Baby Foods LLC, 2025). It is important to continue decolonization efforts by providing platforms to increase these efforts and this unit focuses on holistic practices connected to the ways of our elders and ancestors.

This unit strives to create honor and integrity to our elders and ancestors to restore cultural memories, honor lived experiences and build intergeneration bridges through náádáá’. The goal is to give students a connection to their own families by building a culturally responsive unit that embraces inquiry-based learning, hands on play, storytelling, and language and cultural integration in the teaching strategies while sharing knowledge about náádáá’ – the sacred and fundamental element of Diné like and knowledge systems. As we head into the unit, we need to be cognizant of our teaching strategies and how we are going to implement this into our lessons with our children. As you continue, you will see the layout of my plans sequencing out while connecting the teaching strategies and practice.

Photo Prompt: On The Navajo Nation: A Life Without Water

The unit will open to provide a dialog and discussion with students; provide a photo like the examples provides and ask questions, consider the 5 Ws- who, what, where, when, why. In addition, think beyond the why questions that support learner’s thought process, language development and critical thinking. The photo prompt should open up conversations with your students that spark curiosity, engagement through storytelling and establish parallel connections to their own families. During this, allow your students to talk and capture their dialog through photos, anecdotal notes and videos – this will increase your own knowledge by allowing you to come back and revisit but also establish your baseline framework on what they know and how you can meet them at their levels.

Shímásaní’s Dá’aak’eeh: Hardwork and Resilience

Growing up, I worked to integrate a writing practice into everything I did but often felt underwhelmed due to lack of mentors or inspiration. During a recent workshop, I felt renewed and inspired, in addition, we are lacking Indigenous books that support our students in today’s classroom. In an effort to continue making a difference, I would love to work on create a story that localizes our Diné elders and children. This practice would incorporate a storybook written by me and illustrated by a local author that would love to put their heart into a story that resonates with them. It will focus on building emotional connection to the characters and incorporate Diné language integration while covering the cultural role of gardening and planting. It is also important to cover stories for more than 4 days a week, so this will be a focus during our read aloud so that the content has time to be covered and expanded over the course of the week. “A 2019 study by the Ohio State University found that young children whose parents read to them five times daily will hear nearly 1.5 million more words by the time they turn five than children who were not read to at all. This is known as the “million-word gap” (The Incredible Impact of Reading Aloud to Children, 2023). This not just balanced the western concept of literacy skills but combined with Diné language, we work to integrate in all the ways that we can.

Garden plots and Memory Connections

In order to maintain cultural continuity, there will be levels of family engagement that is vital to the success of the lesson integration. In this lesson, families will get to participate by providing family photos of their children with their grandparents or families. The idea of a photo prompt is to continue to engage students into their own families and provide a language component. As their teacher, I can connect language here to encourage students to use terms like shímásani, shícheii, shínalí hashti'iin or shínalí asdzaa. Another opportunity to take advantage of here is to include a child's elder or family members to come speak to our group which will allow expansion of connection and provide a Diné language integration in an organic and holistic way. In connection to this, a writing and art component can be added which encourages students to practice their fine motor, writing and drawing skills to depict what they know or are seeing.

Dá'aak'eeh Preparation and Garden Visit

In this lesson, we will head outdoors to explore local gardens and da'aak'eeh sites. We will look at critical thinking skills in solving how we can prep a garden while keeping in mind how our relatives were able to do to. Holistically, we keep in mind the strength and resilience, but in modern society, discuss how to can hold steadfast to our tradition while maintaining the balance among our current world to tradition. We use this next step to continue language revitalization methods through reiteration of words in Diné but also to encourage Indigenous students to build on their vocabulary and language. In continuation of writing and art, we can build on this to support students by asking for observational drawings of what they are seeing so that we can revisit their work to continue building on prior knowledge, what they are learning and continue to prompt their connections. In addition, we can scaffold their learning by adding visual drawings illustrated by students to aid in successful planting of a garden, e.g. soil, water, dig, plant, cover, water, etc. This experience will help promote critical thinking, problem solving and sequencing through all actions involved.

