

Seeing the Forest, and the Tree

Subject: Noticing changes across time, plant communities

Duration: 1 Hour (2 days of drawing)

Setting: Outside

Materials: Journal, pencils

National Standards – LS1.A, LS2.A

Guiding Theme: Observation of tree and surrounding plant community, structure and function of tree parts (bark, branches, leaves) and the plants around the tree (interaction between tree and other plants)

Activity Instructions

This activity will have students find a tree they are interested in, as well as assessing the plant community around the tree. Ideally, the class will revisit their trees at least 2 more times during different seasons. This will introduce students to the idea of “plant communities” and connections between plants.

1. Instruct students to find a tree to “call their own.” If they want, they can name their tree, hug their tree, whatever! The class will (hopefully) revisit the tree at least 2 more times and may notice some changes in their tree over time.
2. Students should take 30 minutes to draw their tree. Students should do two separate pages of drawing.

Day 1

First page: students should notice the tree's place in the landscape. Students should either draw a quick sketch of the tree and mostly focus on the other plants 3-5 feet away from the tree on either side. This will help students find their tree again, and tell them about their tree's community.

Day 2

Second page: Have students make one drawing of the entire tree. On the same page, have them make a second drawing of just a branch on the tree.

Note: Before going outside, talk with students about what details they should look for on their trees:

- The shape of the tree
- Is it straight or crooked?
- How many branches the tree has – a lot, or just a few?
- What the bark looks like (color, texture, shapes, etc.)

3. Have students write their “I notice” statements about each drawing of the tree, and the surrounding plants. Emphasize that students should add all details in the drawing they notice (that can be drawn).
4. Have students write “I wonder” statements and make at least 2 wonder webs.

Discussion Questions

What did you notice about the plants around the tree?

Why do you think plants grow near and around trees?

How do you think they interact?

Scientists have found that trees communicate with other nearby trees and plants through their root systems. What do you think they communicate to one another?

What did you notice about your tree's branches? What do you think causes branches to grow differently on different trees?

Example Journal Entry:

Kenai Fjords NP - Exit Glacier

August 18, 2021

Partly Sunny, 65°F

Seeing the Forest, and the Tree - Day 1

👂 I hear the rushing river very nearby

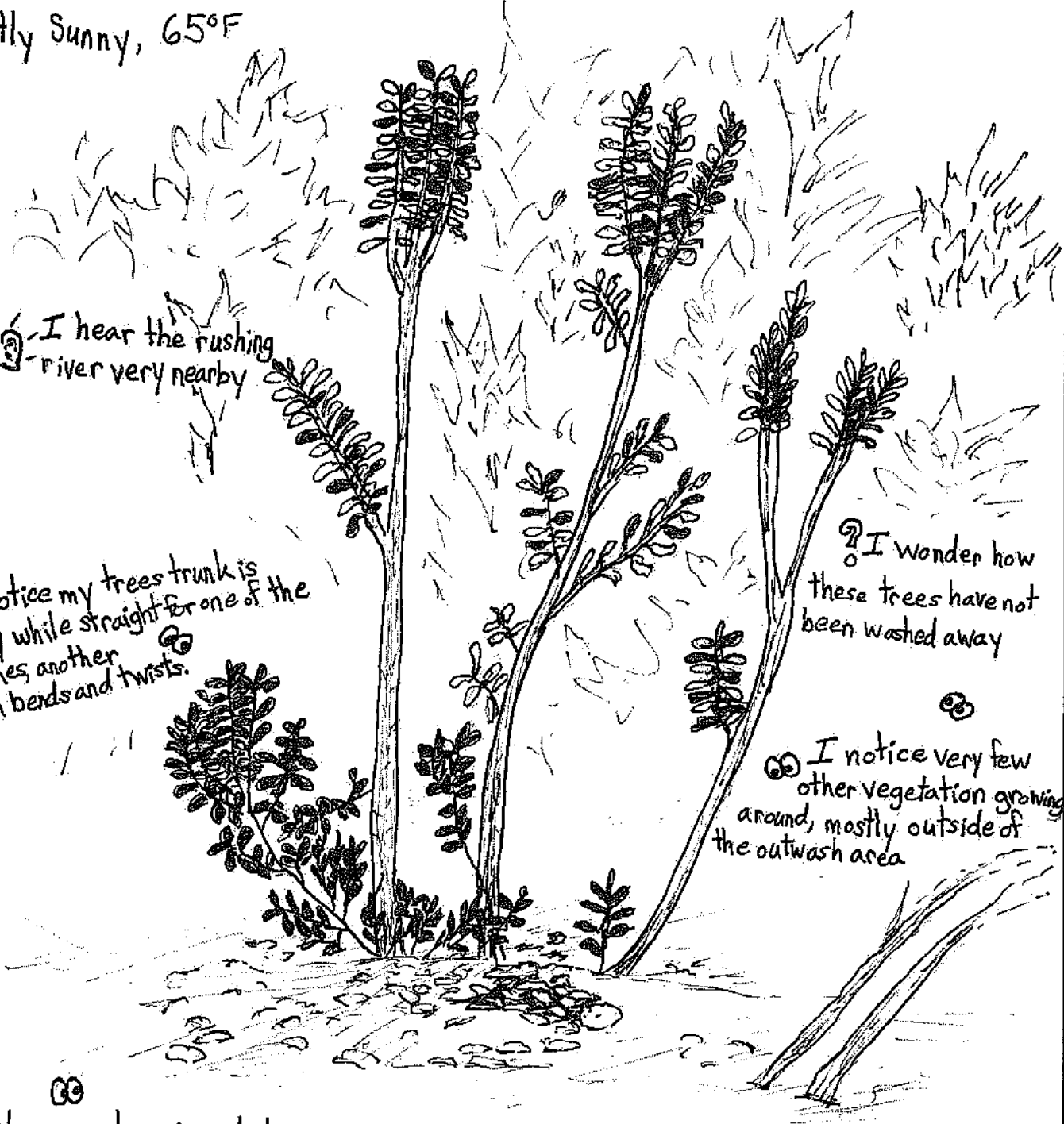
I notice my tree's trunk is skinny while straight for one of the branches another branch bends and twists.

