

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan library programs as well as activities for family time, day care, or the classroom.

Meet illustrator Will Hillenbrand, who grew up in and lives in Cincinnati, and author Elizabeth Rusch, who lives in Oregon.

Engage children in conversations and activities that explore similarities and differences between humans and trees.

Explore fun activities that align with Ohio's Learning Standards.

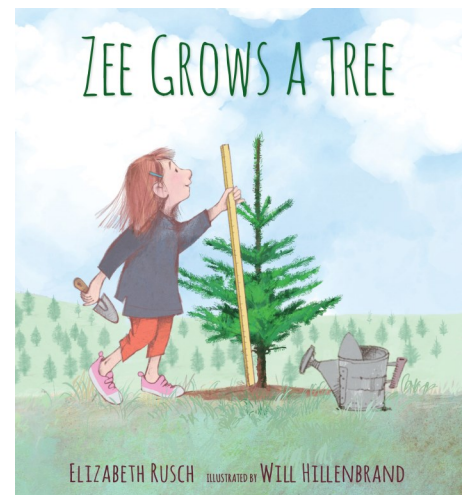
Zee Grows a Tree

By Elizabeth Rusch (author)
and Will Hillenbrand (illustrator)



About the Book

On the morning little Zee Cooper is born, a Douglas-fir seedling emerges from the nursery bed at her family's Christmas tree farm. As Zee and the tree grow up together, they experience many of the same milestones. When Zee starts preschool, her tree is ready to start life outside the nursery. As Zee outgrows all her clothes, her tree grows taller, too. When Zee gets a whole new look for kindergarten, her tree gets a spiffy transformation as well. And as the years go on, Zee takes loving care of her tree, watering it through heat waves and protecting it from winter winds.

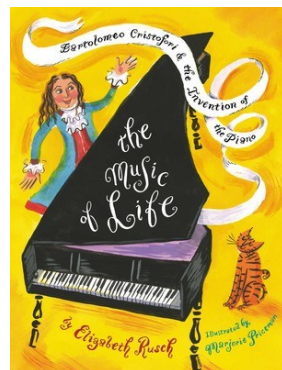


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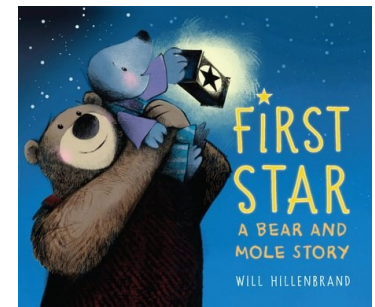
Combining interesting details about how trees are grown and cared for on a farm with the sweet story of a friendship between a girl and her special tree, **Zee Grows a Tree** offers a blend of fiction and nonfiction that will draw the interest of young nature lovers everywhere. In the back of the book, readers will find an index, a bibliography, and an author's note suggesting some ways to enjoy a holiday tree without cutting one down.

Candlewick Press, 2021. ISBN 9780763697549. 32 pages. Ages 5-8.
Leveled Reading: AR Points 0.5. ATOS Book Level 4.6.

www.candlewick.com/cat.asp?browse=title&mode=book&isbn=0763697540



Elizabeth Rusch is the author of nonfiction books for young children, middle grades, and teens, and has written some fiction books as well! Her recent books include **The Music of Life: Bartolomeo Cristofori & the Invention of the Piano**. Will Hillenbrand is the illustrator of more than 70 books and the author of quite a few, including Floyd's Pick Book Award Honor Book **First Star: A Bear and Mole Story**.





Illustrator photo courtesy
Candlewick Press;
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Biographical information
courtesy Ohioana Library
and Will Hillenbrand.

**“In first grade,
Zee learned all
kinds of
exciting new
things: how to
add big
numbers, how
to draw a
castle, and
how to juggle
a soccer ball.
‘Look at me!’
she said to
her tree.
When a heavy
bird snapped
off the top of
Zee’s tree, the
tree learned
something
new too—how
to turn a
branch into a
new treetop!”**

About the Illustrator

Will Hillenbrand is a celebrated author and illustrator who has published more than 70 books for young readers. In addition to his self-illustrated titles, he has illustrated the works of many writers and retellers. He uses a combination of traditional drawing methods and direct impression media to create his magical illustrations.

Will has lived almost all of his life in Cincinnati, where he grew up as the youngest of four boys. He now lives in Terrace Park. He is a member of the National Advisory Board at the University of Findlay’s Mazza Museum, and was the first Illustrator and Author in Residence at Kent State University.

Visit Will’s website to learn much more about him, from his childhood (with photos!) to his creative process to his favorite fruit:

www.willhillenbrand.com/all-about-me
www.willhillenbrand.com/more-about-will

Illustrator Resources

Will Hillenbrand’s official website

www.willhillenbrand.com

Illustrator page on Candlewick website

www.candlewick.com/authill.asp?b=Author&m=bio&id=4472

Videocast: Zee Grows a Tree: Planning (video, 12 minutes)

www.willhillenbrand.com/choose-to-read-ohio-zee-grows-a-tree

Will Hillenbrand created this fascinating video for Choose to Read Ohio. It describes the iterative creative process of illustrating **Zee Grows a Tree**, how Will planned the visual aspects of the book, and what a book dummy is and how it works. Use password **Zee** to access the video.

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

Complete the author visit form on Will Hillenbrand’s website:

www.willhillenbrand.com/author-visit-form

and see

www.willhillenbrand.com/overview-author-visits for more information.

Talk About It!

Open a conversation with children to increase comprehension and spark creativity.