Water Conservation: Tó éí íiná (Water is Life)

In this next lesson, we will look at the book based on a community volunteer who dedicates her time to her community, *The Water Lady: How Darlene Arviso Helps a Thirsty Navajo Nation*. This read aloud will support students understanding in bring awareness to water conservation and tie in social emotional content to understand that we are extremely lucky to have access to water so freely. As we round out the story, we can discuss ways we can be conscious of our water usage at home by comparing water on the reservation to those who have running faucets. In addition, we can become more conscious understanding Tó éí íiná – Water is Life. We can use this to develop empathy for those who do not have running water and work towards water conversation in our classroom and our home. We can also provide supplemental activities such as asking students more critical thinking components on how we can water our gardens, water sustainability and rain catchers if they develop an interest.

Naadáá' Identification

As we continue with our lessons, we will explore through sensory play and observation using real corn – this can be ears of corn, dried kernels or ground corn. In this lesson, we will connect our work to the garden and build on where corn comes from through knowledge we have learned, observations and language. We will also use this to explore the critical component of our language revitalization component by introducing and identifying parts of a corn using the

Diné language. In a passionate workshop series taught by Jennie DeGroat, I took away the importance of staying true to the Diné language. She uses a combination of methods explained by a past student of hers, Ivan Ozbolt, who participated in her workshop, American Indian Language Development Institute. DeGroat uses a method that combines sensory and tactile methods to engage language learners and Ozbolt talks about the importance of culturally based language acquisition, “Second language acquisition research emphasizes the importance of teaching culture along with language, which has shown to be very beneficial to students: “Culture is the most important context for language learning” (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004, p. 225). It also stresses the importance of acquiring communicative competence in addition to linguistic competence, which we can define as “what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular language community” (Saville-Troike, 2006, p. 186)” (Ozbolt, n.d.). In adding this combined method described by Ivan Ozbolt, I want to teach my students using DeGroat’s methods to build on my student’s Diné language while helping to identify the parts of an ear of corn or *dá’aak’eh*.

The History of Blue Corn: Naadaá’ Doot’izh and Family Knowledge

Next, we will continue looked at the types of corn, sweet corn, white corn, yellow corn and multicolored corn. At this point, I hope that my students have connected and talked about what they are learning with their families to incorporate and expand through family funds of knowledge. My school centers on building on learning through their local experts and plan to maximize this as much as my families will allow – which can include having them come in to give demonstrations or speak to our students. We will also be using the book *Celebrate my Hopi Corn* to give background knowledge on where one type of corn comes from. This is important to me as it ties back to the uses of Shímásani’s ways – blue corn pancakes and blue mush. This will also open to a discussion on how we prepare corn in our homes and connect to how our elders did so as well. The idea behind these lessons will allow us to make connections, reflect on what we have learned and then move into the next lessons to come full circle with our lessons.

Final Unit Lesson: leesaan Doot’izhii/Blue Corn Pancakes and Tóshchiin/Blue Mush

Both of these lessons will be separated over a series of days, we will develop an understanding to what each of them are, the ingredients and tools use and then prepare the recipe from start to finish. The combination of lessons will tie the unity together to reflect on the stories we have shared, the language we are developing and the cultural significance we hold to each dish we prepare. Additionally, it looks at a science and math component through the preparation while also giving students avenues to problem solve and plan.

Assessment Plan



Throughout this process, I plan on capturing photos, videos, work samples and anecdotal notes to provide a detailed story of what we learned in the process. In the beginning, we will also create a web that centers on capturing prior known knowledge and at the end, holding discussions to talk about the things we have learned that will be marked in another color. The process and progress will be captured in detail throughout the process. In inquiry-based learning, we learn through hands on activities that encompass learning at all levels while meeting their needs, I believe our story and progress can be told throughout the journey in the photos, samples and notes. It will

also entail the standards captured through the Kaymbu curriculum. Lastly, we will also reflect on the Navajo Nation standards and the CRAIS tool – an assessment development to look at teaching culturally responsive content.

