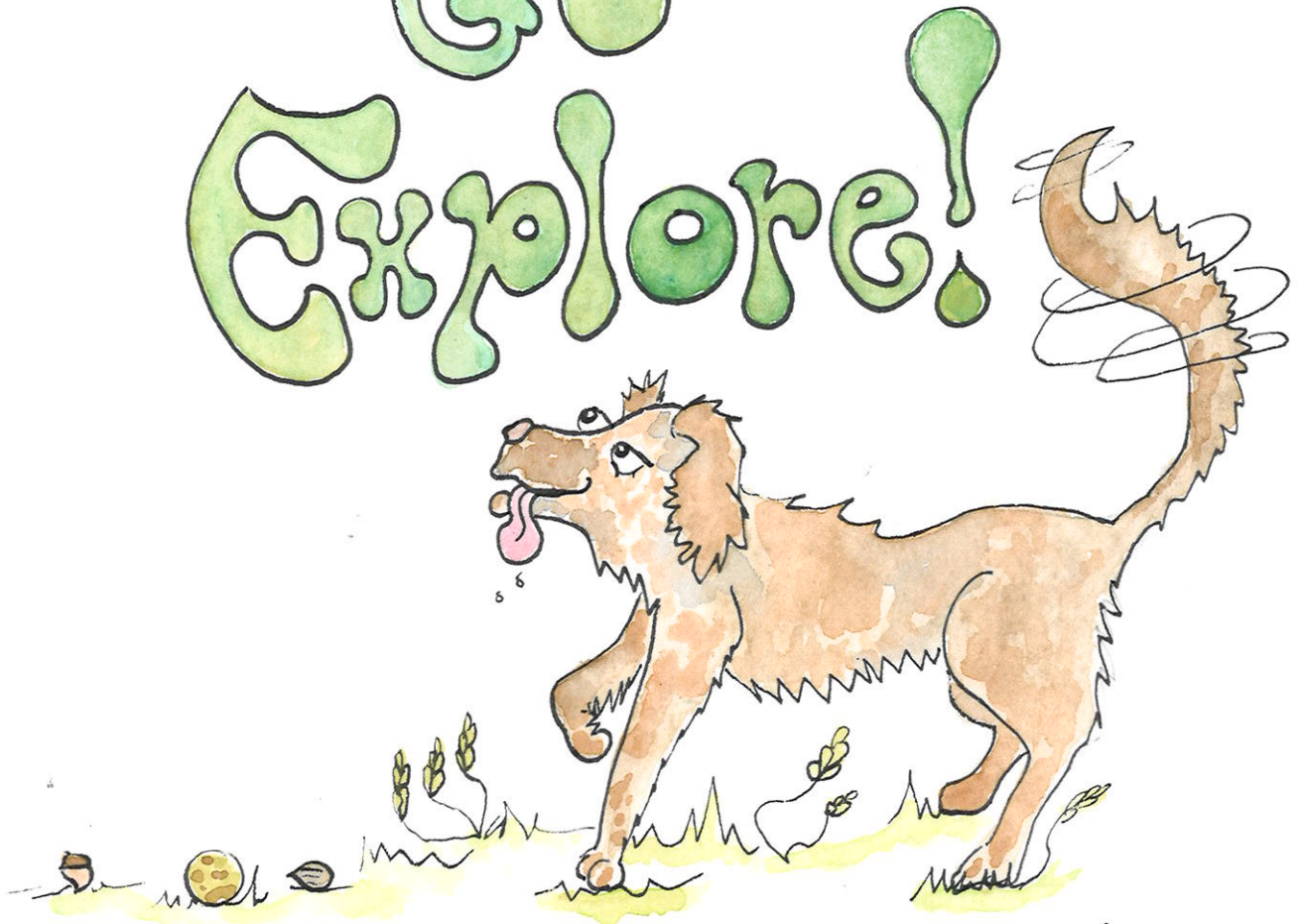


Activity and Nature  
Guide for Kids



# Let's Go Explore!



In this Issue: Squirrels, Nuts, Tree I.D., Seed Dispersal  
Written and Illustrated By: Beth Raboin

Have a question or comment?

