



# The Secret Life of TREES

## Educator's Guide

By Moira Butterfield

Illustrated by Vivian Mineker

Curriculum Connections, Grades 1-4  
English Language Arts, Art, Science



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Ages: 7 to 11 (Grades: 3 to 6)

48 pages

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### Objective

Students will listen to the teacher read the book aloud or read the book independently; extend vocabulary; participate in a class discussion; and complete independent activities using the book as a springboard.



### About the Book

Wise old oak tree Oakheart the Brave takes readers on a beautifully illustrated journey through the world of trees, filled with amazing science and intriguing folklore. He shares his knowledge, wisdom and experience about the world of trees, including how trees grow and survive, the different types of trees and forests, the creatures that depend on trees and much more. With tree folktales from around the world, tips on recycling and ideas on growing new trees, **The Secret Life of Trees** will impart a love of nature and inspire readers to look after their world.



### About the Creators

Moira Butterfield has written numerous children's books, including award-winning work for under-5s, highly commended historical, science, and natural history nonfiction. Moira lives in Bath, England.

Vivian Mineker is a Taiwanese American from Taipei and Portland, currently working out of Ljubljana, Slovenia. She uses watercolor, colored pencil, and digital processes to create a blend of traditional texture with a modern look and feel.



### Pre-reading discussion

If students are reading the book independently, ask them to keep a list of words that are unfamiliar or not understood in context. Encourage them to first try to figure out the meanings from the text and pictures, and then to consult a dictionary.

If reading the book together as a class, have students point out unfamiliar words. Give a brief definition and keep a list of these words for later review.

Some possible examples: taproot, nutrients, photosynthesis, stomata





## Post-reading discussion questions

1. Discuss the difference between nonfiction and fiction. Which do you prefer reading? This book features both: true facts about trees and invented folktales about trees—plus a fictional narrator tree! How did this book compare with other nonfiction books you have read? Do you like it?
2. How did Oakheart the acorn travel from his parent tree into the ground where he could begin to grow? What are some other ways that seeds find new places to grow? Oakheart's seeds are inside a nut. What are the other two places where a tree contains its seeds?
3. What are the three ingredients that trees need to make the food that helps them grow? What happens to the gas trees produce, and how does that gas help humans? Since trees help humans, does it make sense that humans are accelerating the destruction of forests/trees?
4. What are the three types of forests mentioned in the book? Where in the world can you find each of them? Which is Oakheart's forest? What is the name of the biggest rainforest? What animals can you see in the rainforest? What kinds of trees will you find in the boreal forest?
5. Can you name some animals/insects that find shelter in trees? How can some of them harm trees? What are some other tree enemies? Why do trees make chemicals and how do they use them to fight off enemies? What are some other ways the trees can protect themselves?
6. When you see a cross-section of a tree, you can count the rings inside. How does this help you find out how old a tree is? Can you remember what happens inside each of Oakheart's five layers? Why does Oakheart's bark have wrinkles and cracks?
7. What makes up the network for trees to be able to share food with each other? What else can they do through the fungi web? Which are the two "bad trees" that use the fungi web to hurt other trees? Why do they want to hurt other trees?
8. Where is the tallest tree in the world? What kind of tree is it? How many giraffes would have to stand on top of each other to be that high?
9. How old is the oldest tree in the world? What kind of tree is it? What was invented about the time that it was born? Where can you find this ancient tree?
10. What is the name of the heaviest tree in the world? How much does it weigh? How many elephants would it take to reach that weight? Where is it located?
11. Oakheart describes forest life through the four seasons. In the autumn, why do leaves change color? What good can they do after they fall to the ground? Which trees keep their leaves throughout the winter? In summer, how do leaves support the birth and growth of butterflies? What are some of the forest animals who rest or hibernate during the winter? Do you have a favorite season? What do you like about it?
12. This book mentions many wonderful things made from trees. Can you name some of those things? Can you think of some wood/paper things that the book did not mention? What about other tree gifts, like nuts, fruit and flowers? What other benefits do we get from trees?
13. Talk about the jobs that someone might have involving trees: a scientist who studies them; a forest ranger who protects them; an artist who draws them or makes art from them; a writer who writes poems, stories or books about them; a workman who trims their branches or safely cuts them down. Do any of these jobs sound interesting to you?
14. How does "The Banyan Seed" story show that "The world is full of miracles, and anything might be possible?" How does "The Sky-High Tree" story show that sky-high dreams can come true? Can you remember some lessons from the other tree tales? Why do you think that trees are often depicted as wise and kind?
15. Which of the tree folktales was your favorite? Why?





## Activities

### English Language Arts

1. Consult your list of unfamiliar vocabulary words from the story. After confirming the definitions for all, use each of them in a sentence.
2. Write a poem using some tree words: branch, shoot, taproot, grow, seeds, leaves, crown, springwood, flutter, roots.
3. Write your own tree story:
  - What happened the time that you fell asleep under the hawthorn tree?
  - What happened when you picked some fruit from the Tree of Life?
  - Write a story about something magical that grows on trees, like the apples in "The Sky-High Tree."
4. Write three paragraphs describing the animals, birds and insects that Oakheart mentions. Have you seen any of these in your yard, or the park, or at school? Have you seen other animals that Oakheart doesn't mention?

### Art

1. Draw a comic adventure featuring a tree (or trees) and what happens to it/them during the four seasons of a year.
2. Make a world map and designate all of the countries where the tree folktales were from.
3. Create a set of tree flash cards about the oldest, heaviest, tallest and widest trees. Use both facts and drawings on your cards!
4. Choose one of these morals from the folktales and make an original illustration interpretation:
  - "The world is full of miracles, and anything might be possible."
  - "Kindness sends away anger."
  - "You never know where you might go if you let your mind wander."
  - "Sky-high dreams can come true."
  - "Tread carefully across our precious planet and do no harm."



### Science

1. Conduct research and write a report on one of these subjects related to the book:
  - Compare two or more rainforest animals
  - Mangrove forests – how they are different from other forests
  - How forest animals survive in the winter
  - How scientists measured the height of the tallest tree on earth
  - Photosynthesis
2. Using the facts in the book, write two paragraphs about why you think trees are important to humans, to animals, to other plants, and to our planet.
3. Conduct research and write a report about recycling: how it helps trees, how humans can recycle more effectively, what recycled products you use.
4. Make a field investigation of the trees in your neighborhood. Find six different types of trees, conduct research and write a report with information about each of them.

Guide created by We Love Children's Books

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