LESSON 1
To Be a Tree

BIG IDEAS
• Forests are renewable resources. They can be used and regenerated at regular intervals. The complexity of the forest ecosystem and intensity of disturbance affect the rate of renewal. (Subconcept 3)
• A tree is a perennial plant (lives more than one growing season) with a well-defined woody stem, crown, and roots. (Subconcept 6)
• Trees compete for nutrients, sunlight, space, and water. (Subconcept 7)
• Trees have a life cycle that includes germination, growth, maturity, reproduction, decline, and death. (Subconcept 8)

OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:
• Classify trees as perennial plants (live for more than one growing season) with a trunk, crown, and roots.
• Recognize basic characteristics of trees that can be used in identification.
• Summarize the life stages of a tree.
• Explain how trees need nutrients, sunlight, space, air, and water.

SUBJECT AREAS
Arts, Language Arts, Science

LESSON/ACTIVITY TIME
• Total Lesson Time: 125 minutes
• Time Breakdown:
  Introduction...........15 minutes
  Activity 1 ...............20 minutes
  Activity 2 ...............25 minutes
  Activity 3 ...............35 minutes
  Conclusion............30 minutes

TEACHING SITE
Classroom

FIELD ENHANCEMENT CONNECTIONS
This lesson ties closely with Field Enhancement 1, I Can Be a Forester.

NUTSHELL
In this lesson, students review the three main parts of a tree. They complete a worksheet to learn the parts of a tree that are used in identification. Students play a game and act out how a tree meets its basic needs. They then label and put in order the life stages of a tree. As a conclusion, students draw their own tree, label it, and write a paragraph about how that tree is identified.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION
TREES
A tree is defined as “a perennial plant with a well-defined, woody stem, crown, and roots.” Although trees are members of the plant kingdom, these features make them distinct from other plants.

Trees are perennial; they live for more than one growing season. That is one of the requirements for a plant to be considered a tree. Beyond trees’ perennial nature, their “well-defined, woody stem” also sets them apart from other plants. We know this feature as their trunk. Coniferous and deciduous trees both have a relatively straight, upright trunk, with branches growing outward from it. The trunk provides support for the branches and leaves. It also acts as the transportation connection between the leaves and roots.
The leafy **crown** of a tree is where photosynthesis takes place. Photosynthesis is the process trees use to make sugars that are the energy for tree growth. The leaves use energy from the sun and carbon dioxide from the air and combine them with water to make sugars. The food energy created by the leaves in the crown is stored in the woody branches, trunk, and roots.

A tree’s unseen **root** system may have more mass than the visible top portion of the tree. A tree’s roots usually grow farther out from the trunk than its branches. They lie just below the surface in the top nine inches of the soil. The structure of a root system is complex. Root systems consist of large, woody roots that grow out from the trunk and huge numbers of small roots growing out from the large ones. The large roots serve as anchors to keep the tree standing, provide energy storage for times when the tree isn’t making sugars, and are the path for nutrients and water to reach the rest of the tree. The small roots that grow from the large roots absorb water and nutrients from the soil.
IDENTIFICATION
All trees have a crown, trunk, and roots, but they are different in other ways. Each type of tree has characteristics that make it unique. Tree identification keys use a series of questions about things that you can observe. These observations narrow the possibilities about the tree you are identifying. Keys can cover North America, the Midwest, or even just Wisconsin.

Identification keys are very useful when you know how to use them and understand the terms they contain.

Keys generally begin by separating deciduous from coniferous. They continue by identifying branch arrangement, leaf type, leaf arrangement, and fruit or cones. Bark is occasionally used to help in identifying trees, but it can vary in color and pattern, so it isn’t preferred.
LIFE STAGES
The life of a tree can be divided into six stages. They are: germination, growth, maturity, reproduction, decline, and death.

The first stage of a tree’s life begins with a seed. When a seed has the right temperature, moisture, and soil, it will germinate (sprout). Out of the seed comes a young tree called a seedling.

The seedling that emerges during germination continues its life through growth and then on to maturity. A mature tree is capable of reproduction. Many tree species live for several generations of human life. A tree can be mature and reproductive for many years.

Eventually a tree moves on to a part of its life called decline. Decline can be a result of old age, competition, or some other factor such as disease, insect damage, or storm damage. The decline in the health of a tree leads, someday, to the death of that tree. A dead tree is still a part of the nutrient cycle. A dead tree contributes to other plant, animal, and insect life, as the tree’s remains are recycled into the soil. Dead trees also serve as homes for birds, squirrels, and other wildlife.

