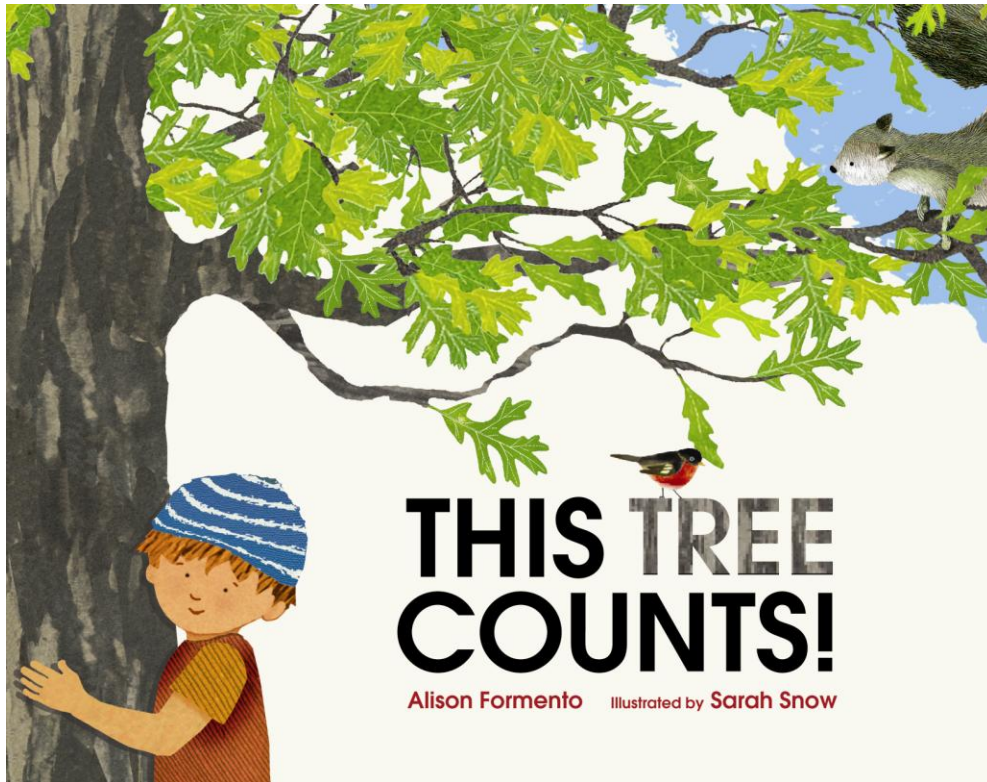


A Teacher's Guide to

# THIS TREE COUNTS!

Written by Alison Formento

Illustrated By Sarah Snow



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## Praise for This Tree Counts!

"Not only does this tree count, it matters!...The message branches out into a concisely written story with a child's point of view that is enlivened with realistic and artfully composed paper-cut and digital-collage illustrations. Teachers will welcome this "going green" tale, which ends with the junior tree huggers planting more trees." ~*Booklist*

"Snow's collage illustrations add texture and natural beauty to the story. The picture of the industrious kids working together in the grassy field under a bright blue sky epitomizes the story's theme of cooperation and friendship." ~*School Library Journal*

"The result gives a very earthy, made-from-nature feel to the illustrations. Snow's animals are easy to count and will keep young readers occupied....this will suit many audiences." ~*Kirkus Reviews*

## Story Summary

**From Albert Whitman & Company:** If you listen carefully to the lone tree behind Oak Lane School, it has a story to tell... about one owl, two spiders, three squirrels, four robins, five caterpillars, six ants, seven crickets, eight flies, nine ladybugs, and ten earthworms, all living safe and free in their tree home. What does this tree need? The children know -- it needs friends! Alison Formento's gentle story, illustrated with Sarah Snow's beautiful papercuts, whispers important ideas to all young tree lovers.

## About the Author

**ALISON FORMENTO** has been a hand model, clown, game show tester, singing gram delivery girl and Renaissance fair queen. Now she's a wife, mother, freelance writer, and children's author living in New Jersey. Besides writing, she enjoys taking trips, watching plays and movies, hiking and playing tennis (though she admits she's much better at hiking than tennis). Learn more about Alison and her work at [www.alisonashleyformento.com](http://www.alisonashleyformento.com).



## About the Illustrator



**SARAH SNOW** is a collage artist who combines found papers and acrylic and watercolor painting. Her work is influenced by the colors of her surroundings. Having lived in California, New Mexico, Colorado, Vermont, Rhode Island and New York, she has had a lot to choose from. Now she lives in the beautiful Hudson Valley with her husband and two children. Learn more about Sarah's work at [www.sarahsnowcollage.com](http://www.sarahsnowcollage.com).

