

ARTS OF THE LAND



learning objectives

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- describe the process of learning a trade or craft;
- identify ways Bermudians have creatively used the natural resources of the island for building, farming, and crafts;
- describe the process for quarrying limestone and its use in Bermuda's vernacular architecture;
- evaluate the use of pesticides and fungicides and natural alternatives for protecting crops;
- evaluate the economic impact of cedar wood's scarcity on craftsmen, businesses, and tourism; and
- understand the characteristics of cedar wood and the steps necessary for creating a quality object from cedar.

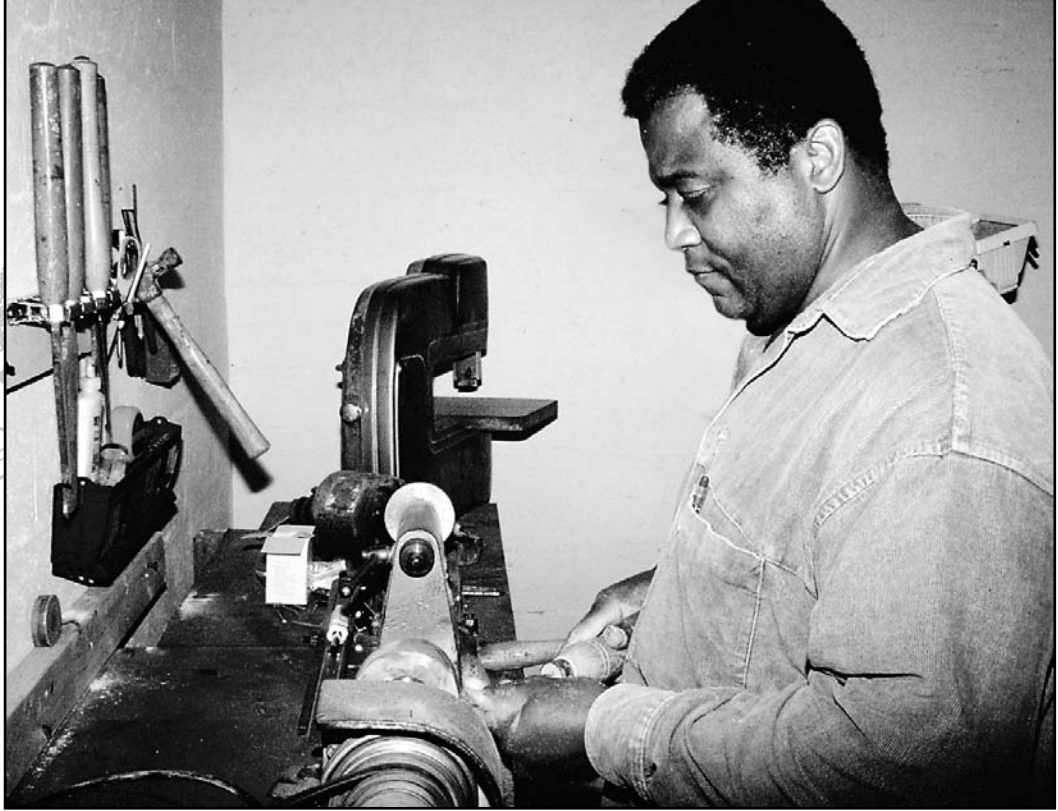
CROSS CURRICULAR LINKS

In this chapter, in addition to social studies curriculum links, there are readings, discussion questions, and activities that fit well with language arts, design and technology, visual and fine arts, health and safety, library science, math, business studies, and physical education.

In this chapter, students are introduced to Bermudians who have applied ingenuity and creativity using the island's natural resources to meet our needs and beautify our lives. The chapter guides students in examining how knowledge, values, and skills related to the environment are learned and passed on to others. Specifically, students discover how Bermudians working in the building arts, farming, and crafts have learned their trade and the meaning that these master artisans draw from their work with the flora, fauna, and other materials of the natural environment on the island. The idea of artistry and mastery in occupational crafts is explored. Stories of quarrying limestone, farming, beekeeping, and cedar woodworking illustrate how cleverness and determination help keep Bermuda's traditions alive and dynamic.



Llewellyn Emery
using a lathe.
Courtesy Departments
of Community and
Cultural Affairs.



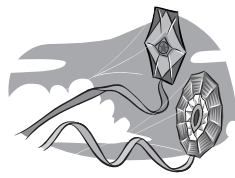
Island Ingenuity

Bermuda is only about 20 miles long and [on average] a mile wide. It is all limestone hills. The soil is actually quite arid and alkaline. The limestone is very porous. So when it rains, and we get about 60 inches a year, the rain will drain right through the limestone so we don't have standing water. It makes quite a unique climate to grow things in. — Nan Godet

For some, an island's limited resources and space would be seen as a problem. For Bermudians it is a challenge that we have creatively answered. Bermuda's landscape is praised and often photographed for its beautifully **manicured** gardens, exquisite traditional architecture, and its use of cedar in furniture, building, and in fine objects for the home. Again and again, our **ingenuity**, environmentalist values, and artistry are evident in the many ways we use and conserve the resources of our island environment. For example, traditional builders use limestone that has been cut from the land for the walls and roofs of homes. Craftspeople also harvest the bounty of the island. Some artisans use banana leaves to create dolls.

