

**PLT Activity #8**  
**THE FOREST OF S.T. SHREW**

CHARACTERS:      narrator                      Jackie  
                    ST Shrew                              earthworm  
                    white grub                              black beetle #1  
                    black beetle #2                      Millie millipede  
                    Sitta (bird)

NARRATOR: Jackie sat down with a “humph.”

JACKIE: I don’t think anything lives here in these woods. I’ve been walking around for a long time, and I haven’t seen anything except for a couple of squirrels.

NARRATOR: Squirrels didn’t really count. She had squirrels in her front yard, and there were squirrels around school.

JACKIE: “Pick a place near school or home and investigate what lives there,” my teacher said. “Then write a report about all the interesting and unusual things you find.” Too bad I don’t live near the pet shop like Rene Navarro. Then I’d have lots to write about. But no, I have to pick this patch of woods behind the playground thinking it would be loaded with animals. Now what am I going to do?

ST SHREW: So, you don’t think anything interesting lives in these woods, huh?

JACKIE: What was that?

NARRATOR: Jackie looked around and gasped. Next to her was a small, furry animal with its head poking out from under the leaves, with big whiskers and tiny little eyes.

ST SHREW: You don’t think anything interesting lives in these woods?

JACKIE: Well, I didn’t .... Who are you?

ST SHREW: Everyone calls me S.T. I am a shrew -- a short-tailed shrew. Now, put your finger on my back.

JACKIE: What?

SHREW: Look, you would like to know about what lives in these woods, wouldn’t you? C’mon, hurry up!

NARRATOR: Slowly, Jackie reached out her finger and gently touched ST’s back. There was a flash and she found herself standing next to ST, looking him right in the eye. Then she realized that she was standing on four legs and covered with fur. She had turned into a shrew!

SHREW: There, that’s much better. Now, follow me.

JACKIE: Where are we going?

SHREW: A lot of creatures around here are pretty upset that you don't know they even exist. So I've been appointed to show you around. Besides, now that you're my size, you'd make a tasty meal for something, so you'll be safer if you follow me.

NARRATOR: With that ST dove down the hole it had popped out of earlier. Jackie looked up and saw a large bird flying overhead and said "Uh-oh" and dove in after ST.

### **IN THE GROUND**

NARRATOR: Jackie had never crawled through the ground before and wasn't sure she liked it. It was dark and damp and smelled like dirt. And there were so many roots everywhere!

SHREW: HI everyone! We're here!

NARRATOR: At first Jackie could hear and see nothing. Then she noticed a rumbling that seemed to be getting louder and louder. Suddenly, heads began popping out of the tunnel walls. There were earthworms and beetles and white grubs and many other creatures Jackie couldn't identify.

JACKIE: Do you all live in the ground?

EARTHWORM: Un-huh and lots of others do too.

JACKIE: But how do you live? I mean ... what is there to eat down here?

EARTHWORM: Well you could say I eat my way through the soil! I make a tunnel by eating the dirt, then separating out bits of plants and other food from the dirt particles. It's not for everyone, but I love it!

WHITE GRUB: I suck juices right out of roots and one day I'll crawl out of the ground and become an adult.

BEETLE #1: Did you ever wonder what happens to animals that die in the woods? It's thanks to me that they're taken care of.

BEETLE #2: He means, thanks to all of us carrion beetles. We eat them up. Keep the forest clean.

SHREW: Thanks all you guys for coming! Follow me Jackie, there's still lots more for you to see.

### **A ROTTEN PLACE TO LIVE**

NARRATOR: Jackie followed ST through the soil for a short distance; then they climbed up to the surface and ran along the ground under a cover of leaves. Jackie could see spiders, centipedes, and other small creatures crawling around them. She wanted to stop and talk to them, but ST kept moving and she knew she had to keep up with him. Finally ST stopped at the

end of a log. ST ran to the top of it and Jackie followed. Most of the log was covered with a thick, green carpet of moss.

JACKIE: Ohh, it's so soft. And look at the other things growing up here.

