

## BORDER CROSSINGS

# ORIGINS



Hello! I'm Beth, a PhD student studying what science looked like 300 years ago, and in particular, scientists' interest in plants and nature.

### BOTANY BAY LEARNING RESOURCES

#### THE HISTORY OF "WINTER GARDENS"

Before colonists went to America and Australia hundreds of years ago, many plants familiar to us today were unknown in England. 700 years ago, for example, no one in England had ever seen a tomato or a potato, let alone tasted one! Tomatoes and potatoes were originally found in the continents we call America, where they were cultivated and eaten by Indigenous people for many centuries before being brought over on ships to Europe in the 15th century.

In consequence, some European scientists became very interested in collecting these new plants and came up with ways of categorising them into different 'families' and 'types'. For instance, 'types' of potato, or 'types' of a tree.

To create this kind of order (or 'family tree' of plants), scientists went on long journeys to the "colonies", where they picked a selection of botanical cuttings—dried them, flattened them, and stuck them onto sheets of paper that could then be rearranged, like putting a pack of playing cards into a certain order.

These dried plants are what we call 'specimens', and a collection of specimens is called a 'herbarium'.

#### 1. Class Discussion:

Do any of you have your own 'collections' of, for example, cards or toys? Why do you collect them? Are you aiming for a complete set? How do you 'order' your collection?

#### 2. Individual Exercise:

Write down as many different names of plants you can think of? These are what scientists call 'common names'

#### PLANT NAMES

On the specimen sheets in scientists' herbaria, they would write down information like where the plant was from and its name.

But who decides what the 'correct' name of a plant is?

English/'common' Name	Indigenous Name	Scientific/'Linnaean' Name
Potato	'Papa' or 'Batata'	<i>Solanum tuberosum</i>
Coco Bean	'xocolatl' or 'cacahuatl'	<i>Theobroma cacao</i>

Our English names often derive from the plants' Indigenous names, and sound fairly similar.

However, the names that scientists give to plants sound unfamiliar. That is because they are in another language: Latin, the language of the Romans, which no one alive speaks as their native tongue any longer. It used to be the official language of all science, but it still used to name plants.

In the BOTANY BAY “WINTER” film, Professor Harris explains how, when coming up with a scientific name for a Coco bean (in other words, chocolate), they did not want to use the Indigenous name, because they found it difficult to pronounce.

But Cacao was very important to the Indigenous Maya people, and many Indigenous people consider plants to be part of their family.

### 3. Group Discussion:

How do you think your family would feel if someone else renamed you?

Why do you think they would feel that way?

Rosalyn LaPier, the Indigenous scientist in the film, explains how to some communities, the renaming and ‘ordering’ of their native plants in herbaria, was in fact theft.

When people create collections, like the ones you might have at home, they can sometimes feel that they ‘own’ those objects. But Indigenous people like Rosalyn argue that no one can ‘own’ nature.

In what ways might a ‘winter garden’ look different if we were to create one according to the **BOTANY BAY GARDENING GUIDELINES?**

#### 1. We Belong to the Earth, We Do Not Own the Earth

- How can we avoid thinking about the plants as ‘objects’ in our ‘collection’?
- Remember that Indigenous peoples speak of all living things as ‘people’; as ‘he’ and ‘she’ and members of our family, not possessions.

#### 2. We Listen and Observe

- What are the different names that different native groups give this plant? How can we respect them all?

#### 3. We Work with Mother Nature, Not Against

- Can we avoid ‘picking’ living plants if ones are available that have already died or fallen to the ground?

#### 4. We Look Forward Seven Generations

- Think about how other classes might be able to use a collection after you have finished with it

#### 5. We Respect and Show Gratitude

- How can we show ‘thanks’ to the plants in our collection? Is there anything we can give back?

### FILM VOCABULARY LIST:

Winter Garden	A collection of flattened, dried plants.
Species	A type of plant, i.e. an English Oak tree
Specimen	A flattened, dried plant, mounted on paper
Classification system	The ‘order’ or ‘family tree’ of a collection
Scientific Name	The Latin name for a plant



*‘Whenever we want to gather any plant or tree we have to talk to that being, explain what we’re trying to do, and introduce ourselves, just like we would to another human being, because to us plants are our older brothers and sisters or grandmothers and Grandfathers. [...] Those being want to hear out language’,*

Wendy Makoons Geniusz, of the Anishinaabe people.