Not all trees go through all of these steps. The life of a tree can be impacted by many things. Many trees germinate but don’t survive to maturity and reproduction. A tree can go into decline at any time in its life.

BASIC NEEDS
Trees and other plants have five things that they need in order to live. They are: nutrients, sunlight, water, air, and space.

Trees use nutrients (minerals) from the soil to build the materials that make up the tree. These nutrients allow the tree to survive, grow, and reproduce.

Sunlight is the form of energy that trees use to complete the process of photosynthesis. In order for trees to convert carbon dioxide and water into sugars (and other carbohydrates), they need energy from the sun.

Water is another part of photosynthesis. Water is also important to a tree for transportation of nutrients. It is water that makes up most of the tree’s sap. Sap carries nutrients up the trunk and energy back down to the roots.

All plants need air to survive. It is from the air that they get carbon dioxide for photosynthesis. Without air in the soil, the roots of a plant would “drown.”

Space seems to be the least tangible of the basic needs. It is important for students to know that trees can’t grow when they are crowded. Root systems need room to grow, as do branches, leaves, and stems.

PROCEDURE
INTRODUCTION
1. Choose a student, or ask for a volunteer to act as a tree. Tell the class that together you are going to dress their classmate as a tree. They all should think about what trees look like. Bring out the crown of leaves you made ahead of time. Explain to students that the top of the tree with the leaves on it is called the crown, and place the crown headband on the volunteer’s head.

2. Next, bring out the paper bag trunk vest that you made earlier. Tell students this is the tree’s trunk, and it helps hold up the branches and leaves. Put the trunk on the volunteer.

3. Finally, get out the belt of string or yarn roots. Explain that these are the tree’s roots. They grow underground where we can’t see them,
4. Review the names of the parts of the tree; crown, trunk, and roots. Tell the students that all trees have these parts.

5. Have the volunteer remove the tree parts.

6. Gather students together in a group where they can all see you and what you will hold up. Have Teacher Pages 2-3, Is That a Tree? ready to show to the students. Cover the pictures with another sheet of paper until you are ready to talk about each one.

7. Uncover the picture of the squirrel. Ask students if it is a tree. (No!) Ask how they know that it is not a tree. (It is an animal, not a plant.)

8. Show the picture of the violet. Tell students it is a plant. Ask if it is a tree. (No!) Ask how they know it is not a tree. (It's not tall. It doesn't have a trunk.)

9. Show the picture of the vine. Tell students this plant has a woody stem. Ask if it is a tree. (No!) Ask why it is not a tree. (It can't stand on its own. It doesn't have a crown.)

10. Show the picture of the shrub. Tell students this plant has woody stems that grow upward and it has a crown. Ask if it is a tree. (No!) Ask why it is not a tree. (It has lots of stems, not one main trunk.)

11. Show the picture of the deciduous tree. Ask if this plant is a tree. (Yes!) Ask how they know it is a tree. (It is a plant with roots. It has a woody stem called a trunk that grows upward, and it only has one. It has a crown made of leaves and branches.)

12. Show the picture of the coniferous tree. Ask if this plant is a tree. It doesn’t look quite the same. (Yes!) Ask how they know that it is a tree. (It has roots, a trunk, and a crown.)

EXTENSION: Create the leafy crown headband, paper bag trunk vest, and yarn root belt as a class art project for each student. They can all be trees for part of the day!

ACTIVITY 1
1. Point to something in the room that is square and ask the students what shape it is. Point to something that is a circle and again ask what shape it is. Use a few more shapes as examples. Tell the students that they have just identified those shapes. They used the shapes’ differences to decide what kind they were. Tell students that they are going to learn how to look for differences in trees so they can identify them.

2. Remind students that trees all have the same parts. They all have roots, a crown, and a trunk. Tell them that trees also have differences that help us tell them apart. Trees have different leaves, branches, seeds, and bark. Tell the class that they are going to learn about those differences.

3. Pass out Student Page 1, Tree Identification Information. Put the overhead of Student Page 1, Tree Identification Information on the projector. As you go through the following steps, be sure to point out and discuss important features.

