

## But It's Just a Tree.....Right?

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When I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade the class was given a list of poems, we had to select one and memorize it. I selected Joyce Kilmer's, *Trees*. I remember that it was short and it rhymed.

Trees are magnificent. The Creation story in Genesis speaks of a tree, the Buddah's enlightenment came while sitting under a Bohdi tree, and trees were the object of worship in George R.R.

Martin's, *Song of Fire and Ice* (Game of Thrones).

**In Texas history**, Santa Anna surrendered to Sam Houston under an Oak tree, Comanche Indians used trees as signposts, and, early Texas political matters were discussed and decided under a tree at a well-known Bier Garden in Austin.

**Trees provide shade and food**, places to hang a swing or build a secret fort, or a place to get married. Trees are so important that, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, April 30, was designated, Arbor Day. One estimate is that the first Arbor Day resulted in 1,000,000 trees being planted. (*Texas Arbor Day in the first Friday in November*).



(Photo, Bill Swantner, BCMG, Cherry Blossom Festival, Washington, D.C.)

**Trees are things of beauty.** While all trees set new leaves in Spring, some trees also blossom with beautiful flowers. During the heat of summer trees provide shade for people, houses, pets and cars. In Fall, the green leaves of Spring turn into artist's palette of color.



(Photo, Bill Swantner, BCMG)

**Trees affect the quality of life in our communities.** In various studies around the country it has been observed that, where the tree canopy goes up, crime goes down. "When we go to talk to communities," says Lydia Scott [director of the Chicago Region Trees Initiative (CRTI)], "We say 'trees reduce crime.' And then they go, 'Explain to me how that could possibly be, because that's the most bizarre thing I've ever heard.'"

"...It seems like one of those "correlation, not causation" things — and this also makes a lot of sense. Poorer neighborhoods see fewer investments and less taking-care-of, so it might be that poorer neighborhoods, which often have high crime rates, just tend to have fewer trees. In other words, criminality and a lack of trees may not be cause and effect but may have a common cause."

<https://www.zmescience.com/science/news-science/tree-map-crime-rate-14082017/>

It's not just Chicago. "Researchers picked up on a similar trend in Cincinnati, where the emerald ash borer, an invasive beetle, forced authorities to remove 646 dead or dying ash trees between

2007 and 2014. City records revealed that tree loss was associated with an uptick in property crimes, assaults, and violent crimes.” <https://www.motherjones.com/environment/2019/04/trees-crime-cincinnati-philadelphia-ida-b-wells-chicago/>

**Trees affect the quality of our life.** “A major 2019 study of nearly 1 million Danish people showed that kids who grew up near green spaces had a lower risk of psychiatric disorders later in life. <https://www.pnas.org/content/116/11/5188>

A 2016 US News and World Report article begins with, “Heat-stroke protection, cleaner air, better breathing, sounder sleep, stress relief, disease prevention and defense from depression – trees and greenery offer a host of health advantages. Planting more trees beautifies urban neighborhoods while helping residents feel better. It’s not just about city spaces, however. Even in highly wooded areas, tree loss is tied to a rise in disease and higher mortality.”

In the same article, Harvard researchers, “found that women living in the [green areas] had a 12 percent lower non-accidental death rate than women surrounded by the least vegetation. While cause and effect wasn’t determined, the strongest associations were for reduced death rates from respiratory illness and cancer.” <https://health.usnews.com/wellness/articles/2016-12-09/the-many-health-benefits-of-trees>

**Trees are critical to our environment.** The environmental benefits of trees are numerous, among them being:

Trees absorb the pollutants we produce and, in return, in one year, a single tree produces enough oxygen for 18 people. Trees not only cool houses but can reduce the temperature in heat islands, the asphalt jungles in our cities. <https://www.treepeople.org/22-benefits-of-trees/>

Franklin Roosevelt said, “Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people”.

Trees use about 15 gallons of water a week but release 200-450 gallons of water per day. Trees are nature’s air conditioning by blocking 90% of the sun’s radiation. <https://theconversation.com/can-trees-really-cool-our-cities-down-44099>

According to the EPA, “ Trees are increasingly recognized for their importance in managing runoff. Their leaf canopies help reduce erosion caused by falling rain. They also provide surface area where rain water lands and evaporates. Roots take up water and help create conditions in the soil that promote infiltration.” <https://www.epa.gov/soakuptherain/soak-rain-trees-help-reduce-runoff>

**Trees may be the cure.** The folk lore medicines of our ancestors tell us that the bark of the Willow tree can be used for pain, but the medical research of today is finding that the bark of the Pacific Yew tree (*Taxus brevifolia*) can be used to produce the cancer drug, Taxol.

To horribly paraphrase Joyce Kilmers, Articles are written by fools like me, but maybe we can learn to respect trees.