SPRUCE TREE

Brenda Hoddinott

D07 BEGINNER: SQUIRKLING

In ten simple steps, you use squirkles to transform a single vertical line on a sheet of paper, into a drawing of a majestic spruce tree.

With lots of practice using squirkles and examining spruce trees in nature, you can easily learn to sketch a tree in a couple of minutes (or less). However, you need to work your way slowly through this exercise to give yourself a chance to fully understand the process.

You first sketch the trunk of a tree and the ground from which it grows. Then, you add branches to the trunk, grass and shrubs on the earth below, and dark shading to the shadows.

Spruce trees come in many shapes and sizes; hence, you can draw your tree any size or shape you want. Naturally, branches on trees are usually larger closer to the bottom, but you can't always tell this by looking at a tree from only one perspective. For a more realistic looking tree, you need to draw some lower branches narrower than others above it. Branches grow outward from the front and back of a tree, not just from the right and left. Hence, some branches are partially hidden behind the tree trunk and/or growing away from you. Others are at the front of the trunk growing toward you; from one perspective, you can't tell how wide or long they are.

Suggested supplies include HB and 2B pencils, vinyl and kneaded erasers, a pencil sharpener, a sandpaper block, and good quality drawing paper.

8 PAGES - 19 ILLUSTRATIONS

This lesson is recommended for artists of all levels. The curriculum is easily implemented into instructional programs for home schooling, academic and recreational learning environments.

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SKETCHING A SPRUCE TREE

You first draw the trunk of a tree and the ground from which it grows, and then add branches growing from the trunk of the tree and some grass and shrubs on the earth below the tree. Spruce trees come in many shapes and sizes; hence, you can draw your tree any size or shape you want. *Shape* refers to the outward outline of a form.

FIGURE 601

Check out these spruce trees (Figure 601). Even though the proportions are different, they all look like trees.

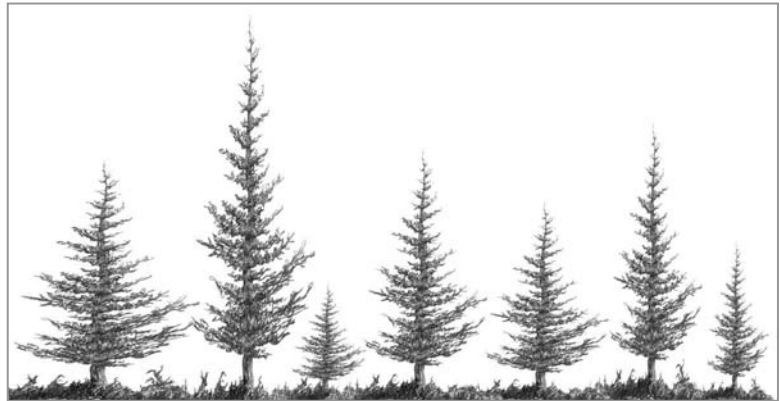*Proportion* is the relationship in size of one component of a drawing to another or others.

FIGURE 602

1) **With an HB pencil, lightly sketch a line (as the center of the trunk of the tree) from the bottom of your drawing space almost to the top.**

A border around my drawing shows you the rectangular shape of my drawing space. Don't try to draw the line perfectly straight; trees look more natural with a few bends and curves in their trunks.

Drawing space (also called *drawing surface* or *drawing format*) refers to the area in which you render a drawing. It can be the shape of your paper or outlined by any shape, such as a rectangle or square.

