



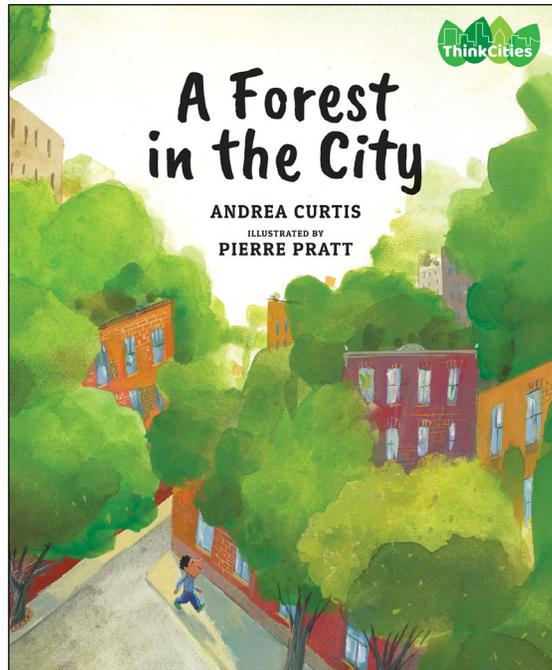
# GROUNDWOOD STUDY GUIDES

## A Forest in the City

ThinkCities Series

*Written by Andrea Curtis*

*Illustrated by Pierre Pratt*



**This beautiful book of narrative non-fiction looks at the urban forest and dives into the question of how we can live in harmony with city trees.**

### **CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS**

Ages 8 to 12 / Grades 3 to 7

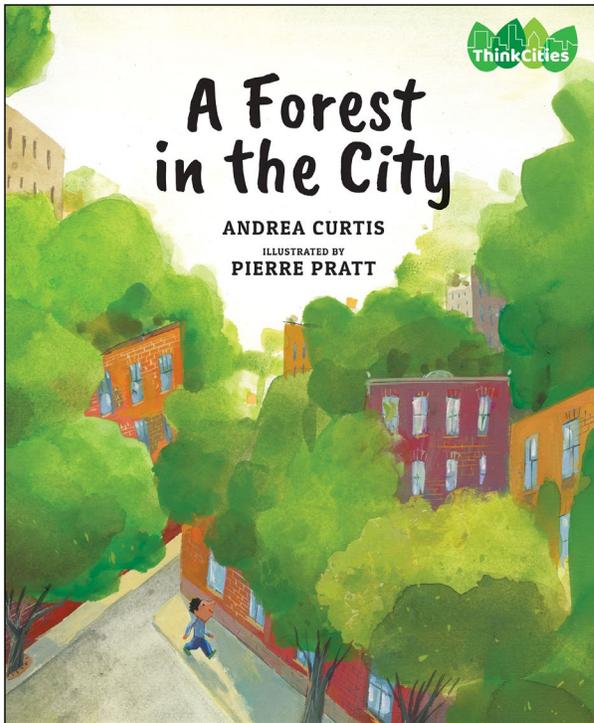
JUVENILE NONFICTION / Science & Nature / Trees & Forests / Environmental Conservation & Protection

Full-color illustrations / 8.5 x 10.625 / 40 pages

Hardcover with jacket / \$18.99 / 978-1-77306-142-9

Ebook / 978-1-77306-143-6

[groundwoodbooks.com](http://groundwoodbooks.com)



## BOOK DESCRIPTION

“The vital importance of the urban forest in relation to the welfare of city dwellers is presented with interesting information and lush illustrations. Useful for reports, projects, and classroom activities.” —*School Library Journal*

“[A] book for budding environmentalists” —*Booklist*

“[A] comprehensive source for those interested in arboriculture and ecology.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*

“*A Forest in the City* ... tells everything you need to know about city trees ... [b]eautiful (mainly green) gouache illustrations by Montreal artist Pierre Pratt help make this book for 8- to 11-year-olds an attractive choice.” —*Winnipeg Free Press*

“This is a beautifully illustrated, very visually appealing picture book that brings up some big questions in an accessible, kid-friendly way.”  
—*Eat. Live. Travel. Write. Blog*

## CURRICULUM LINKS

### SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

- Grade 1 Understanding life systems (needs and characteristics of living things); Understanding Earth & Space systems (daily and seasonal changes)
- Grade 2 Understanding Earth & Space systems (air and water in the environment)
- Grade 3 Understanding life systems (growth and changes in plants); Understanding Earth & Space systems (soils in the environment)
- Grade 4 Understanding life systems (habitats and communities)
- Grade 5 Understanding Earth & Space systems (conservation of energy and resources)
- Grade 6 Understanding life systems (biodiversity)

