THE MAN WHO PLANTED TREES

Puppet State
Theatre Company

WELCOME!

State Theatre New Jersey welcomes you to the performance of *The Man Who Planted Trees*, from Scotland's Puppet State Theatre. The story of one man's (and one dog's) mission to reclaim a barren wasteland, the show touches on themes of altruism, patience, persistence, and caring for the environment.

These *Keynotes* provide information to help you prepare for the performance. Included are discussion questions and suggested activities to help you make the most of your theater experience.

CONTENTS

ABOUT THE BOOK

"The Man Who Planted Trees is a book I have always loved. Having read the story again and again, I know it is true—not true in the literal sense of course, but each of us in our own way can and must try to leave the earth a better place than we found it—we must leave a gentle footprint behind us."

—Michael Morpurgo

The Man Who Planted Trees has also been called *The Story of Elzéard Bouffier—The Most Extraordinary Character I Ever Met*, and *The Man Who Planted Hope and Reaped Happiness*. After the performance, ask your students what title THEY would give the story.

The Lorax, by Dr. Seuss, also deals with the theme of preserving our natural environment. The two books make an effective compare-and-contrast exercise for students.

The Man Who Planted Trees is a short story by French author Jean Giono (ZHON jo-NO), first published in 1953. It is the fictional tale of a man named Elzéard Bouffier (el-zay-ARD boo-FYAY). After losing his wife and son, he retreats to a remote area in the Provence region of France and becomes a shepherd. His only companions are his sheep and his dog.

He finds a barren landscape ravaged by wind and forsaken by people and animals. There are no trees left to enrich and protect the soil, shelter the wildlife, and provide shade, fruit, and wood for people. All by himself, Elzéard sets out on his life's work: planting one hundred acorns each day.

> What kind of tree grows from an acorn?

We learn Elzéard's story through an anonymous narrator, who first encounters him in 1910 while hiking in the region. He stays awhile with the shepherd and learns about his tree-planting mission. Ten years later, the narrator returns to this peaceful spot to recover from his traumatic experience in the First World War. He is amazed to discover that Elzéard's trees have begun to mature and that the land is starting to revive. Over the course of 30 more years, the narrator continues to visit his friend and to observe the gradual transformation of the landscape. Laboring without interruption in complete anonymity, Elzéard plants so many trees that the valley becomes a fertile, green home for plants, animals, and humans.

The government authorities have no idea that the miraculous change is the result of one man's patient dedication; they believe the trees grew naturally. They place the 'natural' forest under government protection. The narrator visits the elderly Elzéard one last time in 1945, at the end of World War II. Two years later, the man who planted trees passes away peacefully.

PROVENCE (pro-VAHNS), the setting for *The Man Who Planted Trees*, is a region in southeastern France. Bordered by Italy and the Mediterranean Sea, it has a warm, dry climate and a rugged landscape. Its famous lavender fields blanket the countryside with their purple blooms and perfume the air all summer long.

MEET JEAN GIONO

Jean Giono, the son of a cobbler and a laundress, was born in 1895 in Manosque, a town nestled at the foot of the Alps in southeastern France. As a boy, he spent summers with a shepherd family, inspiring a love of nature that infused much of his writing. Though his formal education ended with middle school, he continued to read the great works of literature. He was called up for military service in the First World War; the horrors he witnessed there led him to become a pacifist. He was imprisoned in 1937 and again in 1944 for speaking out against war. During his lifetime, Giono traveled very little and rarely left his native village. In 1930, he gave up his job at a bank to devote himself to writing stories, essays, poetry, plays, film scripts, and more than thirty novels, many of which were translated into English. He died in Manosque in 1970.

ABOUT THE SHOW

The Man Who Planted Trees is a multisensory experience. Besides watching and listening, the audience will be able to smell and feel parts of the story.

Ask your students to close their eyes and imagine they are in their bedroom. What sounds do they hear? What does it smell like? What does the floor feel like beneath their feet? If they put out their hands, what do they touch? What feelings or emotions do they get? Have students call out their impressions while you write them on the blackboard.