2) **Use squirkles to add the ground (or base) from which the tree grows.**

You can make the ground bumpy or fairly level by varying the shapes and sizes of the squirkles.
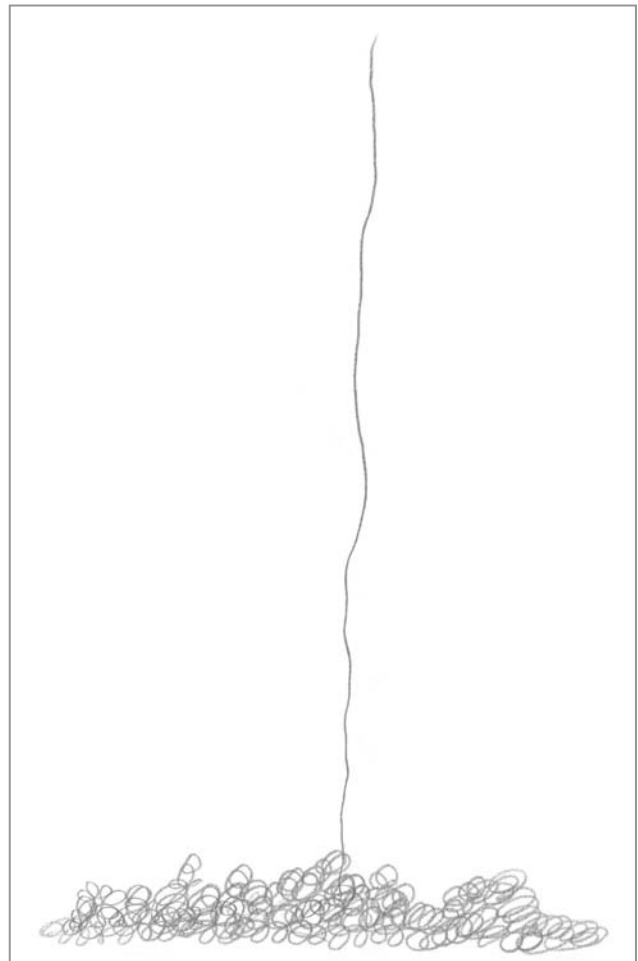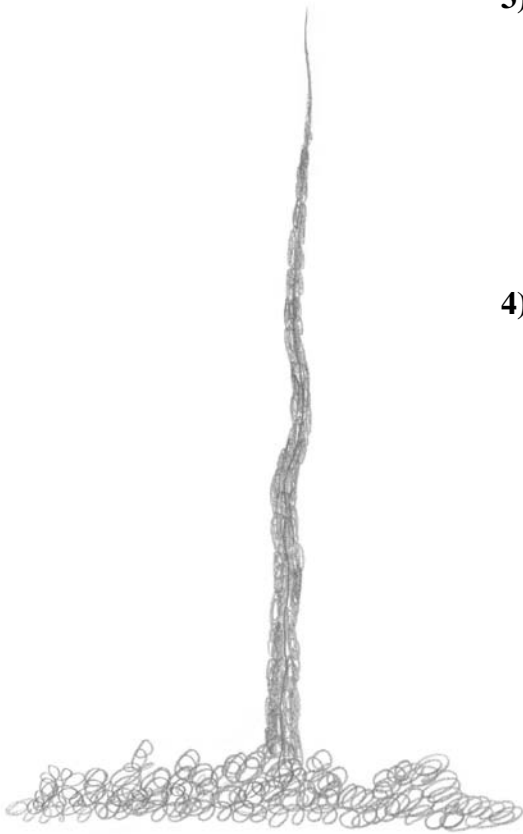
FIGURE 603

3) Use squirkles to make the tree trunk progressively wider from the top to the bottom.

Observe that the trunk of the tree is very narrow at the top and gradually gets wider closer to the bottom. You make the tree appear stronger by drawing the trunk slightly wider closer to the bottom, and anchoring it in some earth.

4) Add a few tiny branches at the top of the tree trunk.

Refer to Figures 604 and 605 (a close-up view). As you can tell by now, loose raggedy squirkling lines create realistic looking branches on a tree.

FIGURE 604   FIGURE 605

Don't try to make your branches look exactly like mine. Just try to make each narrower the farther it is away from the trunk.

Keep in mind the old expression "Less is more"!

It's easy to add more branches later if your tree looks too sparse, but erasing branches that are too full or thick is very difficult.
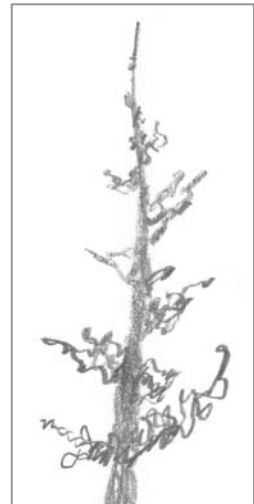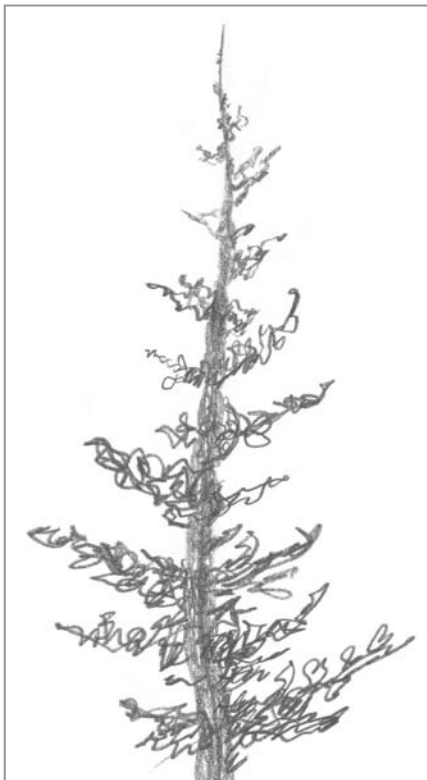
FIGURE 606