On the day Zee was born in the hospital nursery, her tree sprouted on her family’s tree farm. Discuss the care human babies and young children need, the care animal babies need, and the care seedlings need. Who provides care for all these babies? How is the care different? How is it the same?

Discuss the differences and similarities between trees and human bodies. What part of a human body compares to a tree trunk? What human body parts do we call limbs? Tree farmers trim trees to keep a certain shape, like people get a haircut! Douglas-fir trees can live to be hundreds of years old and can grow to be 30 feet tall. How long do humans live? How tall do they grow?

Continued on the last page!

About the Author

Elizabeth Rusch is an award-winning children's book author, magazine writer, writing teacher, and speaker. Her wide-ranging passions include astronomy, volcanology, art, music, history, nature, waves, jokes, crayons, and mud—anything that catches her fancy.

Elizabeth believes in the power of discovery, untold stories, and persistent questions. Whether writing fiction and nonfiction for children and adults or teaching workshops, she hopes her work opens doors, opens minds, and opens possibilities. Elizabeth lives in Portland, Oregon.



Author photo and biography courtesy Candlewick Press.

Author Resources

Elizabeth Rusch's official website

www.elizabethrusch.com

Author page on Candlewick website

www.candlewick.com/authill.asp?b=Author&m=bio&id=10993

Visit Elizabeth on Twitter @elizabethrusch

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

See www.elizabethrusch.com/school-visits and inquire at author@elizabethrusch.com.

Learn and Have Fun!

*Ideas for extending the experience of reading and sharing **Zee Grows a Tree**.*

All living things grow. In **Zee Grows a Tree**, Zee and her tree grow in many ways. Using a measuring device, measure your child's height or the height of each child in the class or group. Then compare to things in the room or area that are about the same height, taller, or shorter. Next, find a tree to measure! Measure as high up as you can, then estimate the total height of the tree. Measure the circumference of the tree. This site describes how to estimate the age of a tree from its circumference:

treescharlotte.org/tree-education/tree-age-equation/

Measure your child's circumference as well!

Take a tree walk! Look for evergreen and deciduous trees. Discuss the similarities and differences. Which type of tree has wide, flat leaves? Needles? Fruit? Look for the seeds of various trees. Collect some leaves, nuts, and seeds from the ground. Take them apart and investigate!

Visit a tree farm and talk with the owners. How do the farmers care for the trees? Find out the best time of year to plant a tree, and why. Discuss the cost of different trees. What expenses are involved in maintaining a tree farm?

Get creative! Create a collage with leaves, seeds, nuts, and branches. Paint a picture using fallen branches or pine needles as a brush. Make leaf prints. Draw the branches of a bare tree, or sponge-paint the leaves of a tree in green or autumn colors.

Grow plants together! Build a lesson plan or library program around growing seeds in cups or baggies. The KidsGardening.org website offers many ideas and resources to help children play, learn, and grow through gardening. Pair a seed-growing experience with various books on plants and growing including **Zee Grows a Tree**; **Up in the Garden and Down in the Dirt** by Kate Messner, illustrated by Christopher Silas Neal; and **In the Garden** by Emma Giuliani.

Talk About It! (continued)

Zee's family lives on a tree farm. Who would buy trees from a tree farm? What might they purchase them for? What might they do with them? Talk about other places trees grow. Discuss the ways that people use trees and how we can protect tree species by replanting what we use.

The age of a Douglas-fir tree can be counted by its whorls, the rings of branches around the trunk. What are some ways we can tell young people are growing?

Tie It In!

Using this book with Ohio's Learning Standards.

Educators: Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards also apply. These activities using **Zee Grows a Tree** align with Ohio's Learning Standards for Grades 1 and 2.

Librarians, parents, and others: These activities are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, education.ohio.gov. From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Learning in Ohio."

These activities are also great for library programs, family time, and playgroups.

English Language Arts

Reading Standards for Literature: Craft and Structure (Grade 1). **Zee Grows a Tree** is unusual in that it is both a fiction and nonfiction book at the same time. It tells the fictional story of a little girl and a tree. It also provides factual information about trees and tree farms. Discuss fiction and nonfiction books, helping the children understand the differences. Share some examples of fiction books and nonfiction books in the public, school, or classroom library. Go back through **Zee Grows a Tree** and point out the parts that tell a story and the parts that give information.

Mathematics

Measurement and Data (Grade 2). As Zee grows, her tree also grows. The image on the book jacket depicts Zee measuring the height of her tree. Introduce or review units of measurement (feet, inches, meters, centimeters). Measure a variety of everyday items in the classroom, library, or home. Then measure each child! Measure height, length of arms, legs, or any other measurement the children choose.

Science

Life Science (Grade 1). Trees and humans both need energy and water to live. Trees make energy from sunlight, using a process called photosynthesis. They get nutrients, including nitrogen, calcium, and potassium, from soil. Have a class or group discussion about how humans get energy from food, where food comes from, and what nutrients are found in food that help humans grow and be healthy.

In the heat of the summer, the needles on Zee's tree turned brown. She gave it extra water and even shared freezer pops with it! Too much heat and insufficient moisture are not good for people either. In the winter, Zee put a burlap screen around her tree to protect it from windburn. With the class or group, discuss how people protect themselves from extreme temperatures in the summer and winter. How are these techniques similar to or different from the ways Zee protected her tree?

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: library.ohio.gov/ctro.

Toolkit created by Terry Tocchi, Columbus Metropolitan Library, January 2023. Links and other information are accurate at the time of publication.