

1 Overview

A Tree is Nice is a simple book that helps us remember and appreciate a natural gift that is easily taken for granted. The book refreshes our gratitude for all the wonderful reasons a tree is so nice. This book received a Caldecott Medal for its illustrations and has been in print for over 50 years. The simplicity and beauty of this book is not lost on modern times. It is an enduring classic that is a perfect, gentle read-aloud for the young student.

2 Author & Illustrator

Janice May Udry was born in 1928 in Illinois. She developed her love for writing for children while working in a Chicago nursery. *A Tree is Nice* was her first book. Other books to her credit are *The Moon Jumpers* and *Let's Be Enemies*.

Marc Simont was born in Paris, France. While a child, he spent a lot of time in France, Spain, and the U.S. Since his father was an illustrator for a French magazine, he credits him as his most influential art teacher. His artwork is characterized by loose outlines saturated with water color. He received Caldecott Medals for *A Tree is Nice* in 1957, and in 2002 for *The Stray Dog*.

3 Before You Read

- Talk about what kinds of trees fill the sky: tall trees, full of leaves, like oak trees or evergreens.
- What kind of trees live: by rivers, on hills (like the willow in the picture)?
- Can you imagine a world without trees?
- Have you ever been to the desert or a big city without trees and green space – how does that feel?
- The book reminds us that not only is the tree itself nice but the parts of the tree are nice, like leaves that whisper and fall and produce bonfires, or trunks and limbs that serve as seats, swings, and playthings.
- Discuss the many benefits of the tree. A tree can:
 1. give fruits and flowers
 2. serve as homes and safe getaways for animals
 3. offer toys (sticks)
 4. shade and resting spots
 5. protect people and homes from heat and wind
 6. produce oxygen

It takes patience to grow a tree, but the book reinforces that the results are well worth it.

4 Vocabulary

- bonfire** — large outdoor fire
- hoe** — tool used for weeding and gardening
- buggy** — a stroller in which the baby can lay down

5 Picture Review & Comprehension

NOTE: When you see a * you should turn the page, when you see two ** you should turn two pages.

- This book rotates between watercolor pictures and black-and-white sketches. Notice the boy in the first picture. What do you think he likes about the trees?*
- The picture of the boy fishing shows weeping willows. How is a tree nice when fishing? (shade, stick for a pole)
- Why do you think it is called a **weeping willow**?**
- Why is even just one tree nice?* (it has leaves, the leaves whisper in the breeze all summer long)
- In the fall, what can you do with the leaves?* (play, walk, and roll in the leaves; build playhouses, make a bonfire)
- How is a tree fun for children?* (climb and see over all the yards, play pirate ship)
- What are all the activities the kids are doing in and around the tree? (climbing, playing pretend, sleeping, picking apples, etc.)
- What kind of fun do you have with a tree?*
- How are fruit trees nice? (pick the fruit)
- What kinds of fruit grow on trees?* (apples, pears, oranges, bananas)
- How do animals benefit from trees?* (build their homes, hide from prey, shade)
- In the swing picture, how are the children using the tree?* (to hang a swing, to hang flowers, to lean his hoe, to relax in the shade)
- Why do the cows like trees?* (for the protection from sun)
- The family members on the picnic are all enjoying the restful shade of the tree. Would the picnic be as restful if there were no tree? Why?* (No. It would be hot, they would not be able to lean against it to rest, and it would not be as pretty.)
- Why would you want a tree near your house? (The tree shades the house to keep it cool and protects the house from wind.)
- Do you have trees near your house?*
- How does a tree protect the house?* (It holds off the wind, keeps the wind from blowing off the roof.)
- Talk about the steps it takes to plant a tree. (see Language Lesson)
- Will the tree be big next year?* (Talk about how some trees grow very quickly and some very slowly.)

6 After You Read

- See if the students can remember all the wonderful gifts of the tree. Make a list of all the ways a tree is nice! (fill up the sky, very beautiful; provide shade, sticks, leaves that whisper in the breeze; in the fall you can play, walk, roll in the leaves, build playhouses, and have a bonfire; fun to climb, good to lean against to rest; hang swings, ropes, and flowers; make apples, pears, oranges, and bananas; cats can get away from dogs, birds build nests to live there, cows can rest in the shade; keeps your house cool, protects it from the wind)
- What would you add to the list? (Christmas trees, tree houses, bird nests, blooming trees)

7 Language Lesson

Towards the end of the book, a good example of sequencing is given. The author explains how to plant a tree. Each step is given in order.

- Ask the children if this section would make sense out of order.
- List the steps. Write these together in complete sentences. Stress the importance of sequence in a story.

WEEK 1: PART 2

SOCIAL STUDIES

- Look at a city map. Find streets with which you are familiar.
- Introduce the idea of landmarks (i.e., church, school, library, fire department, hospital, grocery store, etc.).
- Draw a simple map of your neighborhood. Use your map when you go on your science walk.

SCIENCE

- Take a neighborhood walk. Identify trees indigenous to your area, including your yard. Notice the shape, leaves, and bark of the trees. Review these often and throughout the seasons. (Use the Nature Study Guidelines to discuss.)
- Use watercolors or tempera to paint a favorite tree or one that you can observe while painting. Discuss the lines in the tree trunk, branches and limbs. Discuss shape while painting the leaves, making sure to emphasize that the trees are not always “fluffy” at the top as we usually draw them. Do a painting in each season.
- Resources: *I Can Name 50 Trees Today!* (The Cat in the Hat Learning Library) & *A Tree Is a Plant* (Let’s Read and Find Out)

ART

Birch Forest, 1903, by Gustav Klimt (Art Nouveau), Oil on canvas, private collection

Gustav Klimt was born in Austria-Hungary. Though he was born into a poor family, as one of seven children, he was able to go to school to learn art.

Klimt painted many murals and received a special award from the Emperor of Austria, Franz Josef I.

Difficult times later in his life led to a change in his painting style. This new style was very different from what many people of his time were painting. Some of those who liked his new style joined Klimt in a group dedicated to help other new young artists.

By the end of his career, he worked in the relaxed setting of his home, living the simple life, devoted to his art and family.

MUSIC

Radetzky’s March by Johann Strauss, Sr.

Johann Strauss, Sr., was born in 1804. Since his father’s inn was located next to the Daube Chancel, the noises of the harbor and the music the sailors played influenced his dance music. After studying the violin a short time, he began touring with his own orchestra and even played at the coronation (crowning) of Queen Victoria in London. “Radetzky’s March” was composed when he was conductor of a civil regiment.

- When listening to the music, feel the marching cadence. Allow the children to march. (Actually, try to stop them – it is a natural occurrence!)

POETRY

I’m Glad (A Child’s Book of Poems, p. 110)

“I’m Glad” is a sweet tribute to God for making the world as it is. The sing-song meter of this poem makes it easy for memorization.

- “I’m glad the sky is painted blue” Who painted the sky?
- “And the earth is painted green” Why did the artist choose the color green to represent the earth?
- “With such a lot of nice fresh air” What else is between the earth and sky?
- “All sandwiched in between” Compare the sky, earth, and air to a sandwich.
- Which words rhyme?