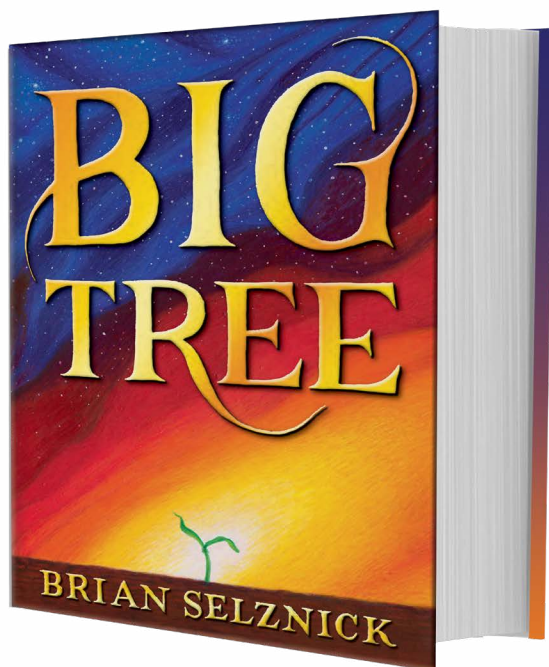


# ACTIVITY GUIDE

POSTER  
INSIDE!



HC: 9781338180633 • \$32.99  
Ages 7 And Up, Grades 2 And Up  
Also available in ebook and as an audio download

The fate of all life on Earth may depend on the bravery of two little seeds in this epic adventure from the #1 *New York Times* bestselling creator and Caldecott Medalist of *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*. Louise and her brother Merwin are Sycamore seeds, who hope to one day set down roots and become big trees. But when a fire forces them to leave their mama tree prematurely, they find themselves catapulted into the unknown, far from home. Alone and unprepared, they must use their wits and imagination to navigate a dangerous world—filled with dinosaurs, meteors, and volcanoes!—and the fear of never finding a safe place to grow up. *Big Tree* is a trailblazing adventure, illustrated with nearly 300 pages of breathtaking pictures, and is Selznick’s most imaginative and far-reaching work to date.

★ “An enthralling and expansive meditation on what it means to be alive on this planet.” —*Booklist*, starred review

“The tale of the natural world is the greatest story we have to tell, and Brian delivers a brilliant chapter of that tale throughout the pages of *Big Tree*.” —*Steven Spielberg*

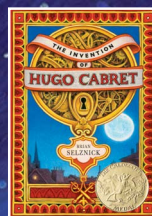
“A labor of love—no, of passion—for the world and all the life it supports, Brian Selznick’s *Big Tree* spreads its storytelling canopy to cover all of us. We’re implicated, we’re honored. We’re family.” —*Gregory Maguire*, author of *Wicked*



Photo: Slimane Lalami

**BRIAN SELZNICK’S** books have sold millions of copies, garnered countless awards worldwide, and been translated into more than 35 languages. He broke open the novel form with his innovative and genre-defying thematic trilogy, beginning with the Caldecott Medal-winning #1 *New York Times* bestseller *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*, adapted into Martin Scorsese’s Oscar-winning movie *Hugo*. He followed that with the #1 *New York Times* bestseller *Wonderstruck*, adapted into the eponymous movie by celebrated filmmaker Todd Haynes, with a screenplay by Selznick, and the *New York Times* bestseller *The Marvels*. Selznick’s two most recent books for young people, *Baby Monkey*, *Private Eye*, an ALA Notable Book, co-written with his husband David Serlin, and *Kaleidoscope*, a *New York Times* Notable Children’s Book of 2021, were both *New York Times* bestsellers as well. Learn more at [thebrianselznick.com](http://thebrianselznick.com).

Learn more about  
**BRIAN SELZNICK**  
and his books at  
[Scholastic.com/BigTree](http://Scholastic.com/BigTree)



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# Discussion Questions

- How would you describe Louise and Merwin's personalities at the beginning of the story? How does their relationship shape the way each of them acts?
- Louise and Merwin's Mama says that "A good parent always gives their children roots and wings. Roots to settle down, and wings to bravely go where you need to go." (59) How does she give them roots and wings? Do you think this happens with humans too? How do the grown-ups you know give children roots and wings? Do you think only parents give roots and wings, or do other adults help too? How?
- On pages 70–81, the "giant" is shown in a series of images. Why do you think the author chose to spread this picture over so many pages? How does that affect the way you "see" or understand the giant?
- More than halfway through the story, Merwin meets the Old One, and the Old One says, "Let's start in the beginning..." (385) How would this book be different if the book started with the Old One telling the story of the world from the beginning? What would Merwin and the readers miss out on learning?
- Do Louise and Merwin save the world? If so, how?
- Who is the Old One? How do you know? As you were reading the book, when did you guess who it might be? Did you change your mind at any point?
- What different kinds of knowledge do the various creatures in the book have? How do they gather their knowledge? How do they use it? Why do some beings miss some kinds of knowledge? Why is it important to understand someone's position and perspective when thinking about the advice or information they share?
- How do Louise and Merwin change throughout the story? What specific events cause them to change? Think about their changes in perspective, knowledge, feeling, and character, as well as their physical changes.
- Picture books and graphic novels tell stories by combining words and pictures on the same pages. In this book, each page continues the story in either pictures or words, with only a few spreads containing both. Some of the text pages are filled with words, and others only have one sentence or a few sentences. How does this design choice affect the way you read the story? Use specific examples to explain how you understood the story based on what's included (and not included) on each page in a series of pages from the book.