Go through the same process, this time imagining their kitchen, classroom, a forest, the beach, the mall, the moon, etc. Have students compare and contrast their responses to the different environments. Which was their favorite? Why?

This exercise can also be adapted into a movement activity, with students moving through the room imagining themselves in different imaginary environments: different temperatures, smells, sounds, weather, surfaces, etc.

The Man Who Planted Trees uses a wide range of theater techniques. During the show, pay careful attention to the following:

- **NARRATION** — As in the book, there is a narrator who tells the story directly to the audience. In the play, he's given the name "Jean," representing the voice of the author. Jean also talks to the dog.
- **PUPPETS** — Except for the narrator, all the characters in the story are played by puppets. The two puppeteer-actors are visible throughout the performance.
- **SOUND EFFECTS** — Pre-recorded music and sound effects help bring the audience into the world of the play.
- **SETS AND PROPS** — The set and props are small and very simple, in keeping with the charming, intimate atmosphere of the performance.
- **MULTISENSORY EFFECTS** — Surprising elements allow the audience to feel and smell the story as well as see and hear it.

STYLES OF PUPPETRY IN THE SHOW

HAND/MOUTH PUPPETS cover the hand and have a mouth that can open and close. DOG is an example of a hand/mouth puppet.

TABLE-TOP PUPPETS perform on top of a table. ELZÉARD and the MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT are both examples of table-top puppets.

MARIONETTES are controlled from above using wires or strings. ELZÉARD'S SHEEP are an example of marionette-style puppetry.

ABOUT THE COMPANY

Puppet State Theatre Company is based in Edinburgh (ED-in-bruh), the capital of Scotland, and its second-largest city.

Scotland is a country in the north of the island of Great Britain, in northwestern Europe. Along with England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, it makes up the country of the United Kingdom (U.K.).

Edinburgh

PUPPET STATE THEATRE COMPANY

Based in Edinburgh, Scotland, Puppet State Theatre Company was founded by Richard Medrington. After performing his one-man puppet shows for 20, years he joined forces with puppeteer Rick Conte and puppeteer/puppet maker Ailie Cohen in 2006. Their show, *The Man Who Planted Trees*, has toured to schools, village halls, theaters, and festivals across the U.K. and Ireland as well as in Malaysia, Bermuda, the Netherlands, U.S., Canada, and Australia, including performances off Broadway at the New Victory Theatre and at the Sydney Opera House.

www.puppetstate.com

RICHARD MEDRINGTON

Richard is a playwright, performer, and storyteller who found his calling as a puppeteer in 1983. His one-man shows include *The Spider of Spindle Wood*, *The Interrogation*, *The Adventures of Ivan the Slug*, and AA Milne's *Winnie the Pooh*, which toured the U.K. for five years to packed houses, culminating in a sell-out run at the Royal National Theatre in London. He moved to Edinburgh in 1992 and is a veteran of 16 Edinburgh Festival Fringes. He founded Puppet State Theatre Company in 2003.

RICK CONTE

Rick studied journalism at the University of Georgia and moved to Edinburgh, Scotland on a whim in 1989. He has worked with The National Theatre of Scotland, Wee Stories, The Edinburgh Puppet Company, and Catherine Wheels. Using one of his puppet creations, Lord Dennis Tippleworthy, Rick has addressed the European Conference on Alcohol Policy in Helsinki, Leiden, and Warsaw. He and Richard have been touring with *The Man Who Planted Trees* since May 2006. He plans to continue until everyone has seen it.

FROM PAGE TO STAGE

After reviewing the story, ask your students: Were you inspired by the shepherd's story? How? If dogs could really talk, what would their voices sound like?

Have students create their own dog puppets out of socks, buttons, fur fabric, felt, scissors, and fabric glue. (Templates and instructions for making a simple dog puppet can be found at: www.barkpost.com/diy-dog-sock-puppet

Have students experiment with different voices until they find just the right one for their dog. Pair them up to create short scenarios about why we should plant trees. Have them act out their scenes with their dog puppets.

