

**First Place** – Larissa Stahl of the Bon Homme Conservation District

“Will life always be so tough?” I pondered, feeling a little envy through my green leaves. Life was hard for me. As I stood amongst a shelterbelt of towering oaks, watching folks plant a new row of saplings in front of me, memories from when my roots were grounded interrupted me.

I remember that feeling as if it were yesterday, the feeling of my tender roots when they first touched the cool ground. While hands so carefully packed dirt around me, excited voices talked about how I would one day protect them from the harsh winds. After that, I knew what I had to do. With each watering, I could feel my roots stretching out and getting stronger. Each time the sun poured rays upon me, my leaves got greener and got a healthy glow.

Now, all of a sudden, while watching young trees grow before me, I felt that I was useless and unimportant. While I was full of those thoughts, I felt something tickle me in my branches. A bird was joyfully building its shelter upon me. A gush of relief ran through my healthy green leaves. I wasn't lonely anymore. Squirrels were playfully chasing each other up my trunk. It was then that I realized that even though I may never get cut down and turned into fancy furniture, I will always like this life better: giving fresh air and having animals shelter themselves among my branches. I felt very important.

**Second Place** – Sophie Dowling of the Jones Conservation District

Planting trees is so much fun,  
It gives us time to work in the sun;  
We plant our rows  
One by one.

We measure, space, and dig our holes  
And take the fabric from its rolls.  
Cut an X to plant a tree  
The fabric helps to stop the weeds.

Now's the time to select a tree,  
They're only a twig, how can this be!  
Plenty of room so the roots can spread  
Just like us, they need a bed.

We hope for rain from the sky,  
Or else the trees will get very dry.  
In South Dakota it's hard to plan,  
On a rain from heaven to soak our land.

During times when hot and dry  
The trees want water,  
You can almost hear them cry.  
The hot, dry winds make the leaves fry.

All this work takes sweat and toil  
Digging and watering the trees in the soil.  
Trees are nesting for birds, protecting from the hot sun,  
Sheltering for wildlife, or building a snow fort.

We mow around trees to make them look nice  
The time we work is worth a big price.  
It's so rewarding when the trees grow tall  
To sit in the shade and drink ice cold lemonade.

### **Third Place** – Connor Torkelson of the Jackson Conservation District

Every day during the cold winter, my sister and I go outside to run, play tag, or play hide and seek, but after a while, like every kid, we get bored of doing the same thing every day. So we went into this beautiful yet sort of eerie place we called “The Forest.” Almost all the trees were dead or fallen.

We found a snow-covered, branchless tree and propped a log on it.

We did it again and again, hauling icy, heavy logs uphill. After a few hours of hard work, we finally got it done. We found these sticks we called “axes” and we would destroy snowmen and snow mounds acting like knights in shining armor or Egyptian raiders stealing a tomb. Our shelter was a secret base, a sap farm, an underground lab, or a castle.

Every day we went to the shelter and it greeted us every day with a sweet “Hello” carried by the wind or a nice “How-do-you-do?” We would reply with a “Hi!” or a “Good Morning, Tree Fort!”

Trees are so very important. We give them carbon dioxide, and they give us oxygen. They grow delicious fruit for us to eat. Trees provide us shade and a nice, grassy place to sit down and read. Trees are the best thing ever, and they will be forever. I love my tree fort, and my tree fort loves me.