

Treemendous Tree Essay Contest

Get outside, get to know a tree, and get creative! For a chance to have your work featured on our website and social media, enter your essay in the SLA Treemendous Tree Essay Contest.

You can find details, resources, and recommendations for your future essay below.

Tree Biography

*This activity is recommended for ages 10 and up, but depending on individual writing abilities, younger kids may excel at this too. This activity is meant to be completed over the course of a week or two. **Remember, if you are submitting work for the essay contest, the deadline is April 15th. We will post the winner on April 22nd, Earth Day!***

Objective: To encourage people to spend an extended period of time outside while practicing their writing skills. Writing a biography on a person typically means spending a lot of time with them, or researching them, and doing so with a tree is no different. You and/or your student will hopefully spend a lot of time over the course of a few days with the tree, and who knows, it may become a new study spot once you see how refreshing and productive working outside can be! There will be two prompts for this activity, one scientific and one literary!

Scientific Prompt: Go outside in your backyard or a nearby park that you can walk to (with parent's permission). Now, look around and pick out a tree that catches your eye that you can go up and examine without disturbing or crushing other bushes and plants. It may be helpful to pick one that you already know what it looks like when it's in full bloom, since many trees don't have their leaves yet. Using your field guide resources, start with simply identifying what kind of tree it is. After you feel confident in your identification, you can check online by googling the name of the tree and making sure the pictures match up to the real thing!

Once you are certain what kind of tree it is... research it! Is the tree native to New Hampshire or is it an introduced species? Where else can you find this tree in the world? What kinds of adaptations does it have? How does it reproduce? What kinds of animals use this tree, and what for? Do humans use the tree for anything? How does the tree affect or contribute to our watershed's health? There are even more questions to be asked here, but you will have to do some digging to find out everything there is to know about your tree! Writing a few pages of all of your research will help you find information for the second prompt more easily.

Literary Prompt: After you have learned everything there is to know about your tree scientifically, it's time for you to teach us about it! You will be writing either a biography or a short story about your tree, and here you may be as creative as you want, maybe you'll even write from the tree's perspective! Be sure to incorporate a lot of your scientific findings into your story, use those findings as "character development" to allow your audience to get to know the tree almost as well as you. Maybe your tree dreamt of a great adventure, maybe your tree wished to be crafted into something, maybe your tree takes a lot of pride in being a home for

animals, or maybe you'll just write about a normal day in the forest with your tree. The possibilities are endless. While your story should incorporate the science you spent so long researching, you don't have to include every little fact you've found out about your tree. But, it will certainly help you write your story and get your creative juices flowing when trying to fit the ecology into the art. Remember, this is not a research paper, it should be fun, silly, and imaginative! *For the contest, we're asking that submissions be at least one page but no more than four.* You may also include an illustration or photo of your tree.

If you or your child are having a hard time deciding what to write about, here are some additional age appropriate prompts! You may use these for the contest, too!

Grades 3-5: Write about a time that your tree lended a helping hand (or branch) to something in the forest!

Grades 6-8: Tell us about a great adventure your tree went on!

Grades 9-12: Tell us about how your tree came to the spot it currently lives!

Adults: Write about a tree that lives on the shoreline of Squam and all that it encounters!

Some good resources for tree ID and history:

Field guide: <http://cortland.cce.cornell.edu/resources/know-your-trees>

ID dial: <https://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/media/48346/leaf-idial-sheet.pdf>

Interactive Tree ID*:

https://naturalresources.extension.iastate.edu/forestry/iowa_trees/tree_id.html

*this is a fantastic resource to help you identify a tree by leaves and branches, but if you do not have a lot of evergreens, this may be more challenging if you are not in an area where spring is in full swing.

Tree ID videos (better for HS age): https://forestry.ca.uky.edu/tree_id_videos

Penn State Trees and Me: this PDF has a lot of lessons and extra activities that your child may find helpful when learning about their tree

<https://ecosystems.psu.edu/youth/sftrc/lesson-plan-pdfs/trees-me-forestry>

UNH links: <https://extension.unh.edu/resource/identifying-trees-and-shrubs-new-hampshire>

Lots of resources all compacted onto one page!

