

Health and Healing Experiences in North Carolina



Healing at Home
Multidisciplinary Educator Guide
North Carolina Museum of History

Healing at Home Multidisciplinary Educator Guide

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Healing at Home in North Carolina

Most healing takes place at home. That's where we use home remedies and store-bought medicines to treat many of our illnesses. The concept of treating oneself at home, a standard practice in the past, is not outdated today. We visit doctors and go to hospitals for the treatment of serious diseases. But most treatment of minor illnesses and recovery still take place at home.

Plant Medicine

Herbs have often been used for healing at home. Almost all garden-grown herbs came to this country with European immigrants, who also brought with them the stories and remedies associated with these plants. Settlers also found out about many of the native plants from Native Americans and incorporated some of the treatments they learned into their own home-based healing practices. Families grew medicinal herbs for treating common aches, pains, and illnesses.

Herbalists are people who practice healing through the use of herbs. They sometimes use an entire plant in a remedy, or they use the plant to create various concoctions to be taken internally or rubbed onto the skin. Herbalists exist in all North Carolina cultures today.

Kitchen Medicine

Almost everyone has tried a self-treatment to cure a minor illness, often using common household items found in the kitchen, pantry, and garage. Many home remedies are harmless, **but others can be harmful or even dangerous**. Where did these remedies come from? Many resulted from

experimentation with various plants, household materials, and behaviors. If the patient improved, the remedy might be repeated at a later time. Sometimes home remedies were published in books, as they are today. Self-treatment guides and advice books have been found in North Carolina since colonial times. Many home remedies used a combination of items found at home and purchased at a store. Some purchased items were designed for medical use, but others, such as kerosene and turpentine, served different purposes as well.

Public Health

The twentieth-century public health movement—when government or civic organizations began addressing specific health situations in North Carolina communities—proved more effective than medicine alone in combating communicable diseases in the state. In North Carolina, this type of community education initiative really got off the ground with the hookworm campaign from 1909 to 1914. Through advertising, home demonstration programs, traveling health fairs, and the public school system, public health initiatives reduced exposure to infectious diseases by heightening awareness of what causes disease and how illness can be prevented. Many early public health initiatives focused on cleaning up the environment and improving living conditions—diet, housing, and personal hygiene. These efforts also helped to lower the incidence of waterborne infections like dysentery and cholera by encouraging local governments to regulate water sources and sewage.

Keeping the public safe and healthy is a prominent goal today, as well. Environmental studies teach us the effects of our lifestyles on our health as well as our physical environment.

Care at Home

Before modern hospitals, clinics, and urgent care facilities came into existence, North Carolinians treated virtually all illnesses at home. Typically, a female family member—a mother, sister, daughter, or aunt—cared for the patient. At other times, a nearby neighbor or friend nursed the sick. Caring for a sick patient involved long bedside vigils during which the caregiver

watched over the patient and tried to make him or her more comfortable. The caregiver also administered various home remedies or patent medicines (nonprescription remedies sold by physicians, stores, and traveling peddlers). Rarely did the family summon a doctor, but if one was consulted, he might bleed or “cup” the patient and administer chemically based prescription medicines. Beyond these measures, little could be done, and the family had to wait for nature to take its course. Not surprisingly, illnesses often generated feelings of fear and helplessness. In addition, prolonged sickness disrupted the entire household, since women—as either patients or caregivers—were prevented from attending to routine chores like cooking, sewing, washing, cleaning, tending gardens, and caring for children.

Antebellum Healing

Many antebellum doctors and their patients believed that balance was the key to good health. Disease might result, for example, from too much blood in a specific area of the body. Some of the treatments included:

- Bleeding with leeches, lancets, or a **scarificator**, an instrument used to draw blood, to restore the body to its proper balance
- Bleeding cups, heated and placed over the wounds created by a scarificator. The air inside the cup would cool, create a vacuum, and suck blood out of the wound.
- **Wet cupping**, in which a cut was made in the skin and a heated cupping glass was placed over the wound to draw a blister and promote healing.
- **Dry cupping**, in which a heated glass was placed on the skin with no cutting involved. The resulting blister was thought to draw the illness-producing factors out of the body.
- **Bloodletting**, usually used to treat fevers.
- **Ipecac** (to induce vomiting) and **calomel** (a form of mercury used for its laxative effects), both used to get rid of excess fluids and restore the body to its proper balance. Calomel could be fatal in large or frequent doses.

