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 from PLT that introduces the concept of **forest cycles.**

Activity 23: The Fallen Log

It's amazing how many things live in and on rotting logs. In this activity, kids become familiar with some of those organisms by observing fallen logs. They'll gain an understanding of how *decomposition* takes place and a better appreciation for *microhabitats* and *communities*.

Doing the Activity

Take your grandchild, neighbor's child, or others for a walk in the woods. Look for a fallen log or rotting tree stump. Conduct a thought exercise by asking, "What happens to a tree after it dies?" Investigate the answer by using powers of observation:

- How did the tree die and how long has it been dead?
- Are there signs of animals, including insects, in, on, or around the log? How about plants?
- How are they interconnected?
- Where do these living things get the nutrients they need to survive?

Be careful not to disturb the *habitat* as you observe. You could use a digital camera—or sketchbook—to record pictures of anything you see. Use field guides or the internet to identify and research them later. Finally, brainstorm ways in which the forest ecosystem benefits from the fallen log you examined.

For a children's story book that illustrates many creatures a child could find under a fallen log, see *What's Under the Log?* by Anne Hunter, published by Houghton Mifflin, 1999, ISBN: 0395754968.

Adapted from Activity 23: The Fallen Log from Project Learning Tree's *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*.

Do this word search puzzle to discover some important components in this microhabitat. Look below for the answers.

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

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WEST VIRGINIA TREE FACT

Slash from timber harvests can return valuable nutrients to forest soil, provide habitat for insects and small mammals, and protect young seedlings from browse until they become established.

Discover how PLT can help you teach… from nature!

- Attend a workshop near you to receive PLT activity guides, ideas, and materials.
- Contact Cinda Francis, West Virginia PLT Coordinator at cfrancis@wvadventures.net or toll-free at (888) 372-9663.

Answers to word search: ant; bacteria; bee; beetle; decomposition; fungi; habitat; insect; millipede; moisture; nutrients; recycle; soil; spider; termite; wood.

PLT®

Project Learning Tree® (PLT) is a program of the American Forest Foundation.