

## PLT Summary



Project Learning Tree (PLT) is widely recognized as one of the premier environmental education programs in the world. Through hands-on, interdisciplinary activities, PLT helps young people learn how to think, not what to think, about their environment. Below are the overviews of the 96 activities that are part of the *PreK-8 Environmental Education Activity Guide*. The materials are arranged under five major themes that fit a conceptual framework:

- Diversity
- Interrelationships
- Systems
- Structure and Scale
- Patterns of Change.

PLT's interdisciplinary activities may include:

- higher-order thinking skills
- technology connections
- differentiated instruction
- constructivism
- reading connections
- cooperative learning
- critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
- authentic assessments (evaluation opportunities designed to match the instructional goals)
- copy-right free student pages
- background information for educators

*PLT is a program of the American Forest Foundation and is co-sponsored in Connecticut by the Connecticut Forest & Park Association and Department of Environmental Protection.*

Correlations to the Connecticut Curriculum Framework in science, mathematics, language arts and social studies were completed in 2009.

### Activity Overview

#### **DIVERSITY**

**Throughout the world, there is a great diversity of habitats, organisms, societies, technologies and cultures.**

#### **Activity 1: The Shape of Things**

As humans we depend on all of our senses-touching, tasting, hearing, smelling, and seeing- to gather impressions of our environment. Our brains sort out the diversity of sizes, colors, and shapes that we see. In this activity, students will focus on the many shapes that are found in both natural and built environments.

#### **Activity 2: Get in Touch with Trees**

By the way of trees in the neighborhood and a mystery box, students will explore their sense of touch and discover different shapes and textures in nature.

#### **Activity 3: Peppermint Beetle**

In this activity students will explore their sense of smell and discover why smell is important to animals, including themselves.

#### **Activity 4: Sounds Around**

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Our ears are constantly being bombarded with sound-so much so that we automatically “tune out” a lot of it. Some sounds are “music to our ears,” while others can annoy us and even damage the delicate structures in our ears. This activity helps students “tune in” to the sounds in their environment and helps them identify and lessen local noise problems. They also learn how different sounds in nature inspire cultural stories.

#### **Activity 5: Poet-Tree**

Writing and sharing poems gives students an opportunity to express their thoughts, values, and beliefs about the environment and related issues in creative and artistic ways. You can do this activity in combination with Activity 21, “Adopt a Tree,” to allow students to explore their adopted tree through poetry. You may also adapt the activity to explore parts of the environment other than trees and forests, such as art or architecture.

#### **Activity 6: Picture This!**

Students learn about the diversity of life on the Earth by looking at different pictures of plants and animals around the world.

#### **Activity 7: Habitat Pen Pals**

By becoming “habitat pen pals,” your students will learn about the diversity of habitats around the world and will write letters from the perspective of organisms living in these habitats.

#### **Activity 8: Forest of S.T. Shrew**

Through a read aloud, students will take a “shrew’s-eye-view” of life in the woods to gain an appreciation for the variety of living things that make forests their home, and for the variety of habitats within forests.

#### **Activity 9: Planet Diversity**

In this activity, students will pretend they are visitors from outer space, viewing life on Earth for the first time. By describing, in minute detail, all the life they find in a small plot of land, they will become more aware of the diversity and abundance of life on Earth and will better understand its importance.

#### **Activity 10: Charting Diversity**

Students will explore the amazing diversity of life on Earth and discover how plants and animals are adapted for survival. This activity provides a basis for understanding why there are so many different species and the value of biodiversity.

#### **Activity 11: Can It Be Real?**

A beetle that drinks fog. A flower that smells like rotting meat. A fish that “shoots down” its prey. Are these plants and animals for real? In this activity, your students will discover extraordinary plants and animals, and will gain insight on how they are uniquely adapted to environmental conditions.

#### **Activity 12: Invasive Species**

Throughout history, people have intentionally and unintentionally moved plant and animals species to new environments. Some of these species have proved beneficial, but others invade natural habitats causing environmental and sometimes economic harm. Students will research invasive species to determine how these species got to their new locations and what characteristics make them so challenging.