Why do we refer to these occupational traditions as "arts?" The answers lie in the way that master **practitioners** use ideas and standards of quality and beauty along with their mastery of the techniques and materials in the course of their work—whether with stone, wood, bees, plant material, or soil. These standards of excellence are shared within the group but are also admired by outsiders as well.

Repeatedly, Bermudians respond with solutions to changing, and often challenging, situations. Woodwork with cedar was a popular art until almost all the cedar trees were wiped out by disease in the 1940s. Thanks to Bermudians' ability to adapt, the craft was not lost as well. Today, furniture makers and carvers use recycled cedar that is sometimes stored in customers' homes. During World War II sugar was rationed, but instead of waiting for the war to end to satisfy our sweet tooth, we started a beekeeping club to share information and work together to use honey as a sugar substitute. Responding to shrinking **arable** land acreage and a decrease in outlets for local produce, farmers recently opened a farmers' market in Hamilton. This may increase the demand for local goods, make the issue of agricultural uses of land more visible, and help to make farming a more sustainable business once again.



How One Learns a Trade

Arts of the land include farming, gardening, and beekeeping as well as the skills and techniques required for traditional building, such as quarrying, stonecutting, lime burning, masonry, carpentry, and drystone walling, and the skills of artistic woodworkers and other craftspeople. Many of these **artisans** learn their trade from someone else rather than in school. They learn either through a formal apprenticeship or simply by working alongside someone. Some are self-taught.

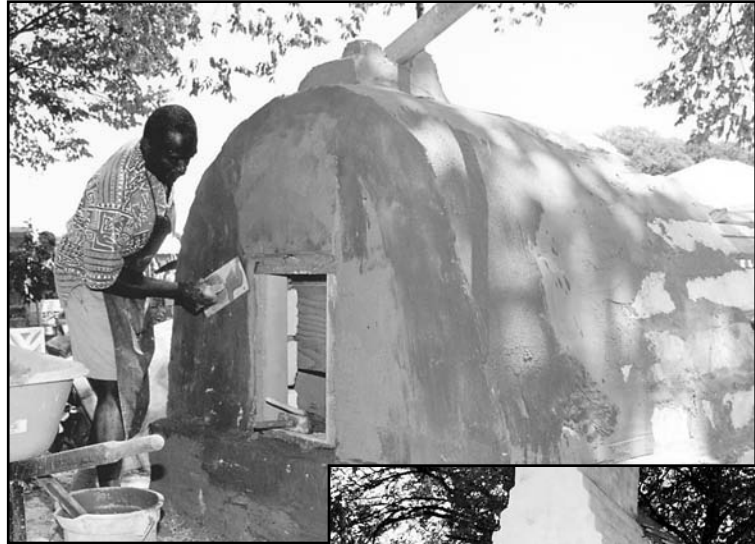
Cedar craftsman Llewellyn Emery, of Pembroke, describes how his curiosity, determination, and perseverance helped him to launch a career in fine woodworking.

In my neighbourhood [there] was a village craft shop and an old cedar craftsman there by the name of Levi Daniels, who was, in fact, making cedar products for the local market even then. I got curious about what he was doing in that shop. So back in the summer of 1957 I started to basically hang around the shop until I got offered a job there.

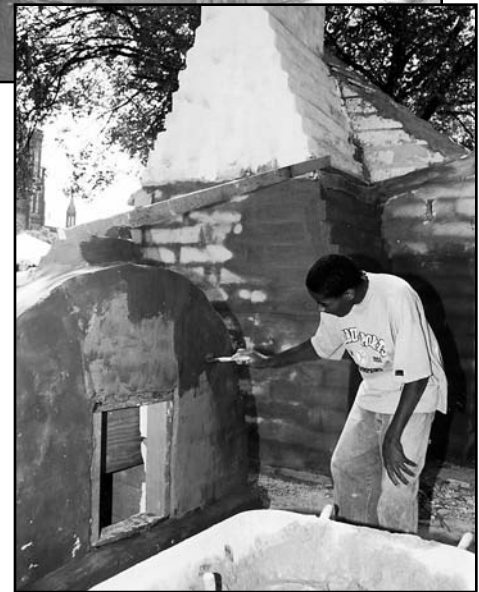
Of course you start at the bottom, so I was sweeping the floor, but every time I got an opportunity I was standing at one of the lathes and watching the number one machine operator there, lathesman, turning items and just waiting for my turn to do it. I just felt after a while that I could do this work. I just knew I could if I was given the opportunity. Gradually they coaxed me along, along with other young boys in the neighbourhood who worked there. They coaxed us along, took us through the various processes, and let us eventually prepare the wood for the machine, to sand it. We gradually graduated until they would put a chisel in our hands and let us actually turn something.

Larry Mills, of Southampton, is a traditional builder and restorer. He has been training his teenage son in the craft. When his son was only five years old, Mr Mills would bring him along on jobs to observe and help with the little things like sweeping the yard. Mr Mills explains:

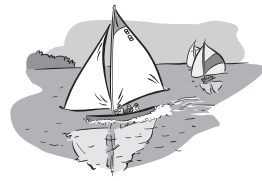
He started practically, by mixing, passing up the slate and then working his way up to slating. I believe right now he knows how to lay the slate. [To help him learn,] I might say, “you are a little off there” or, “you just do it this way, but you go ahead and try it first and then let me look at it.” I will let him try it first, and then if any corrections need to be made, I will help him.



