

Eaten Any Wood Today?

By Julia Pferdehirt

A Readers Theater script to accompany chapter 6 (Timber-R-R Thieves) of the historical fiction book [*Wisconsin Forest Tales*](#).

Author Julia Pferdehirt wrote this Readers Theater script as a way to introduce chapter 6 of the [*Wisconsin Forest Tales*](#) book and give students an opportunity to read aloud with classmates. In the first part of the script, students take turns reading at each asterisk (*). A second scenario within this script contains several parts to be assigned.

Eaten Any Wood Today?

* Trees have always been used by humans. In ancient times, wood was burned to keep people warm and cook food. Somewhere in the world, somebody has used almost every part of a tree for housing.

* Think of Native Americans using bark and branches to build houses. Think of native people in rain forests covering their houses with huge, green leaves. Think of Norwegian farmers building roofs from bark and planting grass on top! As soon as people learned how to use stone tools, they figured out how to use logs.

* American Indians used strong, thin spruce tree roots for sewing. They used bark for cooking utensils and dishes. Maple tree sap was boiled until it became thick, sweet sugar.

* Today, humans use wood in thousands and thousands of ways. Today you may have been housed by wood. Someone in this room may be wearing something made from trees. Chances are you brushed your teeth with some product made from wood!

* In Madison, scientists at the Forest Products Laboratory research the best ways to use wood. Other forest scientists with the state and federal governments and the university study the best ways to plan and use forests for recreation, jobs and caring for the environment. They help us understand how Wisconsin forests can provide homes for wildlife, clean air, sparkling water and the forest products we use every day.

* If you went on a scavenger hunt in your house, you'd be amazed at what you'd find made from wood. Of course you sit on wooden furniture, put food in wooden cabinets and walk on wooden floors. Your house has wooden windowsills and may have wooden walls.

* That's not the only place you'll find wood in your house. Look at the label of your tube of toothpaste. See the word "cellulose?" That means wood is involved! Chewing gum? Crayons? More wood.

* If you pulled up the carpeting in your living room, you'd see the carpet yarn attached to a backing made from wood fiber. The linoleum on your kitchen floor? It contains cellulose fibers from wood.

* You'll find the word "cellulose" on the labels of your dish soap and your mom's lipstick. Head to the bathroom and open the medicine cabinet. Do you see nail polish? Make-up? Cough syrup? Shampoo? More cellulose from wood. The sticky adhesive on Band Aids contains tree gum. And, of course, the toilet paper and tissues in your bathroom are also made from wood.

* Are you wearing wood? Take a look in your closet. Check the labels on your clothes for words like *rayon*, *acetate*, and *tencel*. These kinds of cloth are made using wood fibers.

* Now, head to the kitchen. Open the freezer and pull out that carton of your favorite ice cream. Check the label. Not every kind of ice cream uses cellulose, but if you see that word on your ice cream label, guess what? You're eating a wood product!

* Open the pantry and pull out a box. The cardboard is made from wood. Check the label for cellulose, because some foods are made with wood products, too! Paper napkins and plates are wood products. So is the maple syrup you pour over your pancakes in the morning.

* Head to the basement or garage. Cans of paint will list methylcellulose on their labels. That wood product keeps paint thick. The tires on your car or bicycle contain chemicals from trees. Look for wooden handles on tools and pulp wood used for paper and cardboard. You'll even find wood products used for your baseball bat or football helmet.

* All these things, and many more, come from our forests. Almost every person in the world uses trees in some way. In fact, the paper you're reading from right now was made from wood pulp.

* So, go home and check your house for anything and everything made from wood. Maybe after dinner tonight, as you spoon ice cream into bowls for dessert, you can ask your family, "Have you eaten any wood today?"

Note to teacher: The following scenario is about the many people, places, and businesses involved as an oak tree is harvested, taken to the mill, turned into boards and finally built into a family's table.

Please assign the following parts: 1) Narrator, 2) Logger Chris, 3) Great Grandfather, 4) Grandfather, 5) Father, 6) Forester Marty, 7) Mr. Johnson, 8) Mr. Hoppman, 9) Mike the Trucker, 10) Susan Young, 11) Jake LaFrance, 12) Dan Hansen, 13) Mack Campbell and 14) Nancy Campbell.

From Tree to Table: A Forest Journey

Narrator: From Tree to Table: A Forest Journey

Wood products all start the same way – as trees. Let's follow oak trees on a journey from a Wisconsin woodland to a family's living room.

Logger Chris: I'm Chris Anderson, a logger in Wisconsin. My father and grandfather and great-grandfather all worked in the woods.

Great-Grandfather: I'm Jens Anderson, Chris' great-grandfather. I'm the person you think of when you hear the word *lumberjack*. I wore a red and black wool mackinaw jacket and cut trees with an axe and crosscut saw. I remember the days when men called river rats rode logs down wild, fast rivers to the sawmills.

Grandfather: Ivar Anderson here. I'm Chris' grandfather. When I was a boy we still used crosscut saws and dragged logs from the forest using horses. We loaded our logs on steam-engine trains. By the time I was a man working in the forest, chain saws were invented. We began to move logs by truck instead of horse and train. I can still remember when folks first started to replant the cutover forest land.

Father: I'm Erick Anderson, Chris' father. In my time, foresters and loggers began to work together. We learned to harvest trees with a plan for the future. We learned to protect the environment.

