

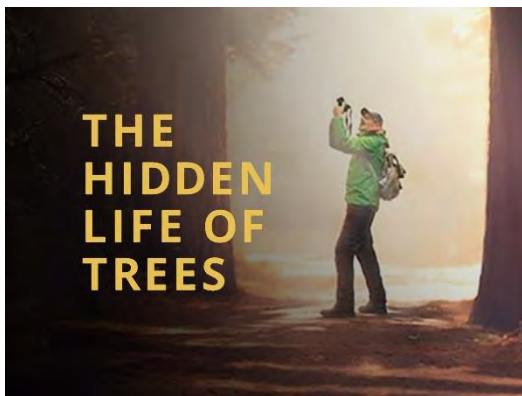
# Trees' Representation in Visual Media

Trees are essential to nature's biodiversity, producing the air we breathe and being the home and food source to many living things. We at the College of Wooster are proud of how diverse our campus trees are. Each tree has a story, holding physical and symbolic importance, as represented in visual media. Here we further demonstrate and explore the importance of trees through their portrayal across visual media, such as films, documentaries, etc.

## Trees in Visual Nonfiction Works:

Visual nonfictional media remind people of the value and role of trees through real life examples. Because of their true existence, trees shown in nonfictional media remind us that trees are not background characters but living entities that hold biological and symbolic importance. Listed below are examples of nonfictional trees in visual media and their deeper meanings that illustrate their overall importance further.

### *The Hidden Life of Trees* (2020):



Based on a book by Peter Wohlleben, Jörg Adolph's documentary shows time lapses of trees' growth as well as their communicate with one another and the rest of the world, illustrating deep complexities. Some benefits and importances of the trees, as explored in the documentary are:

- Trees share information about natural threats, like a "wood wide web"
- Family-oriented, meaning they provide other trees with nutritious sugars through their roots
- Mushrooms and trees cooperate with one another, exchanging environmental information and nutrients

## HBO Max's *Trees, and Other Entanglements* (2023):



This documentary directed by Irene Taylor explores humankind's connection to the natural world through following multiple people's lives and their stories. Inspired by Richard Powers's *The Overstory* (2019), Taylor wanted her documentary to provide "an ecosystem of narratives" to display the complicated interconnectedness of humans and trees. This documentary supports the following importances of

trees:

- Intersection with economics, ecology and personal identity (e.g. conservationist but originally timber baron, George Weyerhaeuser, and the timber extraction legacy)
- Trees are signs of virtue but also moral complications and dysfunction, going beyond environmental preaching by appreciating their array of attached meanings and their connection to human experiences (ex: Grief, growth)

<https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2023/dec/14/hbo-documentary-trees-and-other-entanglements>

## National Geographic's Short Film Showcase: Kauri Multimedia's *The Silent Friends* (2016):



This short documentary from Kauri Multimedia focuses on Spain's diverse scenery with trees as the focus, highlighting their silent but vital role they play in the ecosystem. This film discusses the trees' important roles in the past, present, and future of our world while including people's actions that occurred by or with the trees, such as painting, horseback riding, and walking. The following importances of trees, as

illustrated in the documentary are:

- Trees tell us about the past historically, culturally, etc.
- "You are the shrines that we visit to calm us down and you are the perfect listener" in the present day
- Trees ask for nothing BUT give us everything like wood for houses and fire making, a place to relax by hanging up a hammock, providing food such as coconuts, and more.

<https://youtu.be/DJdy4W4B1lo?si=5m8JKSDq5Bx1rbdJ>

### TED-Ed's *The Secret Language of Trees* (2019):



Presented by Camielle Defrenne and Suzanne Simard, this TED-Ed video uses digital drawings to depict how trees communicate with one another. They explain that this process is done through mycorrhizal networks, where multiple kinds of fungi at the end of the trees' roots send warnings and resources to each other. They share that “the forest’s health relies on these intricate communications and exchanges”, in which the specific importances of such are listed below.

- Trees share food and supplies with other beings such as bugs, birds, squirrels, etc.
- Most of all, trees share their wisdom through lineage and exchange of resources to one another, allowing the forests to thrive.

[https://www.ted.com/talks/camielle\\_defrenne\\_and\\_suzanne\\_simard\\_the\\_secret\\_language\\_of\\_trees](https://www.ted.com/talks/camielle_defrenne_and_suzanne_simard_the_secret_language_of_trees)

### Trees in Visual Fictional Works:

Trees in fictional works illustrate the real world importances of them within their portrayal in visually intriguing and digestible forms of content.

