



Tree Observation

Activity Description:

There are so many trees that look alike but are actually different if you look close enough. This activity will help you learn about the different trees that live around you. The goal of this activity is to observe the variety of trees in your surrounding environment and record your observations through photography and drawing. Enjoy your time outside and remember, these are your neighbors so get to know them!

Materials:

- This activity printout
 - Pencil
 - Notebook
 - Camera
 - Optional: colored pencils/markers
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Trees are...

Trees are defined as perennial (can live for multiple years) plants that have a trunk and branches, typically growing to a considerable height.

Trees are identifiable by looking at the patterns and color of the bark, the shape of their leaves, their seed pods and flowers, the shape of their trunk, the shape of their branches and canopy, their height, and more. For example, pine trees grow tall, with long pointed needles. Oak trees are shorter with crooked trunks and flat lobed leaves.

Trees are of Cultural & Historical Importance

Let's take a look at Picture Canyon in Flagstaff, AZ, for example.

The Northern Sinagua People lived in Picture Canyon from 700-1300 ACE (that's more than 700 years ago!). Picture Canyon's variety in plants and animals and access to water made it possible for people to farm, collect water, and live there. Trees and other plants, such as banana yucca, Gambel's oak, ponderosa pine, and currants, provided food and materials for shelter and tools.

Fast forward several centuries, and Picture Canyon's trees were still being utilized by people but at a whole new scale. From the late 1800s to mid 1900s, northern Arizona ponderosa pine forests were heavily logged. An extensive network of logging railroads, including more than 770 miles of rail line, were built for companies to access and transport the harvested trees. The Greenlaw Lumber Company installed a rail line at Picture Canyon to harvest timber in 1908-1909 using crosscut saws. The railroad beds are still visible in some places around Picture Canyon.

Hikers at Picture Canyon pass by evidence of people's interactions with Picture Canyon, including an old railroad trestle and several petroglyphs. The Sinagua People etched nearly 800 petroglyphs into the canyon walls and boulders. Remember, when you visit cultural sites, please help protect them by not touching the petroglyphs or removing any artifacts.

Check out the [City of Flagstaff's website](#) to learn more about the history of Picture Canyon. How do you think Picture Canyon's story would be different if there weren't any trees there? What if the area was a grassland instead?

Directions:

1. **Find a tree and spend some time drawing a closeup perspective of its bark.** Make sure your drawing shows enough detail to help someone match your drawing to your tree.
2. **Find a leaf of your tree.** You might find that your tree's leaf has 3-5 leaves attached. If so, that's okay—these are called leaflets! If the tree's leaves are too high, see if you can find any fallen leaves on the ground. Please **draw your leaf**.
3. Now **take a picture of the tree bark and leaf that you found.** Make sure enough detail is visible to help someone match your picture to your tree.
4. **Write down any thoughts or observations** about the tree's bark and leaves. For example, "The bark has dark brown and reddish brown puzzle-shaped pieces that flake off."
5. **Repeat this process at least three times with three different trees,** but you are encouraged to keep going!

6. **Optional: Expand your learning.** Trees have important anthropological uses. Many people, historically and currently, use parts of trees for medicine, ceremony, tools, shelter, food, jewelry, and more. Do some research to identify some ways people have connected with your local tree species. Some common species in Arizona include the following: ponderosa pine, Gambel's oak, oneseed juniper, and pinyon pine. Record what you discover on the back of this paper.

7. **Share your learning with Seeds of Stewardship.** Send us your photos and drawings, and tell us about what you observed:
 - Post your photos to Instagram and tag [@aztsos](#)
 - Or email your photos to
 - julie@aztrail.org for Northern AZ
 - treven@aztrail.org for Southern AZ

Did you discover anything new about a tree you hadn't noticed before?