

The Oak Tree

AUTHOR

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ILLUSTRATOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Lower Primary



SYNOPSIS

Watch a thousand years unfold in the life of one magnificent tree! A thousand years ago, a tiny acorn fell to the ground. As the years pass, it grows . . . and GROWS into an enormous oak tree! As the centuries sweep by, children play games around the tree. Families dance about it. A fleeing king even hides inside its hollow trunk! The tree gives food and shelter to a host of animals, from squirrels and badgers to birds and beetles. After a thousand years, the ancient tree finally falls in a storm—but a new acorn sprouts, and the cycle of life begins all over again.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Julia Donaldson has written some of the world's best-loved children's books, including modern classics *The Gruffalo* and *The Gruffalo's Child*, illustrated by Axel Scheffler, which together have sold over 25 million copies worldwide and have been translated into over one hundred languages. Julia also writes fiction, including the Princess Mirror-Belle series illustrated by Lydia Monks which has been made into a successful CBBC series, as well as poems, plays and songs—and her brilliant live shows are always in demand. She was the UK Children's Laureate 2011–13 and has been honoured with a CBE for Services to Literature. Julia and her husband Malcolm divide their time between West Sussex and Edinburgh.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Victoria Sandøy is a freelance illustrator based in Oslo, Norway. Her work is inspired by her Scandinavian roots and often consists of imagery influenced by nature, folklore and children's literature.

Visit her online at www.victoriasandoy.com.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What can you see happening on the cover of this book?
 - Who do you think this story might be about?
 - What time of year is it in the cover artwork? How can you tell?
 - What do you hypothesise might happen in this story? Why do you think this?
- How can you recognise an oak tree? Look carefully at the illustrations in the story, and then research online to find out as much as you can about what oak trees look like and where they grow. Create an illustrated fact sheet about oak trees sharing your research and discoveries.

- Where is this story set—where is the oak tree growing, and how can you tell? As a class, discuss all the clues in the story that tell us where this oak tree is.
- Are there any oak trees growing near where you live? Why/why not? If there are, as a class, visit an oak tree and hunt for acorns. When you return to class, plant an acorn in a paper cup full of potting soil. You will want to keep the soil damp but not soggy, and place your cups in a warm place for the acorn to germinate. Keep a careful record of how much you water them and how often, where they are placed and how much sun and warmth the cups get. If you are lucky, some of your acorns will sprout into baby oak trees.
 - Discuss which acorns sprout, and which ones don't. Are there any obvious patterns to which ones are growing into baby trees and which ones are not? How quickly do they grow, and at what time of year? Measure your baby tree's growth weekly, and at the end of the school year either plant it in an appropriate corner of the schoolyard, or take it home.
- The children in the story play games with the fallen acorns. As a class, go on a walk around your local area and look for acorns, nuts, seeds or seed pods, or other natural tree and leaf litter that can be used for games and craft projects. When you return to class, spread out your findings, and see if you can play knucklebones or other games, or make necklaces with any of what you found.
- Use twigs and leaves to make boats like the ones the children sail on the stream. Have a boat race in a local waterway, or across a large tub or paddling pool set up in the school playground. You might need to make wind with folded paper fans if it is a still day.
- Some of the children in the story dance with oak leaf garlands in their hair. Make leaf-garlands of your own to wear, and as a class, learn or create a dance that can be done around a large tree of your own.
- Who would the fleeing king who hid inside the tree have been? Why did he need to flee, and why would the children have hidden him inside the tree?
- Look carefully at all the illustrations in the story. How many different animals can you see appearing in the artwork, and what are they all doing? Choose one of the animals, and draw a close up picture of it. Caption your artwork with a fact about your chosen animal, or write an informative paragraph about it, sharing why it would choose to live near, in, or on an oak tree—you may need to research more about it online or in the library first.
- When it snows near the oak tree, a deer, a rabbit and a hooded crow all leave footprints. If it snowed where you live, what birds and animals might you expect to leave footprints in the snow, and what would they look like?
 - Create an animal-footprint themed artwork, featuring prints of birds and animals that are common in your local area.
- The oak tree in the story is a thousand years old when it finally falls down, and a new baby tree starts to grow. What do you think life will be like in a thousand years time when the baby tree is old enough to topple? Write and illustrate a short story set a thousand years in the future.
- Read the notes at the back of the book that tell you more about oak trees. As a class, discuss what you think is the most interesting fact about oak trees that you have learnt from this book.
- The oak tree in the story lives for a thousand years. Is this a long time for an oak tree to live? How long do other types of trees live for? In pairs or small groups, choose a tree that is common in your local area, and research it online or in the library. Some things you might like to know about it could be:
 - Where is this type of tree native to?
 - Where can we find this type of tree growing today?
 - What environment or climate does this type of tree do best in, and why?
 - How do people use this tree?
 - Why might someone plant one of these trees?
 - What animals include this type of tree in their habitat, range or territory?
 - What role does this tree play in its local ecosystem?
 - What do the leaves on the tree look like?
 - What does the trunk of the tree look like, and the bark?
 - Is the tree deciduous or evergreen?
 - What other trees and plants are related to this tree?

- What is the common name of the tree, and what is its scientific name?
- What is the tree called in the local language?
- How long does this tree typically live?
- What can commonly threaten or damage this tree?
- Go for a walk around your schoolyard or local area, and collect fallen leaves from the ground. When you return to class, use these leaves to create an artwork. You can make crayon rubbings of your leaves, you can cover them with paint and use them as stamps to make leaf prints on paper or you can paint them and glue them to the page as part of a collage.

AUTHOR OF NOTES
RAE CARLYLE