



Introduction

Welcome to the Smithsonian Garden's *History in Full Bloom* backpack program for the Haupt Garden! The Haupt Garden is located between the Smithsonian Castle and Independence Avenue in Washington, D.C.

History in Full Bloom is an interpretive backpack program that allows children in kindergarten through fourth grade to engage in several multi-sensory activities throughout the Haupt Garden that will enhance their understanding of the history of the Smithsonian. By actively using the space and resources of the gardens, children will gain a wider appreciation of how gardens preserve the culture of Victorian America, as well as the Smithsonian's long history of collecting plants and educating visitors about natural history. This program will show children that studying history is an exhilarating adventure to be experienced in full bloom. Embark on your own journey through history by exploring the activities throughout the Haupt Garden.

Our story begins with James Smithson, a wealthy mineralogist and chemist, who left his fortune and collection of scientific objects from around the world to the United States of America in 1836. His wish to create "an establishment for the increase and diffusion of knowledge among men" was carried out by Congress in founding the Smithsonian Institution a decade later in 1846. Curators of the Smithsonian embarked on expeditions to collect plants from around the world and display them among Smithson's collections. The Smithsonian led Victorian America in the effort to document, display and diffuse knowledge of its collections, seeking to express its confidence in America's cultural and intellectual superiority. Today it remains America's greatest cultural institution, caring for vast collections and providing educational resources for the benefit of the public.

One such collection is preserved in the Haupt Garden, a representation of American Victorian gardens during the mid to late nineteenth century (1850-1900). Located behind the Smithsonian Castle, the Haupt Garden's central component is a symmetrically patterned parterre (French for "on the ground"), surrounded by the Moongate Garden and the Fountain Garden. Due to the Smithsonian's perpetual interest in exploration, the Haupt Garden maintains a diverse collection of exotic plant species from around the world. The Haupt Garden continues to cultivate a collection of living artifacts that convey the history of the Smithsonian and its deep-seated roots in Victorian America.



Purpose

- Show children the significance of nature to Victorians through their writing.
- Stimulate writing and verbal skills through creativity.
- Compare and contrast past and present meanings of gardens in America.

Length of activity: 10 minutes

Age/Grade level: grades 2-4, ages 7-9 years old

Location: Moongate Garden

Learning Goals:

- Students will learn about Victorian culture through several activities, exploring the past through multiple subjects such as history, math, science, and English.
- Students will use the resources of the Haupt Garden to build an awareness of their physical surroundings and relate to a sense of place that they can recognize outside of the Smithsonian. This will involve making the children actors in the historical narrative of the program and allow them to create their own experiences in the garden.
- Students will understand the importance of cultural landscapes by making connections between the past and present shape of the garden, using primary sources such as photographs, poetry and sketches.
- Students will gain a better understanding of the Smithsonian's collecting expeditions during the Victorian era by interacting with various objects and living artifacts from around the world. They will understand the importance of why the Smithsonian collected from certain places and how these collections represented wealth and the mission to increase and diffuse knowledge.
- Overall, students will develop skills to think historically about plants, gardens and landscapes that they can apply in their own backyard.

What you'll need:

- Writing pad- not included
- Pencils- not included
- Poem
- Botanical Illustrations

**Activity:**

Look around you. The gardens that you see represent those designed during the Victorian era in the mid to late 1800s. Can you imagine this place over one hundred years ago? There were no towering buildings or fast moving cars. If you looked toward the Renwick Gates, you would have seen the Potomac River. However, cities like Washington, DC were growing larger as more and more people moved to them in search of jobs. Because of this, people built gardens like the one you are standing in right now in which to relax and get away from the growing city life.

Take a look at the poem. This is a section of a poem written by Celia Thaxter (1835-1894) called *Spring*. Thaxter was an influential Victorian poet who expressed feeling through writing about nature. She loved gardening and even kept her own garden at her home in Maine. That garden is still preserved today in memory of Celia Thaxter.

BEGIN:

1. Read Celia Thaxter's poem.
2. What did you like about this poem? What was it about? How did it make you feel? Were there words you couldn't understand?
3. Take out the writing pad and a pencil from the backpack. Now close your eyes. What do you hear? What do you smell? Can you feel the sun shining on your face? Write your own poem about how this garden makes you feel. You can use the Celia Thaxter poem as an example. How many lines can you write? Read it aloud to a classmate.
4. Look at and discuss the botanical illustrations. Encourage children to create their own botanical illustration.

Spring

*The alder by the river
Shakes out her powdery curls;
The willow buds in silver
For little boys and girls.*

*The little birds fly over
And oh, how sweet they sing!
To tell the happy children
That once again 'tis spring.*

*The gay green grass comes creeping
So soft beneath their feet;
The frogs begin to ripple
A music clear and sweet.*

*And buttercups are coming,
And scarlet columbine,
And in the sunny meadows
The dandelions shine.*

*And just as many daisies
As their soft hands can hold
The little ones may gather,
All fair in white and gold.*

-Celia Thaxter

Botanical Illustrations

