

Tree of Life

The World of the African Baobab

By Barbara Bash

This book ties in beautifully with Maggie's latest adventure to Africa. The life cycle of the African baobab tree is told in rich detail and supported by captivating illustrations. Adults and children alike are fascinated by the quantity of life this tree supports. The reading of the story becomes an experience where the concept of ecology and the value of a single tree are easily grasped.

Unfortunately this book is no longer in print, but available in most public and school libraries.

Listed below are a few ideas that may be applicable to your grade level's units of study.

MATH:

- The African baobab can grow to forty feet across and sixty feet high. Have your students do the African baobab thinker.

LANGUAGE ARTS:

- Students write an animal guide for some of the animals presented in the story. Information about the animal is presented in note form. These two activities can be found in

the Teachers' Lounge section, Herd of Elephants? Parts 1 and 2, under Language Arts.

- Students write other facts about the baobab (e.g., the different names for the tree, dimensions, life span).
- Students use the vocabulary from the book to find words within words.

ART:

- Students create a **huge** baobab tree.
- First have a group of students make the trunk. It could be available during center/group time. The tree trunk could be created with torn paper, bark, cork, and then painted. Be creative!
- Each student makes one crazily shaped branch. **(Think big.)** The branches are then put together to create the tree.
- Students make the animals and other life forms that are dependent on the tree for food and shelter. Paste Styrofoam packaging pieces to the backs of the animals. Let dry. Paste animals to the tree. This will make the animals stick out and make the mural more 3-dimensional. (Post the children's animal guide and their other fact sheets around the tree.)

SCIENCE:

Ecology/Habitat:

- Students can make accordion books to record all plant and animal life dependent on the tree for food and shelter.

Food Chain:

- Students discuss the food chain presented in the story.
- Make thick arrows that the students can paste onto the tree to show the relationships between the plant and animal life. Students write a sentence on individual arrows. For example, Fruit bats drink the flower nectar.
- Students label the mural with vocabulary appropriate for your grade level (consumer, producer, herbivore, omnivore, carnivore, prey, predator, decomposer).
- Younger children would enjoy making masks and putting on a play. The sun might say, "I am the sun. Without me the baobab tree could not grow. A fruit bat might say, "I am a fruit bat. I love to drink the flower nectar." Let the children decide. Their text and masks could then be posted on a bulletin board.
- Make a master list of all living things in the story with the whole class. Divide the class into groups. Each group copies the master list on to individual cards. Ask the students to classify the cards in as many different ways as they can. Groups share their classifications.