### SOCIAL STUDIES

#### PEOPLE & ENVIRONMENTS

- Grade 1 The local community
- Grade 7 Physical patterns in a changing world; natural resources around the world: use and sustainability

### HERITAGE & IDENTITY

- Grade 3 Communities in Canada 1780-1850
- Grade 4 Early societies
- Grade 5 Interactions of Indigenous people and Europeans
- Grade 6 Communities in Canada, past and present

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR GRADES 1–3

1. What did you learn about what trees need to survive and thrive in cities?  
Make a list of five key elements for a healthy urban forest.
2. The author describes a city “draped in a blanket of green” on the first page. What does she mean? She also asks: “Is this the city you know?” What’s your city like—do you have lots of trees on streets and lawns or are they few and far between? Are they big and healthy or small and spindly? Does your city and its people care about trees? How do you know?
3. Pick four vocabulary words in the book that you don’t know but think are important to understanding city trees.
4. The author writes that many trees planted by city sidewalks don’t live past seven years old. After reading the book, what do you think you could do to help them to live longer? What else did you learn in the book about the difference between young trees and older ones?
5. Why does the author think it’s so important to protect the urban forest?
6. What kind of animals have you seen in trees in the city? What are they doing in the trees? (For instance, do they sleep there? Eat there? Build nests or gather materials?)
7. What kind of fruit have you seen on city trees? Would you eat it? Why or why not?
8. Why do you think having a view of trees makes people feel happier and less stressed? What is it about the trees that helps improve our mood?

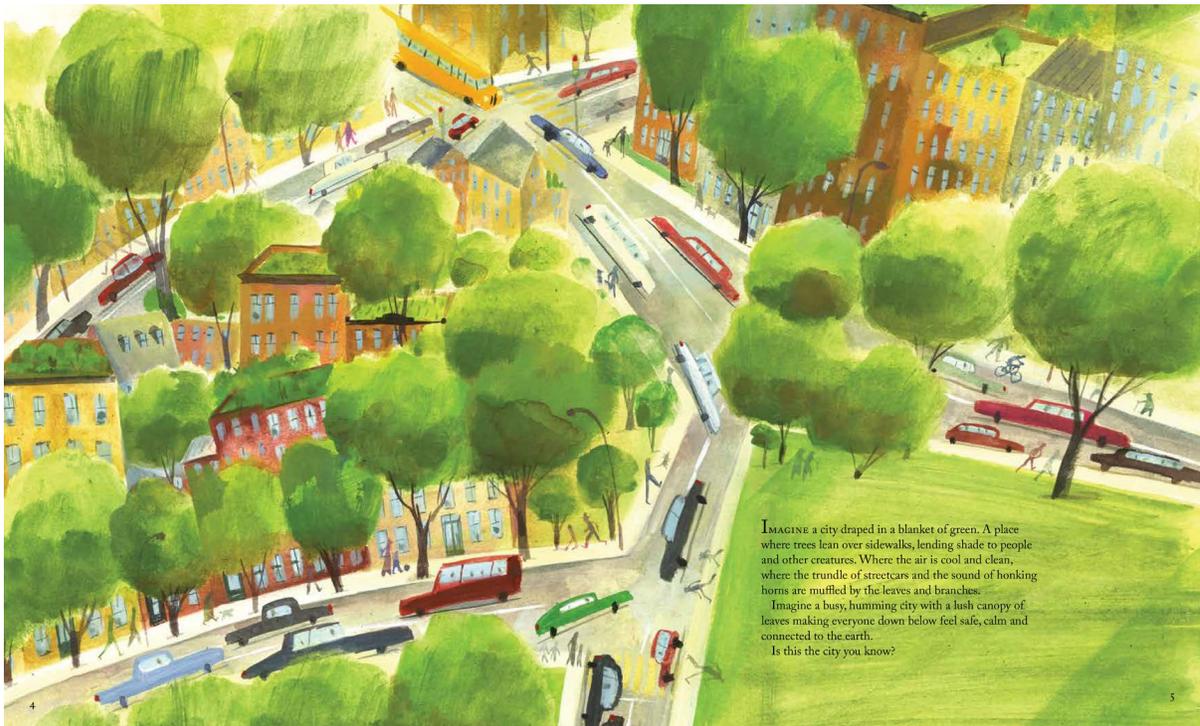
## ACTIVITIES AND FURTHER LEARNING FOR GRADES 1–3