Be in touch at:

goexploreguide@gmail.com

About the author: Beth is a writer and nature-lover who has been declared favorite auntie by kids across the country. She holds a MS in Environmental Studies from the University of Montana and a BA from our very own UW Madison. When not out exploring, Beth can be found drawing - usually silly animal portraits commissioned by her youngest friends. Beth hopes her work affords kids the chance to practice being attentive to the natural world through the lenses of awe, humor, compassion, and curiosity.

Hi! I'm the super cute dog you see walking all around Madison. (and beyond!)

My name is ... um...

(Fill in the blank.)

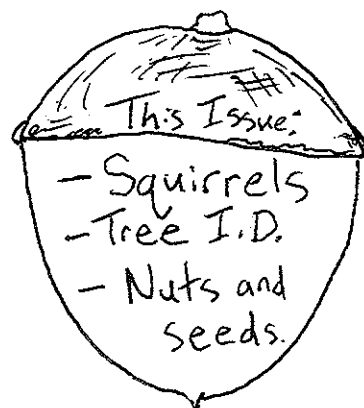
(oh, and... Please choose a super, fantastic, fun name for me!)

I love walks. I also love treats, getting petted, and friends. Come walk with me. There's so much to see (and sniff and chase).

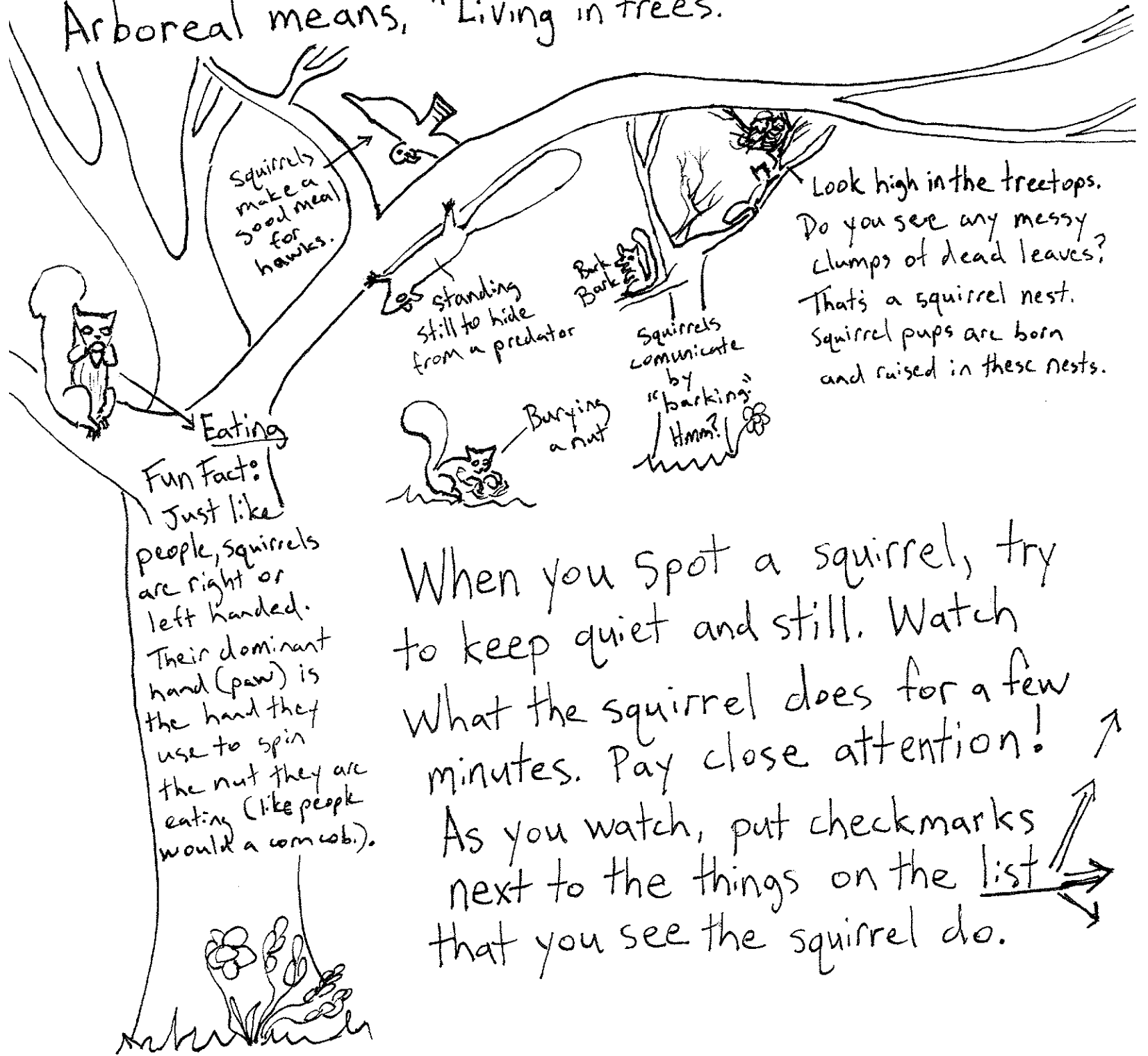
Let's go explore!



