



Home tweet Home

A FREE, FULL VERSION OF AN ACTIVITY IN
TREES & ME: ACTIVITIES FOR EXPLORING NATURE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN



For Families &
Teachers of
Ages 1-6



HOME TWEET HOME

Home Tweet Home is one of 12 activities in Project Learning Tree Canada's new *Trees & Me* activity guide. This activity showcases a few of the 250 hands-on learning experiences found in the guide, designed for families and teachers to explore nature with children ages 1–6, with a focus on trees.

TREES & ME: ACTIVITIES FOR EXPLORING NATURE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Trees & Me offers ideas for fun, indoor and outdoor, learning experiences for toddlers and preschoolers to explore nature through their senses, experience trees throughout the seasons, and connect with their community.

The activities are designed for parents, grandparents, and caregivers, childcare providers, and early childhood or PreK-Grade 1 educators to use in a range of settings, including preschools, childcare and nature centers, and at home.

Special instructions tailor many experiences for children under 3 years of age.

BONUS MATERIALS

- A free, self-guided online interactive tutorial helps you get the most out of *Trees & Me*. Select one or more different paths based on how you interact with young children.
- A free, online supporting resources hub. For each activity, you'll find links to ready-to-go resources, correlations to early learning standards, tips for outdoor learning, and much, much more!

LEARN MORE

- Learn more about the *Trees & Me* activity guide and its supporting resources at www.plt.org/treesandme
- Contact pltcanada@forests.org to find out about professional development near you.

Home Tweet Home



OBJECTIVES

Provide opportunities and materials for children to:

- Observe signs of insects and other animals living on, or eating, sleeping, or hiding in trees.
- Observe plants such as mosses and lichens that live on trees.
- Adapt a storyline by adding new characters and sounds.
- Express feelings about trees as habitats through music, movement, and art.
- Incorporate the knowledge they gain into their everyday world.
- Play outside in a natural setting.

ASSESSING THE EXPERIENCES

As you observe the children during the day, note the following:

- New vocabulary. In the children's conversations with you and one another, are they talking about trees as habitat for other organisms like insects, birds, and plants?
- Questions. Are the children asking questions that show an increased awareness of how plants and animals depend on trees?
- New ideas. Are the children drawing new conclusions or asking new questions about trees as habitats that are based on their observations?
- Integration of concepts. Are the children using the idea of insects, birds, and other species depending on trees in their art, play, and other creations, without prompting, in a way that demonstrates understanding?

WORD BANK

algae, forest, habitat, lichen, moss, snag, survival

STEM SKILLS

Communication, Creativity, Investigation, Nature-Based Design (making masks), Problem Solving (squirreling around)

OVERVIEW

Children discover how plants and animals depend on trees.

BACKGROUND FOR ADULTS

From their leafy branches to their tangled roots, trees provide habitats for a diverse variety of plants and animals. A habitat is the place where a plant or animal finds all the things it needs to survive, including food, water, shelter from weather and predators, and space to live and raise offspring. Many physical factors can influence habitat, including soil, moisture, temperature range, and light.

Different organisms need habitats of different sizes. A habitat may be as large as a square mile for a white-tailed deer or as small as a single plant for an insect. A tree may serve as part of an organism's habitat, or it may be the organism's entire habitat. For example, an oak tree may be just part of the habitat for a squirrel or a crow, but to the lichens and mosses growing on the tree, it's their entire habitat and provides everything they need. Trees sometimes serve as a microhabitat, which is a small, localized habitat within a larger ecosystem. A decomposing log in a forest is an example of a microhabitat that sustains a variety of animals and plants.

Even snags (standing dead trees) provide habitats for a number of different species. Tree frogs and beetles live under a snag's bark. Woodpeckers and other birds feed on the insects that live in snags. Chickadees nest in cavities created by woodpeckers. Squirrels and deer mice store food in holes and crevices there.