Teaching Plan

Lesson	Photo Prompt: On The Navajo Nation: A Life Without Water (Tsong-Taataarii, 2023).	
Lesson Description:	<p>In this lesson, children will participate and engage in a photo prompt discussion. Students will be provided a collection of photographs of different images from the Pulitzer Center’s story surrounding the Navajo Nation’s water crisis. The images include a photo of a Diné family’s da’aak’eeh, images of water trucks and homes in need of running water. The images will service as a conversation prompt to encourage student’s language expression and observations, build vocabulary and establish a foundation on what students already know based off of the photos. The lesson is to encourage language, explore early da’aak’eeh and to concepts while building empathy, cultural and familial connections through age-appropriate discussion.</p> <p>**Be mindful to honor the individuals in the photos, we want to model honor and resilience while sparking interest, awareness, empathy and connection.</p>	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Approaches to Learning:</i> C. Reflection • <i>Social and Emotional Development:</i> D. Emotions, E. Building relationships with adults, F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • <i>Language, Literacy, and Communication:</i> L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension • <i>Mathematics:</i> S. Number and counting, V. Patterns • <i>Creative Arts:</i> X. Art • <i>Science and Technology:</i> DD. Natural and physical world 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 9. Models critical thinking about historical narratives and contemporary status quo • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities. • 19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities.

Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will observe and describe details in the photographs using prior knowledge and expressive language to share with teacher and peers. • Students will build language and vocabulary related to the photographs – garden, water, da’aak’eeh, tó, shímasaní, shícheii. • Students will begin to develop and connect to a cultural context around running water and access to water. • Students will connect and use visual storytelling to aide their own stories and connections.
Instructional Strategies:	<p>Teacher will gather students in small groups and introduce photo cards. First, the teacher will model, “I see” statements in the photo and use, “Shímasaní had a garden just like this!” Give students an example of what you would like to see happen with the photo cards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show one photo at a time, students may pass around. • Ask open ended questions: What do you see in the picture? What do you think is happening? What are they doing? How do you think they feel? Where do you think the water is coming from? • Support students language development by repeating what they are saying to model language. • Connect students to their own access to gardens and water, do you have a garden? Do you know anyone that has a garden? How do you water it? Where does your water come from? <p>Extension You can further extend this if students are engaged through providing drawing materials, ask students to create their own visual representations of their own connections to gardens and water or to what they remember.</p>
Learning Resources:	<p><u>On the Navajo Nation, A Life Without Water</u></p> <div data-bbox="464 1266 870 1551"> </div> <div data-bbox="883 1266 1317 1551"> </div> <div data-bbox="464 1587 883 1866"> </div> <div data-bbox="891 1587 1291 1866"> </div>