#### **Activity 13: We All Need Trees**

Students are often surprised to learn how many different products we can get from trees. Use this activity to help your students learn just how much we depend on our trees daily lives.

#### **Activity 14: Renewable or Not?**

Students often do not know which resources are renewable and which are recyclable or reusable. In this activity, students will learn what these terms mean and discover why sustainable use of natural resources is so important.

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**Activity 15: A Few of My Favorite Things**

Here's a way to give your students a better appreciation for how many natural resources they depend on in their day-to-day lives. By tracing the resources that go into making one item, they will learn how the manufacturing of just one product can have an impact on the environment.

**Activity 16: Pass the Plants, Please**

Spaghetti. Fried rice. Tortillas. Vegetable soup. Thanks to plants, these and many other favorite foods are ours to enjoy. This activity will get your students thinking about just how big a part plants play in our daily diets.

**Activity 17: People of the Forest**

To the Mbuti of Africa, the Pesch of Latin America, and other peoples around the world, the forest is home. More than just a place to live in, the forest provides their basic needs. By comparing and contrasting different forest peoples, both past and present, your students can learn about some of the ways people have depended on the forests throughout history.

**Activity 18: Tale of the Sun**

Every culture in the world has stories that are part of its history and tradition. These stories reveal information about the environment and perspectives of the people who tell them. In this activity, your students can analyze a story told by the Muskogee (Creek) Indians of present-day Oklahoma. Later, students can read and discuss stories told in other cultures from around the world.

**Activity 19: Viewpoints on the Line**

This activity is designed to get students thinking about and expressing their views and to listen to those of their classmates. It helps students explore the underlying assumptions that shape our opinions. You may wish to use this activity on a regular basis to give students a chance to evaluate their opinions as they learn more about environmental issues.

**Activity 20: Environmental Exchange Box**

Preparing an environmental exchange box will give your students a chance to learn more about their own region and the things that are special about it. Then, when they receive an exchange box from another region, they can compare environments, people, and much more.

**INTERRELATIONSHIPS**

**The ecological, technological, and socio-cultural systems are interactive and independent.**

**Activity 21: Adopt a Tree**

Students "adopt" a tree, deepening their awareness of individual trees over time and encouraging a greater understanding and appreciation of their local environment.

**Activity 22: Trees as Habitats**

From their leafy branches to their tangled roots, trees provide a habitat for a host of plants and animals. In this activity, your students will inventory the plants and animals that live in, on, and around trees and discover how plants and animals depend on trees in many ways.

**Activity 23: The Fallen Log**

It's amazing how many things live in and on rotting logs. In this activity, your students will 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.

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**Activity 24: Nature's Recyclers**

It's amazing how many organisms live off dead organic material and recycle those materials back into life. In this inquiry-based activity, your students will devise an experiment to investigate the eating habits of one of these creatures. They will gain both an understanding of how decomposition works and an appreciation for some of nature's less-heralded organisms.

**Activity 25: Birds and Worms**

Camouflage is an important survival strategy in the animal kingdom. In this activity, students will discover the value of protective coloration as they pretend to be birds in search of colored worms or bugs.

**Activity 26: Dynamic Duos**

Organisms in an ecosystem depend on each other for food. But they may also depend on each other for protection or shelter. In this activity, students will learn about different types of symbiotic relationships.

**Activity 27: Every Tree for Itself**

Try this active simulation to give your students an understanding of the conditions that trees need to live and grow and to help your students learn that trees must often compete for their needs.

**Activity 28: Air Plants**

Plants play a part in every breath we take. Use the activity to help your students understand the process of photosynthesis, and how people depend on this process (and plants) because of the production of oxygen.

**Activity 29: Rain Reasons**

Rainfall, sunlight, and temperature are important factors influencing where plants can grow and, in turn, where animals can live. In this inquiry-based activity, students will design experiments to see how these climatic factors influence the growth of plants. They will explore how plants are adapted to local climate and how varying climate conditions have resulted in a variety of forest types in Puerto Rico and Honduras.