Take a close look at trees to see the many plants and animals that depend on them!



did you know?

Forest Fact

Forests are home to 80 percent of all land-based plant and animal species!



INTRODUCING THE THEME

Materials: Tree parts that show signs of use by animals and plants (e.g., leaves with chewed edges, a log with lichens, bark with insect tunnels)


Encourage the children to describe their own homes. If available, use a dollhouse to facilitate the discussion. Ask, “What rooms do you have in your house? What do you do in your house? Where do you eat, and where do you sleep? Do you have a yard to play in? A park nearby that you visit a lot?”

Explain that animals and plants have homes too. We call a plant or animal’s home a habitat. Using a real tree or a picture of a tree, ask, “Have you ever seen an animal using a tree as its home or habitat? What animals have you seen eating, sleeping, or hiding in trees? How are trees part of our habitat too?”

Display natural objects that show signs of animals and plants depending on trees, such as fallen leaves, twigs, bark, pine cones, fruits, or nuts with chewed holes, tunnels, scrapings, cocoons, webs, mosses, lichens, or fungi. Allow time for the children to investigate the objects. Ask, “What clues do you see that show the relationship that animals and other plants have with trees? A good example to use is culturally modified trees if they are accessible in your area.

FEATURED EXPERIENCE: A Nature Excursion



 Go outside to find examples of animals and plants that depend on trees or shrubs in your neighbourhood. If there aren’t many trees, look for ways that plants and animals use buildings, bridges, or telephone poles as homes. Look for the following:

- Animals (e.g., squirrels, birds, insects) living in tree holes or leafy nests, hiding from predators, eating tree fruits or tree parts, and perching or nesting in tree branches
- Vines climbing up tree trunks to seek and soak up sunlight
- Lichens growing on bark
- Mushrooms growing on dead or dying trees
- Snags or fallen trees providing homes for many animals and plants





Take time to investigate a few trees up close. Collect some of the fallen objects. Take digital pictures of things that are too large to collect or that are still attached to the tree. Notice the children's observations, theories and questions about what they see. The following are some prompts that can be used with the children:

- Look around the tree for fallen bark, fruits, leaves, nuts, seeds, or twigs that might show signs of animal or plant life. Ask, "Who do you think left these clues?"
- Look on the ground for animal droppings that show animals live in the tree or eat the tree's fruits or seeds. Look—don't touch!
- Look on the bark for scratch marks caused by sharp claws or antlers.
- Look up in the branches for broken twigs, nests, and holes.
- Look at the small trees and shrubs near the ground for nibbled-on twigs and bark.

After exploring for a while, find a place to sit. Ask, "Do you hear any animals? Do you think they can hear us? What do you think they will do if we are very quiet?" Encourage the children to sit as quietly as they can while they use their eyes and ears to watch and listen for animals. When you observe a plant or animal, ask, "What do you think a _____ needs from a tree? How does this plant's or animal's tree home compare with your home?"



SAFETY! For safety information and other ideas for conducting learning outdoors, see Appendix G: Tips for Outdoor Learning.





GROUP EXPERIENCES



Music and Movement

ACT OUT A STORY

Materials: *Good-Night, Owl!* by Pat Hutchins; animal masks (see Art) or puppets

Read the book *Good-Night, Owl!* to the children. Talk about the animals in the story and encourage the children to describe their personal experiences with any of them. As you talk about each animal, ask the children to make the animal’s “voice.”

Allow the children to choose which animal in the story they would like to become. Reread the story with the children acting out their parts using animal masks they’ve made or puppets. Children love repetition. As the story is read over and over, incorporate their improvisations and suggestions for change.

SING AND DANCE WITH BILLY B

Play Track 12: This Bark on Me by Billy B on PLT Canada’s *Trees & Me* Playlist (scan QR code at right). Invite children to learn the lyrics and dance to the music. See Appendix C: *Trees & Me* Playlist for song lyrics and for tips on using this and other music selections.



