

## Lesson Guide: Beans

### Vocabulary:

- Bean
- Crop
- Pod
- Ancestor
- Cherokee

*See the attached vocabulary sheet in Educators Guide.*

### Engage:

- **Activity 1: Show and Wonder**

- Display slides 1-2 (title and “What are beans?”). Pass around physical bean varieties if possible — black beans, kidney beans, pinto beans — so students can touch and observe them before the slides frame the conversation.
- Guiding questions to students:
  - "What do you see in this picture? Describe the colors and shapes."
  - "Have you ever eaten beans? What did they taste like or look like?"
  - "Where do you think beans come from before they end up in a store?"
  - "How many different kinds of beans do you think exist in the world?"
- Display Slides 3–4 (Beans Are Very Old / The Three Sisters):
  - "Who do you think grew beans first?"
  - "Why might corn, beans, and squash be called 'The Three Sisters'? What does calling them sisters tell us?"
  - "What do you think a bean needs to grow?"
- Continue through the presentation, posing questions and sharing context of the lesson with students.

### Explore and Explain:

- **Activity 2: The Story ‘The Beans that Remembered the People’**

- Read aloud the story, provided in the *Educators Guide*  
Story Summary for Young Learners: Long ago, Cherokee families in the green mountains of the Southeast planted corn, squash, and beans every year. One special bean — small and shiny black — was saved by grandparents and passed to children, season after season. Then soldiers forced the Cherokee people to leave their homes on a long, cold, painful journey to a new land, now called the Trail of Tears. Families had to leave almost everything behind. But some carried something small and powerful in their pockets: bean seeds. When they arrived, they planted those seeds. The vines grew, the beans survived — and so did the people. Today the Cherokee Trail of Tears bean is still grown, connecting families to their ancestors and their strength.
- Discussion Questions:
  - "Why did Cherokee families save seeds every year?"
  - "The story says the beans carried 'life, memory, and hope.' What does that mean to you?"

- "If you had to leave your home and could carry only one small thing, what would it be? Why?"
  - "What does it mean to be a 'seed keeper'?"
  - "How can an object — like a tiny seed — hold a whole story?"
- **Handout Activity 3: The Bean's Journey**
  - Review the bean lifecycle, then have students draw each cycle on their worksheet.
  - Have students complete the bottom table to emphasize what the bean does and how humans help the bean through the life cycle.
  - Encourage students to think and discuss or write their answers to the following questions:
    - Why is it important for farmers to save seeds at the end of each year?
    - If you could be any step in the beans journey, which would you choose and why?

***Elaborate:***

- **Activity 4: Then and Now**
  - This activity will help students compare historical challenges with modern efforts toward cultural and agricultural restoration.
  - Pass out the “Then and Now” handout.
  - Using the story and class slides, students complete two columns:
    - Hard Times: What challenges did Indigenous peoples and their seeds face? (Examples: forced removal, loss of homelands, cold weather, hunger, protecting seeds.)
    - Hope and Healing: What are Indigenous communities doing today? (Examples: saving seeds, restoring traditional crops, teaching youth, building seed banks.)
  - Whole-Class Discussion:
    - “What changed over time for Indigenous communities?”
    - “How did people show strength during hard times?”
    - “Why is growing traditional beans important today?”
  - Grades 4–5 Extension:
 

Ask students to reflect on: “What Can I Do?” where students reflect on:

    - Caring for plants
    - Respecting cultural stories
    - Helping gardens or school green spaces
    - Protecting nature and sharing learning.

***Evaluate:***

- **Activity 5: Beans and Indigenous History**
  - This activity will assess student’s understanding of Indigenous agricultural history and the importance of cultural stewardship. This activity checks comprehension and encourages thoughtful reflection about cultural continuity.
    - Students will place timeline events in order (Indigenous domestication → Three Sisters agriculture → government disruptions → modern restoration).
    - Students draw and label the Three Sisters planting system.
    - Students complete filling in sentences about beans, seed keepers, and modern tribal efforts.

- Students answer reflection questions:
- “What qualities would a good seed keeper need?”
- “Why is losing a special seed like losing a piece of history?”
- “How might communities feel when growing traditional beans again?”

**Suggested Lesson Activities:**

- Indigenous Vocabulary
- Show and Wonder
- The Story: ‘The Beans that Remembered the People’
- The Bean’s Journey
- Then and Now
- Beans and Indigenous History

**Additional Educator Resources:**

- [Three Sisters: Companion Planting of North American Indigenous Peoples](#)
- [Bean Plant Life Cycle for Kids | From Seed to Green Bean!](#)
- [Germination for Kids – How Does a Seed Grow?](#)
- [Delaware Lenape Tribe Bean Dance](#)
- [How Cherokee Trail of Tears Beans Connect a Community to Its Roots](#)
- [Three Sisters \(agriculture\) Wikipedia](#)

## The Beans That Remembered the People A Cherokee Story of Survival and Hope

Long ago, in the soft green mountains and forests of the Southeast, Cherokee families lived close to the land. They planted corn, squash, and beans, caring for each crop as if it were a relative. These plants fed them, taught them, and helped them grow strong.