1. Can you draw a picture of the thing that most surprised you in *A Forest in the City*?
2. Write a recipe for a thriving urban forest. What are the ingredients trees need to survive and thrive? What are the most important directions for people who live in cities?
3. Draw a picture of a tree as a climate-change fighting superhero!
4. Make a scientific observation chart about the animals or birds that live, play or eat in city trees. Where do they make their homes? What do they eat from the trees? Do they sleep in the canopy? What kind of trees do they prefer? What are the similarities and differences between the critters that live in the urban forest?
5. Write a note to your favourite tree and tell it why you like it so much! Use the author's craft tutorial to make a card for your note!
6. Listen to your teacher or Amanda Palmer read Mary Oliver's poem, "When I Am Among the Trees": <https://www.brainpickings.org/2019/09/23/amanda-palmer-mary-oliver-when-i-am-among-the-trees/>. Write a poem or draw a picture about how it feels to you to be among the trees.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR GRADES 4–6

1. What did you learn in the book or from other research about the difference between how Indigenous people and European settlers thought about trees?
2. How are urban forests different from rural ones?
3. On pages 12–13 the author talks about something called the Wood Wide Web. Watch this YouTube video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yWQqeyPIVRo> and consider how trees and people are similar and different in the way they build communities.
4. On pages 14–15, you’ll notice tree roots competing with pipes underground. Watch this video about what New York City looks like underground <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SX1xmaKPb9o>. What do you think is under your city? Is it the same or different?
5. Check out the website <https://hungrytrees.com/>. Have you ever seen a tree “eating” something unusual in your city?
6. On page 21 the author writes that scientists test lichen on city trees to monitor pollution. Watch this video <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih3xFOW62aU> about why lichen is important. What did you learn about the value of lichen to us and the environment?
7. Have you ever seen a city tree that’s sick or diseased? What happened to it? What creatures lived in it before it fell down and died? Was it killed by invasive insects like the ones the author writes about in *A Forest in the City*? How do you know?
8. Have you ever swung on the trees in your school playground? Does this book make you think twice about keeping the trees in your schoolyard safe? What can you do to make sure they grow big and strong?

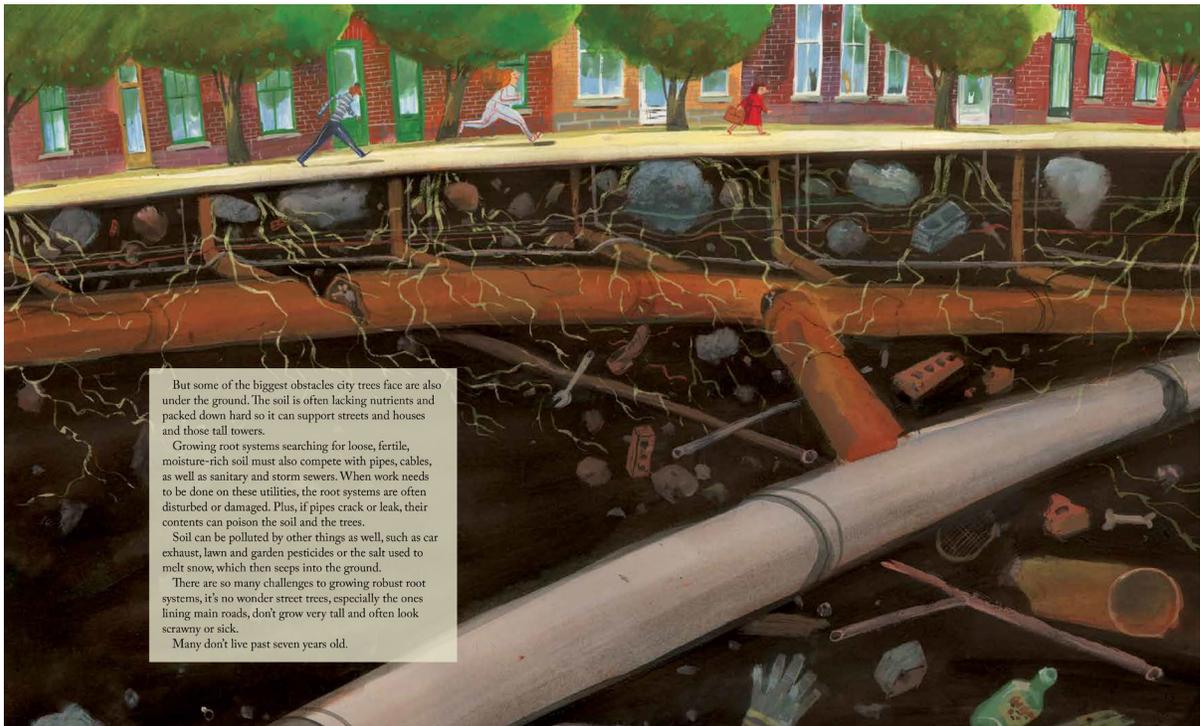
9. Trees help absorb CO<sub>2</sub>, the gas that causes global warming (pg. 26). Research how humans produce CO<sub>2</sub>. How can we cut down on the production of this gas and help fight climate change?
10. Were you surprised to hear about the “prescribed burns” in Toronto’s High Park on page 31? Watch this video for an idea of what it looks like: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdUkL4q-WOQ>. Research how fires help urban forests as well as other types of forests.
11. Why do you think trees lower crime rates?
12. Why do you think having a view of trees makes people feel happier and less stressed? What is it about the trees that helps improve mental health?



