



Build a Tree

A Collaborative Role-Play About Tree Structure and Function

Students role-play the different parts of a tree in this team building exercise as they learn about the parts of a tree and their function in helping a tree survive.

GRADES PREK, K-2

SCIENCE, DRAMA

ROLE-PLAY

NO MATERIALS

Instructions

This activity is best conducted outside or in a class-sized space where students can get loud. The facilitator will choose small groups of students to represent each part of the tree so the whole class can become a living model of an entire tree. The parts of the tree and associated actions are listed here. Tell your students that they will be acting out the parts of a tree.

For an advanced version of this game with more complex tree anatomy for older students, check out this version of [Build A Tree \(California ReLeaf\)](#).

Roots

Roots gather water and nutrients. They also stabilize the tree and connect with other trees' roots. Have three to four students lay on the ground with their arms outstretched. Say, "Tree roots grow out wide and hold onto other tree roots so the tree can grow extra tall. They also gather up water and nutrients. Roots get to say 'Sluuuuuuuuuurp!' and wave their arms on the ground." Prompt the students by saying "Roots!" so

the students can practice their motion with the sound. Repeat this with each part of the tree's anatomy, adding students for the remaining tree parts.

Trunk

The trunk helps the tree stand tall to reach the sunlight. Water travels up the trunk to all parts of the tree. These students stand in a small circle facing outward. They stick their arms up high and say "Strong and taaall!" as they sway gently in the wind.

Bark

The bark helps protect the tree. These students stand in a circle outside of the students who are the tree trunk. They hold their arms with both fists together and elbows out. Students can say "Back off!"

Branches

Branches hold the leaves and provide homes for other plants and animals that are important to the forest community. Branches stand next to the bark with one hand touching the bark and the other reaching out. These students can say "I hold the leaves."

Leaves

Leaves help gather sunlight so the tree has energy to grow. Students hold the outer hand of the branches and say “Soakin up sunshiiiiine!” as they gather up the sunlight.

Fruits, Flowers, or Seeds

These open when the time is just right. Students can crouch or stand near leaves and say “Grow new trees!” while spreading open their hands or arms.

Tips

Repeat the activity a few times so students can experience being different parts of the tree. Or, practice the same parts so they are familiar with them. The teacher can call out a tree part and all students get in that position and make the sound effect.

Reflection

Ask students to turn and talk to others with these possible prompts:

- Which part of the tree did they represent?
- How does their part help the tree?
- What was the most fun part?
- What did they start to wonder?
- What was something new they learned?

NATIONAL SCHOOLYARD FOREST SYSTEM

The National Schoolyard Forest System™ seeks to create schoolyard forests on PreK-12 public school grounds across the country to directly shade and protect students from extreme heat and rising temperatures due to climate change. This initiative was founded by Green Schoolyards America, and launched with California as the first state in partnership with the California Department of Education, the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection, and Ten Strands.

For more information, visit:
greenschoolyards.org/schoolyard-forest-system



NEXT GENERATION SCIENCE STANDARDS

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- Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics

Crosscutting Concepts

- Structure and Function
- Systems and System Models

Science and Engineering Practices

- Obtaining, Evaluating, and Communicating Information
- Developing and Using Models

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Build A Tree™ is a classic environmental education activity that has been adapted from Joseph Cornell's work. This version with vocabulary for younger students is adapted by Green Schoolyards America with permission from [Save the Redwoods League](#).

Cornell, Joseph Bharat. (2015). *Sharing Nature: Nature Awareness Activities for All Ages*. Nevada City, CA: Crystal Clarity Publishers. More information at <https://www.sharingnature.com/>.

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