

Theme 2

Why are forests important?

The concepts within this theme help students investigate the connection between Tasmania's forests and their own lives. Recognising their connections to forests can increase students' understanding of the importance of forests to humans and the factors that have shaped today's forest landscapes.



Theme 2 Why are forests important?

Environmental

When we look at a forest landscape what we see is greatly influenced by our understanding and appreciation of the multiple values we associate with forests and how these are, to varying degrees, interdependent on each other as the natural components of a forest environment.

It is important for students to understand the function of forests environmentally, socially/culturally and economically and the need for integration between these perspectives.

Examining the ecological services provided by forests helps students understand that forests are one of Earth's major life-support systems along with fresh waters, oceans and grasslands.

Forests are one of the Earth's most important natural resources. They play a vital role in sustaining the life forms and atmosphere of our planet. Forests are interdependent and adaptable communities of flora and fauna – complex webs of life, from high in the canopy to deep in the soil.

Forests provide a habitat for all living things contained within them. Forests are an integral part of

nutrient cycles in our environment, ensuring that water, minerals, gases and trace elements stored in vegetation and the soil are recycled to maintain soil fertility. Forests protect and increase water supplies and water quality. Trees, forests and forest products store carbon and have the capacity to play a significant role in contributing towards solutions around climate change.

Social/Cultural

When asking someone – 'Why are forests important?' It is rare to get the same answer twice. Answers may include, good health and wellbeing, sense of place, recreation and tourism, aesthetic values, intellectual and spiritual inspiration, identity and cultural heritage or career opportunities and forest products – our ideas are driven by multiple factors. Throughout our history, forest environments have had a profound influence on the emotions and attitudes of the people who interact with them. From a quiet stroll with the dog to a community that relies on forest resources for employment, forests shape Tasmanian culture.



Tasmanians have a strong connection to our local forests and hold different values concerning our forests, based on personal experiences. The intrinsic value of forests is reflected in the expressive arts, literature, design and architecture which, over time, have created a tangible record of our relationships with Tasmanian forest landscapes.

Indigenous Tasmanians' identity and culture is fundamentally linked to a core relationship with the environment and the balance which exists between the human and natural world. This relationship is spiritual, as well as physical, the Earth as Mother sustains all forms of life within a framework of mutual respect.

The social/cultural values of forests are often difficult to define and are profoundly personal. Examining the intrinsic value of forests helps students understand peoples' unique perspectives and why making decisions about our forests can be complex and multifaceted.

Theme 2 Why are forests important?

Economic

Forest products are an important component of Tasmania's economy and play a significant role in communities across the state. By exploring the importance of forests economically, students understand how forests contribute to Tasmania, Australia and the world.

From the earliest times, people have depended on forests – for food and shelter, for warmth and safety, for materials and resources. People who live in country towns on the fringes of our production forests have strong links to the places that have provided their communities with employment for generations. Forests provide income for local, state, national and international economies. Tasmania's forest sector provides critical resources and products to the global marketplace.

We read a book, sitting at a glue-laminated kitchen bench in a timber-framed house, spreading our toast with honey and pouring milk on cereal from cardboard cartons. Where does the wood, paper, cardboard and honey come from?

Yes, from forests and trees.

It is difficult to separate the environmental, social/cultural and economic values of forests. Our interactions with forest landscapes must recognise and reflect the importance of all these values and therefore guide how we manage our interactions, so they can continue to provide us with the resources we need and the values we wish to preserve.