## Pre-Reading

### Tree House

Brainstorm a list of animals and insects that live in trees. Make another list of things we use from trees. As you read, check off the list items that appear in the story.

- *Activate prior knowledge and anticipates what will be read or heard.*

### Take a Book Walk

Point out the title and names of the author and illustrator. Ask what the title means. What are the multiple meanings of “count”?

Turn the pages and ask students what they think is happening in the story.

- *Set purpose for reading and check to verify or change predictions*

### Vocabulary

Your students may be unfamiliar with the following words. When appropriate, encourage students to use picture clues to infer meanings.

cling	skitter	boughs	to inch
cocoons	exploring	glide	rich (soil)
moist	oxygen	oak	saplings
acorns	gather	palm trees	fir trees

- *Use context clues to decode new words.*
- *Use pictures as cues to check for meaning.*

## Discussion Questions

1. What did Mr. Tate's class decide to do? (*knowledge*)
2. What did the children hear in the tree? (*comprehension*)
3. Natalie thinks the oak tree is pretty. Do you agree? Find photos of ten different types of trees on <http://www.trees-online.com>. Take a class poll to see which one students like best. Graph the results. (*application*)
4. Mr. Tate says that "Trees will speak only if you listen closely." Do you agree? If so, what can trees tell us? If not, why do you think Mr. Tate thinks so? (*analysis*)
5. Look at the page where Mr. Tate's class is planting the baby trees. What is everyone doing? Using the illustration as a reference, come up with a set of step-by-step instructions for planting trees. (*synthesis*)
6. In the story, Jake says, "This tree counts!" Do you think this is a good title for the book? Why or why not? Brainstorm a list of other titles that would also work for this story. (*evaluation*)

## Student Activities

### In the Treetops

In the story, Eli writes a poem about his tree house:

Tree house, tree house, in the sky,

grow some wings and you can fly!

Birds can nest and so can I!

Ask students to design their own dream tree houses. What shapes would they use? How would they get up to their tree houses (ladder, rope)? How would they get down (slide)? Let them draw their tree houses and/or write a poem about them. Make a floor-to-ceiling paper tree and attach it to a classroom wall. Display the students' tree house designs and poems in the leaves of the tree.

- *Generate ideas for writing through talking, sharing, and drawing.*
- *Create written texts for others to read.*
- *Create two and three-dimensional works of art while exploring color, line, shape.*
- *Identifies basic shapes in the environment (e.g., circle, square, triangle, cube, sphere).*

## Bouncing Baby Saplings

Plant a sapling near your school! Before you plant it, take a photo of each child holding the sapling. Measure the height and weight of the baby tree and make birth announcements to post at school or send home. Note that you can use “sapling” (a young tree) or “seedling” (a tree grown from a seed).

### Room 201

proudly welcomes our newest arrival,  
an oak tree sapling!

Height: 4 inches

Weight: 6 ounces

Time planted: 10:05 a.m.

Day planted: Wednesday, September 9

Proud planter: Jordan

Insert photo  
of child with  
sapling here.

- *Select and use appropriate standard and non-standard units of measure.*
- *Tell time to the nearest minute.*



## Arbor Experts

Throw a class fundraiser and join the Arbor Day Foundation. For a \$10 membership fee, your class will get a 6-month membership and ten free trees to plant. Visit [www.arborday.org](http://www.arborday.org) to find out which trees grow best in your area.

- ▶ How much does each tree cost?
- ▶ How much would the membership be per month?

- *Plants and animals have features that help them survive in different environments.*
- *Develop the meanings of the four basic arithmetic operations by modeling and discussing a variety of problems.*

## This Tree Counts!

Have the students illustrate a pictograph showing the number of each type of creature living in the oak tree. Use the graph to answer the following questions:

1. Which creatures have the largest population?
2. Which creatures have the smallest population?
3. How many insects are there? Birds? Wings? Legs? (Note: Most caterpillars have 6 real legs and 10 fake legs, or *prolegs*.)
4. Which creatures can be combined to make a total of 10?