Larry Mills. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



Trevor Mills follows in his father's footsteps.



Stonemason Dennis Butterfield, of Somerset, describes how he acquired his skills in stonemasonry also by starting at the bottom and working his way through the various processes a stonemason uses. He learned carpentry, though, by observation and jumping in on the job.

Well, my [stonemasonry] trade mostly came from my family. I worked with my uncle [Edgar Butterfield] out of school for about 10 to 15 years and I had to learn from what you call scratch. First you would start in the mortar trough. And then you do your labourer's work, and then you come to your apprenticeship.

[I learned carpentry,] just by observation, working on different jobs. You know, you watch someone else, and then you can go ahead and do these little things yourself. As you get along, you improve in different fields. If they [the more experienced workers] saw you going wrong, they would stop you on the spot and explain things to you and show you the right road to go.

Today it seems to me the kids don't want to learn, or don't want to be told. I was proud that somebody's going to show me something, show me how to do something.

Fred Phillips, of Warwick, is a successful self-employed carpenter and furniture maker. He remembers when he worked in the trade with others how they would train the newcomers. He also talks about how those who marry their skills with a desire to learn and a determination to achieve are the ones who later progress from menial workers to become masters of their trade.

You'd get a helper and you could recognise if somebody had interest. Usually if you got a helper and he just did what you said, that was someone who would be retiring and just doing what you said. But if you got somebody who wanted to take the saw out of your hand, wanted to try himself, you would give it to him and just watch over him and give him a few pointers. You knew that was someone who was going somewhere. When they were anxious to try something, even if they botched it up a little bit, just that need to give it a go, they were the ones who progressed and became tradesmen.

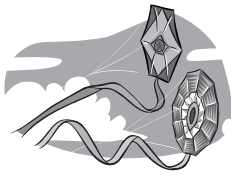
I worked [with] fellows years ago that . . . had the ability but they just didn't have the ambition, and they are still labourers today. It's an interesting thing about human nature, I guess, the ones that want to give it a go will give it a go, no matter what it is, what trade or anything else.

Increasingly today, those working in the building arts learn their trade at school. But there seems to be a decrease in the number of people who want to take the time to really perfect their building skills. Mr Butterfield explains that he switched from the stonemasonry business to carpentry because there weren't enough skilled workers to make his business really successful.

I think the problem was money reasons. People wanted to work, wanted money and not [to] learn the trade. I can recall a few times when I was running a job, I'm trying to get a guy to take up a tool to use, he would say he ain't getting paid for using a tool. I tried to



Furniture maker Jeremy Johnson displays a fine example of his workmanship in this parrot back chair, traditional in Bermuda as a variation on the Queen Ann style. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



tell him I'm only trying to give him advice on how to get along and, you know, become a mechanic. But as soon as you give him a tool, he wants more money. I think that's the reason today—money—because when I came along money wasn't the thing, it was to learn a trade. I think that's why there's more of a decline in the mechanics of Bermuda today.

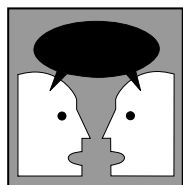
Money was an important thing at that time. You bring up a family, you need money. But, to me, to learn something was more important than money. After you know [your trade], then you can demand what you want.

Randolph Furbert, of Hamilton Parish, didn't immediately embrace the family tradition of beekeeping, but once he did there was no turning back. In looking towards the future, he has found young people are interested in learning his trade.

As I'm getting [to be] an older man now, one of the things that concerns me is what's going to happen to all this beekeeping. So I've been blessed in that I have five teenaged boys that work with me every Saturday and on holidays. Whenever they have free time they come and help me in the field with harvesting honey, packaging it, and marketing it. Putting equipment together. I have a young fellow now. He's 13; he's just started. He's just as crazy about bees as I am. I've had the privilege of taking the [boys] abroad on trips to bee conventions with me, which gives them a little stimulus. The day will come when I'm not around. Beekeeping can continue because they're becoming as knowledgeable as I am. Because working together we are learning together about bees.

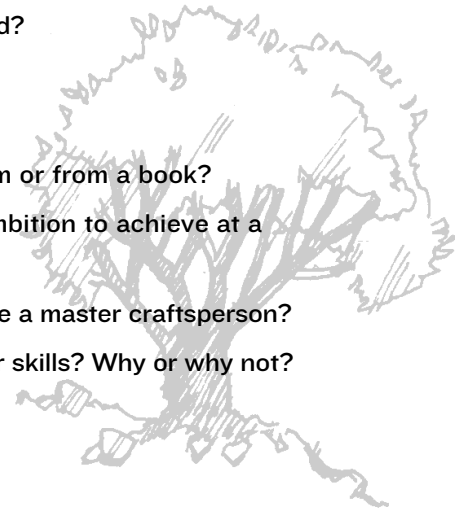


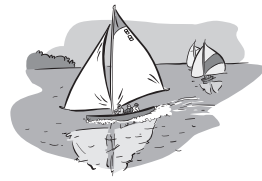
Randolph Furbert displays a beehive at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. Courtesy Smithsonian Institution.



Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever learned how to do something by working with someone else and has that person helped? If so, what was it that you learned?
2. How did you learn it? Explain the process.
3. How is learning this way different from learning something in school?
4. How did it feel to learn by working with someone rather than in a classroom or from a book?
5. What might happen if someone is skilled but shows no determination or ambition to achieve at a higher level?
6. Do you think determination and ambition are important if you want to become a master craftsman?
7. Do you think that earning more money is more important than perfecting your skills? Why or why not?
8. Would perfecting your skill help you earn more money? How?
9. Would perfecting your skill give you a higher sense of self-achievement?





Activities

Learning a Trade

1. Make a list of trades commonly practised in Bermuda.
2. With a partner, pick a trade and create a list of interview questions about the trade. Be sure to include questions about how the person learned his trade and what it takes to master the trade. Also ask about a typical workday.
3. Working with your partner, conduct an interview with someone working in a trade.
4. After your interview, write a step-by-step plan outlining how someone would learn the trade and become involved in the business.
5. Shadow a stonemason, carpenter, farmer, or other craftsperson. Keep a journal chronicling a typical workday. Be sure to include any stories you heard about the craft, special vocabulary used by the workers, and ritualised ways of doing things that you observed. Afterwards write a description of what you observed. Reflect on the types of work, the skills required to achieve a mastery of that work, and the work environment.

Building with Limestone, a Natural Resource

Traditional Bermudian architecture used the natural environment in practical and creative ways. The first settlers exploited what they found to build houses with cedar wood frames thatched with palmetto fronds. Soon the palmetto was replaced with limestone plaster obtained from the abundance of limestone throughout Bermuda. Increased shipbuilding put further demand on the cedar supply and this, combined with two major hurricanes, made Bermudians see the advantages of building with limestone blocks.

Limestone wall construction became the predominant building technique in Bermuda during the 18th and 19th centuries and was revived during the late 20th century. Traditional limestone houses were small with few windows and a high-pitched roof with chimneys on the

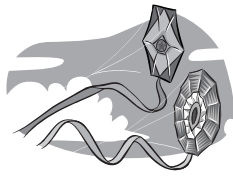


Top: Cutting limestone blocks.

Bottom: Quarrying limestone.

Courtesy Department of Communication and Information.





outside which acted to **buttress** the walls. They were built to be **proportional**, using scale and space in economical ways.

Larry Mills works in restoration of Bermuda's traditional buildings. He proudly describes Bermuda's vernacular building material:

Building around the world is basically the same, you put one thing on top of another. But what makes us unique is the material, especially the stone. I don't think there is anyplace else in the world where they cut stone like they did here . . . right out of the ground with hand tools.

Fred Phillips is known as a furniture maker and carpenter, but when carpentry and construction jobs were scarce, he would put down his woodworking tools and take up a saw and chisel to cut limestone blocks from the earth.

*I threw in my lot with my friend, a fellow called Robbie Simmons, and we pooled our resources and bought a big power saw and we used it to cut stone out of the side of the hill . . . We had an eight-foot saw. It would chisel in eight feet or maybe seven feet . . . We used to chisel about four feet across the back and then take the motor saw and cut down parallel. When you got right to the bottom you would cut out underneath a **keyway**.*

All the surplus rock that had been cut away from the hill you would stand them up like little cathedrals. Then you would go up on top of the bank, and pry [the limestone block] out from the solid bank and it would come over and come down on these, what we called crushers. If the block broke into two pieces, that would save you a lot of work, then you could start cutting the size stone (8 x 9s, 10s, 12s) that a trucker . . . would require for a contractor who was building a house.

When we would go into a quarry the fellows who are already there have the best sites . . . They could cut slate block—that would be the big stones that they cut into 1 x 12 x 18 inch tiles to do the roofing. That is the finest part of the stone in the quarry. We would be relegated to a lesser area and we would cut building stone . . .

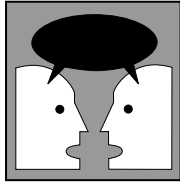
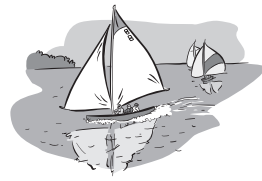
That's how I got into it . . . It wasn't difficult to pick up. Basically you could measure, and the fellow you were working with knew something about it . . . There is very little building stone being cut now, only for decoration, like for walls.



Traditional Bermuda cottage with above-ground tank. Courtesy Department of Planning and Bermuda National Trust.



Building using limestone blocks and slate. Courtesy Department of Communication and Information.



Discussion Questions

1. What is your house constructed of? Do you live in a house made from limestone blocks?
2. Has anyone in your family quarried limestone? How did they learn the necessary skills?
3. Has anyone in your family built a house or wall of limestone blocks? How did they learn to do it? Why did they do it themselves?
4. How do you assess whether a stone is cut well or a house is beautifully built?



