

What have the trees seen?

Objective

In this lesson, the Junior Ranger will learn about the history of the land they are on and the people that have inhabited it over time. By learning about the concept of a Witness Tree, they will make the connection between years passed on the land, and years passed in their own lives.

Topic(s) Covered: People and Plants

Materials

Paper plate/piece of paper

Writing/drawing utensil

Background Information

A Witness Tree is a tree that was alive in a location where significant historical events happened. While many people have come and gone since those events, the trees have lived through and “seen” it all.

How do we know how old a tree is? We can tell the age of a tree by counting the rings of growth within the wood. For each year that a tree is alive, it gains another ring which can tell the story of that year. In years where the tree may have lived through stressful times like fire or drought, the ring may be thinner or have marks that look like scars. If the tree had a year full of lots of sunshine and water, the ring would be thick to show lots of good health and growth.

Activity 1

Meet a Witness Tree

Instructions

Take a walk around your neighborhood or favorite Maryland State Park, and think about what the trees around you have witnessed. While the trees cannot talk, the people in your life can. Ask family members, neighbors, or Park Rangers what they think these trees may have “seen” during the tree’s life. Many of the trees around you may be older than the people, and have seen more than a person will in their lifetime.

Take this time to learn the history of the land that you are on and answer the following questions:

- Do you think the Witness Trees around you would be full of thick healthy rings, or would they have had years that were difficult leading to scars or less growth too?
- What were a few important historical events that happened here?
- Who originally lived on this land? Where you are standing used to be the home of Indigenous Americans. To pay respect to those who called the land home before you did, research who they were and how they lived.

Activity 2

Pretend you are the Witness Tree

Instructions

Using a paper plate or your nature journal, draw your own life in tree rings. Remember, each year of a tree's life is represented by one ring. The years and rings of your life that were very full of excitement and growth should be thicker than the rings that represent tougher years. Ask other people in your life to create their own tree ring story as well.