



Nature Connection Activity #9:

Time:
40 – 60 minutes

Year Levels:
Years 4 – 8

Activity #9 Link:
Download the activity that corresponds to this guide -
[Getting to Know Your Trees](#)

Materials Needed:
Pen, paper, drawing materials

Curriculum Areas:
SOCIAL SCIENCES **ENGLISH**
THE ARTS

Getting to know your Trees

Mōhiotanga i ngā rākau

Background:

Trees (rākau) have been here long before we arrived on this planet and will be here long after we are gone. The power, beauty and wisdom of trees and forests (ngāhere) have been noted by many cultures including Māori. Scientific studies show that trees calm us and provide spiritual and creative inspiration.

Being able to notice, connect with, recognise and name our trees and plants is one of the first steps you can take to respecting and valuing it, just as knowing someone's name is the first step to a relationship and potentially a friendship. This activity is a way of connecting students with trees in their school grounds in an experiential way.

How to facilitate:

Start in the classroom:

1. Introduce the topic of trees (rākau)

Ask what the class knows. What makes a tree a tree? How tall do trees grow? Why are different types of trees? What trees grow in New Zealand? What are native trees and what are some examples? Why are these particularly special? What do you like / not like about trees? What do they provide us? What lives in and around trees? How does being among trees make you feel? Do you know any stories to do with trees?

Here are some links to aid this discussion:

<https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2636-what-is-a-tree>

<https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/2635-the-uniqueness-of-new-zealand-plants>

2. Optional media to include

These resources may help to explain the points you want to focus on. We suggest you review these in advance to choose the most age-appropriate for your students and to find the snippets that work best)

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=517u5FMQxHA (A short educational video on trees - the science talk would suit some older students)
- www.doc.govt.nz/nature/native-plants/ (Information to research on different native species in NZ)
- [New Zealand Trees](#) (Slideshow to introduce trees made by DOC)





3. Discuss Māori perspectives of trees and the forest

Ask the class what they know about the importance of trees to Māori. Introduce the idea that in Te Ao Māori, trees are part of whakapapa (connections and ancestry) links to animals, people and the environment. Plants and trees are in the domain of Tāne Mahuta (Atua/God of trees and forests).

There are many pūrākau that you could share that would be fitting for this activity as a way of introducing the ways that trees are important to Māori. Here are two examples:

- **Younger Students:**
[Rātā me te Rākau / Rata and the Tree](#)
- **Older Students:**
[Tāne and the Baskets of Knowledge](#) (this is a graphic-novel style video)

Take students outside for the activity

4. Start with a karakia

Open the activity with a karakia. An appropriate karakia to open the activity that shows respect and creates connection with the trees, flowers, and birds is below. Otherwise, you could use a school karakia if you have one [\(Video to assist pronunciation\)](#)

Kua tipu ngā rākau
Kua pūāwai ngā hua
Kua waiata ngā manu
Kua tau te wao
Kua tau, kua tau, kua tau e
Haere mai te āiotanga
Haumi e, hui e, tāiki e

*The trees have grown
The flowers have bloomed
The birds have sung
The forest has settled
It is settled, it is settled, it is settled,
Let the peace be amongst us,
Let us all be as one*

5. Go for a walk to start the activity

Explain the activity to the students. Encourage students to walk around the school grounds. 5- 10 minutes should be enough time to complete their initial observations. This part of the activity can be done as individuals, in pairs, or in groups. Set the boundaries for their hīkoi (walk) and encourage students to take notice of trees they haven't found before.

6. Choose ONE tree to observe closely.

Ask each person to pick ONE tree that appeals to them. Ask that they take a good look at all aspects - trunk, leaf shape, size, edges, under leaves, fruit, flowers, colours, feel, smell, listen, taste. How do you feel when you are with your tree friend?

7. Sharing Time

When students are called back in, you could all sit in the shade of a tree and ask them to share their tree friend in pairs or small groups, using the ideas from (6) to guide their description. What do they remember, what did they notice, why did they pick that tree?