Examples:

$$1 \text{ owl} + 9 \text{ ladybug} = 10 \text{ creatures}$$

$$2 \text{ spider} + 8 \text{ fly} = 10 \text{ creatures}$$

$$3 \text{ squirrel} + 7 \text{ caterpillar} = 10 \text{ creatures}$$

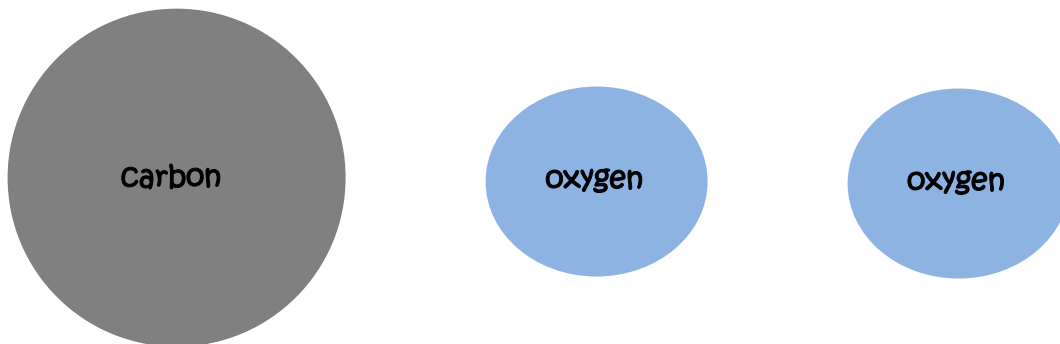
$$4 \text{ bird} + 6 \text{ ant} = 10 \text{ creatures}$$

- *Develop the meanings of the four basic arithmetic operations by modeling and discussing a variety of problems.*
- *Add two groups by counting the total.*
- *Sort and classify objects according to attributes.*

## Take a Breather

Ask for four student volunteers to help you illustrate how trees “wash” the air.

- ▶ Wrap brown paper around one student's torso, with roots either drawn or cut from the bottom.
- ▶ Give one student a paper “carbon atom” with tape on the back.
- ▶ Give two students smaller “oxygen atoms.”



- ▶ Tell the three students to touch their atoms together to form a carbon dioxide molecule. Explain that this combination is what pollutes the air (although some carbon dioxide is not bad—it's what makes soda fizzy and causes cakes to rise).
  - ▶ Have the rest of the class cover their noses with their hands so they won't breathe in the “dirty air.”
  - ▶ Direct the children to walk together, atoms touching, to the “tree.”
  - ▶ The students should touch the trees leaves (carbon dioxide is taken in during photosynthesis).
  - ▶ The student who is the tree then sticks the carbon atom to the trunk or roots.
  - ▶ The two students carrying the oxygen molecules may now drift freely around the room, and the rest of the class can take a deep, clean breath.
- *Learn to say the counting numbers.*
  - *Describe the sources of the reactants of photosynthesis and trace the pathway to the products.*
  - *Explain that all matter is made of atoms.*
  - *Demonstrate the use of creative movement.*

## Tree Products

Make a list of the items in the book that come from trees (houses, guitars, picnic tables, and pencils). Ask students to brainstorm other everyday items that come from trees and add those to the list.

Visit the Kentucky Division of Forestry website for a comprehensive list of products made from trees and add some to the class list. Some tree products that might surprise your students: ping pong balls, tires, football helmets, toilet seats, fireworks, crayons, chewing gum, rubber gloves, nail polish, toothpaste, syrup, shampoo, energy for electricity and even ice cream thickener!

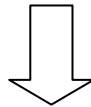
To access the list, go directly to go directly to:

<http://www.forestry.ky.gov/NR/rdonlyres/5779B802-30FD-4372-A5D2-40EFDBAFEB51/0/products.pdf>

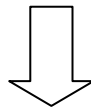
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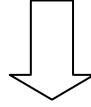
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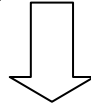
Kids, Teachers and Everyone



Educational Materials



Forestry Publications



Product from Trees Fact Sheet

- *Demonstrate ability to recall facts and details of text.*
- *Identify the natural resources used in the process of making various manufactured products.*




## Class Tree Experts

- ▶ Take a class field trip to a local nursery to learn more about planting trees. Take photos and make a class book showing the steps needed to plant and care for a tree.
- *Determine the characteristic changes that occur during the life cycle of plants by examining a variety of species.*
- *Participate in group writing activities such as experience stories and shared writing.*

## Leaves of Wisdom

- ▶ Learn about a different tree each day! Visit [www.alisonashleyformento.com](http://www.alisonashleyformento.com) and click on "Today's Tree." Have students write a new tree fact each day on a paper leaf. Hang the leaf from a paper tree in the classroom.

