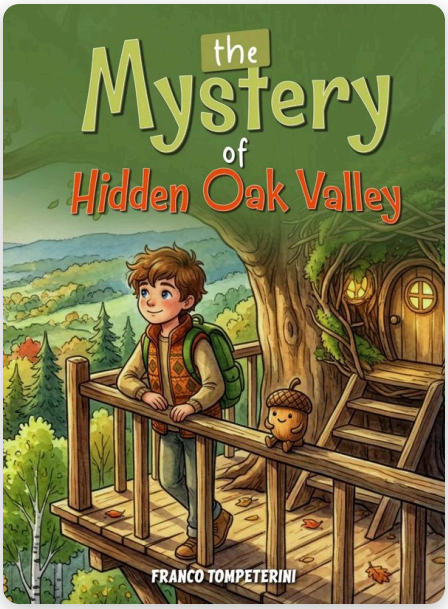


HIDDEN OAK VALLEY · BOOK 1 · FALL

The Mystery of Hidden Oak Valley

Teacher & Homeschool Guide

On a crisp fall morning, curious nine-year-old Hickory wonders why the Great Oak he lives in is so special. With help from Mr. Owl, he sets off across Hidden Oak Valley to meet the maple, aspen, pine, birch, spruce, and oak, learning how each tree grows, changes, and helps the valley, before coming home full of wonders.

Best for: ages 9–12 (younger children can follow along as a read-aloud).
Plan: one week, about 30–45 minutes a day.
Free to print and copy for your classroom, library, or homeschool.

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Who's who in the valley

- **Hickory**: a curious 9-year-old boy who lives in a treehouse high in the Great Oak Tree and loves to ask questions.
- **The ladybug**: tells Hickory the Great Oak is special and that the other trees are special too.
- **Mrs. Mouse, Mr. Praying Mantis, and Mrs. Robin**: friends Hickory meets as his journey begins.
- **Mr. Owl**: carries Hickory across the valley and teaches him about each tree.
- **Mr. Farmer**: shows how maple sap becomes maple syrup.
- **Ms. Lily Mouse**: a sweet mouse in a red scarf whose specialty is aspen trees.
- **Mr. Rabbit**: a friend of Hickory's in the valley.

Discussion questions, chapter by chapter

Chapter 1: Hickory and the Curious Morning

1. What question does Hickory have about the Great Oak at the start of the story?
2. The ladybug says the oak's bark protects it "like armor." What do you think that means?
3. Why do you think the ladybug tells Hickory the other trees are special too?

Chapter 2: The Journey Begins

1. Which friends does Hickory meet as he sets out? How does each one help?
2. Mr. Praying Mantis is good at camouflage. Why would camouflage help an insect?
3. How would you feel flying across the valley on Mr. Owl's back?

Chapter 3: The Maple Tree and Mr. Farmer

1. How can you recognize a maple leaf? (Hint: count the lobes.)
2. Put the steps for making maple syrup in order, from tapping the tree to the sugar house.
3. It takes about forty gallons of sap to make one gallon of syrup. Why does it take so much?

Chapter 4: The Shimmering Aspen Tree

1. What is surprising about the aspens' roots?
2. Why are aspens sometimes called quaking aspens?
3. What are the dark marks on aspen bark called, and what do they do?

Chapter 5: The Tall and Prickly Pine Tree

1. How are pine needles different from maple and aspen leaves?
2. What does it mean that a pine is evergreen?
3. Where are a pine tree's seeds kept?

Chapter 6: The Papery Birch Tree

1. Describe a birch tree's bark. How might its white color help the tree?
2. Why are birches called pioneers of the forest?

Chapter 7: The Sturdy Spruce Tree

1. What is one way to tell a spruce from other evergreen trees?
2. How does a spruce's shape help it in snowy weather?
3. Which trees has Hickory met so far that are evergreen, and which are deciduous?