Among the plants was a small, shiny black bean. Every year, Cherokee families saved its seeds. Grandparents showed children how to plant them. Parents cooked the beans in warm soups and stews. This little bean helped keep their families healthy.

But one winter, everything changed.

Soldiers came and forced the Cherokee people to leave their homes. They had to walk a very long way to a new land. The journey was cold. It was tiring. Many were hungry. Some did not survive. Later, people would call this journey the Trail of Tears.

Because they could carry so little, families had to leave behind almost everything—homes, tools, gardens.

But some Cherokee people carried something small...something powerful.

They carried seeds.

They tucked the shiny black bean seeds into pockets and bags, holding them close as they walked through rain, snow, and wind. Even when their world was changing, they protected the seeds.

Why?

Because each seed carried life.

Because each seed carried memory.

Because each seed carried hope.

When the Cherokee people reached their new land, nothing felt familiar. The soil looked different. The air felt different. Everything around them had changed.

But the seeds were still with them.

They planted the seeds gently into the earth. After some time, green vines pushed upward.

Leaves spread toward the sun. Purple-tinted pods appeared. Inside each pod were the same shiny black beans their ancestors had planted long ago.

The beans had survived.

And the people had survived.

Every year, the families planted the beans again. They saved seeds for the next generation. Elders told stories, and children listened closely. The bean crop became a reminder: The Cherokee people are still here.

These beans were more than food.

They were courage.

They were memory.

They were connection.

A Cherokee seed keeper explained that saving seeds is not only about growing plants. It is about saving culture, history, and identity.

Today, Cherokee families still grow this bean, now called the Cherokee Trail of Tears bean.

When they plant it, they remember their ancestors, the journey they took, and the strength they carried.

And in their own quiet way, the beans remember too.

Every time a child plants one of those shiny black seeds, they plant more than a bean.

They plant a story.  
They plant resilience.  
They plant hope.

**TEACHER EXAMPLE**

**Indigenous Languages Vocabulary Sheet (K-5)**

**Directions:**

In Column 1, rewrite the word in English. In Column 2, write the definition of the word in your own words, then in Column 3 rewrite in Native language (if available). If it's not available, you may use the Native language of a neighbor, friend, or community member.

<b>Vocabulary Word</b>	<b>English Rewrite</b>	<b>Definition</b>	<b>Iroquoian (Haudenosaunee) Language Rewrite</b>
Bean			Osahe'ta
Crop			n/a
Pod			ká:nen Iseed)
Ancestor			-chiot-
Cherokee			Oyata'ge'ronoñ

**STUDENT WORKSHEET**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

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Bean			
Crop			
Pod			
Ancestor			
Cherokee			



# Beans: A Gift from the Earth

LENT. VERDI  
GROSSE

SOYA ROSSI  
CUIA

SOYA VERDE  
CUIA

LENTICCHIE  
ROSSI  
€ 1,80

FIRICOLI SOYA  
VERDE, INDIAN



# What Are Beans?

- Beans are seeds we can eat
- They grow inside pods
- They come in many colors
- They grow on plants



# Beans Are Very Old

- Indigenous peoples grew beans long ago
- Beans have been grown for over 7,000 years
- Tribes all across the Americas planted beans



# The Three Sisters

- Corn
- Beans
- Squash

These three plants grow together.



# How Beans Help the Soil

- Beans give nutrients back to the soil
- They help other plants grow
- They are good for the Earth



# Beans Are Healthy

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- Give us protein
- Help our hearts
- Give us energy
- Help our tummies stay healthy



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# Different Indigenous Beans

- Tepary beans (grown in the desert Southwest)
- Cherokee heirloom beans
- Hidatsa beans
- Many tribes grow special family beans



# Hard Times in History

- Native lands were taken
- Some traditional farms were lost
- Some seeds were almost lost



# Protecting Beans Today

- Tribes save traditional seeds
- Communities grow gardens
- Kids are learning to plant beans again



# Why Beans Matter

- They connect us to ancestors
- They help the Earth
- They keep communities strong
- They teach us to work together

