Activities using trees

Description

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Trees are an important part of our world. The more we get to know the trees around us the more we will appreciate them. The following are some activities or games, that you can do with students or groups of people as well as individuals, that use trees or parts of trees.

Meet a Tree

Feeling the tree

Area to play Meet a Tree

Smelling the tree

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This activity involves a blindfold, people being partnered up, and an area with a bunch of trees. During this activity you will use your senses to feel, smell, and even hear what a tree is like. This is a game to see how well you can get to know a tree without using your sense of sight. The object of the game is to find the tree that your partner brought you to when you were blindfolded. If you find the tree, then it shows that you did a good job getting to know your tree.

How to play

1. Put people in groups of two or three.
2. One person wears the blindfold first.
3. The person not blindfolded leads the blindfolded person around and eventually to a tree.
4. The blindfolded person feels the tree, smells the tree, and listens to how the wind blows through the leaves or branches.
5. The person not blindfolded leads the blindfolded person back to the starting point.
6. The blindfolded person removes their blindfold and looks for which tree was their tree.
7. After they find the tree, they think is the one they were brought to, they ask if this is the correct tree.
8. If they find the correct tree, then you start over with blindfolding the other person who has not been blindfolded yet. If they didnâ€™t get the tree correct, then have them try guessing again. If they still get it wrong have the other person tell them which tree was the correct one.
9. Repeat all these steps with the other person.

Concerns/Suggestions

- Explain and demonstrate how to walk someone blindfolded slowly by the hand telling them if they need to step up or down.
    - Remind them not to walk their partner into the tree or anything else that could hurt them.
    - Explain that you do not want to walk them in a straight line but take them to the tree in a roundabout way. Then take them back to the starting point in a roundabout way.
    - They could spin them in a circle a few times to get them confused before they start walking and at the end of walking.
    - You might have to set boundaries of where they can take their partner to a tree.
- Emphasize safety and respect of each other doing this activity.
- Find a place that has very little undergrowth and a variety of trees if possible. A nice place to do this activity is a park with mowed grass around the trees.
- Discuss after the activity. What was helpful to successfully finding the tree? What was hard about finding the tree? Did you notice anything special about your tree?
- For blindfolds, I use scrap material like an old pillowcase or sheet that I cut up. You could also get fabric from a craft store. You need to make sure the fabric is long enough that you can tie it. Itâ€™s also important that itâ€™s thick enough people canâ€™t see through the material. A concern teachers might have with using blindfolds is spreading lice, but you could make sure you have enough for everyone to have their own. I have also had kids pull their hats down over their eyes, but you donâ€™t know if they can see through the hat.

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Stick Finder

This is an activity to do with a whole class or just a few people. It can be a game or activity to do during a morning meeting or just to get people focused using their sense of touch. The object of the game or activity is to find which stick you were given with your eyes shut.

Pile of sticks to pick from

Pick your stick

How to Play

1. Have enough sticks for each student to have their own. If you only have a few people playing, have a few extra sticks to make it more challenging. Try to make each of the sticks unique compared to the others such as how long or thick the branch is. How many leaf scares does it have? Does it bend a certain way?
2. I recommend putting a number on each stick with permanent marker or some other way. I didnâ€™t do this when I did this activity with my second graders, and they were upset that I couldnâ€™t tell them if they were correct or not.
3. Have everyone stand or sit in a circle and close their eyes.
4. Tell everyone they are going to try and use their sense of touch and smell to figure out clues to help them find their stick later.
5. Hand each student a stick while their eyes are closed. Mark down what number each student has on their stick.
6. Collect all of the sticks after a certain amount of time. You can determine how long you want them to have with their stick. Have them continue to keep their eyes shut until you tell them to open them.
7. Put the sticks in the middle of the circle and have everyone open their eyes.
8. Call on people to try and pick which stick they think is the one they had.
9. They then sit down with the stick they think is theirs. Other people can choose to look at their stick and disagree with them, if they think that is their stick. They then have to explain why they think this is their stick.
10. After everyone finds the stick, they think is theirs. Check to see who is correct.
11. Discuss how people were able to tell which stick was theirs or strategies they used with their eyes shut. Was the activity hard or easy?
12. If most people didnâ€™t pick the correct stick; you could try doing it again to see if they learned any strategies to help them.

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Concern

It is important that you use sticks from your local area. If you transport branches from different counties, it could spread diseases or bugs to new locations. Dutch Elm disease and Emerald Ash borers are major concerns for trees because they both will ultimately kill the trees. Dutch Elm disease only effects elm trees and Emerald Ash borers only effect ash trees.

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This activity could be done as an introduction to learning about trees. For example, if each stick has leaf scars on it, you could explain them or have students explore them. You could even turn this into a writing activity to describe their stick. Then students could read their description and see if others could figure out which stick belongs to them. You could ask math questions using the sticks or measure their stick with a tape measure. Some examples of math questions. Did more people find the correct stick or did more people not find their correct stick? How many more? If we broke every stick in half, how many sticks would we have then?

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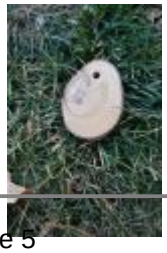
Tree Cookie Name Tags

Tree cookies are a common activity to use with kids, but how about turning them into name tags. The tree cookies could serve as a dual purpose. Students could count the rings on one side and then write their name on the other. If students are younger, you might want to write their name for them. Permanent markers work well for writing names on tree cookies. You could also try woodburning names onto one side.

