

Create a Wishing Tree

Overview: Creating a wishing tree in your garden or home allows kids to consider their wants, goals, and dreams. Taking this a step further and asking kids to wish something for others or for our world as a whole offers them a chance to practice empathy and goodwill. It's also a great way to add color and movement to winter gardens!

Materials:

- Paper cut into strips or shapes
- Hole punch
- Yarn or twine
- Scissors
- Writing utensils



Approximate Time to Complete: 20 Minutes

Location: Indoor or Outdoor

Ages: 3-5, 6-8, 9-12

Season: All Seasons

Background Information

The practice of tying wishes to trees is shared amongst a number of cultures. The following are just a few of them:

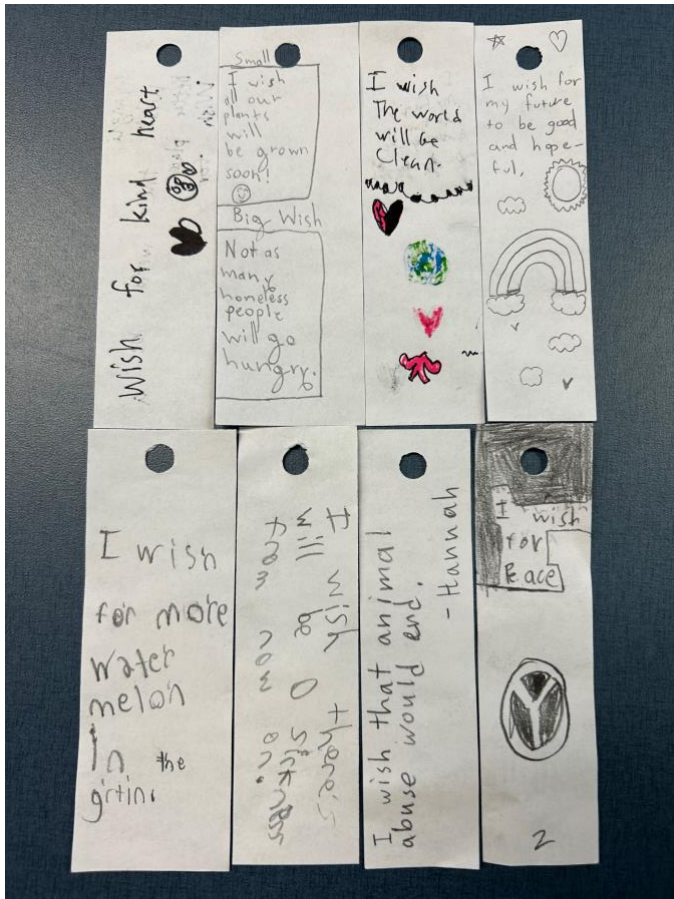
- In parts of Scotland, Ireland, and England strips of cloth, ribbon, or prayer beads are attached to trees to wish for healing or good health. The adorned trees are called cloutie trees. These regions also share a practice of making coin trees, where a coin is hammered into certain trees as an offering to make a wish.
- The Lam Tsuen Wishing Trees, located in Hong Kong, are two banyan trees frequented during the Lunar New Year when wishes are written on paper, tied to an orange, and then thrown up into the trees.
- In Thai folklore spirits or fairies related to trees are known as Nang Mai ("Lady of the Tree"), the most well-known being Nang Ta-khian. Trees, logs, beams, or wooden boats that are home to these spirits have lengths of colored silk tied to them as offerings for luck.
- In Turkey people tie fabric tokens or paper tags with wishes and reflections written on them onto branches of wishing trees (Dilek Ağacı). Another tradition is hanging evil eye talismans on the trees for good fortune.
- In Japan, during the festival of Tanabata, people write wishes, sometimes in the form of poetry, on small pieces of paper and hang them on bamboo.

Creating wishing trees can be a useful tool for bringing social and emotional learning into garden-based education. Asking kids and teens to think about their hopes and dreams within their personal spheres (self, home, community) is a great way for them to set goals, share needs, and hone their identities. Asking them to focus their intentions toward the larger world invites them to hope and dream for others and for a positive global future. This can be a great jumping-off point for conversations about personal choices and actions that impact others, environmentalism, and social activism.

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Instructions:

1. Choose the site for your wishing tree. Choose a tree with branches children can reach or a sizeable bush. If you don't have access to a tree or bush that would work for this activity, you can also create an indoor wishing tree by collecting some branches or sticks and placing them in a vase.
2. Decide on what shape your wishes will be and cut out as many as are needed from the paper. You can make simple strips of paper or cut out shapes like leaves or flowers. Keep in mind you'll want them to be large enough for a sentence or two on either side.
3. Punch a hole at the edge of your wishing papers in advance of writing.
4. Cut pieces of yarn long enough to tie around your wishing tree's branches. Generally, four to five inches should be long enough.
5. Hand out wishing papers to kids and instruct them to write one wish for themselves or their families on one side of the paper, and to write a big-picture wish for the world on the other side.
 - Instructions here can be modified to your programmatic goals: If you are at the start of a season or new calendar or school year, wishes can be geared towards a set period of time. Wishes can be geared towards nature, i.e., a wish for your school garden and a wish for our natural world.
6. Once wishes have been written on paper, hand each child a length of yarn or twine and head to your wishing tree. Have each child tie their wishes onto the tree, thinking about their wishes as they do so.



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