Environment: *Middle Fork* (Grade K–2)

*Middle Fork, 2014–2017, John Grade*
American, b. 1970, cedar, 105 ft. long x 30 ft. diameter, Seattle Art Museum commission, Photo: Ben Benschneider.

Find online at: [https://tinyurl.com/yb9ekqb5](https://tinyurl.com/yb9ekqb5)

**LOOKING QUESTIONS**
First, look at the artwork. Don't do anything else but look until you've counted to 20 in your head or out loud!

- What do you see? What do you think about it? What does it make you wonder?
- If you were able to touch it, what might it feel like?
- What materials do you think this is made out of? How do you think the artist might have created this?

**INFORMATION**

*Middle Fork* is a sculpture of a HUGE tree that hangs in the lobby at the Seattle Art Museum. If you have been to the museum recently, you probably have noticed it. The artist John Grade made it based on a real hemlock tree that is growing in the Cascade Mountains. First, he made casts of the tree in different pieces. Similar to some casts that are made on broken arms, he wrapped strips of a wet plaster paste around the tree and let it dry and harden into the shape of the tree. He then brought these casts into his studio. He worked with many helpers from the community to glue together small pieces of wood around the casts, making a sculpture in the shape of this exact tree. When he is finished showing this sculpture around the world, it will go back to the forest and will decompose, breaking down and becoming part of the soil that will help other trees grow. The artist wants us to think about the life cycle of trees around us.

- Listen to the artist talk about *Middle Fork* in this video: [https://tinyurl.com/ybcb8cuc](https://tinyurl.com/ybcb8cuc)
- See photos of the sculpture being made here: [https://tinyurl.com/ydyyp798](https://tinyurl.com/ydyyp798)

**MOVEMENT ACTIVITY: TREE POSE**

- Start standing up tall, with your arms at your sides and your feet a little bit apart from each other on the ground. Imagine that there are roots growing from the bottom of your feet and attaching you to the floor!
- Bend your right knee. Then, reach down and use your hand to bring your right foot to rest anywhere on the inside of your left leg, except for your knee.
- Put your hands on your hips and try to stay balanced. Then, put the palms of your hands together into a prayer position at your chest.
- With your eyes, focus on one point in front of you that doesn’t move. Breath calmly in and out and count eight full, slow breaths.
- Then, bring your right foot down and do the same movements on your left side.
- How did it feel to stand like a tree? Many people do this pose if they want to calm down and practice balance. You can go back into the tree pose at any time!

KEEP LEARNING WITH A STORY

*Because of an Acorn*, by Lola M. Schaefer & Adam Schaefer
This book illustrates the interconnectedness of the natural world, showing how a tiny acorn connects to the plant and animal life of an entire forest.
- Hear the book read out loud here: https://tinyurl.com/y8jfum6s

*The Giving Tree*, by Shel Silverstein
This controversial yet classic tale can be read as a parable between humanity and nature.
- Hear the book read out loud here: https://tinyurl.com/y9nfbmq5 or here: https://tinyurl.com/mov72wc

ART ACTIVITY
Just like John Grade, create a sculpture of a tree from a material that comes from a tree!

**Materials**
A paper bag and scissors (optional: cardboard).

**Steps**
1. Find a paper bag of any size. This can be a lunch bag, grocery bag, or large leaf bag. This paper bag was created from a tree!

2. Open your bag and let it sit on the table. If you want, you can put a small square of cardboard inside the bottom of your bag to make it more stable.

3. Now, make cuts from the top of your bag down about half-way to the middle of your bag. The example shows eight cuts, but you can do more or less! This will make flaps at the top of your bag.

4. Squeeze the bottom of your bag together and, as strong as you can, twist it with both hands. This will be the trunk of your tree. Just like you squeezed the trunk, squeeze together two top flaps at a time to make your branches.

5. When you finish twisting your branches, your tree will be complete! Move the branches around to put them in new arrangements and look at your tree from every angle. You can build more trees to make a forest. Each one will look a little bit different.

You can think about the life cycle of this tree: it was a tree, then a paper bag, and now you turned it into a sculpture of a tree. What will happen to it next?