



Introduction

There are many objects with significant meanings. Consider all the things in museums around the world. Think about your own belongings. Do you have anything that has a special meaning to you? Maybe it is a picture, a figurine, a piece of jewelry, or even a tree. Did you know there are trees with significant stories? The following trees located on the grounds of the Smithsonian Gardens have meaningful stories that bring a new appreciation to them. Learn about these trees and think about how you will now view the tree. Finally, do you know of a tree in your community that has a special meaning?

Medal of Honor tree- Red oak (*Quercus rubra*)

This tree was planted on the grounds of Smithsonian Gardens near the American Museum of Natural History on Veterans Day in November 2010. The idea was that this tree would commemorate the United States war veterans who were presented the Medal of Honor, which is the highest military award a member of the United States Armed Forces can receive. This tree has a symbolic meaning because it was on the first design of the Medal of Honor and today the honorees are also presented with a silver encrusted cluster of oak leaves and acorns with their medal.

The final piece to this story is that the new tree was planted with soil that was collected from 16 battlegrounds that represent America's 11 wars.



Soil from the battlegrounds- ©Smithsonian Gardens

Brian Long, "For the Veterans, A Tree Grows at American History"

<http://blogs.smithsonianmag.com/aroundthemall/2010/11/for-the-veterans-a-tree-grows-at-american-history/>



Other significant red oaks (*Quercus rubra*), on the grounds, that were collected from sites significant to American history.

- Minuteman, representing the soldiers who were sent first during the American Revolution: oak from Lexington Green, site of the Battle of Lexington in Massachusetts during the American Revolution
- The Trail of Tears refers to the forced relocation of American Indians from the South East, what is now the southeastern United States, to the Oklahoma territory: oak is from Georgia
- Manassas National Battlefield Park, Virginia, preserves the site of two battles, the first and second battles of Bull Run, fought during the Civil War: oak from Virginia
- Nathan Hale, a spy for the Revolutionary war: oak collected from his birthplace in Connecticut

In the nursery at the Greenhouse:

- Robert Kennicott, was a famous Naturalist and friend of Secretary Spencer Baird, the 2nd Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution: oak from his family estate in Chicago
- Spotsylvania, Virginia marks the spot of “The Battle of Spotsylvania Court House” during the Civil War: oak from Virginia



Yoko Ono’s Wish Tree for Washington- Japanese flowering dogwood (*Cornus kousa*)

In 2007, during the National Cherry Blossom Festival, the artist and activist Yoko Ono, widow of musician John Lennon, showcased 10 trees around Washington, DC as part of her “Imagine Peace” project. The trees were presented as part of her ongoing Wish Tree project, which started sometime around 1981, in which people could write a wish on paper and hang it on the tree. After the festival, the Japanese flowering dogwood was planted in the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden as a permanent addition to the garden. People can still place a wish on the tree from Memorial Day through Labor Day.

Get more information through her website: Imagine Peace (www.imaginepeace.com)





Activity:

State trees

Each state has designated a native tree, except for Hawaii, and in most cases it represents something of beauty or is symbolic. The United States National Arboretum has a useful page listing all of the states trees and flowers. <http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/statetreeflower.html>

This list reflects which trees are present on the grounds of the Smithsonian Gardens and are considered to be a state tree:

Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) – Virginia and Missouri

Scarlet oak (*Quercus coccinea*) – Washington, DC

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) – Oklahoma

Tulip poplar (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) – Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee

White oak (*Quercus alba*) – Maryland, Connecticut, Illinois

Southern magnolia (*Magnolia grandiflora*) – Mississippi

Red oak (*Quercus rubra*) – New Jersey

Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*) – New York, Vermont, West Virginia and Wisconsin

Colorado spruce (*Picea pungens*) – Colorado and Utah

American holly (*Ilex opaca*) – Delaware

Baldcypress (*Taxodium distichum*) – Louisiana

American elm (*Ulmus americana*) – Massachusetts and North Dakota

Paper birch (*Betula papyrifera*) – New Hampshire



Vocabulary

- Significant
- Medal of Honor

Learning Goals:

- Introduce students to concepts of things being meaningful and representative
- Incorporate into history lessons and present new ways of learning about the past
- Present US geography in a new light by learning about state trees

What you'll need:

- Activity sheet and notebook
- Colored pencils and crayons

Sources:

- United States National Arboretum, Information about state trees, showcased in the *National Grove of State Trees* area: www.usna.usda.gov



Activity:

1. *In the classroom:* Share the introduction stories with students and have them share any stories about things that are significant to them based on the questions listed as **Activity Part I**.
2. *Back in the schoolyard, local garden, and classroom:*
 - Pick a tree in your schoolyard to visit or adopt during the school year. Have students draw a picture of the tree from **Activity Part II** and think about what type of story they will write about the tree. Encourage them to incorporate the earlier lessons about naming, observing the surroundings to describe the life of the tree, and thinking about what the tree does for the habitat in which it lives. Then head back to the classroom and allow them time to complete their stories. Have students share the stories and pictures with the class.

Bonus: Try to locate a tree in your neighborhood or community that has special significance or a story. If there are none, think about planting one in honor of something. This could be an “adopt a tree” program that would encourage others to do the same. See how you can make a difference and give new meaning to an object we see every day!