Yes, please color me in!



Today I'm going to a park to look for squirrels. Gray squirrels are the squirrels most commonly found in Madison. You can find them in trees, because gray squirrels are arboreal. Arboreal means, "Living in trees."



When you spot a squirrel, try to keep quiet and still. Watch what the squirrel does for a few minutes. Pay close attention! As you watch, put checkmarks next to the things on the list that you see the squirrel do.

\_\_\_ 1.) Climb a tree

\_\_\_ 2.) Eat something

Bonus! What's it eating? \_\_\_\_\_

Bonus! Is it right or left handed? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ 3.) Jump between branches

\_\_\_ 4.) Dig a hole

Bonus! Did it bury something? What? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_ 5.) Stand still like a statue to hide

\_\_\_ 6.) Run through the grass

\_\_\_ 7.) Chase another squirrel

\_\_\_ 8.) Visit a nest

\_\_\_ 9.) Get chased by a dog!!!

\_\_\_ 10.) Sunbathe

\_\_\_ 11.) Other: What else did you see that wasn't on the list?

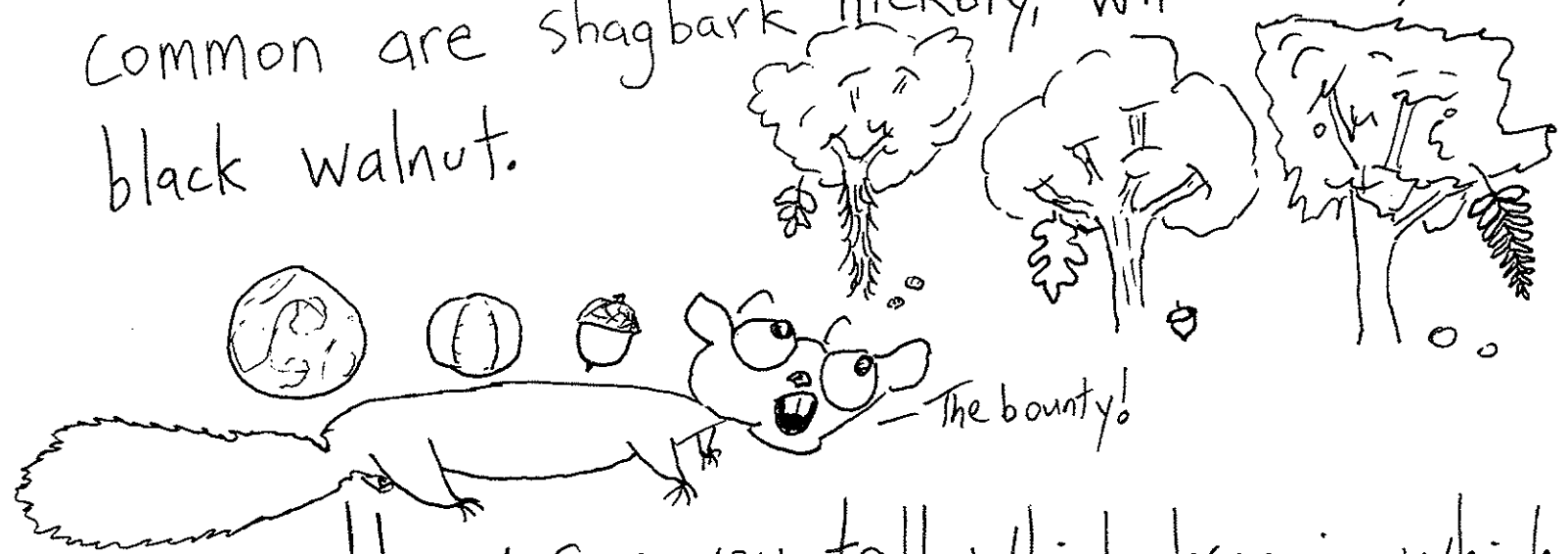
a) \_\_\_\_\_

b) \_\_\_\_\_

c) \_\_\_\_\_



Not all trees are equal in the eyes of a squirrel. Squirrels eat a lot of nuts. Nuts grow on trees. Thus, squirrels spend much of their time in nut trees. In Madison we have several native nut trees. Three of the most common are shagbark hickory, white oak, and black walnut.



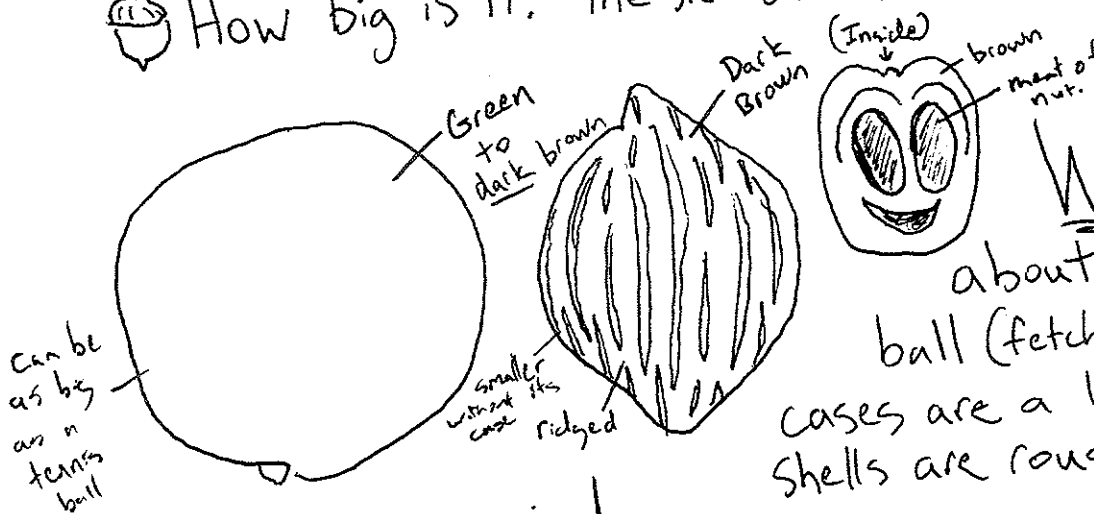
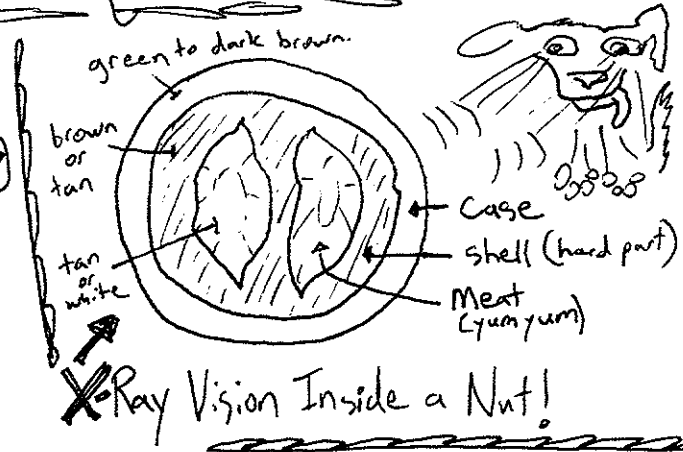
How can you tell which tree is which?

First, look for nuts up in trees and, better yet, on the ground. Draw what you find.