Limestone Buildings

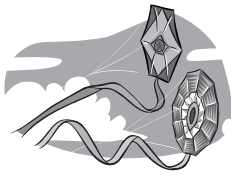
1. Take a walk through your neighbourhood and see how many limestone buildings and walls you can find. Either take a picture of them or draw a sketch of them. Look carefully as it is sometimes difficult to tell the difference between buildings made of limestone and those made of concrete.
2. What are some of the common features among these buildings and walls?
3. Ask traditional masons about what to look for in a wall that is built well. Every craft tradition has examples of mastery. Ask craftsmen for examples of fine work in cedar, stone, and plant material around the island. Photograph several examples and ask questions about why they are considered excellent.
4. Talk with an owner of one of the limestone buildings or walls and ask them what they need to do to maintain them.
5. Find a stonemason and ask him to describe the process involved in building a cottage or wall from limestone blocks.
6. Make a list of all tools and materials needed, and create a step-by-step guide to building a wall or cottage of limestone blocks.

Farming

Agriculture was once a large part of Bermuda's economy. Changes in U.S. tariff laws, competition from growers in Texas, and the advent of refrigerated railroad cars ended the export to the U.S.A. of the famous Bermuda onion, which had given us our nickname. When export trade was at its height, between 1890 and 1910, more than 3,000 acres were planted, and Bermuda's onions, potatoes, arrowroot, carrots, celery, beets, kale, parsley, bananas and strawberries were exported to the eastern United States, Canada, and the West Indies. During the late 20th century, Bermuda was famous for its lily bulbs until a



Tom Wadson with lilies at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



virus stopped export and later competition from markets with cheaper labour made export unprofitable. During the first half of the 20th century Bermuda continued to export cut flowers, but again overseas competition and the island's decline in arable land acreage made it unprofitable. Today tourists enjoy visiting the Bermuda Perfumery and buying and wearing perfumes made from locally grown flowers.

Locally grown produce helped Bermudians get through the war years when imports were limited. But today competition with imported goods and high tariffs on equipment bought overseas make it difficult for local farmers to make a profit. Over the years as building projects have increased, arable land has decreased, limiting the growth potential of farming as a vocation. Historically Bermudians have kept small kitchen gardens where they grow herbs, flowers, and a few vegetables. Some continue this practice today.

Tom Wadson, who owns and operates Wadson's Farm in Southampton, got into farming because he saw the trade dwindling. He says, "I took up serious farming as I saw a serious shortfall in serious farming in Bermuda. Farming is his passion.

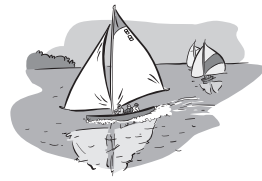
Now we work 30 acres, primarily in vegetable crops, but we grow probably five or six acres of bananas, a lot of lettuces, a lot of green crops. We grow a lot of potatoes, when I say a lot, probably five to six acres of potatoes a year, in the Spring. We grow a lot of sweet potatoes . . . We grow flowers. We grow a lot of freesia . . . We run a couple of greenhouses that are just for growing our seedlings . . . We grow a lot of berries too. We grow a lot of melons, a lot of herbs . . . At one point in this last calendar year, I think, we had 43 different items on offering, from herbs right through to truckloads of lettuce. So we are pretty busy . . . We have usually a crew of about eight guys in the garden.

One of the challenges of farming in Bermuda is the lack of ground water. Mr Wadson deals with this by making water, which is very expensive.

We make a lot of water. None of the land that I have has any ground water underneath it that is useable for irrigation, not one square inch of it. So I make all the water, which is costly and tortuous . . . We have a water maker at this farm, and we make between 4,000 and 5,000 gallons a day, and the only efficient way to distribute that is with drip irrigation. So we use a lot of plastic, a lot of drip irrigation. We have pretty serious control on it all, pretty serious water management, because we don't have much water to play with. As a last resort, we buy water from the government water supply system.



Sally Godet holding a starfruit—one of the many varieties of fruit grown in her garden from which she makes preserves and chutneys to sell at the farmers' market. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



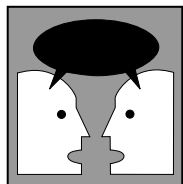
Mr Wadson sells all of his produce locally. He has a roadside market and was instrumental in reestablishing the idea of a central farmers' market in Bermuda. Local chef and author Judith Wadson, of Somerset, remembers as a child buying fresh produce at such a market.

[The] farmers' market was centre stage on Front Street in Hamilton in the late 1800s and early 1900s, in Number One Shed, I believe. When I was young, my Mum would shop along Parliament Street, where Portuguese

farmers would have trucks with the freshest goods just picked from the farms. Weighing scales would be hanging off the end or side of the truck, which would have a cover over the flatbed. Thankfully, a farmers' market has been started this year in Bull's Head parking lot, Hamilton. I work with Tom, selling veggies, and bake organic breads for it. I also give cooking tips to people who don't know what to do with the stuff.



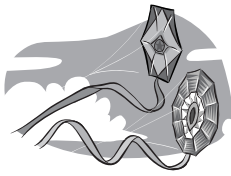
Farmers' Market, Bull's Head parking lot, Hamilton. Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think farming has declined in Bermuda?
2. What are the benefits of farming as a profession?
3. What knowledge and skills do one need to be a successful farmer in Bermuda?
4. What types of plants can be cultivated in Bermuda?
5. How do you make water?
6. What are the benefits of shopping at a farmers' market?
7. How would the experience of shopping at a farmers' market differ from shopping at the supermarket?





