

## **Doctrine of Signatures Matching Game**

Plant biodiversity is the original source of human medicines, and even today, over 85% of the medicines used around the world, originally were, or are still, plant-based. For millennia, many cultures have used the Doctrine of Signatures (DOS) as a way of recognizing medicinal plants. In this form of traditional medicine, people believe that their god(s), or the Creator, put their “signature” on useful plants to show people what bodily problems a plant could cure — basically the plant (or part of it) looks like the part of the body it can heal. The DOS was a popular theory in western medicine in the Middle Ages; however like many other early theories, it was replaced by other medicinal practices and theories. It is also part of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge. Those who opposed the theory pointed out that, just because a plant resembles a body part does not mean it cures it. For example, not all heart-shaped leaves will cure a cardiac problem. However, research sometimes shows that Indigenous medicine plants contain active ingredients similar to those used in western medicine.

The DOS remains a useful tool in plant-based medicine, making it easier to remember what each plant does, as looking at a unique feature of a plant to remember what it heals is much easier than trying to memorize each plant’s use. And, it serves as a good reminder of how connected human well-being is to plant biodiversity.

**Materials:** Doctrine of Signatures Cards (print out from this document)

**Duration:** 10+ minutes

**Age Range:** Grade 5 and up

### **Activity:**

1. Print and cut-out the attached cards.
2. Use the cards to and play one of these games:

#### **Mix-and-Match**

- 1) Using the doctrine of signatures cards, try to match the plant card with the body part card that you think it helps heal.
- 2) Use the answer key to check and see if you got all the right matches and learn a use of each plant.

#### **Memory!**

- 1) Lay all the cards face down.
- 2) Flipping two cards at a time, try to find all the matches
  - a. If the two cards you flipped are not a match, return them face down.
  - b. If the two cards you flipped are a match, collect them and set them aside
- 3) See how quickly you can find all the matches or if playing with multiple people, see who can find the most pairs!

**For Teachers:** See below for links to the curriculum

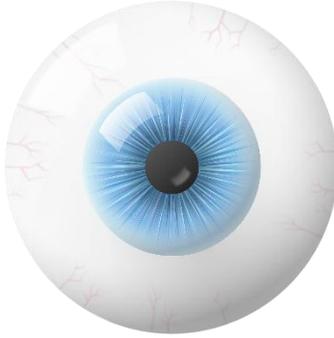
<b>Grade</b>	<b>Element/Principle</b>
Grade 5	Science: Understanding Life Systems: Human Organ Systems
Grade 6	Science: Understanding Life Systems: Biodiversity
Grade 7	History: New France and British North America, 1713-1800 Science: Understanding Life Systems: Interactions in the Environment

**Additional Resources:**

Medicinal plant use in Ojibwe culture: <http://creatorsgarden.blogspot.com>

- A blog written by a traditional knowledge holder who helped develop RBG's Anishinaabe plant medicines trail.

