



Book: Seeds of Change by Jen Cullerton Johnson

Global Goal: 15 Life on Land

Ogham – Family/Friend Tree Activity

The main character in the book , Wangari Maathai , was an inspirational woman, who dedicated her life to creating a better natural environment in Kenya by organising communities to plant over a million trees. We are connecting the storybook and activities to the Global Goal 15: Life on land.





















The aim is to encourage personal connection, local action and global awareness.

A stark statistic is that only 2% of Ireland is covered by native trees, the lowest in the EU.

Did you know..

- Irish culture has its own special connection to trees!
- The earliest form of writing found in Ireland is called Ogham (dated around 400AD).
- Lettering was formed by a series of lines.
- Eight of the letters are thought to be linked to native trees of Ireland; Birch, alder, willow, oak, hazel, pine, ash and yew. This gives us an indication of the importance of trees in early Irish society

Ogham Alphabet

 A airm	 O onn	 U ur	 E eacha	 I iodheda
 B beith	 L luis	 F feam	 S soil	 N nion
 H hueth	 D deir	 T thra	 C coll	 Q quoit
 M muin	 G gort	 NG ngaeal	 Z zail	 R ruis

As well as letters being linked to trees, some scholars have suggested there could well have been an Ogham tree calendar, so you can find your birth month tree. There is also lots of Irish folklore about the powers of each tree. Can you find your birth tree in the chart below? What powers and uses does your birth tree have?

Ogham letter	Month in Irish	Tree	Tree calendar
I	Idad	Yew	1 Nov - 28 Nov
A	Ailm	Scots Pine	29 Nov - 26 Dec
B	Beith	Birch	27 Dec - 23 Jan
L	Luis	Rowan	24 Jan - 20 Feb
F	Fern	Alder	21 Feb - 20 Mar
S	Sail	Willow	21 Mar - 17 April
H	Huath	Hawthorn	18 April - 15 May
O	Onn	Ash	16 May - 12 June
D	Dair	Oak	13 June - 10 July
T	Tinne	Holly	11 July - 7 Aug
C	Coll	Hazel	8 Aug - 4 Sept
Q	Qert	Apple	5 Sept - 2 Oct
R	Ruis	Elder	3 Oct - 30 Oct

Why not draw your own Family or Friend Tree!

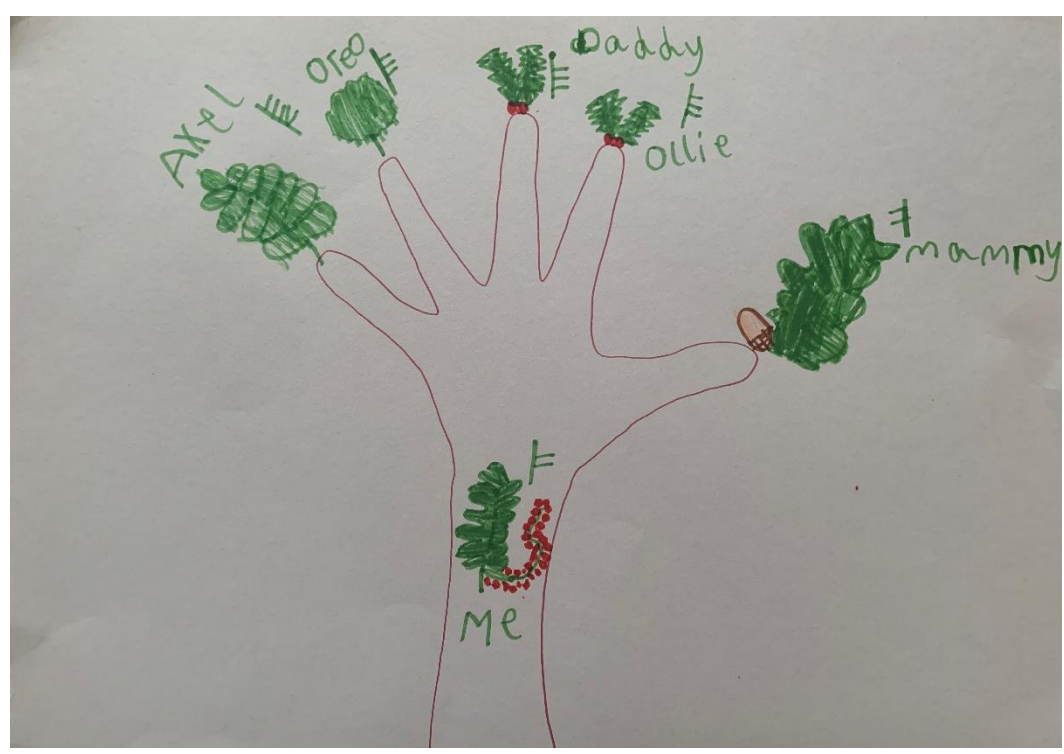
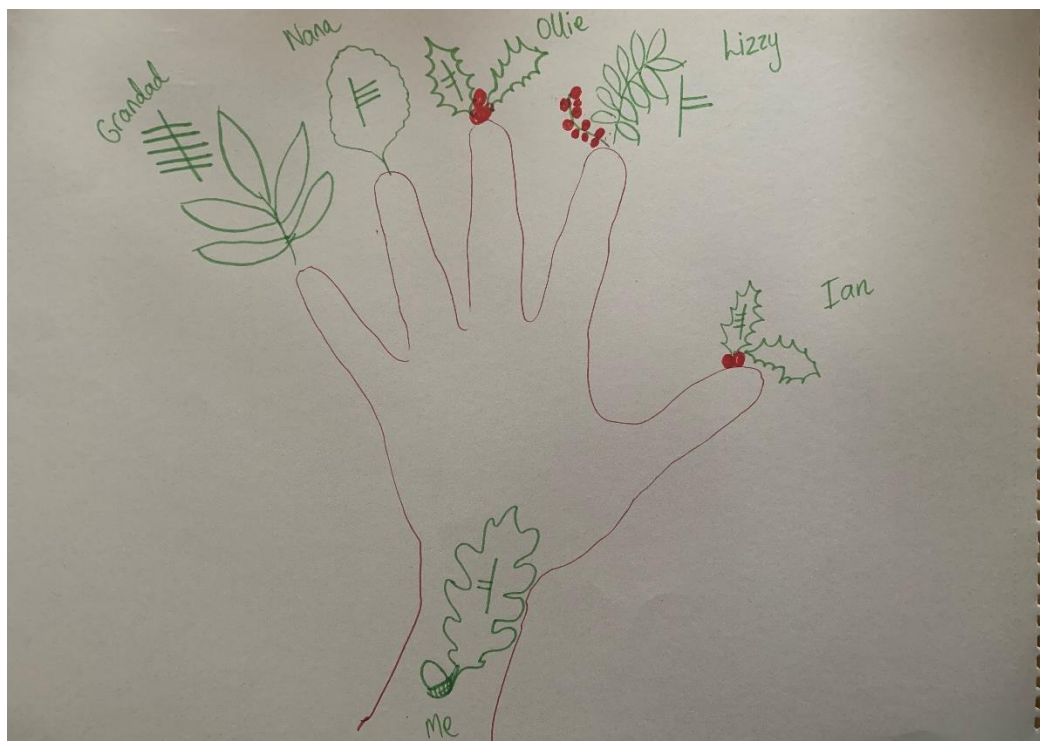
Find the tree and Ogham symbol on the charts above that represents you along with the ones that represent your family or friends.

Draw around the outline of your hand now you have a trunk (palm) and branches (fingers) of a tree. In the 'trunk' draw the outline of your tree's leaf and inside that your Ogham letter. Then at the end of each branch you can draw the leaf and Ogham letter of members of your family or friends. Each tree will be unique!

Google for leaf shapes. A good option is: <http://www.irishwildflowers.ie/more/trees.html>

Finally, go outside and see if you can identify the different Irish native trees and find your birth tree. (Can be extra challenging when many trees don't have their leaves!)

Here is some we made earlier!



Check out the Celtic Mythology meaning for each of the Trees below!

List of Irish native trees: mythology, uses and characteristics.



Yew: Celtic mythology symbol: Power, longevity and strength.



Yew trees can grow up to 25 metres in height. The Yew tree is associated with the afterlife; druids planted them near sacred spaces. You will find this tree nowadays planted near graveyards and churches. The wood of the yew was used in Medieval times to make longbows and is used a lot today in woodturning.

Scots Pine: Celtic mythology symbol: Protection, prosperity and vitality.



Pine is one of the oldest trees and has been around since the dinosaurs 300 million years ago. This is the tree that becomes our Christmas tree. Celts used this wood as building material to make boats and ships because of its resin content which makes it water resistant. The druids associated this tree with the coming of the sun after the dark winter months (winter solstice).

Birch: Celtic mythology symbol: Rebirth, protection and growth.



Birch tree stands out in contrast in those winter months with its silvery- white bark. It can thrive in harsh conditions of low nutrients and cold climate. It is the first tree to grow its leaves after the winter months. Birch is associated with protection and brooms and baby cradles were made out of this wood for its protective qualities.

Rowan: Celtic mythology symbol: Courage, protection and survival.



The Rowan tree is part of the rose family. Rowan thrives in high mountains and grows in craggy spots. The rowan has creamy white flowers in spring and red berries in autumn. The twigs of Rowan were placed in barns and above doorways to protect against misfortune. The bark of Rowan makes a powerful dye.

Alder: Celtic mythology symbol: Determination, balance and inner confidence.



Alder produces green and yellow catkins at this time of year. Alder is found growing near wetlands, rivers and streams. The root of the Alder tree improves the Ph of the soil and brings back life to poor soil conditions. Alder can completely survive submerged in water and was often used in the construction of buckets, pipes and bridges.

Willow: Celtic mythology symbol: Flexibility, imagination and hope.



Bees are delighted with the catkins of the Willow; they are the early source of pollen at this time of year. Willows are planted next to areas of water such as rivers and lakeshores. They help to prevent flooding. The Willow branches are flexible and can be used in weaving and wickerwork. In Druid stories all mankind was hatched in two scarlet eggs hidden within the willow tree, this story was re-enacted in Beltane and later adopted by Christians as Easter eggs.

Hawthorn: Celtic mythology symbol: Protection, sacred and creative.



Hawthorn trees used to be decorated this time of year with streamers and coloured cloth to celebrate the beginning of summer. At this time of year Hawthorn has beautiful white blossoms. Hawthorn tree is known as the meeting place of the fairies. Hawthorn trees were forbidden to be cut down in Ireland and some developments of roads were stopped because of this belief.

Ash: Celtic mythology symbol: Balance, growth and power.



The biggest Ash in Ireland is forty meters in height and can be located in Clonmel Co. Tipperary. The Ash comes into blossom at this time of year. If an Ash is cut down it re-sprouts to grow again and for this reason the tree is called the tree of life. Ash was burnt in the festival of Beltane to protect the crops and cattle. Ash was planted around holy wells and sacred springs.

Oak: Celtic mythology symbol: Truth, courage and wisdom.



Oaks provide food, shelter and life for many ecosystems. Oak trees are known for their large size and equally their long lifespan. It is known as the king of the forest. The wood of oak is very strong and is used in the construction of houses, boats and furniture. When times were hard acorns were ground down to make bread in replacement of grain.

Holly: Celtic mythology symbol: Protection, strength and optimism.



This time of year Holly comes into flower and later turns into berries in the winter months. The berries are a good source of food for the birds in the cold months. Holly repels lightning so Holly was planted around home dwellings. When a Chieftain was chosen a wreath of holly was made for good luck and a new born baby was bathed in the water of its leaves to protect them from harm.

Hazel: Celtic mythology symbol: Wisdom, inspiration and intuition



Hazelnuts are green at this time of year soon they will turn brown and be ready to eat. Hazel trees are known as the tree of wisdom/knowledge. According to the myth there were nine hazel trees surrounding the Well of Segais (the source of the River Shannon) it was one of these hazelnuts that fell into the water and was eaten as the salmon of knowledge by Fionn Mac Cumhaill.

Apple: Celtic mythology symbol: Youthfulness, transformation and truth.



Crabapple is the native apple tree of Ireland; it is bitter in taste and was used to make wine, juice and cider. Apple trees can live up to a hundred years old. There are over 7,500 different types of apples. Celts believed apples to be associated with rebirth. They buried apples as food for the dead. Apples can also be found in tombs of Asia over 5000B.C

Elder: Celtic mythology symbol: Regeneration, magic and caring.



You can identify elder by its fragrant white flowers in the summer, these can be made into delicious elderflower cordial. At this time of year they turn into purple/red berries and are a great source of Vitamin C for the winter months. If you break a branch and it can easily root and grow again, this tree is associated with regeneration.