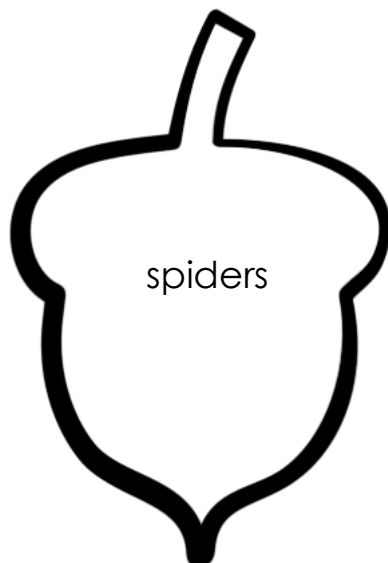
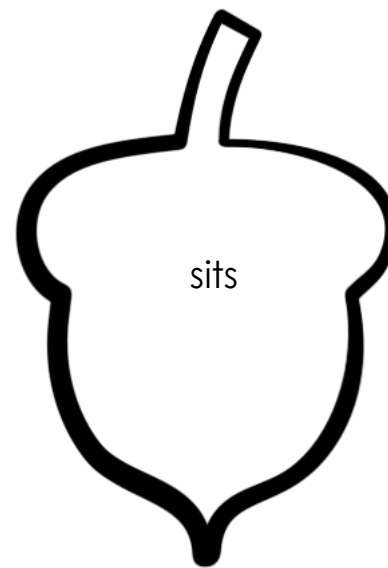
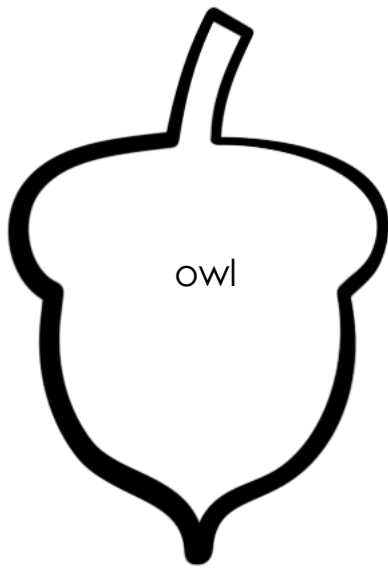
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- *Investigate and compare the basic physical characteristics of plants,*
  - ▶ Visit [www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/statetrees.html](http://www.usna.usda.gov/Gardens/collections/statetrees.html) to find a photo of your state tree and interesting trivia. Did you know that the oak tree is the U.S. National Tree?
  - *Identify American symbols.*

