

# LISTENING TREE

## Activity 8

AGE LEVEL = 9-11 (5-13)  
DURATION = 30-45 min.  
LEARNING STATION = Forest  
RELATED ACTIVITIES = None

WHEN =  



**UNDERSTANDING:** Auditory awareness in a natural setting.

**SPECIAL NOTE:** If the children are of various ages, have the older children team up with the younger children.

**MATERIALS:**

- A listening tree “sound map”  
For each child:
- Clipboard and paper (see Activity A)
- Crayons of four different colors
- A tree 10 inches in diameter or greater

**PREPARATION:** Select any forested area (with enough trees per child) where the children can scatter and not see each other. Gather the clipboards and crayons for distribution. Create your own sound map by running through the activity in advance, and be prepared to share it with the children.

**LESSON:**

**Warm-up:** Find a quiet, comfortable spot in the woods and form a sharing circle. Ask the students what they like to do in the woods. Have any of them ever sat quietly in the woods and listened?

Explain that there is a special way to hear all the woods’ sounds. Tell them that the tall trees are magical listening trees, with large antennae that pick up all the sounds. We can hear those sounds by choosing a listening tree. We plug into it by sitting with our backs tight against the trunk. Explain that the magic will work only if they remain as still as possible.

**Activity:** Send the children to find a tree and have them listen for five minutes. Call them back and in a sharing circle discuss the sounds they heard. Before sending them back to their trees a second time, tell the following story about “forest elves” to help the children focus their hearing:

Ask if anyone heard any forest elves while they were listening. Explain that forest elves are very secretive, mystical creatures. Whispering, explain that no one has ever seen a forest elf because they’re very quick. You can see them out of the corner of your eye, but they disappear as soon as you turn your head. Forest elves don’t want to share the sounds of the magical listening trees, so they sneak behind you and whisper things like: “I’m hungry,” or “I wonder what my friend is doing,” or “I can’t wait until I get home to play” — anything to distract you from listening to the magic trees. So, “this time when you return to your trees, switch those forest elves off and tune in to the magical listening trees!”

Hand a clipboard and four crayons to each student. Explain that they are going to map out the forest sounds they hear. Have everyone put an “X” in the middle of the page to represent their magical listening tree. Discuss symbols they could use for sounds they hear. Share your magical listening tree “sound map” to provide clues for the children and/or participate in the activity with them.

After 10 to 15 minutes of listening and mapping, break into small groups of three or four. Within groups, compare notes: the causes of sound; intensity of sounds heard; and how the sounds made the students feel (allow five minutes).

Wrap-up: Pull the group together and discuss: What can sounds tell you about the woods? Will a different kind of wood (deciduous vs. coniferous) have different sounds? Why? How would these woods sound if you returned to the same spot in three, six or nine months? How did you feel about the human-made sounds compared to the natural sounds? What did you learn about yourself? Did certain sounds frighten you? Anger you? Make you feel happy?

#### OPTIONS AND FURTHER EXPLORATIONS:

1. Unless there is an electrical storm or a torrential downpour, find a nice, large crowned tree under which to conduct the activity while it is raining. A whole new set of sounds is yours during a rainy day.
2. Once indoors, make a guessing game with sounds. One student makes a sound (no actions), and others guess what it is, then discuss their feelings or experiences with that sound (i.e., a bird call, tree creaking, squeaky door and so on.)