

Tree Friends

Overview: Students are split into pairs. One student is blindfolded, and the other student leads and introduces them to a “tree friend”. The blindfolded student gets to know the tree through the sense of touch and then is led back to the starting point. The student takes the blindfold off and then must find their tree friend by sight. The pair then switches roles.

This activity is a great intro to *Meet a Tree*. It is suitable for students of all ages.

Overview of Biodiversity:

Trees are very important to our Nova Scotian ecosystem! They provide homes for animals like squirrels, porcupines, and bats, while also being a food source for other birds like woodpeckers and cedar waxwings. Nova Scotia’s forests, classified as the Acadian Forest Region, are a transitional zone of temperate deciduous forests and boreal coniferous forests. This means we have hardwood trees like maples, birches and beeches as well as coniferous trees like cedars, tamaracks, and pines. This mix of trees is not only important for wildlife in our province, but for humans as well! Nova Scotia relies on forestry practices to sell wood all around the country and the world, and to build the houses we live in. Trees also protect us by helping prevent flooding and erosion, and they store excess carbon so we can breathe nice fresh air.

Location: Pick an area with a lot of trees to give choices, but make sure it is an area with relatively good footing and an absence of thick bushes and undergrowth.

Materials: blindfolds (one per pair – scarves or strips of fabric work well)

Activity

1. **Lead In...** Today you will have the chance to meet some of the best friends of the forest – trees! Since trees can’t talk, you don’t meet or get to know tree friends in the same way you get to know human friends. You’ll be blindfolded to help you focus on the different textures (and maybe even smells and sounds) of your tree.

2. **How to Visit Tree Friends:** Here's what you have to do. Can I have a volunteer help me demonstrate? [Explain and demonstrate the following steps]

- We will start here. One person puts on the blindfold and the other person (the leader) decides on a tree friend they want to introduce their partner to. The leader takes their partner over to the tree friend and allows them to get to know the tree.
- Optional: to make it tougher, the leader can spin their partner 3 times at the start and the end so that it is harder for them to know where they are headed to meet their tree friend.

- The leaders have to be very careful when they are leading their partners. Lead them slowly and carefully. Tell them if there are branches or sticks, if you're going up or down a small hill, if there are obstacles, etc. You could hold their hand, arm, or shoulders if they are comfortable.
- [Guide the volunteer to a nearby tree, explaining anything they need to watch out for or avoid. Be very descriptive to set a good example for what the students should do.]
- Once you arrive at the tree, you will get to know your friend very well—without using your eyes. You want to feel its shape, the texture of the bark, and how many branches there are. You might want to use your sense of touch, give it a hug to know how big it is, etc. [include your own ideas]. Get to know it well. [While you are saying these things, encourage the volunteer to demonstrate]
- Once you have enough time to get to know your new tree friend, the leader leads you back to the start, spins you around (optional), and then you can take off the blindfold. The challenge is for you to find your new friend using your eyes. After you have done this successfully, you will switch roles.
- Have students form pairs—or the teacher can pick pairings to get good combinations.

4. **Safety Expectations:** To make sure that everyone is safe, I have a few very important instructions [Cover these next points in a serious tone]:

- The leader is responsible for making sure their partner is safe. You must tell your partner if they will bump into or trip on something. Pick a tree that your partner can easily get to while blindfolded.
- When spinning or guiding your partner, be gentle. Don't pull or squeeze them too hard.
- If I see that any leader is not being careful, the leader will lose the chance to continue and will have to sit out [or whatever your consequence would be].

5. **Do Activity:** Start the activity and supervise to ensure everyone is careful. Everyone can have a few turns in each role, so they have multiple tree friends at the end.

6. **Final Sharing About Friend:** When everyone is done, have everyone sit in a circle. Go around and have each student share one thing they really liked about their new friend. Encourage each person to come up with something different.

Curriculum Connections

| Grade | Outcome | Activity relevance/how to adapt this activity to meet the outcome |
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| Primary | Learners will compare living things through the senses | No adaptations are required. Students could have the option to choose plants other than trees to befriend. |
| 1 | Learners will analyse daily and seasonal change in the environment | Complete the activity in fall, winter, and spring. Have students focus on what's different each time, in both the forest and their experience participating in the activity. |
| 1 | Learners will analyse the interconnectiveness of living things and the environment | While blindfolded, encourage students to identify how their tree friend is connected to other living things. Is there moss or lichen on the tree? Are the roots of their tree tangled with the roots of another? Are the branches brushing up against another tree? |
| 3 | Learners will investigate plants in the environment | No adaptations are required. Students could have the option to choose plants other than trees. |
| 4 | Learners will investigate a variety of local natural habitats | Complete the same activity in multiple habitats, or divide the students into different habitats and have them share what they found. Discuss the similarities and differences of the trees (and animals/other plants) in each habitat. For example, you could compare trees around the playground to trees in a forest or marshy area, being sure to discuss the other plants in each area. What did it feel like to walk through each habitat blindfolded? Which creatures would prefer each habitat? |
| 4 | Learners will analyse interconnectiveness of and within local habitats, inclusive of a Mi'kmaw perspective | While blindfolded, encourage students to identify how their tree friend is connected to other living things. Is there moss or lichen on the tree? Are the roots of their tree tangled with the roots of another? Are the branches brushing up against another tree? You can talk about the concept of Trees Holding Hands . |
| 6 | Learners will analyse diversity of life in nature and significant relationships within the natural world | While blindfolded, encourage students to identify how their tree friend is connected to other living things. Is there moss or lichen on the tree? Are the roots of their tree tangled with the roots of another? Are the branches brushing up against another tree? You can talk about the concept of Trees Holding Hands . Ask students about how these species are connected to each other and what |

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| | | would happen if one species increased or decreased (or disappeared entirely). |
| 7 | Learners will analyse the interconnectiveness of living things and the environment, in relation to the concept of Netukulimk. | The four pillars of Netukulimk are Respect, Relationship, Responsibility, and Reciprocity. Connect these pillars to the activity, then complete the “Tree Friends” activity. For example, we show respect and responsibility by guiding our partner gently. We show reciprocity by taking turns being the leader and being blindfolded. We are strengthening relationships with each other and the environment. |