

## NATURE

## Activity N07

**Theme**

Class activity (CA). Trees used to cover much more of Ireland than they do today. Which particular trees were found in our area? Can we use our powers of detection to find out?

**Objectives**

Enhancing awareness of the impact of trees over time. Focusing attention on

our local area. Inspiring thought about our own place in relationship to the natural environment.

**Curriculum Strands**

SESE, Science–Living things  
SESE, Geography–Maps  
History–working from evidence  
Gaeilge–Foclóir

**Skills**

Questioning, observing, predicting, sorting, identifying

**Time**

40 minutes

# Well rooted

## THE PLACE OF TREES IN IRELAND

**WHAT YOU NEED**

- A list of tree names—see the student worksheet attached
- Photocopies of different, but adjoining, parts of the OS map of your area for each group or pair of students. Please make sure the placenames are clearly legible on the copy.
- Coloured pencils (at least one light green pencil and one dark green pencil for each group)

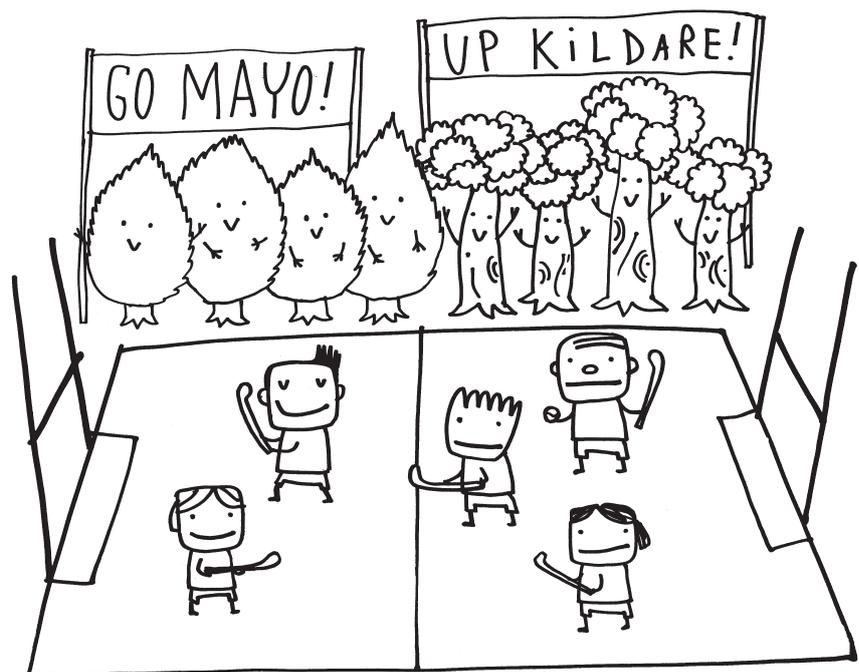
**PLACENAMES**

Examples of some tree-related Irish placenames include: Maigh Eo (Mayo / Plain of the Yew), Doire (Derry / Oak), Má Bhile (Moville / Plain of the Sacred Tree), Baile Átha Troim (Trim / Ford of the Elder), Droim na Coille (Drumnakilly / Ridge of the Wood), Cloch na Coillte (Clonakilty / Stone of the Wood).

Students might like the idea of the sacred tree or 'bile' usually found at an ancient royal site or later associated with holy wells.

It may be useful to introduce the students to some of the more common words that may be joined to the names of trees in a placename. Some examples are given on the student worksheet, but others might include words like baile, carraig, cathair, caiseal, cloch, cnoc, dún, gort, inis, lios and rath.

The students may find English placenames such as Ashford, Hollywood, Aldergrove or the names of local areas, roads or developments, such as Holly Farm or Elm Drive. These may represent a more recent history but are also of value in looking at how trees may have once lived in places where there are now farms, housing or shops.