Many people rejected the harsh treatments of the early nineteenth century and the high cost of treatment by a physician. They continued to treat themselves at home. Medical self-help books like *Gunn's Domestic Medicine*

(first published in 1830), also known as *Poor Man's Friend*, were available and encouraged families to treat themselves.

For the slave community, there were two systems of health care: 1) internal—within the slave community, and 2) external—imposed by the slave owner. Slaves often hid their illnesses because they did not trust the health system imposed by plantation owners and preferred their own remedies. By law, however, slaveholders in antebellum North Carolina had the legal authority to direct the treatment of sick slaves.

Like many free Americans, enslaved African Americans often distrusted physicians and the harsh therapies used in the 1800s. Concealing ailments from their owners was one way slaves could maintain a degree of control over their bodies. Most slaveholders treated sick and injured slaves themselves but called on physicians for life-threatening cases.

Slaves treated themselves using home remedies and herbs from their gardens and from the wild. Enslaved African American women often assisted in delivering babies, and some became experienced midwives for black and white women on their own plantations as well as surrounding plantations. Midwives were often hired out to nearby plantations, although generally the slave owner was paid, not the midwife.

Owners and slaves generally disagreed about the origin of illness itself as well as the treatment of disease. Many slaves believed that medical doctors were powerless to cure illnesses caused by such things as soured relationships, evil thoughts directed toward others, or spells cast as revenge. Slaveholders and physicians attempted to suppress these beliefs, but they continued to thrive among slave communities.

Glossary of Definitions

Apprentices	People who learn a skilled trade (like carpentry or blacksmithing) while serving as an assistant to a more experienced person. Early doctors and midwives used the apprentice system to learn about healing "on the job."
Bacteria	Microscopic organisms that can live in soil, water, plants, and animals. Some bacteria are helpful, while others cause diseases such as pneumonia.
Bleeding	A common method used by doctors in the past to remove "bad blood" from the body and restore balance to the humors. This procedure used lancets, leeches, cups, and other tools to draw the blood from a cut on the body.
Elixir	A "cure-all" believed to eliminate disease and prolong life. Most were mixtures of alcohol and sugar.
Immunity	Resistance to a disease. Immunity can come from vaccination or having an illness once. It can also be passed from a mother to a baby.
Public health	The organized effort of keeping a community healthy by preventing diseases and controlling them if they get started. The most common forms of public health are education about disease, inspecting environments that could contribute to disease, and vaccinating potential patients.
Quarantine	To separate, or isolate, well persons from patients who are ill or who have been exposed to a contagious disease.
Self-treatments	Home remedies or over-the-counter medications that are used without direction from a doctor or druggist.

Tradition

Any belief, custom, or behavior that is passed down from generation to generation. Healing practices, including ceremonies and home remedies, can be traditions.

Lesson 1: Kitchen Medicine



Competency Goals: Grade 3: Science 1; Social Studies 3
Grade 4: Science 1; Social Studies 6; Healthful Living 2
Grade 5: Science 1
Grade 6: Healthful Living 2

Objective: Students will investigate how North Carolinians have treated illnesses at home.

Time: 30 minutes

Materials: "Guide to North Carolina Plants and Healing"
"What Was It Used For? Student Worksheet," one copy for every five students
"What Was It Used For? Answer Sheet"
Samples of home remedy ingredients on answer sheet
Paper
Pencils, one per student

Procedure: 1. Introduce the topic of home remedies by leading a class discussion. Ask students the following questions.

Do you ever gargle with salt water? Put meat tenderizer or tobacco on a beesting? If you do, then you take part in a tradition of using home remedies. Many of these self-treatments use common household products found in the kitchen. Some ingredients are purchased, some are homegrown, and some are gathered in the wild.