## The Great Deku Tree in *Legend of Zelda*:



The Great Deku Tree is a massive living tree that is the guardian of Kokiri forest and the oldest and wisest character in the Zelda universe. He guards both the dense land and the small populations that live underneath him. He also guides Link, the character players play, in saving the kingdom of Hyrule from Ganondorf, the villain who cursed Link, and is trusted with the Kokiri's Emerald, one of the spiritual stones. Because of Ganondorf's curse, The Great Deku Tree dies, however, after seven years and

following Link's return to the forest in which he kills all the monsters stemming from the tree's absence, he plants the Deku Tree sprout, the ancestor of The original Great Deku tree. *The Legend of Zelda* games use a fictional story to illustrate the existing importances of trees as follows:

- Trees act as protectors of other living things: providing homes for birds and squirrels, shade for humans from the sun, food for bugs and thus birds, oxygen for all, etc.
- Trees are continuous beings, passing down relatives through seeds, thus have family lineage just like humans do
- Because trees can live so long and grow so tall, they act as a marker of both physical location and symbolic wisdom, strength, and resilience

[https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The\\_Great\\_Deku\\_Tree](https://zelda.fandom.com/wiki/The_Great_Deku_Tree)

## Pandora's Trees in *Avatar* (2009):



In *Avatar*, the world of Pandora has the Tree of Souls, Tree of Voices, and Home Tree for the Na'vi, which visually depict the neural networking of all life through their bioluminescence. These trees and the overall theme of *Avatar* embody Indigenous ecological ethics and beliefs, saying that if any part of nature is harmed, the world will be harmed too. This film depicts the mutualistic relationship of species with trees, such as the Na'vi with their

sacred trees as listed above. The trees depend on pollination and protection while the Na'vi

depend on them for spiritual communion and data exchange, as described by researcher Melvyn Sng in his writing *The Biology of Sacred Trees on Pandora: A Xenobotanical Exploration*.

[https://www.academia.edu/129210446/The\\_Biology\\_of\\_Sacred\\_Trees\\_on\\_Pandora\\_A\\_Xenobotanical\\_Exploration?auto=download](https://www.academia.edu/129210446/The_Biology_of_Sacred_Trees_on_Pandora_A_Xenobotanical_Exploration?auto=download)

Importance of Trees as Found in *Avatar*:

- Trees are spiritual connections to people
- Trees provide physical benefits such as protection, food, and other forms of life production/perpetuation

*Shawshank Redemption's* (1994) Oak Tree:



The importance of this 'ordinary' white oak in Shawshank Redemption's story is its value to Morgan Freeman's character, Ellis Boyd "Red" Redding. The white oak was a marker for him as he searched for clues leading to Andy Dufrense, his friend and main character of this story, who escaped prison after being wrongfully convicted. This example illustrates how trees can harbor human emotions and personal histories as well as become a symbol for people, such

as this white oak symbolizes hope and rebirth for Redding while acting as a reminder of his friend.

Importance of Trees As Found in Shawshank Redemption:

- Trees hold symbolic value that can motivate or guide oneself
- Trees can illustrate and/or remind us of the past

## Weirwood Trees in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (2011-2019):



As pictured here, the television series, and further described in detail in the novels *A Song of Ice and Fire*, each weirwood tree has its own carved faces and red sap, described as deeply magical and ancient, making them repositories of ancestral memory. While it is never explained why these trees are so magical, they were once cut down to suppress the Old religion. Because these trees are so powerful and magical, it explains why almost

all of them were cut, illustrating their intimidation factor and abilities. While these trees do not exist in real life, there are ancestral ties to real trees in similar ways. Weirwood trees further symbolize old gods, old knowledge, and pre-colonial histories because of their age and, despite being unable to speak, they are believed to be ancient peoples' spirits whispering, as explained by the character Alys Rivers in *House of the Dragon*.

### Importance of Trees as Found in *Game of Thrones*:

- Trees remind us of and teach us about the past
- Trees are tied to ancestry, both as visuals to show family connection, but specifically hold onto familial pasts or even embody them

## Overall Themes:

Through nonfictional and fictional portrayals of trees, we are able to see their importances both biologically and symbolically. Trees are more than just biological entities that provide oxygen and resources to other beings; they are also entities that hold literal and symbolic familial ties, deepen natural connections, and intertwine with human's individually lived experiences and stories.