

LEARN ABOUT FORESTS

We all depend on trees and forests! Use this fun, hands-on activity to engage youth in learning about sustainable forest management. It's perfect for educational events, career days, or field visits.



WHAT'S IN A LABEL?

PLAN

KEY CONCEPT: Forest certification standards include measures to ensure social, economic, and ecological dimensions of sustainability. It includes maintaining forest and ecosystem health (e.g. biodiversity, wildlife, water, and soils), productivity, and diversity, and conserving a forested land base for the needs of present and future generations. [PLT's Forest Literacy Framework, Concept 3.D.3]

OBJECTIVES: Provide opportunities and materials for learners to

- Describe and define forest product certification.
- Articulate ways that certification benefits the environment, the people who rely on forests, and consumers.

SESSION TIME: 50 minutes

SETTING: Indoors or outdoors



BACKGROUND

Sustainable forestry may be defined as forest management that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It involves managing, growing, nurturing, and harvesting trees for useful products and ecosystem services and reforesting areas that have been harvested.

Forest certification is one approach to ensure that a forest is managed in a sustainable way. Certified forests meet certain standards for environmental, social, and economic practices. These standards are intended to protect water quality, biodiversity, wildlife habitat, and forest health and to provide economic and community benefits.

Information about certification is often communicated through a label on a product to help consumers recognize the product as originating from a sustainable source. The two most common forest certification labels in the United States are Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) and Forest Stewardship Council (FSC).

PREPARE

MATERIALS: Two identical spiral-bound notebooks, large self-stick notes, sample product with a certification label (optional), paper and pens.

GET READY: Using self-stick notes, label one notebook “A – \$3.99” and the other “B – \$2.99,” leaving room for additional information on each sticky note. Arrange for learners to tour a forest site, either in person or virtually.

