



A FOREST SONG

KIRSTEN HALL & EVAN TURK

ABOUT THE BOOK

This cento poem by Kirsten Hall, illustrated by Evan Turk, takes readers deep into the forest to listen carefully to its sounds, observe the creatures that call it home, and experience its majesty. Through each verse—created from classic lines of poetry from Robert Frost, Pablo Neruda, Emily Dickinson, Lucille Clifton, Edgar Allan Poe, and others—the forest and its wonders burst with life. This tribute to the woods celebrates the beauty of our forests and encourages readers to awaken to and be in awe of all that nature has to offer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Kirsten Hall is a former preschool and elementary school teacher, and the author of several picture books, including *The Honeybee*, which was praised as “glorious” by *The Wall Street Journal*; *The Jacket*, a *New York Times* Notable Book; and *The Gold Leaf*, illustrated by Matthew Forsythe. In addition to writing, she operates her own boutique illustration and literary agency. Kirsten lives in New York City with her husband and two sons.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Evan Turk is an award-winning illustrator, author, and animator. He is the illustrator of *Grandfather Ghandi*, written by Arun Ghandi, which received an Ezra Jack Keats Illustrator Honor; *The People's Painter*, written by Cynthia Levinson, which received a Robert F. Sibert Medal; and *Muddy: The Story of Blues Legend Muddy Waters*, which was a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Book. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, and on NPR. Originally from Colorado, Evan now lives in southern California with his husband and two cats.

TALK ABOUT FORESTS

Keep in mind that sharing poetry with students does not always need to be followed by digging for meaning or analyzing technical aspects! Invite students to share reaction and reflection statements to *A Forest Song* that could begin with “I wonder,” “I am curious about,” “I noticed/feel/enjoy,” or “I am excited/surprised/confused by.”

YOU CAN ALSO DISCUSS:

- What is a forest? Are all forests the same? Who or what can you find living in a forest? Where are forests located?
- What words are used in the book to describe the forest? How do these words make you feel? What images do they bring to mind? How are the images in your mind similar to or different from the illustrations in the book?
- How does this poet feel about the forest? What do the patterns of sounds used in the poem make you think of? Besides animals, what other sounds of the forest do you hear in the poem?
- How does this poem help you think about the forest in new ways?

TUNE INTO NATURE

When you take time to listen, you can hear that nature is full of music! Engage students in the act of listening and have them channel what they hear into their own song of the forest.

- Head out* to the schoolyard or a nearby park or take a field trip to a forest. Let students know that when they head outside, they are going to focus on listening and observing. Make sure kids have paper and pencils with them.
- Once outside, ask students to listen carefully to the sounds around them while making no sounds of their own. Encourage them to close their eyes and listen for at least ten minutes.
- When time is up, get students thinking and talking about the sounds they encountered, what made those sounds, and what they could do to make similar sounds. Then have students write or draw the sounds they heard.
- Have students work in small groups to turn the sounds they heard into a piece of music. Have groups choose at least five woodland sounds from those they

heard, and experiment with how to best re-create them using their bodies (tapping, sliding, stomping, snapping clapping, whispering, whistling, buzzing, humming), basic instruments (shakers, rhythm sticks, blocks, bells, xylophones, tambourines) and other provided materials such as paper (flat, shredded, crumpled), cardboard, sandpaper, rubber bands, bottles of water, etc.

- Give students time to explore and develop their sounds, testing how they fit together. Have one group perform their sound first. Have other groups of students follow with different sounds that might grow louder, softer, faster, or slower as they continue to build the song. Record their performance.

*If going outside isn't possible, tune in to forests from around the world by visiting tree.fm.

BLAZE A POETRY TRAIL

Help students take poetry outside. Create purposeful wanderings outdoors and bring your community together with student poetry on a Poetry Trail, an event on your school campus or at a local park.

