

## ACTIVITY 4

### DREAMING OF WISCONSIN

In Chapter 4 of Wisconsin Forest Tales, false advertising leads Will's family to attempt to farm cutover land. In this activity, students create a brochure to persuade people to plant trees instead of farm on cutover land.

## BACKGROUND

By the beginning of the 1900s, most of Wisconsin's forests had either been cut over to provide lumber or burned by wildfire. Lumber companies liquidated land holdings as they moved west to new forest resources. Some of the companies used misleading advertising to attract immigrants and people from cities to purchase the land. They appealed to those eager for a new life with advertisements claiming that cutover land would make rich farmland. Advertisements were

even sent to Europe to lure adventurous folks to Wisconsin. Like the Meyers family in Wisconsin Forest Tales, many families risked it all at a chance for a new start. After several years of backbreaking work and only meager crop yields, many families abandoned their farms. Wisconsin became known as the land of 10,000 failures.

Tax-delinquent farms became the property of their respective counties. Beginning with Marinette County, trees were replanted on this land. With help from volunteers and the Civilian Conservation Corps, Wisconsin got its forests back. Now, in an effort to make sure that there will always be trees in Wisconsin, our forests are carefully managed to ensure regeneration after harvest.



### LESSON OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this activity, students will be able to:

- Explain why farmers attempted to farm cutover land.
- Explain why farmers were not successful farming cutover land.
- List several benefits of trees to humans, wildlife, and the environment.

### TIME

Introduction.....20 minutes  
Activity.....60 minutes  
Conclusion.....15 minutes

### MATERIALS

- Drawing paper and crayons, markers, or colored pencils
- One worksheet per student

### SUBJECT AREAS ADDRESSED

Language Arts  
Science  
Visual Arts

## INTRODUCTION

Have students look back at the beginning of Chapter 4 of Wisconsin Forest Tales. Ask them what claims the little book "Wisconsin: The Farmer's Dream" made about farmland in Wisconsin. (*The book claimed that Wisconsin grew wheat taller than a man and that cows gave rivers of milk.*) Next, ask students what Pa thought he was buying when he handed over \$400 at the Wisconsin Land Company Office. (*He thought he was buying cleared land and a house.*) Finally, ask students what the Meyer family actually found when they arrived on their land. (*The land was cleared of trees, but not of stumps. The "house" was actually a tar-papered shack.*)

Explain to students that the advertisements put out by lumber and railroad companies to persuade people to buy cutover land were misleading. Many families, like the Meyers, gave everything they had to buy cutover land, only to find out that the land was not good for farming.

**Optional:** Ask your students to draw two pictures: one of what the Meyers may have imagined their farm to look like before they arrived in Wisconsin and one of what the Meyers actually found when they got to the farm.



## ACTIVITY

**1)** Ask students, “If cutover land was not good for farming, what was it good for?” (*It was good for growing trees.*) Tell students that you are giving them an opportunity to do a better job of advertising about cutover land than the lumber and railroad companies did. Explain to students that they will each create a brochure to persuade people to plant trees on cutover land. The brochure will not try to sell land to people. It takes too long before seedlings grow big enough to be harvested and sold. Instead, the brochure will persuade people to make a trip to the cutover to help plant trees. You may want to bring in several sample brochures advertising various places or items to show your students.

**2)** Tell your class that in order to make such a brochure, they need to know a little bit about what might motivate someone to plant trees on cutover land. Give each student a worksheet and encourage them to take notes from the discussion on Part One of their worksheets. Lead your students in a discussion about the benefits of trees.

- Ask your students to raise their hands if they can list a benefit that humans receive from trees. (*Trees clean the air, they prevent soil erosion, provide shade, help prevent flooding, and provide beauty.*)
- Explain to your students that wildlife also benefit from trees. Ask your students to list some ways that animals benefit from trees. (*Trees provide homes, hiding places, shade, and food for*

*animals.*) Tell your students that some people really love wild animals. If they knew of the benefits trees provide for wildlife, they might be willing to plant trees on the cutover.

- Next, ask students if anyone can list ways that trees benefit the environment. (*During a strong rainstorm, the leaves on trees break the fall of the raindrops, which prevents erosion and runoff into nearby streams. Trees near streams help keep the water temperature cooler. Shade from trees can lower the amount of energy we use to cool our homes and that helps the environment.*)
- Tell your students that in their brochure they might want to mention the personal benefits someone might get from participating in tree planting. Ask your students if anyone can list ways that people would benefit from participating in tree planting. Encourage your students to be creative, yet truthful, in their answers. (*Answers may include: tree planting is good exercise, you get to spend time outside in nature, you will always have the satisfaction of knowing you played a role in restoring Wisconsin’s forests.*) Be sure everyone has listed several benefits on their worksheets.

- 3)** Before giving your class time to plan their brochure, explain Part Two of the worksheet.
- Tell students the first thing they need to do is figure out what their main idea will be. This should be stated in a complete sentence on their planning sheet. The main idea is the starting point for the rest of the brochure.
  - Tell students the front cover should contain a catchy slogan and maybe a picture to catch people’s attention. They should write down their ideas for the front cover on the planning sheet.
  - Inside the brochure, your students will want to bring home their point. Ask students to choose at least three ideas from the list they made during the class discussion. Your students should elaborate on these three points on the inside of their brochure.
  - The back of the brochure should be a call to action. Tell your students to use the planning sheet to write down their ideas of how to motivate people to take action.

- 4)** After students have completed their planning sheets, hand out blank sheets of paper. Ask students to fold the paper in thirds. Explain that this will become their brochure. Tell students to use their ideas from their planning sheet to

complete their brochure. Give your students time to work. Once everyone has completed their brochures, ask several students to share their brochures with the rest of the class.



## CONCLUSION

Tell students that false advertising led Will's family to attempt to farm cutover land. Will gave up his dream of becoming a schoolteacher so that he could help his family with chores on the farm. Ask students the following questions and allow several to respond to each one. "What do you dream of doing someday?" "Would you be willing to give up your dream to help your family survive?" In the end, Will joined the Civilian Conservation Corps and helped to reforest Wisconsin. Lumber companies and paper companies still harvest trees to make products, but today they also replant trees so that we will always have trees to enjoy and use.

**Optional:** Remind your students of the two drawings they made at the beginning of the lesson. Ask your students to make a third drawing showing the Meyers' farm after it was reforested. When everyone is finished, find a place in the classroom to display each series of three pictures.



## ASSESSMENT

Explain to your students that we cannot go back and change the false advertising that took place in the early 1900s, but we can make a difference in our world today. Trees continue to offer people, animals, and the environment many benefits. Assign your students to write and deliver a letter that uses facts about the benefits of trees to persuade a parent, neighbor, relative, or the school groundskeeper to plant a tree in their yard (or the schoolyard).



# PART ONE: DISCUSSION

**Benefits of trees to humans:**

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**Benefits of trees to wildlife:**

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**Benefits of trees to the environment:**

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**Personal benefits to participating in tree planting:**

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# PART TWO: PLANNING

**Main Idea:**

What will be the main idea of your brochure? What is the most important point you want to make? State it here in a complete sentence.

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**Front Cover:**

Create a catchy slogan to introduce your main idea to the reader.

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Describe the type of picture you want to draw on the front cover.

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**Inside:**

Which reasons for planting trees on the cutover do you want to use in your brochure? Choose at least three of the ideas from your class discussion and make a case for them in your brochure.

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**Back Cover:**

Write something that will get people to take action and help plant trees.

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