

NOT BORING MEDIA

THE TREES THAT TALK TO EACH OTHER

High-Interest Nonfiction Reading Passage

WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ Reading Passage ✓ Comprehension Questions
- ✓ Answer Key ✓ Teacher Guide

GRADES 4-6 • LEXILE ~750L • DOK LEVELS 1-4

Reading they'll actually do.

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WHAT'S INCLUDED

- ✓ High-interest nonfiction reading passage (300-400 words)
- ✓ 6 comprehension questions spanning DOK levels 1-4
- ✓ Complete answer key with explanations
- ✓ Teacher guide with standards, pacing, and extensions

Questions or feedback? Leave a review or message us through TPT!

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THE TREES THAT TALK TO EACH OTHER

Beneath the forest floor, something remarkable is happening. Trees are communicating with each other through an underground network of fungi that scientists have nicknamed the 'Wood Wide Web.' Through this network, trees share nutrients, send warnings about insect attacks, and even nurture their young.

The network works through mycorrhizal fungi—thread-like organisms that attach to tree roots and spread through the soil. A single fungal network can connect dozens of trees across hundreds of feet. The fungi get sugars from the trees in exchange for helping the trees absorb water and nutrients from the soil.

But the relationship goes beyond simple trade. Scientists have discovered that trees actively share resources through these fungal connections. Older 'mother trees' send carbon and nutrients to seedlings growing in the shade, helping them survive until they can reach sunlight. When trees are dying, they sometimes dump their resources into the network for other trees to use.

Trees also use the network to send chemical signals. When a tree is attacked by insects, it can send warning chemicals through the fungi to neighboring trees. Those trees then increase their own defenses—producing chemicals that make their leaves taste bad to insects—before the attack even reaches them.

The discovery has changed how scientists think about forests. Rather than viewing trees as individuals competing for resources, researchers now see forests as cooperative communities. Some scientists argue that a forest is more like a single organism than a collection of separate trees.

This understanding has implications for conservation and logging. Clear-cutting forests destroys the fungal networks that took decades to develop. Some forest managers now practice selective cutting that preserves mother trees and keeps networks intact.

The Wood Wide Web reminds us that nature is more connected than we imagined. Even plants, which seem so passive and isolated, are communicating in ways we're only beginning to understand.

Word Count: 307 | Lexile: ~750L | Grades 4-6 | Source: Nature Journal

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 What is the underground fungal network called?

- A) The Root Web
- B) The Wood Wide Web
- C) The Forest Network
- D) The Tree Internet

2 What do trees give the fungi in exchange for nutrients?

- A) Water
- B) Sugars
- C) Sunlight
- D) Seeds

3 How do 'mother trees' help seedlings?

- A) They block wind
- B) They send carbon and nutrients through fungal networks
- C) They shade them from sun
- D) They produce extra seeds

4 How do trees warn each other about insect attacks?

- A) They make sounds
- B) They send chemical signals through fungal networks
- C) They drop leaves
- D) They change color

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How has this discovery changed scientific understanding of forests?

- A) Scientists now see forests as competitive battlegrounds
- B) Scientists now see forests as cooperative communities rather than competing individuals
- C) Scientists think trees don't need fungi
- D) Scientists believe trees can't communicate

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How might understanding the Wood Wide Web change forest management practices?

- A) All trees should be cut at once
- B) Preserving fungal networks and mother trees during logging could help forests recover faster
- C) Fungi should be removed from forests
- D) Trees should be planted closer together

ANSWER KEY

The Trees That Talk to Each Other

1. B) The Wood Wide Web

DOK 1 — Recall. *The passage states: 'scientists have nicknamed the Wood Wide Web.'*

2. B) Sugars

DOK 1 — Recall. *The passage states: 'The fungi get sugars from the trees.'*

3. B) They send carbon and nutrients through fungal networks

DOK 2 — Inference. *The passage explains: 'Older mother trees send carbon and nutrients to seedlings growing in the shade.'*

4. B) They send chemical signals through fungal networks

DOK 2 — Inference. *The passage states: 'When a tree is attacked by insects, it can send warning chemicals through the fungi to neighboring trees.'*

5. B) Scientists now see forests as cooperative communities rather than competing individuals

DOK 3 — Analysis. *The passage states: 'Rather than viewing trees as individuals competing for resources, researchers now see forests as cooperative communities.'*

6. B) Preserving fungal networks and mother trees during logging could help forests recover faster

DOK 4 — Extended Thinking. *The passage notes: 'forest managers now practice selective cutting that preserves mother trees and keeps networks intact.' Understanding connections suggests protecting them.*

TEACHER GUIDE

The Trees That Talk to Each Other

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.4.1 — Refer to details and examples in a text
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.4 — Determine meaning of words and phrases
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.5.8 — Explain how author uses evidence
- NGSS — Connections to scientific practices

PACING OPTIONS

- Quick Read (10-15 min): Passage + questions 1-4
- Standard (20-25 min): Full passage + all questions
- Deep Dive (35-40 min): Add discussion + extension

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Before this discovery, people saw trees as competing individuals. How might new information change how we treat something?
- If trees can communicate and share resources, should that change how we think about cutting them down?
- What other 'obvious' facts about nature might actually be wrong?

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Find a forest or park near you and draw a diagram imagining the underground fungal network connecting the trees.
- Research mycorrhizal fungi and create a presentation about their importance to ecosystems.
- Design an experiment that could test whether trees in your area share nutrients.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Struggling: Pre-teach vocabulary, partner reading
- Advanced: Add research, compare to related events
- ELL: Visual supports, pre-teach context

SOURCE

- Nature Journal / Suzanne Simard research