4. Tell the class that the first step to decide what kind of tree you have is to decide if it’s deciduous or coniferous. Deciduous trees are the trees that have wide, flat leaves. Deciduous trees lose their leaves every fall. A maple tree is deciduous. Coniferous trees have cones and needles. Pine trees are coniferous. Coniferous trees also lose some of their needles in the fall, but not all at once, so we don’t usually notice. (NOTE: An exception to this is the tamarack. It is coniferous but also loses all its needles every fall. You may want to explain this to your class, depending on their level of understanding.)
5. Branches grow differently. Some grow opposite each other, and some grow in an alternate pattern. The leaves on a tree will grow either opposite or alternate too. They will always grow the same way (opposite or alternate) that the branches do.

6. Another way to tell trees apart is by the kind of leaves they have. Needles (as on pine trees) are actually a kind of leaf that has its own special name. Needles can be single or in groups. Leaves can also be simple or compound.

7. The kind of edge that leaves have is another way to tell trees apart. Leaf edges can be needle-like, toothed, entire (smooth), or lobed.

8. The seeds of a tree are inside something we call either a fruit or a cone. Fruit is the part of the tree that holds and protects the seeds. The fruit of a tree can be a nut or berry. It can also be winged. Cones from pines and spruces hold seeds too.

9. Hand out Student Page 2, Tree Identification Matching. Tell the students that they need to draw a line between the tree part on the left to the name that describes it on the right. They can use their Student Page 1, Tree Identification Information for reference. Collect these worksheets and review them to assess the level of understanding the class has.

NOTE: The characteristics listed in this activity are only a few of the many that may be found in tree identification books. This activity is intended to help students become familiar with the terms and increase their awareness of the details of Wisconsin trees.

EXTENSION: Take the class on a quick walk outside to get concrete experience with leaf margins, branching patterns, deciduous trees, coniferous trees, etc.

ACTIVITY 2

1. Discuss with the class what the five needs of a tree are (space, water, nutrients, sunlight, air). Discuss why the needs are important and what part of the tree collects each of the needs. Space is important to a tree so that it has room to grow and can get enough of the other needs from that space. (Trees can’t move to go find more water if they run out.) Water is important because a tree needs it to move its food energy and nutrients from one place to another in the tree. It is also important to a tree to help it make food. Water is collected by a tree’s roots. Nutrients are important to a tree because they are used to build the parts of the tree. Nutrients are dissolved in the water that roots collect. Sunlight is important because a tree’s leaves use sunlight to make food energy. Food gives a tree energy to grow. The crown of a tree collects sunlight. Air is important so a tree can get carbon dioxide used in making food energy. Trees take in the carbon dioxide animals (including humans) breathe out and give off the oxygen we breathe in. The leaves of a tree collect air.

2. Divide the class into groups of six. They will become trees and the things trees need. Three students make up each tree; one student is the crown, one is the trunk, and one is the roots. The other three students in the group are the tree’s needs; one student is water, one is nutrients, and one is sunlight. You may have as many trees as your class size will allow. Extra students may be assigned to hand out the energy cards later in the game or be extra needs. Assign students their roles now, but wait until after you have explained the way the game is played to pass out the appropriate props.
3. Describe to the students how one round of the game is played. Show students where the carpet square, or space, is. The three parts of the tree will put themselves together in the correct order and hold hands. (Trunk between the crown and roots.) At least one part of the tree must remain on their space (carpet square) at all times. All the needs should form a circle outside the carpet squares and walk slowly around the trees. Each of the needs will be holding a card and should be within reach of the trees at all times. See the diagram below for the set up.

4. Tell the class that it is the job of the tree to collect the things it needs and make those things into food energy so it can survive. Each part of the tree does its job to help the tree survive. Just as in real trees, the crown and the roots collect things. What does the crown collect? (Sunlight cards.) What do the roots collect? (Water and nutrients cards.) The tree may collect its needs cards from any of the needs in the circle, as long as the tree doesn’t leave its space (carpet square). To collect a card, the crown or roots must reach out and “tag” the appropriate need. When a need is tagged, it must hand its card to the tree and leave the circle.

5. Ask what the tree is going to do with the things it collects. (The crown uses sunlight and water to make food energy for the tree. The crown also uses nutrients to grow more branches and leaves.) So, the roots pass water and nutrients to the trunk. The trunk passes them to the crown. Tell students it is okay for them to let go of hands for this step.

6. After the trees have collected their needs, and the crown has all of them (sunlight, water, nutrients), the crown may trade the needs cards for one energy card. (Another student or the teacher can have the red energy cards to hand out when they are asked for them.) A tree with an energy card at the end of the round has survived. (Each tree only needs to collect one energy card.) It has the energy and building blocks to grow.