If you live in the Washington, DC area: check out Casey Trees (www.caseytrees.org)

- They are a nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving the canopy of the District of Columbia and you can participate in a tree planting.
- **State Tree Activity Part III**
 - Find out what your state tree is and present information about it. You could also turn this into a geography lesson by discussing state trees. If you are in the Washington, DC area you might even take your students to the United States National Arboretum to see their *National Grove of State Trees*.

For younger students: Do you have any sort of award system in place in your classroom? If not, think about establishing something where the students have certain goals to meet and then are awarded for meeting them. Relate this to the story behind the Medal of Honor and also to the story of the oak tree being a representative for the armed forces’ efforts.

For older students: Assign a time in history and have them look up any Medal of Honor awards that were awarded during that time period

Activity Part I

Do you have something that has a special meaning to you?

Do you know of a tree in your community that has a special meaning?

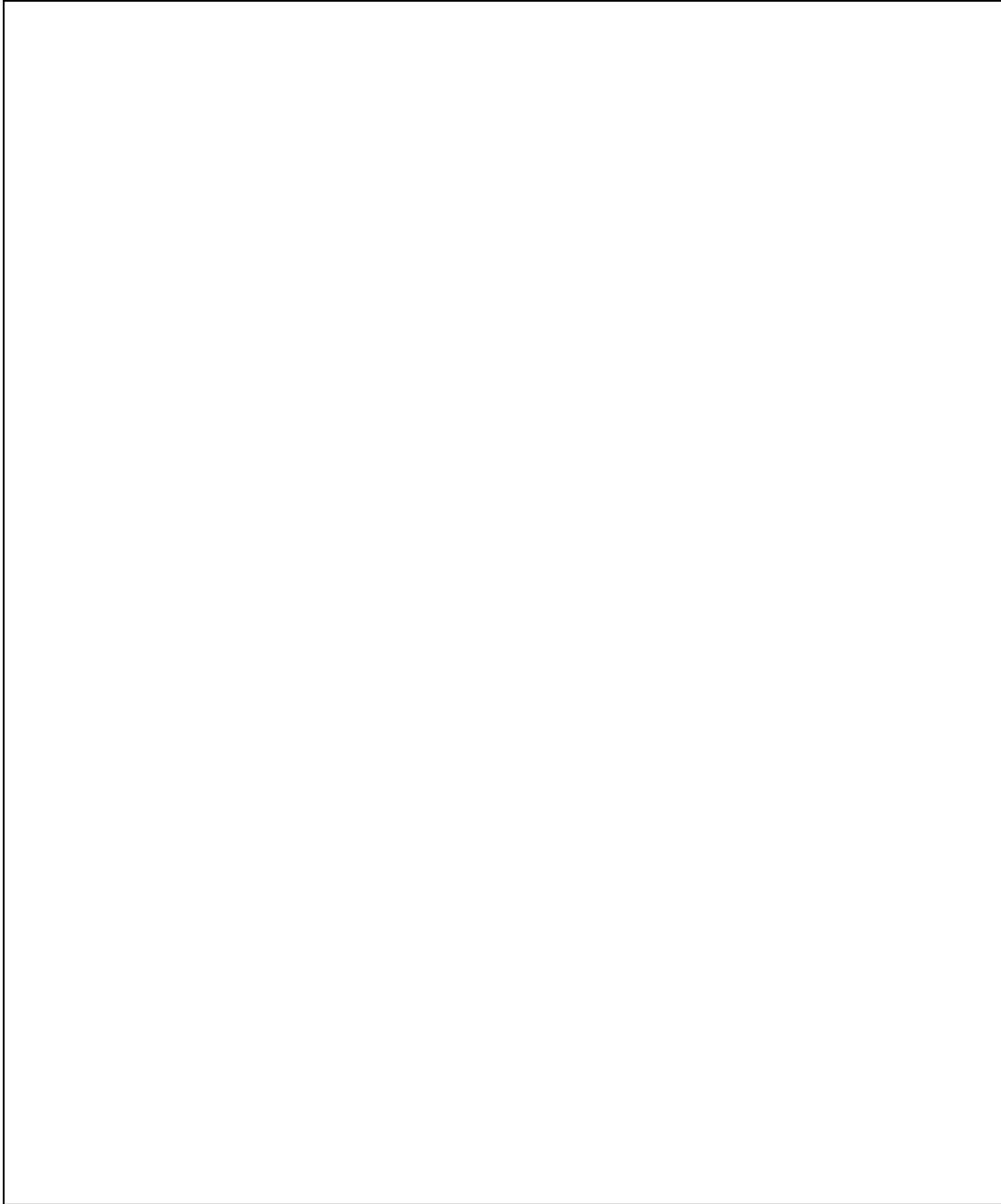
Is there a tree that represents something about your family? If not, what tree would you pick to represent something about your family?

Activity Part II

Pick a tree in your schoolyard to visit or adopt during the school year. Have students draw a picture of the tree from Activity Part II and think about what type of story they will write about the tree. Encourage them to incorporate the earlier lessons about naming, observing the surroundings to describe the life of the tree, and thinking about what the tree does for the habitat in which it lives

Activity Part III

- What is your state tree? Draw it here or glue a picture



- What does it represent in history?
- Why was it chosen?