	 
Assessment:	<p>Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.</p>

Lesson	Shímásaní's Dá'aak'eeh: Hardwork and Resilience (Kee, 2025).	
Lesson Description:	<p>In the second follow up lesson, we will be reading a book over the course of the week. The book features a personal story written by me that showcases her relationship with her másaní and the memories created around her dá'aak'eeh. The story reflects the hard work and perseverance behind every Diné elder, it uses the connect built among granddaughter and to bring awareness to our elders while staying true to respect, honor, and hard work to build connection and empathy to students. Throughout the week, a series of questions or connections will be pulled to encourage students learning and Diné language incorporation.</p>	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language, Literacy, and Communication: L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension, N. Phonological Awareness, P. Reading, Q. Book Enjoyment and Knowledge • Approaches to Learning: C. Reflection • Social and Emotional Development: F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • Science and Technology: DD. Natural and physical world 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 4. Traditional and/or cultural knowledge is included. • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities.</i> • <i>21. Local Indigenous language(s) are valued.</i> • <i>22. Local Indigenous language(s) is integrated.</i>
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will listen to and respond to story during read aloud. • Students will develop oral language and vocabulary through repetitive exposure and discussion. • Students will develop and connect personal experiences to the story. • Students will understand and recognize the value and respect of our elders. • Students will engage during read aloud to support Diné language development and also support the “million word gap.” 	
Instructional Strategies:	<p>The incorporation of this read aloud will happen over a week, sources have shown that consistent and multiday read alouds using the same story prove to have beneficial effects on retention of story and teaching contexts. “Thus, effective interactive read alouds include a systematic approach that incorporates teachers’ modeling of higher-level thinking, asking thoughtful questions calling for analytic talk, prompting children to recall a story in some way within a reasonable time frame, reading a single book repeatedly, and reading books related by topic. It also involves a systematic approach to developing children’s understanding of vocabulary, such as inserting short definitions of words and phrases during reading” (McGee & Schickedanz, 2025).</p> <p>Children increase their vocabulary and boost comprehension when stories are repeatedly read, they connect to the story on a larger scale than if read just once.</p> <p>Day 1: Read aloud of story Day 2: Read aloud of story and introduce Diné vocabulary, teacher will support with clapping syllables, modeling language alongside meaning and picture support.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shímá • Shímásaní • Hooghan • Dá’aak’eeh • Chaha’oh <p>Day 3: Read aloud and utilize small groups with storytelling with props. Day 4: Connection to story: Who is your másaní? Tell me about her, draw a picture of her. (This can include other members of the family to support inclusion and mixed family dynamics). Day 5: Reread story and ask students to reflect on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One thing your family does. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One thing you did not know. • One thing you want to do with your family. • As an added extension, families can invite their families in to connect to the class by allowing questions and engagement. Other opportunities can include a FaceTime call or video sent in by families.
Learning Resources:	N/A
Assessment:	Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.

Lesson	Garden plots and Memory Connection Stories <i>*Two weeks prior to this lesson, the teacher will need to reach out to parents and ask for photos. The photos can be pictures of personal gardens, community gardens, students helping in gardens, working in family dá'aak'eh or older photos of family.</i>	
Lesson Description:	The next lesson ties into family engagement, Diné language immersion, memory stories and expression through language, art and social emotional content. The lesson continues storytelling; this time you will be engaging through student's personal photos and memories shared by family. Memory stories such as this allows our students to explore generational ties through dialog, self-expression and connecting to their family. It uses personal student connections to integrate Diné terms that will expand and deepen student identity. It also provides shared experiences that gives students an opportunity to voice, cross collaborate through parallel connections and build on shared classroom cultural space.	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<i>COR Advantage</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Approaches to Learning:</i> C. Reflection • <i>Social and Emotional Development:</i> D. Emotions, E. Building relationships with adults, F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • <i>Language, Literacy, and Communication:</i> L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension 	<i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 4. Traditional and/or cultural knowledge is included.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Social Studies:</i> FF Knowledge of self and others, HH. History • <i>Science and Technology:</i> DD. Natural and physical world 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11. Diverse narratives and perspectives are integrated. • 12. Local/regional Indigenous community is reflected. • 13. Norms, values, traditions, interests of local/regional Indigenous communities are leveraged for learning opportunities. • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities. • 16. Encourages students to build and sustain relationships.
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will engage in language development through personal story telling connections and photos. • Children will engage and practice Diné kinship terms in correlation with their own family members, e.g., shímásání, shícheii, shínáíí hashtį́'ín, shínáíí asdzáá and work to build and sustain familial relationships. • Students will build fine motor, writing and literacy skills through drawing and labeling of photos they bring in. • Students will be encouraged to expand on understanding themselves in a larger context within their cultural surrounding. 	
Instructional Strategies:	<p>We will begin by the teacher modeling expectations of photos/memory stories. Teacher will present personal photos and model how to talk about photos: “We are going to look at photos of my family today, some of them are at my house and some are of shímásani and her dá’aak’eh/garden.” Teacher will continue talking about experiences and ask students to do the same.</p> <p>Before beginning, set expectations for students: Be Kind, Be Safe, Be curious. We set a schoolwide list of expectations for students to show kindness through listening to others. We are safe by having safe bodies and are curious through asking and answering questions. Once expectations are set, allow student a chance to talk about their own photos. **If student did not bring a photo, provide one from teacher’s personal selection or internet.</p> <p>During sharing, encourage students to use kinship terms, shímásání, shícheii, shínáíí hashtį́'ín, shínáíí asdzáá. This lesson may be continued over a series of days to allow students to share stories.</p>	