**Eye**



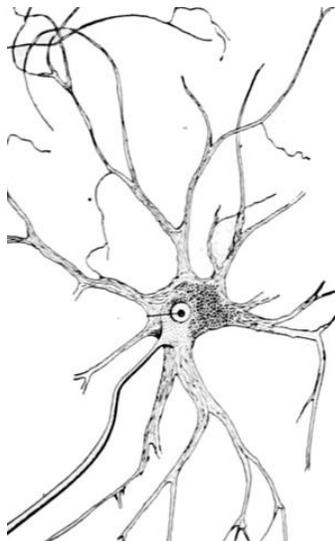
**Sweetfern**



**Scouring-rush  
Horsetail**



**Nerve Cell**



**Seneca Snakeroot  
(flower)**



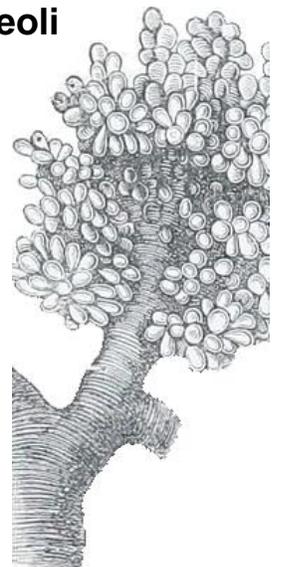
**Ginger root**



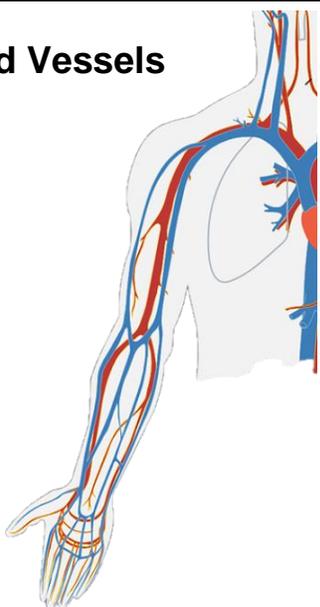
**Prickly Ash**



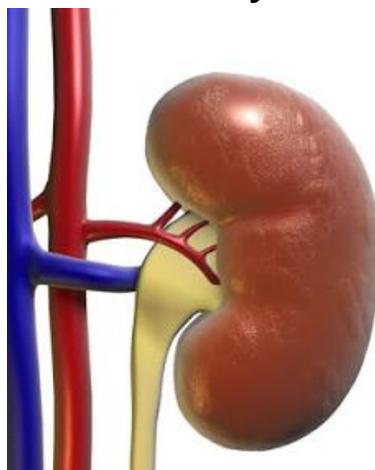
**Alveoli**



**Blood Vessels**



**Kidney**



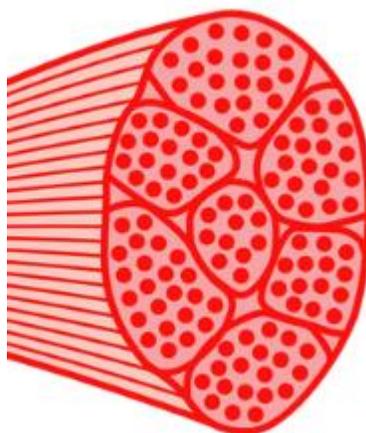
**Brain**



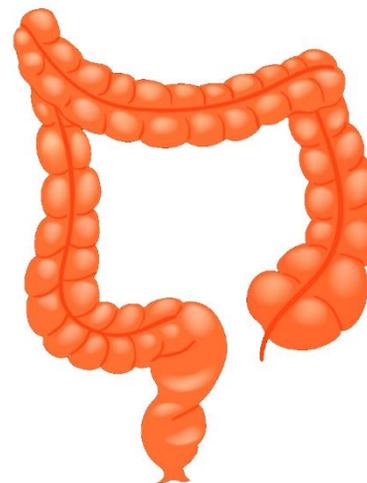
**Seneca Snakeroot  
(root)**



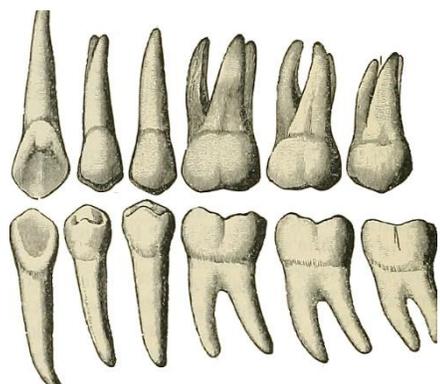
**Muscle fiber**



**Colon**



**Teeth**



**Carrot**



**Canada Wild  
Ginger**



**Kidney beans**



**Striped  
Maple**



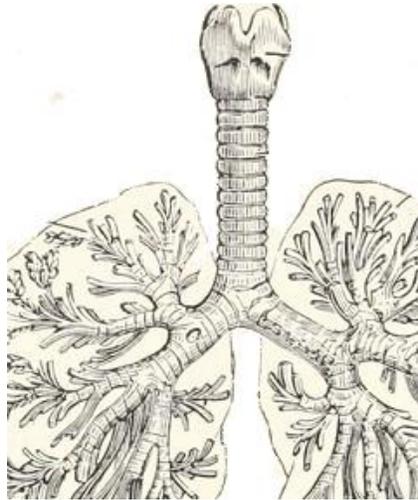
**Waterlily root**



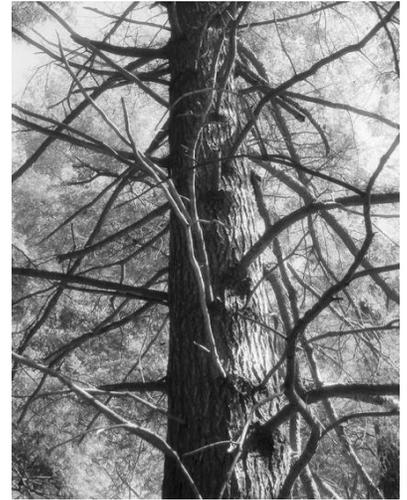
**Walnut**



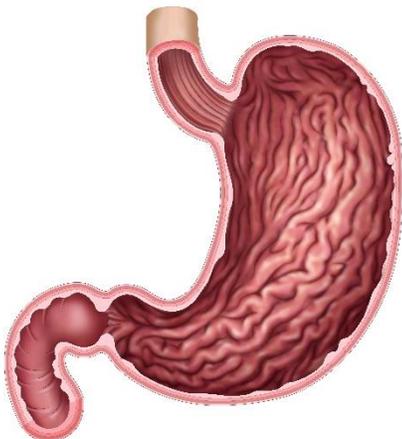
**Bronchiole tubes**



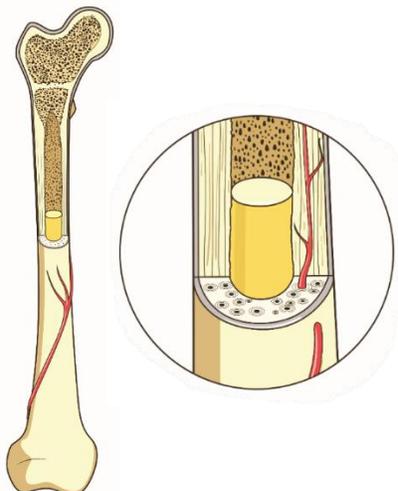
**Tamarack**



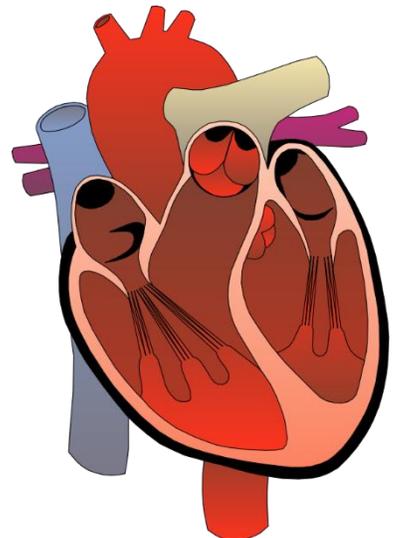
**Stomach**



**Bone**



**Heart**



### Doctrine of Signatures Answer Key:

<b>Plant</b>	<b>Body part</b>	<b>Plants Medicinal Property</b>
Striped Maple	Blood vessels	Stimulates the formation of new blood vessels
Scouring-rush Horsetail	Bone	Full of nutrients needed to absorb calcium, which makes strong bones
Seneca Snakeroot (root)	Bronchiole tubes (lungs)	Clears lungs of pollutants by irritating the vagus nerve
Canada Wild Ginger	Heart	Helps regulate growth hormone to correct the thickness of the vascular system
Tamarack	Nerve cell	The bark has antioxidant flavonoids that help protect and treat the nervous system
Prickly Ash	Teeth	Shuts off pain receptors in the mouth
Seneca Snakeroot (flower)	Alveoli (lungs)	Irritates the vagus nerve to help inflate alveoli and clear the lungs of pollutants
Waterlily root	Muscle fibre	Attracts new blood to the muscles allowing them to heal and increases the energy they can store
Sweet Fern	Colon	Contains gallic acid which helps the colon
Ginger root	Stomach	Contains phenols which help reduce nausea
Carrot	Eye	Contains beta-carotene that the body uses to support good vision
Kidney beans	Kidney	Contain high levels of magnesium and potassium which can help prevent kidney stones
Walnut	Brain	Walnuts have high levels of Omega-3 fatty acids and minerals that all help brain function