

Teacher lesson idea

Trees uncovered

Trees can be characterised by leaf shape, silhouette, fruits, seeds etc. Their hidden personalities can be revealed through colourful myths and legends associated with them. Many fascinating stories are linked to our best-known trees. They help us to remember some of their characteristics and recognise them next time we visit woodland.

Tree tales

There follows one story from German mythology and one from Greek. You may like to use either of these outdoors whilst next to the relevant tree. If used indoors, pictures and/or characteristic features of each tree are useful for children to refer to. Visit: www.naturedetectives.org.uk

- The stories are designed to be used as drama exercises.
- Read the stories to the children first and discuss.
- The Dancing silver birch has 3 characters whilst the Trembling poplar has 6.
- Divide the children into groups accordingly.
- Give them each a copy of the story to enact.
- Younger KS2 children can use them in their present form.
- Older KS2 children can rewrite them as a play script adding direct speech, stage directions, settings etc.
- The plays can then be performed at a later date, perhaps in an assembly.

For other tree stories: *'Spirit of the Forest – tree tales from around the world'*, Helen East/Eric Maddern/Alan Marks. ISBN 0-7112-1879

Try the 'Guess my name' activity sheet for a creative writing resource based on tree identity.



Silver birch: WTPL/Alex MacLeod

Pupil worksheet

The dancing silver birch

A german myth

Characters:

poor shepherdess

birch tree

a sheep (a toy could be used)

1. A poor shepherdess is looking for her lost sheep. Her fingers are busy spinning little bits of wool as she searches for her sheep. She sits down for a rest, leaning against a white birch trunk.
2. Suddenly, the tree begins to sway and she looks up into its branches and sees a beautiful wooden face. She is scared and starts to run but a soft voice calls down to her.
3. The tree asks her to stay and dance as it cannot dance or walk because it is rooted deep into the ground.
4. The girl is afraid but she also feels sorry for the tree. So, she decides to dance.
5. She skips and dances around the tree and grabs a low-hanging branch to swing on.
6. The tree branch holds her fast and begins to tremble so much that it heaves itself up and right out of the earth.
7. They dance together faster and faster until dusk.
8. The shepherdess pleads with the tree to stop dancing as she is so tired.
9. The tree eventually tosses her in to the air, catches her gently and sets her back down on the ground.
10. The tree murmurs deep thanks to her for helping it to be free from its roots and dance for a day. It promises her that in return, her wool will be spun, her sheep found and she will have good luck. It asks her to take some leaves to remember the dancing tree.

11. She finds herself resting against the tree once again and wondering if it was all a dream. However, her wool has been spun, her sheep has come back and her apron is full of leaves.

12. She jumps up, curtsies to the birch tree and leads the sheep away.

13. As she walks home her apron gets strangely heavy. She stops to rest and looks at the leaves. They tip out on the road, landing with a ringing clink, gleaming in the dusk. She gets down on the road to feel them. They have all turned to solid silver.

14. She thinks she hears a leafy laugh as she skips home.



silver birch

Illustration by Vivien Wilson

Pupil worksheet

The trembling poplar

A greek myth

Characters:

Zeus – King of the gods

Ganymede – A human boy, Zeus' servant

oak tree

birch tree

elm tree

poplar tree

1. Zeus, the King of the Gods wants to host a dinner party to celebrate all he has created. He invites every important person to be there on Mount Olympus.

2. Among his list of invited guests were trees – they could walk and talk back then.

3. Ganymede lays out the best silver plates, bowls and spoons to eat ambrosia, the sweet nectar which is the food of the gods.

4. Next morning, congratulating himself on such a good party, Zeus goes to the Great Hall.

5. To his annoyance, he discovers that his silver spoons are all missing.

6. Ganymede is sent down to earth to find them.

7. He questions the oak but he grandly says that he is King of the Forest and would not need to steal silver spoons. He already has countless spoon-sized cups to fit each acorn.

8. He questions the birch but she huffily says that she is already clothed in silver and does not need any more.

9. He questions the elm but he says he is far too upright to stoop to such tricks.

10. Lastly, he questions the poplar who trembles with fear and holds its branches tightly behind its back.

11. Ganymede demands that the trembling poplar raises its branches. On doing so, the stolen silver spoons tumble to the ground.

12. This is why the poplar's leaves often have pale undersides with just a hint of silver from the stolen spoons. As a punishment, ever since, it has had to hold its branches up, outstretched, to show there is nothing hidden.

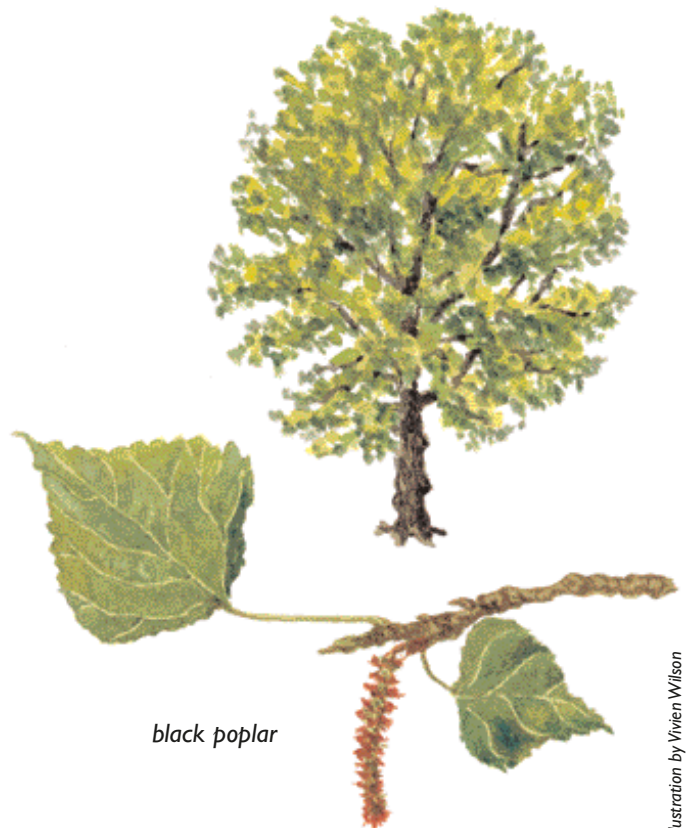


Illustration by Vivien Wilson