Logger Chris: I'm a Master Logger. I went to school to learn how to harvest trees without harming the forest. I have to be an environmentalist, a businessman and a logger all in one! The kind of machinery we have today would take my great-grandfather's breath away! I use a harvester to cut trees based on a plan prepared by a professional forester. This harvester is quite a machine. It's smaller and lighter than Dad's equipment. It has special tires that don't dig up or press down the soil. The harvester uses a huge hand-like pincher that grabs the tree and cuts it at the ground. The pincher raises the trunk into the air. Then the machine trims off the branches. There's even a computer that measures the logs. Today we're cutting some oak trees in a beautiful stretch of forest up in northern Wisconsin.

Forester Marty: I first met with Mr. Johnson, the farmer who owns this land, about fifteen years ago. He wanted a plan to sell some of the trees. We walked on his land, checking out the forest. Some trees were healthy and strong. One part of his woodland had been poorly managed. Trees were crowded together so many of them didn't get enough sunlight, water or food from the soil. This forest needed a plan! We decided to remove many of the crowded, unhealthy trees and plant some new trees. In time, the healthy, strong trees would naturally reseed themselves.

Mr. Johnson: It's a fine, sunny day for working in the woods. On this farm, we grow corn and soybeans. But our most interesting crop is trees.

Thousands of trees grow on our family's land. We like to say we live *with* the forest. You can picnic in the shade of a maple tree, walk along a trail through the woods and go fishing along the creek and never leave our land.

Mr. Johnson: Forester Marty and I have marked some trees to cut and sell for lumber. We're thinning the oak trees I planted 40 years ago. Thinning means we remove weak, unhealthy or overcrowded trees.

Logger Chris: Farmer Johnson hired me to cut the oak trees that Forester Marty marked for harvest.

Mr. Hoppman, the Timber Buyer: My business is trees. I buy them for the local sawmill. On most days you can find me hiking through the woods on somebody's land. Land owners appreciate the income from the trees I buy.

Mike, the trucker: Maybe you'll see me driving down the highway with a load of logs. After Chris cuts trees into logs, it's my job to haul them to a mill to be made into boards or veneer or pulp.

Susan Young, Pine Valley Saw Mill Owner: Here at Pine Valley, timber comes in and lumber goes out. Maybe you've seen pictures of old-fashioned mills. Logs were cut, one at a time, by big saws powered by steam engines.

Wow! The business of turning trees into lumber has changed in so many ways. Logs are still cut into boards, but computers help us get the most boards from each log.

Most of the logs from Farmer Johnson's oak trees will be cut into boards and dried. Then we'll ship them out to a lumber store in your town.

Jake LaFrance, Owner of Northland Veneer Mill: My company buys birch, walnut, oak, maple and other special wood to make a wood product called *veneer*. Veneer is a thin sheet of wood. Instead of building furniture with solid wood boards, a thin layer of high-quality, beautiful wood less than 1/8 inch thick is glued onto plainer, lower-quality wood. Buyers get the beautiful look of oak, walnut, birch or maple without the higher price of solid wood. Some of the logs from Farmer Johnson will make beautiful veneer.

Dan Hansen, truck driver: Hello from the great state of Wisconsin. Folks like to call my town the “north woods.” I call it home! I don’t spend all my time up north. I deliver lumber all over Wisconsin. One day I’m delivering two by fours or boards to a lumberyard in Milwaukee. The next day I might deliver veneer to a furniture factory.

Mack and Nancy Campbell, Owners of Wood Works:

Mack: We earn our living from the forests, too. Nancy and I are furniture makers. Most of the dressers and tables and cabinets in your house were made in huge factories. With big machinery and lots of workers, these companies can make enough furniture to fill your whole house in a few hours. Furniture factories give jobs to a lot of people.

Nancy: We make furniture by hand. Sure, we use power tools and even computers, but our furniture is built one piece at a time, like wood workers have built furniture for hundreds of years.

Mack: Today, we’re using some beautiful oak wood we bought at the lumber store. It’s going to become a coffee table for a customer down in Madison.

Nancy: When I see a really beautiful piece of wood I often picture it in my mind as a shiny table top or a desk. I know beautiful wood came from a tree somewhere. Sometimes I wonder where that tree grew. I wonder who cut the logs. I wonder who carefully cut the logs into lumber.

When this coffee table is finished, the Allen family from Madison will drive out to pick it up. Wouldn't it be fun to tell them the whole story of their table?

Farmer Johnson: I could tell the Allens about the wooded land that has been owned by my family for over 100 years.

Forester Marty: I could tell the Allens how Mr. Johnson and I made plans to care for, use and regenerate the Johnson's forest.

Mr. Hoppman: I'd tell the Allens about the day Mr. Johnson decided to sell some oak trees. The money Mr. Johnson got for those trees helped pay for his granddaughter's school fees.

Logger Chris: I could tell the Allens about the day I harvested the oak trees out at the Johnson farm.

Mike: I'd tell the Allens about my truck stacked high with logs ready to go to the sawmill.

Jake LaFrance and Susan Young: We'd tell the Allens how our mills use computers and high-tech machines to cut logs into boards and veneer.

Dan Hansen: I tell the Allens how I deliver lumber to lumberyards and building companies all over Wisconsin. I'd tell them that one day I delivered boards and veneer from Mr. Johnson's oak trees.

Nancy and Mack Campbell: And we'd finish the story by telling them how we bought lumber from the Johnson's oak trees and used it to build the beautiful table they'll take home and enjoy!