	<p>Extension</p> <p>As a session to close out, students can match student photos and/or drawings to correct kinship printed card. If kinship cards are used, incorporate into lesson at the beginning to create visual cues and ties.</p>
Learning Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family submitted photos – can be emailed or printed. Request can be asked weeks in advance, be specific in requesting images of family garden plots, community plots the family helps in and include grandparent photos and or garden related images with grandparents. • Teacher’s personal photos to model and demonstrate with. • Writing and drawing materials to create language/vocabulary cards to display in the classroom.
Assessment:	<p>Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.</p>

Lesson	<p>Dá’aakeeh Preparation and Garden Visit</p> <p>Hands-on experience deepens understanding of how plants grow and what they need.</p>	
Lesson Description:	<p>In preparation for this visit, we have introduced Diné terms and build connections for students. As we venture into the next lesson, we explore through a direct connection with the land. This lesson goes outdoors to explore gardens within your current surroundings. The lesson will take place over a few days to give students time to explore and think critically through the planting process, then modeling what the steps are to finally, allowing them to plant in the garden beds. In the process, you will deepen their understanding of plant care while integrating language development, critical thinking, planning and scientific observation. In the process outdoors, the teacher will need to remain cognizant of tying back to ancestral traditions, “Shímásaní didn’t have a garden bed but planted in the ground, I wonder...” Thinking aloud and having these reflections allow students to ponder and engage while also focusing on language revitalization, problem solving and sequencing.</p>	
Age/Grade Levels:	<p>Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)</p>	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science and Technology: BB. Observing and classifying, CC. Experimenting, predicting and drawing conclusions, 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed

	<p>DD. Natural and physical world</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Approaches to Learning:</i> B. Problem solving with materials, C. Reflection • <i>Social and Emotional Development:</i> E. Building relationships with adults, F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • <i>Language, Literacy, and Communication:</i> L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension • <i>Mathematics:</i> S. Number and counting, V. Patterns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 9. Models critical thinking about historical narratives and contemporary status quo • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities. • 19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities. • 21. Local Indigenous language(s) is valued. • 22. Local Indigenous language(s) is integrated.
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will reflect, think and expand on prior knowledge and familial connections. • Students will continue to build on Diné vocabulary using kinship terms and language related to dá'aak'eh/garden. • Students will be observed and reflect on being able to sequence gardening process. • Students will make connections between traditional practices and modern adaptations. • Students will express through learning through drawing, labeling and storytelling while exploring a place-based environment. 	
Instructional Strategies:	<p>Begin the lesson with an open discussion and reflection based off what we have been discussing over the last few days: What do plants need to grow? Record student responses and begin second prompt: How did shímásaní and shícheii grow food without running water/hose or a tap connection to our house?</p> <p>The prompt might need to include visuals or future scaffolding, once students have an understanding, discuss traditional tools elders used to modern tools we can access to today. If needed, provide visual cues such as pointing out hose faucet to house or modern/ western</p>	
Learning Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outdoor garden environment • Gardening tools (kid friendly) • Soil, water, seeds and/or starter plants (starter plants can be requested from families and provide another opportunity for family engagement) • Visual language cards to encourage language prompts 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Laminated sequential cards (this can be completed in collaboration with students or teacher led).
Assessment:	Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.

