Northern Ireland's Bendy Tree wins UK award

LEVEL A2/B1


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I. WARM-UP

1. What interesting trees or parks are near your home?
2. How does wind change things you see outdoors?
3. What makes a place memorable: its shape, age or story?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

seaside
next to or near the sea

trunk
the main thick stem of a tree

sideways
in a direction to the side, not up or down

fungus
a living thing like mould or mushrooms that can cause disease

resist
to stay strong against something harmful

shelter
to protect from wind, rain or sun

promenade
a public path for walking, often beside the sea

charity
an organisation that helps people or nature and does not make a profit

III. READING

A 150-year-old wych elm in Newcastle, County Down, Northern Ireland, has been named the UK's Tree of the Year. The charity Woodland Trust runs the annual contest, and this year's theme was "against the odds". Locals call it the Bendy Tree.

Its near-horizontal trunk grew sideways because of strong seaside winds from the Irish Sea. The tree has resisted Dutch elm disease, a fungus that has killed most of the UK's 30m elms. It was planted in the mid-19th century as part of a row of wych elms along the promenade to shelter the main street.

Many were removed during redevelopments, and this elm is now the last one standing. Its wide branches give shade to people resting on the bench under it. Other notable trees were also on the shortlist, such as the Crowhurst Yew in Surrey, which once held a small meeting room inside its trunk. But the Bendy Tree's story and shape made it the winner.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Bendy elm still standing against all odds...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the Bendy Tree located?
2. How old is the Bendy Tree?
3. What made the tree's trunk grow sideways?
4. What disease has the tree resisted, and what is it?
5. Why is it the last elm left on the promenade?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Have you seen a famous tree or natural place? Where was it?
2. What outdoor places in your town give shade or shelter?
3. Should cities protect old trees during building work? Why?
4. Which tree detail do you like more: shape, age or story? Why?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Subject & object questions

Subject questions ask who/what did the action — no do/does/did. Object questions ask about the receiver — use do/does/did + subject + verb.

"**Who removed the other elms?**"
"**What do locals call it?**"

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Choose the correct option.

1. Which disease (did kill most elms / killed most elms)? _____
2. What (did winds do / winds did do) to its trunk? _____
3. Who (rests here / does rest here) on the bench? _____
4. Which tree (they named / did they name) the winner? _____
5. Who (did plant it / planted it) in the 19th century? _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 8–10 minutes vocabulary, 10–12 minutes reading, 8–10 minutes comprehension, 8–10 minutes grammar, 10 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check seaside, trunk, fungus, promenade and charity. Show a photo of a wych elm or a windswept tree to anchor meaning.
- Reading and comprehension: set a first skim for the who/what/where, then scan for details (age, place, cause of the bend, disease). The text mentions many elms were killed by disease; allow comments about plant disease in general and keep the focus on the award and the tree's survival.
- Differentiation: weaker students highlight dates, places and names as they read; stronger students summarise in four sentences and add one fact about another tree on the shortlist.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Let students show a picture from their phone if they have one, then ask one follow-up detail (location or why it was special).
2. Elicit examples like parks or bus stops, then push for what makes good shade or shelter and why.
3. Take a quick show of hands, pair the two sides, and ask each pair to give one reason that answers cost or safety.
4. Put options on the board (shape/age/story), form small groups by choice, and have each group share one example.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Writing: In pairs, write a 60-word tourist sign for the Bendy Tree to place by the bench.

Presentation: In small groups, make a 1-minute poster talk comparing the Bendy Tree with the Crowhurst Yew.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Subject & object questions

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where is the Bendy Tree located?
   Newcastle, County Down, Northern Ireland.
2. How old is the Bendy Tree?
   About 150 years old.
3. What made the tree's trunk grow sideways?
   Strong seaside winds from the Irish Sea.
4. What disease has the tree resisted, and what is it?
   Dutch elm disease, which is a fungus.
5. Why is it the last elm left on the promenade?
   Many other elms were removed during redevelopments.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Choose the correct option.

1. Which disease (did kill most elms / killed most elms)? **killed most elms**
2. What (did winds do / winds did do) to its trunk? **did winds do**
3. Who (rests here / does rest here) on the bench? **rests here**
4. Which tree (they named / did they name) the winner? **did they name**
5. Who (did plant it / planted it) in the 19th century? **planted it**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Subject questions ask who/what did the action — no do/does/did. Object questions ask about the receiver — use do/does/did + subject + verb. (Examples constructed.)

"**Who removed the other elms?**"
"**What do locals call it?**"