

HOW TO READ A TREE

The small details of trees are often overlooked, but with practice you can learn to read a tree. Examining it closely can give you clues about its life. You may notice a black streak from lightning, or chew marks from a beaver. You can tell a bear once visited by a large claw mark down the trunk. You can also learn to identify types of trees by studying their bark, leaf shape, and even smell! Some trees are bumpy, while others are smooth. You may notice the smell of cedar sap or the sweet butterscotch scent of the ponderosa pine. Our senses give clues that can help us identify the plants we are studying. At first you will need a field guide to help with identification, but with lots of practice you can learn to recognize tree types and even tell their age!

Skills

NOTICING
ADVENTURING
IDENTIFICATION

Materials

TREE
NATURE JOURNAL
OR PAPER
PENCIL

- 1 For this activity, you need to identify and observe a **coniferous** tree (a tree that produces cones, such as pines, cedars, spruces, firs, and cypresses). Find a young coniferous tree about your height.
- 2 A fun way to determine a tree's age to count is its **whorls**. Whorls are the areas where branches grow out from the trunk and circle around the tree like the spokes of a bicycle wheel. Count the whorls of your tree from bottom to top; each one represents a year of growth. Be careful not to count the small branches in between, as these are false whorls.
- 3 Is your tree about the same age as you? Record your observations in your journal.



TRY THIS AT HOME

Find a small tree branch on the ground (about 12 inches long). Can you identify what type of tree it came from by looking at the bark? Bring your branch home and decorate it. Use items such as paint, markers, yarn, feathers, beads, and charms to make a one-of-a-kind stick. Will you create a sword to vanquish a dragon, a fairy wand, a tool for writing in the dirt, or a baton for conducting an orchestra?