

Weekly Lesson Plan: The World Inside a Tree

An interdisciplinary lesson plan for a 3rd-grade student based on "One Small Place in a Tree" by Barbara Brenner.

Materials Needed:

- **Book:** "One Small Place in a Tree" by Barbara Brenner
 - **Art & Craft Supplies:**
 - A shoebox or small cardboard box for the diorama
 - Construction paper (brown, green, blue, etc.)
 - Modeling clay (various colors) or salt dough ingredients
 - Twigs, leaves, moss, small stones (collected from outside)
 - Glue, scissors, tape
 - Crayons, markers, or colored pencils
 - **Writing & Observation Tools:**
 - A blank notebook or journal (for Nature Journal/Field Guide)
 - Pencils
 - Magnifying glass (optional but fun)
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Weekly Learning Objectives

- **Science:** Student will identify a tree as a micro-habitat and describe how at least three different organisms (animals, insects, fungi) depend on it for food or shelter.
 - **Language Arts:** Student will write descriptive sentences about organisms observed or learned about and organize these observations into a simple field guide format.
 - **Art & Design:** Student will construct a 3D diorama representing the tree habitat, demonstrating an understanding of the spatial relationships between the organisms and their environment.
 - **Critical Thinking:** Student will explain the concept of a life cycle and ecological succession as it relates to a tree (from living tree to decaying snag).
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Daily Lesson Breakdown

Day 1: The Tree as a Home

- **Focus:** Introduction to Habitats, Observation Skills
 - **Reading:** Read the first half of "One Small Place in a Tree." Pause to discuss new vocabulary like "pupa," "larva," and "grub."
 - **Main Activity (The Nature Walk):**
 1. Go outside to a yard or local park. The mission is to find one special tree to "study" for the week. It doesn't need a hole, but look for interesting features: peeling bark, moss, fungus, or insects.
 2. Use the Nature Journal to document the tree. Draw the whole tree. Then, draw close-up details of the bark, leaves, and any signs of life. Write down observations: What does it feel like? What do you smell? What do you hear?
 3. Collect a few natural items for the diorama (fallen leaves, small twigs, a piece of bark, a
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small stone).

- **Discussion Questions:**

- What makes a tree a good home?
- The book started with a bear's claw mark. What other ways could a hole form in a tree? (Woodpecker, lightning, broken branch).

Day 2: Building the World

- **Focus:** Habitat Construction, Reading Comprehension

- **Reading:** Read the second half of "One Small Place in a Tree."

- **Main Activity (Diorama Creation - Part 1):**

1. Take the shoebox and turn it on its side. This is the stage for your tree habitat.
2. Use brown construction paper to create the inside of the tree hole. Wrinkle it to make it look like wood grain. Glue it to the back and sides of the box.
3. Use collected twigs and leaves to decorate the "forest floor" at the bottom of the box.
4. Create the exterior of the tree on the outside of the box using paper or by gluing on collected bark.

- **Discussion Questions:**

- Why did different animals use the same hole? Were they all there at once?
- How did the tree change throughout the book?

Day 3: The Inhabitants Arrive

- **Focus:** Animal Life, 3D Modeling, Scale

- **Review:** Look back through the book and make a list of all the creatures that used the tree hole.

- **Main Activity (Diorama Creation - Part 2):**

1. Choose 3-5 creatures from the list to create.
2. Use modeling clay or salt dough to sculpt the animals. Pay attention to their features (a raccoon's mask, a mouse's long tail, a salamander's smooth skin).
3. If using clay, you can also create fungus (like the shelf fungus from the book) to add to the tree.
4. Carefully place the finished, dry creatures inside and around your diorama. Think about where they would realistically be (e.g., the mouse inside the hole, the woodpecker on the outside).

- **Discussion Questions:**

- Would a bear and a family of mice use the hole at the same time? Why or why not? (Discussing competition and timing).
- Which animal do you think was the most interesting? Why?

Day 4: The Naturalist's Field Guide

- **Focus:** Descriptive Writing, Research, Illustration

- **Main Activity (Field Guide Creation):**

1. Using the Nature Journal from Day 1, dedicate a new section to be a "Field Guide to My Tree."
2. For each animal created for the diorama, dedicate one page in the journal.
3. On each page, draw a picture of the animal.
4. Write the animal's name at the top. Below the drawing, write 2-3 descriptive sentences about it.
 - **Sentence 1:** What does it look like? (e.g., "The raccoon has a black mask and a striped, bushy tail.")
 - **Sentence 2:** How does it use the tree? (e.g., "It uses the tree hole to stay safe and warm during the day.")
 - **Challenge:** Add a third sentence with a fun fact you find online or in another book.

- **Discussion Questions:**

- Why are field guides useful for scientists and explorers?
- If you were an animal, which one would you be and why?

Day 5: The Ecologist's Presentation

- **Focus:** Synthesis, Oral Presentation, Ecological Concepts
- **Main Activity (Show and Tell):**
 1. The student presents their finished diorama and Field Guide.
 2. They should act as a "park ranger" or "ecologist," guiding you on a tour of their tree habitat.
 3. They should introduce the tree, point out the inhabitants, and use their Field Guide to share facts about each one.
 4. Encourage them to tell the "story" of their tree, explaining how one animal made way for the next.
- **Concluding Discussion (Big Ideas):**
 - The book shows that even a dead or dying tree is full of life. Why is it important to leave dead trees (snags) in a forest?
 - What is one small thing we can do to help the creatures in our own backyards or neighborhoods? (e.g., leave some leaves on the ground, plant native flowers, provide a source of water).

Assessment

Assessment is based on the completion and quality of the creative projects and the student's ability to articulate their understanding during discussions and the final presentation.

- **Diorama:** Is the habitat thoughtfully constructed? Are at least 3 different organisms included and placed logically?
- **Field Guide:** Does the guide include drawings and descriptive sentences for each creature from the diorama? Is the writing clear?
- **Oral Presentation:** Can the student explain the role of the tree as a habitat and describe the relationship between at least two of its inhabitants?