? I wonder how these trees have not been washed away

👁️ I notice very few other vegetation growing around, mostly outside of the outwash area

👁️ I notice my tree is rooted in a rocky, outwash area that floods occasionally and covers the trunk

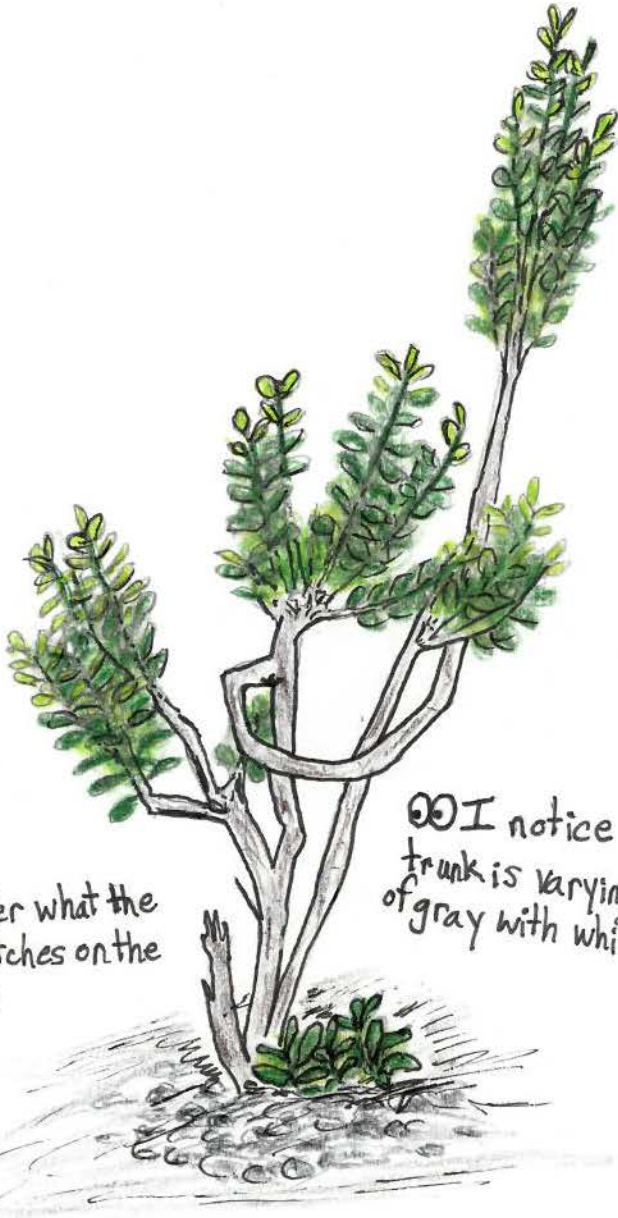
? I wonder how this tree has managed to root itself in such a compromised area.



Example Journal Entry:

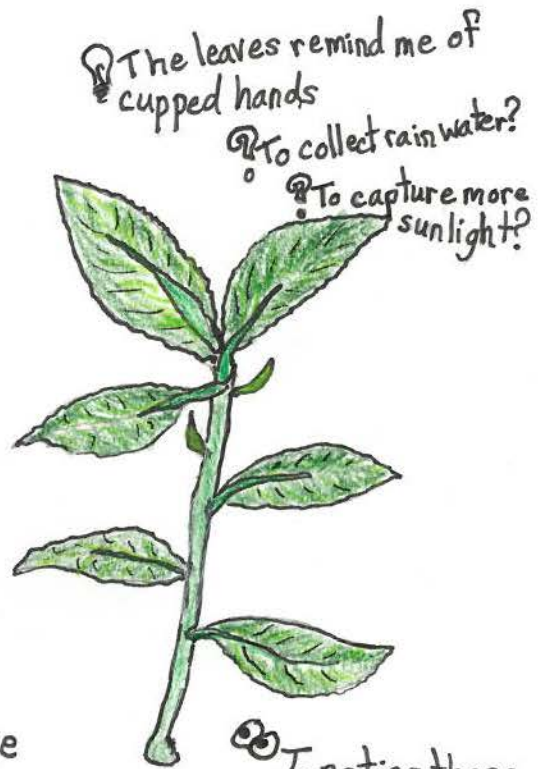
Kenai Fjords NP - Exit Glacier
August 20, 2021
Sunny, 62°F

Seeing the Forest, and the
Tree - Day 2



🤔 I wonder what the white patches on the trunk are

👁️ I notice the trunk is varying shades of gray with white patches



💡 The leaves remind me of cupped hands
🤔 To collect rain water?
🤔 To capture more sunlight?

👁️ I notice these green branches are coated with what looks like white powder, but no residue is rubbed off