

Snake Woman's Garden  
Keekah Natee Toot'sah Nah'too  
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Goals/Purpose:

1. To share information about the Caddo culture particularly as it relates to traditional agricultural knowledge.
2. To give students an opportunity to use their observational skills in the garden to learn about some of the plants growing there.

Lesson:

We are standing at the entrance to Snake Woman's Garden.

Nawee - Welcome

Nawee is the Caddo word for welcome.

**Can you say Nawee?**

On our sign are the words Snake Woman's Garden and the Caddo words for that Keekah Natee Toot'sah Nah'too.

**We can practice saying these words. Keekah for snake, Natee for woman, Toot'sah is the way in the Caddo language that they say the garden, Nah'too, belongs to the woman, similar to our apostrophe. Let's practice saying the whole thing together.**

Language is an important part of a culture. Today you are going to be learning about the Caddo culture. CMHS is one of the ancestral homelands of the Caddo people.

**What do we know about the Caddo people?**

A group of Caddo people known as the Hasinai lived here on this site more than 1200 years ago. (A very long - more than 14 generations back in time) The Caddo people were an agricultural people and are known as the first farmers in what we now call Texas.

**Do you know where the word Texas comes from? It is the Caddo word tayshay for friend.**

The Caddo lived on this land for about 500 years before they started moving away probably due to a combination of factors like other tribes coming in and climate change issues like droughts. So when the Europeans arrived they were still in East Texas but not on this particular site.

Today, the Caddo headquarters are located in Binger, Oklahoma and the tribe has over 6000 registered members today. They are still a significant people working to keep their language and culture vibrant and growing.

(Sometimes I talk about how large an area the Caddo nation covered and how it was diminished through the expansion of European settlers, other tribes, diseases, etc. If questioned I have also discussed the forced removal of the tribe from Texas to Oklahoma.)

Now let's talk about the story of Snake Woman who our garden is named after.

**Snake Woman Distributes the Seeds** is a traditional story from the Caddo people. I'm going to tell you a version of the story.

“Creator gave the seeds of all living things to Snake Woman with the knowledge of how to plant the seeds and care for the plants and even prepare food from the harvest.

**What are some of the things that the seeds need to grow? Sun, water, soil, the right place, space, nutrients**

Snake Woman was a good mother to the seeds and one time when she had more than she could care for she decided to share the seeds with the people. She gave each of her two sons a bag of six seeds to give to people all over the world. Snake woman told them they must plant and care for them as they grew. But no one (especially the children) should touch or bother them until they were ripe and ready to eat. If they gathered them too soon, she would send a poisonous snake to bite them. Parents tell this story as a cautionary tale so the children won't bother or hurt the plants.

**Why was it so important for the people to care for the seeds and plants?**

It was their source of food, medicines, dyes, weaving materials for baskets, rugs, houses.

**Did they have stores to get their supplies?**

No. They didn't have a Walmart or grocery store. Everything they needed they got from the land they lived on. The Caddo were experts at knowing how to use the plants and animals for their survival.

**Did they have books, the internet, universities?**

No. They were amazing scientists who learned by observing over time and through trial and error and experimenting.

In Snake Woman's Garden we grow some of the original plants the Caddo grew and also some of the plants they would grow in their garden today. As you enter the garden it is set up as a loose time line with some of the earliest plants they cultivated on the left going around through the different plant varieties (sunflowers, three sisters) all the way to the plants they might grow in their gardens today. In the garden please stay on the gravel or walk very carefully so as not to hurt the plants just as Snake Woman told us.

**Break the group into teams with the help of the teachers.**

**Each group will choose one plant that is labeled. On the labels you will see two names, the common name and a scientific name. Try to remember at least the common name. Then use your senses to observe special things about your plant to share with the larger group. (Color of leaves or flowers, shape, big or small, tall or short, texture of the leaves, smell, etc.) We will meet back here around the center circle when you hear me clap my hands and say “Snake Woman's Garden!”**

Spend a few minutes letting students share what they observed.

I end by reminding them that gardens and farms are still where our food is grown. Everything we eat is connected back to the land in some way. Snake Woman's story is still an important reminder for us to care for the seeds and plants.