

O Christmas Tree!

A Bibliography of Delightful Children's Books for General Use

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A native Wisconsin tree shown on
the lawn of the United States Capitol

The Christmas tree, originally brought to the United States by German immigrants in the 19th Century, has become a beloved holiday tradition. Whether associated with religious or secular adornment, children cannot escape the ever-present symbol of the season in this country. In addition to symbolic importance, the Christmas tree is a valuable and renewable crop that is grown throughout the U.S.

For children whose background experiences do not include Christmas trees, some of the following books will help them to understand the tradition. For those well acquainted with Christmas trees, other books listed will deepen their understanding of the diverse world of private memories associated with these special trees. Some of the books describe Christmas tree growing in a way that will encourage appreciation of the benefits surrounding this crop.

Albers, Henry and Ann Kirk Davis. *The Wonderful World of Christmas Trees*. 1997. 100pp. Mid-Prairie Books. \$19.95 (0-931209-69-2).

Middle grade students will find this comprehensive informational book useful in gathering a complete story of evergreens. It includes the history of Christmas tree traditions as well as the tree growers' year long activities. The text presents well-researched, accurate information, which is clearly supported by carefully selected lithographs, wood engravings, copper etchings and photographs. Students could use this book for reports on various aspects of Christmas trees ranging from worldwide traditions to past and present day information on the tree growing and marketing industries. It also includes notable individuals and their special holiday trees and species of trees. It is thorough and interesting and blends the content areas of history, literature, science, business and sociology. It could serve as a core book for a thematic unit or a text set on the subject of Christmas trees.

Andersen, Hans Christian. *The Fir Tree*. Illus. by Nancy Ekholm Burkert. 1970. 36pp. Harper and Row Publishers, Inc. \$13.56 (73-121800)

Andersen's classic tale of a little fir tree that hoped for more and failed to enjoy the gifts that forest life afforded him might be a springboard into decisions regarding recycling Christmas trees. Told in lilting language, the story nevertheless is a quite straightforward realistic one recounting the life and death of an evergreen. It is meant to teach a lesson, to enjoy the moment rather than long for something more. But 21st century children used to sanitized, happy endings to their tales, may need guidance to appreciate that message couched in a blatantly sad story.

Barry, Robert. *Mr. Willowby's Christmas Tree*. 1963 and 2000. 32 pp. Random House Children's Books. \$15.95 (0-385-327221-8)

Robert Barry created new illustrations for his clever narrative poem that tells the tale of a very tall Christmas tree. Several owners of their repeatedly trimmed tip of a too-tall tree, delight in their pruned acquisition. The tiniest tip ends up as a mouse family's tree beneath the floorboards that support the huge tree of old wealthy Mr. Willowby himself.

Bunting, Eve. *Night Tree*. Illus. by Ted Rand. 1991. 32 pp. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$28.00 (0-15-257425-5)

The minute children open *Night Tree*, the muted evergreen endpapers invite them into the nighttime forest "where the dark and quiet begin." Luke's Forest provides the setting for a young boy and his family's Christmas tradition. It is a simple celebration of the grandeur and serenity that alders, maples, pines and fir trees offer under the stars during the hectic holiday season. The family decorates a huge evergreen with popcorn chains, seeds, and fruits they have prepared; then they picnic and sing beside their tree in the moonlight. Children will delight in the final page, which gives them a bird's eye view of the forest animals enjoying the feast that adorns the family's chosen tree, their gift for the woodland creatures.

DePaola, Tomie. *The Family Christmas Tree Book*. 1980. 32pp. Scholastic Books. (0-590-13287-3)

In DePaola's simple yet distinctive artistic style that is so popular, an extended family discusses the origin of Christmas tree customs. With the text in cartoon bubbles, each member contributes some knowledge or experience connected with Christmas tree traditions. There is just enough information that it does not become

overwhelming for a child. Nor is it too religious to raise concerns in a school context for DePaola presents the facts historically in an appealing informational book format geared for children.

Harrington, D. Peter. *Christmas Treevia*. 1994. 46pp. Harrington Companies. \$8.99 (TX-3-618-534)

A handy little fact book that could be useful for middle grade children looking for the origins of all sorts of Christmas customs. It is thorough and appears to have been drawn heavily from *The London Ritz Book of Christmas*.

