Adopt a Tree

Students “adopt” a tree, deepening their awareness of individual trees over time and encouraging a greater understanding and appreciation of their local environment.

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**Levels**
Part A: Grades PreK-2
Part B: Grades 3-8

**Subjects**
Science, Math, Language Arts, Visual Arts, Social Studies

**Concepts**
- Organisms are interdependent; they all depend on non-living components of the Earth. (2.1)
- While every organism goes through a life cycle of growth, maturity, decline, and death, its role in the ecosystem also changes. (3.3)

**Skills**
Composing, Observing, Concept Forming, Reasoning, Organizing Information

**Differentiated Instruction**
Nonlinguistic Representations, Realia/Hands-on Learning, Curricular/Personal Connections, Oral/Reading/Writing Skills, High Order Thinking

**Technology Connections**

**Materials**
Small notebooks, different colored pieces of yarn (optional), pencils, drawing paper, crayons or markers, tree field guide, binoculars and magnifiers, camera, copies of student pages

**Time Considerations**
Preparation: 15 minutes
Part A: 50 minutes (ongoing visits and projects can be done throughout the year)
Part B: 50 minutes, plus repeated visits throughout the year

**Related Activities**
See the box on the next page.

**OBJECTIVES**
- Students will describe a chosen tree using personal observation and investigation and organize information about the tree.
- Students will identify relationships between their tree and other organisms.

**ASSESSMENT OPPORTUNITIES**
- Over short or extended periods, have younger students create journals or portfolios about their adopted tree(s). On the first book page, each student can glue a picture of himself or herself standing next to the adopted tree. Students’ journals can also include drawings, poems, stories, pressed leaves, rubbings, flowers, or twigs.
- Older students can write an essay about life from their tree’s perspective. For example, a student who adopts a very old tree might write a story in which the tree “talks” about the days when small farms dotted the landscape or when horses and buggies crowded city streets. The tree could also talk about how it relates to the plants, animals, and people around it, and what problems it has.
- Through drawing or photography, the students show and describe at least five distinguishing features of their trees and compare their findings with those of other students.

**BACKGROUND**
See Backgrounds for “Tree Factory” and “Plant a Tree.” This activity also works well as a way to integrate a number of other activities. See the box on the next page for other suggested activities to use with an adopted tree.

**DOING THE ACTIVITY**

**PART A—Growing Up Together**

1. Take the class outside to a grove of trees. Give students a few minutes to use their senses of smell, touch, hearing, and seeing to get acquainted with the area. Choose a particular tree to observe.

2. Ask students to volunteer to describe the tree, using first their sense of sight and then their other senses. Students can record descriptive words in their journals. Summarize each student’s description by making comparative statements. You may structure students’ comments by asking individuals to complete this sentence and record it in their journals: “The tree is ______.”

3. Ask students whether they think the tree is alive. Ask students how they know whether the tree is alive or not. (Trees need food and water to grow, just like people.)
PART B—My Favorite Tree

1. Ask students to name something that is their very own or is special to them in some way. For example, one person might mention a pet and another might mention a present received from a relative or close friend.

2. Explain that each person will choose his or her very own special tree to adopt. With younger students, you can have the whole group adopt a particular tree. Where there’s a shortage of trees, you might have teams adopt trees. Students will observe their trees throughout the school year, or for however long you decide to conduct the activity. Explain that how they select their tree is up to them. Some students may choose the tallest or fullest tree. Others may choose the smallest, “cutest” tree. Some may pick a seemingly average looking tree, only to discover that there’s more to it than meets the eye. No matter which tree they pick, students should be able to say why they chose it.

3. Provide each student with a small journal, and explain that students should use their journals to record observations and answer questions about their trees. (You can also have them make and decorate their own journals. See Getting Ready.)

4. Take students outside and let each choose a tree. Students might tie a colored piece of yarn around their tree to identify it. If you’re working with older students, or if there aren’t trees near your school, you might have students choose trees in their yard or in the neighborhood. Students could briefly visit their trees before or after school.

5. Give students a copy of the “Adopt a Tree Activities” and have them do a number of the activities. They should write and draw their observations and responses in their journals. (For younger students, you will need to read and explain the activities to them.) Students may also develop their own

Other PLT Activities for Your Adopted Tree

Get in Touch with Trees: Use sense of touch to explore your adopted tree.
Sounds Around: Sit under your adopted tree and listen for a variety of sounds.
Poet-Tree: Write poems about your adopted tree.
Environmental Exchange Box: Share with another class what you’ve learned about your adopted tree.
Trees as Habitats: Study your adopted tree to learn what plants and animals depend on it.
Plant a Tree: Plant a new tree to adopt.
Then and Now: Research how the area around your adopted tree has changed over many years.
Sunlight and Shades of Green: Do an experiment using your adopted tree to learn how it manufactures its own food.