**Activity 30: Three Cheers for Trees**

It's easy to take for granted both trees and the many benefits they provide. In this activity, students picture how their community would be different without trees and think about how much trees add to people's lives.

**Activity 31: Plant a Tree**

Never underestimate the power of a tree! Besides giving us an amazing array of paper and wood products, trees provide a host of other benefits - from shading our backyards to assisting in the maintenance of the global climate. Students can express their appreciation of trees by planning and carrying out their own tree-planting project.

**Activity 32: A Forest of Many Uses**

Privately and publicly owned forests are often managed to provide many different resources. In this activity, students will learn how forests are managed to meet a variety of human and environmental needs.

**Activity 33: Forest Consequences**

Few issues, if any, have simple solutions - and resolving them usually involves compromise. In this activity, your students will learn about some of the effects that human activities can have on a forest. They will explore some of the trade-offs involved in working out a land-use issue.

**Activity 34: Who Works in this Forest?**

All kinds of people work in the forest - from foresters to loggers, from scientists to naturalists. Everyone depends on properly managed forests for recreation, essential products, and a healthy environment. This activity provides students with an overview of forest-related careers.

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**Activity 35: Loving It Too Much**

National parks are the treasures of any nation. Yet national parks today struggle with serious dilemmas. By looking at problems in America's national parks, students can begin grappling with some tough environmental issues that affect parks locally and globally.

**Activity 36: Pollution Search**

Here's a way for your students to take a closer look at pollution: what it is, what its sources are, and what people can do to reduce it.

**Activity 37: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle**

By taking a look at their own trash, your students will learn a lot about how and why they throw things away. Students will also conduct a service-learning project, and in doing so find ways to cut down on the waste they produce and improve how waste is managed in their community.

**Activity 38: Every Drop Counts**

It's easy to waste water and even easier to take water for granted. Water pours out of our faucets as though it were endlessly available. But the truth is that the supply of good quality fresh water is limited. Fortunately, it's just as easy to conserve water as it is to waste it. This activity will help your class (and maybe the whole school) cut back on water waste.

**Activity 39: Energy Sleuths**

There are different sources of energy. Some are renewable; some are nonrenewable. In this activity, your students will learn about the different sources, advantages and disadvantages to their use, and how energy is used in their daily lives.

**Activity 40: Then and Now**

If your community is like most others, it's now quite a bit different than it was 100, 50, 25, or even five years ago. By viewing pictures and interviewing elders, your students will understand how we, as people, affect and alter the environment in which we live.

**SYSTEMS**

**Environmental, technological, and social systems are interconnected and interacting.**

**Activity 41: How Plants Grow**

A plant is a biological system that needs sunlight, water, air, nutrients, and space for functioning and growing. In this inquiry-based activity, students design experiments to explore what happens when a plant's basic needs are unmet.

**Activity 42: Sunlight and Shades of Green**

This activity introduces students to photosynthesis, the process that enables trees and other green plants to use sunlight to manufacture their own food. Students will test what happens when they block sunlight from the leaves of a tree, and then they will interpret their findings.

**Activity 43: Have Seeds, Will Travel**

A plant is a biological system. Its systems, processes, and components enable it to grow and reproduce. By observing, collecting, and classifying seeds, students are introduced to one aspect of a plant's reproductive system.

**Activity 44: Water Wonders**

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The water cycle is the system by which Earth's fixed amount of water is collected, purified, and distributed from the environment to living things and back to the environment. Through a game and an experiment, this activity will introduce students to various steps of the water cycle and will help them make connections between the water cycle and all living things.

#### **Activity 45: Web of Life**

By conducting research and simulating a food web, students will take a close look at a forest ecosystem and discover ways that plants and animals are connected to each other. While this activity focuses on forests, you can also use it to study other ecosystems, such as oceans, deserts, marshes, or prairies by substituting the appropriate information.

#### **Activity 46: School Yard Safari**

Every organism requires a place to live that satisfies its basic needs for food, water, shelter, and space. Such a place is called a habitat. In this activity, students will go on a safari to explore a nearby habitat- the schoolyard- while looking for signs of animals living there.