- In her author's note, Kirsten Hall shares that it was during her ramblings in the woods that she felt the words of the poems that make up *A Forest Song*. Read and explore some of those poets and poems with students. They are listed at the back of the book.
- Talk with students about how these poems—and many others—begin with something that they are good at doing: taking notice, wondering, and making connections. Then ask students to draw on their own observations, questions, connections, and memories to create a poem about trees or forests that they can read aloud on a Poetry Trail.
- To make a Poetry Trail, break students into small groups. Each group will serve as a stop on the trail, a place where trail trekkers can listen to students read their poems aloud. Have groups make and decorate a numbered sign for their trail stop and invite parents and other classes to walk the trail. (Consider also asking parents or other volunteers to supervise each stop.) Place student trail signs far enough apart so that groups aren't reading over each other. Be sure to give students plenty of time to practice reading their poems aloud before the event!
- Make the final stop on your Poetry Trail a generous space supplied with writing and art materials so that all trekkers can end their walk by writing and illustrating a poem of their own.

CONNECT THROUGH COLLAGE

Take a closer look at the elements that make each tree unique—from the shapes of their leaves to the textures of their bark—when students make a forest collage from bark and leaf rubbings.

- Head outdoors* with students to a space with plentiful trees. Bring paper, clipboards, and crayons with wrappers removed for each student to make a bark rubbing, and a bag for collecting green or freshly dropped leaves.
- Talk with students about respecting the trees and their bark. Discuss the ways a tree's bark helps to protect the tree. Encourage students to be gentle when they touch different trees to explore the textures of the bark. Show them how to place paper flat against the bark and rub the side of the crayon against the paper until the pattern of the bark is visible.
- After students make a few bark rubbings, ask them to each collect three different leaves. Talk with students about what they know about the role and function of

leaves before they place their leaves vein-side up on their clipboards and secure a sheet of paper on top. Have them choose different colors of crayons and gently rub against the paper over the leaves until the shapes appear.

- Use leaf rubbings to talk about the parts of the leaf (pointing out the blade, petiole, veins, etc.) or get right to making art! Have students cut out their leaves and cut out different shapes of the forest (birds, animals, mountains, trees, plants, etc.) from their bark rubbings. Using those pieces, along with any other paper or media, students can create their own landscape collage and express how they feel about forests.

*Depending on the season and the availability of trees that you can access with students, you may want to modify the activity by focusing solely on leaves or providing students with tree leaves that you have collected.

MAKE A POETREE

Bring poetry and nature together to create a poetree!

The most important part of any poetree are the poems. Students can write concrete poems in the shape of a leaf, free verse on a leaf rubbing, or write a haiku or a narrative poem about a woodland adventure. Whatever shape the poems take, have students leave room to punch a hole to attach string or yarn to their poem. See the reproducible leaf template included on the next page. There are a few options for creating your poetree.

- Find a tree on campus with low branches that many people walk by, tie students' poems to the branches, and leave a sign explaining the poetree. (You may want to laminate or use clear packing tape to cover student poems and protect them from the weather.)
- Repurpose an artificial tree, adding a string of white lights, before hanging student poems on the tree, along with a note about what the poetree is.
- Twist brown packing paper or brown paper bags into a tree trunk and branches to fill a bulletin board or blank wall. Attach poems to branches and add a title to your poetree.
- Create a classroom or library poetree by securing a sturdy, but not too large, dead branch in a bucket with gravel or other material to hold it in place. Tie poems to branchlets and twigs. Leave blank leaf shapes nearby for students to continue to write and add new poems to the poetree.

MORE ACTIVITIES

- Try out the "Write Your Own Cento Poem" activity from the author's note.
- Have students compile their favorite poems into a little book of poetry so they can easily find and return to them.
- Have students pretend to be a tree in a forest and write a story about what it is like or what they imagine a tree thinks about.
- Work with students to research and identify local green spaces to create a map to help others find trees, parks, and forests to enjoy in your community.
- Have students put poetry in motion and create their own dances inspired by *A Forest Song* that explore movement and expression.

LEAF SHAPE POEM

Inside the leaf, write your own poem that celebrates the forest.



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