## Activity Prompts

- On pages 386–389, Brian Selznick's black and white illustrations depict "the beginning." Using colored pencils, paints, or pastels on black or white paper, create a piece of artwork that represents how you imagine the "beginning" might look in color.
- Over the course of their travels, Louise and Merwin encounter, and learn from, many plants, animals, and other beings—but you don't have to travel far to learn about the plants and animals in your region! Start with a visit to your school, or local library, or trusted online sources to learn what plants, insects, and animals are indigenous to where you live. Choose one to research in depth. What connections can you identify between that plant or creature and other plants or creatures in your region? Where might you be able to spot that plant or creature in the wild in your area?
- Choose something in nature that intrigues you. It can be a plant, an animal, an insect, a fungus, etc., or it can be an inanimate object like a rock, a mountain, a river, or a volcano. Learn about the life or growth cycle of your chosen item: what conditions does it need to grow or sustain itself? Write and/or draw a story with two of these things as characters seeking their ideal conditions to grow and thrive.

Guide prepared by Autumn Allen, an educator and an editor, a reviewer and an author of books for children and young adults. She consults with parents and educators on using diverse literature with children, and she teaches children's literature at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Find out more at [autumnallenbooks.com](http://autumnallenbooks.com).



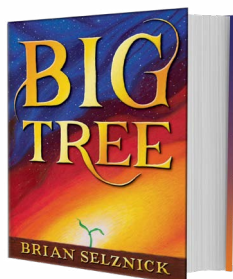
# Tell Your Story in the Style of Brian Selznick

Much of the story in *Big Tree* flows seamlessly between double-page spreads of text and double-page spreads of art. Brian Selznick's distinctive storytelling style is the result of careful planning and hands-on experimentation, and with this activity, you can use his process to tell a story of your own!

**Step 1.** On a separate sheet of paper or in a writing journal, brainstorm an idea for a story, including a beginning, middle, and end. If you need inspiration, you can use the third activity prompt from page 2 of this poster! Next, list the key events or scenes that will move your story from the beginning to the middle, and from the middle to the end. Which of these key events or scenes will you tell in words, and which will you tell in pictures? Choose 1–2 of those key events and write and draw in the boxes below to plan out (or “storyboard”) the placement of your words and pictures on each double-page spread. Your drawings (or “thumbnail sketches”) don’t need to be perfect: this is just the first step to help you experiment and make sure your story looks the way you want!

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**Step 2.** Next, fold eight (8) sheets of paper in half and staple them together to make a 16-page booklet. Using your storyboard and thumbnail sketches for reference, fill in the pages of your booklet to create a preview (or “dummy book”) of what your finished book will look like. (If your story requires more pages, create more 16-page booklets to add to your dummy book.) Creators like Brian Selznick use dummy books to evaluate whether their planned layout and illustrations successfully tell the story—and they also use dummy books to share their creative vision with other people involved in the book’s journey to publication!

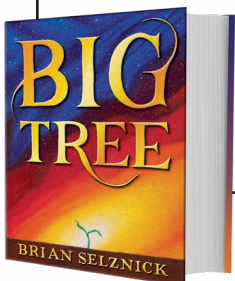


**Step 3.** Once your dummy book is complete, you can decide if you want to start working on a finished version of your book, or if you’d like to revise your storyboard and/or dummy book so that it better represents your story. Be patient and curious throughout this process—and remember to have fun!

# Imagining a Greener Future

As the Earth's population has increased, humans have been using more of the planet's natural resources for land, food, energy, and other things we need and want in order to live. The demand for these resources has motivated scientists and activists who champion environmental conservation to develop more sustainable ways to live on Earth and protect our planet's wildlife, waterways, air, and more. Earth Day, first established in 1970, is now a global day of action to promote awareness of environmental issues and inspire shifts in human behavior as well as global, national, and local policy.

Does your community celebrate Earth Day? Have you observed your community making choices or changes that impact the environment? Imagine the descendants of Louise and Merwin living 50 or 100 years from now. What visible changes would you hope they'd see in your community (or on a global scale) in 50 or 100 years? Write or draw your vision for an environmentally-conscious future in the space below.



From the activity guide for  
*Big Tree* by Brian Selznick

To learn more about Earth Day, visit [earthday.org](http://earthday.org).



Learn more about Brian Selznick and  
his books at [Scholastic.com/BigTree](http://Scholastic.com/BigTree)



# BIG TREE

BRIAN SELZNICK

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