#### **Activity 47: Are Vacant Lots Vacant?**

Look closely and you will see that a vacant lot is not so vacant! Plants of all kinds thrive in vacant lots, along with a host of animals such as insects, birds, and mammals. In this activity, a nearby vacant lot, overgrown strip, or a landscaped area will provide a rich laboratory for students to examine elements of an ecosystem.

#### **Activity 48: Field, Forest, and Stream**

In this inquiry-based activity students will conduct a field study of three different environments as they focus on sunlight, soil moisture, temperature, wind, water flow, plants and animals in each environment. By comparing different environments, students will begin to consider how nonliving elements influence living elements in an ecosystem.

#### **Activity 49: Tropical Treehouse**

While tropical rainforests and the temperate forests of North America operate on many of the same ecological principals, they differ greatly in their climates, and in the types of soil, plants, and animals that make up the forest ecosystems. Students will explore the rainforests in different ways: researching rainforests inhabitants, mapping the route of neotropical migratory birds, and analyzing a case study involving a tropical rainforest.

#### **Activity 50: 400-Acre Wood**

In this activity, students will play the role of managers of a 400-acre (162 hectare) piece of public forests. Through this role, students will begin to understand the complex considerations that influence management decisions about forest lands.

#### **Activity 51: Make Your Own Paper**

Students investigate the papermaking process by trying it themselves. Students are thrilled to find that they can make paper and that their product is practical, as well as beautiful. See the PLT website, [www.plt.org](http://www.plt.org), for images of the paper-making process used in this activity.

#### **Activity 52: A Look at Aluminum**

Aluminum is a nonrenewable, but recyclable, natural resource that we use every day. In this activity, students sequence the steps that go into making aluminum products and participate in a service-learning project to encourage aluminum recycling in their community.

#### **Activity 53: On the Move**

Students will compare various transportation methods for getting to and from school, and research transportation systems used in their community.

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**Activity 54: I'd Like to Visit a Place Where...**

Students will develop an understanding of the value of recreational areas and facilities, and why these areas are established nationally and locally. By working on a service-learning project to improve a local park, students will also learn about the community's system for managing open spaces.

**Activity 55: Planning the Ideal Community**

A human community is a system of facilities, services, resources, and human relationships that enable people to live in a particular place. In this activity, students survey the area around their school to look for the components of the human community in which they live. They then plan an ideal community that meets all the needs of its residents.

**Activity 56: We Can Work It Out**

When certain people decide how to use a particular piece of land, the decision can involve and affect many people in many ways. Therefore, groups must establish processes for planning and resolving conflicts about land-use. In this simulation, students will develop a plan to address a land-use issue. While this activity focuses on land-use, the process can be adapted to examine other issues in your community.

**Activity 57: Democracy in Action**

Democratic systems depend on the involvement of citizens in policy-making and decision-making. This activity will help students learn about the roles and responsibilities of citizens' groups in environmental policies and decision-making, and about how young people can become involved in the process.

**Activity 58: There Ought to be a Law**

In democratic societies, citizens have the power to influence the lawmaking process. In this activity, students examine why and how groups develop rules, find out how local laws are made, and then create a poster presentation on the process for passing a law they propose.

**Activity 59: Power of Print**

Newspapers keep the community informed about current events and trends. In this activity, students will examine articles from different sections of the newspaper, comparing and contrasting the different types of words and styles they employ. Then students research opposing sides of a local environmental issue, and write both news articles and opinion pieces on the issue.

**Activity 60: Publicize It!**

Students will plan and conduct a service project, and obtain skills in using media to inform others in the community about their project. This activity can be done in conjunction with any of the service-learning or action projects in this activity guide.

**STRUCTURE AND SCALE**

**Technologies, societal institutions, and components of natural and human-built environments vary in structure and scale.**

**Activity 61: The Closer You Look**

All students, no matter how young, have an idea of what a tree looks like. But many are unfamiliar with the actual structure of a tree. In this activity, your students will go outdoors or view pictures to take a closer look at trees and their parts.