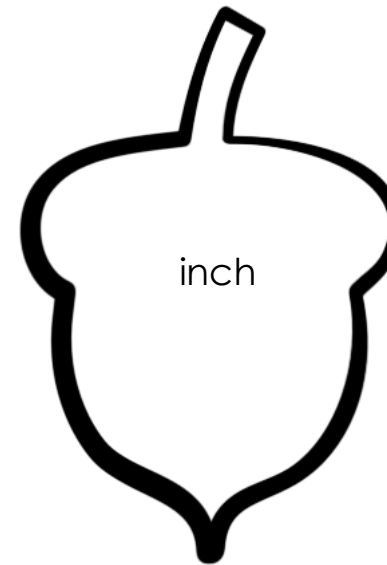
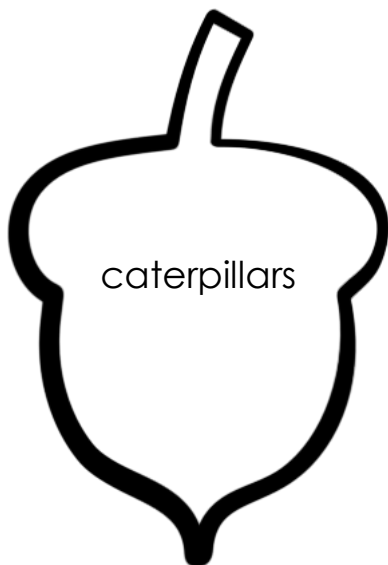
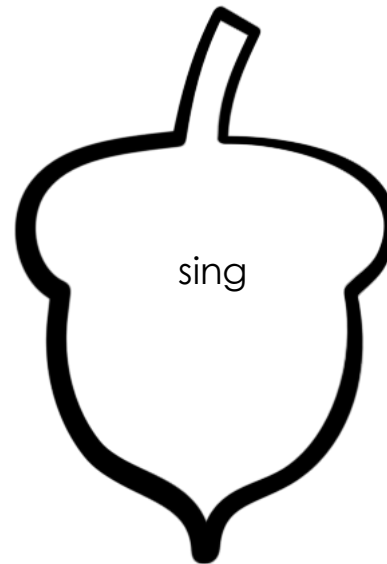
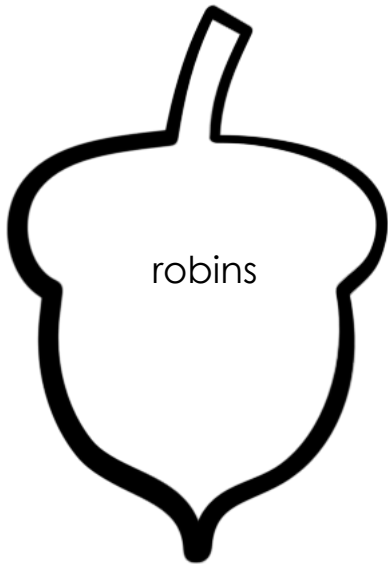
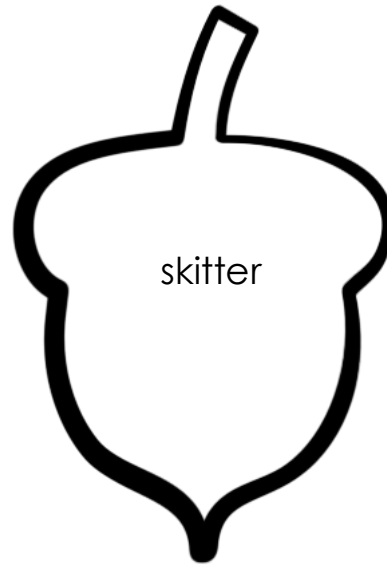
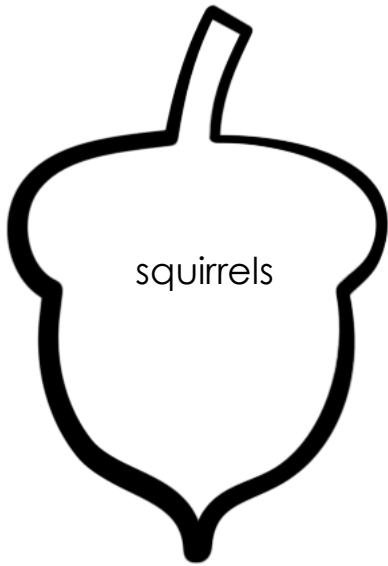
## Matching

