
ONCE THERE WAS A TREE

Author: Natalia Romanova
Illustrator: Gennady Spirin
Publisher: Dial

THEME:

Trees are vital to the existence of all living things, as they serve numerous practical and aesthetic functions.

PROGRAM SUMMARY:

This feature book beautifully weaves together the important relationship among all living things, and primarily our dependence on trees to provide food, shelter and the air we breathe.

LeVar explores the magnificent life cycle of trees in the forest and their importance to humans, animals and the planet, and he explores how photosynthesis works. He also visits a scientist who climbs trees to study them more closely, and a family who harvests maple syrup.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION:

Before the viewing the program, discuss the forest habitat and what comprises it.

Discuss with students what they enjoy doing with, in, and around trees.

People often think of a tree stump as a “dead” tree. Discuss ways in which the tree stump in this story was still very much full of life.

The end of the story states that trees belong to all of us. Discuss the responsibilities that go along with our “ownership.” How can people help preserve the forests?

CURRICULUM EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:

Working in small cooperative learning groups, have students “adopt” a tree in the schoolyard or nearby area. Encourage them to observe small details closely, by examining bark, leaves (or needles), the ground beneath the tree, and the like. Have them begin a log that records changes in their tree over the span of a school year. This log would include their field notes, sketches, measurements, and other information. Discuss with students the importance of not pulling bark or leaves off the tree and of leaving this space the way they found it, as much as possible.

Have students collect leaves and seeds (those that have already fallen from trees) and create a tree identification book. Jim Arnosky's *Crinkleroot's Guide to Knowing the Trees* (Bradbury) will be a useful resource for them. (They might also consult this book as a model for the adopted tree field log discussed above).

Have students make a large mural of the stump in *Once There Was a Tree* and draw all the creatures who called it their own in their respective places according to the story.

If the opportunity or area is available, locate a rotting log or stump with the students. Have them carefully observe plant growth on or around the log/stump and look for signs of animals around the area as well. If searching for a log or stump is not possible, bring a rotting log into the classroom for the class to investigate. Encourage them to examine such factors as the bark, evidence of plant growth on the log, evidence of animal activity on the log (different sizes of holes), and the possibility that insects might be living in the log.

Have students make a table-top display of objects in the classroom that are by-products of trees. They will need to label other objects too large for the actual display, such as bookcases, the door, etc.

Invite a nursery person or forester into the classroom to talk about tree planting.

Have students brainstorm 8-10 words that could be used to describe a tree. List the words as a one-word-per-line poem on brown paper cut into a tree trunk. Have them make leaves for the tree and add birds, insects, and mammals in, on, and around the tree. Put this tree on a bulletin board or other large display area.

Through creative dramatics, have the students pantomime how a tree might react in the following situations: when a person is climbing it, when a bird nests in its branches, during a thunderstorm, in a gentle breeze, when someone is picking apples from it, when someone is carving initials in its trunk, when a squirrel is leaping from branch to branch, when its leaves are falling, in the winter when it's snowing, and other ideas. (Until children become comfortable with creative dramatics, this type of activity is generally more successful if everyone is doing the pantomimes at the same time, so that there is no audience).

Arbor Day is in April. Have students research some of the history of Arbor Day, including when and why it was founded. Write to the National Arbor Day Foundation (100 Arbor Avenue, Nebraska City, NE 68410) for *The Education Materials Brochure*, a free catalog of the Foundation's classroom materials. There is no charge to educators for many of these materials.

RELATED THEMES:

animal homes
forest habitat
ecology

RELATED READING RAINBOW PROGRAMS:

Program #99 — And Still The Turtle Watched
Program #21 — Paul Bunyan
Program #94 — The Salamander Room

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Natalia Romanova was born and raised in Leningrad, Russia, and studied at the State University of Moscow. She has written eight children's books since 1961.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR:

Born and educated in Moscow, Gennady Spirin published his first books in his native Russia. Since that time, his illustrations have won numerous awards and have been exhibited in galleries throughout Europe and the United States. Although he has spent long periods of time in the U.S., Spirin lives with his wife and two sons in Moscow.

BOOKS REVIEWED BY CHILDREN:

THE TREMENDOUS TREE BOOK
by Barbara Brenner and May Garelick, illus. by Fred Brenner (Boyd's Mills Press)

RED LEAF, YELLOW LEAF
by Lois Ehlert (Harcourt Brace)

THE TREE IN THE WOOD
adapted and illus. by Christopher Manson (North-South Books)

SUPPLEMENTARY BOOKLIST:

CRINKLEROOT'S GUIDE TO KNOWING THE TREES
by Jim Arnosky (Bradbury)

A TREE'S TALE
by Lark Carrier (Dial)

MIGHTY TREE
by Dick Gackenbach (Gulliver/Harcourt)

THE BIG TREE
by Bruce Hiscock (Atheneum)

BE A FRIEND TO TREES

by Patricia Lauber, illus. by Holly Keller (HarperCollins)

TREE TRUNK TRAFFIC

by Bianca Lavies (Dutton)

AROUND THE OAK

by Gerda Muller (Dutton)

HAVE YOU SEEN TREES?

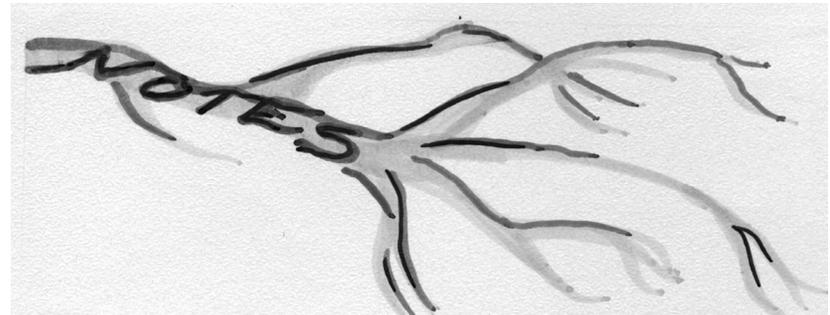
by Oppenheim, Joanne, illus. by Jean and Mou-sien Tseng (Scholastic)

HELLO, TREE!

by Joanne Ryder, illus. by Michael Hays (Lodestar)

LOG HOTEL

by Anne Schreiber, illus. by Debbie Pinkney (Scholastic)



A tree is struck by lightning and dies but that isn't the end. The story follows the succession of animals that make use of the stump as it decays with beautiful detailed pictures. Each animal thinks of the stump as their own and the book asks the reader to think about who really does own the tree. Perhaps a bit heavy handed but it is still a wonderful book for fostering a love for and understanding of the natural world. Read more. Helpful. While the illustrations are rather dark and detailed, the story of the cycle of a tree and the idea that the earth belongs to everyone is such a good message, I highly recommend it for its simplicity and poetic style. Read more. Helpful. There is still use to a tree stump, as the feature book entails. Eli Wallach reads the story about the lifetime of a tree, and how different animals and people made use of the tree during its many stages, from sapling to tall tree to a cut down stump. There is still use to a tree stump, as the feature book entails. Eli Wallach reads the story about the lifetime of a tree, and how different animals and people made use of the tree during See full summary ».

Director