THE STORY

While hiking through Provence, France, Jean, the play's narrator, meets a shepherd and his chatty dog, who spend each and every day planting trees. Over thirty years— through two world wars—they carry on patiently with their task until the barren landscape is transformed into a lush, green valley.

ADAPTING THE BOOK

In 2005, Puppet State Theatre Company came across Jean Giono's tale of a tree-planting shepherd. They were struck by the beauty and simplicity of its message, and the inspiring lesson about persistence in the face of many setbacks. They decided to adapt it for their company—using puppets, of course!

Taking a story off the page and bringing it to life onstage requires good problem-solving skills. In *The Man Who Planted Trees*, the main character lives in silence and isolation. He does the same thing every day for thirty years: he plants trees. From these elements, how do you create an interesting and entertaining play that will hold the audience's attention?

The Puppet State creative team searched the book for clues to help them tell this slow and gentle story in a theatrical way. They noticed that Jean Giono mentioned that the shepherd had a dog. This was the key: the shepherd would remain silent, but the dog—his friend and confidant— could accompany the audience on the journey and tell us all we needed to know. In the play, the dog continually interrupts the narrator with silly comments and antics.

Another problem for the team to solve was how to show the passing of time over the story's 30-year span. Here, too, the dog was the key. As the story moves forward in time, he ages before our eyes: his fur becomes gray, his movements become slow and less lively. But he never loses his sense of mischief!

WHY PLANT TREES?

"The creation of a thousand forests is in one acorn."

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

"Plants are conscious and they breathe like we all do. They have equal rights like us to live on this earth."

— *Abdul Kareem*

How did Elzéard's tree planting benefit local people, plants, and wildlife?

"The oak trees Elzéard planted in 1913 were now as tall as I was," the narrator tells us. Different tree species grow at different rates. How long would it take an oak tree to grow as tall as you? A maple? A pine? An apple tree? A redwood? A baobab?

In the story, the forest planted by Elzéard comes under the protection of the government. What do you think is the government's responsibility to protect our natural resources? Why?

Trees are an essential part of our ecosystem. Here are some of the many ways in which they help keep our planet safe and healthy.

- **CLEAN WATER** — The hair-like root fibers of trees help filter groundwater by trapping and filtering pollutants and contaminants. A mature tree can take up and release up to 400 gallons of water every 24 hours.

- **CLEAN AIR** — Trees produce oxygen, absorb carbon dioxide, and capture particulates (dust, pollen, etc.). Mature trees create enough oxygen in a day to support a family of four.

- **SOIL PROTECTION AND NOURISHMENT** — Tree roots prevent erosion by holding soil in place so it cannot be easily blown away by wind or washed away by water. Without trees, heavy rains can wash soil into streams and rivers, spreading pollution, destroying habitats, and increasing the risk of flooding. When trees die, they break down into nutrients that enrich the soil.

- **HABITAT FOR WILDLIFE** — Trees and forests provide homes for many different species of animals.

- **HABITAT FOR HUMANS** — Trees make our world a more beautiful and happy place. Parks and forests are great places to stay active by hiking, backpacking, bird watching, etc. Studies show that hospital patients who can see trees outside their windows recover more quickly than those who look out on pavement and buildings.

- **NATURAL SOURCE OF MEDICINES** — Trees provide substances used in medicine; for example, Taxol, a drug extracted from the bark of the yew, is used in treating cancer.

- **ECONOMY** — The forest industry provides jobs for many people, from cabinetmakers to homebuilders. When trees are planted near homes and businesses, they conserve energy by keeping buildings cool. Landscaping with trees can reduce air conditioning costs by up to 50 percent, by shading windows and walls.

