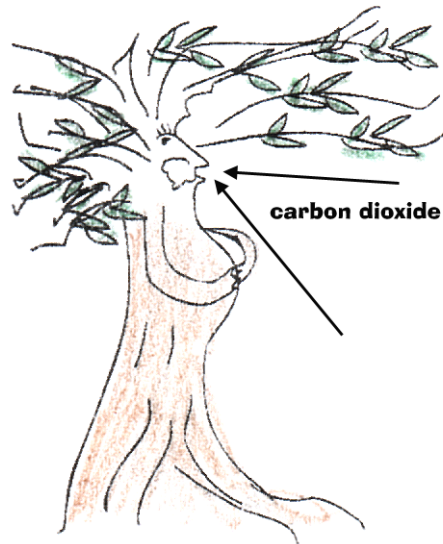


They're Nature's Gift: Trees

Trees Add More Than Beauty to Our Planet

So many poems have been written about the beauty of trees. Have you ever read the poem by Joyce Kilmer that begins, "I think that I shall never see a poem lovely as a tree?" This is a famous poem that is often used to celebrate trees. We know that trees are important homes for animals and birds, too. But trees are also necessary to the balance of nature.



You can think about it in a very simple way – trees take **carbon dioxide** out of our air. They take it and use it! In fact, trees keep much of that carbon dioxide. This line from Joyce Kilmer's poem could read:

I think that I shall never see a carbon eater like a tree.

That's right – carbon that occurs naturally in our air is used by trees. Nature had a great balance going. Animals breathed in air, used the **oxygen**, and breathed out carbon dioxide. Trees took in that carbon dioxide, and they used it. But, when we started burning **fossil fuels** and putting waste carbon dioxide into our air, things got out of whack! Now we have a lot more

carbon dioxide all around us. This adds to the **greenhouse effect**. Many scientists believe it is making our planet too warm.

Using a “Nature – All” Way to Reduce Pollution!

People and companies who are concerned about the environment are trying many different strategies to reduce pollution. You have read about many of these solutions like using **fuel cells** or alternative energy sources such as solar or wind power. One of the important ways that we are trying to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide in our air is to make sure there are enough trees to “eat it up!” This natural way of fighting pollution is called **carbon sequestration**. Carbon sequestration might be a big word, but the idea is simple - people and companies plant trees to make up for the amount of carbon dioxide they put into the atmosphere.

Carbon sequestration is happening all over the world. The Programme for Belize, The Nature Conservancy, and utilities such as Wisconsin Electric Power Company are working together to save 6,014 hectares of endangered forest in Belize. Their project is called The Rio Bravo Carbon Sequestration Project. They plan that this forest will sequester or keep over one million tons of carbon over the lifetime of the project. That’s a lot of carbon that won’t make it into the atmosphere to cause problems.

In Guatemala, partners from Allied Energy Services Corporation and the World Resources Institute (WRI) teamed up to see how a forest in Guatemala could help make up for the amount of carbon that a power plant in Connecticut would put into the air. Not only did they develop good ways to protect the forest and replant trees, but also helped to organize the community to fight fires. This protects the trees even more. The WRI thinks that there will be 15.5 to 58 million tons of carbon kept in the forest over the lifetime of this project!

It Starts With One!

It's not just big companies that are working to save and plant trees. Children can help return the natural balance of carbon dioxide and oxygen to the Earth, too. Children in Sweden worked to raise money to save a rainforest in Costa Rica. They held bake sales, had rabbit jumping contests, and performed songs they had written in shows. They wrote many letters to ask other people for help. The ideas of this one classroom spread worldwide! Today there is a huge network of children's groups that work to save rainforests. The network is called The International Children's Rainforest Network. Imagine that from the idea of that one classroom in Sweden, over 3.5 million U.S. dollars have been raised to save thousands of acres of trees. That's power! Just imagine what you could do!

One person with a strong commitment can make a difference in our world. A woman from Kenya is a good example of this. Wangari Maathai was worried because trees were being cut down for firewood. This is the way most people cook their food in this part of Africa. But cutting down trees meant that topsoil was being washed away. This hurt farming in the area. Wangari Maathai knows the importance of trees, and she wanted to help. She planted seven trees in her yard. But Ms. Maathai didn't stop there! She motivated other people to plant trees, too. A program called the Green Belt Movement was started. Children were the first to become a part of this movement. Today over one million children are working to help plant trees. Many Kenyans even have jobs planting and caring for seedlings. Imagine, because of the idea of one person, Wangari Maathai, over 7 million trees are alive today!

A Team Effort

You can help the balance of nature, too. If you live in Great Britain, Mazda Motors will help you do this. Mazda is selling a new car called the Demio in Great Britain. For every Demio that is sold in one year, Mazda will plant five trees. They have teamed up with a company called Future Forests to do this.

Why five trees, you might ask? Future Forests estimates that it will take five trees to make up for the amount of carbon dioxide that is put into the air each year by this small car. After the first year, car owners can team up with Future Forests to plant more trees so that the carbon their car puts into the air is sequestered by trees. Then car owners can make a difference and help our planet, too!

Look Around You!

More and more we are learning to respect the work that trees do for us. People in cities are realizing that trees provide more than beauty. In fact, a tree planted in a city saves fifteen times more energy than a tree planted in a rural forest. That's because it has the added benefit of providing shade for city buildings and cooling the city in the summer. Planting more trees in cities could help reduce the number of bad smog days, too.

In New York City, people are growing green plants and small trees on rooftops. This can provide food, beauty, and "carbon eaters."

A fourth grader came home from school one day and saw fourteen new, big trees in his backyard. The builder of his house had cut down too many trees to make room for the house. The city told the builder he had to make up for the trees he cut down. This is happening in many places. People are now realizing the important work that trees do to keep our planet safe and beautiful! Look around you. Are there places where trees are protected or need to be protected? Think about what you can do to help. One person has the power to make a difference!

You're an Expert!

Throughout *A Breath of Fresh Air* you have read about the important role trees play in keeping our atmosphere clean and what can happen when forests are cleared. As a class, make a

list of everything you know. Plan on giving a presentation to other classes throughout your school. It would be fun to dress up as trees. You may even solicit the help of your music teacher. Possibly you could write music and sing your information. You may even want to take your presentation “to the streets.” How about making a presentation outside a grocery store to educate the public? You will need to get permission from your teacher, the grocery store, and your parents before doing this. Wouldn’t it be exciting if you made the nightly news?

Take Action...

1. Begin a “Carbon Eater Campaign” in your neighborhood. How many people can you get to plant trees? How many government or city officials or places of business can you persuade to grow trees on top of their buildings?
2. Find out if there is a city ordinance requiring builders to replace trees they cut down. Take action if there isn’t. Write a letter to the editorial page about the importance of having such an ordinance.