

A Method for Working a Speaking Knowledge of the Flora of the Region into the Course in General Biological Science

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In the crowded General Biology Science course, it is hard to find time to work into the course a speaking knowledge of the flowers of the region, yet there is a definite need for such a knowledge. Many of the students in the class will soon become teachers in the elementary and in the high schools of the state. As elementary or high school teachers, these students will have an excellent chance to create an interest in science through the medium of the native wild flowers.

There is not enough time in the course for one to gather, and to press plants, or to learn the vocabulary necessary to identify successfully the plants by following their characteristics through a taxonomic key. It is essential, then, that a rapid means of learning be used if the student is going to attain a knowledge of the regional flora. The medium of showing colored slides has been tried and found to be reasonably successful. The slides can be made rather cheaply with many of the present-day 35 mm. cameras and a good light meter.

Proper equipment and proper placement of the equipment for showing the slides are essential. A 500 watt projector with a long focal length lens (7 inches or longer) and a 72 inch screen will allow the instructor to remain behind and to the side of the class. This procedure is an important factor in maintaining discipline in the partially-darkened room. The screen should never be placed in a position that will allow light to fall directly on it. White light has a tendency to neutralize colors and will make invisible many of the fine color lines. A wall screen should not be used as it does not allow the use of a back light to relieve the strain on the eye caused by the sudden change in light intensity during the changing of the slides.

During the second or third week of the fall semester, 20 to 30 slides of the fall flowers are shown to the class. Common names and binomials, if known, are given to the class. Students are urged to write down the common name, the binomial, and some characteristic that will help them to recognize the plant. The binomial system of nomenclature is discussed during the first showing of the slides. A regular classroom period field trip is made soon after this showing in order to correlate the slides with the plant in the field. If plant characteristics are used in naming the plant, these are pointed out to the student. This procedure produces a mental association helpful in the recall of plant names. A chance to make 10 extra points by recalling the common name or the binomial is included in the first test. It is surprising how this practice increases the interest in the showings that follow. Summer flowers with repeats of the fall flowers are shown during the winter months and again at the close of the second semester. Slides of the spring flowers are introduced about the same time as they appear in the field, a timely introduction which creates interest and helps the student to establish in his mind the time of flowering. Slides of about 100 species of plants are shown during the course.

Two Saturday field trips, taken during the spring semester, are made on a voluntary basis in order to eliminate uninterested students who are likely to be a hindrance to the progress of the trip. The first trip, taken early in April, will find most of the early spring flowers in bloom. The second trip, mainly an ecology trip taken about May 15, will find many of the late spring flowers and some of the early summer flowers in bloom.

A total class time of about 5 hours and parts of two Saturdays will be required for this method. All of this time should not be charged to the learning of the flora of the region since many other phases of both plant and animal biology can and should be presented at the same time.