



2018 U.S. CAPITOL CHRISTMAS TREE

Instruction Guide

Grades
3-4

Every year the U.S. Forest Service provides a tree from one of the country's 154 National Forests to display on the West Lawn of the U.S. Capitol for the holiday season. This year, for the first time, the tree will come from Oregon's Willamette National Forest.

This guide is designed to help third- and fourth-grade teachers use the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree as a context for investigating why Oregon is such a great place for growing trees. Through graphs and other data, students will examine where Oregon Christmas trees come from and where they go, and explore the importance of trees and forests to our state and beyond.



BACKGROUND

Oregon's climate is ideal for growing trees, particularly conifer trees with evergreen leaves that look like needles or scales. These trees flourish in Oregon's long, sunny summers and cool, moist winters. Unlike deciduous trees, which drop their leaves in the fall and "hibernate" during the winter, evergreen trees keep their leaves during our wet fall and winter months. Nearly half of Oregon's land is covered in forests, some of which contain the biggest and oldest conifer trees in the world.

OREGON'S "AMBASSADOR" TREE

The U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree will serve as an ambassador, representing our state's magnificent forests. It will come from the Willamette National Forest, a 1.6-million-acre expanse that stretches along the western slopes of the Cascades in Oregon. The forest includes large stands of massive Douglas-firs, many with trunks 3 to 8 feet in diameter.

The U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree, along with more than 70 smaller companion trees and 10,000 handmade Oregon-themed ornaments, will travel to Washington, D.C. The 3,000-mile journey will begin in November in Sweet Home, and will include community celebrations at various stops in Oregon and in other states along the way. It will culminate with the official tree lighting in early December.

GROWING CHRISTMAS TREES

In contrast to the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree, almost all Christmas trees sold in the U.S. are from tree farms, not forests. The



same climate conditions that benefit our forests also make Oregon a great place to grow Christmas trees. In fact, Oregon is the top Christmas tree producer in the country, selling more than 5 million trees a year. Most Christmas trees come from small family farms, where trees are cultivated like other crops. Farmers plant tree seedlings either in neat rows or more natural stands, and grow them for seven to 10 years until the trees are about 6 feet in height. They also plant new trees every year to replace those that are cut.

CHRISTMAS TREES FROM NATIONAL FORESTS

Most National Forests allow harvesting Christmas trees for personal use, but you must get a permit from the local National Forest office and follow specific guidelines, which can vary by forest. Many people wonder whether cutting trees from the forest will harm it. But cutting individual Christmas trees helps thin out undergrowth, which reduces competition for other species, lets older trees stay healthier, and can lessen fire risk.

Discussion Questions

You may use the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree to spark a discussion on what students like and value about Oregon, and the importance of trees and forests to our state.

What is your favorite thing about Oregon?
What makes you proud to live in Oregon?

Forests cover nearly half of Oregon's land.
What products do we get from our forests?
What else do trees and forests provide us?

In what ways is the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree an "ambassador" for Oregon? What would you want people in other parts of the country to know about our state?

The Oregon tree will be covered in Oregon-themed decorations. What symbols might you suggest to represent Oregon?

Activity

In this activity, students analyze data on Oregon's Christmas tree production.

Materials: Copies of the "Oregon Christmas Trees: Where they come from and where they go" student page

Procedure:

1. Describe the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree project, pointing out that this year's tree will come from the Willamette National Forest. Ask, "Have you ever been to a National Forest?" and tally students' responses.
2. Review different ways to present data by sketching examples – a data table, a pie chart and a scaled bar graph – using students' responses from Step 1. Pose "how many more" and "how many less" questions related to each.
3. Ask students where they think most Christmas trees come from. If they don't know, explain how they are grown on tree farms, similar to other crops.
4. Give students copies of the student page and have them work in pairs to analyze the graphs and answer the questions.
5. Lead a discussion about where Oregon-grown Christmas trees come from and where they go, and why Oregon is such a great place to grow trees (see Background).
6. Ask students what they think happens to Christmas trees after the holidays. (Most are fed into wood chippers for mulch, some are used in lakes and rivers as fish habitat or they end up in landfills.) Invite students to suggest alternatives for recycling Christmas trees. Check with your local soil and water conservation district to see whether it collects trees for fish habitat. See americanforests.org/blog/8-creative-ways-to-recycle-or-reuse-your-christmas-tree or pickyourownchristmastree.org/OregonTreeRecyclingDisposal.php for other ideas.