Reading and Writing

WRITE A GROUP BOOK

Materials: Animal masks (see Art), crayons, paper, and other book-making supplies

After reading and acting out *Good-Night, Owl!*, ask, “What other animals have you seen in trees?” Encourage the children to choose an animal (e.g., amphibian, bird, insect, mammal, reptile, spider). Invite them to add a page to the story by drawing a picture and by writing or dictating text that follows the pattern of the story. To simplify the story, they can have each animal interrupt the owl’s sleep individually rather than cumulatively. Assemble the new pages into a group book, make masks for the new animals, and act out your new story.

Enjoying Snacks Together

MAKE EDIBLE BIRDS' NESTS

Recipe: 235mL (1 cup) “grass” (shredded wheat, crumbled), 60mL (1/4 cup) “strings” (coconut), 1 tbsp brown sugar, 60mL (1/4 cup) melted butter, fruit “eggs” (grapes, melon balls, or other round fruits). Optional: 60mL (1/4 cup) “sticks” (pretzel sticks, broken in half)

Preheat oven to 350°. Prepare muffin tin by putting cupcake papers or pressing foil into the cups. In a bowl, mix together “grass,” “strings,” and brown sugar. Drizzle in melted butter and stir well. Firmly press mixture into prepared tins to make nest shapes. Bake for 10 minutes. When cool, add “eggs” and “sticks” (if using). Makes 6 nests.



SAFETY! Be aware of any food allergies, dietary needs, or choking hazards for the children in your group.



FREE EXPLORATION



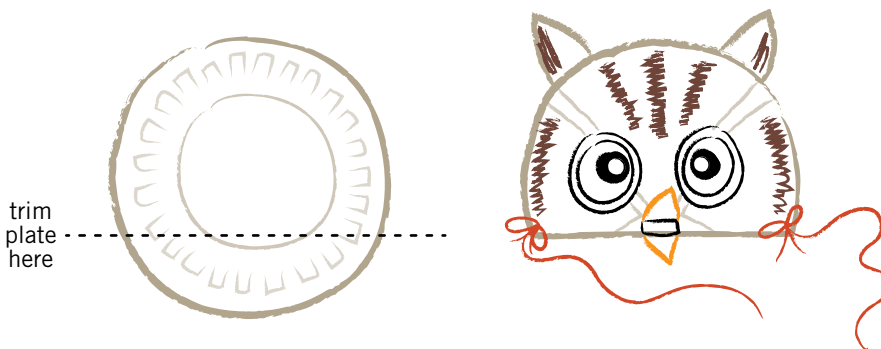
Art



MAKE MASKS TO MATCH *GOOD-NIGHT, OWL!* STORY

Materials: Paper plates; hole punch; yarn, string, or elastic for tying on masks; scissors; crayons and markers; construction paper or foam pieces; buttons, craft sticks, feathers, pompoms, or other decorations; glue and tape

Provide dessert-size paper plates with the bottom one-fourth removed. Punch holes in the plate for attaching yarn (see diagram). Supply craft materials and encourage the children to make masks that represent animals. The mask is designed to sit on a child's forehead, with the straight edge of the paper plate resting right above the eyebrows. As a group art activity, you may also wish to design a tree for the story.



ADD ANIMALS TO YOUR TREE MURAL

In Activity 9: Parts to Play (see Art), children made trees by printing with their forearms and hands. Now they can add animals! Encourage the children to draw or cut out pictures of animals from magazines and to add the pictures to their handprint trees. Ask, "What kinds of animals and insects do you think live in trees? Where will your animal live (e.g., on the ground under the tree, in a hole in the trunk, on the leaves)?" Let the children add a variety of animals to the trees.

When they are finished, ask the children to step back and look at their creation. It's no longer a bunch of trees and some animals: this is a forest! Ask, "Have you ever visited a large area with many different kinds of trees and animals? What was it like to be in a forest?"