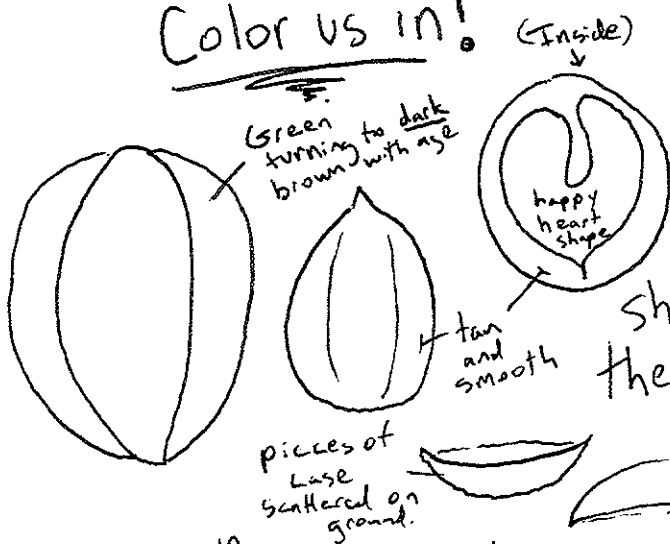
# Helpful nut identification questions

- 🌰 What color is it? 🌰 Does it have an outer green case? (see pic)
- 🌰 - Is its shell rough or smooth?
- 🌰 What color is its shell?
- 🌰 Does it have visible seams (cracks)?
- 🌰 How big is it? The size of a tennis ball? A golf ball? A marble?

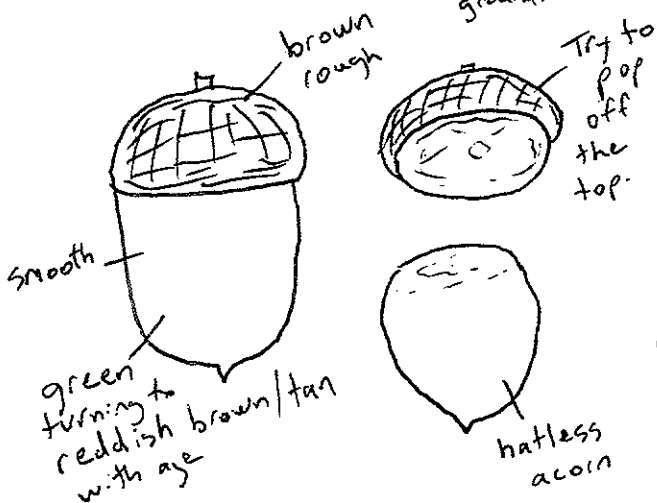


Walnuts are biggest— about the size of a tennis ball (fetch anyone?). Their green cases are a little stinky. Their shells are rough and dark brown.

## Color us in!



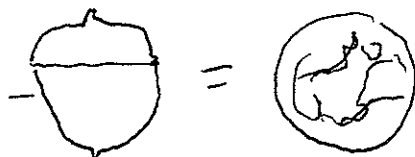
When hickory nuts are in their green cases, they are about the size of a golf ball. Their shells show seams, or cracks, where they break apart. The hard shells are smooth and tan.



Oak's acorns are the smallest of the three. They are smooth and tan with a darker, slightly rougher cap. They are about as big as a good-sized marble.

5

almost to scale



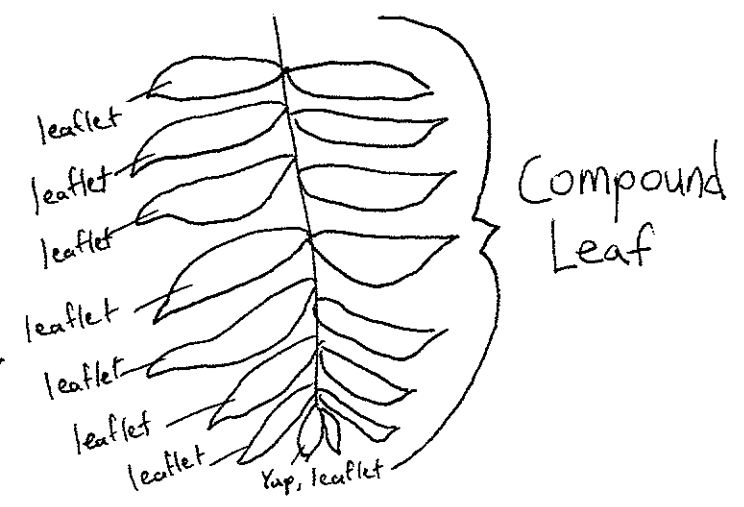
beautiful marble

Now that you can identify walnuts, hickory nuts, and acorns, let's try to match each nut to its tree. Let's start by looking at leaves. Collect as many different kinds of leaves from the ground as you can find. Draw or trace the ones you think look the coolest.

