Cornbread Connections

Haudenosaunee cornbread is usually made of White Corn. We make it using traditional methods. Those are from before Europeans arrived in the Americas.

It can take a whole year to make a wheel of cornbread if we use only these methods. There is something to do in each season of the year to properly prepare corn. We can fill almost every day in the yearly cycle. We can relate the work to all areas of the environment. To have corn, we must plant, cultivate, harvest, dry, and store it. It is not a plant that we gather growing in the "wild."

First we gather plants we call medicines. Then we soak the corn seed in water with the medicines. Soaking the corn seed with the medicines protects the corn seed. They act as a natural insecticide. When planting, we sing seed songs. They are a way of expressing thankfulness and asking for a good crop. After harvesting, we pull back the husks from the corn. We braid them together. Then we hang the corn up to dry for several months.

While we wait for the corn to dry, we could make utensils for preparing and cooking corn. We could make a bone husking pin for removing husk. We could make clay pots for cooking corn in. First we would need to gather clay. For firing pots, we would need to cut down trees. We need to know which trees were appropriate.

We could then save the ashes for lyeing the corn. Lyeing is a process that helps break down the corn. To lye corn, we boil it with hardwood ash. Lyeing makes the corn easier to grind and makes it more nutritious. After boiling the corn in ashes, we need to strain it and rinse it. For that we can use a corn-washing basket woven from black ash splints. To make
the basket, we need to know how to identify the right trees. We need to pound the splints and weave them.

After washing the corn, we need to pound it to make the flour. For that, we could make a corn pounder. First we would need to identify the right trees. Then we would need to burn a log and scrape it to make the large mortar (grinding bowl). We would also need to carve out the large pestle (corn pounder). After making the flour, we add boiling water to form the wheels of cornbread. Then we add them to boiling water with a wooden paddle.

Often people will add beans, nuts, seeds, or berries to the bread. Sometimes they add maple syrup on top. These foods need to be prepared first, too. And that requires tools, too. So all of those processes would be added. All of this goes into eating one meal of cornbread! By preparing traditional Haudenosaunee cornbread, or even just reading about it, we can see how food, land, environment, language, people, art, and technology are all related.