

Name: _____

Date: _____

Primary Source Deciphering: Herbal Journals

Instructions: Read the excerpts from 19th-century Canadian folk magic practitioners' journals below. Transcribe the historical text, then analyze the practitioner's methods, ethics, and safety based on modern botanical knowledge.

Journal Entry 1: September 1862



"Sept. 4, 1862. Walk'd to the edge of the woods and gather'd a great bunch of Artemisia vulgaris, which the locals call Mug-wort, and some sprigs of Cedar. I hung them in the window in the bright sun to dry quickly. Once dry, I plan to make a potent infusion tea for my pregnant sister to bring her good dreams, and sew the rest into a cloth sachet for protection."

1. Summarize the practitioner's actions and intentions in your own modern words.

2. The practitioner intends to give Mugwort to his pregnant sister. Based on modern plant profiles, why is this a danger, and what alternative symbolism might Mugwort offer?

3. Identify the error the practitioner made in the drying process. What is the correct method to preserve the potency of these botanicals?

Journal Entry 2: October 1864

"Oct. 12, 1864. Found a fine stand of wild herbs today. I remembered the old rule: leave plenty for the forest, take but one in ten. I asked permission of the land. When I returned home, I placed the dried leaves into a small cloth bag with a river stone to carry on my person for a safe journey."

4. What specific ethical harvesting rule is the author practicing, and why is this vital for sustainability?

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5. What specific "practical ritual application" is the author describing in the last sentence? State the term and its purpose.

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6. Canadian folk magic is a tapestry of Indigenous, European, and African diasporic traditions. Why is "asking permission of the land" an important ethical step rather than just an act of politeness?

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Answers

- 1.** The author went to the woods and harvested Mugwort and Cedar. They dried them in direct sunlight. They plan to brew the herbs into a tea for their pregnant sister to help her dream, and put the leftover herbs into a small bag for protection.
- 2.** Mugwort should be avoided by pregnant women as it can be harmful/unsafe. Its traditional symbolism is associated with lucid dreaming and intuition.
- 3.** The practitioner hung the herbs in the "bright sun." Herbs should be hung in a dark, dry place to prevent mold and preserve their chemical properties/potency, then stored in airtight jars.
- 4.** The author is using the 'one-in-ten' rule. This ensures the harvest is sustainable, leaving enough of the plant population so it can continue to thrive.
- 5.** A Spirit Sachet. It is a small cloth bag carried on the person to maintain a specific 'correspondence' (in this case, protection/a safe journey) throughout the day.
- 6.** It honors the cultural origins of the practice and acknowledges Indigenous territory and traditional land ownership. Taking without permission crosses the line into cultural appropriation rather than appreciation.