Have Seeds Will Travel: Include seeds from your adopted tree in a study of seed dispersal.
Field, Forest, and Stream: Study the environmental factors under your adopted tree and compare them to factors in another area.
The Closer You Look: Use your adopted tree to make careful observations of trees and their parts.
Bursting Buds: Examine your adopted tree’s leaf buds.
Germinating Giants: Compare your adopted tree to the coast redwood and the coconut palm.
How Big Is Your Tree?: Measure your adopted tree’s height and circumference.
Trees in Trouble: Examine the health of your adopted tree.
Signs of Fall: Do an experiment on your adopted tree’s leaves to learn why the leaves of deciduous trees change color.
questions or activities to explore. After the initial visit to the tree, you might give younger students official “PLT Adopt a Tree Certificates” to fill out.

6. Ask students what they now know about the tree and what they would like to find out. Have them write their questions in their journals.

7. Have students visit their trees on a regular basis throughout the year and in a variety of weather conditions, noting changes or making other kinds of observations. Help students develop investigations to answer their questions about their adopted tree.

8. Each time they visit, you might have them write a few sentences or make sketches in their journals describing any changes they notice (broken branches, new leaves); animal or human activity taking place on or near the tree (nest, carved initials); or any other observations. You might ask additional questions as different seasons come and go, such as: What color do the leaves become in the fall? When does the tree bloom in the spring? Have students guess the causes of these changes and predict future changes.

Students can create “Adopt a Tree eJournals” using word processing or presentation software. Students may add digital photos of the tree to document seasonal changes, and include optical scans of leaves and other artifacts from around the tree. You might also create a data table using spreadsheet software so that students can record their observations each time they visit the tree. Help students insert the data table into their eJournals.

**Enrichment**

- Have students create a picture of a tree with flip-up windows portraying the life of their tree, in their tree, and among the tree’s roots. (See the diagram above or go to www.plt.org for enlarged, printable versions.)

- Make a painting or model of a large bare tree and use it as a focal point for various curriculum topics. Through the year, you might have students show how the tree is constantly changing: from green leaves and apples to changing colors and falling leaves; and from winter skeletons to bursting buds, flowers, and bees. You can also use the tree to illustrate units of study about plants, wildlife, holidays, social studies, environmental issues, and so on.

- Raise money to buy a class tree. Take students to a nursery to pick out the tree; then hold a tree-planting ceremony. (See Activity 31, “Plant a Tree” for complete directions.)

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**READING CONNECTIONS**

Arnosky, Jim. Crinkleroot’s Guide to Knowing the Trees. Simon & Schuster, 1992. An illustrated introduction to trees and woodlands with information on how to identify the bark and the leaves, the many ways that animals use trees, and how to read the individual history that shapes every tree. Grades 2-7. ISBN: 0027058557.


Adopt a Tree Activities

Keep notes and drawings in your journal.

1. Make a sketch of your tree. Draw the shape of its trunk, branches, and canopy (treetop).

2. Find out what kind of tree it is. Does it have any fruits, nuts, or seeds that help identify it? Sketch what you find. Use a field guide or other reference guide to look up its name.

3. Where is your tree? Draw a map to show its location.

4. Draw a picture of your tree from various perspectives: from a distance, from a high place, or from lying underneath looking up.

5. Investigate the health of your tree. Is it alive? How can you tell? Is it healthy? In what ways are people helping or hurting it?

6. Write 10 words to describe your tree, and then use these words in a paragraph or poem about your tree.

7. Draw a picture of a leaf from your tree. How does the leaf smell? How does it feel?

8. Make a rubbing of your tree’s bark using the edge of a crayon or a soft-leaded pencil. How does the bark feel? How does it smell?

9. Are any animals on or near your tree? Don’t forget to look for insects, spiders, and other small animals. Use binoculars or magnifiers for a closer look.

10. Are there any signs that animals have used your tree in the past? Look for holes, nests, trails, and other animal signs and describe what you see.

11. Each time you visit your tree, describe any changes you notice since the last visit.

12. Take photographs of your tree every visit. Look at several of the different photographs at once. In what ways has your tree changed over time and in what ways has it stayed the same?

13. Keep a journal of seasonal changes in your tree. When do the leaves start to fall? When do the leaf buds form on the branches? When do the fruits or seedpods ripen?
Project Learning Tree Adopt a Tree Certificate

Official Tree Name

Nickname

Birthplace

Circumference  Height

Identifying Characteristics

Adopted By

Date Adopted

One Especially Interesting Thing About My Tree Is:

In the box above, make a leaf or bark rubbing of your tree.