## ACTIVITIES AND FURTHER LEARNING FOR GRADES 4–6

1. After reading the book and watching the [video](#) about the “Wood Wide Web,” make a chart comparing how trees and people build communities.
2. **Writing prompt:** write a story about a hungry tree like the kind you read about and saw on the website [hungrytrees.com](http://hungrytrees.com).
3. Go on a lichen safari! What kind of lichen can you find in your schoolyard? Check out this video of lichenologists in Edinburgh, Scotland: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyaB18pL\\_3c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyaB18pL_3c). How many types of lichen can you identify in your schoolyard or a nearby park?
4. Write a persuasive letter to a neighbour who doesn’t like city trees. Tell them why they’re so important to all of us! Or write a persuasive letter to your local city councillor to encourage them to create education campaigns, planting targets and city bylaws that protect the urban forest. Send it!
5. Why do you think it’s important not to take bark or damage trees? Could you make a public service poster or advertisement telling other kids to be careful with the trees in your schoolyard?
6. **Writing prompt:** choose a person illustrated in the book. Imagine who they are and what they’re all about. Write a short story about them and include something (big or small!) about a tree.
7. Do you know of any big trees in your neighbourhood or near your school? Research how old the tree is or measure it and take an educated guess. What was happening in that place when it was just a seedling? Who or what might have sat beneath that tree, climbed its branches, raked its leaves? Write a story about someone or something from the past that might have known that tree just like you do!

8. Make a tree inventory of your schoolyard. What kind of trees grow there? Draw the leaves and bark, measure the diameter of the trunk. Which ones are healthy or sick? Create a map of your schoolyard and plot the trees. Make a graph charting the types, size and other identifying details. How can your inventory help ensure the trees stay healthy? See <http://neighbourwoods.org/> for more information about doing a tree inventory.
  
9. There's a campaign by the UK Timber Festival to map the sounds of forests around the world. Check it out here: <https://timberfestival.org.uk/soundsoftheforest-soundmap/>. Brainstorm the sounds you might hear in your schoolyard or a nearby park or forest. Could you record the sounds and post them to the Timber Festival soundmap?



But some of the biggest obstacles city trees face are also under the ground. The soil is often lacking nutrients and packed down hard so it can support streets and houses and those tall towers.

Growing root systems searching for loose, fertile, moisture-rich soil must also compete with pipes, cables, as well as sanitary and storm sewers. When work needs to be done on these utilities, the root systems are often disturbed or damaged. Plus, if pipes crack or leak, their contents can poison the soil and the trees.

Soil can be polluted by other things as well, such as car exhaust, lawn and garden pesticides or the salt used to melt snow, which then seeps into the ground.

There are so many challenges to growing robust root systems, it's no wonder street trees, especially the ones lining main roads, don't grow very tall and often look scrawny or sick.

Many don't live past seven years old.

