

# Each Tree is Holy: Holiness in Nature and the Basics of Tree Identification

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**SUMMARY:** Look around! Do you see the vast and mystical expanse of nature? Or do you see an Oak tree, Sugar Maples, Pine Trees, Dandelions, and ladybugs?

**GOALS:** Participants will learn the basics of identifying trees, recognize differences in trees when they observe nature, and feel connected to the holiness of nature, through the big and the small.

**AUDIENCE:** Ages 10+, but could be adjusted for younger ages (less frontal learning and more exploration!)

**TIMING:** 45 minutes

**MATERIALS:** Pencils for each participant, Tree Identification handout: 1 per participant (look up how to fold a zine to turn the handouts into little booklets)

**SET-UP:** This activity can take place anywhere in nature! (ideally during the day when you can see small details well)

## SESSION TIMELINE

- 00:00-00:03 – *Introductions*
- 00:03-00:06 – *Heading to the Woods!*
- 00:06-00:10 – *Observation Meditation*
- 00:10-00:20 – *Stop 1 (pine)*
- 00:20-00:30 – *Stop 2 (oak or maple)*
- 00:30-00:40 – *Stop 3*
- 00:40-00:45 – *Reflections*

## SESSION OUTLINE

*00:00-00:03 – Introductions*

- Facilitator introduces self and invites everyone to do the same, and share a favorite plant, flower, tree or phenomenon of nature

*00:03-00:06 – Head into the Woods!*

- The facilitator leads participants from the initial meeting spot to the first stop in nature, prompting everyone to take note of 2-3 things they observe on the way.

- Upon arriving, the facilitator asks: What did you all observe on the way here? (*Any level of detail is okay, from noticing a specific bug to noticing how blue the sky is today*)

*00:06-00:10 – Observation Meditation*

- After letting participants share initial observations, facilitator gives participants 2 minutes to sit, stand, or walk around, and write down more specific observations about the area in their Tree ID booklets. After 2 minutes participants can share some of the things they observed.
- Ask:
  - Does this space feel different than before your observation? How? What changed?
  - Does it feel bigger or smaller?

*Teach these words to describe leaves and have participants follow along with pictures in their booklets:*

- *Needle-like (like a pine tree!)*
- *Scale-like (like a cedar)*
- *Broad (think oak or maples)*
  - *Opposite (leaves arranged opposite each other on the stem) vs. Alternate (leaves alternate on the stem)*
  - *Simple (single leaf attached to woody stem) vs. Compound (central stalk with several **leaflets**)*
    - *Pinnate (arranged like a feather) vs. Palmate (arranged like the palm of your hand)*

*00:10-00:20 – Stop 1 (pine)*

- The facilitator walks participants to find the first stop (a pine tree) and asks participants to point out things they notice about this tree. They should draw leaves and note anything else they see about the tree (facilitator should make sure to know the name of the specific tree stop beforehand). Facilitator can ask participants to identify if the leaves are needle-like, scale-like, or broad, opposite, alternate, simple, or compound.

*00:20-00:30 – Stop 2 (oak or maple)*

- The facilitator should repeat the steps of stop one with a maple or oak tree! On the way there, the group can identify other pine trees. If there is extra time, the facilitator can use the Acorn and Nut Identification Guide to let participants try to identify different trees by acorns and nuts.

*00:30-00:40 – Stop 3 (TBD)*

- Facilitator should choose one more tree to stop at that is pinnately or palmately compound. Look up trees in the area like this!

*00:40-00:45 – Reflecting on this experience*

- Facilitator asks participants to reflect with these questions:
  - How did it feel to learn the names of these trees? Did you recognize any of them?
  - Does knowing more about specific trees change how it feels to look around outside? How?

To conclude, share: Nature is the biggest and the smallest thing surrounding us. It is so vast and incomprehensible, and yet there are infinite things to learn just looking at the smallest parts. When you understand the difference between two trees, the world outside grows even larger.

## **BRINGING IT TO YOUR CAMP**

This activity will differ depending on the types of trees at your camp! I would recommend looking up “common native trees in [state or region]” and seeing if any tree identification guides come up. Some states have guides made by the department of forestry, but most regions will have some sort of unofficial guide to trees in the area. While it is easiest to facilitate this activity if you have a little bit of experience identifying plants, but with a little bit of practice, anyone could run it! If your camp has some sort of nature track or activity, this could be a great way for campers to begin to develop an appreciation for all the diversity and beauty in nature.