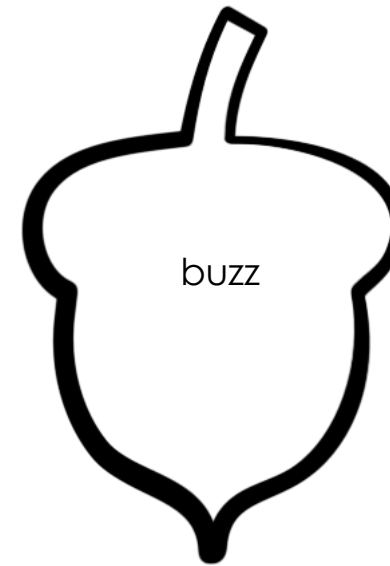
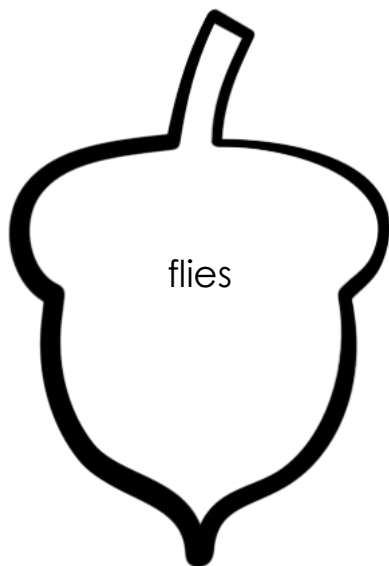
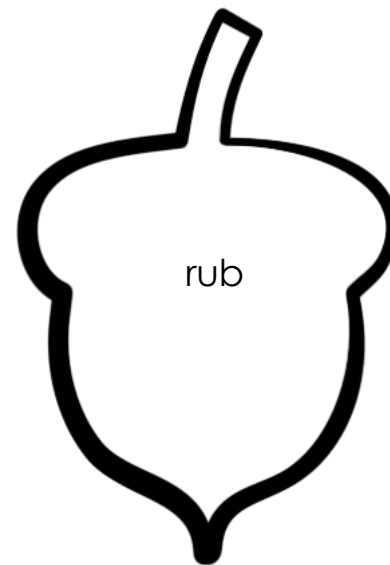
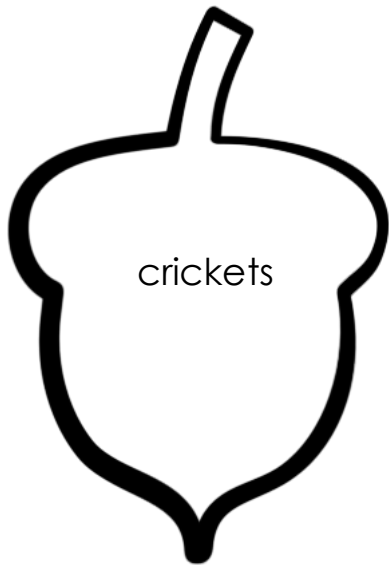
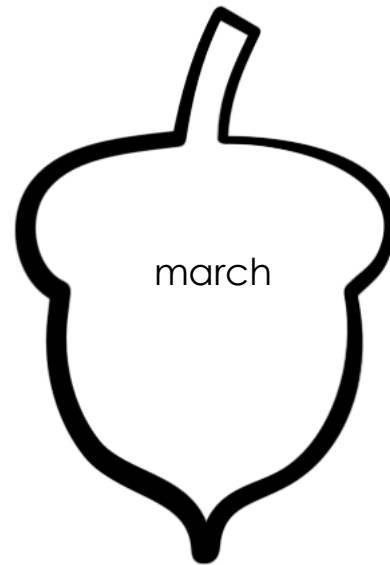
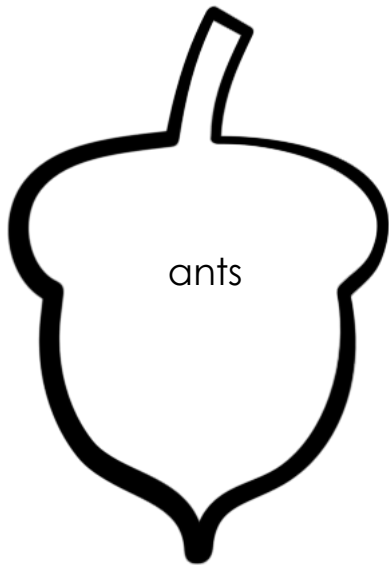
Photocopy the acorns onto cardstock and cut them out. Discuss how each creature acts or moves in the story. Mix up the acorns and see if students can match the creatures with the correct actions. Use the blank acorns for other actions that students come up with, such as tree + counts, children + plant, etc.

