Passage 1: Myth

Why the Evergreen Trees Never Lose Their Leaves
by Florence Holbrook

Winter was coming, and the birds had flown far to the south, where the air was warm and they could find berries to eat. One little bird had broken its wing and could not fly with the others. It was alone in the cold world of frost and snow. The forest looked warm, and it made its way to the trees as well as it could, to ask for help.

First it came to a birch-tree. “Beautiful birch-tree,” it said, “my wing is broken, and my friends have flown away. May I live among your branches till they come back to me?”

“No, indeed,” answered the birch-tree, drawing her fair green leaves away. “We of the great forest have our own birds to help. I can do nothing for you.”

“The birch is not very strong,” said the little bird to itself, and it might be that she could not hold me easily. I will ask the oak.” So the bird said, “Great oak-tree, you are so strong, will you not let me live on your boughs till my friends come back in the springtime?”

“In the springtime!” cried the oak. “That is a long way off. How do I know what you might do in all that time? Birds are always looking for something to eat, and you might even eat up some of my acorns.”

“It may be that the willow will be kind to me,” thought the bird, and it said, “Gentle willow, my wing is broken, and I could not fly to the south with the other birds. May I live on your branches till the springtime?”

The willow did not look gentle then, for she drew herself up proudly and said, “Indeed, I do not know you, and we willows never talk to people whom we do not know. Very likely there are trees somewhere that will take in strange birds. Leave me at once.”

The poor little bird did not know what to do. Its wing was not yet strong, but it began to fly away as well as it could. Before it had gone far, a voice was heard. “Little bird,” it said, “where are you going?”

“Indeed, I do not know,” answered the bird sadly. “I am very cold.”

“Come right here, then,” said the friendly spruce-tree, for it was her voice that had called. “You shall live on my warmest branch all winter if you choose.”
“Will you really let me?” asked the little bird eagerly.

“Indeed, I will,” answered the kind-hearted spruce-tree. “If your friends have flown away, it is time for the trees to help you. Here is the branch where my leaves are thickest and softest.”

“My branches are not very thick,” said the friendly pine-tree, “but I am big and strong, and I can keep the north wind from you and the spruce.”

“I can help too,” said a little juniper-tree. “I can give you berries all winter long, and every bird knows that juniper berries are good.”

So the spruce gave the lonely little bird a home, the pine kept the cold north wind away from it, and the juniper gave it berries to eat.

The other trees looked on and talked together scornfully.

“I would not have strange birds on my boughs,” said the birch.

“I shall not give my acorns away for any one,” said the oak.

“I never have anything to do with strangers,” said the willow, and the three trees drew their leaves closely about them.

In the morning all those shining green leaves lay on the ground, for the cold north wind had come in the night, and every leaf that it touched fell from the tree.

“May I touch every leaf in the forest?” asked the wind in its frolic.

“No,” said the forest king. “The trees that have been kind to the little bird with the broken wing may keep their leaves.”

This is why the leaves of the spruce, the pine, and the juniper are always green.

www.gutenberg.org

Words that could be defined for students are in bold.
Passage 2: Informational

Why are evergreen trees green all year round?

Evergreen trees (also known as conifers because of the cones that hold their seeds) include spruce, fir, and pine trees. Evergreen trees do lose leaves, but not all at the same time the way that deciduous trees (trees that lose their leaves) do. These trees are specially adapted to live in climates where there may be limited annual sunshine and/or available water.

The evergreen thrives in cold climates and its leaves are adapted to make the most of its environment. The leaves of evergreen trees are often small and narrow, like needles. Evergreen leaves can remain on a tree for anywhere from 1-20 years depending on the species of tree, but most leaves remain on the tree for less than five years. It is thought that by keeping its leaves year round the plant might be able to take advantage of periods of thaw during the winter to make food. It also means that the plant does not need to waste energy re-growing a full set of leaves each year.

The leaves of an evergreen have the same function as leaves of other trees, mainly to make food for the plant through photosynthesis. The leaves are often a dark green color indicating that a lot of the sun-absorbing compound chlorophyll is present. By having a lot of small leaves packed with chlorophyll, the plant gathers as much energy as it can from the sparse sunlight. It uses this energy to make food in the form of glucose. The dark color also helps keep the plant warm in its cold environment (think about wearing dark clothing on sunny day versus light or white clothing. The dark clothing absorbs more sunlight and is hotter to wear).

The cold climate where evergreens often live means that even if there is a large amount of precipitation, the water is often frozen and therefore unavailable to the plant. The small surface area and the thick coating of wax on the needle-like leaves allow the plant to retain more water (there is less surface area available for evaporation). The small leaves also have small holes called stomata that are used for gas exchange; these can be closed very tightly to stop water loss. Lastly the small pointy leaves and the cone-like shape of the tree itself shed snow more easily than other trees so the evergreens are not as likely to break under the weight of snow and ice.

www.ccmr.cornell.edu

Words that could be defined for students are in bold.
In the myth called “Why the Evergreen Trees Never Lose Their Leaves,” why does the little bird begin talking to the trees? Use **two** details from the myth to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

**CCLS Alignment:** RL.4.1

**Commentary:** This item aligns with CCLS RL.4.1 because it requires the student to refer to details and examples in the text when explaining what the text says explicitly.

**Rationale:** The response accurately explains that the bird has broken its wing and cannot fly south for the winter, thus it must spend the winter in the cold, and needs the shelter that the trees can provide.
Short Answer Constructed Response for “Why are evergreen trees green...”

According to the article, evergreen trees are often found in cold, icy climates where water may be frozen. How does the tree survive in these conditions? Use two details from the article to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________
_________________________________________________________________________________________________

CCLS Alignment: RI.4.3

Commentary: This item aligns with CCLS RI.4.3 because it requires the student to refer to specific information in the text in order to explain how evergreen trees survive in cold, icy climates where water may be frozen.

Rationale: The response accurately explains that in order to conserve water in the frozen climate evergreens have leaves with a thick coating and a small surface area. They also have small holes called stomata that allow for gas exchange.
The myth and the article both provide explanations for why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter. How are the explanations similar and different? Use specific examples from the myth and the article to support your answer.

In your response, be sure to do the following:

- Describe what the myth says about why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter.
- Describe what the article says about why evergreen trees keep their leaves in winter.
- Compare and contrast the two explanations.
- Include details from both the myth and the article to support your answer.

CCLS Alignment: RL.4.9, RI.4.9, W.4.2, W.4.4

Commentary: This extended response aligns with CCLS RL.4.9, RI.4.9, W.4.2, and W.4.4 because it requires the student to compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics using supporting details from each text.

Rationale: The response accurately compares and contrasts both passages, describing the reasons given in the myth and article for why evergreens keep their leaves in the winter. The response recounts the request of the bird and the rejection of the various trees and the acceptance of the evergreens. The response also explains, based on the informational text, the adaptations evergreens have made to survive in colder climates resulting in year-round leaves.