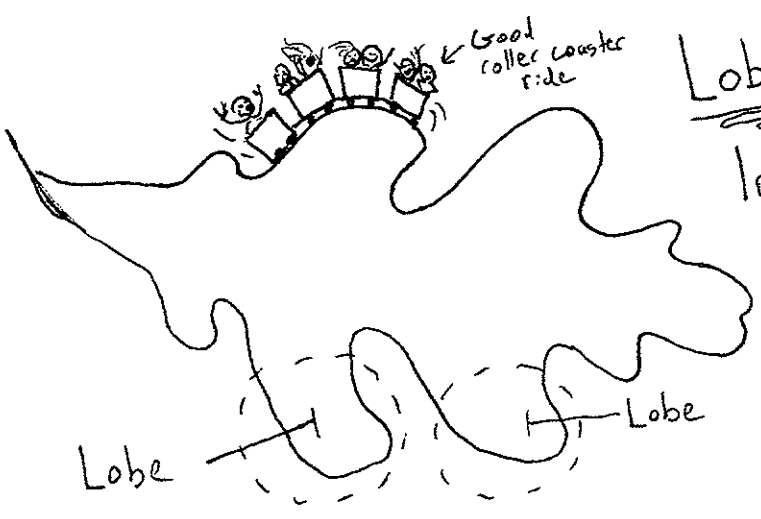
What do the leaves have in common? What are some differences? Think about size, shape, patterns, and color.



Words that will help you sound like a scientist!  
 (You can use these words to label your drawings.)



Compound Leaf: A leaf made of multiple leaflets. A leaflet might look like its own leaf, but it is attached to a stem along with other leaflets. Everything attached to that stem is part of the whole leaf. Mind boggling!



Lobed: The edges of lobed leaves look like hills and valleys. A "lobe" is the hill. If you had a mini roller coaster, the edge of a lobed leaf would offer a wild ride.

Serrated - Serrated leaves have sharp, finely toothed edges. Does the edge of the leaf look like the inside of a dinosaur's mouth? That's serrated!



Furrowed: When someone is thinking really hard, we say her brow is furrowed. It means crinkled up or ridged. If you were an ant climbing a furrowed tree trunk, it would feel like a trek over cliffs and canyons.



# Detective Scientist: Leaves and Bark = Great Clues

Use the clues below to try to identify these three trees in real life.

## Shagbark Hickory



- Compound, serrated leaves, 5-9 leaflets.

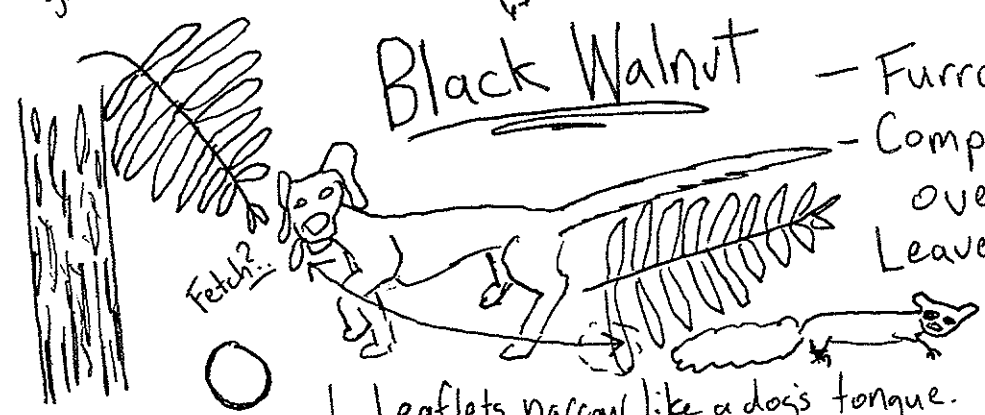
\* Bark \* (woof!) - Shaggy like a shaggy dog.\*

No other tree in Wisconsin has bark like this\*

- Leaflets about as big as a big dog's ear.