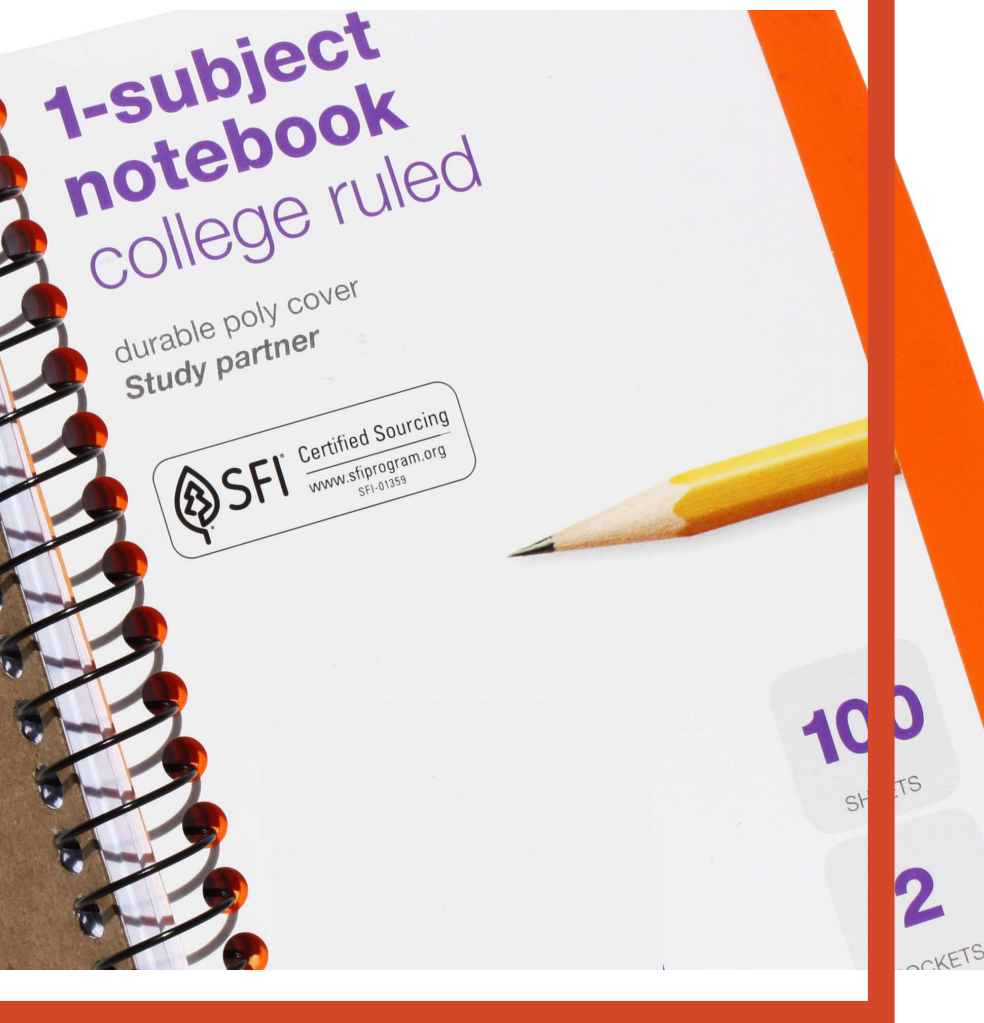
A - \$3.99

B - \$2.99

BENEFITS OF FORESTS

Certified forests may be managed by public agencies, private companies or individuals, Indigenous and Tribal communities, universities, conservation organizations, or other communities. Partnerships between landowners and local organizations can support sustainable multi-purpose forest management.





LEAD

INTRODUCE:

Display the two notebooks and ask learners which they would buy. (You may have them raise their right hand to indicate the notebook on their right and their left hand for the one on the left.) Share the following statements and ask which they would choose with each new piece of information:

- Notebook A contains 50% paper fiber from sustainably harvested forests; Notebook B's paper is from forests that were not sustainably harvested (Write "50% sustainable" on Notebook A.)
- The other 50% of the paper fiber in Notebook A is recycled content; Notebook B's paper fiber is from unknown sources. (Write "recycled content" on Notebook A.)
- The company that made Notebook A works to support the local community by employing local workers, donating to local charities, and helping to beautify neighborhood parks; the one that made Notebook B does not. (Write "supports community" on Notebook A.)

Discuss: How did your choice change as you got more information?

EXPERIENCE:

1. Introduce the term "forest certification" and ask learners what they think it might mean. You might ask them whether they've ever received a certificate for completing a program and to describe what it means to certify something.
2. Point out that forest certification is a process in which an independent certification body makes sure the organization that manages the forest, or the company that manufactures the product, meets certain requirements. A forest certification label on the final product shows consumers that it meets those requirements, which often fall under three categories:
 - **Environment:** positively contributing to the health of the forest and ecosystem, biodiversity, wildlife, water, and soils
 - **Economics:** using resources efficiently over time
 - **Social:** taking responsibility for the well-being of people

You may want to share a sample product with a certification label.

3. Invite learners to imagine that their job is to certify forests. Have teams of two to four learners create a list of requirements they would include in their certification system under the categories of Environment, Economics, and Social. Have them put a star next to the five requirements they think are most important.
4. Ask teams to share their lists.

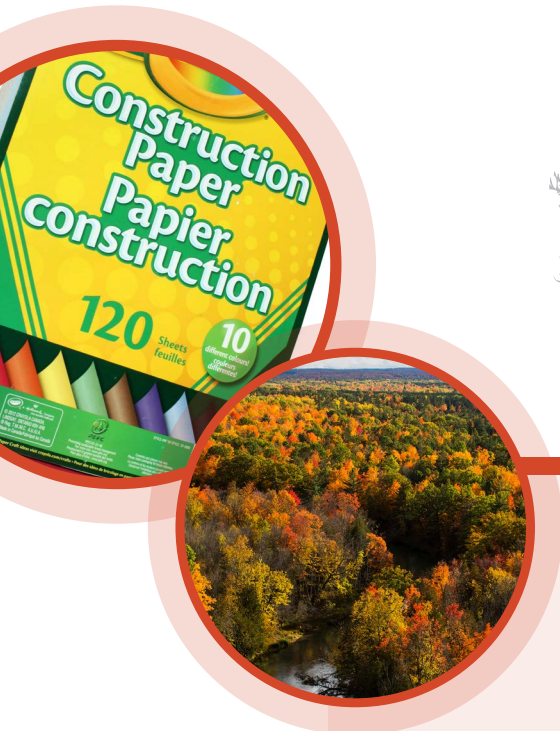
CONNECT:

Take learners on an actual or virtual tour of your forest site, focusing on its role in forest product certification. Encourage learners to ask questions about the benefits and challenges of the certification process.

CLOSE

Display the two notebooks and ask learners which they would buy. (Again, you may have them raise their right hand to indicate the notebook on their right and their left hand for the one on their left.) Share the following statements and ask which they would choose with each new piece of information:

- How does forest certification help the forest, the people who live in or near forests, or businesses?
- What might be some of the challenges with forest certification?
- What are your thoughts about forest certification?



TAKE ACTION

Challenge learners to look for forest product certification labels at home, in stores, or in the community. Encourage them to research and identify what specific labels signify.

Project Learning Tree is an initiative of the Sustainable Forestry Initiative, a nonprofit organization that advances forest sustainability through its work across the areas of conservation, community engagement, and education and through its certification standards.