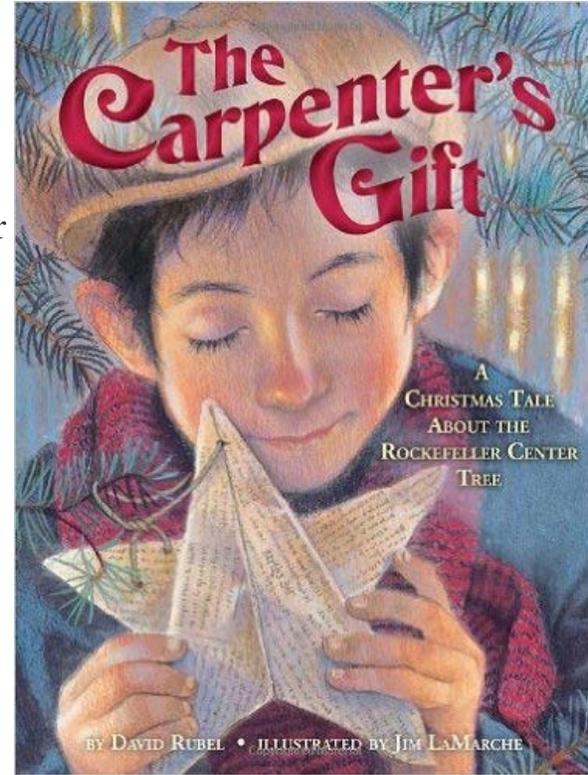


## December 2015 Book of the Month

### *The Carpenter's Gift*

By: David Rubel

The Carpenter's Gift tells the story of eight-year-old Henry and his father selling Christmas trees. They give a Christmas tree to construction workers building Rockefeller Center and celebrate together. Through the kindness of the construction workers and neighbors, Henry gets his wish for a nice, warm home to replace his family's drafty shack. He plants a pinecone from that first Rockefeller Center Tree. As an old man, Henry repays the gift by donating the enormous tree that has grown from that pinecone. After bringing joy to thousands as the Rockefeller Center tree, its wood will be used to build a home for another family in need.



### NC Christmas Tree Facts:

- North Carolina has approximately 1,300 growers producing Fraser Fir Christmas trees on an estimated 40,000 acres.
- Fraser firs represent over 98% of all species grown in North Carolina.
- Fraser firs are grown in western North Carolina counties which include Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Jackson, Macon, Madison, Mitchell, Swain, Transylvania, Watauga, and Yancey.
- The North Carolina Christmas Tree Industry is ranked second in the nation in number of trees harvested and cash receipts.
- North Carolina produces over 19% of the real Christmas Trees in the U.S.
- The North Carolina Fraser Fir has been judged as the Nation's best through a contest sponsored by the National Christmas Tree Association and chosen for the official White House Christmas tree 12 times (more than any other

species)....1971, 1973, 1982, 1984, 1990, 1993, 1995, 1997, 2005, 2007, 2008, and 2012.

- The North Carolina Fraser Fir Christmas tree is the most popular Christmas tree in North America and is shipped into every state in the U.S. as well as the Caribbean Islands, Mexico, Canada, Bermuda, Japan and other points all over the world.
- The North Carolina Fraser Fir has soft, pleasant-to-touch needles, incomparable needle retention, long lasting aroma, and more pliable yet stronger branches for even the heaviest ornaments.
- Individual Christmas tree growers may sell anywhere from a few dozen trees per year to hundreds of thousands of trees per year.

### Activities

#### **Pinecone Experiment: Why Do Pinecones Open?**

Take students on a nature walk and have them collect pinecones. Let the students observe the different types, sizes and shapes. Take notice to the pinecones that are open and closed. Lead a discussion and ask students: *Why are some pinecones open and others closed? Why do you think they open?* Conduct an experiment with the students. You will need: 3 pinecones (about the same size) three jars the same size, cold water, hot water. Label each jar: Hot Water, Cold Water, Air (this is the control pinecone). Fill each jar except the “air” jar with the same amount of water (hot and cold). Have students observe the changes, if any. Students can record, sketch and write about the changes. The changes should happen fairly quickly. Other things the students may observe besides the pinecones opening (because of moisture) is: Pinecones float and the glass causes a magnifying effect. Take them out of the water and see how long it takes to see a change in the pinecone again. Leave the pinecones in water overnight and let the students see what changes happen! Hint: It’s not the pinecone that changes!

#### **Grow Your Own “Christmas Tree”:**

For this quick and easy ‘botany’ experiment, you will need: 1 sponge cut in the shape of a Christmas tree (you can precut these for younger kids, older kids can cut their own), fast growing sprout seeds (such as grass seeds) and a water bottle. Have the students soak the sponge in water and then cover it with the seeds. Use a spray water bottle to spray the seeds to ensure they are damp. Place the tree in a plastic tray and let the students spray the tree each day. In about 2 weeks the students will see a noticeable amount of grass

growing. Students can observe that some blades of grass are tall while others are still short and sprouting. Discuss why they are not all the same size. When the grass is full and bushy, the students can trim the tree and watch it continue to grow taller.

### **Pinecone Bird Feeder:**

Trees provide homes to so many animals. Have students make a list of as many animals as they can think of that use trees for homes. Birds tend to need additional food during the winter so students can make pinecone bird feeders to provide additional food. First, attach the desired length of twine to the top of the pinecones. Next, have the students cover the pinecone in natural peanut butter, making sure they get inside the seeds and all around the pinecone. Then, have the students roll the pinecones in birdseeds making sure to coat it well. Last, let the students choose a perfect spot outside to hang the birdfeeder.

### **STEM: Build a Christmas Tree with Gumdrops:**

**Materials:** Gumdrops (lots of them) and toothpicks

Have students work independently or in groups. They can use a specified amount of gumdrops and toothpicks or an unlimited amount. Let students try to construct a “Christmas tree” shape using the materials. See which students can build the tallest tree. Discuss why some trees were taller than others and how they were built. Have students record the number of gumdrops and toothpicks used and compare them to the other sizes and shapes of the trees.

### **Habitat for Humanity and the Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree:**

[http://www.habitat.org/lc/stories\\_multimedia/thecarpentersgift/about.aspx](http://www.habitat.org/lc/stories_multimedia/thecarpentersgift/about.aspx)

### ***The Carpenter’s Gift* story read aloud:**

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYzMgQ1kP\\_o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SYzMgQ1kP_o)

### **Sources:**

<http://www.ncchristmastrees.com/educational-environmental/tree-facts>

[http://lemonlimeadventures.com/why-pine-cone-science-experiment-for-kids/#\\_a5y\\_p=2800546](http://lemonlimeadventures.com/why-pine-cone-science-experiment-for-kids/#_a5y_p=2800546)

[http://www.giftofcuriosity.com/grow-your-own-christmas-tree-ponge/#\\_a5y\\_p=2926427](http://www.giftofcuriosity.com/grow-your-own-christmas-tree-ponge/#_a5y_p=2926427)

[http://www.habitat.org/lc/stories\\_multimedia/thecarpentersgift/about.aspx](http://www.habitat.org/lc/stories_multimedia/thecarpentersgift/about.aspx)