**Activity 62: To Be a Tree**

By making a tree costume, your students will gain an awareness of a tree's structure and functions.

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**Activity 63: Tree Factory**

By acting out the parts of a tree, students will learn about the structure of a tree. They create a tree factory.

**Activity 64: Looking at Leaves**

Are leaves ever hairy? Do they have teeth? In this activity, students will take a closer look at leaves and find out more about leaf characteristics and how leaves can be used to identify plants.

**Activity 65: Bursting Buds**

In early spring, the tiny, bright green leaves of many trees burst forth. Where do the leaves come from? How do they form? In this activity, your students will find the answers to these questions on their own by observing tree buds throughout the year.

**Activity 66: Germinating Giants**

In this activity, your students sharpen their math skills by comparing their local trees to the world's tallest tree, the coast redwood, and to the tree with the largest seeds, the coconut palm.

**Activity 67: How Big Is Your Tree?**

Trees come in various shapes and sizes. In this activity, students will measure trees in different ways and become familiar with the tree's scale and structure. They will also learn the importance of standard units of measure and measuring techniques.

**Activity 68: Name that Tree**

Tree species can be identified by looking at several different features: leaves, bark, twigs, flowers, fruit, and seeds. Even the overall shape of a tree can give clues to the tree's identity. In this activity, your students will learn more about trees through these identifying features. Afterward, they can play an active game that tests their knowledge of different types of trees.

**Activity 69: Forest for the Trees**

In this activity, students will role-play managing a tree farm. By using a piece of land as a tree farm, they will begin to understand the economic factors that influence management decision for private forest lands.

**Activity 70: Soil Stories**

In this inquiry-based activity, students will explore differences in soil and what those differences mean to people and to plants.

**Activity 71: Watch on Wetlands**

If a duck can paddle in it, it's a wetland. If a duck can waddle on it, it's not. If only wetlands could be defined as simply as this, wetlands issues and legislation would be less muddy. In this inquiry-based activity, students will conduct field studies in a local wetland and learn how land-use decisions and legislation affect wetlands.

**Activity 72: Air We Breathe**

Did you know that the air in our homes, schools, and offices can sometimes be less healthy than the air outside? In this activity, students will learn about indoor air quality and what they can do about it.

**Activity 73: Waste Watchers**

Energy seems easy to use, but obtaining it is often not easy on the environment. When we reduce the amount of energy we use, we decrease the pollution that results from producing that energy. In this activity, your students conduct an audit of the energy they use in their own homes and create an action plan to reduce energy use.

**Activity 74: People, Places, Things**

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By taking a closer look at their community, students can gain an appreciation for its structure and complexity. In this activity, students will develop a deeper understanding of the many people, places, and things on which they depend every day.

### **Activity 75: Tipi Talk**

Whether it's a 100-room palace or a small hut mad of branches, all human shelters serve the same basic purposes: they provide privacy, shelter from inclement weather, and protection from danger. In this activity, your students will take a close-up look at one kind of dwelling - the tipi used by Plains Indians- and will discover how homes can give clues about the lives of people who live in them.

## **PATTERNS OF CHANGE**

**Structure and systems change over various periods of time.**

### **Activity 76: Tree Cookies**

One way to learn about tree growth is to look at annual rings. Tree rings show patterns of change in the tree's life as well as changes in the area where it grows. In this activity, students will trace environmental and historical changes using a cross section of a tree, or "tree cookie."

### **Activity 77: Trees in Trouble**

Like humans, trees can become weak and unhealthy, suffer injury, and die. People have learned to read the symptoms of unhealthy trees in order to help them. In this activity, students will examine trees for signs of damage or poor health. They will also conduct a series of experiments to determine the conditions that may cause plants to become unhealthy.

### **Activity 78: Signs of Fall**

In temperate regions, people can observe the annual change of seasons. In this activity, students will look for signs of autumn. They will also try an experiment to discover why leaves of deciduous trees change in the fall.