Chapter 8: Coming Home, The Mighty Oak

1. What makes an oak leaf easy to recognize?
2. Why is one oak tree so important to wildlife?
3. After all his travels, what does Hickory now understand about the Great Oak?

Chapter 9: Home Again, Full of Wonders

1. Name all six trees Hickory visited. Which was your favorite and why?
2. Hickory's adventure starts with a single question. What question would start your own adventure?

Big-picture questions

1. Every tree in the story is special in a different way. How are people like that too?
2. Which tree fact surprised you most?
3. Why do you think the author has Hickory ask so many questions?

Vocabulary

Word	What it means in the story
Lobes	The rounded or pointed sections of a leaf. A maple leaf has five lobes.
Deciduous	Trees that lose their leaves every year, like the maple, aspen, birch, and oak.
Evergreen	Trees that keep their leaves or needles all year, like the pine and spruce.
Sap	The liquid inside a tree. Maple sap is boiled to make syrup.
Tap	A small opening put in a maple tree so the sap can drip out.
Evaporate	When water turns into vapor and goes into the air. As sap boils, water evaporates and the syrup thickens.
Sugar house	The building where maple sap is heated over a fire to make syrup.
Clone colony	A group of aspen trees connected by the same roots, growing like one big family.
Lenticels	Dark marks on birch and aspen bark: breathing pores, like tiny windows.
Quaking	Shaking or trembling. Aspen leaves quake in even a light breeze.
Camouflage	Colors or shapes that help an animal blend in, like Mr. Praying Mantis.
Furrowed	Deeply grooved and ridged, like an oak's thick bark.
Pioneer tree	A tree, like the birch, that is one of the first to grow after a fire or flood.
Samaras	Maple seeds that spin like helicopters when they fall.
Species	A kind of living thing. One oak can support over 500 species of wildlife.

Tip: have students keep a word list in a notebook, just like Hickory keeps his.

A simple one-week plan

Day	Read	Do
Day 1	Chapters 1–2	Talk about the Great Oak. Go outside and pick one tree to be your class or family tree. Start a Tree Journal (Activity Three) with a drawing and three things you notice.
Day 2	Chapter 3	Count the lobes on real or pictured leaves. Draw the maple syrup steps as a comic strip. Math: if 40 gallons of sap make 1 gallon of syrup, how much sap makes 2 gallons?
Day 3	Chapters 4–5	Compare a leaf and a needle. Sort leaves, needles, and pinecones you find. Use the Field Guide in the back of the book to name them.

Day 4	Chapters 6–7	Make a two-column chart: evergreen vs. deciduous. Do Leaf Rubbings (Activity Two) with leaves from at least two different trees.
Day 5	Chapters 8–9	Talk about why the oak matters to wildlife. Make the pinecone bird feeder (Activity One) and hang it where you can watch. Write: "My favorite tree is ___ because ___."

Nature-learning tie-ins

- **Tree ID walk:** use the book's Field Guide pages for 12 trees and its tree comparison chart to identify trees near you.
- **Seasons:** watch your chosen tree once a week through fall. Does it drop its leaves (deciduous) or stay green (evergreen)?
- **Trees and wildlife:** look for animals, nests, or insects using a tree. The book explains that one oak can support over 500 species of wildlife.
- **Seeds:** collect acorns, pinecones, or maple samaras and compare how each tree spreads its seeds.
- **Science and math:** the maple syrup chapter is a ready-made lesson on evaporation and ratios (about 40 gallons of sap to 1 gallon of syrup).
- **Bark:** compare bark textures (furrowed oak, papery birch, scaly spruce) with a rubbing or a close-up drawing.

Activities in the back of the book

- Activity One: Make Your Own Bird Feeder! (pinecone feeder; check for nut allergies before using peanut butter)
- Activity Two: Leaf Rubbings!
- Activity Three: My Tree Journal
- Field Guide pages for 12 trees, a tree comparison chart, and a maple syrup review

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