7. Ask students which tree need they have not discussed yet. (Air.) Tell students that air is not one of the needs trees have to work for in this game because air is everywhere.
8. Now pass out the props for the game. The students chosen to be the trees should be assigned to be the crown, trunk, or roots and given the appropriate tree part to wear. (Crown of leaves, paper bag trunk vest, a belt of yarn as roots.) The students who are needs should be given a card of the appropriate color for their need. Water = blue, sunlight = yellow, nutrients = brown. (Be sure to have enough needs for the first round so that all of the trees can meet their needs.)

9. Play the first round. The results of the first round should be that all of the trees survive.

10. Play additional rounds with a few changes. Reduce the number of needs cards. Ask students what happens when there isn’t enough of one of the needs to go around. (Trees don’t all survive. Trees compete with each other for the needs.)

ACTIVITY 3

1. Hand out Student Page 3, Tree Life Stages. (Discuss “life stage” if the term is unfamiliar to the students.)

2. Write the word “germination” on the board. Describe germination, making sure to cover the following information:
   - The first step in the life of a tree is germination.
   - During germination a seed sprouts.
   - A root comes out of the seed and grows into the soil, and a stem comes out and grows a few leaves.
   - A seed germinates if it has the right amount of water, the right kind of soil, the right temperature, and if it does not have too many other plants around it.

   Have the students find the picture of germination on their sheets and write the word on the line under the picture.

3. Write the word “growth” on the board. Describe growth, making sure to cover the following information:
   - After a tree germinates it grows.
   - It adds more leaves and roots and gets taller.

   Have students find the picture of growth and write the word on the line under the picture.

4. Write the word “maturity” on the board. Describe what it means for a tree to be mature, making sure to cover this key information:
   - After a tree grows for a while (sometimes a very long time) it becomes mature.
   - A mature tree still keeps growing, but only a very little bit each year. Trees aren’t like people and animals who stop growing when they are mature.
   - A mature tree has lots of leaves and is healthy. Have students label the picture of a mature tree on their sheets.

5. Write the word “reproduction” on the board. Describe reproduction:
   - Once a tree is mature it is ready for reproduction.
   - Reproduction occurs when a tree produces seeds that can grow into new trees.
   - If those seeds land in the right spot, lots of new trees can begin their own lives.

   Have students label the picture of reproduction.
6. Write the word “decline” on the board.
   Describe decline:
   • When a tree gets old (that may take anywhere from 50 to several hundred years, depending on the type of tree), it isn’t as healthy anymore and begins to decline.
   • When a tree declines, it often has fewer leaves, starts to lose branches, and gets cavities in its trunk. (Compare cavities in the tree trunk to cavities in a tooth.)

   Have students label the picture of decline.

7. Write the word “death” on the board.
   Describe death:
   • All trees die sometime.
   • When a tree dies, it loses all its leaves, and eventually its branches break off. It gets lots more cavities in it too.
   • These cavities serve as homes for wildlife such as woodpeckers, squirrels, and raccoons.
   • A dead tree stays standing for a long time, but eventually falls to the ground. Once a dead tree is on the ground, it provides homes for animals and other plants and slowly breaks down and becomes part of the soil.

   Have students label the picture of death.

8. Ask students to color their pictures of the life of a tree. Have them cut out the pictures that are in random order on their sheets. Once the pictures are cut out, have the students arrange them on another sheet of paper in correct order (germination, growth, maturity, reproduction, decline, death). Review the steps in the life of a tree to be sure everyone has them in the correct order. Once you are confident all the students have the correct order, have them glue the pictures down. Post the completed papers on a bulletin board.

CONCLUSION
1. Pass out sheets of unlined 8.5” X 11” paper.
2. Have students draw a tree in one of its life stages. They may choose a life stage, or you may assign one. The drawings can be of real trees or imaginary ones.
3. The drawing must include the main parts of a tree (crown, trunk, roots), and they should be labeled. The drawing must also include at least one basic need (sunlight, water, nutrients, air, space). Have them include a detailed picture of a leaf and the seeds of the tree as well. (NOTE: The resources listed in the “Recommended Resources” section may help with this step.)
4. Ask students to write a short paragraph below the picture explaining what kind of tree it is and what you use to identify it (what the leaves, bark, etc., look like). Post the drawing and write-up on a bulletin board.

CAREERS
The career profile in this lesson is about Jim Storandt, Tree Nursery Manager, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources. Career Profile 2A.TNM is found on page 24. A careers lesson that uses this information begins on page 88.

