

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of **habitats**.

Activity 22: Trees as Habitats

From their leafy branches to their tangled roots, trees provide a habitat for a host of plants and animals. In this activity, children will inventory the plants and animals that live in, on, and around trees and discover how plants and animals depend on trees in many ways.

Doing the Activity

Where do you live? A *habitat* is the place where a plant or animal can get all the things it needs to survive. The next time you pass by a tree, think of it as a habitat, or living space. While observing a tree, have children learn about the different ways plants and animals can find food, water, shelter, and living space by asking:

- What are some plants and animals that depend on trees?
- What do trees provide for these plants and animals?
- Can you see signs of life on the trunk, branches, roots, and leaves? (Have children look on the ground around the tree for fallen leaves, twigs, bark, seeds, fruits, or nuts.)
- How is a tree affected by the plants and animals that live on it? (*they may benefit, harm, or be neutral to the tree*)

If possible, allow children to use hand lenses or binoculars to get a closer look. Ask them to use their sense of hearing to locate more plants and animals. Finally, compare a tree to your own home, or habitat. How are they alike or different?

Conduct a read-aloud with young children using *Goodnight, Owl!* by Pat Hutchins. For a children’s story about how a cactus provides habitat for desert wildlife, check out *Cactus Hotel* by Brenda Guiberson. Both books can be purchased at <http://shop.plt.org>.

Adapted from Activity 22: Trees as Habitats from Project Learning Tree’s *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.



DID YOU KNOW?

Even snags, or standing dead trees, provide habitat 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 next in cavities created by woodpeckers. Squirrels and deer mice store food in them.

www.plt.org

Discover how PLT can help you teach...from nature!

- Attend, host, or sponsor a local PLT workshop where participants receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- Contact your PLT State Coordinator. Visit www.plt.org or call 202-463-2475 for their contact information.



Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation.