

The Story of a Forest Part 1: Climax Forest

Once upon a time, there was a forest. It had old, tall trees with big trunks and beautiful branches. Pines, beeches, oaks, and maples shaded the forest floor with their branches. Ferns grew underneath them in the cool shade, and it was easy to walk between their wide trunks. **A black bear** passed through the forest in the fall to munch on acorns and beech nuts, but didn't find too many small plants to nibble on. **Red squirrels** chattered from the tree tops. Once in a while, you could hear the loud drumming of a pileated woodpecker building its nest in a tree trunk.



The Story of a Forest Part 2: Set back

One summer, during a big storm, a bolt of lightning hit one of the pine trees and started a fire. The forest went up in flames! The **bats** that roosted in the big, old trees flew away to escape danger. **Deer** ran as fast they could from the fire. The fire burned and burned, and eventually stopped. What used to be a forest was now a barren wasteland filled with ashes!



The Story of a Forest Part 3:

Plant Stage

Winter came and blanketed the ashy ground with snow. When spring came, the sunlight shone on the big open space where the forest once stood. Tiny grass shoots began to poke out of the soil. By the end of the summer, the grass had grown tall. Wildflowers added splashes of color to the green grass. **Butterflies** fluttered around the flowers, and bluebirds swooped overhead. At night, a **red fox** wandered through the meadow in search of **mice**. What used to be a forest was now a big meadow!



The Story of a Forest Part 4: Shrub Stage

Five years passed, and the meadow began to change. Blueberry and huckleberry bushes grew up and the grass grew less and less. Briars grew into little thickets. A **box turtle** slowly feasted on the berries and mushrooms. A **cardinal** hopped among the shrubs, safely hidden in the thicket. What used to be a meadow was now a shrubland!



The Story of a Forest Part 5:

Young Forest

Fifteen years passed and the shrubland had changed. Tall, skinny birches and aspens grew in the bright sun. Many of the shrubs got bigger, and the thickets got more tangled. The tiny trees grew so close together, you could barely see between them! **Cottontail rabbits** hid from predators in the thickets. The young trees and shrubs rang with the beautiful spring songs of many birds. A **bobcat** quietly rested in the shelter of the trees. A woodcock snuck around under the shrubs, camouflaged in the leaf litter. What used to be a shrubland was now a young forest!



The Story of a Forest Part 6:

Mature Forest

Fifty years passed, and the young forest grew older. The birches had disappeared, replaced by the oaks that had grown bigger. The forest floor was shaded, but still had some plants and shrubs growing in the understory. The calls of ovenbirds and wood thrushes echoed among the trees. At night, a **great-horned owl** hooted from the tall trees. A young **raccoon** scrambled up a tree, running away from a hungry **fisher**. What used to be a young forest was now a mature forest again!