2. Bring in samples of ingredients used in home remedies (use the "What Was It Used For?"

sheets as your guide) for the students to see, smell, and touch. Have the students identify each ingredient and guess how it might have been used.

Note: Be sure to discuss the danger of trying these remedies. While some may be effective, others can be harmful!

3. Divide the class into teams of five students, and give each team one "What Was It Used For? Student Worksheet." Based on the previous discussion about home remedies, have teams guess what the ingredients were used for.

Note: "What Was It Used For? Answer Sheet" provides examples of what these materials could be used for. Many of these ingredients have multiple uses in healing.

4. Wrap up the lesson by discussing the ingredients and how they were used, and asking students what kinds of home remedies they use.

What Was It Used For? Student Worksheet

Name(s): _____

Household Item	What Was It Used For?
Vinegar	
Ginger	
Baking soda	
Salt	
Mud	
Milk and tea	
Cloves	
Flannel	
Olive oil	
Butter	
Dried mustard	
Onions	
Dirty sock	

What Was It Used For? Answer Sheet

Household Item	What Was It Used For?
Vinegar	For a HEADACHE soak cloth or brown paper in vinegar and tie to head.
Ginger	For an UPSET STOMACH take chopped boiled gingerroot (or sassafras tea).
Baking soda	For the MEASLES put a handful of soda in the bath to "bring the measles out" and cool the fever.
Salt	For SORE THROAT mix salt with warm water and gargle. Or put in cloth bag, heat, and use as poultice.
Mud	For a BEE or WASP STING take out the stinger and pat on mud to reduce the swelling.
Milk and tea	For EYE ACHES and INFECTIONS apply a few drops of warm milk or tea.
Cloves	For TOOTHACHE put cloves on the hurting tooth or along the gum.
Flannel	For SORE THROATS or CHESTS or ACHING JOINTS make a poultice with flannel and oil or grease.
Olive oil	For EARACHES put a few drops of warm olive oil in ear and plug with cotton batting.
Butter	For a COUGH make syrup of warm butter and honey or melted rock candy.
Dried mustard	For a CHEST COLD or ACHE make a paste with mustard, flour, water. Put in cloth and lay on chest.
Onions	For a CHEST COLD put fried onions and oil in a flannel bag on the chest to "break the cold up."
Dirty sock	For a SORE THROAT wrap a dirty sock around the throat. May grease sock with lard first.

Lesson 2: Home Healing and Family Stories



Competency Goals: Grade 3: Social Studies 2; English Language Arts 3, 4
Grade 4: Social Studies 4; English Language Arts 3, 4
Grade 5: English Language Arts 3, 4
Grade 6: English Language Arts 1
Grade 7: English Language Arts 1
Grade 8: English Language Arts 1

Objective: Students will explore their family history by examining home remedy traditions.

Time: 30 minutes in the classroom; 1 hour at home

Materials: "What Was It Used For? Answer Sheet"
"Oral History Interview Worksheet," two copies per student

Procedure:

1. Introduce the lesson by reviewing information about home remedies and the Lesson 1 activity. Point out that a family is any group of people who take responsibility for caring for each other.
2. Have students pass around laminated home remedy pages and read the suggestions for remedies. Do they sound familiar? strange?
3. Explain the definition of oral history: the documentation of traditions, stories, and recollections that are shared verbally. Much like a newspaper reporter researches a story by interviewing people, historians and folklorists learn a lot about how people live by interviewing them.

4. Ask each student to identify a family or community member they would like to ask about home remedies. They can conduct their interviews in person or over the telephone.
5. Distribute copies of the "Oral History Interview Worksheet" to students and give them a deadline for their assignment.
6. When the assignments are complete, ask students to discuss their experiences in doing oral histories. Who did they interview? What did they learn?
7. Wrap up the lesson by "binding" the oral histories into a class notebook or three-ring binder.

Extension Activity: Create a remedy recipe book using the recipes collected by students.

USE COMPLETED INTERVIEW SHEETS FOR
LESSON 3!!!

Oral History Interview Worksheet

Directions: Use this sheet to interview someone in your family or community about home remedies they have used.