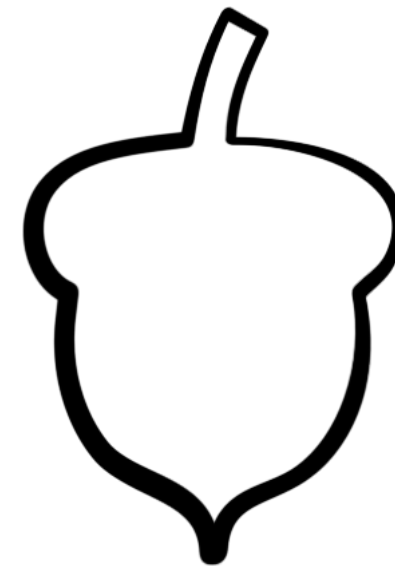
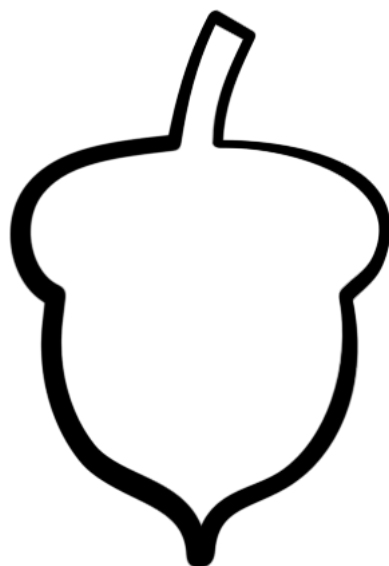
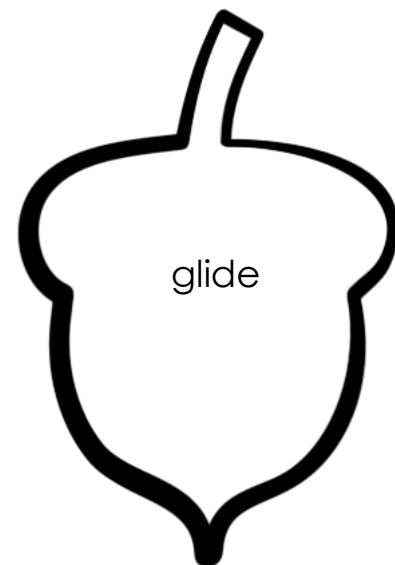
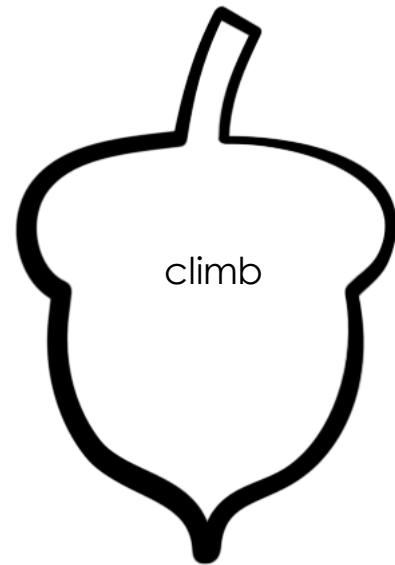
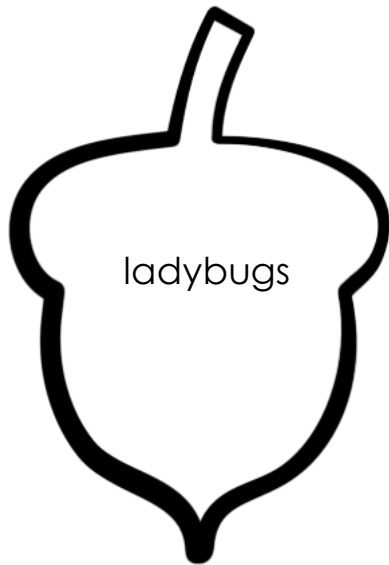
**Variation:** Pull the verb cards one at a time and see if students can mimic the action listed on the card.

- *Continue to develop a vocabulary through meaningful, concrete experiences.*









## An Interview with Alison Formento

### 1. How did you become a writer?

Reading led me to writing. I've always loved reading. As a child growing up in Arkansas, I'd walk to the local grocery store where the Book Mobile parked every Saturday and check out a giant stack of books. I grew strong toting those books back and forth each week! In high school, I took a class in poetry and Nobel literature that made me want to write like e.e. cummings and Pearl Buck. When I joined the speech and debate team, writing and research became a habit. My love of creative writing was further fueled in college, where I fell in love with Shakespeare. I went on a binge of writing sonnets and wrote a number of short plays, some in iambic pentameter, too. Reading hundreds of plays, the classics and contemporary, truly fed my desire to write dialogue and develop believable scenes between characters. I wanted to put words on the page that a reader or actor could bring to life.



### 2. How did you get the idea for THIS TREE COUNTS!?

I've always loved trees, so the idea of THIS TREE COUNTS! must have been developing inside of me since birth. Climbing them is still a favorite pastime and there's something special about hiking through a dense forest. I always carry a pen and little pad of paper in my pocket to jot any story ideas I might have while I'm out on a hike. One bitter winter morning while walking through a local nature preserve, as I maneuvered my way over icy patches, the sun seemed to spotlight this very large, very weathered tree. That tree stuck in my mind as I continued my walk. I jotted a few ideas about what this tree might say if it could talk.

### 3. Once the idea came to you, what happened next?

The tree's words came to me in a rhythmic, poetic form. I jotted the idea, but had to rework it for over a month to form the poem I wanted to share. It was a short poem, less than a hundred words. The story surrounding the tree's "words" came later, as I decided that I wanted someone in the story to listen to the tree. The tree needed friends, just like I say in the beginning of my story. Who better than a group of students and their wonderful teacher?

**4. How did the illustrations come about?**

After I received the great news that Albert Whitman & Company wanted to publish THIS TREE COUNTS! my editor told me they were looking for an illustrator. A few weeks later, I received a call and was told that collage artist Sarah Snow would be illustrating my story. I had to clarify the exact type of oak tree (a white oak) and verify the various creatures I referred to in my story so Sarah could get to work using her unique collage and painting technique. Every now and then, Sarah sent me a few sample illustrations. Was I thrilled to see her ideas? You bet! She has done a fabulous job capturing the feel and tone of my story and I couldn't be more pleased with the finished book. It's gorgeous.