Man Helping Nature; Nature Helping Man

Farming and beekeeping are dependent on what nature provides. Sometimes, man helps nature by using chemicals, but usually there is also a natural approach to solving the problem. In addition, modern science is now helping Bermudians combat the problem of plant viruses that in small, enclosed environments such as Bermuda can be devastating. Cedar blight, a virus, wiped out most of Bermuda's famed cedar trees in the 1940s. As part of an experiment with the University of North Carolina in the U.S.A. to control such viruses, Tom Wadson is growing genetically engineered sweet potatoes. He uses pesticides that are organically approved.

Pests can be a big problem in a place that doesn't have a winter to kill them off. In Bermuda, farmers must combat pests year round. While Tom Wadson doesn't like to use pesticides, he finds he must, but tries to do it in a responsible way so as not to counteract the benefit of eating fresh foods.

We try to [farm] pesticide-free. We try to do a lot of it pesticide-free, but it is tough because we don't have a winter. So we keep the pesticides to a dull roar. I've got to apply them [in a way that] I'm not going to kill myself, and if I kill you I probably won't sell you anything tomorrow, so it is not a good deal, you know. So the pesticide thing is a little bit of a problem for me personally. It's a tough one. So the only way to do it is to be just totally responsible with it, which we try to do, which I think we do.

Although he uses pesticides, farmer Peter Exell, of Southampton, still looks to birds for signals that something may be wrong in his fields.

You know, I do all my own spraying. Because in potatoes it's very, very important to spray for the late blight—which is the problem that caused the Irish potato famine. I use pesticides. I use the actual pesticide for worms as opposed to the fungicide for the blight [as] that's the more serious thing. This year, I only used three applications of pesticide all year in the potatoes because I don't use it if I don't see it. If I don't see a worm infestation, I don't use it. I look for signs like, you see the birds flying over and then landing in the actual potato vines, you know, that's a sign that there are worms in there. I mean they do a wonderful job on them. People, you know, see all the birds around, but they don't really realise what they do.

It reminds me of a little story I read in the news about three years ago. I think it was 20 or 30 years ago, in China, Chairman Mao decided that all the sparrows had to go. So he made everybody go out for one or two days a week killing sparrows. And for three years after that, they almost starved to death because of the infestation of worms. So, there's lots of natural controls out there.

Beekeeper Randolph Furbert says that while honey may benefit the beekeeper and delight the consumer, the bees also benefit local farms. Many of his farming neighbours acknowledge the power and importance of his bees as natural pollinators.



Peter Exell on his farm in Southampton.
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.

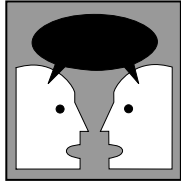


Now beekeeping is something that's very, very vital to our livelihood really, because without bees mankind couldn't live on the earth. That's how important they are to our survival. Bees do something, a bigger job than just providing honey for us to eat. They pollinate the vegetation. They pollinate the fruit and the vegetables so we can get more seed, to get more plants, to get more food.

Some parts of the world where I've travelled, I've seen fields of cotton. The farmer is planting cotton and it's being pollinated by the bees so he can get more cotton to make clothes for us to wear. Some parts of the world where I've visited I've seen fields of grain that farmers are farming so that they can get more grain to get more food to feed the cattle so we can get beef to get hamburger and there it goes. In Bermuda, lots of my bees are close to estates where there are farms, and people don't want me to move them because they know the value of the bees.



Randolph Furbert holds a honeycomb at the 2001 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, in Washington, D.C.
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



Discussion Questions

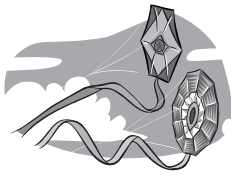
1. What is a fungicide? A pesticide? How do they work?
2. How do birds help protect the potato crop?
3. What value do bees have?

4. What happens if you kill off one species in the food chain?



Nature's Way

1. Interview a farmer or gardener about natural practices they know about for protecting crops from pests and fungi.
2. Write a report explaining natural alternatives to pesticides and fungicides for protecting potatoes, onions, or Easter lily bulbs from pests and fungi.
3. Draw a design for a garden that relies on natural remedies for combating pests and fungi. Show what plants will be planted in relationship to one another and explain why. Use "voice bubbles" (like in cartoons) for the text.
4. Make a chart showing what happens if one species is taken out of the food chain.
5. Hold a debate on the merits and problems of pesticides and fungicides as compared with natural alternatives. Divide the class into two groups. One group will defend the use of pesticides and fungicides, the other group will argue for the use of natural alternatives to chemical repellents. Take time to conduct research in libraries and talk with farmers, gardeners, and agricultural specialists.



Cedar Carving

Until the cedar blight in the 1940s wiped out most of the cedar trees on the island, cedar was a popular wood among woodworkers. Today, because of its scarcity, cedar is almost exclusively used for small crafts items such as candlestick holders, salt and pepper shakers, and little boxes. Artisan Llewellyn Emery talks about how the blight actually helped his trade as a craftsman specialising in cedar carving.

