



A tree

*Standing uncomplaining in your place
where wind or chance or fate
hath cast a seed
which grew and thrived
sent down its roots apace
through fire and drought
grew tall and strong and flowered
then to the wind cast seed...*

*standing unmoving
unmovable cannot escape
a fire a flood the rain
the cold wind and sun you face
boldly unflinchingly
green magic in your leaves
as you make the very oxygen we breathe
pollution free even until life's end.*

Written by: Rob Greenwood

The author – Rob Greenwood – very generously gave the AOP permission to include
“A tree”© in its Education Website.

(In special recognition of “2011 – The Year of the Forests”.)

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Teachers’ Notes – Possible Focus Questions / Discussion Topics

After having read and re-read this poem, take some time for quiet reflection.

1. The tree which Rob Greenwood has described, has grown and thrived in spite of many natural obstacles or threats.
 - 1a. What were some of these threats?
 - 1b. Have you ever faced any of these natural threats? If so, what are your recollections of the experience?
2. Although the “cycle of life” is not actually mentioned, this poem certainly elicits such thoughts. Why is this so?
3. Explain what you think Rob Greenwood means when he says that there is “green magic in your leaves”.
4. We need trees for many reasons. In the last two lines, one of our most important needs is mentioned.
 - 4a. Which one is actually named?
 - 4b. Bearing this in mind, if deforestation continues, how will this affect people?
5. Why do you think that Rob Greenwood gave this poem such a simple title?
6. Why do you think that Rob Greenwood wrote this poem?

Further Research:

Most humans like to think that we have some control over our lives. Imagine what it would be like to be a tree, rooted to the ground and apparently unable to change your circumstances.

- Are trees totally unable to change their circumstances?

The book entitled “Tree – A life Story”, by David Suzuki and Wayne Grady is filled with wondrous information. For instance on page 6 it is stated that:” Trees cannot run or hide or swat attacking predators, but they are not helpless victims. Their bark behaves like a coat of armor, and they make a variety of potent compounds that act as toxins or repellents to invaders. If attacked by insects, trees can produce volatile compounds that not only repel the insects, but also warn neighbouring trees of danger and stimulate them to synthesize the repellent.” They also go on to say that, “In the soil, roots of the trees in a community may mingle and actually fuse, thereby allowing the trees to communicate, exchange materials, and help each other out.”

- Were you aware of these capabilities?

- What other fascinating facts can you discover about trees?

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Teachers’ Notes – Possible Activities

It is highly unlikely that Rob Greenwood composed this beautiful poem with just a superficial observation of a tree.

Especially in 2011 – “The International Year of the Forests” - it is recommended that we gain a deeper knowledge and understanding of the importance of forests. To begin this process, really observing a single tree would be an advisable start.

- If undertaking this project, the tree should ideally, be close to your home. If this is not possible, choose a tree in an area which you frequently visit. eg. school, park, or the home of a relative, friend or neighbour.
- Another option if you have very limited garden space is to plant a tree in a pot. (Although you would not be able to initially observe an established tree, it certainly would be ideal for a long-term study.) This also has the advantage of being movable if you relocate to another area. There is a huge selection of possibilities. For instance, you could choose a tree such as a woolly bush or a wollemi pine which could be used as a Christmas tree for many years. Another different possibility is a miniature fruit tree.
- Care for your tree and use it as a place of quiet reflection. Try to observe your tree in as many different circumstances as possible. You may keep a “Tree Diary” in which you note or sketch anything you choose. (Rubbings of bark and leaves add another dimension.) Continue to do this for as long as possible.
- Once you feel that you have gained any insights about your tree, devise a way to convey your discoveries and feelings to others. This could be through various forms of writing, drama or music.

Other Activities

- Give trees as gifts – especially to celebrate a birth or birthday.
- Some Shire Councils (eg Kalamunda in Western Australia), have a “Commemorative Tree Planting Programme to celebrate the births of its newest residents. Parents are invited to assist with the plantings in local parks, and each young tree has a plaque with the child’s name, date of birth and a short inscription. Contact your council to see if it has such a programme.
- Learn about Wangari Maathai – the winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. She is a truly inspirational woman. She is also known as “Mama Miti” – “The Mother of Trees”. Many books have been written about her. eg.
 - “Seeds of Change” by: Jen Cullen Johnson,
 - “Wangari’s Trees of Peace” by: Jeanette Winter and
 - “Mama Miti” by: Donna Jo Napoli (See Resources Section.)
- Read books which other people have written about their relationships with trees. Eg “Our Tree Named Steve” by: Alan Zweibel (See Resources Section.)