### **Activity 79: Tree Lifecycle**

In this activity, students will discover that trees have a lifecycle that is similar to that of other living things. They will investigate a tree's role in the ecosystem at each stage of its life.

### **Activity 80: Nothing Succeeds Like Succession**

Succession is a natural pattern of change that takes place over time in a forest or other ecosystem. In this activity, students will read a story about succession, and investigate the connection between plants, animals, and successional stages in a local ecosystem.

### **Activity 81: Living with Fire**

Students learn about the three elements a fire needs to burn and find out how an understanding of this "fire triangle" can be used both prevent and manage wildland fires.

### **Activity 82: Resource-Go-Round**

This activity gives students the opportunity to explore a variety of natural resources and products that people depend on everyday. They learn about product life cycles, using a pencil as an example, and then research a specific product to find out the sources of its various components.

### **Activity 83: A Peek at Packaging**

Nearly everything we buy comes in some sort of package. Packaging, made from a variety of renewable and nonrenewable resources, is necessary to protect an item, keep it fresh, make it tamper-proof, and make the item

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easy to transport and store. In this activity, students will examine the pros and cons of different packaging strategies.

#### **Activity 84: The Global Climate**

Using data control from Mauna Loa, students will graph changes in atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) over a 46-year period, and identify possible reasons for those changes. They will also learn about the relationship between CO<sub>2</sub> and the Earth's climate, and explore ways to reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> they generate.

#### **Activity 85: In the Driver's Seat**

In this activity, students keep a log of their family's transportation for a week, learn how petroleum is refined, and then explore fuel conservation and energy efficiency by simulating the distance they can travel using different vehicles.

#### **Activity 86: Our Changing World**

Patterns of change are evident in the Earth's global systems, particularly as they relate to both energy and resources. To help students see how changing one aspect of our world affects others, students make a graphic organizer connecting natural resources, energy, and human activities. They also research a global issue, thereby gaining an understanding of some of the issues facing us today as global society.

#### **Activity 87: Earth Manners**

Children are naturally curious about their environment. They should be encouraged to explore the out-of-doors, living things and their habitats. In this activity students will develop a set of guidelines for exploring and enjoying nature.

#### **Activity 88: Life on the Edge**

Patterns of change can be observed in the diversity of species on Earth. In this activity, students will become advocates for endangered species of plants or animals and create "public relations campaigns" on behalf of these species.

#### **Activity 89: Trees for Many Reasons**

By reading fables such as *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss or *The Man Who Planted Trees* by Jean Giono, students can examine the importance of conserving natural resources.

#### **Activity 90: Native Ways**

Patterns of change can be observed in human uses of natural resources. In this activity, students read three different statements attributed to Chief Seattle and Chief Luther Standing Bear, and compare and contrast the attitudes these statements reflect about natural resources.

#### **Activity 91: In the Good Old Days**

Human attitudes and values, and therefore behavior, with regard to the environment can change over the course of generations. In this activity, students express their own views about forests, and then read excerpts from the writings of different authors who have influenced people's thinking about the environment.

#### **Activity 92: A Look at Lifestyles**

By examining the historical attitudes of American Indians and the American pioneers toward the environment and natural resources, students can reflect on their own lifestyles, and identify trade-offs between simple subsistence and modern technology-based living.

#### **Activity 93: Paper Civilizations**

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Humans have always had a strong need to record the events of their lives. From cave painting to writing paper, humans have preserved their history in many ways. In this activity, students create a mural about the history of papermaking and discover how it has changed over time.

**Activity 94: By the Rivers of Babylon**

Throughout history, people have depended on natural resources for survival. The availability of food, water, and other resources has generally determined where humans have settled and how cultures evolved over time. In this activity, students read about an ancient civilization and create “before” and “after” pictures that describe its decline.

**Activity 95: Did You Notice?**

In this activity, students will study changes in their local environment over short and long periods and will identify patterns of change.

**Activity 96: Improve Your Place**

Each living thing has a habitat – a place to live that suits its needs. For human beings, the community they live in is their habitat. In this activity, students are encouraged to plan and carry out a service-learning project that focuses on making positive environmental changes in their community.