Houston, Gloria. *The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree*. Illus. by Barbara Cooney. 1988. 32pp. Dial Books for Young Readers. \$15.00 (0-8037-0300-7)

The year is 1918 and Ruthie's father is off to war. Before he left, he and his young daughter selected the perfect Christmas tree that their family would donate to their mountain's community church. With strength and determination, Ruthie and her Mama fell the tree alone despite their disappointment that Ruthie's dad has not returned home for Christmas as promised. Ruthie experiences some surprises at her church's Christmas celebration, adorned by her family's tree, that will warm readers' hearts. Barbara Cooney's illustrations perfectly complement Houston's nostalgic Appalachian childhood memories.

Jaspersohn, William. *How the Forest Grew*. Illus. by Chuck Eckart. 1980. 56pp. Greenwillow Books. \$6.95

This easy-to-read book could supplement a science textbook to fully explain the growth cycles of a forest. Eckart's sketches of the forest's flora and fauna are beautifully detailed and clearly expand and support the text. Readers are taken through the three stages of a forest's growth – pioneer, middle and final or climax stages – and can easily learn about change, growth, development, and the interdependencies in nature. They will also learn about tree species and the importance of allowing nature to take its course.

Jordan, Sandra. *Christmas Tree Farm*. 1993. 32pp. Orchard Books. \$16.95 (0-531-05499-3)

A visit to the Clark's Christmas Tree Farm in Tiverton, Rhode Island, in Sandra Jordan's picture book will teach children about the activities that tree farm owners do all year long. Hand-colored sepia-toned photographs give the book an old-fashioned 50's feel when hand-coloring photos was popular. The book contains an end note describing old traditions and new recycling practices

for post-season Christmas trees that is very interesting. A good introduction to the Christmas tree growing business, this non-fiction book will make readers want to go to the nearest tree farm to pick out their family's Christmas tree early in the season.

Kemmelman, Leslie. *Dance, Sing, Remember: A Celebration of Jewish Holidays*. Illus. by Ora Eitan. 2000. 36 pp. HarperCollins. \$18.95 (0-06-027725-4)

This brightly illustrated picture book, set on pages of different colors with faint pictures related to each of 11 Jewish holidays, explains celebrations and suggests related holiday activities. One holiday Tu B'Shevat—"the new year of the trees"—is commemorated by planting new trees in Israel. Jewish people from all over the world send money to Israel for tree planting. Foods that grow on Israeli trees—olives, dates, almonds, carobs, figs, and pomegranates—are eaten to celebrate a day similar to the U.S. Arbor Day in some respects. Noting Tu B'Shevat may be a way to draw Jewish children into the discussion of fondly cared for and remembered trees during the holiday season.

Krahn, Fernando. *The Biggest Christmas Tree on Earth*. 1978. 72pp. Little, Brown and Company. (0-316-309-6)

Children are transported into a whimsical fantasy world with Krahn's black and red pencil sketches. A little girl chases a Christmas tree ornament and is swept into a tree-trimming operation staffed by animals and insects in the hollow of a giant evergreen. Making her way to the treetop, she is swooped up by a huge eagle from the tip of the giant tree and is returned safely to her village where she invites her community to share her discovery.

Metcalf, Edna. *The Trees of Christmas*. Illus. by A. Clayton, H. Graff, W. Witsell, and R. Lee. 1969. Abington of Nashville. (0-687-42591-3)

This is an older book still in print, and worth searching out. Ornaments categorized mainly by country, prefaced with a picture of a Christmas tree from that nation and information on their holiday customs, are presented with illustrated directions for their construction. With an adult's guidance, ideally an art teacher, children could create an international Christmas tree project and experience hands-on learning of a global nature. Although many of the trees featured are European in origin, the publishers included an Old Testament tree of Jesse, and trees from Brazil, Mexico, and Japan. Some references to religions are made but always in the context of national customs. The book's format is simple and very useful in a world with an increasingly visible need for international cooperation and understanding of

any sort.

Monroe, Colleen. *A Wish to be a Christmas Tree*. Illus. by Michael Ilesn Monroe. 2000. 32pp. Sleeping Bear Press. \$11.87 (1-58536-002-3)

Michael Monroe's woodland birds and animals will easily capture young readers' interest in yet another story of an evergreen wishing to become Christmas tree. This tree's story is told in rhyme, which sometimes strains to present the plot. But children like narrative poetry and often appreciate rhyme and the great fir tree in this book manages to get decorated and live a long life on a tree farm.

