

E.T. - A LOCAL WAY OF LEARNING

Title: CHINCHERI, THE BIRD AND THE BUSH
Author: Jane Ducey
Eulalie R. Rivera Elementary School

Grade Level: 5-6

Concepts:
1. The Sun
2. Ecosystem
8. Values and Attitudes

Disciplines:
1. Social Studies
2. Science
3. Language Arts

Objective:

Student shall define what a plant parasite is and distinguish it from a saprophyte and explain the role of the bird in spreading the chincheri plant.

Student shall identify the bush plant and describe its medicinal use today and historically.

Rationale:

There is a partial parasite called mistletoe, or Chincheri, (*Phthirusa caribaea*) which grows on trees in the islands. Contrasting with the white berried mistletoe of the Pacific Northwest, used in Christmas lore, the islands' mistletoe has small dark blue berries in clusters, and is one of the many plants used for medicinal purposes as a tisane.

The berries are food for a medium sized bird, the chincheri, (Grey Kingbird) who sows the mistletoe on other trees. One can see at the same time, the bird droppings on a tree, with a small sprout of the new plant and the hold fasts (not roots) well dug into the bark of the host tree.

Directions/Activity:

Either in the field or on branches brought into the class, demonstrate the adult plant and the seedlings which clearly relate it to the bird. How can you spot the mistletoe in a tree? (The leaves are different shape, color and size from the trees leaves).

Explain the interdependence: What does the bird get and what does the bush plant get from the relationship? Is it symbiotic? Write a paragraph about the interdependence. Define a parasite. Define a saprophyte. What is an epiphyte? Look them up in an encyclopedia.

The bush tea is used to get relief from colds, according to this recipe: Break a sprig from the chincheri growth and pour water, which has been brought to a boil, over the leaves. Let it steep as the water cools a little and drink as a tea.

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What is the status of bush medicine? (It is coming into greater acceptance in the Western World.)

Where did the herbal remedies used in the islands originate? (Probably from Africa handed down from generation to generation).

Are biochemists today isolating the active ingredient in many of the teas used? (Yes, and this is what is giving credence to the practice).

Did the peoples of the Virgin Islands have much choice when they fell ill long ago? (No pharmacy to go to and get cold medicine, etc.).

Do you suppose some of the remedies are "old wives' tales?" Are some of today's medicines also placebos?

What was the biggest problem with using leaves from a tree to be taken internally?

(The problem of dosage: all leaves are not the same size and may not have the same amount of active ingredient, etc.)