

The Lyn Li Reisen Memorial Fund for Children Grant - Spring 2008  
Christine Haller

I want to thank the NEHA for awarding me, "The Lyn Li Reisen Memorial Fund for Children." This grant was used with 36 sixth grade students to increase their awareness concerning body care products that they and their families use everyday. By conducting research on some of these products, studying some medicinal herbs, and then making their own salves and lip balms, students discovered information needed to make decisions about over-the counter products. Empowered with knowledge and action, students gained a renewed appreciation of the plant world.

There are many skin care products on the market today which contain ingredients that have been shown to be harmful. Many of these products are heavily advertised for pre-adolescents and adolescents. Sixth-graders are beginning to use or have been using, these products: deodorants, moisturizers, cleansers, shampoos, conditioners, etc.

The grant enabled students to research body care products, learn about the healing properties of herbs, make salves and lip balms, go for an herb walk and plant herbs on the school grounds. A class of 20 students met for 2 hours in the morning and a class of 16 met for 2 hours in the afternoon, on 4 days, beginning late April and ending with the planting in early June.

In April, students brought in personal care products and researched their safety, using the website, "Skin Deep" (<http://cosmeticsdatabase.com/index.php>). "Skin Deep," is a safety guide to cosmetics and personal care products brought to the public by researchers at the Environmental Working Group, whose mission is to use the power of public information to protect public health and the environment. EWG is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization, founded in 1993 by Ken Cook and Richard Wiles. The children wrote a short summary, including information about the product's safety rating, ingredients, manufacturer and alternative products which might be safer to use. In general they were quite surprised to see how many of these products received ratings of 8-10, (ratings were 0-10 with 0 deemed the safest to use). Very often chemical fragrances and preservatives were the harmful ingredients.

One activity for learning the healing properties of herbs was playing, in a cooperative manner, the game *Wildcraft!*. This game was created by Kimberly and John Gallagher, with artwork by Beatriz Mendoza. "*Wildcraft!* is meant to start you thinking about how the plants growing around you might be able to help you with common ailments like sniffles or cuts." The students truly enjoyed playing and learning from this game.

In May, we made an all-heal salve using olive oil infused with Calendula, St. John's wort, comfrey and plantain. I prepared the infused oil at home. For lip balm, we used Gretchen Gould's recipe for Lemon Meringue Lip Balm from [Herbs from the Outside In](#). I learned with the students to use a slow cooker rather than a hot plate for melting beeswax. Carrot seed, cypress, eucalyptus, lavender, lemon, oregano, peppermint, tea tree and thyme were the essential oils available for use. After properly labeling and filling their containers, each student brought at least one container of all-

heal salve and 2 lip balm tubes home. Some students delivered salve and lip balm to other school staff members.

On May 13th we took an herb walk on the school grounds and found plantain, red clover, dandelion, lemon balm, yellow dock and lamb's ear. We discussed each one and related them to the game *Wildcraft!*

On June 2nd I presented to the classroom pots of comfrey, calendula, St. John's wort and lemon balm. Appropriate places, for the plants, were found in the gardens outside their classroom, and students planted them.

This pilot program served as an excellent introduction to the medicinal properties and wonder of herbs. Students would love to spend more time exploring the herbs, making salves and planting.

In early June, I presented this project to the Parent/Teacher Organization. There was a lot of interest, and one parent suggested that the program could be funded as an after school enrichment activity. I plan to return to the PTO next year and ask for funds to continue the project in all of the 6th grade classrooms. The PTO and Principal of Burgess were very appreciative that I was awarded this grant from NEHA.

I again want to thank NEHA for this opportunity. I also am thankful to Veronica Spokis, the 6th grade Science and Math teacher, with whom I worked. Her enthusiasm for the project greatly enhanced the students' learning and empowerment. She is quite willing to lead this project next year. I will be available to her and other teachers in the school for the continuation of this program if funds are available.

If you have questions about this project or have suggestions, please contact me at [chrishaller@cox.net](mailto:chrishaller@cox.net).

The following is a list of reference books that were used by the students and teachers. They especially enjoyed using the book, [A Kid's Herb Book](#) by Lesley Tierra.

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