

Shakin' the Three Sisters

Native Americans adapted to their environment and used a variety of agricultural techniques to grow food. Three principal crops of the Eastern Woodlands Native Americans were corn, beans, and squash. These “Three Sisters” were planted together because of the ways in which they benefit each other. The corn serves as a strong, sturdy support for the beans to climb up. Beans are a legume, which means they pull nitrogen from the air and bring it into the soil. The nitrogen is then able to help the squash and corn grow. Squash shades the beans and soil with its large leaves, preventing evaporation, soil erosion, keeping predators away that want to feast on the beans or corn, and controlling weeds. Corn, beans, and squash also offer a nutritional diet with corn for grain and carbohydrates, beans for protein and squash for vitamin A. Thus, the Native Americans, who recognized the relationship between the plants, used the natural harmony between them to feed their communities.

You will need:

Paper plates (2 per child)

Staplers

Markers or crayons

Corn kernels, beans, and squash (enough for each child to have 5 each)

How to:

1. Discuss with children how the Native Americans adapted to their environment. Talk with children about how they got their food or clothing and how we get those things today.
2. Introduce the story of the Three Sisters and their relationship with each other. Make sure you work with the children as you explain the activity to them.
3. Pass out two paper plates to each child. Give them markers or crayons and tell them to decorate the back of the plates with pictures of the Three Sisters.
4. Staple the plates together so the pictures are facing out, but leave an opening at the top to put the seeds inside the paper plates.
5. Children should take a few of each seed and put them inside the plates and then staple the rest of the plate around the edge.
6. Create music with the children using their shakers!

Suggested Books:

Life of the Powhatan by Bobbie Kalman



For more resources to connect children to agriculture visit AgInTheClass.org.