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# How old is your tree?

To tell how old a tree was you can look at the trunk once it has been cut down and count the rings within the trunk. Each ring represents a years growth. You can also get a good idea of what the growing conditions were like in different years. In good years a thick ring of sapwood will have been laid down. In poor years the layer will be much thinner.

Encourage children to estimate the age first.

Younger children may like to measure the girth of the tree using non-standard measures

eg How many people can encircle the tree by holding hands?

We can estimate the age of a tree without cutting it down by measuring the girth. Most trees grow an average of 2cm every year of their life.

Assuming a child's hand span is approximately 10cm (representing 5 years growth), younger children can estimate the age by counting how many hand spans fit around the tree, as they count up in 5's.

More able children can work out the approximate age of the tree by measuring the girth and dividing the measurement by 2.

A tree with a girth of 200cm would therefore be about 100 years old.

Horse chestnuts and many of the smaller species grow more slowly. Poplars and exotic American giant conifers have growth rates 2 or 3 times faster than this. To work out a more precise figure for specific trees by dividing by the figure given below.

|                               |                |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| <i>Oak</i>                    | <i>1.88 cm</i> |
| <i>Sweet chestnut</i>         | <i>2.15 cm</i> |
| <i>Sycamore</i>               | <i>2.75 cm</i> |
| <i>Holly, Yew</i>             | <i>1.25 cm</i> |
| <i>Hazel, Ash, Elm, Beech</i> | <i>2.50 cm</i> |
| <i>Pine, Spruce</i>           | <i>3.13 cm</i> |

You might like to end this activity by demonstrating the size of the largest living tree. Take a piece of string that is 3.86m in length (the radius of the trunk). Get the children to stand holding one end in the centre. Use this string to describe a circle, placing children at various points around the circle. The resulting circle will show them the girth of the giant Sequoia.

***Taking Care of Sussex***