Name: _____

1. What is the remedy?

2. What is it used to cure?

3. Where do the ingredients come from?

4. How did you learn about this remedy?

5. How well did the remedy work?

6. What other medicines are available to treat the same problem?

For the student: On the back of this page write down the recipe for the home remedy. Include the name, ingredients, and instructions for using the remedy.

Lesson 3: Math in the Kitchen

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Competency Goals: Grade 4: Mathematics 1
Grade 5: Mathematics 1

Objective: Students will use home remedies from Lesson 2 to explore measurement and addition of fractions.

Time: 30 minutes (students should have completed Lesson 2)

Materials: Completed copies of "Oral History Interview Worksheet" from Lesson 2
"Home Remedy Grocery List Worksheet," one copy for every five students
Pencils, one per student
Scrap paper

Procedure:

1. Introduce lesson by reviewing information on home remedies and the oral history project. Provide directions and overview for Lesson 3.
2. Divide class into teams of five students. Give each team two or three completed interview worksheets and have them look at the recipe section.
2. Distribute copies of the "Home Remedy Grocery List Worksheet" to teams and have them complete the sheets using information from the oral history interview worksheets.

4. Discuss ways to determine how much to buy (or gather, if there are homegrown herbs) when the measurements are not precise.
5. Wrap up by reviewing what students learned.

Home Remedy Grocery List Worksheet

Name(s): _____

Item	Amount	Source

Lesson 4: Plant Medicine and a Classroom Garden



Competency Goals: Grade 3: Social Studies 4; Science 1
Grade 4: Social Studies 1
Grade 5: Science 1, 2
Grade 6: Science 1

Objective: Students will understand the historical uses of plants, use scientific observation techniques, and combine these using creative expression.

Time: Approximately 2½ hours (30 minutes for the first session, 10 minutes twice a week for four weeks, and 30 minutes for the wrap-up session)

Materials: "Guide to North Carolina Plants and Healing" (📖)
Seeds, cuttings, or small herb plants
Wax-coated paper cups or small pots
Roll of plastic wrap
Masking tape
Rubber bands, one per student
Potting soil
Water
Paper
Art supplies

Procedure: 1. Introduce this lesson by discussing with students that many herbs are believed to have healing properties, using the list on page 25 of the Teacher Background Materials.

Discuss how, not long ago, a trip to the "drugstore" was as easy as stepping out your back door. Many

families grew herbs and other plants and used them to treat aches, pains, and illnesses.

2. People who study herbs and other plants are called *botanists*. They study and record the growth and appearance of plants at various stages in the season. Botanists discover new plant medicines all the time.
3. Place a piece of masking tape on each paper cup or pot and record the student's name and the date (if using paper cups, make sure they are wax coated and have a hole for drainage).
4. Distribute cups/pots to students and have them fill their pots with soil. Give each student two or three seeds to plant. Have them water their seeds and cover the cups with a piece of plastic wrap. Use rubber bands to hold the plastic wrap on if necessary.
5. Have students record their plant's growth twice each week by keeping notes of how tall it is, how many leaves it has, its general appearance, and whether it flowers.
6. Encourage students to explore the history of their plant by using information from the encyclopedia, the Internet, or the "Guide to North Carolina Plants and Healing."
7. Wrap up the lesson with an interactive art activity. Have each student choose one herb and tell its story through the student's choice of art expression: dance, music, visual arts, or creative writing. The stories should include information gathered during the class's study of herbs.

Lesson 5: Healing and Primary Documents



Competency Goals: Grade 4: Social Studies 4; English Language Arts 2, 4
Grade 5: English Language Arts 2, 4
Grade 6: English Language Arts 1
Grade 7: English Language Arts 1
Grade 8: English Language Arts 1

Objective: Students will learn about the past by reading primary source documents, creating personal responses, and comparing and contrasting medical treatments in the past and present.