①  
↓  
seamed tan nuts  
golf ball sized or smaller

## Black Walnut



- Furrowed bark (not shaggy)

- Compound leaves - can have over 20 leaflets! They're long!  
Leaves as long as a big dog's tail or a squirrel including its tail.

Nat'l Tennis ball when in its case or dark brown and furrowed in shell.  
Leaflets narrow like a dog's tongue.

## White Oak

- Simple leaves (simple is the opposite of compound.)

- Lobed Leaves - think roller coaster

← Furrowed Bark (woof!)

⊖ - Acorns are small with hats



## Bonus Fun



Use a marker to draw a silly face on an acorn, or find a bunch and make an acorn party.

# Some Nutty, Squirrely Questions



1) If you were a squirrel, what kind of tree — walnut, oak, or hickory — would be the most fun to climb and why? (Think about bark, leaf shape, the nuts in the trees, and how each tree grows.)

2) If you were a squirrel, what kind of nut would you want to eat for breakfast? Why? (Hint: This is more interesting if you compare their sizes or try to break them open, or smell them. If you have an adult's help, you can research how to cook them for people to eat. I'm a dog. I eat garbage, so don't look to me for advice here.)

3) If you were a dog looking to chase squirrels, where would you go looking for them first? Please, please, tell me all your best tricks for finding squirrels. Please.



Um, do you think I can't see you?



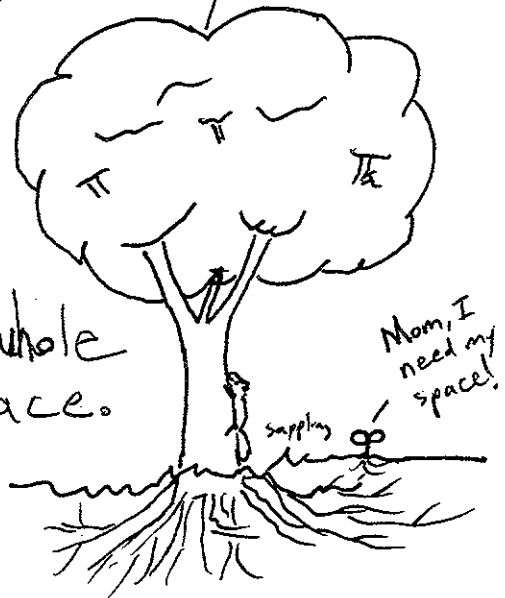
Why do trees bother to grow nuts anyway?  
Do they do it just to offer squirrels a tasty breakfast?



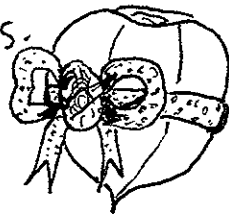
Trees don't have legs to use to move around.

They spend their whole lives rooted in one place.

How do baby trees move to places with space to grow their roots?



Nuts are big seeds. A nut is the package that holds the makings of baby trees.



A nut is a package. It's a tiny, gift-wrapped tree.

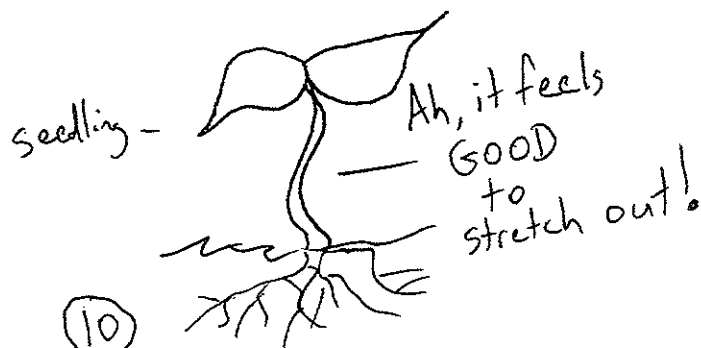
It's gonna be a good winter!



Squirrels bury nuts to save them for winter. Sometimes they forget where they buried a nut.



When a squirrel forgets a buried nut, that seed gets a chance to grow into a tree.



The process of moving seeds is called dispersal.  
 Dispersal means spreading out. Lots of plants have evolved cool ways to disperse their seeds.