More Activity Suggestions

Choose one or more activities to deepen your exploration of Oregon's trees and forests.

- **Follow the Trees.** Track the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree and companion trees as they travel to Washington, D.C. See capitolchristmastree.com/track-the-tree.html for a real-time map of their journey. Students may calculate the distance traveled or estimate when the trees will arrive in Washington. Plan to see the trees at one of the community celebrations along the way.



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- **Governor’s Essay Contest.** Encourage fourth-grade students to share what they love about Oregon’s outdoors and have a chance to win a trip to Washington, D.C. for the U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree lighting. Essay submissions are due by September 28, 2018. See capitolchristmastree.com for details.
- **Find Your Trail.** Invite students to explore National Forests or other local forests with their families, highlighting how National Forests are public lands that belong to all of us. See fs.fed.us/visit for more information about visiting a national forest.
- **“Every Kid in a Park” Passes.** All fourth-grade students in the U.S. are eligible for a free year-long pass to National Forests, National Parks and other federally managed areas. See everykidinapark.gov to help your students get their “Every Kid in a Park” pass, which they may bring to their local National Forest office for a free Christmas tree permit.
- **Visit a Christmas Tree Farm.** See how and where Christmas trees grow in your area. Be sure to arrange your visit with the farm in advance, particularly during the busy holiday season. See pickyourownchristmastree.org for a listing of farms.
- **Compare Trees.** Conduct an investigation of the differences between evergreen trees and deciduous trees in your schoolyard or nearby park. Have students compare the leaves and tree shapes and research life-cycle adaptations of each tree type. Help them use the evidence to construct an explanation of how trees survive where they do.

RESOURCES

Explore the Forest. Designed for third- to fourth-grade classes, this student book and accompanying teacher guide from the Oregon Forest Resources Institute provide an overview of Oregon’s forests. Available free of charge at learnforests.org/resource_article/explore-the-forest.

U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree website.

This resource contains background and ways to participate in the project. capitolchristmastree.com.

Willamette National Forest website.

See this website for information about the National Forest contributing this year’s U.S. Capitol Christmas Tree. fs.usda.gov/willamette.

Holiday Spirit: Christmas Tree Story.

This 24-minute video offers a glimpse into the management of a Willamette Valley Christmas tree farm. Available at the Oregon Agriculture in the Classroom Foundation free loan library. oregonaitc.org.

It’s All Yours. This U.S. Forest Service website provides a number of resources showcasing National Forests and encouraging exploration and stewardship. itsallyours.us.

TEACHING ABOUT CHRISTMAS TREES

Oregon K-12 students come from many different religious and cultural traditions. We encourage teachers to approach the subject of Christmas trees as an opportunity to educate students about the importance of trees and forests to Oregon’s economy and environment, and not to promote a religious holiday. Christmas trees derive from pagan celebrations in Europe, in which evergreens were honored for their ability to stay alive during the winter and seen as symbols of eternal and renewing life.

OREGON FOREST LITERACY PLAN CONCEPTS

Theme 2, D.1. Forests provide multiple economic benefits, including jobs and forest products; renewable energy and minerals; financial returns to owners and investors; and ecosystem service benefits such as carbon storage, clean water, recreation and tourism.

EDUCATION STANDARDS CONNECTIONS

Oregon Social Studies Standards

- 3.12. Identify and analyze Oregon’s natural resources and describe how people in Oregon and other parts of the world use them.
- 4.9. Explain the influence of Oregon’s and the Northwest’s physical systems on humans, including Native Americans.

Common Core State Standards – English Language Arts

- RI.4.7. Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

Common Core State Standards – Math

- 3.MD.B.3. Solve one- and two-step “how many more” and “how many less” problems using information presented in scaled bar graphs.

