

Connecting Kids to Nature

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

For over 35 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 **structure and scale**.

Activity 61: The Closer You Look

All children, no matter their age, have an idea of what a tree looks like, but many are unfamiliar with the actual structure of a tree. In this activity, children will go outdoors to take a closer look at trees and their parts.

Doing the Activity

Before your next nature walk or outdoor adventure, have children close their eyes and picture a tree. Ask them to think about its shape, branch arrangement, and trunk and leaf texture. Have them draw a picture of a tree from memory. Next, head outside with a camera or sketchbook to have a closer look. On your walk, locate several different tree species for children to observe. Ask:

- What is the shape of the trunk? Tall, straight, bent, or gnarled? Is there one trunk or does it split into multiple trunks?
- What color is the bark? How does it feel? How does it look?
- What shape are the branches and twigs?
- Are there any seeds, flowers, fruits, nuts, or cones on the tree?
- What color and shape are the leaves or needles? Where are they located on the tree?
- What is the overall shape of the tree crown?

While outside, consider taking photographs or making sketches to record your observation data. Once your observations are complete, have children draw a second tree picture.

Compare and contrast the two drawings. What new details appeared in the second drawing? What characteristics were similar? Use this Sample Graphic Organizer chart to assist with your comparison.

Sample Graphic Organizer

Structure	Tree from Memory	Tree from Observation
Trunk shape		
Bark color, texture, look		
Branches—shape, pattern, texture		
Leaves—shape, texture, color		
Leaf attachment		
Seeds, fruits, flowers, nuts, or cones		
Shape of trees		
Plants or animals on tree		

Adapted from Activity 61: The Closer You Look in Project Learning Tree’s *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.

PHOTOGRAPHY AND POETRY

Some children may not be confident in their drawing abilities or may not take the time necessary to complete field sketches. In lieu of drawing, consider using a camera to collect data. Photography, especially once paired with a story or poem, can deliver a powerful message. Check out this photograph and haiku combination!

*The icy branches
On a chilly winter day
Stare right back at me*



Hunter Liu, 4th grade student
Sunny Hills Elementary

www.plt.org

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

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- To contact your local PLT State Coordinator, visit www.plt.org or call 202-765-3641.



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