The blight, in the '40s, early '40s, mid-'40s—that was a little bit before I was born, I guess. Actually, ironically, that's what's responsible for my trade really, because we use dead cedars. We don't want to use the live trees. The young cedars are very moist, very sappy. The dead trees . . . [are] just perfect.

He goes on to talk about the qualities of cedar wood that make it appealing to work with.

It's not a brittle hard wood. It's hard, but it has a nice grain to it, and beautiful colour. Of course, the scent is beyond description, and then you get these characteristics like the knots and things from branches that grow out from the trees. It's a lovely grain to work with. It's unpredictable in some ways, but it's just right for lathe work. It's not real hard, yet it's not so soft that it will chip easily when you're working it with the tools, you know. Very strong wood, [resilient] wood too . . . The range in colour in cedar is tremendous. It has a lot to do with the terrain that it's growing on.

They used cedar in Bermuda for the whole history of the island. It's [cedar] endemic to Bermuda. I won't use any other cedar. I don't use imported cedar. Some of the craftsmen for a while there decided to use Virginia cedar, which to me doesn't really resemble or match up to the Bermuda cedar at all.

There are a few people who supply [Bermuda cedar]. You know, they'll stockpile the cedar. Mr Sheen is a supplier. He managed to make some good deals years ago and stockpiled a warehouse.

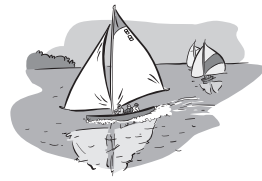
Fred Phillips tells a story which illustrates how people regard cedar and try to save it for a special use.

I had one couple, over in Harvey Road, he called me. I think it was in 1936, when he got married. They'd built their house and they had all the wood taken off it—there were a lot of cedar trees round then. He said that he had the wood milled and put down in the cellar. He promised all those years, and now he's retiring, that he'd have a cedar dining room set made for his wife.

I went over and looked, and he took me down and showed me this wood. It was beautiful wood, it really was. It cured for years and years and years. The only thing is it wasn't

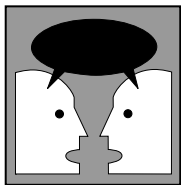


Fred Phillips in his outside workshop. He uses recycled cedar to make furniture.
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



ventilated. Half the wood was dry rot. Half was dry rotten. I made him six chairs and a china cabinet and a dining room table. He wanted a sideboard as well, but there wasn't enough wood. I mean there was wood, if the wood was in good [condition], if it had been stored correctly, it would have been enough wood to make his whole set and had wood left over. But after I picked through it . . . I mean so much of it was dry rotten because it had just been stored under bad conditions for too long a period.

Everybody thinks they've got an absolute fortune in cedar if they've got a tree out in their yard, and a lot of times you go and see the tree, you tap on it and it sounds like a Conga drum. It's just a conduit; it's all rotted in the centre . . . Wood is hard to come by, so I have to splice in pieces to make it. You're trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.



Discussion Questions

1. Describe the qualities of cedar wood.
2. How did the blight affect Bermuda's cedar trees? How did this affect woodworkers?
3. Now cedar is rare. What is the economic impact of its rarity on craftsmen, businesses, and tourism?
4. Do you have any items made of cedar at home? What are they? Are there any items made of cedar in your neighbourhood? What are they? Do you know when they were made?

Selling to Tourists

Lewellyn Emery is considered a master craftsman working in cedar. He sells his products directly to customers and through stores that sell to tourists. Mr Emery talks about the pricing structure when selling through a retail store. He tells about his experience selling his pieces at Bermuda Crafts, a store on Front Street that catered to tourists.

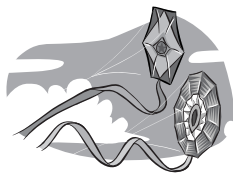
I think what it was, was that the older craftsmen, they were so used to supplying the stuff wholesale. The prices had to be so low to allow the stores to be able to put a kind of mark up on it and still have it sell. If you're going to say, "I want \$10 for this," and the store is going to sell it for \$25, then they are going to say, "No, that's not going to sell at \$25. You need to make it for us at seven [dollars] so we can sell it at \$18."

I've always thought this is the perfect type of work to be made and sold retail directly. But no one in the trade, well hardly [anyone did]—there was one, Mr Davis in Somerset, [who] was the exception. Mostly everybody depended on supplying it wholesale. It was a sure thing, you know, to just keep dumping it off at the store and getting paid for it.

When I started to do this myself—I always prided myself on my finish—there was a store on Front Street called Bermuda Crafts. Stanley Thomas and his wife Cynthia operated it. It was right across from where the cruise passengers came off the boat. On Monday mornings



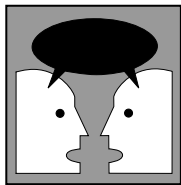
Cedar tree (*Juniperus bermudiana*). Courtesy Department of Communication and Information.



he would be nervous about 10 o'clock if I wasn't in there with stuff that I'd been working on all weekend. Literally, I would be unpacking the stuff and the tourists would be—they would have this in their hand and this in their hand. They were picking up the things and they were just going to the cash register. They didn't stay on the shelf at all.

