
The Life of a Ponderosa Pine



Purpose:

- In this activity, students begin by going outside to “Meet a Tree” using their sense of touch. Back indoors, students will read a story about wildfire and answer questions about the story. This activity accompanies the “Burnt Tree Cookie” lesson, and can be a standalone activity, read aloud as a class, or assigned as homework.

“Fire Scars: The Story of a Ponderosa Pine” by Pepper Trail is used with permission. The story was originally published in *Mountains and Rivers* in 2001, and republished in *Jefferson Monthly* in 2012.

Time Required: 1 hour

Appropriate grades: 3th – 9th

NGSS and Common Core Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1: Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.4.1: Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

Objectives:

Students will:

- Find and relocate a tree using their sense of touch.
- Demonstrate their understanding of a story about wildfires by answering questions about the story.
- Articulate their feelings and views towards wildfire by writing a wildfire haiku.

Materials:

- **Laminated Fire Scar on Tree Photo** (located in the back pocket of this binder)
- **“Fire Scars: The Story of a Ponderosa Pine”** (In binder, one for each student, pair, or group)
- **“Fire Scars: The Story of a Ponderosa Pine Questions”** (In binder, one for each student, pair, or group)
- **“Fire Scars” Timeline** (Teacher Copy, and supplement for students who may need extra help).

Activity:

Introduction	Go outside and play “Meet a Tree” from Joseph Cornell’s <i>Sharing Nature</i> . Head outside, avoiding areas with poison oak. Have students pair up. One student is the blindfolded <i>player</i> and the other student acts as the <i>guide</i> .
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	<p>The guide leads their blindfolded player to a tree. Upon meeting the tree, the blindfolded player feels the texture of the tree’s bark, leaves, sees how big the tree is by hugging it, etc. The guide may help the player locate interesting parts on the tree. Have the guide lead the player back to the starting place. Then the player must walk around looking for their tree. If time and resources allow, have students use a field guide from the library to identify their tree to species. Have the players switch roles. Come back together as a group and have students think-pair-share their tree and some interesting features they felt on their tree. Have them think about why these features are on the tree. Do these features help us understand the tree? Close by telling the students that Every Tree Has a Story.</p>
<p>Body</p>	<p>Back inside, hand out the story “Fire Scars: The Story of a Ponderosa Pine” by Pepper Trail to each student. Before the students read the story, examine the drawing of the tree cookie located in the upper left-hand corner on the first page of the story. As a class or individually, have the students answer the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Estimate the age of the tree by counting <i>either</i> the light or the dark rings. <i>Answer: about 50 years old</i> ● Count the number of fire scars from medium-intensity fires. These are the wider, black rings. <i>Answer: 4. See teacher copy of story</i> ● Identify the fire scar from the high-intensity fire. <i>Answer: The dark line running from the top to the bottom of the tree cookie. See teacher copy of story</i> ● Locate the layers of new growth that were “healing” the scar by growing over it. <i>Answer: The top and bottom edges of the high intensity fire scar. See teacher copy of story</i> <p>Show the class the Fire Scar on Tree photo to provide a visual of a fire scar. As a class, in groups, or individually, have the students read “Fire Scars.” *If any students need additional support to understand the story, provide them with the “Fire Scars” Timeline. Have the students fill out the worksheet “The Story of a Ponderosa Pine Question Worksheet.” As a class, discuss the article and the “Questions Worksheet.” <i>For Answers refer to “Fire Scars” Timeline.</i></p>



Closure	<p>Conclude by having the students think-pair share. Prompt them with questions such as:</p> <p>Do you think wildfire is important for the health of a Ponderosa Pine in this region? Why or why not?</p> <p>Ask the students if wildfire kills or damages trees?</p> <p>Are trees able to withstand wildfire?</p> <p>What are some signs trees leave behind that help us understand the history of wildfire?</p> <p>Have the lesson conclude by having students write a wildfire haiku and reading it outloud.</p>
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Modifications:

Elementary: Read the story together as a class, or provide students with Fire Scars Timeline to assist them with their worksheet.

Middle School: Have the students read the story as homework.

Additional Activities:

- Take a field trip to a historically burned forest to see fire burned Ponderosa trees.
- Have the students “Meet a Tree” in their yard at home. Students can choose to draw their tree, take a photo of their tree, write a haiku or poem about it, or write a life history story about it, and come back the next day and share it with the class.
 - Students can monitor their tree each season, and blog about how the tree changes throughout the year.



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