Materials: Laminated copy of "Bob's Story"
Paper, several sheets per student
Pencils or pens, one per student

Time: A. Letters and journals from the past: 30 minutes
B. Letter writing: homework assignment
C. Venn diagram: 30 minutes

A. Letters and journals from the past

Procedure:

1. Introduce the lesson by discussing what primary documents are and why they are important. Discuss how, during much of North Carolina's history, people healed themselves at home. Hospitals were rare, and doctors were scarce and sometimes expensive. If a doctor was called, he came to the sick person's home.
2. Introduce the story of Bob by asking students to list the ways illnesses were treated. Describe some of the treatments, using the information on page 25 of the Teacher Background Materials.

3. Read "Bob's Story" to students. Have students listen for the different treatments used to treat Bob's illness. What kinds of treatments might be available for the same illness today?
4. Discuss the importance of journal and letter writing as a form of communication. Take a poll to find out how many students occasionally keep a journal or share information through letters rather than the telephone or e-mail.
5. Review the various parts of a proper letter, including date, address, salutation, body, and closing.

B. Letter writing

6. Explain to students that they are going to write letters describing an illness they have experienced. Include symptoms, treatments, help from others (doctors, parents, etc.), and how they felt and acted during the illness.
7. Wrap up the lesson by asking students what historians in the future could learn about health and healing practices today by reading their letters for clues.

C. Venn diagram

8. Have students find the similarities and differences between their illnesses and Bob's.

Bob's Story

This journal entry by Anna Pritchard, Bob's mother, reveals information about his illness and treatment.

“On April the 4th, 1853, Dr. Pritchard found that Bob had a hot fever and difficulty breathing. He gave him a small dose of ‘Cherry Pectoral’ and covered his chest with oilsilk. He did not improve during the night, and although I was nearly eight months advanced in pregnancy, I sat up several hours. From that night until the 5th of May, I was that child’s constant nurse, and sat up with him three weeks.

“The 6th of May, we got so alarmed, we sent for Drs. Macon and Howard. They arrived at dark and thought Bob’s an attack of pneumonia. Dr. Howard applied two German Leeches to the upper part of his back and after they dropped off Dr. Pritchard applied cups over the bites. All this time, the little fellow screamed and struggled frightfully. I held him and coaxed him and felt as if my very life was being torn from me, and poor little John came and stood by the bedside with tears in his eyes and trembling watched his little brother.

“The leeches took blood from Bob. I do not know how much—but from his struggling, not as much as they desired. His breathing was very rapid. His pulse, 160, sometimes a great deal more and sometimes so feeble it could hardly be felt.

“O, his recovery was so slow.”

Lesson 6: Public Health and the Environment



Competency Goals: Grade 4: Social Studies 4; Science 1; Healthful Living 2
Grade 5: Healthful Living 2
Grade 6: Healthful Living 2
Grade 8: Social Studies 5; Healthful Living 2

Objective: Students will explore the history of the public health movement, relate environmental conditions to illness, and create a public health poster to address a current issue.

Time: A. Brochure or poster: one class period or homework assignment
B. Top ten list: 30 minutes

Materials: Copy of public health poster
Paper, either 8½" x 14" or poster board, one piece per student
Art supplies
Chalkboard and chalk

Procedure: 1. Introduce students to the lesson by discussing public health laws. Pass around the copy of the public health poster and discuss ways that water, food, insects, and waste products can cause health problems.

Many diseases and illnesses are caused by unsanitary conditions. By the early 1900s, the public health movement was working to change people's home environments by teaching them the

importance of clean water, food safety, insect control, and proper waste disposal.

2. Engage students in a discussion about why public health measures are needed and how they impact the personal freedom of people for the “greater good”—community health.
3. In the past, the public health movement has used posters and brochures to educate people about how to stay healthy. Explain to students that they will make a brochure or poster encouraging disease prevention by simple sanitary measures, such as washing hands, storing food properly, and using screens on windows to keep insects out of the house. The brochure or poster can include a catchy title, public health facts, and drawings or other illustrations.
4. Display creations in the classroom or in the school hallway.
5. **Top ten list:** Have students as a group brainstorm ways that environmental problems (such as water quality and waste disposal) affect public health and create a “top ten list.”
6. Once they have identified their top ten environmental problems, have students determine solutions to these problems and identify ways they can contribute to each solution.
7. Wrap up the lesson by reminding students that taking care of the environment is not just good for the environment but is good for our health as well.