

Picture a Tree

All students, no matter their age, have an idea of what a tree looks like, but many are unfamiliar with the actual structure of a tree. In this activity, students will go outdoors to take a closer look at trees and their parts.

Before your next nature walk or outdoor adventure, have students close their eyes and picture a tree. Ask them to think about its shape, branch arrangement, and trunk and leaf texture. Have them draw a picture of a tree from memory. Next, head outside with a camera or sketchbook to have a closer look. On your walk, locate several different tree species for students to observe. Ask:

Photograph & Poetry
Some students may not be confident in their drawing abilities or may not take the time necessary to complete field sketches. In lieu of drawing, consider using a camera to collect data. A photo, especially when paired with a story or poem, can be just as effective.



- 1** What is the shape of the trunk? Tall, straight, bent, or gnarled? Is there one trunk or does it split into multiple trunks?

- 2** What color is the bark? How does it feel? How does it look?

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3 What shape are the branches and twigs?

4 Are there any seeds, flowers, fruits, nuts, or cones on the tree?

5 What color and shape are the leaves or needles? Where are they located on the tree?

6 What is the overall shape of the tree crown?



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While outside, consider taking photographs or making sketches to record your observation data. Once your observations are complete, have students draw a second tree picture. Compare and contrast the two drawings. What new details appeared in the second drawing? What characteristics were similar? Use this Sample Graphic Organizer chart to assist with your comparison.

Structure	Tree from Memory	Tree from Observation
Trunk shape		
Bark color, texture, look		
Branches - shape, pattern, texture		
Leaves - shape, texture, color		
Leaf attachment		
Seed, fruit, flowers, nuts, or cones		
Shape of trees		
Plants of animals on tree		

Refer to Project Learning Tree's *Tremendous Science!* e-unit for more hands-on tree activities. Go to www.plt.org/curriculum/e-unit/tremendous-science/