5) Add more branches below those at the top.

Refer to Figures 606 (a close-up view) and 607 (on the next page). Branches on trees tend to become progressively larger the closer they are to the base of the tree, but don't forget to draw branches that appear to be in front of and behind the trunk.

FIGURE 607   **FIGURE 608**

6) Add more and larger branches as you get closer to the base of the tree.

Refer to Figure 608 and the close-up view in Figure 609. While branches on trees are usually larger closer to the bottom, you can't always tell this by looking at a tree from one perspective.

Some branches are partially hidden behind the tree trunk and/or growing away from you. Others are at the front of the trunk growing toward you; hence, you can't really tell how wide or long they are.

FIGURE 609

7) Add large branches to the bottom section of the tree.

For a more realistic looking tree, I drew a couple of lower branches shorter than others above it. These branches are either in front of or behind the trunk. Refer to Figures 610 (close-up view) and 611.

FIGURE 610

8) **Add some squiggly and raggedy lines extending from the earth to look like shrubs and grass.**

Refer to Figures 612 and 613.

At this point, you may wish to call your drawing completed. In other words, the next step is optional.

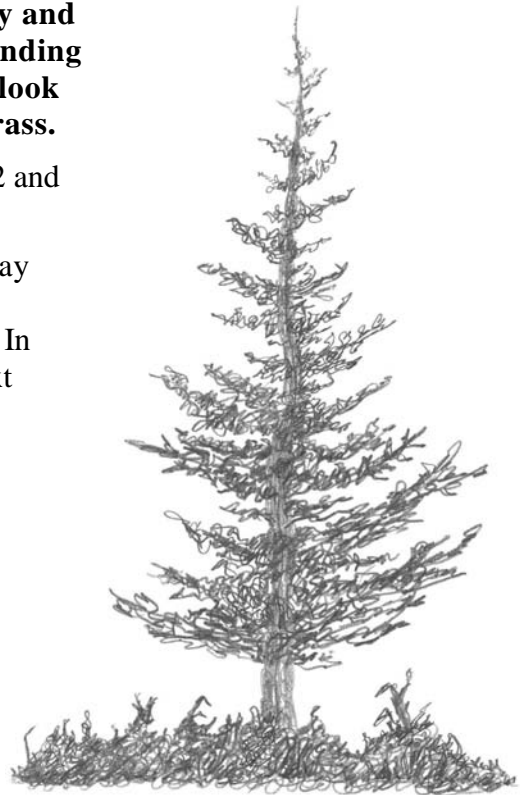The goal in the next step is to add shadows with a 2B pencil to enhance the three dimensional forms of the tree.

FIGURE 613

Examine your drawing and imagine your tree growing in a field. It's late afternoon, and the sun is shining from the right, creating dark shadows on some sections of the tree. The sun is beginning to set, but still high enough that its light cannot reach the undersides of the branches. Rays of sun peek through the branches, and a few sections of the trunk appear lighter on the right; however, the left side of the trunk is mostly in shadow. A cast shadow from the tree darkens the ground foliage on the left and under the tree. The grass and shrubs closer to the sunlight (on the right) are lighter than those in the shadows.

