

1 Overview

A Tree Is Nice is a simple book that helps us remember and appreciate a natural gift that is easily taken for granted. The book refreshes our gratitude for all the wonderful reasons a tree is so nice. This book received a Caldecott Medal for its illustrations in 1957. The simplicity and beauty of this book are not lost on modern times. It is an enduring classic that is a perfect, gentle read-aloud for the young student.

2 Author & Illustrator

Janice May Udry was born in 1928 in Illinois. She developed her love for writing for children while working in a Chicago nursery. *A Tree Is Nice* was her first book. Other books to her credit are *The Moon Jumpers* and *Let's Be Enemies*.

Marc Simont (November 23, 1915 - July 13, 2013) was born in Paris, France. While a child, he spent a lot of time in France, Spain, and the U.S. Since his father was an illustrator for a French magazine, he credits him as his most influential art teacher. His artwork is characterized by loose outlines saturated with watercolor. His book *The Stray Dog* was a Caldecott Honor Book in 2002.

3 Before You Read

- Talk about what kinds of trees fill the sky: tall trees, full of leaves, like oak trees or evergreens.
- What kind of trees live: by rivers, on hills (like the willow in the picture)?
- Can you imagine a world without trees?
- Have you ever been to the desert or a big city without trees and green space? How does that feel?
- The book reminds us that not only is the tree itself nice but the parts of the tree are nice, like leaves that whisper and fall and produce bonfires, or trunks and limbs that serve as seats, swings, and playthings.
- Discuss the many benefits of the tree. A tree can:
 1. give fruits and flowers
 2. serve as homes and safe getaways for animals
 3. offer toys (sticks)
 4. provide shade and resting spots
 5. protect people and homes from heat and wind
 6. produce oxygen

It takes patience to grow a tree, but the book reinforces that the results are well worth it.

4 Vocabulary

- bonfire** — large outdoor fire
- hoe** — tool used for weeding and gardening
- buggy** — a stroller in which the baby can lie down

5 Picture Review & Comprehension

NOTE: When you see a * you should turn the page, and when you see two ** you should turn two pages.

- This book rotates between watercolor pictures and black-and-white sketches. Notice the boy in the first picture. What do you think he likes about the trees?*
- The picture of the boy fishing shows weeping willows. How is a tree nice when fishing? (shade, stick for a pole)
- Why do you think it is called a **weeping willow**?**
- Why is even just one tree nice?* (it has leaves, the leaves whisper in the breeze all summer long)
- In the fall, what can you do with the leaves?* (play, walk, and roll in the leaves; build playhouses, make a bonfire)
- How is a tree fun for children?* (climb and see over all the yards, play pirate ship)
- What are all the activities the kids are doing in and around the tree? (climbing, playing pretend, sleeping, picking apples, etc.)
- What kind of fun do you have with a tree?*
- How are fruit trees nice? (pick the fruit)
- What kinds of fruit grow on trees?* (apples, pears, oranges, bananas)
- How do animals benefit from trees?* (build their homes, hide from predators, shade)
- In the swing picture, how are the children using the tree?* (to hang a swing, to hang flowers, to lean a hoe against, to relax in the shade)
- Why do the cows like trees?* (for the protection from sun)
- The family members on the picnic are all enjoying the restful shade of the tree. Would the picnic be as restful if there were no tree? Why?* (No. It would be hot, they would not be able to lean against it to rest, and it would not be as pretty.)
- Why would you want a tree near your house? (The tree shades the house to keep it cool and protects the house from wind.)
- Do you have trees near your house?*
- How does a tree protect the house?* (It holds off the wind, keeps the wind from blowing off the roof.)
- Talk about the steps it takes to plant a tree. (see Language Lesson)
- Will the tree be big next year?* (Talk about how some trees grow very quickly and some very slowly.)

6 After You Read

- See if the students can remember all the wonderful gifts of the tree. Make a list of all the ways a tree is nice! (fills up the sky, very beautiful; provides shade, sticks, leaves that whisper in the breeze; in the fall you can play, walk, roll in the leaves, build playhouses, and have a bonfire; fun to climb, good to lean against to rest; hang swings, ropes, and flowers; make apples, pears, oranges, and bananas; cats can get away from dogs, birds build nests to live there, cows can rest in the shade; keeps your house cool, protects it from the wind)
- What would you add to the list? (Christmas trees, tree houses, bird nests, blooming trees)

7 Language Lesson

Towards the end of the book, a good example of sequencing is given. The author explains how to plant a tree. Each step is given in order.

