From the author of the Waterstones Children’s Book Prize shortlisted *The King Who Banned the Dark*, comes a powerful fable about community and our relationship with nature, where children dictate the future. *The Last Tree* is an arresting tale that feels both timeless and timely for the current environmental and political climate.

Once upon a time a group of friends were seeking a place to call home. The desert was too hot, the valley was too wet and the mountain was too windy. Then they found the forest. It was perfect. The leaves gave shelter from the sun and rain, and a gentle breeze wound through the branches.

But the friends soon wanted to build shelters. The shelters became houses, then the houses got bigger. All too soon they wanted to control the environment and built a huge wooden wall around the community. As they cut down the trees, the forest became thinner, until there was just one last tree standing. It was down to the children to find a solution.

**Questions for Guided Reading or Whole Class Discussion**

- Why did the people stop talking to each other?
- Why did the adults want to build so many things?
- How does the picture of the wall make you feel? Why? How did it make the people feel?
- Was it ok that the children didn’t listen to the adults? Should you always do what you are told? When might it be ok not to obey instructions?
- Why did the children feel happier outside?
- Are trees important?
Activities and National Curriculum Links

Science
During years 1 and 2, pupils should be taught to use the following practical scientific methods, processes and skills:

• identifying and naming a variety of common wild and garden plants, including deciduous and evergreen trees (Year 1)
• identifying and describing the basic structure of a variety of common flowering plants, including trees (Year 1)
• observing and describing how seeds and bulbs grow into mature plants (Year 2)
• identifying and comparing the suitability of a variety of everyday materials, including wood, metal, plastic, glass, brick, rock, paper and cardboard for particular uses (Year 2)
• observing changes across the four seasons (Year 1)
• observing and describing weather associated with the seasons and how day length varies (Year 1)

1. What trees can you name? Which one do you think is in the story? What does a tree need to grow?
2. Children could plant seeds and observe them grow, noting how they change.
3. Look at the picture of the village that people made. What material did they use for all their creations? What else do we use wood for? Why is wood a good material for these things?
4. Children to list things at home and school that are made of wood. Is your house made of wood? What is it made of? Why?
5. Name and discuss the four seasons. What season are we in now? How can you tell? What will come next? Go outside and look at the natural environment to spot signs of which season it is. Discuss the days getting longer and shorter in different seasons and why this happens.

History
Pupils should develop an awareness of the past, using common words and phrases relating to the passing of time. They should ask and answer questions, choosing and using parts of stories and other sources to show that they know and understand key features of events.

Pupils should be taught about:

• changes within living memory
• events beyond living memory that are significant nationally or globally
1. Look at houses in the past and what they were made of. Go on a local walk and look at the differences in the houses. Why are houses not made of wood anymore? Link to the Great Fire of London if the children have studied this.

Art
Pupils should be taught to:
• use a range of materials creatively to design and make products
• use drawing and painting to develop and share their ideas, experiences and imagination
• develop a wide range of art and design techniques in using colour, pattern, texture, line, shape, form and space

1. Look at pictures of leaves. Collect leaves from outside. Look at the pictures of the leaves in the story. Discuss the colours, shapes and patterns that you see. How is green made? How can you make different shades of green? Children to choose a medium and make their own leaf pictures. Make a class tree with each child’s leaf on.

English
Pupils should be taught to:
• develop positive attitudes towards and stamina for writing by:
  1. writing poetry
  2. writing for different purposes
• consider what they are going to write before beginning by:
  1. planning or saying out loud what they are going to write about
  2. writing down ideas and/or key words, including new vocabulary
  3. encapsulating what they want to say, sentence by sentence
• learn how to use expanded noun phrases to describe and specify (for example, the blue butterfly)

1. Read some poems about the seasons. Children to write their own poems about a season. Look at how the text has been laid out on the opening pages. How could we display our poems to reflect the season? For example, in the shape of a leaf, in a sun for summer, in capitals to suggest thunder etc.

2. Look at the pages with the speech bubbles on and discuss what they are for. Children to write speech bubbles for the characters on pages 3 and 4. Write thought bubbles for the children when they are gathering the seeds (p. 20)
DT
Design
Pupils should be taught to:
• design purposeful, functional, appealing products for themselves and other users based on design criteria
• generate, develop, model and communicate their ideas through talking, drawing, templates, mock-ups

Make
• select from and use a range of tools and equipment to perform practical tasks
• select from and use a wide range of materials and components, including construction materials, textiles and ingredients, according to their characteristics

Evaluate
• explore and evaluate a range of existing products
• evaluate their ideas and products against design criteria

1. Make a class mini village. What equipment could we use? Work as a group to design your house. Write a list (link to English) of all the resources you will need. Make the house and write instructions (link to English) of how to make it.

Geography
Pupils should be taught to:
• identify seasonal and daily weather patterns in the United Kingdom and the location of hot and cold areas of the world in relation to the Equator and the North and South Poles
• use basic geographical vocabulary to refer to:
  1. key physical features, including: beach, cliff, coast, forest, hill, mountain, sea, ocean, river, soil, valley, vegetation, season and weather
  2. key human features, including: city, town, village, factory, farm, house, office, port, harbour and shop. See Science section above for work on seasons.

1. Discuss physical and human features of a location. Which ones are in the book? Which human features would the village need to thrive?
2. Draw a map of the village.