Lesson	Water Conservation: Tó éí íiná (Water is Life) Bringing awareness to the delicate balance of humans and mother earth, Water is Life.	
Lesson Description:	In this lesson, we will begin during the second week as another weeklong read aloud. The class will dive into a story about Darlene Arviso, a true story about a Diné woman who delivers water to rural areas on the Navajo reservation. They will explore water conservation, access to water and bring awareness to social responsibility while tying in Diné language components such as tó. The idea is to help students reflect on their own actions, creating self-awareness among ourselves to be water conscious and also connect water resources to the dá'aak'eeh.	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Language, Literacy, and Communication: L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension, N. Phonological Awareness, P. Reading, Q. Book Enjoyment and Knowledge Approaches to Learning: C. Reflection Social and Emotional Development: F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community Science and Technology: DD. Natural and physical world 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) 4. Traditional and/or cultural knowledge is included. 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities. 19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities. 21. Local Indigenous language(s) are valued.

		22. Local Indigenous language(s) is integrated.
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will recognize and build awareness around Tó éí íiná (Water is Life). Students will reflect on personal actions to guide water conscious choices. Students will analyze and create a list of water conservation strategies to apply to local garden. 	
Instructional Strategies:	<p>During the second week, you will be reading this book over the week to engage critical thinking while applying repetitive read aloud strategies to support learners. Throughout the week, emphasize empathy and build connection to activities happening in the classroom to build rapport.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Day 1: Read aloud to students – repeat and reuse tó often. Incorporate a visual cue of a person drinking water (visual can be prepared using students in the classroom) and incorporate a body movement to for multimodal communication. Day 2: Read book, at the end, provide two visuals to discuss with students. Visual 1: running faucet in the home, visual 2: a photo of a water truck. Ask students how they get water in their own homes, scaffold to discuss which way their grandparents get water. Day 3: Read book and discuss Tó éí íiná (Water is Life). What does Water is Life mean? How can we show respect to the way we use water? Document student responses and create a list – can be scaffolded to give students opportunities to create drawings to revisit on classroom wall to continue encouraging water conservation and respect. Day 4: Read book and talk about how we can respect our water usage while watering our gardens, what can we do to stay conscious of our water usage? Day 5: Read book and watch YouTube video of The Navajo Water Lady. Develop an open ended discussion with students to talk about the book. 	
Learning Resources:	<p><i>The Water Lady: How Darlene Arviso Helps a Thirsty Navajo Nation</i> by Alice B. McGinty, illustrated by Shonto Begay</p> <p>The Navajo Water Lady - YouTube</p>	
Assessment:	<p>Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.</p>	

Lesson	Naadáá' Identification	
Lesson Description:	<p>This lesson will introduce corn and explore sensory play with ears of corn, dried kernels and cornmeal. Students will have an opportunity to explore with their senses and provide observations and discussions during the activity. Jennie DeGroat, an NAU professor and language revitalization expert encourages multimodal sensory exploration to build experiences and most importantly, home language. In this activity, students will be introduced to different corn and identify parts of each component in the Diné language using multimodal experiences. Developing an understanding of where naadáá' comes from provides intentional framework that will also establish their understanding of food sources that Diné people heavily rely on while integrating Diné terminology and traditional knowledge.</p>	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Approaches to Learning:</i> B. Problem solving with materials, C. Reflection • <i>Social and Emotional Development:</i> E. Building relationships with adults, F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • <i>Physical Development and Health:</i> J. Fine-motor skills • <i>Language, Literacy, and Communication:</i> L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension • <i>Mathematics:</i> S. Number and counting, V. Patterns • <i>Creative Arts:</i> X. Art • <i>Social Studies:</i> FF. Knowledge about self and others • <i>Science and Technology:</i> DD. Natural and physical world 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 9. Models critical thinking about historical narratives and contemporary status quo • 10. Encourages asking critically oriented questions about historical narratives and contemporary status quo. • 11. Diverse narratives and perspectives are integrated. • 12. Local/regional Indigenous community is reflected. • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities.
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will observe, handle and identify parts of a corn/ naadáá' Students will build vocabulary in Diné and English related to naadáá' and dá'aak'eeh. Students will develop an understanding to the cultural relevance of naadáá' through guided conversations and storytelling. 	
Instructional Strategies:	<p>The lesson can be completed over a series of days depending on time and day to day restraints. The plan is best if separated over four days to allow children to discover each corn component and using the fourth day to bring them all together to compare. During each day, place out corn and books related to corn. These stories will supplement their knowledge of corn, invite traditional stories and give history on corn. There is a list of books listed under resources – set up this activity designed as a provocation. Provocations are open ended displays of materials to encourage play, discussion and learning. Teacher will use these as an opportunity for small groups to read and engage in conversations while asking open ended questions.</p> <p>Day 1: Explore ears of corn out in various styles: corn with husk, corn without husk and also place our corn husks and silk to explore. This can also take place in allow your students to husk the corn and connect to its meaning and names.</p> <p>Day 2: Place our different types of dried corn kernels: blue corn, Indian corn, white corn, yellow corn and popcorn. Allowing different variations gives students a chance to explore familiar concepts, make connections and build through scientific curiosity.</p> <p>Day 3: Cornmeal: Offer a selection of various to explore. You can also consider adding a grinding stone to allow students to ground their own corn using traditional methods and an added sensory experience.</p> <p>Day 4: Place out a combination of the different textures you used over the week to give students a chance to compare.</p>	
Learning Resources:	<p><i>The Corn Whisperer</i> by Sue Houser <i>First Laugh–Welcome, Baby!</i> by Rose Ann Tahe & Nancy Bo Flood <i>We Are Water Protectors</i> by Carole Lindstrom <i>Corn is Maize: The Gift of the Indians</i> by Alikì <i>Corn</i> by Pam Robson <i>Corn</i> by Gail Gibbons</p>	
Assessment:	<p>Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.</p>	