- **ENERGY** — In some parts of the world, trees are the main source of fuel for cooking food, warming houses, and running small businesses.
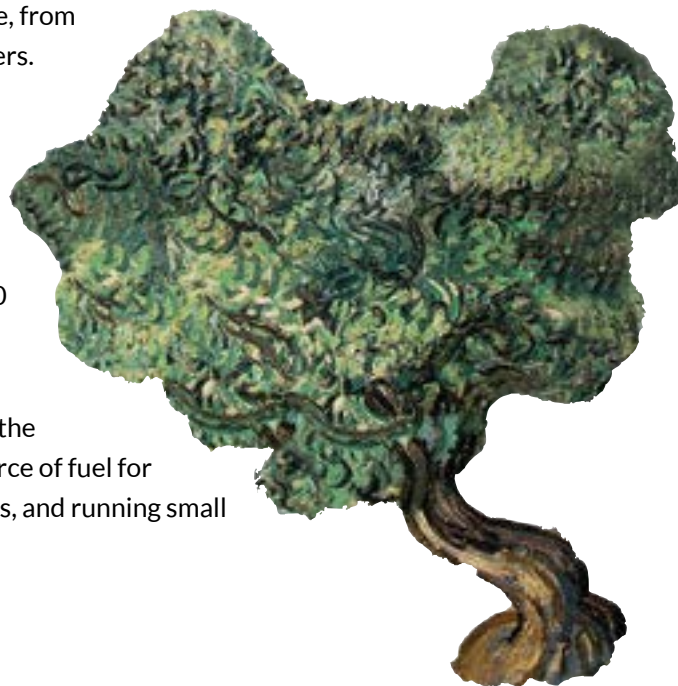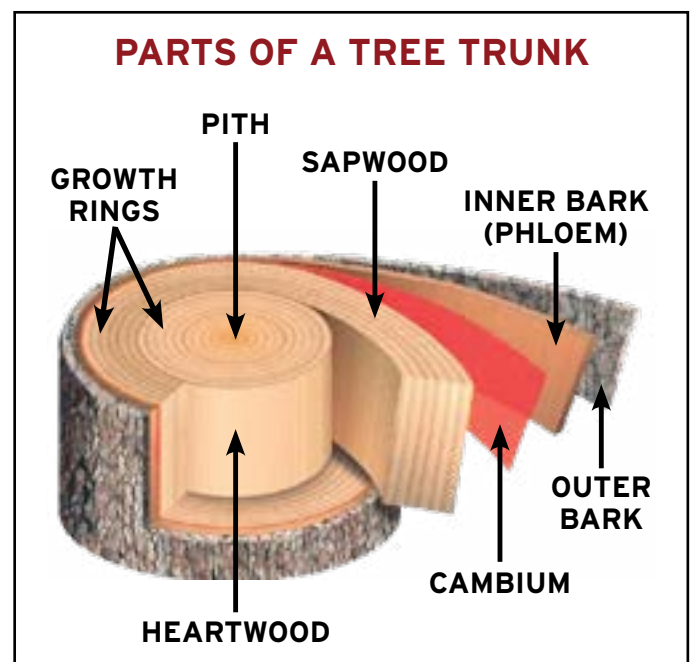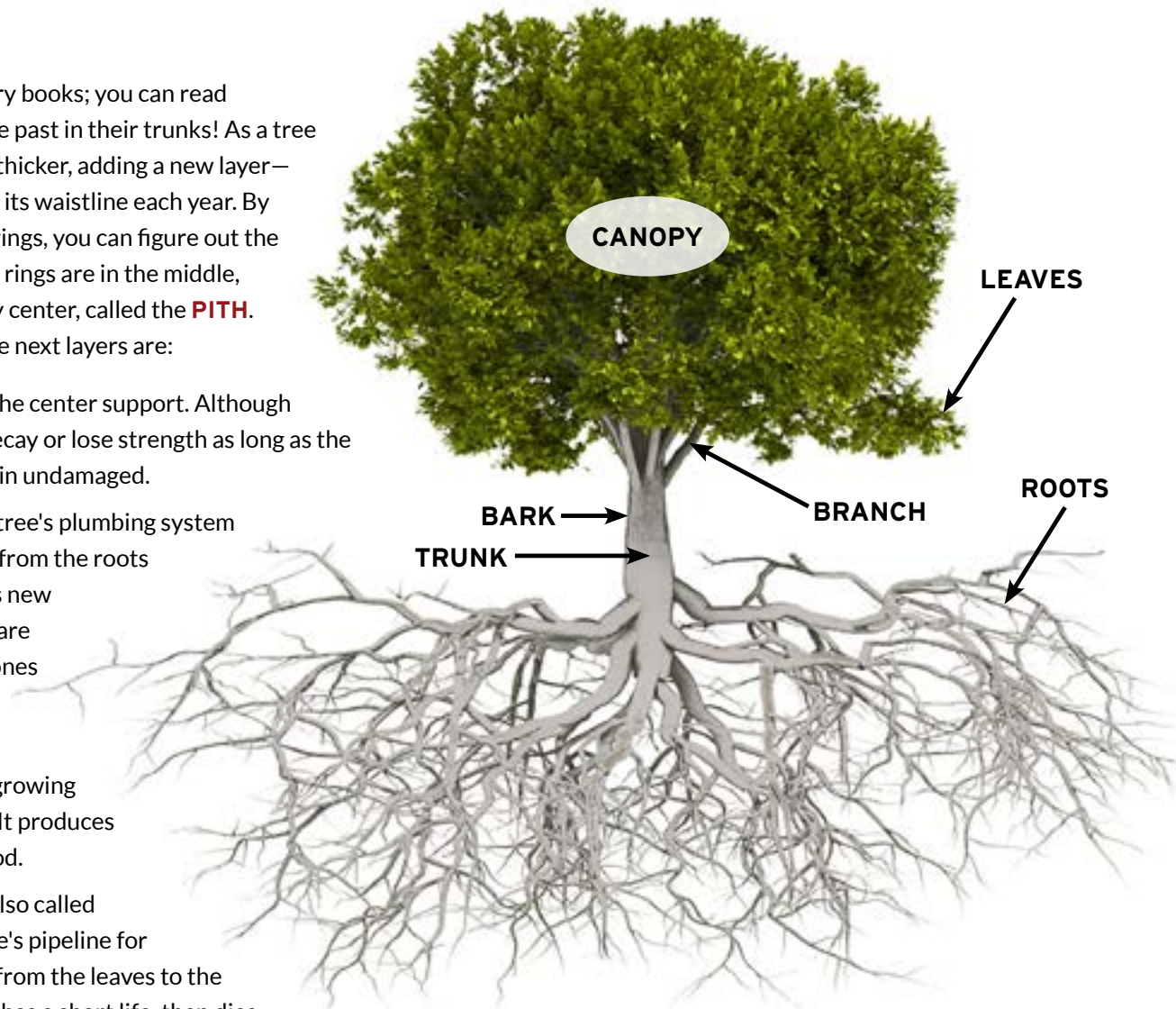
READING A TREE

