



In this FACTivity, you will learn about the American chestnut tree and compare its story to the threat of sudden oak death disease.

The American chestnut was a large tree that grew across the Eastern United States to the Ohio Valley. American chestnut trees could grow so large that their trunks sometimes reached 5 feet across. The American chestnut was a common tree. Its nuts, which were tasty and nutritious, were used by both wildlife and people. People especially liked to eat roasted chestnuts. (Do you remember the holiday song, "Chestnuts Roasting on an Open Fire"?) The wood from American chestnuts was used for furniture and to build framing for barns. The trees were so numerous that their white blooms often made the forests look like they were snow capped.

In 1904, a fungus-like organism was brought to the United States. No one knows exactly how the organism came to the United States. Some think it may have come on nonnative chestnut trees imported from Asia. This organism enters the bark of American chestnut trees and kills everything above the place of



entry. Thus, although the chestnut trees are not killed by the organism, they are reduced to nothing more than shrub-like sprouts. Within 50 years, all large American chestnut trees were gone.

Today, scientists think they will be able to bring the chestnut tree back. Even if they are able to do so, it will take years for the trees to grow. Scientists are not sure how the native forest will adapt to this new type of large chestnut tree.

In this research article, you read about the threat of sudden oak death disease. It may seem hard to believe that our Nation's big, strong oak trees could be in danger

Sudden oak death Web resources:

<http://www.suddenoakdeath.org>

<http://www.na.fs.fed.us/sod/>

American chestnut information from S.L. Anagnostakis
(e-mail: Sandra.Anagnostakis@po.state.ct.us) and
<http://munic.state.ct.us/BURLINGTON/chestnuttree.htm>.

because of a fungus-like organism. The American chestnut story shows that the threat of sudden oak death could be a disaster. It could change the look and ecology of our Nation's forests, parks, schoolyards, and backyards.

In this FACTivity, you will ride a time machine into the future. Imagine you are an adult with children the age that you are now. Since the time you were their age, the organism that causes sudden oak death has spread across the United States and killed all the oaks. You and your children are now



living in a world without oak trees. Your children have asked you what the forests and parks were like when oak trees were alive. They want to know if you climbed oak trees, if you played under them, and what they looked like.

Write a story for your children about living with oak trees. If you have a favorite oak tree, you can write about that tree. You could tell about climbing an oak tree or building a tree house, or you could write about that one big oak tree standing alone in the park. You may include drawings with your story.

After completing your story, share your story with your classmates. You may post your stories and drawings on a display. As a class, discuss what benefits of oak trees were identified in the stories. How might your lives be different if oak trees did not exist? Basing your response on the class discussion, do you think it is important to guard against the spread of the organism that causes sudden oak death disease? Why or why not?

Extension: Students who want an extra challenge could do research to learn more about recent efforts to bring the American chestnut back to American forests.

If you are a Project Learning Tree-trained educator, you may use PLT Pre K–8th Activity Guide #77, “Trees in Trouble,” as an additional activity resource. This activity teaches how to read signs and symptoms of stressed trees.