By Thursday, when the ship left, he was saying, "See you Monday. You're going to have to get back in here with some more stuff on Monday." So on Mondays when I delivered I'd go right back and start again. Sometimes I would manage to get another fair-sized order ready for him before Thursday afternoon, like late Wednesday afternoon or early Thursday morning. They never had any trouble selling for us. If someone was on site making it right there and selling it directly it would have been [even] more business for people.

Mind you, now that it's [cedar] rarer and I think the work is finer, I can charge more for what I make. It's just accepted now that prices have gone up for everything, so it works out well . . . I think the lines and the designs [are important]. I think I've always had an eye for design. [But for] some of the craftsmen, the work is popular because it's cedar. It's not popular because it's very attractive to the eye, the lines of it. I like to design things that are symmetrical with nice curves and lines to them.



Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think so many craftspeople sell their items through a retail store and not directly to customers?
2. What are the benefits and disadvantages of selling wholesale to a store versus selling retail directly to customers?
3. What reason does Mr Emery give to explain why tourists buy the cedar wood items? Does the craftsmanship and the design of an item make a difference to a sale?

Working with Cedar

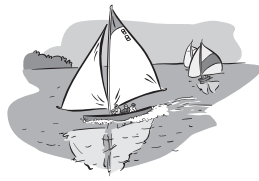
Mr Emery describes how he makes a cedar wood trinket box. He describes the different finishes carvers use.

I can turn one on the machine in maybe minutes; the finishing is what takes the time. Maybe because I've developed this process for finishing . . . But it requires drying time between coats. Then it has to be burnished.

Most of the finishes that they used to use for cedar even when I was working with Levi, they used shellac, orange shellac, and then wax, you know, furniture wax. We used to use Simonize actually. Car wax, a good hard wax. In England they would use beeswax or an older wax or something like that. Bermuda's always been a place of improvisation.



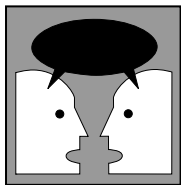
Cedar wood trinket boxes made by Llewellyn Emery.
Courtesy Departments of Community and Cultural Affairs.



We always modify whatever we see somewhere else. So we use Simonize. I don't use that. I use that plastic coating epoxy type finish. [With] the old finish, the oils in the cedar tended to bleed through and it would lose its shine in time. These will stay shiny for I don't know how long. I made things eight years ago, forgot about them, dug them out and [they were still] nicely finished.

Cedar carver Roy Boyer also emphasises the importance of a piece's finish.

Cedar is like a jewel, a precious stone. Anyone can learn to carve, but finishing is a whole different ball game. [Sometimes] you can look at a carving and still see sandpaper scratches or something that throws it off. Because of its beautiful grain, cedar needs to be polished smooth.



Discussion Questions

1. Mr Emery says that Bermuda has always been a place of improvisation. What does he mean by that? Is this a good trait?
2. Can you think of other examples where Bermudians have modified something or some way of doing something from how it is elsewhere?
3. What is a characteristic of a good craftsman when it comes to working with cedar?



Cedar Carving

1. Visit a cedar craftsman (or invite one to the classroom to demonstrate) and observe how he works with the cedar.
2. Look at pieces made with Bermuda cedar and with Virginia cedar. Can you tell the difference? What is it?
3. Research how cedar is being reintroduced to the island. Are the plans working? How and why?

Now It Is Your Turn

Look around Bermuda! Check out the stories and traditions of others who work in areas dealing with the land. Talk to carpenters, cabinetry makers, house builders, gardeners, farmers, cedar carvers . . . Find out about furniture and fences made from limbs of cedar without working them, moongates, container gardening, farmers markets, roadside vegetable stands, and more . . .



Cassandra Samuel, Berkeley Institute student, interviews cedar sculptor Chelsey Trott. "As I interviewed Mr Trott, he had a lot of information to share, and he seemed passionate about what he does. What Mr Trott had to share was very interesting, and I learned a lot from what he shared, especially how patience is the key to a good piece of work." Courtesy Cassandra Samuel.

LINKS

ARTS OF THE LAND

Links to Social Studies Curriculum Goals and Subgoals

By the end of this chapter, students should be able to:

- describe the process of learning a trade or craft (SS Goal 3, subgoal 3.4);
- identify ways Bermudians have creatively used the natural resources of the island for building, farming, and crafts (SS Goal 1, subgoal 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5; SS Goal 3, subgoal 3.3, 3.4; SS Goal 4, subgoal 4.4, 4.2; SS Goal 5, subgoal 5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5);
- describe the process for quarrying limestone and its use in Bermuda's vernacular architecture (SS Goal 1, subgoal 1.1, 1.2, 1.3; SS Goal 4, subgoal 4.1, 4.2);
- evaluate the use of pesticides and fungicides and natural alternatives for protecting crops (SS Goal 3, subgoals 3.2, 3.3; SS Goal 4 subgoal 4.2; SS Goal 5, subgoals 5.4, 5.5);
- evaluate the economical impact of cedar wood's scarcity on craftsmen, businesses, and tourism (SS Goal 2, subgoal 2.4, SS Goal 5, subgoal 5.3); and
- understand the characteristics of cedar wood and the steps necessary for creating a quality object from cedar (SS Goal 1, subgoal 1.2).