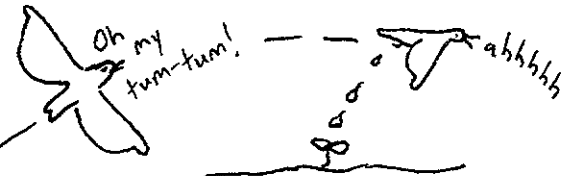
← Squirrels disperse nuts by moving them and burying them in lots of places.



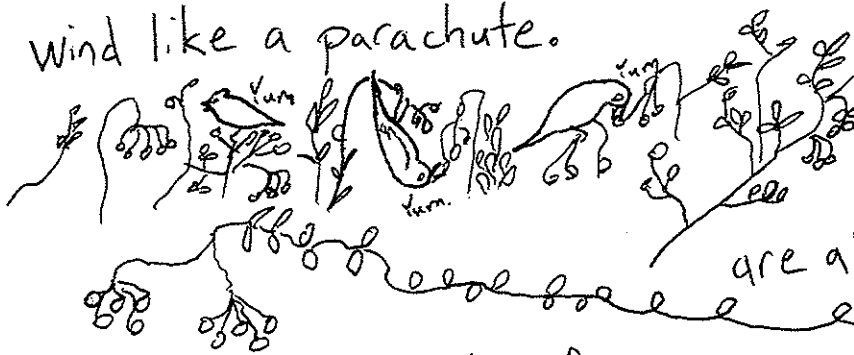
Maple trees grow their seeds on helicopter wings to fly to new places.



Plants like cottonwoods and milkweed attach their seeds to fluff that blows in the wind like a parachute.

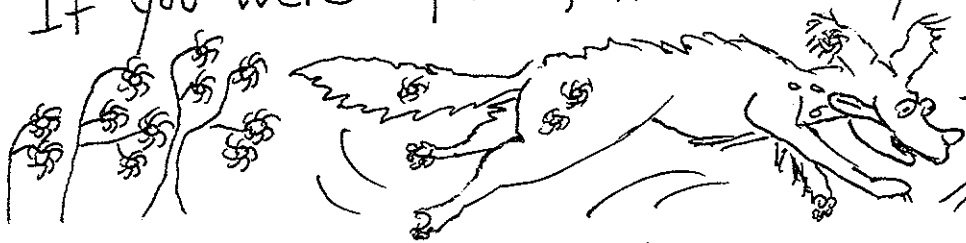


Some plants grow seeds inside yummy fruit. Birds eat the fruit then poop out the seeds that are all set to grow in new places.



Can you think of other ways seeds disperse?

If you were a plant, how would you move your seeds?



— Personally, I like moving seeds by getting them stuck in my fur while I'm playing.

\* \* \* — If you want to get a headstart on the scavenger hunt on the next page, keep your eyes peeled for dispersing seeds. \* \* \*

# Scavenger Hunt!

How many things from the list can you spot?  
Remember to give yourself tons of bonus points for every bonus item you find.

- Squirrel
- Squirrel burying a nut
- Squirrel Eating **★ Bonus:** What kind of nut? \_\_\_\_\_
- ★ Bonus:** What's it eating? \_\_\_\_\_
- Squirrel Nest **★ Bonus:**  Squirrel using nest
- Squirrel jumping from one tree into another
- Predator that eats squirrels
- ★ Bonus:** What kind of animal is it? \_\_\_\_\_
- Acorn
- Oak Leaf
- Oak Tree
- Walnut
- Walnut Leaf
- Walnut Tree
- Hickory Nut
- Hickory Leaf
- Hickory Tree

# More Scavenging...

- Shaggy Bark

- Furrowed Bark

- Lobed Leaf

- Compound Leaf

- Leaflets

- Simple Leaf

- Seed Helicopter

- Seed Fluff (like a milkweed)

- Berries ★ Bonus: What kind? \_\_\_\_\_

- Fruit ★ Bonus: What kind? \_\_\_\_\_

★ Bonus: List any other type of seed dispersal that you spot. \_\_\_\_\_,  
\_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_.

★ Bonus times a BILLION for every drawing you make of anything from the list or of anything else you saw on our walk.

★ Bonus: Pet a dog.