9) **Use a 2B pencil and squirkles to add shadows to some sections of the branches, trunk, and ground foliage.**

Work from the top of the tree downward, and follow along with Figures 614 to 619. In the next two drawings you can compare my tree before and after I added the shadows. Keep the point of your 2B pencil nice and sharp as you work; sandpaper blocks work great.
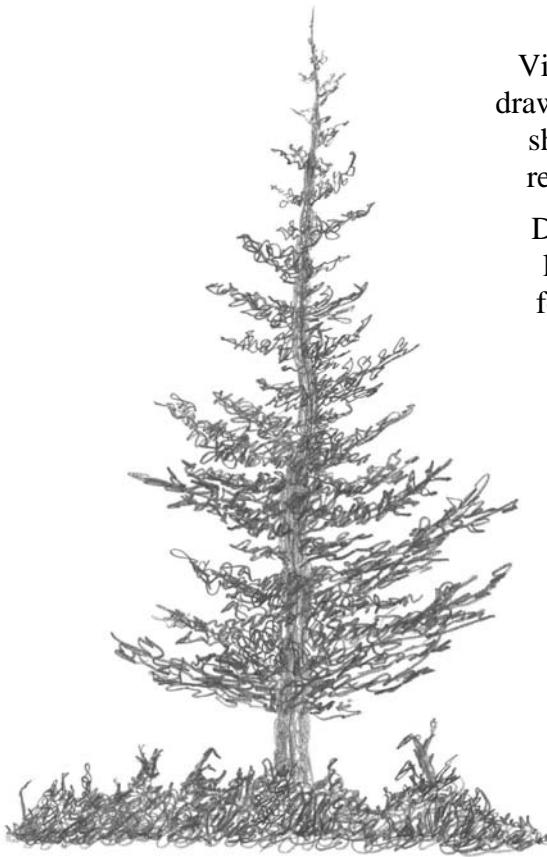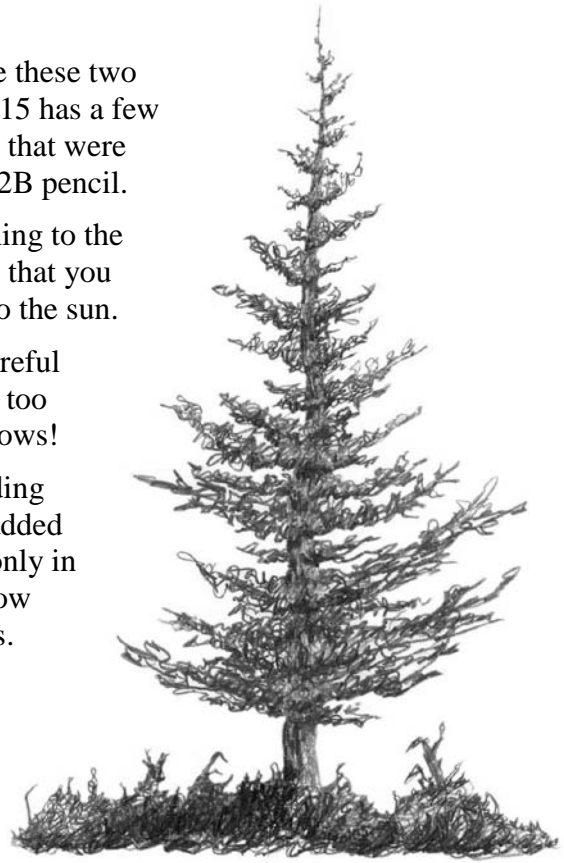
FIGURE 614

FIGURE 615

Visually compare these two drawings. Figure 615 has a few shadow sections that were rendered with a 2B pencil.

Don't add anything to the lighter sections that you feel are closer to the sun.

Also, be careful not to add too many shadows!

