

# Waxing Poetic about Trees

Subjects: Language Arts

Objective(s): Students will write poems/short stories about trees

## Material Needs:

Drawing materials (pencils, colored pencils, crayons, etc.)

Paper

## Activity/Instructions:

1. Introduce this activity by reading some examples of poetry that include trees. (A few examples have been included at the end of this Program Planning Page.)
2. Review the basics of poetry, especially any particular form of poetry that your class has been studying. Remind the students that there are many different forms of poetry. Some poetry rhymes, some does not. Some poetry has an “even rhythm,” some of it does not. Some poetry has strict rules (for example: Haiku’s pattern of 5 syllables in the first line, 7 syllables in the second line, and 5 syllables in the third line), and some does not.
3. Explain that they are going to create poetry about trees. Topics they might want to consider for their poems include:
  - Specific trees that they “know” (ones they play in/around at home)
  - Different parts of trees (and how they all work together to help the tree survive)
  - Benefits that humans get from trees (products, shade, oxygen, clean air, wildlife habitat, etc.)
  - The beauty of trees
  - Wildlife living in trees(Any topic is fair game, as long as the general theme is trees. )
4. Have the students write their poem (or poems), and then draw a picture to go along with their poem(s).
5. If there is time, have them recite their poems to the class. (If you have shy students, you may want to ask for volunteers.)
6. Post/display the class poems and drawings in the classroom, or somewhere else in the school.
7. If your class has not studied poetry, then consider having the students write short stories about trees instead.

## Examples of Poetry/Verse that mentions trees:

I think that I shall never see  
A billboard lovely as a tree.  
Perhaps, unless the billboards fall,  
I'll never see a tree at all.  
- Ogden Nash, *Song of the Open Road*

Oak-logs will warm you well,  
That are old and dry;  
Logs of pine will sweetly smell  
But the sparks will fly.  
- Mother Goose, *Wood Lore*

The maple is a dainty maid,  
The pet of all the wood,  
Who lights the dusky forest glade  
With scarlet cloak and hood.

The elm a lovely lady is,  
In shimmering robes of gold,  
That catch the sunlight when she moves,  
And glisten, fold on fold.

The sumac is a gypsy queen,  
Who flaunts in crimson dressed,  
And wild along the roadside runs,  
Red blossoms in her breast.

And towering high above the wood,  
All in his purple cloak,  
A monarch in his splendor is  
The round and princely oak.  
- Anonymous

See the big oak tree.  
Watch its leaves dance in the wind.  
Listen for its song.  
- Karen Lain Potter

Enormous and solid  
    But swaying,  
Beaten by the wind  
    But chained,  
Murmur of a million leaves  
    Against my window.  
    Riot of trees,  
Surge of dark green sounds.  
    Suddenly still,  
Is a web of fronds and branches.  
    - Octavio Paz, *The Grove*

Peace to these little broken leaves,  
That strew our common ground;  
That chase their tails, like silly dogs,  
As they go round and round.  
For though in winter boughs are bare,  
Let us not forget  
Their summer glory, when these leaves  
Caught the great sun in their strong net;  
And made him, in the lower air,  
Tremble – no bigger than a star!  
    - W.H. Davies, *Leaves*

I am the heat of your hearth, the shade screening you from the sun;  
I am the beam that holds your house, the board of your table; I am  
The handle of your hoe, the door of your homestead; the wood of  
Your cradle, and the shell of your coffin.  
I am the gift of God and the friend of man.  
    - Anonymous

And see the peaceful trees extend  
Their myriad leaves in leisured dance –  
They bear the weight of shy and cloud  
Upon the fountain of their veins.  
    - Kathleen Raine, *Envoi*

The tree stands very straight and still  
All night long far on the hill;  
But if I go and listen near  
A million little sounds I hear.  
The leaves are little whispering elves  
Talking, playing by themselves,  
Playing softly altogether  
In the warm or windy weather,  
Talking softly to the sky  
Or any bird that darts by.  
O little elves within the tree,  
Is there no word to tell to me?

- Annette Wynne, *The tree stands very straight and still*

Give me the dance of your boughs, O Tree,  
Whenever the wild wind blows;  
And when the wind is gone, give me  
Your beautiful repose.

How easily your greatness swings  
To meet the changing hours;  
I, too, would mount upon your wings,  
And rest upon your powers.

I seek your grace, O mighty Tree,  
And shall seek, many a day,  
Till I more worthily shall be  
Your comrade on the way.

- Edwin Markham, *Song to a tree*

The talking oak  
    To the ancients spoke.  
But any tree  
    Will talk to me.  
What truths I know  
    I garnered so.  
But those who want to talk and tell,  
    And those who would not listeners be,  
Will never hear a syllable  
    From out the lips of any tree.

- Mary Carolyn Davies, *Be different to trees*

What do we plant when we plant the tree?  
We plant the ship which will cross the sea.  
We plant the mast to carry the sails;  
We plant the planks to withstand the gales –  
The keel, the keelson, the beam, the knee;  
We plant the ship when we plant the tree.

What do we plant when we plant the tree?  
We plant the houses for you and me.  
We plant the rafters, the shingles, the floors,  
We plant the studding, the lath, the doors,  
The beams and siding, all parts that be;  
We plant the house when we plant the tree.

What do we plant when we plant the tree?  
A thousand things that we daily see;  
We plant the spire that out-towers the crag,  
We plant the staff for our country's flag,  
We plant the shade, from the hot sun free;  
We plant all these when we plant the tree.  
- Henry Abbey, *What do we plant?*

By the little river,  
Still and deep and brown,  
Grow the graceful willows,  
Gently dipping down.

Dipping down and brushing  
Everything that floats –  
Leaves and logs and fishes,  
And the passing boats.

Were they water maidens  
In the long ago,  
That they lean out sadly  
Looking out below?

In the misty twilight  
You can see their hair,  
Weeping water maidens  
That were once so fair.

- Walter Prichard Eaton, *The Willows*

Live thy Life,  
Young and old,  
Like yon oak,  
Bright in spring,  
Living gold;

Summer-rich  
Then; and then  
Autumn-changed,  
Soberer-hued  
Gold again.

All his leaves  
Fallen at length,  
Look, he stands,  
Trunk and bough,  
Naked strength.

- Alfred Tennyson, *The Oak*

“Come, little leaves,” said the wind one day,  
“Come o’er the meadows with me and play;  
Put on your dresses of red and gold,  
For summer is gone and the days grow cold.”

Soon as the leaves heard the wind’s loud call,  
Down they came fluttering, one and all;  
Over the brown fields they danced and flew,  
Singing the glad little songs they knew.

“Cricket, good-by, we’ve been friends so long,  
Little brook, sing us your farewell song;  
Say you are sorry to see us go;  
Ah, you will miss us, right well we know.

“Dear little lambs in your fleecy fold,  
Mother will keep you from harm and cold;  
Fondly we watched you in vale and glade,  
Say, will you dream of our loving shade?”

Dancing and whirling, the little leaves went,  
Winter had called them, and they were content;  
Soon, fast asleep in their earthy beds,  
The snow laid a coverlid over their heads.

- George Cooper, *Come, little leaves*