# The Bean's Journey

A Life Cycle Sequencing Activity | Grades K-5

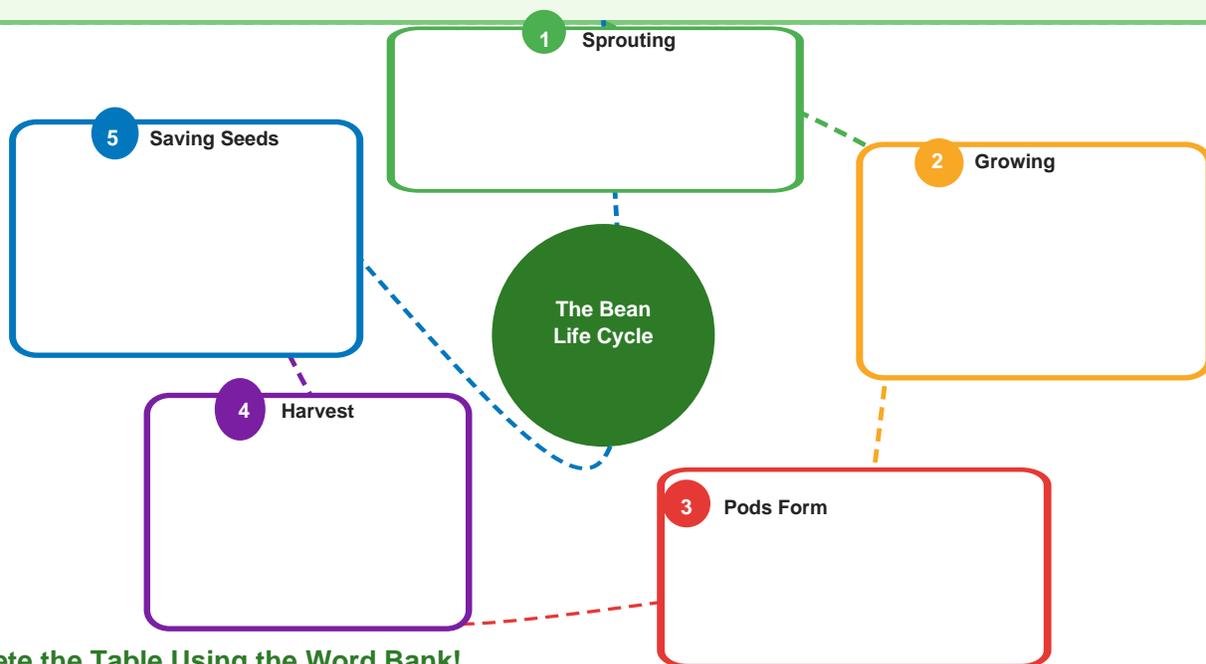
Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_

**Did you know?** Beans have been grown for thousands of years! They go through an amazing journey from a tiny seed to a plant that makes *even more* seeds. Discover how **people and plants work together**.

**Directions:** Draw each step of the bean life cycle in the circular diagram below to show how the cycle continues. Then fill in the table below to identify what the bean does and how a person helps the cycle, using the word bank below



**Complete the Table Using the Word Bank!**

#	Bean Does (fill in or circle)	Person Does (fill in or circle)
1	Seed sprouts in soil	_____
2	_____	Water and care for the plant
3	Pods form on the plant	_____
4	_____	Pick the pods
5	Seeds are ready for next year	_____

**Word Bank:**

plant the seed | vines and leaves grow | watch and protect | seeds are harvested | store seeds for next year

### Think About It!

1. Why is it important for farmers to *save seeds* at the end of each year?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. If you could be any step in the bean's journey, which would you choose and why?

\_\_\_\_\_



# Then and Now — Hard Times & Hope

Directions: Think about the story *The Beans That Remembered the People* and what you learned about Cherokee seeds. Look at the two boxes. Draw or write inside each one.

## Hard Times

What problems did Indigenous peoples and their seeds face long ago?

Examples might include: having to move, losing gardens, bad weather, or other challenges.

## Hope and Healing

What are tribes and communities doing today to protect seeds and important plants?

Examples might include: planting gardens, saving seeds, sharing stories.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Beans & Indigenous History

Timeline: Place these events in order (1-4):

- \_\_\_ Indigenous peoples domesticate beans thousands of years ago
- \_\_\_ Government policies disrupt Native food systems
- \_\_\_ Tribes restore heirloom seeds and begin seed banks
- \_\_\_ Three Sisters agriculture spreads across North America

Draw Indigenous crop design of Three Sisters Planting System (label each: corn, beans, and squash). Below, explain how they help each other.



The corn \_\_\_\_\_,  
 the beans \_\_\_\_\_, and the  
 squash \_\_\_\_\_.

Finish these four sentences by filling in the blank:

1. Beans are important to Indigenous people because \_\_\_\_\_.
2. One special Indigenous bean is called the \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Seed keepers protect \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Today, tribes are \_\_\_\_\_.

Write your answer to the questions below:

5. What qualities would a good seed keeper need?

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6. Why would losing a special seed be like losing a piece of history?

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7. How do you think Indigenous communities felt when they started growing their traditional beans again?

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