

Connecting Kids to Nature

Try this activity in a forest—a natural place to learn!

For over 30 years, Project Learning Tree® has used the forest as a “window” to help young people gain an awareness of the world around them and their place within it. Blending a walk in the forest with a fun and engaging PLT activity creates a powerful learning experience for children of all ages. Here’s one idea in a series from PLT that introduces the concept of forest cycles.



www.plt.org

Activity 76: Tree Cookies

One way to learn about tree growth is to look at annual rings. Tree rings show patterns of change in a tree’s life as well as changes in the area where it grows. In this activity, you can trace environmental and historical changes using a cross section of a tree, or “tree cookie.”

Doing the Activity

Have you ever counted tree rings? Every growth season, a tree adds a new layer of wood to its trunk and limbs. This means you can determine the age of a tree by counting its layers, or rings. Have children learn more about a tree’s life by examining a tree cookie and asking:

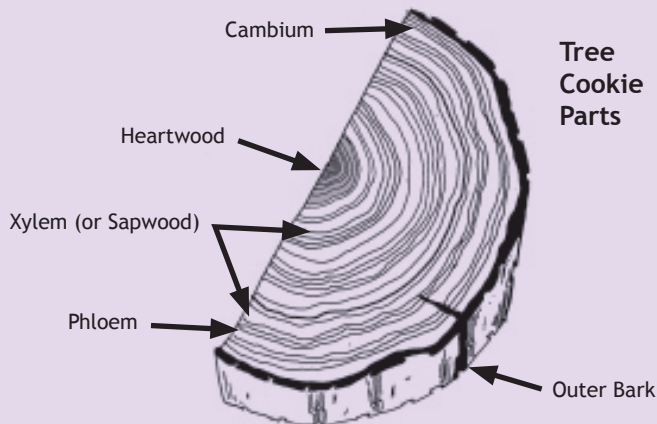
- How old was this part of the tree when the tree cookie was cut?
- Can you see different markings? Evidence of scars or narrow, misshapen rings?
- What might have happened to the tree to cause these different markings?

Use a hand lens to get a closer look at the tree cookie’s texture. Can you see any holes or channels that might allow water and nutrients to travel up the tree? Finally, ask children to draw a tree cookie the same age as themselves. What can they do to show when important events in their lives took place?

For a children’s book that describes the various parts of trees and their functions, check out *Outside and Inside Trees* by Sandra Markel, published by Simon and Schuster, 1993, ISBN: 0027623130.

Do this word search puzzle to discover some components of trees and forest cycles. Look below for the answers.

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| H | M | Z | E | S | B | M | I | L | T | F |
| G | E | C | F | D | T | C | A | K | L | B |
| E | T | A | M | I | L | C | N | X | A | I |
| S | H | M | R | G | R | U | E | R | U | S |
| A | G | B | P | T | R | E | K | S | N | G |
| E | U | I | H | T | W | O | R | G | N | N |
| S | O | U | P | H | L | O | E | M | A | I |
| I | R | M | S | A | P | W | O | O | D | R |
| D | D | X | Y | L | E | M | Z | D | W | R |



Tree Cookie Parts

Adapted from Activity 76: Tree Cookies from *Project Learning Tree’s PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.

Discover how PLT can help you teach... from nature!

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- Contact your MN PLT State Coordinator, laura.duffey@state.mn.us or 651-259-5263, or visit www.plt.org.



Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation. In Minnesota, PLT is sponsored by the Department of Natural Resources.