Polacco, Patricia. *Uncle Vova's Tree*. 1989. 32pp. Philomel Books. \$16.99 (0-399-21617-0)

For teachers of a growing Russian and eastern European immigrant population, this Christmas storybook will be welcomed reading material. Readers unfamiliar with Russian Christmas traditions will learn of them through Polacco's memories of Christmas spent with her Uncle Vova. Those whose Christmas traditions resonate with Uncle Vova's household, will remember them fondly through this tender story. At the heart of the celebration are two trees, one strung with food and paper stars outside for the woodland animals and one decorated with candles, painted pysanky eggs, bells and mint hearts inside to thrill the children. Polacco's detailed drawings with charcoal sketched faces that stand out in their simplicity complement her text to create together a rich, warm story filled with memories of a beloved family member. Sadly, readers will find at the book's end that the Christmas they have just shared through its pages was Uncle Vova's last. But they are given hope with his niece's realization that his spirit lives on, remembered by his family and the woodland animals alike.

Powell, Consie. *Old Dog Cora and the Christmas Tree*. 1999. 32 pp. Albert Whitman and Co. \$15.95 (0-8075-5968-7)

Cora, an aging black lab, proves she is not too old to take part in her owners' Christmas tree harvesting tradition. Her determination to help bring the large Douglas fir selected by the family back to their farmhouse helps her owner to see that she can still handle leading the pack in hauling the sled and that it is important to her. Powell's black outlined illustrations give the impression of country woodcuts transporting readers into a cozy, northwoods setting for a glimpse of the holidays from a dog's point of view.

Rahaman, Bashanti. *O Christmas Tree*. Illus. by Frané

Lessac. 1996. 32 pp. Boyds Mills Press. \$14.95 (1-56397-237-9)

Rahaman tells a realistic story of a young boy's disappointing attempt to have a traditional pine tree for Christmas in his Caribbean island home. He learns to appreciate his own island's holiday traditions when his Christmas tree plans fail. The folk art drawings of Frané Lessac impart a childlike innocence to the story and transport readers to the tropical island. Rahaman ends with an Author's Note that explains a little of her island background, dialect, and mélange of holiday traditions.

Raschka, Chris. *Little Tree*. 2001. 32pp. Hyperion Books for Children. (0-7868-0795-4)

Inspired by an e.e. cummings poem of the name which starts the book, Chris Raschka creates an upbeat, happy story of a special little Christmas tree with his typically playful illustrations. The layout of the print echoes e.e. cummings' avant garde disregard for conventional capitalization and punctuation. His primitive style printings also defy traditional layout and pop up and around Raschka's text. This book tells the same story as Andersen's *Fir Tree* but will leave young readers feeling happy as an image of the little tree joyfully hugged by a child brings the story to an end.

Repchuck, Caroline. *The Snow Tree*. Illus. by Josephine Martin. 1996. 24pp. Dutton Children's Books. \$11.19 (0-525-45903-0)

The embossed pages and striking art work in this book make it a worthwhile picture book despite its thin storyline and stiff wording. Little Bear wonders why his world has become so colorless. Then the forest animals contribute items of color to decorate a winter evergreen. Each animal's decorations splash vivid colors on the white raised background. It becomes clear at the end of the story, the only time readers see the tree, that an evergreen is being creatively adorned with natural "ornaments".

Robinson, Howard. (Editorial Director) *Trees of Christmas*. 1988. 48pp. National Wildlife Foundation. (0-912186-92-5)

Junior high readers could handle the thoughtfully selected pieces in this Christmas gift book. The excerpt from the classic *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn*, in which Francie Nolan and her little brother literally stand up against a huge 10 ft. conifer and win the discarded tree to their parents' and neighborhoods' astonishment is characteristic of the high quality selections chosen for this book. Whether fiction, poetry or non-fiction, all

of the collected excerpts center around the Christmas tree and feature excellent poets, commentators, and authors such as E. B. White, Robert Frost, e.e. cummings and Charles Kuralt. Photographs and drawings are integrated nicely and complement the text. The result is an informative and moving tribute to the American Christmas tree tradition.