8. Drawing Time

Send them back out to their tree with paper, pencil and book/clipboard to find and draw...

- One leaf (veins, pattern of how they grow from the branch)





- The tree (pattern of the branches growing from the trunk or off other branches)
- Older students may enjoy a free-drawing option

9. Can you find any more?

Ask students to do a slow walk round the school grounds looking for other trees the same as their tree friend

- This part could be done in pairs, so they are sharing their tree with someone else
- Look for features the same in both students' trees
- Can you recognise a sibling of your friend? How can you tell?

10. Write a Short Poem

Use poetry to tell the story of their tree. These could be displayed in the class in the shapes of leaves on a tree (have you got space on a wall for a tree mural?) or hang poems off a collected dead branch to create a poem tree.

- seasons, climbing in/on, shade it provides, the oxygen trees provide, the timber, the canoe, something about what we as humans can do for trees!

Links to curriculum:

Level 1-4 English, Level 1- 4 Social Sciences, Level 1-4 The Arts

Extension activities:

This activity can be adapted to be easier or create further challenge for your students. Consider the following:

- For younger students ask them to come up with a game that involves their tree or group of trees and have them try it out with some friends. For example a version of hide and seek. Play is a great way to connect young people with their environment.
- Build up a regular daily or weekly practice of the students sitting under their tree. A few minutes would do for a young child, but longer for older participants. There is something about trees that can help a person slow down and be fully present. Students can simply use this time to quiet the mind, becoming calm and present. Or they can use this time to engage all your senses to notice what is happening around you and wonder why that is so. See resource below.
- Back in the classroom research the different names of their tree (common, Latin and te reo Māori). They could use these web links to help them or find a book in the library.
<https://www.treesthatcount.co.nz/native-trees/>
https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nztrees&hl=en_NZ&gl=US
- Extra research questions to find out more about the trees:
 - How is your tree special to Māori?
 - Does it have any medicinal uses? If yes, what are they?
 - Find out more about its growth, flowers, seeds and special properties/features.
 - What are the native trees that are endemic to your region?
- Build a whole enquiry around trees and forests, including a visit to your local ngāhere, researching what the land was like near your school before European settlement, and/or connect with a local restoration project to take action for the environment. Ask your students to come up with their own area of enquiry that they are interested in. Use the resources below.
- Have a go at growing plants from seed - <https://5adayeducation.org.nz/learning/primary/lesson-1>





Related resources:

Resource Area	Integration with Activity	Link
Tree rings video	Information about a tree's life through its rings for younger students	www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwNJC-IRgPE
How paper is made video	How paper is made	www.youtube.com/watch?v=7IP0Ch1Va44
Te Waonui a Tāne – forest mythology	Background to the importance of the forest to Māori – includes stories, symbolism, whakatauki (Māori proverbs).	https://teara.govt.nz/en/te-waonui-a-tane-forest-mythology
Drawing inspiration from the wisdom of trees	Link to a great picture book about trees, plus activities a class can do to find inspiration from trees.	https://www.theclassroombookshelf.com/2021/11/drawing-inspiration-from-the-wisdom-of-trees/
Experiencing native trees in your greenspace	An education resource from the Department of Conservation	https://www.doc.govt.nz/globalassets/documents/getting-involved/students-and-teachers/experiencing-native-trees-in-your-green-space.pdf
The meaning of trees book	A book that explains the meaning of many New Zealand native trees to Māori, including their rongoā (healing) properties.	https://meaningoftrees.com/tag/maori/
Land, Air, Water Aotearoa (LAWA)	Landcover database showing changes in land use over time in different parts of NZ	https://www.lawa.org.nz/explore-data/land-cover/
Sit Spot activity	This resource explains how you can build a sit spot into your daily or weekly teaching practices	https://d1tfm8vclptj.cloudfront.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Sit-spot-assignment.pdf?x60225

Ngā kupu

Rākau – tree or stick
Pene rākau – pencil
Pūrākau - story
Rau – leaf
Hīkoi – walk
Ngāhere – bush, forest
Rongoa – plant medicine