## MORE RESOURCES

### WRITE A NOTE TO A TREE!

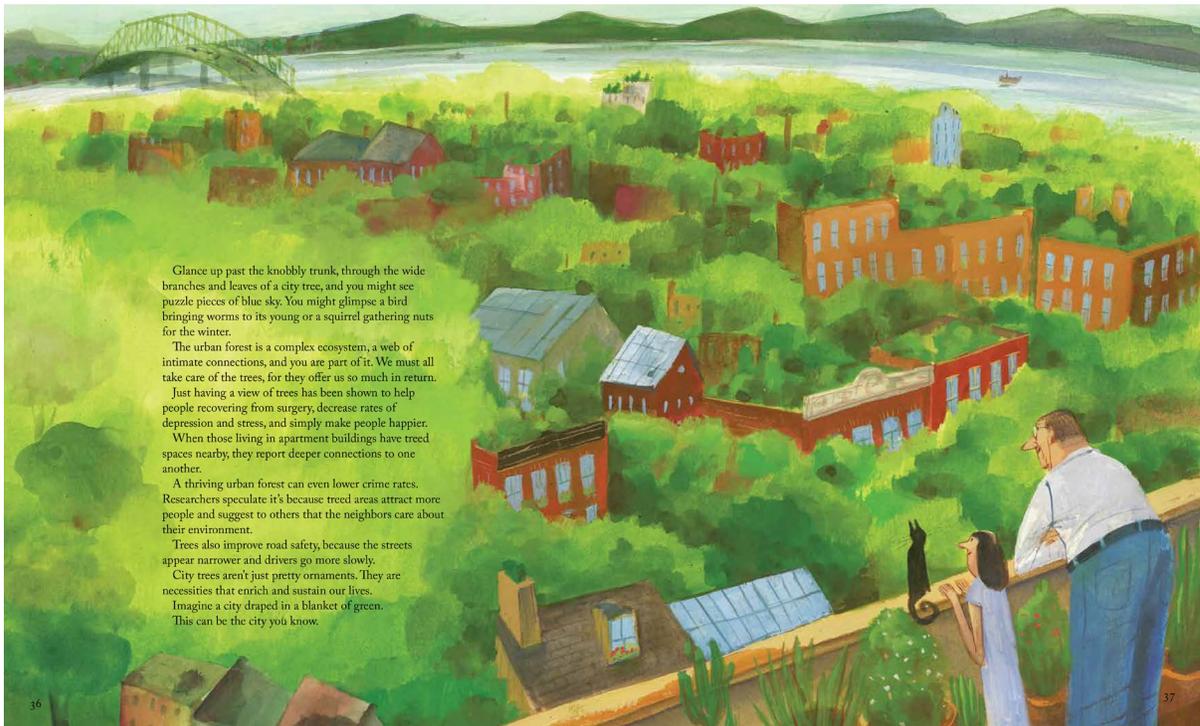
Trees do so much for us! The least we can do is say thanks! Andrea has been writing notes to her favourite city trees. Check out this easy [craft tutorial](#) using materials you can find around your house or classroom and do the same.

### MAKE TREE GOGGLES!

Andrea talks often about how, in cities, especially, we have to work hard to notice the urban forest and all the work our trees do for us. Use Andrea's visual guide on her website ([www.andreacurtiskids.ca](http://www.andreacurtiskids.ca)) and make these toilet-paper-roll tree goggles and see if you can see the forest for the trees!

### WATCH A VIDEO ABOUT THE URBAN FOREST!

Andrea participated in the kidlit festival Telling Tales and made a short video about the importance of our urban forest. Watch it [here](#) starting at 2:03!



Glance up past the knobby trunk, through the wide branches and leaves of a city tree, and you might see puzzle pieces of blue sky. You might glimpse a bird bringing worms to its young or a squirrel gathering nuts for the winter.

The urban forest is a complex ecosystem, a web of intimate connections, and you are part of it. We must all take care of the trees, for they offer us so much in return.

Just having a view of trees has been shown to help people recovering from surgery, decrease rates of depression and stress, and simply make people happier.

When those living in apartment buildings have trees nearby, they report deeper connections to one another.

A thriving urban forest can even lower crime rates. Researchers speculate it's because tree areas attract more people and suggest to others that the neighbors care about their environment.

Trees also improve road safety, because the streets appear narrower and drivers go more slowly.

City trees aren't just pretty ornaments. They are necessities that enrich and sustain our lives.

Imagine a city draped in a blanket of green. This can be the city you know.

## AUTHOR AND ILLUSTRATOR BIOGRAPHIES



**Andrea Curtis's** children's non-fiction titles include *A Forest in the City* and *City of Water* in the ThinkCities series, *Eat This!*, which received starred reviews from *Kirkus* and *School Library Journal*, and *What's for Lunch?* (VOYA's Honor List). She has also written the young adult novel *Big Water*. Andrea lives with her family in Toronto, Ontario, where she grows vegetables, wanders the ravines and spends as much time as possible on her bike.



**Pierre Pratt** is an award-winning illustrator of more than fifty books for children. He has been a finalist for the Hans Christian Andersen Award and is a three-time winner of the Governor General's Literary Award for Illustration.