MAKE A LEAF BACKDROP

Using a large bed sheet, have the children make "leaf prints" by printing on the sheet with their hands dipped in paint. Use washable finger paints so the sheet will be reusable. Vary the colour of the "leaves" depending on the season. Let it dry overnight. Use this leaf backdrop for Dramatic Play, picnics, and story times.

Take It Outside!



3 Look for and observe critters in dead leaves (leaf litter) or soil under a tree. Play an “I spy” game where you describe an animal you see and ask if children can see it. When you find something interesting, use a spoon to carefully lift the animal and place it in a jar or container to pass around for a closer look. After children look at the animals, be sure to put them back where they were found, covering them again with leaves.



Outdoor Play

Try these fun outdoor activities related to animal habitats:

- Roll over a dead log together and look to see what’s living underneath it.
- Put a white sheet under a tree and gently shake the branches over it. Have bug jars ready!
- Provide butterfly nets and large clear plastic jars with holes drilled in the lids. Catch and release!
- Look for nests in trees, being careful not to disturb nests or their contents.





Discovery Table

INVESTIGATE ANIMALS AND PLANTS THAT DEPEND ON TREES

Set out the natural objects from Introducing the Theme, along with magnifiers and field guides, for children to explore. Ask “How is a tree a home for a _____?”

SQUIRRELING AROUND

Encourage children to pretend to be squirrels. Invite them to find and hide acorns and other seed pods. As an engineering challenge, encourage them to devise a way to move the seed pods from one place to another without using their hands.

Dramatic Play

3 PLAY IN A TREE HOUSE

Drape the hand-printed leaf backdrop (see Art) over a table or play equipment. Supply stuffed animals, puppets, and nest-building material. For older children, you might add plastic insects, eggs, and food. Ask, “If you were an animal and the weather became cold and rainy, where would you go? What would it feel like to sleep in a squirrel’s nest? Can you show me? If you were a bird, what kind of food could you find in a tree?”

Explore Careers

Invite children to explore a green job that involves animal habitats—**BIOLOGIST**. Biologists are scientists who study living things. Encourage children to be biologists as they use “binoculars” (from Activity 1: The Shape of Things) or magnifying glasses to look for animals living on a tree or in the play yard.



BIOLOGIST

INTEGRATED LEARNING

FIRST PEOPLE'S PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING

- Learning involves patience and time.
- Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.

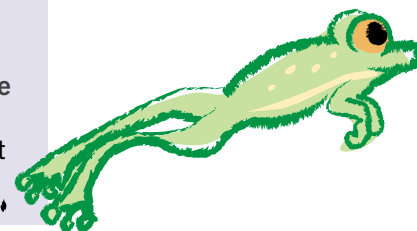
CMEC GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

Communication

- Speaking and listening; comprehension and collaboration.

Learning to Learn/Self Aware & Self Directed

- Planning and carrying out an investigation.




READING IS FUN!



Bishop, Nic. *Forest Explorer: A Life-Size Field Guide*. New York: Scholastic, 2004. This book is a photo collage that explores and depicts many of the plants and animals that live in a forest. Ages 4–8. ISBN: 0439174805.

Brenner, Barbara. *One Small Place in a Tree*. New York: HarperCollins, 2004. A child watches one tiny scratch in a tree develop into a home for a variety of woodland animals over many years, even after the tree has fallen. Ages 4–8. ISBN: 068817180X.

Cole, Henry. *Nesting*. New York: Katherine Tegen Books, 2020. This stunning picture book follows two robins as they build a nest, keep the eggs warm, and protect their babies. Ages 4–8. ISBN: 0062885928.

 **Garnett, Jaye. *Who: Peek-a-Flap Board Book*. Rolling Meadows, IL: Cottage Door Press, 2016.** Peek and explore in the forest, where you'll meet all sorts of animal friends. Ages 1–5. ISBN: 168052125X.