Dark shading should be added sparingly - only in the shadow sections.
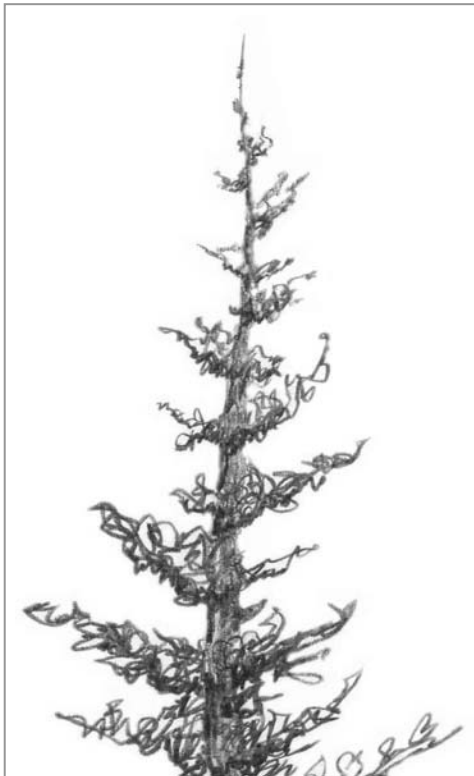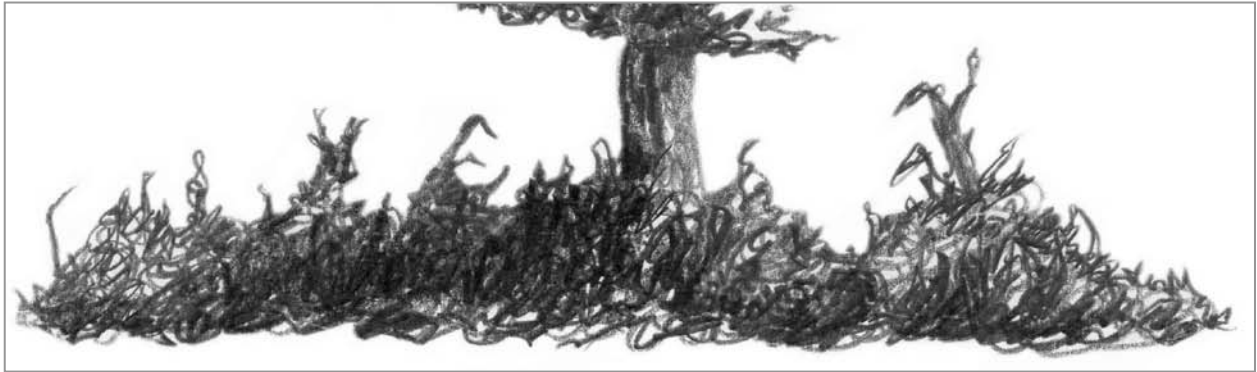
FIGURE 616

FIGURE 617

FIGURE 618

FIGURE 619

Consider adding a matte or frame to your drawing; or, you can simply draw a rectangle around it.

The goal in doing this is to take away the illusion that the tree is floating. By cropping the lower sections of foliage, the tree becomes grounded (Figure 619).

10) **Sign your name, put today's date on the back of your drawing, give yourself a big hug, and go hug a tree.**

CHALLENGE

Use a timer to draw ten more spruce trees of different shapes and sizes. Begin with five minutes and progressively set the timer for fewer minutes.

Then, take a sketchbook and pencils outside during the late afternoon of a sunny day. Find any tree (maybe in your back yard or neighborhood) and draw it ten times. Change your position each time you begin a new drawing, so the sunlight appears to be coming from different directions. Draw the light and shadows as you see them.

BRENDA HODDINOTT

As a self-educated teacher, visual artist, portraitist, forensic artist, and illustrator, Brenda utilizes diverse art media including graphite, technical pen, colored pencil, chalk pastel, charcoal, conté crayon, and oil paints.

My philosophy on teaching art is to focus primarily on the enjoyment aspects while gently introducing the technical and academic. Hence, in creating a passion for the subject matter, the quest for knowledge also becomes enjoyable.

Brenda Hoddinott

Biography

Born in St. John's, Newfoundland, Brenda grew up in the small town of Corner Brook. She developed strong technical competencies with a personal commitment to self directed learning, and the aid of assorted "Learn to Draw" books. During Brenda's twenty-five year career as a self-educated civilian forensic artist, numerous criminal investigation departments have employed Brenda's skills, including Royal Canadian Mounted Police and municipal police departments. In 1992, Brenda was honored with a commendation from the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, and in 1994, she was awarded a Certificate of Membership from "Forensic Artists International".

Her home-based art career included graphic design, and teaching recreational drawing and painting classes. As supervisor of her community's recreational art department, Brenda hired and trained teachers, and designed curriculum for several children's art programs. In 1998, Brenda chose to end her eighteen-year career as an art educator in order to devote more time to writing, drawing, painting, and developing her websites.

Drawspace http://www.drawspace.com incorporates her unique style and innovative approach to curriculum development. This site offers downloadable and printable drawing classes for students of all abilities from the age of eight through adult. Students of all ages, levels and abilities have praised the simple step-by-step instructional approach. This site is respected as a resource for fine art educators, home schooling programs, and educational facilities throughout the world.

Learn-to-draw books

Drawing for Dummies: Wiley Publishing, Inc., New, York, NY, this 336 page book is available on various websites and in major bookstores internationally.

The Complete Idiot's Guide to Drawing People: Winner of the Alpha-Penguin Book of the Year Award 2004, Alpha - Pearson Education – Macmillan, Indianapolis, IN, this 360 page book is available on various websites and in major bookstores internationally.