

Climbing the Giants

Total Time: 75 minutes

Overview:

Students will gain a new perspective on forests by having the chance to climb up into the canopy of an old growth Douglas fir. Our community partner, Pacific Tree Climbing Institute, will provide the equipment and safety instructions for climbing the tree. Once all students who want to climb have climbed we will debrief for a few moments on their experience.

Rationale:

Climbing into the canopy of an old growth Douglas fir tree is a unique and thrilling experience that will help push the students' edges. The climb will also give them a different perspective of the forest as they will be climbing high up into the canopy. Students will be able to go at their own pace and climb only as far as they are comfortable with, creating a personal experience. Having this personal experience will give them a deeper connection to the forest, making them want to help protect it.

Middle school students are at a pivotal time in their emotional and social development, meaning they are beginning to gain a sense of identity, learning how to face challenges and handle them in healthy ways. The tree climb provides an opportunity for middle-school students to discover a new perspective of the forest and explore a unique way to interact with their surroundings. Through this experience, middle-schoolers were given a chance to face new challenges and reach outside of their comfort zones. This activity is something that they have not done at this scale, and for some of them, this activity revealed new passions that they can further explore at home.

Framing: Scientists sometimes need to get up close and personal with the things they are studying. Just like scientists we will use our investigative skills to analyze different aspects of OWLS that are present. We are going to climb this giant old growth tree to get a first hand observation from different viewpoints in a forest. While observing your surroundings also check in with yourself and see how you are feeling throughout the climb.

Pre-Climb Discussion: 2 minutes

Step One: While preparing to climb the tree discuss the tree they will be climbing, asking:

- Does anyone know what tree we are climbing? (Douglas-fir)
- How old do you think this tree is? (500 years old) What characteristics make you think it's that old?
 - (Answers may include: the width of the tree, the thickness of the bark, its height)
 - What animals do you think use this tree for a habitat? (Spotted Owl, chipmunks, mice, shrews, red squirrels)
 - What are you expecting to see throughout the climb?
 - Let's make a hypothesis: do you think it will be hotter or colder at the top? Why?

Step Two: Talk to the students about observing the structural diversity throughout the different levels of the tree.

- Ask students if they know what structural diversity and layers means.
 - If they don't know say... "It refers to the amount of three-dimensional variation in the forest, which includes differing tree species, ages and sizes".
- Talk to students about the importance of layers in O.W.L.S
 - Ask students to stop for a few seconds and examine the differences in the canopy as they reach the marked heights.
 - What tree species do they notice at each marked height? Do more species appear at certain heights over others?
 - How does the view look from the top? What can they see that they could not at the first marker?

Step Three: Ask the students to pause when they have climbed as high as they want and make some observations. This should be for several minutes if possible.

- Make sure students know you are to be as quiet as possible when you are sitting and observing.
 - Say: Imagine you are a squirrel or owl sitting in the tree. Listen for different sounds, take some deep breaths, and look around you. Take a few minutes to observe.
- Talk to them about encouragement and respect for each other and for the tree that they are climbing
 - Remind them of the acronym R.O.S.E. (Respect Others, Self, and the Environment).
 - Ask them to think about how old this tree is and the importance it has had in the forest for over 500 years.

Step Four: Safety talk

- Pacific Tree Climbing Institute will prep the students with a safety talk and discuss how to properly put on the gear.
- Make sure all students with long hair have it tied back. Ask if anybody needs a hair tie.

Tree-Climb: 30-50 minutes

Step One: Remind them to observe at different points in the canopy and safety.

- Remind them of the L in O.W.L.S.
- While waiting for students to get on the platform make sure they are following the rules provided by PTCI.

Step Two: Support and encourage students who are nervous with phrases like:

- “It’s good to be out of your comfort zone!”
- “Only go as far as you want to!”
- “You can just try on the harness if you want! PCTI are very good at their jobs”
- “You are being so brave!”

Step Three: Make sure guides are keeping track of time and students are observing.

- Once students reach the top or go as high as they feel comfortable, we will have students do a few minutes of quiet time at the top, if they feel comfortable.
- 10-15 minutes before the session ends, request that the students start to descend.

Alternative Activity For People Who Don’t Climb: 10-15 minutes

Step One: With a chaperone have the student(s) who choose not to climb use the field guide to help identify plants around the area.

- Prompt them with questions like: what do you find interesting about this plant/tree? What do you notice? Does it smell like anything?

Step Two: Once they identify a few of the trees and plants in the area ask them to draw the leaves of the tree or part of the plant.

Post-Climb: 5 minutes

- As students change out of their gear, ask how they felt during and after the climb.
- Ask if anybody was nervous. Did they push their edge? Do they feel excited? Would they do it

again?

- Ask students what they discovered during the climb. What trees could they see? Were all of them the same height or different? Were they the same size? Did they see any animals? What other things did they notice?
- Thank PCTI for the tree climbing.