- Ask the children if this section would make sense out of order.
- List the steps. Write these together in complete sentences. Stress the importance of sequence in a story.

WEEK 1: PART 2

HISTORY & CULTURE

- Look at a city map. Find streets with which you are familiar.
- Introduce the idea of landmarks (i.e., church, school, library, fire department, hospital, grocery store, etc.).
- Draw a simple map of your neighborhood. Use your map when you go on your science walk.

SCIENCE

- Take a neighborhood walk. Identify trees indigenous to your area, including your yard. Notice the shape, leaves, and bark of the trees. Review these often and throughout the seasons. (Use the Nature Study Guidelines to discuss.)
- Use watercolors or tempera to paint a favorite tree or one that you can observe while painting. Discuss the lines in the tree trunk, branches, and limbs. Discuss shape while painting the leaves, making sure to emphasize that the trees are not always “fluffy” at the top as we usually draw them. Do a painting in each season.
- Resources:**
I Can Name 50 Trees Today! (The Cat in the Hat’s Learning Library)
A Tree Is a Plant (Let’s Read and Find Out)

ART

Birch Forest, 1903, by Gustav Klimt (Art Nouveau), Oil on canvas, private collection

Gustav Klimt (July 14, 1862 - February 6, 1918) was born in Austria-Hungary. Though he was born into a poor family, as one of seven children, he was able to go to school to learn art.

Klimt painted many murals and received a special award from the emperor of Austria, Franz Josef I.

Difficult times later in his life led to a change in his painting style. This new style was very different from what many people of his time were painting. Some of those who liked his new style joined Klimt in a group dedicated to helping other new young artists.

By the end of his career, he worked in the relaxed setting of his home, living the simple life, devoted to his art and family.

MUSIC

Symphony No. 6 in F Major, op. 68, “Pastoral”: I. Allegro ma non troppo by Ludwig van Beethoven

- Music Enrichment Guide: Kindergarten, Week 1* (Links for Kindergarten music can be found here: memoriapress.com/music-kindergarten)

POETRY

“I’m Glad” (*A Child’s Book of Poems*, p. 110)

“I’m Glad” is a sweet tribute to God for making the world as it is. The sing-song meter of this poem makes it easy for memorization.

- “*I’m glad the sky is painted blue*” Who painted the sky?
- “*And the earth is painted green*” Why did the artist choose the color green to represent the earth?
- “*With such a lot of nice fresh air*” What else is between the earth and sky?
- “*All sandwiched in between*” Compare the sky, earth, and air to a sandwich.
- Which words rhyme?

1 Overview

- The well-known and loved classic Christmas carol is illustrated by one of today's most acclaimed artists in children's literature. Each page is a visual, delightful story within itself!

2 Author & Illustrator

Jan Brett was born on December 1, 1949, and she still lives close to the home in which she grew up in Massachusetts. From a young age she knew she wanted to be an illustrator, so she spent a lot of time reading and drawing. She loved her time at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts, Tufts University in Boston, where she further developed her skills in art.

Jan Brett has over thirty-seven million books in print. Her book awards are numerous, but she is best known for *The Hat* and *The Mitten*. Many of her books contain actual architecture and costumes from the countries that she and her husband, who is a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra, have visited.

3 Before You Read

- Be sure to read the Editor's Note in the back of the book for some history about this carol and the Christmas games that accompany it.

