

Activity: Creative Expression Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Connecticut Nutmeggers: A Sense of Place

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ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will learn about Connecticut heritage, specifically nutmeg & its historical background to the state.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Explore the lore & horticultural facts associated with nutmeg; investigate differences between mace & nutmeg, both grown from the *Myristica fragrans* tree

Physical: Grate nutmeg seeds; strengthen hand-eye coordination

Psychological/Emotional: Compare nutmeg attributes to self; increase self-awareness; consider personal sense of place, belonging & identity in Connecticut or elsewhere

Sensory: Smell, taste & view nutmeg & nutmeg products; discern its sensory qualities, describing them to others

Social: Participate in discussions & hands-on activities; improve social awareness in a group setting; listen patiently & with tolerance when others speak

Materials

Nutmeg seeds, ground nutmeg, nutmeg products (essential oils, baked goods)

Cinnamon, cloves, coriander

Hand graters, microplane, mortar & pestle, wipes

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Gather materials. Determine if any participants have allergies to nutmeg. Set up room for activities.
2. Facilitator begins session by asking who is a nutmegger. Introducing this nickname for people from Connecticut, the group shares history, facts, lore about why this plant spice is associated with people in this region. Facilitator has researched facts to guide discussion.
3. Group breaks into smaller numbers & undertake the hands-on nutmeg activities: touching/smelling/viewing nutmeg seed, ground nutmeg & essential oils; grinding seed into powder; tasting a food item flavored with nutmeg; and comparing sensory attributes of nutmeg to other spices (cinnamon, cloves, coriander).
4. Facilitator leads discussion of historical attributes of nutmeg encouraging participants to think about their human traits vs nutmeg or nutmegger traits (ingenuity, shrewdness, trickery, irony, guard against negative energy or harm). And health attributes of nutmeg – do participants have any health challenges nutmeg is purported to relieve (farting, indigestion, bad breath or oral hygiene issues, nausea... make a few jokes about this!).

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: Nutmeg is the rarest of spices with the fruit not very plentiful in N. America. Nutmeg is associated with early inhabitants of Connecticut, considered ingenious and shrewd. The lore suggests nutmeggers, as they became known, sold fake wooden nutmeg for profit. Though nutmeg is not grown in Connecticut, the association of these human traits to the state's inhabitants, along with Connecticut's commercial interests in the spice trade from Asia, Africa and South America, and the pride with which the people

have embraced the nickname nutmegger contributes to this plant's mystique. Some historical associations include nutmeg's protective properties, spells, amulets and guard against negative energies and harm continue to this day. The irony of nutmeg as the well-known symbol of Connecticut though it does not grow in the state has not changed the references to the spice, denoting sense of place in this New England/Northeastern state.

Most populations will find the spice, lore, and comparisons to human traits engaging. This can be adapted to cognitive and maturity levels. Using plants, or in this case a plant-based spice to examine what constitutes a sense of place and belonging provides an opportunity to discuss themes that may resonate with populations feeling isolated, lonely, lost, or displaced. This may be due to adoption, newly diagnosed health issues or disability, grief, or immigration. Young people, as part of their maturation, explore their sense of place and belonging, as they establish their sense of identity, using factors that ground or connect them to others or geographical, spirituality, cultural or philosophical frameworks.

“A sense of place comes from a feeling of connectedness, be it physical, emotional, or spiritual, to a specific geographic area (Relph 1976). Developing a sense of place through geographic experiences helps build the social and emotional foundation children need and will one day use as adults” (Brillante & Mankiw, 2015).

Epstein theorized that “developing a sense of place is linked to a sense of belonging, which contributes to children’s [and adult’s] social and emotional development” (2009). Humanistic geographers suggest that sense of place and belonging—attachment to spaces (physical addresses or regions)—are where people *feel* at home, and this can include plants, landmarks, schools and experiences. These become part of an identity. People recall childhood trees, playing in creeks, smells of camping, and grandma’s garden.

A TH session can provide the groundwork or connections for people to explore their sense of place, identity and belonging. The facilitator, using intention to do so, can establish links to plants of a region as suggested in this case, or to other botanical or nature elements. This can provide the safety and belonging to something larger than themselves that allows people to interpret the world from a personal and positive egocentric point of view.

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: Facilitators are responsible for knowing poisonous and toxic plants and plant parts. Allergies, swallowing issues or contraindications with medication need to be identified prior to session. In small quantities for culinary purposes, nutmeg is harmless to people, however, in large amounts it can have psychoactive and toxic effects (WebMD, 2024).

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Nutmeg is the seed kernel inside the yellow fruit of the tropical evergreen *Myristica fragrans* tree. It can be ground, sold as whole seeds or for its essential oils. Used to flavor foods, the spice can be harmful if consumed in large quantities (WebMD, 2024). Black diaspora cooking uses nutmeg widely.

The most often touted health benefit of nutmeg is [antibacterial properties](#), particularly when used in dental products for its effectiveness against oral pathogens. Other health benefits include its fiber that aids in digestion, prevention of flatulence, treating nausea, diarrhea, and preventing blood sugar spikes. A study on rats indicated nutmeg acted as an antidepressant, improving mood, though this has not been validated in humans.

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

Brillante, P., & Mankiw, S. (2015). [A sense of place: Human geography in the early childhood classroom.](#) *National Association for the Education of Young Children.com.*

Epstein, A.S. (2009). *Me, you, us: Social-emotional learning in preschool.* HighScope.

WebMD. (2024). [Nutmeg: Health benefits, nutrition, and uses.](#) *Webmd.com.*

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TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2024.