

Talking Trees

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Written by Chris Beimborn for Halloween Glen
Courtesy of the Recreation Division of Milwaukee Public Schools

[As children approach, the little tree is sobbing and its leaves are shaking]

Big Tree: Hello, welcome, it's good of you to visit an old grandpa tree. Uh – say, little sapling, why are you crying?

Little Sap: [blows nose in a leaf] Oh, grandpa, the other plants – [sob] – they said nobody likes me and that people – [sob] – people are going to cut me down someday ... and they called me a shrub!

Big Tree: Whoah, now settle down. First of all, you are not a shrub. A shrub is woody, just like you, and lives year after year through the seasons, like you, but a shrub does not have a main central stem. You do. That makes you a tree, not a shrub! Here, maybe this joke will cheer you up. Why aren't shrubs allowed on the beach?

Sap: [blows nose again, voice still shaky] I don't know. I'm stumped.

Big Tree: Shrubs aren't allowed on the beach because... they don't have any trunks! Ha ha!

Sap: [giggles] But...is somebody going to cut me down someday because they don't like me?

Big Tree: Well now, let me explain. Somebody just might cut your down...

Sap: [Gasp!]

Big Tree: ...because they do like you, very much. You see, people make all kinds of useful things out of trees. Long ago people explored this country in canoes – made of trees! A fire of burning wood keeps people warm. Trees become buildings, bridges, ships, medicine, even the paper that all great books are made of. When you look at every human accomplishment, you'll find that for most of them, trees are at the root.

Sap: All those useful things stem from trees! Wooden' you know it. Gee, I feel like a sap.

Big Tree: We do other important things – let me think. Wait, I'm drawing a plank. Oh, yes, we also have cool shade, we clean the air, muffle noise and our roots keep the soil from washing away. We're not just any run of the mill plants! We're resourceful! Although there was a time when people may have liked trees too much. Do you have time to stick around for the story?

Sap: Oh, yes. When you tell a story, I never get board.

Big Tree: Long ago, people came to Wisconsin and chopped down trees like nothing you ever saw. They whittled away at the forest until there was hardly any left. Then, 100 years ago, the Wisconsin governor decided to chip in and hired the state's first forester. Now the forests are back, and when people cut down trees, they help new trees grow. They still follow the plans that the first Wisconsin forester wrote down in his log book.

Sap: Wow, grandpa, I think you should take a bough.

Big Tree: Thank you, and now it's time for everyone to leaf. Lumber along now!