

## CHAPTER 5 —Dyes Made from Natural Products



**B** **ackground:** Native Americans and the early pioneers dyed fabric with colors extracted from plants. The first materials dyed were likely skins and leather and later textiles. Making the color fast or permanent is difficult. The Native Americans, however, set their dyes with urine as a mordant.

In this exercise, the students will dye scraps of fabric with natural dyes. Whether the students or the teacher make the dyes will depend on the set up of and rules concerning the classroom.

### Materials

- Plant material, such as grapes, tree bark, sunflower seeds, walnut shells, moss, beets, sumac and other berries, onionskins, and sagebrush.
- Containers in which water can be boiled.
- Containers to hold the dyes
- Strainer
- Aprons for the students or ask the students to bring in protective clothing
- Protective covering for tables or desks
- Material that can be dyed, such as yarn, string, or fabric
- Blotter cloths or paper towels

### Planning

- Prepare the dye by boiling one kind of plant material with salt or baking soda. Allow the mixture to simmer for several hours to obtain an interesting color. Cool the mixture.
- Label the containers for the dye with the plant used to make the dye.
- Strain the mixture into the labeled containers.
- Tell the students that they will have to bring in aprons or other protective clothing for this exercise.

### Procedure

#### *Initial preparation*

- Set up all the supplies the students will need in one central location, such as on a long table or a couple desks in the classroom.
- Cover the areas in which the students will be working to protect against spilled dye.

#### *Begin the exercise*

- Show the students the dye and the original plant from which the dye was made.
- Tell them how you made the dye.
- Allow the students to choose the material and dye.
- Tell them that the material will have to soak overnight to absorb the color.

- Allow the dyed material to dry overnight.
- Offer alternatives and ask for suggestions for how the dyed material can be used.

### **Extensions**

Ask someone who knows how to knit or crochet to make an item from dyed yarns.

Arrange a color chart that identifies the colors and the plants that they were made from.

Add dried samples of the plants from which the dyes were made and swatches of dyed fabric to a scrapbook.

Dye a t-shirt to wear during a Native American pageant. Caution the students that the dyes may not be colorfast.