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENT
Take students on a walkabout of the schoolyard. Point out trees in different stages of life and review the vocabulary terms with students. Collect various leaves, seeds, fruits, and branches that have fallen from trees. Take them back to the classroom and have students categorize them using Student Page 1, Tree Identification Information.
REFERENCES


RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

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WEBSITES

**LEAF**
www.uwsp.edu/cnr/leaf click on the “Tree Key” link. The LEAF website features a dichotomous key with photographs of Wisconsin trees as well as other information.

**EEK! (Environmental Education for Kids), Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources**
www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eek/veg/treekey/
This dichotomous tree key features drawings and descriptions of Wisconsin trees.

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BOOKLET
Forest Trees of Wisconsin: How to Know Them. (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources PUBL-FR-053, 1990.) This tree ID booklet contains a dichotomous key, illustrations of Wisconsin trees, and tree uses.

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POSTER
Forest Trees of Wisconsin. (Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources PUBL-FR-101, 1990.) This poster has color illustrations of common Wisconsin trees, their leaves, and fruits.

To order copies of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources publications go to:

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GAME
The Wild Seed Game. (Ampersand Press, 1998.) This fun and colorful game illustrates the life stages of a plant, seasonal changes, and basic needs. Comes with accompanying story and teacher’s guide.
Meet Jim Storandt. Jim is in charge of the Griffith State Tree Nursery. A nursery is a place where people grow trees from seeds and then sell the trees for other people to plant. Jim’s job is to make sure everything happens just right in order to grow seven million young trees every year! He also is in charge of the other people who work at the nursery. Together they make sure the tree seeds are planted, watered, fertilized, and protected from insects and diseases that might harm them. The trees that Jim and his staff grow are sold to people in Wisconsin who want to plant trees on their land. There are two other state tree nurseries like Jim’s in Wisconsin.

To get this job, Jim went to college and studied water and soil. He volunteered with the Peace Corps in Paraguay, South America, where he learned about growing and planting trees. When he came back to Wisconsin, he worked as an assistant at the nursery before he got the job as the superintendent.

Jim says that one of his favorite things about his job is that he gets to do different things in different seasons of the year. He also likes working with landowners who buy the trees. Jim knows that he is helping improve the forests of Wisconsin and making them more beautiful.

If you want to work in a tree nursery like Jim, he says you should, “Take an interest in how plants grow, how the seed develops, and try growing them.” He also suggests that you work on your math and writing skills.
CROWN OF LEAVES
FOR EACH CROWN
• Make five leaves from the pattern on this page.
• Color and cut out the leaves.
• Cut a one-inch wide strip of paper long enough to go around a student's head.
• Attach the leaves to the strip of paper.
• Fasten the ends of the crown around the student's head with a paper clip or tape.

TRUNK VEST
FOR EACH VEST
• Cut up the center of one of the wide sides of a paper grocery bag.
• Cut the bottom out of the bag.
• Cut circles for arm holes in the two narrow sides of the grocery bag two inches from the top.
• Turn the bag inside out and color it to look like tree bark.

YARN ROOT BELT
FOR EACH ROOT BELT
• Cut a piece of yarn long enough to go around a student's waist and tie in a bow.
• Cut 20 pieces of yarn 20 inches long.
• Tie the 20 pieces of yarn to the belt piece.
IS THAT A TREE?
IS THAT A TREE?

[Diagram of tree leaves]

[Diagram of a tree]

[Diagram of a pine tree]
# Tree Identification Information

## Type of Tree
- **Coniferous**
- **Deciduous**

## How Branches Grow
- **Opposite**
- ** Alternate**

## Leaf Type
- **Single Needle**
- **Groups of Needles**
- **Simple**
- **Compound**

## Leaf Edge
- **Needle-like**
- **Toothed**
- **Entire**
- **Lobed**

## Fruit (Seeds and Cones)
- **Nut**
- **Berry**
- **Winged**
- **Cone**
Lesson 1: To Be a Tree

TREE IDENTIFICATION MATCHING

- CONIFEROUS
- DECIDUOUS
- ALTERNATE
- OPPOSITE
- NUT
- BERRY
- WINGED SEED
- CONE
- COMPOUND
- GROUPS OF NEEDLES
- SINGLE NEEDLE
- SIMPLE
- TOOTHED
- LOBED
- ENTIRE
- NEEDLE-LIKE
TREE LIFE STAGES

1. Sapling
2. Seedling
3. Dormant
4. Leaf
5. Branch
6. Trunk
7. Root