

The Power in Plants to Quench Unnameable Thirst
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Plants, not only beautiful, are phytochemical powerhouses. A single leaf contains alkaloids, antioxidants, adaptogens, flavonoids—poisons, too. Humans, for thousands of years now, have taken interest. Chamomile, harvested for the compound apigenin, calms us. And we slather Aloe Vera’s gelatinous, gooey material on particularly nasty burns.

These medicinal properties (“magical powers” as I like to call them) are a spring board for exploring the human-plant relationship. And we do so by bringing the poetic device personification into the realm of scientific observation and study. We’ll take time to collect a specimen, study it, name its parts—get to know it. After reading a bit of poetry, and learning about the medicinal plant, Brigham’s tea, we’ll put ourselves in the shoes (ahem, “roots”) of that plant specimen. Personification allows us to live life as that plant as well as possess its magical powers! And as you’ll see, maybe we’ll heal others along the way, too.

Lesson Plan

Materials: Plant specimen found in your garden, yard, or from around your neighborhood; 2 pieces of paper—lined or unlined; writing utensil

Estimated Time: 60 minutes

Partner activity or solo activity

Collect your Specimen!

First things first: collect your specimen! Venture outside and look for the first plant that catches your eye. It could be a feathery grass from the yard or a flower growing along the sidewalk in your neighborhood!

Observation List

Step 1: Take time to study your specimen. What do you notice about it? What are *all* the colors you see in this plant? Does it have a smell, a texture? Does its appearance remind you of something else?

Make a list of your observations.

Challenge: If you can, name the parts of this plant! Does it have a flower? Can you see its seeds?

Plants are Powerful!

Plants, besides being fun to look at, possess mysterious powers. Humans throughout history have used plants for their magical properties! Why would humans use plants? What do you think these magical properties might be?

Step 2: With a writing partner or parent/guardian discuss these magical properties. If you’re working solo write your thoughts on the opposite side of your observation list.

Step 3: What magical powers might your specimen possess? Can your plant heal people? Can it make animals talk? How do its magical properties work? Write these down.

Brigham’s Tea: A Cure for...

We know plants have superpowers: we use them for food, shelter, clothing, and even to cure sickness! There's a plant growing right here in our Sonoran Desert that has superpowers. It's called **Brigham's tea**, or Mormon tea.

Brigham's tea is native to the Sonoran Desert; although that's not the only place it is found. It's also found in the Midwest United States, Mexico, India, Pakistan, and China! Brigham's tea can be used as medicine. It has, what herbalists refer to as **medicinal properties**.

Brigham's tea magical, medicinal properties include:

- Colds
- Kidney disorders
 - Fevers
 - Malaria
- Used to treat internal bleeding
 - Asthma
- Ability to quench extreme thirst

Literary Model

Brigham's tea medicinal properties have inspired poetry! Here is a poem by Gary Paul Nabhan.

Brigham's tea
By Gary Paul Nabahn

So what if I'm as visually attractive as dead sticks.

There are those who would die just to take me in,
To have me in their backyard, a tonic for the soul.

All I can say to you is "Drink me. Take me into your
Life and let me heal you, let me comfort you, let me
Take care of that thirst you've never mentioned aloud."

Exercise

1st Stanza: What is a thirst you've had that you've never mentioned aloud? Another way to think about this is: what is something you've wanted *so* bad that you haven't told anyone about? Record your thoughts on your second piece of paper. This will be the first stanza of your poem!

2nd Stanza: Now, look again at the specimen you collected earlier. Pretend you are this lovely plant, rooted in the desert ground. You see a stranger walking in the desert. It turns out they have the same **secret thirst** as you. How would you quench their thirst? What parts of your plant-self would you give to that lonely, thirsty stranger? Do your leaves cure loneliness? Does the juice from your roots bring a smile to those who consume it?

Write for 15-20 minutes and think of all your plant parts. How do parts of your plant-self cure?