

THE FIRST INVENTORS



EPISODE 4 THE SCIENCE OF STORY

STORY 2

MEDICINES OF TOMORROW

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Historically, Western science has paid little attention to First Nations traditional knowledge. But today as we face new and complex challenges, this is starting to change.

Australia is the home to thousands of plant species that do not exist anywhere else in the world. D'harawal Elder Auntie Frances (Fran) Bodkin, with her vast knowledge of indigenous plants to Australia, is working with Pharmacologist Professor Gerald Muench to analyse active plant samples in the search for individual compounds that can revolutionise Western medicinal chemistry, bringing medicines with little or no side effects.

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Pre-Viewing Discussion Questions

- How do you think Aboriginal people tested if they could eat a plant?
- Do you think we could use plants to help make medicines?
- To your knowledge have you ever used a First Nation plant remedy for medicinal purposes?

Post Viewing Discussion Questions

- What are your thoughts on using indigenous plants to make medicine with less side effects?
- Should we have been doing this years ago in Australia?
- Why is the knowledge Auntie Fran Bodkins has collated in her books a gift to the future?

Activity The First Chemists

Read the Chapter titled 'The First Chemists' (from the book 'The First Scientists' by Corey Tutt) to your students so they can learn about some First Nations peoples' skincare, bush medicine, wound treatment, healthy sugars, bush soap and art preservation. Discuss with your students if they have ever used any First Nations medicines or remedies before. Research other bush medicines and plant remedies. Make a small class book like Auntie Fran Bodkin's book to see how many bush medicines you can find in your research.

Invite a First Nations Elder or knowledge holder into your classroom to share the medicinal uses of local plants around your school. Ask them to bring some local bush medicines to show the class. If you are lucky, they may make a traditional bush medicine recipe with the students to take home and use with their families.

Extension Activity Bush soaps and saponin chemical compounds

Watch the video [Making Soap with Bush Science](#) embedded in this article of Kaytetye Arrernte women Shirleen McLaughlin and Amy Ngamperle from central Australia as they demonstrate how when you rub together green sickle leaf wattle seed pods with water, the leaves produce a soap-like lather due to saponin chemical compounds. Ask your students to further research and create a fact sheet of saponin chemical compounds showing benefits, uses, dangers, and what other plants they are found in too.

Mirage News

[Making Soap with Bush Science](#)

<https://www.miragenews.com/making-soap-with-bush-science/>

For Deeper Discussion Or Debate

What should we be doing as a country to capture First Nations plant knowledge and how will this change medicines we use to heal and cure people in the future?

Teacher Note

If you have an Elder or Knowledge Holder come into the class, they may bring or cook some bush medicines with you all. The recipe may be a secret, so don't ask for the recipe, just enjoy the process and discussion with your class.

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Further Information

SBS NITV

10 bush medicines that have been curing people for generations

<https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/10-bush-medicines-that-have-been-curing-people-for-generations/128n762uh>

Sydney Morning Herald (article)

Bush medicines: Traditional remedies find support from scientists, public

<https://www.smh.com.au/national/bush-medicines-traditional-remedies-find-support-from-scientists-public-20210521-p57u1z.html>

The Lighthouse

Bush Remedies Leading to Advances in Modern Medicine

<https://lighthouse.mq.edu.au/article/july-2019/bush-medicine>

Frontiers for Young Minds

Plants: The Master Chemists of Our Planet

<https://kids.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/frym.2020.512423>