Lesson	The History of Blue Corn: Naadáá' Dootł'izh and Family Knowledge	
Lesson Description:	Focusing on Blue Corn: Naadáá' Dootł'izh, we will dive into another local Indigenous community and the Hopi origins of blue corn. Furthermore, we will extend gratitude and appreciation to our neighboring relatives by honoring Diné preparation methods of blue corn such as łeesaan dootł'izhii/blue corn pancakes and tóshchíin/blue mush. The teacher will use this time to prepare students or observe for prior knowledge of families and cultural connections. They will use this time to gain further insight into blue corn, it's characteristics and the local Indigenous communities that utilize the corn.	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approaches to Learning: C. Reflection • Social and Emotional Development: D. Emotions, E. Building relationships with adults, F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • Language, Literacy, and Communication: L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension, P. Reading, Q. Book enjoyment and knowledge • Mathematics: S. Number and counting, V. Patterns • Creative Arts: X. Art • Social Studies: FF. Knowledge of self and others. • Science and Technology: DD. Natural and physical world 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 9. Models critical thinking about historical narratives and contemporary status quo • 10. Encourages asking critically oriented questions about historical narratives and contemporary status quo. • 11. Diverse narratives and perspectives are integrated. • 12. Local/regional Indigenous community is reflected. • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities. • 19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities.
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student will be able to identify and name using Diné and English vocabulary: blue corn: naadáá' dootł'izh. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will develop and understand the history and origin of blue corn throughout Hopi neighbors. • Students will recognize and share cultural connections and knowledge of łeesaan dootł'izhii/blue corn pancakes and tóshchíin/blue mush.
Instructional Strategies:	<p>Begin your lesson by introducing the book, <i>Celebrate My Hopi Corn</i> by Anita Poleahla and Emmett Navakuku. Ask questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is corn special to you and your family? • How do you prepare/cook corn in your family? • What types of corn have you seen? Have you seen any colors <p>After reading the book, the teacher will talk about personal reflections of łeesaan dootł'izhii/blue corn pancakes and tóshchíin/blue mush. This connection can also be reconnected to books read in other activities such as <i>First Laugh–Welcome, Baby!</i> by Rose Ann Tahe & Nancy Bo Flood. Watch Navajo Blue Corn Pancakes and talk about what is being used to make łeesaan dootł'izhii/blue corn pancakes.</p> <p>Another video is providing for making tóshchíin/blue mush if students continue to engage – you can also separate this lesson into two days. Other ideas might be to ask incorporate family engagement in your classroom by asking a family to do a classroom demonstration.</p> <p>In the process, allow students time to explore and come up with their own thought process to share with you. Ask open ended questions and engage students by providing Diné terminology is proposed objective – continued and repetitive usage is key.</p> <p>This lesson will flow into the final lesson: provide an opportunity here to take a survey on which food your students would like to prepare to focus on one key piece as a culminating event.</p>
Learning Resources:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Celebrate My Hopi Corn</i> by Anita Poleahla and Emmett Navakuku • <i>First Laugh–Welcome, Baby!</i> by Rose Ann Tahe & Nancy Bo Flood • Navajo Blue Corn Pancakes – YouTube
Assessment:	<p>Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.</p>
Lesson	<p>Final Unit Lesson: łeesaan Dootł'izhii/Blue Corn Pancakes and Tóshchíin/Blue Mush</p>

Lesson Description:	As we complete the unit, the last one will mark a culminating event that allows students to connect, reconnect, discover and taste the different types of food prepared. It honors shared memories, intergenerational storytelling, and Diné values through finding common grounding experiences in cultural continuity, familial connections, reverence and real-life application. This last lesson will also tie in a series of standards that balance language, math, science, problem solving and exploration of self-identity for your students.	
Age/Grade Levels:	Preschoolers to kindergarteners, (ages 2-6)	
Standards: Subject Matter:	<p><i>COR Advantage</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Approaches to Learning:</i> A: Initiative and planning, B. Problem solving with materials, C. Reflection • <i>Social and Emotional Development:</i> E. Building relationships with adults, F. Building relationships with other children, G. Community • <i>Physical Development and Health:</i> J. Fine-motor skills, K. Personal car and healthy behavior. • <i>Language, Literacy, and Communication:</i> L. Speaking, M. Listening and comprehension • <i>Mathematics:</i> S. Number and counting, V. Patterns • <i>Creative Arts:</i> X. Art • <i>Science and Technology:</i> DD. Natural and physical world, EE. Tools and technology. • <i>Social Studies:</i> F. Knowledge of self and others. 	<p><i>Culturally Responsive Assessment of Indigenous Schooling (CRAIS) Tool</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1. Stereotypes of Indigenous people and or/communities are addressed • 2. Indigenous people are represented as contemporary (not only historical) • 9. Models critical thinking about historical narratives and contemporary status quo • 10. Encourages asking critically oriented questions about historical narratives and contemporary status quo. • 11. Diverse narratives and perspectives are integrated. • 12. Local/regional Indigenous community is reflected. • 14. Encourages students to understand themselves within broader communities. • 19. Local/regional context is leveraged for learning opportunities.
Objectives:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will develop a list of ingredients and tools need to complete the food journey. • Students will explore hands-on, real-life practical experience to connect to their culture. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will engage in various subject areas while learning in a place-based environment. 	
Instructional Strategies:	<p>This lesson can be done in a series of ways depending on the current engagement of students and their families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The teacher can provide a food demonstration while students help in the process. The students may create their own small batches of food through visual cues/ recipe prompts and modeling to allow student autonomy. A local elder or family member may come in to provide a demonstration for students. <p>In the process, use each opportunity to engage in math (counting our 4 scoops of corn meal), literacy skills (providing visual prompts to read the recipe), modeling language, storytelling, sensory exploration through the food and labeling tools used to mix ingredients.</p>	
Learning Resources:	Blue Corn Pancakes Mixing bowl Whisk Strainer Measuring spoons Spatula G'ad – juniper ash Water Blue corn meal Milk	Blue Mush Water Blue corn meal G'ad – juniper ash Whisk 2 pots Mixing bowl
Assessment:	<p>Student assessment will be captured through anecdotal notes, photos and videos that will be compiled to show a learning journey show casing moments captured. All data will be available through Kaymbu, assessment will also be visual through observations, notes and visual storyboarding. In addition, students will be assessed and measured through the CRAIS tool using a numeric scoring tool.</p>	

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