Trees are living history books; you can read information about the past in their trunks! As a tree grows, its trunk gets thicker, adding a new layer—called a ring—around its waistline each year. By counting the annual rings, you can figure out the tree's age. The oldest rings are in the middle, starting with the very center, called the **PITH**. Working outward, the next layers are:

- **HEARTWOOD** - the center support. Although dead, it will not decay or lose strength as long as the outer layers remain undamaged.

- **SAPWOOD** - the tree's plumbing system for moving water from the roots into the leaves. As new rings of sapwood are added, the inner ones die and turn to heartwood.

- **CAMBIUM** - the growing part of the trunk. It produces new bark and wood.

- **INNER BARK** - also called **PHLOEM**, the tree's pipeline for getting nutrients from the leaves to the rest of the tree. It has a short life, then dies and becomes part of the bark.

- **OUTER BARK** - the tree's shield layer. It protects the tree from insects, extreme heat and cold, and too much or too little water.

The rings provide a record of everything that happened to the tree during its life—from insects, wounds, and disease to temperature changes, floods, and fire. Trees that depend heavily on temperature in the growing season will have narrow rings during cold periods and wider rings for warm periods. Trees that depend heavily on moisture during the growing season will have wider rings during rainy periods and narrower rings during dry periods.

You can get information from living or dead trees, as well as ancient logs. Because tree-ring data can be hundreds or thousands of years old, it allows scientists to extend climate records back in time well before modern weather instruments were invented. By understanding the past climate using tree rings, scientists can more accurately predict future changes in the climate system.

CANOPY

LEAVES

BRANCH

BARK

ROOTS

TRUNK

PARTS OF A TREE TRUNK

GROWTH RINGS

PITH

SAPWOOD

INNER BARK (PHLOEM)

OUTER BARK

CAMBIUM

HEARTWOOD

DOING THE RIGHT THING

"Someone's sitting in the shade today because someone planted a tree a long time ago."

—Warren Buffett

"You don't need a diploma to make a difference; everyone is qualified to save the planet."

—Wangari Maathai

"What we are doing to the forests of the world is but a mirror reflection of what we are doing to ourselves and to one another."

—Mahatma Gandhi

Reversing deforestation is complicated; planting a tree is simple.

—Martin O'Malley

In creating an entire forest all by himself, Elzéard Bouffier displayed some special qualities of character, for example:

- **Altruism**
- **Persistence**
- **Patience**
- **Seeing the "big picture"**

What are some other qualities you observed in him?

- _____

- _____

- _____

Define the terms above and give examples from *The Man Who Planted Trees* that demonstrate these qualities. Then give examples you have observed in real life. How can these qualities help you achieve your goals?

What motivates people to do things for others when they have nothing to gain themselves?

Describe a situation in your life where you went out of your way to help someone—or where someone went out of his or her way to help you.

The book, *The Man Who Planted Trees*, opens with these lines:

> *For a human character to reveal truly exceptional qualities, one must have the good fortune to be able to observe its performance over many years. If this performance is devoid of all egoism, if its guiding motive is unparalleled generosity, if it is absolutely certain that there is no thought of recompense and that, in addition, it has left its visible mark upon the earth, then there can be no mistake.*

FORTUNE - luck
DEVOID OF - doesn't have
EGOISM - selfishness
UNPARALLELED - the most
RECOMPENSE - reward

Whom do you think this paragraph is talking about? What is it saying? What special qualities of character is it describing?

In the story, representatives from the government believe that the forest has sprung up naturally. The narrator and the forest ranger never reveal the truth. Why do you think they chose to keep Elzéard's accomplishment a secret? Did they make the right choice?

Why do you think Elzéard didn't ask anyone for help planting his trees?

GET INVOLVED!

There are lots of things you can do to make the world a better place. For example:

- Organize a clothing or food drive.
- Visit a nursing home.
- Volunteer at a soup kitchen.

- Help plant and tend a community garden.
- Form a litter patrol.
- Plant a tree!

TREE HEROES

WANGARI MAATHAI

Wangari Maathai (1940-2011), from Kenya, was an outspoken activist for democracy, human rights, women's empowerment, and environmental conservation. In 1977, she started the Green Belt Movement, a grassroots organization whose main focus is poverty reduction and environmental conservation through tree planting. The campaign pays rural women to plant trees in their local environments, and teaches them to think ecologically. Since 1977, Green Belt Movement communities have planted over 51 million trees, provided work for tens of thousands of women, and served as a model program for other African countries. Wangari was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004.

ANTONIO VICENTE

Antonio Vicente (born 1936) grew up watching his father cut down trees in the Brazilian rainforest to clear land for raising cattle. He noticed that as the trees disappeared, so did all the sources of water. In 1973, he bought a small piece of land and began planting trees. His neighbors told him that he was being foolish, saying that he wouldn't have any income if there was no room on the land for cows or crops. Antonio paid no attention and kept on going. In more than 40 years, he has replanted 50,000 trees. As his forest grew, the water returned, and all kinds of birds, insects, and other animals now make a home there. Unfortunately, deforestation continues throughout Brazil, home of the world's largest tropical forest.