**5. What were some of the challenges and rewards in writing this book?**

You often hear about picture books being shortened while going through the editing process. For me, it was the complete opposite. I had focused on one student, a teacher, and the tree. In the editing and revising process, I had to add a number of students to my story. My editor, Kathy Tucker, suggested developing the other students more fully so the reader has a sense of this entire group learning together from the tree. It was a huge change from my original short poem-like tale, and it was both a challenge to write and rewarding, too. There's a fullness and richness to THIS TREE COUNTS! that wouldn't have been there without that major change.

**6. Do you have a writing routine?**

I have to move my legs before I can write. For me, there's some connection in moving and getting my brain active, too. If possible, I take a walk, hike, play tennis, some sort of physical activity first thing in the morning. Next comes a necessary cup of tea, and then I settle into work at my too messy desk or at a local library with my laptop. I open whatever story is "on deck" and start right away.

**7: What's the best piece of writing advice you've ever received?**

That's easy. "The more you write, the more you write." That simple statement is so true. If I sit down to write every day, I'm going to produce. It's a matter of bringing myself to the work. I can have a brain full of fabulous story ideas, but if I don't commit to putting pen to paper or banging out a few pages of a new story on my keyboard each day, then I'm not doing my job.

**8: What advice do you have for young writers?**

Don't try to sit down and write a 300 page novel. Try writing poetry, or very short

pieces first. The short story is still one of my favorite forms of writing. Knowing that you're writing a story less than ten pages will help you focus on finishing. Also, if you're passionate about a subject, then do the research and write about it. Magazine editors and local newspapers are eager to find new, strong writers. Always keep a notebook and pencil handy. You never know when you'll have a great idea. One more piece of advice is to be brave and share your writing with trusted writing friends or a favorite teacher. Writing is a solitary activity, so it's important to be able to give and receive feedback for your writing. Joining a critique group has been so valuable in my growth as a writer.

**9. When you aren't writing, what are some of your favorite things to do?**

Spending time with my family always comes first. We enjoy traveling, seeing movies and plays, hiking, swimming and playing tennis. But there's one certain activity I do every day, all on my own. I read! I'm always in the middle of reading two or three books. I even listen to books in the car. It really is my favorite activity.

**10. What is your favorite tree?**

Oh, do I have to choose just one? Every tree is my favorite, for what they give the world. The world comes alive for me, depending on the trees around. A palm tree on a beach, the white Oak tree that's in my story, gorgeous pine forests all over America, and I particularly love the deep green Magnolia trees in the South. Every tree is unique and—listen close!—each has a story to share.



## An Interview with Illustrator Sarah Snow



### **1. When did you begin to think of yourself as an artist?**

Although I did a lot of art in high school, I really didn't think of myself as an artist until college. It is still hard to think of myself as an artist even today. Just seems too good to be true.

### **2. What type of media do you like working with the most?**

I really love collage. Putting together found paper and different kinds of paint, always felt like a jigsaw puzzle with a surprise outcome.

### **3. How did you break into the children's book illustrating profession?**

I was an illustration major in college. After college, I worked in book design and began to get illustration work slowly through the years that followed.

### **4. Did you collaborate with the author as you did the illustrations?**

We did not collaborate on this book. I received the book when it was already written, so it was a surprise for me. The same was true for Alison, that my illustrations were a surprise for her. The author and I have still not met in person. I think this is more usual than not, but the outcome can be really fun.

### **5. How long did it take to illustrate THIS TREE COUNTS?**

Three months, but I wish I'd had six.

### **6. How did you decide on an illustration style for the book?**

I just did the illustrations in the collage style that I had been working in. Because of the time factor, I relied on the computer to help put together the illustrations more than I normally would.

### **7. Are any of the characters or the setting modeled on real-life people and places?**

Yes, Natalie, was based on a girl (also named Natalie) who was in my son's 1st grade class. I would volunteer to help the teacher when they had art class. We were doing self portraits one day and I was sitting with Natalie. Her Mom had made her all these great pony-tails with different colored pony-tail holders and hair clips. She and I had a great time coloring her portrait that day and it really turned out beautiful. So I remembered how we had drawn her hair that day and modeled Natalie's hair in the book the same way.

**8. Pablo Picasso once said, "All children are artists. The problem is how to remain an artist once he grows up." Do you agree?**

I do agree. Whenever I look at my kid's art I always wish I could draw like them. There is a simple purity that I love in art made by children that I wish I could emulate as a grown-up.

**9. What do you like to do in your spare time?**

Playing with my kids, being outdoors, finding new cool music to listen to.

**10. What is your favorite kind of tree?**

Willow