4 Vocabulary

- partridge** — a game bird
- turtledoves** — doves known for soft cooing call
- French hens** — hens from France
- colly** — old-fashioned name for blackbird
- a-laying** — that lay eggs
- piper** — someone who plays the bagpipes
- lord** — someone who is a nobleman having authority over others by rank or birth

5 Picture Review & Comprehension

- Jan Brett is renowned for her unique way of telling a story within a story in the details that are around the border of the main illustration. Children love finding the clues the artist gives in the borders as to what will happen next in the story!
- Point out the picture of the partridge on the front cover. Most children are not familiar with this game bird which has a unique feather that hangs over its head.*
- On the title page, notice the winter scene. Where do you think the man on horseback is going? Can you find two ermine in their winter coats?
- Does the countryside home give a hint as to the time period in which this book takes place?*
- After the title page is a lovely spread with the music for "The Twelve Days of Christmas," a traditional English Christmas carol. Do the instruments look like they are from the past or present?*
- What gift did the man give his true love first? (a partridge in a pear tree)
- Would you like this gift?
- In the border art, notice the man on horseback at the left, while his true love's house is on the right. Their story will unfold on the right and left throughout the book.
- At the bottom right and left, Jan Brett will have different animals with the words "Merry Christmas" in different languages. On this first page, what animal does she draw? (squirrel)
- In what language is Merry Christmas written? (English)
- Along the top will always be Christmas ornaments that coordinate with the main text of the page. Find the partridge ornament and the pear ornament.*

- What did the true love give on the second day of Christmas? (two turtledoves)
- What are the man and his true love doing? (He is standing in the door and she is running to greet him.)
- Do you think they are a family?
- What animals are at the bottom? (turtles)
- Buon Natale means “Good Christmas” in Italian.*
- Do you think French hens really wear wigs and fancy dresses?
- What do you think the true loves are getting ready to do? (take a sleigh ride)
- What animals do you see? (hedgehogs)
- What are they doing? (decorating cakes)
- Joyeux Noël means “Joyous Christmas” in French.*
- What did the true love give on day four? (four colly birds)
- What are the true loves doing? (walking in the woods)
- What would they be doing in the woods?
- Do you see the four blackbirds in the trees above them?
- What animals do you see at the bottom? (badgers)
- God Jul means “Good Christmas” in Norwegian.*
- What winter animal did the illustrator use in this picture to hold the gold rings? (snow owls)
- What is the man doing with the evergreen tree? (chopping it down)
- Why would he do that? (for a Christmas tree)
- Zalige Kerstdagen are the words “Blessed Christmas” in Dutch.*
- On the sixth day, what gift did the true love give? (6 geese)
- What are the man and his true love doing? (riding home, the sleigh is carrying a Christmas tree)
- What animals are at the bottom? (foxes)
- Wesołego Bozego Narodzenia means “Happy Birth of God” in Polish.*
- Now where do you think the man and his true love are going with the tree?
- What do you think they’ll do?
- What new animals are at the bottom of the page? (rabbits)
- Счастливого Рождества means “Happy Christmas” in Russian.*
- Would being a milk-maid be fun?
- What is happening with the tree? (The children are getting ready to decorate it.)
- Where do you think the man and his true love are?
- What animals are at the bottom? (kittens)
- Fröhliche Weihnachten means “Merry Christmas” in German.*
- Would nine drummers drumming be a nice Christmas gift?
- What are the man and his true love doing now? (decorating the tree)
- Do you think the children are part of their family?
- What animals are at the bottom of the page? (mice)
- Boldog Karácsonyi Ünnepeket means “Merry Christmas Festivities” in Hungarian.*
- Have you heard bagpipes before?
- What country do you think they are from?
- What is the family doing now? (Mom and daughter are baking cookies, and dad and son are putting them on the tree.)
- What animals are at the bottom? (birds)
- Nollaig Chrìdheil means “Merry Christmas” in Scottish.*
- The ladies dancing are dressed in Spanish clothes. Can you guess what country they are from? (Spain)

- What is the little girl doing? (stringing berries and popcorn)
- What is the little boy doing? (helping mom to hang the strung berries and corn)
- What decorations at the top represent the ladies? (fans)
- What new animals are at the bottom? (dogs)
- Feliz Navidad means “Happy Christmas” in Spanish.
- What decoration represents the lords a-leaping? (shoes)
- What is the family doing now? (hanging the ornaments)
- Do you think the man really gave his true love all those things or just ornaments for the tree?
(turn the page to find out!)*
- Try to locate something from each day of Christmas on the tree!
- Happy New Year!

6 After You Read

- Go back through the story and look at the way the author dressed the animals and/or people in the focal part of the pictures. The animals are dressed in the traditional clothing of the country whose language translates Merry Christmas by the animals at the bottom of the pages. Remember, Jan Brett traveled extensively to research these details.