Hutchins, Pat. *Good-Night, Owl!* New York: Macmillan, 1990. This humorous story looks at an owl's daytime attempt to sleep in a tree shared with a variety of noisy wildlife. Ages 3–8. ISBN: 0689713711.

Sheehy, Shawn. *Welcome to the Neighborwood*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick, 2015. This stunning pop-up book takes readers from neighbourhood to neighbourwood. It introduces readers to several different woodland animals and explores their unique skills and behaviors that enable them to thrive where they live. Ages 4–8. ISBN: 0763665940.

George, Bridget. *It's a Mitig!* D&M Kids, 2020. It's a Mitig! Guides young readers through the forest while introducing them to Ojibwe words for nature. From sunup to sundown, encounter an amik playing with sticks and swimming in the river, a prickly gaag hiding in the bushes, and a big bark covered mitig. Ages 3-5. ISBN: 9781771622738



Home Tweet Home

Things to Do Together

We are exploring the plants and animals that live in and on trees. Trees are great homes (habitats) for birds, insects, lichens, mammals, and mushrooms. Here are some activities you and your child can do together:

- Visit a park or nature center and look for animals living, hiding, and eating in trees.
- Look at trees in your neighbourhood for signs of wildlife (e.g., holes, nests, scat, nibble marks).
- Watch a tree for several minutes. How many different animals can you find? Look for amphibians, birds, insects, mammals, reptiles, and spiders.
- Make a flour “trap” to see if animals live near your home. On a smooth, flat board, deck, or off-the-beaten-path walkway, place a dusting of flour. Check for footprints the next morning.

→ Family, Friends, and Forests: Find out what animals live in our state’s forests.



Make a “bug hotel” to provide shelter for beneficial insects. To attract mason bees (which are gentle pollinators), fill a clean, empty soup can with paper straws cut to approximately 1 cm (1/4 inch) shorter than the height of the can. Hang the can horizontally near a tree or bush. Search online for other ideas.

Help build your child’s vocabulary by using some of these new words in your conversations:

We are reading the following books. Check them out from your library, and invite your child to share them with you.



MORE ACTIVITIES FOR EXPLORING NATURE WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

Trees & Me includes 12 activities and more than 250 learning experiences for families and teachers to connect children ages 1–6 to nature, with a focus on trees.

Exploring Nature with the Senses

1. **The Shape of Things** — Search for shapes and colors in natural and built environments.
2. **Sounds Around** — Discover the sounds of nature.
3. **Tree Textures** — Explore trees using the sense of touch.
4. **Follow Your Nose** — Investigate tree parts through smell and taste.

Experiencing Trees through Seasons

5. **Fall for Trees** — Observe the signs of autumn.
6. **Evergreens in Winter** — Explore evergreen trees—and the season of winter.
7. **Best Buds** — Examine twigs, buds, tree flowers, and the coming of spring.
8. **My Tree and Me** — Compare trees and identify distinguishing features.

Meeting Neighborhood Trees

9. **Parts to Play** — Explore the parts of trees and how trees grow.
10. **Home Tweet Home** — Discover how plants and animals depend on trees.
11. **Community Explorers** — Explore how your community—and its trees—provide things people need.
12. **Three Cheers for Trees** — Investigate the many products and benefits that trees provide.

Find PLT Canada's newest resources at pltcanada.org/en/shop/

ABOUT PROJECT LEARNING TREE CANADA

Project Learning Tree Canada is committed to advancing environmental education, forest literacy, and green career pathways, using trees and forests as windows on the world. Our award-winning resources offer a lifetime of learning from early childhood through adulthood, and our wide and diverse network provides professional development for educators and opportunities for young adults to explore forests and green careers. Together, we are growing future forest and conservation leaders. PLT is an initiative of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative®, a non-profit charitable organization with the mission of advancing sustainability through forest-focused collaboration.

Sign up for our education newsletter at pltcanada.org/en/environmental-education/#teachers and visit us on social media



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