You can buy already premade tree cookies from a place like Nature Watch and many other things to help teach about trees. Iâ€™ve ordered these in the past from Nature Watch, and they have been a quality product. The string they send with them can be a little itchy around studentsâ€™ necks. You could just use yarn instead, if it is a problem. I stopped buying them and started making my own to save money.

Directions for making your own



Tree
cookie

Picking a good wood

Find a branch or a tree trunk that is the size of roundness you want your tree cookies to be. This is typically 2 â€“ 3 inches in diameter. Use a type of tree that shows the growth rings well. Oak, maple, cherry, and walnut are some hard woods that show nice rings. Some soft woods are spruce, pine, cedar, and fir that show nice rings and are easier to cut and sand.

I recommend staying away from ash trees because of the emerald ash borer. This bug is devastating to the Ash tree population and can be transferred in cut down trees to other areas with ash trees. I would also stay away from elm trees because of Dutch Elm Disease. There are laws about transporting cut trees that are not treated to other counties. Make sure to read what the laws are in your area before doing this. Typically, if you are using a tree from the area, you will be using the tree cookies, you should be fine.

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Cutting the tree

Wood logs for drying

If you need to cut a living tree, cut the branch off if using a branch or cut the tree at the base if using the trunk. Do this with a large tooth pruning saw. Cut it into smaller more manageable size that can be stored until dry.

Drying the wood

Drying the wood is a very important part because the tree cookies could start to mold. If you have access to a lumber kiln, you can dry it that way in just a few days. Otherwise, you can put the branches or logs in a dry and well-ventilated place for a couple months. The time will depend on the size of the logs or branches.

If you sliced the logs or branches before they were dry, then you will still need to dry them. Put the slices into a dry, well-ventilated area with low humidity for about 10 days. This could be outside, so the air can help dry them out. Just make sure they donâ€™t get wet if sitting outside. You need to flip them each day, so they can dry on both sides.

It is also possible to use an oven set on 200 degrees or less to dry the tree cookies after they have been sliced. You need to check on them frequently in the oven and turn them occasionally. They can be put on the oven rack, a cookie sheet or tinfoil. This process will take three to five hours.

Slicing the wood

You can use a large tooth pruning saw to cut the slices by hand as thin as possible. Itâ€™s easier to use a table saw or radial arm saw if you have access to one of these. Try to make the slices about half-an-inch to one inch in thickness. If you donâ€™t have a saw at home, you could ask the high school or middle school shop teacher to cut them for you or let you cut them.

Size of tree cookie

Splits or cracks in tree cookie

Sand and drill a hole in tree cookie

If you are trying to prevent cracking, which tends to happen when wood dries, cutting the wood after it is dried might help. Some people say cutting it at a slight angle works.

Sanding

After the wood is dried, it can be sanded. Use course sandpaper first and then medium sandpaper. This can be done by hand or using a belt sander. Sand the tree cookies until you can see the rings well.

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If you want to make them into necklace name tags, then you need to drill a hole into one end of the cookie. Donâ€™t drill too close to the edge or it will break easily. The hole needs to be about the width of a pinky finger. If you donâ€™t have access to a drill, you could ask the shop teacher to do this as well for you. If you do a necklace, kids like to swing them on the string. I had this problem with my second-grade students.

Pins or Magnet Name Tags

If you want to make the tree cookies into pins or magnet name tags, then you donâ€™t need to put a hole in them. Instead, you buy the pin or a really strong magnet to hot glue to the back of the tree cookie. If you are using a magnet, you will need another magnet to put on the inside of the shirt to hold it there. I have not tried to do magnets or pins with these, but I canâ€™t see why they wouldnâ€™t work.

Optional

To help preserve or make them last longer, you can dip, spray, or brush them with a clear varnish or polyurethane, but you donâ€™t have to do this.

Adopt A Tree

You could adapt a certain tree for the school year. This is going to be your tree friend for the year. Visit the tree as often as possible and really get to know your tree. If you want to listen to a video explaining what the Adopt a Tree activity is, here is one done by Learning Tree.

Ideas to do with your adopted tree

- Print and fill out an adoption certificate from Project Learning Tree.
- Sit by the tree and close your eyes and just listen. Do you hear the wind blowing through the leaves or any birds singing in the tree?
- Lay down under the tree and look up through its branches. Do you see anything different from this perspective?

laying down under your tree

laying down under your tree

laying down under your tree

- Keep a journal about anything you see or notice when visiting the tree. Make sure to put the date, time, and what the weather is like during each visit.
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    Nature Journal

    Project Learning Tree has a couple different types of printable tree journals you can print. There is a printable two-page journal and a printable longer journal which has pages of questions and is more like a whole lesson plan.

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- Do you see any signs of animals?.

bird

Mushrooms

- Write how the tree changes over the seasons or draw a picture of your tree during each season.
- Figure out the approximate age of the tree, kind of tree, what kind of seeds or flowers the tree produces.
- Write a narrative from the perspective of the tree.
- Create poetry with the tree as inspiration or the topic of the poem.
- This could be used as a reading spot.

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- Create a book with all the information you gather about the tree. This could include a leaf and bark rubbing from the tree.

Special features of
your tree

- Describe where your tree is located and draw a map to help you find your tree.
- Measure different parts of your tree such as the circumference.
- Describe special characteristics or the health of your tree.
- If you want more ideas for things to do with your adopted tree; Project Learning Tree has a list of ideas, you could do.

For activities involving leaves please check out my blog on leaf activities.

Category

1. Education

Tags

1. #adopt a tree
2. #meet a tree
3. #name tag
4. #stick finder
5. #tree
6. #tree activities
7. #tree branches
8. #tree cookies

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