7 Language Lesson

- Try to recall all twelve days in order. Write the number word and draw an illustration for each. Bind to make your own book of *The Twelve Days of Christmas*!

WEEK 14: PART 2

HISTORY & CULTURE

- Read the Christmas story in the Bible. Then, read Isaiah 9:6 (*For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace*). List all of the names by which Jesus is called. Discuss the meaning of each of these names.

SCIENCE

- Do your students know reindeer are real? Learn about reindeer/mammals. What other animals look similar to reindeer? (deer, moose) Where do reindeer live? (Arctic and Sub-Arctic) What do they eat? (leaves and grass) How are they born? (as live young - not hatched from eggs)
mammal: warm-blooded, hair-covered, vertebrate (backbone)

ART

Sistine Madonna, 1513-1514, by Raphael (Renaissance)
Oil on canvas, Gemäldegalerie Alte Meister—Dresden, Germany

Raphael (1483 - April 6, 1520) was born in a little Italian town, was brought up around court life, and was set as an artist's apprentice by his father. He became a master artist at the very young age of seventeen. He soon moved to Florence, Italy, to study the greats, Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo.

Raphael went to Rome the same year Michelangelo began his work on the Sistine Chapel. Pope Julius II soon became his patron, and Raphael decorated several rooms now called the Raphael Rooms in the Vatican Palace. Some of his most recognized pieces were done on the walls in the palace, including *The School of Athens*. But Raphael was probably best known for his Madonnas.

This painting was made for the monastery of San Sisto in Piacenza, Italy, at the request of the Benedictine monks. Mary is holding the Christ child while Saint Sixtus and Saint Barbara are beneath them. The two cherubs at the bottom of the piece are quite famous in themselves and have been copied without the rest of the piece. This altarpiece was the last one completed by Raphael.

MUSIC

“The Twelve Days of Christmas,” English Carol of French Origin

- Music Enrichment Guide: Kindergarten, Week 14* (Links for Kindergarten music can be found here: memoriapress.com/music-kindergarten)

POETRY

“An Old Christmas Greeting,” Nursery Rhyme (*A Child's Book of Poems*, p. 53)

- Read the poem several times.
- What do you think it means to twine mistletoe and holly? (make a wreath)
- Why do friendships glow in winter snows? (When it is snowy and the weather is too bad to play outside, you play with your friends.)
- What does it mean to be jolly? (happy)

1 Overview

This book was chosen for the lovely illustrations and the timelessness of the hymn.

2 Author & Illustrator

Cecil Frances Alexander (April 1818 - October 1895) was born in Ireland. As a child, she wrote poems which were religiously influenced, and this was true of her work throughout her life.

She wrote hymns which were included in Church of Ireland hymnals. Her songs were very popular. They included the Christmas carol "Once in Royal David's City," which was known worldwide, as was her translation of "Saint Patrick's Breastplate." Cecil married a clergyman who was a poet himself. Throughout her adult life, she was known for her generous charitable donations.

Bruce Whatley was born in the United Kingdom but moved as a child to Australia, where he resides today with his family and a Boxer dog that is in many of his picture books.

The illustration style is watercolor. Each page is a panoramic view.

3 Before You Read

- Make a list of things in nature that are bright.
- Make a list of things in nature that are beautiful.

4 Vocabulary

- bright** — emitting or reflecting light
- creatures** — living beings
- wonderful** — especially good
- pleasant** — delightful
- ripe** — ready to be picked
- greenwood** — woods that are green (Old English term)
- meadow** — a grassy area
- rushes** — plants that grow by the water, whose stems are used for basket-making
- gather** — to collect

5 Picture Review & Comprehension

- Identify the creatures in every picture.
- What things are bright and beautiful in this picture? (the day, the flowers, the dog, the butterflies, the bird, the grass, the leaves, the trees)
- What creatures do you see? (dog, bird, butterflies)
- What is the girl going to do? (chores)
- What season do you think it is?* (spring)
- Who in the picture is wise? (the horses)
- Where is the girl now? (in the barn)
- What is she doing?* (feeding the horses)
- What animals do you see? (chicken, horses)
- Do you think she is feeding the horses a meal or an extra treat?
- Does she ever ride the horses? (Yes, there is a saddle in the picture.)
- Do the children live with the horses?* (No, children live in houses.)
- What creatures are in this picture? (birds, butterflies, a ladybug)

