

# Whale Fall: An Ecosystem in the Deep Blue Sea

For grades 1-3

## What is an ecosystem?

An ecosystem is all the animals, plants and other organisms that live together in a specific area. Ecosystems also include the physical environment (water, weather, landforms etc.)

In *Whale Fall Cafe* you learned about the ecosystem found on a dead whale on the ocean floor.

Describe some of the creatures that are part of the whale fall ecosystem.

Which ones would you like to know more about?

How could you find out more information?

A “tree fall” is similar to a whale fall. When a tree or part of a tree falls to the forest floor it also creates a special ecosystem.

**Take a walk in the woods** and look for a “tree fall”. Or study the picture below then answer the questions on the next page using your observations and your imagination:



What do you see on the tree or branch? Is there any bark still on the wood?

How many different types of plants are growing on your “tree fall”?

Nutrients from the decaying wood help other plants to germinate and grow. What plants are growing on the forest floor around the “tree fall”?

What invisible organisms do you think are living on your “tree fall”?

Describe any insects or evidence of insects that you see. (Evidence might include burrow trails in the wood, insect casings, pupae, webs, egg masses, etc) Do you remember the name of the type of creature that might be found both at a whale fall and a tree fall?

How might larger animals like skunks and squirrels use a “tree fall”?

How old do you think your “tree fall” is? Did it fall recently or long ago? What clues make you think this? What do you think it will look like in 100 or 500 years?

Thinking about what you just learned, **write a short story** about your “tree fall”.