

Three Cheers for Trees

It's easy to take for granted both trees and the many benefits they provide. In this activity, students picture how their community would be different without trees and think about how much trees add to people's lives.

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3 Activity

Objectives

- Students will describe the benefits of trees in their community.

Assessment Opportunity

- Have students create a "Three Cheers for Trees" bulletin board showing the benefits of trees. Have them develop a list of the benefits that trees provide, and then draw or cut out pictures that depict these benefits (products, shade, wildlife, beauty, fresh air, and so on). With your guidance, allow students to design and arrange the bulletin board.



Levels

Grades 1-4

Subjects

Science, Social Studies, Visual Arts

Concepts

- Resource management technologies interact and influence environmental quality; the acquisition, extraction and transportation of natural resources; all life forms; and each other.
- While technological advances decrease the incidence of disease and death, the ever-increasing world population is placing heavy demands on the finite resources of the Earth.

Skills

Discussing, Evaluating, Comparing and Contrasting, Identifying Attributes and Components

Technology Connections

Digital/Video Cameras, Graphics Software

Materials

Activity: drawing paper, crayons or markers
Variation: 8" x 10" (20 cm x 25 cm) white paper, 8" x 10" (20 cm x 25 cm) overhead transparencies, pencils, colored markers for drawing on transparencies

Time Considerations

Preparation: 20 minutes
Activity: 50 minutes



Background

Most people plant trees to provide fruit, beauty, or shade, but the benefits of trees – especially in urban settings – go far beyond those things. Trees provide social, environmental, and economic benefits as well.

Social benefits. Trees enhance the quality of life for residents of a community. They provide privacy, emphasize views, or screen out unpleasant sights. They reduce glare and reflection. They provide the urban landscape with natural elements and wildlife habitats.

Environmental Benefits. Trees provide environmental benefits by moderating temperatures and improving water and air quality. Tree leaves absorb and deflect the sun's radiant energy, reducing the "heat island" effect of buildings and paved areas in city centers. Trees also intercept rain and hail, reducing the amount of water that falls onto the ground below. Leaves absorb carbon dioxide from the air, and in the process also absorb other air pollutants – such as ozone, carbon monoxide, and sulfur dioxide – and give off oxygen.

Economic Benefits. Some trees provide wood, fruit, and nuts. Beyond these obvious economic benefits, trees also reduce energy

costs. A 25-foot tree may reduce the heating and cooling costs of a typical residence by 8 to 12 percent. Trees also enhance property values, offering another economic benefit to residential property owners.

(For more information, see the Background of Activity 6, "Plant a Tree.")

Getting Ready

1. Write the following list where everyone can see it:

- playground
- school grounds
- city street
- neighborhood
- park
- zoo
- highway
- picnic area
- backyard
- farm

2. Have each person or team choose and draw one of the areas on the list. Explain that students can draw the area any way they like, with one exception: They must leave trees out of the picture. (You might work on one big mural with each team drawing a different section.)



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3. When students have finished their drawings, have them draw the same scene again, but this time using as many trees as they wish.

4. Display the drawings (or murals) where everyone can see them. Ask students in which environment they would rather spend their time, and if trees have anything to do with their preferences.

5. Discuss the benefits of trees in public places. Have the students brainstorm a list of benefits. For example, trees not only look nice; they also provide shade, protection from wind, and a habitat for wildlife. Trees help to improve the quality of air and to reduce noise.

Variation

1. Give each student or team an 8.5" x 11" (215 mm x 279 mm) piece of paper and an 8.5" x 11" (215 mm x 279 mm) blank overhead transparency.

2. On the piece of paper have students draw a familiar scene (their house or building, street, school, playground, downtown) without its trees, bushes, grass, flowers, or plants of any kind.

3. Have students place the transparency over the picture and tape it to one edge.

4. On the transparency, have them use colored markers to draw any trees, bushes, and plants that they remember being in the scene.

5. When they've finished, they can flip up the transparency and compare the pictures with and without trees and plants.

6. Afterward, they can continue drawing on the transparency. Maybe the added trees, plants, or flowers represent the way students would like to see the scene some day.

Enrichment

Have students use a digital camera to take a picture of a place they visit. Help them load the image into a graphics program and, using the eraser tool, erase all the trees. They can then compare and contrast the two images as they write about the importance of trees.

Many communities have programs to promote urban tree planting. Find out whether this is happening in your community and how students can get involved. Contact the local parks, natural resources, extension service, or environmental services department.

As a service-learning project, plan a planting event (trees, bushes, plants, flowers) for your school, group, or community. Use this opportunity to publicize all the benefits that trees and plants provide for us. (See Activity 6, "Plant a Tree.")



Reading Connections



Gackebach, Dick. *Mighty Tree*. Harcourt. 1992. Three seeds grow into three beautiful trees, each of which serves a different function in nature and for people. Grades K-3. ISBN: 0785784209.

Lauber, Patricia. *Be A Friend To Trees*. HarperCollins. 1994. Discusses the importance of trees as sources of food, oxygen, and other things essential in life. Grades K-4. ISBN: 0064451208.

Morrison, Gordon. *Oak Tree*. Walter Lorraine Books. 2005. Describes the impact of the changing seasons on an old oak tree and the life that surrounds it. Grades 1-4. ISBN: 0618609180.

Nivola, Claire A. *Planting the Trees of Kenya: The Story of Wangari Maathai*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 2008. Nobel Peace Prize winner Wangari Maathai learned that Kenya's farming practices were threatening the well-being of her fellow citizens. To combat the situation, Wangari encouraged women to begin planting trees. Learn how one person's actions can truly make a difference. Grades K-4 ISBN: 0374399182.

Ryder, Joanne. *The Goodbye Walk*. Lodestar Books. 1993. At the end of the summer, a child revisits the special places she has enjoyed on her vacation. Grades K-3. ISBN: 0525674055.

Undry, Janice May. *A Tree is Nice*. Harper Trophy. 1987. Trees are beautiful. If you have a tree, you can climb up its trunk, roll in its leaves, or hang a swing from one of its limbs. Birds can make nests in the branches. Grades PreK-2. ISBN: 0064431479.