

## ***A Grand Old Tree***

Mary Newell DePalma

Arthur A. Levine Books/Scholastic 2005

ISBN 0-439-62334-0

*A Grand Old Tree* describes the life cycle of a tree in story form. Rather than introduce the tree as a series of discrete parts, (leaf, fruit, seeds), the narrative's simple descriptive sentences present the tree as an ever changing living organism. The words and pictures offer many opportunities for discussion and further research in the classroom.

### **Pre-Reading Activities**

Take a nature walk, also known as 'field research.'

- Observe tree trunk textures
- Examine tree and leaf shapes
- Collect leaves, seeds, fruits, and flowers

Think about trees:

- Brainstorm; name different kinds of trees.
- Describe a tree that you have seen. How did you notice it?
- Draw a picture of a tree. Draw the tree in different seasons.
- Tell a story about a tree. Where is the tree? What is happening nearby?

### **Social Studies**

The tree grows in a particular place. How does it affect the environment it lives in?

In the book the tree's children 'changed the landscape for miles around.' What does that mean?

Trees can't move, are there ways that trees can affect the world beyond their immediate surroundings?

(We eat fruit from faraway trees, we can live in homes and sit in chairs made from wood, and we can grow their seeds far from where they originated).

### **Social/Emotional**

The tree establishes relationships to the environment and the animals around it.

- Compare and contrast people's lives and trees' lives.
- Compare and contrast the relationships you have with your friends/neighbors/other with the relationships that the tree establishes.
- How is the tree 'home to many creatures?'
- How did you feel when the tree died?

### **Science**

The tree grows and changes during the story.

The characteristics of living things are that they:

- grow
- eat
- reproduce
- die

Do you think a tree is a living thing? Find evidence of these characteristics in the text. Thank you to first grade teacher Kari Snyder for passing along this lesson idea. She warns that 'eating' is tricky, but her smart first graders were able to figure out that the sun is an energy source for trees.

- Look for other animals in the story that evolve and change.
- Compare and contrast the life cycle of a tree to other animals, including human beings.
- Observe and discuss weather and seasons in relation to trees.
- How do trees get water from their roots to their leaves?
- Why are leaves green?

- Why do leaves change color?
- What are the ways that trees 'sow' seeds?
- What is happening when the tree 'crumbles back into the earth?'
- What is the bee doing in the picture of the flowering tree?
- Using a reference book, identify trees by their leaf shape, seed, or fruit.
- Observe, discuss, and draw parts of trees, as if you were botanical illustrators

### **Math**

'The grand old tree lived a long, long time. She grew and shed many millions of leaves.'

- How long do trees live?
- Make a graph that compares the lifespan of a tree and the lifespan of other living things.
- How many leaves does a tree have in one season? In its whole lifetime? Is it possible to estimate this?
- Figure out how many different kinds of trees you can see in your yard, or on your street.
- Count the seeds in a pinecone.

### **English/Language Arts**

A Grand Old tree is a circle story. That mirrors the life cycles of the seasons and the trees in the book.

- Find examples of anthropomorphism; discuss why I might have chosen to describe the tree this way.
- Compare the two phrases: 'swayed and danced...cracked and snapped'
- Write your own contrasting descriptive phrase.
- 'Grand' 'gently' and 'slowly' are adjectives and adverbs used in the story--how do they make you feel?
- Write about your favorite tree.
- Write a circle story.

### **Art**

I've illustrated the book with tissue paper collage, and color is very important in the story.

- Locate illustrations that communicate different moods based on color.
- Look at the words, their shape, style and arrangement. Find a shape poem.
- Look at the positive/negative shape relationship between the illustration of the roots and the illustration of branches.
- Make a positive/negative shape illustration with cut paper.
- Make your own tissue paper collage.
- Make a series of drawings based on a life cycle.

### **Movement:**

Words evoke movement in the text of the story.

- Sway and dance like a tree in the wind
- Crack and snap like an old tree.
- Nest like a raccoon, scurry like a squirrel, crawl like a ladybug.
- Reach for the sky, like branches.
- Sink into the earth, like roots.