Ross, Kathy. *More Christmas Ornaments Kids Can Make*, Illus. by Sharon Lane Holm. 2000. 64 pp. Millbrook Press. \$24.90 (0-7613-1396-6)

The page numbers of this how-to book appear in a small evergreen tree shape. Each ornament presented hangs from a pine branch. Needed materials are shown on one side of the page and the completed ornament with clear steps can be seen on the opposite page. This book would make a perfect follow-up to Stevens' book *Christmas Trees* and children could create lovely ornaments from easy-access materials without frustration. Many of the ornaments recycle common household items like marker tops, plastic bottle caps, toilet tissue tubes, toothpaste caps and old neckties. Young children will delight in transforming these ordinary objects into hand-made adornments for a classroom or home holiday tree.

Rylant, Cynthia. *Children of Christmas: Stories for the Season*. Illus. by S. D. Schindler. 1987. 38pp. Orchard Books. \$14.95 (0-531-05706-2)

Newbery award winner Cynthia Rylant created six heartwarming, beautifully written short stories for the Christmas season. The first, entitled "The Christmas Tree Man", tells the story of a lonely man who has spent his life operating a Christmas tree farm and looks forward to the human company he has during the tree selling season. Like her other pieces, it is superbly written with a quiet voice that wonderfully captures some little bit of the Christmas spirit. The writing is warm and moving and so lovely it could be used as a model to inspire composition in a creative writing course.

Say, Allen. *Tree of Cranes*. 1991. 32 pp. Houghton Mifflin Company. \$12.57 (0-395-52024-X)

During an afternoon of mixed emotions, a young Japanese boy wonders whether his mother is being quiet because she is annoyed with him for playing in the pond during winter or if there is another problem. He learns that his mother misses the American tradition of decorating a Christmas tree that she experienced while living in California. She decorates a small tree planted when her son was born with candles and silver paper cranes. The boy falls asleep finally feeling relaxed and believing that his tree is the most special in the world.

He awakes to find an especially meaningful gift under his little tree with which he is delighted.

Stevens, Kathryn. *Christmas Trees*. 2000. 32 pp. The Child's World, Inc. \$22.79 (1-56766-638-8)

This straightforward, non-fiction book explains the origin of the European Christmas tree tradition as well as how trees are grown, cut and shipped. Tips for selecting a tree and caring for it are also given. Illustrated with large, helpful photographs, this book could serve as a good introduction to this tradition for immigrant children or families unfamiliar with the Christmas tree tradition.

Strand, Keith. *Grandfather's Christmas Tree*. Illus. by Thomas Locker. 1999. 32pp. Harcourt Brace and Company. \$16.00 (0-15-201821-2).

Sprigs of pine decorate the forest green endpapers and flyleaves of this picture book illustrated beautifully with oil paintings by Thomas Locker. A story within a story, the text relates a grandson's memories of his grandparents' ranch in northern Colorado. A tall blue spruce and carved wooden geese figure prominently in the young boy's memory of his grandparents' home. When asked to tell the story connected to these images, readers learn a little of pioneer history in the state of Colorado. It is a poignant story of a young couple's struggle to stay warm and fed as they await the winter birth of their first child, the narrator's father, on a farm far from neighbors during a brutally cold season. Faced with the threat of no more firewood, the then young couple manages to save one tree near their house at Christmas that sheltered two geese and their goslings. Almost miraculously the weather turns warm for New Year's Day and they are able to gather firewood once again and spare the geese's home. From that Christmas on the boy's grandparents honor the memory of the geese and their son's first Christmas by placing the carved wooden birds under the same blue spruce tree.

Zolotow, Charlotte. *The Beautiful Christmas Tree*. Illus. by Ruth Robbins. 1972. 32 pp. Parnassus Press. \$15.99 (0-87466-004-1)

Written by one of America's best-loved authors for children, Zolotow's book will not disappoint readers searching for a meaningful Christmas story. Love, care, inner strength, and simplicity emerge from the pages of this story which avoids religious references yet manages to impart a deep sense of values that belong at the heart of the Christmas season. An elderly man's dedication to a sickly pine tree provides the straightforward plot that conveys those values beautifully. This 30 year old book is truly worth looking for in your local library.