NARRATOR: Jackie ran around on top of the log. She rolled in the soft moss, touching the cool, bright-orange fungi and sniffed at the tops of the tall, red-capped lichens as though they were flowers. There was even a tiny tree, only about three inches tall, growing out of the log.

SHREW: Want to see inside?

JACKIE: OK.

NARRATOR: Jackie waited as ST called to someone named Millie. In just a few seconds a long, dark creature with dozens of legs came crawling out of the end of the log.

SHREW: I am a little too big to go with you on this part of the trip. You go with Millie and I'll wait for you here.

JACKIE: But I am just as big as you are.

NARRATOR: Just then Millie reared up and touched Jackie's head with several of her legs. As before, in a flash Jackie turned into a millipede just like Millie. At first Jackie found it a little difficult to move in a coordinated way. But once she and Millie got inside the log, she was too busy looking around to think about how to walk and she didn't have any trouble at all.

MILLIE: This is like a factory, a factory that breaks logs down into soil. Listen for the chewing and look for the tunneling and boring through the wood.

NARRATOR: There were wood roaches, small white termites and hard-shelled pill bugs that rolled into tight little balls as Jackie and Millie passed by. There were also insect-eating hunters like huge shiny black beetles with giant jaws and centipedes with venomous fangs. Deep inside the log they even saw a salamander resting in a damp hole inside the log.

JACKIE: Wow! I had no idea there was so much activity inside a log. I hate to leave but I better get back to ST. Thanks Millie!

NARRATOR: Jackie returned to ST and turned back into a shrew. She and ST scurried off.

### **LIFE AT THE TOP**

NARRATOR: Jackie and ST stopped at the base of a large tree. Immediately a small black-capped bird flew down and landed on the leaves next to them.

BIRD: I was beginning to wonder whether you were coming. Hello Jackie, I am Sitta. Ever felt like flying?

NARRATOR: Sitta stretched her wings over Jackie and with a flash Jackie was changed into a nuthatch just like Sitta.

BIRD: Let's go!

NARRATOR: Sitta and Jackie flew off into the air.

SHREW: I'll wait here.

JACKIE: Of everything I've done today this is the best.

NARRATOR: Sitta and Jackie flew over the trees where they could see many other birds flying in and out of the treetops. They swooped down into the top of a tree and darted into and out among its branches.

BIRD: Be sure not to miss all the insects, the grasshopper-like creatures and the other bugs sitting on the leaves. Watch out for the wasps and flies buzzing around. Look at all the caterpillars crawling on the leaves. Lets land and take a walk down this trunk.

JACKIE: Wow! Look at all the caterpillars and ants crawling on the trunk. These spiders and moths are almost the same color as the bark. I almost missed them.

NARRATOR: That's called camouflaged. There were also pale green lichens and moss growing on the bark. Jackie and Sitta reached the bottom of the trunk.

JACKIE: This tree is like an apartment building. There are different things living in it all the way from the leaves at the top to the base right here on the forest floor. I guess I should say the dirt—I shouldn't forget everyone I met underground earlier!

BIRD: Well, it's good to hear you talking about all the things that live in and on the trees. I've got to go now, bye-bye.

### **HOME AGAIN**

NARRATOR: As Jackie once more followed ST through the ground, she began wondering where they could be going next. It was dark and damp in the tunnel and root hairs were brushing her in the face. As they ran along, the smell of dirt filled her nose ... suddenly Jackie opened her eyes. She was back by the tree she'd sat down against earlier. Somehow she had fallen over and was lying on the ground with her face resting on top of the leaves. Her nose was filled with the smell of dead leaves and dirt. Slowly Jackie sat up.

JACKIE: There's a dead log over there like the one I went to with ST. And the bark of this tree is covered with all kinds of things just like the one I saw with Sitta.

NARRATOR: Still the adventure seemed impossible to Jackie. But then Jackie looked at the ground near to where she'd been sitting and carefully lifted up some of the leaves. Sure enough there was a small hole in the ground just like the one she had entered with ST.

JACKIE: Boy, do I ever have a lot to write about in my report.

**THE END**