- What is the titmouse (bird) in the picture doing? (singing)
- Does the girl enjoy the song?* (Yes, she is smiling.)
- What animals have glowing colors? (baby chicks)
- What tiny-winged animal does the girl take care of?* (a baby chicken)
- Do you see the purple-headed mountain?
- Who is the girl's main companion in this story? How do you know? (the dog, he is with her again)
- Where is the sunset?
- What is the opposite of a sunset? (sunrise)
- Notice how the sunset colors give a glow to the girl, tree, dogs, fence, grass, and sky.*
- Review the four seasons.
- Does the girl enjoy the sunshine? (Yes)
- What flowers do you see? (daisies)
- Is it a windy day?* (Yes, her hair is blowing in her face.)
- What is the girl doing with the fruits? (picking them)
- What kind of fruit is it? (orange)
- What other fruits grow on trees? (apples, pears, bananas)
- Where do you think the girl is going with the fruit? (home)
- What do you think her mother will make with the fruit?*** (a pie, applesauce)
- After seeing all the places the girl has been, where do you think she lives? What were the clues? (a farm - horses, pigs, chickens, cows, haystacks, a barn)
- Which animals does she care for, and which are wild? (She cares for the dog, horse, chickens, pigs, and cows. The wild animals are the ducks, birds, insects, frogs, and rabbits.)
- What can we do to help care for the wild animals? (not disturb them)
- In the picture of the family, who are the people there? (mom, dad, brother, and grandpa)
- What flowers do you recognize? (pansies)
- What are we supposed to tell with our lips?* ("How great is God Almighty, who made all things well")
- When the girl lies in bed to gaze at the moon and stars, what do you think she is thanking God for? (for her good day, her beautiful farm, all the animals, all the flowers, her family, etc.)

6 After You Read

- Pray and thank God for all the things on the list you made in the Before You Read section.

7 Language Lesson

- Since the text in this book is taken from a well-known hymn written in the 1800s, some of the phrases seem a little foreign to us today. Can you think of some examples? (purple-headed, river running)
- Alternating lines of this hymn rhyme.
 1. all, small
 2. sings, wings
 3. by, sky
 4. sun, one
 5. play, day
 6. tell, well
- Talk about the imagery in the story.
 1. purple-headed mountain and a running river
 2. Does a mountain really have a head?
 3. Does a river really "run" like you run?
- Talk about how some words that rhyme are spelled alike, but some words that rhyme are spelled differently.

HISTORY & CULTURE

- Discuss birds in your area. Are there favorite nesting spots near your home? Take a walk to spot or hear various birds.

SCIENCE

- Introduce the concept of migration. Point out specific birds that you see in your area year-round and birds that disappear seasonally. Look at migration patterns for those birds.
- No two bird types follow the same path from beginning to end. All species differ in distances, times of starting, speed of flight and geographical position. Generally, migration is the north-to-south movement. It is more concentrated near the coasts, mountain ranges, and principal rivers.
- Resource:** *How Do Birds Find Their Way?* (Let's Read and Find Out)

ART

The Peaceable Kingdom, 1826, by Edward Hicks (American Folk Art)
Oil on canvas, National Gallery of Art—Washington, D.C.

Edward Hicks (April 4, 1780 - August 23, 1849) was an American painter known for his farm scenes and landscapes in a folk style. He was a Quaker who framed his works with edifying verse. *The Peaceable Kingdom* was his best-known work. In it, the famous Quaker William Penn is pictured on the left making a treaty with Native Americans, with the beasts all around and children playing.

Hicks painted over a hundred versions of this picture, the theme of which was taken from Isaiah, chapter 1.

MUSIC

“The Lark Ascending” by Ralph Vaughan Williams

- Music Enrichment Guide: Kindergarten, Week 34* (Links for Kindergarten music can be found here: memoriapress.com/music-kindergarten)

POETRY

“Hurt No Living Thing” by Christina Rossetti (*A Child's Book of Poems*, p. 16)

For a biography of **Christina Rossetti**, see Week 10.