JADAV "MOLAI" PAYENG

In Assam in India, 16-year-old Jadav "Molai" Payeng (born 1963) discovered a large number of dead snakes on a hot, treeless sandbar in the Brahmaputra River, washed there by floods that had eroded the shoreline. Since 1979, Jadav has spent decades planting trees, turning the sandbar into a forest reserve. Today, the land bubbles with biodiversity. There are thousands of varieties of shrubs and trees, as well as a wide spectrum of wildlife: several species of birds, deer, apes, and elephants. Tigers and rhinos fleeing from the guns of poachers have found sanctuary there. Officials from the Forest Department were amazed when they stumbled upon the lush forest, which was named the Molai Forest in Jadav's honor.

FELIX FINKBEINER

In 2007, a nine-year-old German boy named Felix Finkbeiner (born 1997) was working on a school assignment about climate change, when he came across the story of Wangari Maathai and her Green Belt Movement. He came up with the idea that children around the world would plant one billion trees in every country on Earth. His idea grew into an international organization, Plant-for-the-Planet. They reached the one billion mark in 2011, and by 2017, the group had planted more than 14 billion trees in 130 countries. They have since raised their goal upward to one trillion trees—150 for every person on Earth. In 2008, Felix was elected to the children's board of the United Nations Environment Program.

A WORLD AT WAR

"The shepherd had seen nothing of [the wars]. He was thirty kilometers away, peacefully continuing his work, ignoring the war of '39 as he had ignored that of '14."

—The Man Who Planted Trees

Why would Jean Giono's war experiences make him write a book like *The Man Who Planted Trees*? Do you agree with Giono's decision to protest World War II, even though many people in France supported it? Did his resistance make him unpatriotic?

Do you follow any news about wars that are going on right now (in Syria, Afghanistan, and other places)? Do these wars have any effect on your daily life? (Perhaps you have a family member fighting in one of these conflicts.)

During the more than 30 years that Elzéard Bouffier spends patiently planting his trees, the world goes through two terrible wars. In his quiet and remote corner of Provence, he does not take any notice, but goes right on with his work. There is not much impact on Elzéard's forest, either. During World War II, the government starts cutting down some of the oak trees, but the location is so far from roads and railways that it proves to be impractical.

Author Jean Giono served in the First World War and took part in the Battle of Verdun—the longest and one of the most devastating battles in history. The horror of the experience stayed with him all his life. Returning home after the war, Giono began to embrace pacifism. As the clouds of World War II began to darken the horizon, he steadfastly resisted the growing public support for military action. He was jailed twice for his anti-war beliefs.

WORLD WAR I (1914-1918)

Beginning in 1914, the First World War involved the allied forces of Russia, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Serbia, Belgium, Romania, Greece, and Japan. On the opposing side were Austria- Hungary, the German Empire, the Ottoman Empire, and Bulgaria. The United States entered the conflict on the Allied side in 1917, a year before it ended in an Allied victory.

Known as "the war to end all wars," World War I was one of the deadliest in history, killing between 15 to 19 million people. (In comparison, there were about three million killed in the Korean War and approximately five million in the Vietnam War.) One of the horrors of World War I was the use of poison gas, which resulted in slow, painful death.

WORLD WAR II (1939-1945)

"The war to end all wars"—World War I—did not live up to its name. Twenty years after peace was declared, Germany invaded Poland, marking the beginning of World War II, the deadliest conflict in modern history. The Allied side included the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union, the United States, China, Poland, France, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Belgium, the Netherlands, Greece, Yugoslavia, and Norway. The opposing side, known as the "Axis," included Germany, Japan, Italy, Hungary, Romania, Finland, Thailand, Bulgaria, Croatia, and Slovakia. The Allies declared victory in 1945.

Over 60 million people died in World War II—around 50 million of them civilians. (This was about 3% of the world's total population at the time.) Among them were victims of The Holocaust—the systematic genocide of Jews, disabled and mentally ill people, gay men, and other groups—carried out by the Germans.