PROJECT PARTNERS

Choose Outdoors, Oregon Forest Resources Institute, Travel Oregon, Willamette National Forest and the Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association.

Oregon Christmas trees: where they come from and where they go

QUESTIONS

- Which state harvested the most Christmas trees in 2016?

 - How many more trees did it harvest than the next highest state? _____
 - What is the most popular Oregon-grown Christmas tree species?

 - What is the second most popular?

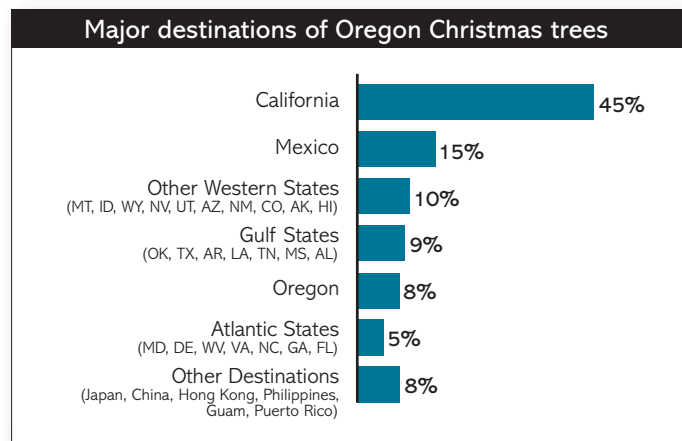
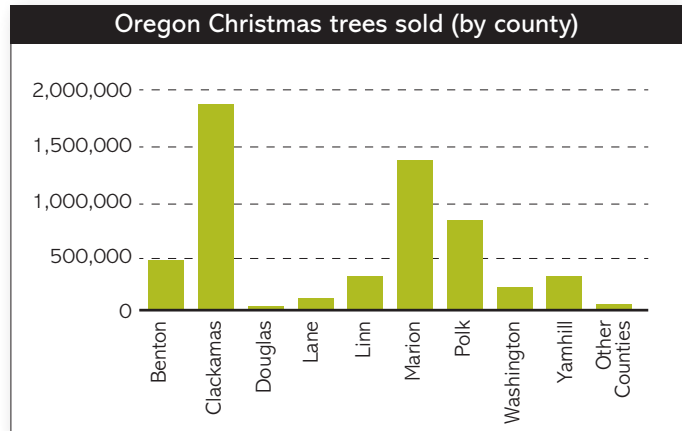
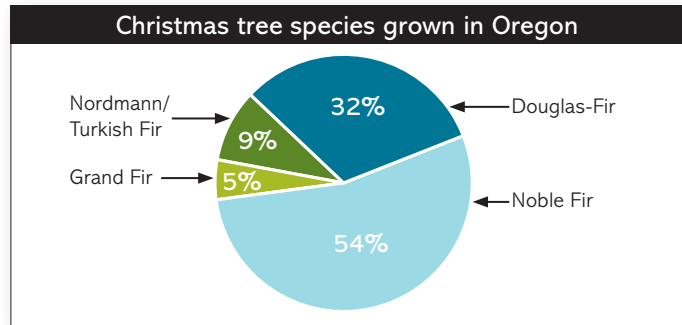
 - What three Oregon counties sold the most Christmas trees?

 - In total, about how many trees did these three counties sell?

 - To what two destinations do most Oregon Christmas trees go?

- Shade in these destinations on the map below.
- Why do you think Oregon is such a great place for growing Christmas trees?

Christmas trees harvested in 2016 (by state)	
State	Trees Harvested
Oregon	5.2 million
North Carolina	3.5 million
Michigan	3.0 million
Pennsylvania	2.3 million
Washington	1.5 million



Sources:

"Facts at a Glance." Pacific Northwest Christmas Tree Association. pnwcta.org/news-events/facts-at-a-glance.
 Oregon Christmas Tree Survey. U.S. Department of Agriculture. nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State/Oregon/Publications/Horticulture/xmas2016.pdf.