

# Adopt-a-Tree: First Visit



**Grade Level: 3 to 5**



**Developed by** Erica Morse and Emma Hollowell, Marlboro Elementary School, Marlboro, VT, and used in Grades 3 and 4

**Community Partner:** Hogback Mountain Conservation Association

## Overview/Rationale for Lesson:

Children revisit the same tree several times over the course of the year in order to observe seasonal changes, deepen their understanding of the tree and its habitat and build a relationship with the tree. This is the first lesson in a year-long sequence.

## Learning Objectives:

- Students will use skills of mapmaking, observing, illustrating and journal writing to locate and describe their tree for future reference.
- Students will spend time getting to know the tree and its context.
- Students will develop follow-up questions about their tree to pursue through research and subsequent visits.

## Lesson Plan Procedure

### Preparatory Activity:

Time: 15 minutes

Step 1. Pre-trip discussion. 5 minutes. Before visiting the site, explain to the class that they will be going to the same place several times over the course of the year and each child will “adopt” one tree to learn about in depth.

Step 2. Group meeting at the site. 10 minutes. Gather children in a circle and give directions for choosing a tree and recording work in a journal.

Teacher’s directions for choosing a tree:

- Tree has to be clearly visible from top to bottom (not too blocked by other trees, rocks, etc.).
- Tree has to be bigger around than the circle of your hands.
- Spread out along the path so you have some room between children.

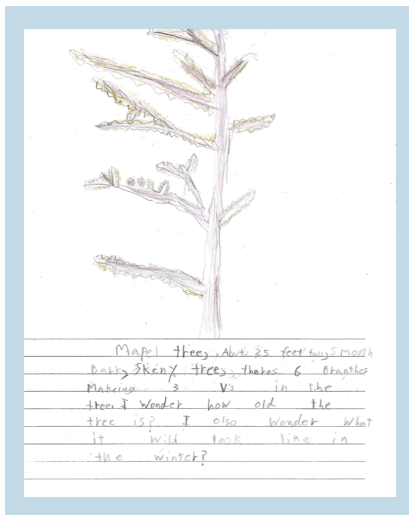
### Main Activity:

Time: 1 to 1 1/2 hours

Step 3. Individual work at the site with trees. 50-75 minutes. Students follow directions on “Adopting a Tree” Handout (download at Resources).

**Directions for Adopting a Tree:**

- Find a tree that you will revisit during our Hogback field trips throughout the year. 5-10 minutes.
- On the first page of your journal, make a map of the area around your tree. 10-15 minutes. (Look around, make sure you include landmarks that will help you find your tree in the future.) *Mapmaking suggestion: In preparation for the trip, have students practice making maps of the classroom or playground. Make a simple template map of the Adopt-a-Tree site to help students locate and show their tree (include major paths, landmarks, etc).*
- On the second page of your journal, make a sketch of your tree. 10-15 minutes. Notes: Make sure you draw the entire tree, using up all of the space on the page. Make sure to use color, after you sketch in pencil. Try to fill whole page.
- Underneath your sketch, write down your observations. 10-15 minutes.



Questions to consider:

What does your tree look like?

What colors do you see?

What is growing around your tree?

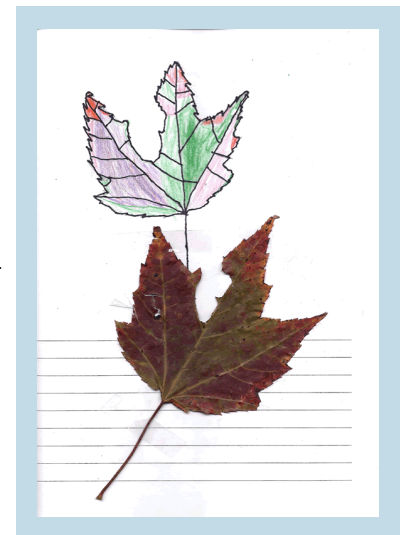
How big is it?

How old do you think it is?

Describe the textures of the bark.



- If you have time, draw a sketch of one of the leaves on your tree. 5-10 minutes. Notes: Use the backside of Page One for this detailed sketch. You may bring a leaf back to classroom to sketch later if there is not enough time.
- Write down any questions you have about your tree. 5-10 minutes.

**Conclusion/Follow-Up to Activity:**

Step 4. After first visit to tree, give students time in the classroom to complete their leaf sketch and write down questions about their tree. Students may want to share their journal with a partner. After several visits make a display of tree photos, poems and watercolors.

**Additional Notes on Lesson Plan:**

This lesson is the first in a sequence of tree explorations over the course of a school year. See ROW-CTRiver Lessons *Adopt-a-Tree: Poetry Writing and Adopt-a-Tree: Watercolor Painting* as well as *Ideas for Hogback Tree Unit* (links in Resources).

**Materials Checklist:**

Student Handout: Adopting a Tree (downloadable from Resources)

Pencils and colored pencils

Journal for each student

Notes: The best paper for this purpose is unlined on the top half for illustrating and lined on the bottom half for writing. A stiff journal cover eliminates the need for clipboards.

Optional: digital camera for photographs of trees; measuring tape to measure circumferences of tree trunks.

**Extension(s):**

Adopt-a-Tree: Poetry Writing

Adopt-a-Tree: Watercolor Painting

Ideas for Hogback Tree Unit

Hogback Tree Study Book

**Developer's Comments on Lesson:**

"I was impressed with how focused the children were. They wanted to hang out with their tree in their spot. They were ALL feeling a connection to the place and within that there were varying degrees of focus with the actual work."

—Erica Morse

**Useful Links and Downloads** are available at [http://row.ctriver.org/?page\\_id=187](http://row.ctriver.org/?page_id=187)

## **CURRICULUM STANDARDS**

**SCIENCE** (Connections to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks):

Framework: Science and Technology/Engineering

Strand: Life Science (Grades 3 to 5)

Topic: Characteristics of Plants and Animals

*1: Classify plants and animals according to the physical characteristics that they share*

Topic: Structures and Functions

*2: Identify the structures in plants (leaves, roots, flowers, stem, bark, wood) that are responsible for food production, support, water transport, reproduction, growth, and protection.*

Topic: Adaptations of Living Things

*9: Recognize plant behaviors... Recognize that many plants and animals can survive harsh environments because of seasonal behaviors.*

*River of Words-CT River is a place-based poetry and art program designed to promote watershed awareness, literacy, and the arts. It is offered in partnership with the Connecticut River Watershed Council and funded, in part, by Mass Humanities and Mass Center for the Book. Find us at <http://row.ctriver.org>*