Grades: 6th - 8th Grade
Lesson: 2
Unit: 1: American Indian traditional land values
Subject: Science
Achievement Goal: Conduct class project(s) that promote the respectful care and stewardship of community environments.
Time: Multiple class periods

Lesson Description:
Students explore the idea of creating a schoolyard habitat as a site for traditional teachings.

Teacher Background:
Environmental education has proven to be an excellent way to not only teach students about the natural sciences, but to inspire them to be better learners and stewards of the environment. For Native students, environmental education also provides a unique way to explore the traditional cultivation or use of native plants, which encourages interest in, and respect for, one’s culture.

The National Wildlife Federation (NWF) has created a national program that helps educators and school administrators integrate hands-on environmental education into school curriculum through the Schoolyard Habitats program. According to NWF:

[The Schoolyard Habitats program] provides administrators and educators a framework for incorporating environment-based education into their school curriculum or youth service programs. Through the creation and use of wildlife habitat sites, the Schoolyard Habitats program gives formal and non-formal educators the resources they need to create and use an outdoor learning site on school/facility grounds and provides interdisciplinary curricula based on the national Standards of Learning. Schoolyard Habitats sites provide students with a place to experience hands-on learning and connect to the natural world while providing local wildlife with essential habitat. First-hand, students see and experience the difference that stewardship makes toward improving the environment.

Alternatively, a few tribal schools have initiated their own programs designed to teach young tribal members about traditional land ethics. The Village of Galena, Alaska has established an excellent environmental education program in its schools. The environmental education program is the result of an agreement between the Louden Tribal Council, the Galena City Schools, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The agreement ensures that environmental education is integrated into all the disciplines for all school-age children. By pooling the resources of all these entities, the schools hope to establish a first-rate watershed education and stewardship program that will benefit the entire community.

After a short research project, this lesson will introduce the idea of creating a schoolyard habitat to students.

Standards:
This lesson aligns with Common Core standards RST1, RST2, RST4.

6th Grade

RST1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of science and technical texts.

RST2 Determine the central ideas or conclusions of a text; provide an accurate summary of the text distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

RST4 Determine the meaning of symbols, key terms, and other domain-specific words and phrases as they are used in a specific scientific or technical context relevant to grades 6-8 texts and topics.
Teacher Preparation Resources:

- Arrange time and resources for students to conduct research on plants and animals.
- Explore the links found in the Lesson Resources section.
- Check into the possibility of creating a schoolyard habitat.

Student Activity:

1. To begin this lesson, ask the students to define “stewardship,” “native habitat,” “indigenous,” and “natural resources.” Ask them to explain, in their own words, what they consider traditional Native land ethic principles. Write the students’ ideas on the board.

2. As an in-class mini-research project, have the students research and create a list of the many species of trees, plants, insects, birds, fish and larger mammals indigenous to their particular community or region of the country. Initiate a discussion of habitat and how natural resources, gifts from nature, and wildlife require appropriate kinds and amounts of habitat to exist. Discuss the concept of land stewardship and how it involves the intelligent and respectful care of native habitat and natural gifts. Ask the students if they feel a connection to their land and the native habitats found on it.

3. Open a general student discussion about the possibility of the class creating a schoolyard habitat project as offered by the NWF. Also review with the students the collaboration between the Louden Village Council, Galena Schools and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to promote environmental stewardship and learning opportunities in Galena, Alaska.

4. Review with the students the steps for creating a school habitat project as presented in “Create a Habitat” from the Lesson Resources section. If the students are interested, contact the National Wildlife Federation and obtain additional materials and information to help with a decision of whether or not to pursue the project.

5. If this a tribal school where the tribe has a Natural Resources office, contact that office for assistance, information and advice on such a project. Or, you may want to assign students this specific task. Collect all the information from the NWF, the tribal natural resources department, and other resources you may deem appropriate and ask the students to create a presentation on the possibility of creating a Schoolyard Habitat for the administrators of the school. You may want to assign specific portions of the presentation to different groups. For example, one group may want to present the different plant species that may be planted in the habitat. Another group may point out the pros and cons of building the habitat on several sites around the school. Yet another group may want to discuss ways of utilizing traditional teachings within the habitat.

6. After your own discussions with the school administrators and other teachers, determine whether the project is viable or not. If so, proceed with the steps given by NWF’s Schoolyard Habitat Program.

Evaluation:

1. Evaluate the students’ definitions of the terms discussed during the beginning of this lesson.
2. Assess the thoroughness and accuracy of the students’ list of plants and wildlife that are indigenous to the area.
3. Assess the students’ contributions to the presentation of the possibility of creating a Schoolyard Habitat.

Lesson Resources:

- National Wildlife Federation Garden for Wildlife includes Schoolyard Habitats and others.
- National Wildlife Federation, Create a Habitat website.
- National Wildlife Federation, Schoolyard Habitats Factsheet PDF file.
- Schoolyard projects at Tuckahoe Elementary School.
- Honoring the Loudon Village Council, Galena, Alaska (Teacher Resource), including the full list of...
honorees and publications.

Source URL: http://www.lessonsofourland.org/lessons/tribal-environmental-education

Links:
[7] http://hpaied.org/publications-and-research/search-publications?keywords=&amp;season=none&amp;year=0&amp;type=Honoring%2BNations%2BReport&amp;tribe=0&amp;author=none&amp;submit-button=Search+Publications&amp;limitstart=0&amp;option=com_publibrary&amp;task=search