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**WHAT YOU DO**

- 1 Ask the students to give you the names of some native Irish trees that they know. What do we mean by native trees? Would they have been around when your parents were in school? Your grandparents? Your great-grandparents? Charles Stuart Parnell? When the Normans were around? In Neolithic times?
- 2 Do you think there were more trees then or now? Why do you think so?
- 3 We can sometimes find clues as to where trees used to grow from placenames. Can you think of the names of any towns that sound connected to trees?
- 4 What language might places have been named in long ago? Why? What about nowadays? Which languages might be used?
- 5 Divide the class into small groups or pairs. Arrange the seating so that all the students will be able to see their map simultaneously.
- 6 Give out the detailed maps and the student's page attached to this exercise.
- 7 Ask the students to make a list of all the Irish language placenames they can find that might be connected to trees.
- 8 Ask them to make a separate list of any English placenames connected with trees that they find.
- 9 Ask the students to highlight the Irish placenames with dark green pencil and the English ones with light green pencil. If a wood or forest is indicated they could make a bigger mark—maybe the size of a one-cent piece.
- 10 Put all the maps up on the wall to form a bigger map of the area. Where do names suggest that most trees have grown over time? Ask each group to introduce their particular part of the map to the class.
- 4 Read the poem Laoi Shuibhne / Sweeney's Lay in Irish or English. Build Sweeney's forest as he describes it.
- 5 On a map of Ireland find some major towns whose names are connected to trees.

**Go further**

- 1 Use colour to show the different kinds of trees on your map—use a different colours to indicate each type, for example.
- 2 Divide into groups and pick a tree from the list. Find out its characteristics. Write a verse to describe your tree. Recite or sing it for your class.
- 3 Find an Irish poem about woodland or trees (or use your own!). Use art materials to represent the colours, textures, atmosphere or theme of the poem.

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### WELL ROOTED ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR TEACHERS

You may wish to adapt the exercise according to the trees or maps you have been working on in class. Similarly the 'Go further' section can be adapted to your own choice of poetry, writing activity or art work. The trees included on the student worksheet are taken from a list of trees made in Ireland in the 900s. (See Mac Coitir)

#### References

Irish Trees: Myths, Legends and Folklore by Niall Mac Coitir. Collins 2003. ISBN 1-903464-46-3.

Contains the poem Laoi Shuibhne in Irish and English. Lots of interesting facts about the significance of trees in Ireland. Clear colour illustrations.

An Duanaire 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed by Seán Ó Tuama, Thomas Kinsella. Irish Books and Media, May 1985. ISBN 0-85105-364-5. Contains the poem Cill Chais in Irish and English. [www.coillte.ie](http://www.coillte.ie) has educational links for teachers and students.

### HISTORY OF TREES

16,000BC	The ice age—Ireland covered in ice
8000BC	Ireland covered in woodlands
7000BC	Neolithic farmers began to clear forests and the weather changed so that areas of woodlands got smaller
600BC	The Celts arrived and needed wood for crannógs, tools and boats
600AD	Buildings were made of wood. Normans needed wood for castles and towns. Wood was used for ships and export.
1800s	The Industrial revolution in Britain meant wood was needed to burn as fuel. Farmers sold trees and preferred crop-land. What does this mean? Only 1.5% of woodland was left!
1900s	Governments started to support forestry and planting programmes were started
2000s	Ten percent of Ireland is forest (the average for Europe is 31%), but the trees are often cut down for wood as soon as they are big enough. Often the trees are non-native species: non-native species are less useful to native wildlife than are native trees.

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### STUDENT WORKSHEET

You may find the names of some of these trees in placenames in your area or on the map of Ireland. They may have changed in their spelling over time or they may have changed because they have been written down in English. They may also be stuck to another word.

If you think you've found a tree-based name but you're not sure, say it out loud to see what it sounds like. Take a chance! This is where the detective work comes in!

#### Tree names

aiteal	juniper
aiteann	furze
beith	birch
caithne	arbutus
caorthan	rowan
coll	hazel
crann creathach	aspen
cuileann	holly
dair	oak
draighean	blackthorn
fearnóg	alder
feoras	spindle
fuinseóg	ash
giolcach	broom
giúis	pine
iúr/eo	yew
leamhán	elm
saileach	willow
sceach gheal	hawthorn
silín	cherry
trom	elder
úll	apple

#### Related words

coill	a wood
fiodh	a wood
crann	tree
bile	a sacred tree
craobh	branch

#### Other useful place-words

átha	ford (in a river)
cluain	meadow
gleann	valley
maigh	plain