NEW JERSEY'S TREES POET

Sgt. Joyce Kilmer, as a member of the Fighting 69th Infantry Regiment, U.S. Army

JOYCE KILMER

The most famous poem ever written about trees came from the pen of New Jersey poet Joyce Kilmer. He was born on December 6, 1886 in New Brunswick. (The house where he and his family lived, until he was six years old is still standing and houses a small museum.) He attended Rutgers College for two years, then finished his studies at Columbia University.

Kilmer joined the New York National Guard in 1914, and became part of the regular Army after the U.S. entered World War I in 1917. He shipped out with his regiment to France. During the war, he volunteered for the most dangerous assignments. On July 30, 1918, while on a scouting mission, he was killed by a German sniper's bullet. He was only 31.

Kilmer is remembered today for his poem, "Trees," written in 1913.

TREES

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.

A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowing breast;

A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

A tree that may in Summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

BE A GOOD AUDIENCE MEMBER.

Going to see a show at the theater is not the same as going to a movie or watching TV. The performers will be right there with you and the rest of the audience, which makes it very exciting! It also means you have a special responsibility to respect the performers and the rest of the audience so that everyone can enjoy the show. Make sure to follow these rules:

- **If you have a phone, make sure to turn it off before the show starts. Keep it off until the show is over.**
- **During the show, give the performers all your attention. Stay in your seat and don't talk.**
- **Taking pictures or recording the show is not allowed.**
- **Don't eat or drink in the theater. And no chewing gum, please!**

BE A GOOD OBSERVER.

During the performance, pay attention to everything that's going on onstage—not only the words, but the lighting, the way the performers move around on stage, how they're dressed, and how they interact with the audience. Notice how all of these elements come together to create a unique experience.

Also try to observe how the performers interact with each other. What are some of the ways you see them working together as a team?

photo: Samira Bouaou

STORYBOOKS

The Curious Garden, by Peter Brown. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2009. A picture book about a little boy who rescues an urban garden. Grades Pre-K-3.

The Great Kapok Tree: A Tale of the Amazon Rain Forest, by Lynne Cherry. HMH Books for Young Readers, 2000. A man who wants to cut down a kapok tree learns that all living things depend on each other. Grades Pre-K-3.

How the Ladies Stopped the Wind, by Bruce McMillan. Houghton Mifflin Books for Children, 2007. A picture book about some determined ladies in Iceland who set out to plant trees. Grades Pre-K-3.

The Man Who Lived in a Hollow Tree, by Anne Shelby, illustrated by Cor Hazelaar. Atheneum/Richard Jackson Books, 2009. A picture book based on an Appalachian folk tale. Grades K-3.

BIOGRAPHIES

The Forest Man Of India. A documentary about the life's work of Jadav Payeng.
www.youtube.com/watch?v=7vPFF03JC20

Jadav and the Tree-Place, written and illustrated by Vinayak Varma. A picture book based on the life of Jadav Payeng. Grades 1-3. Download for free at:
https://freekidsbooks.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/5052-jadav-and-the-tree-place.pdf

Johnny Appleseed, by Stephen Vincent Benet and Rosemary Benet. Margaret K. McElderry, 2001. Grades Pre-K-3.

Seeds of Change: Wangari's Gift to the World, by Jen Cullerton Johnson, illustrated by Sonia Lynn Sadler. Lee & Low Books, 2010. Grades 2-4.

REFERENCE

Forests: More Than Just Trees, by Julie Kerr Casper. Chelsea House Publications, 2007. Grades 4-6.

The Life Cycle of a Tree, by Bobbie Kalman and Kathryn Smithyman. Crabtree Publishing Company, 2002. Grades 1-4.

A Log's Life, by Wendy Pfeffer. Aladdin, 2007. Grades K-3.

WEBSITES

National Alliance for Community Trees
http://actrees.org

National Arbor Day Foundation
www.arborday.org

Plant-for-the-Planet
www.plant-for-the-planet.org

The Green Belt Movement
www.greenbeltmovement.org

Project Learning Tree, an environmental education program for educators and students in grades PreK-12
http://plt.org

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