

Squirkle a Realistic Spruce Tree



Transform a single vertical line into a drawing of a majestic spruce tree on a sunny afternoon

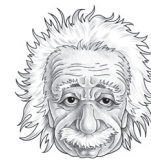
Resource: Module 3.1 Introduction to Shading

Supplies: paper, 2H, HB, 2B, 4B, and 6B pencils, pencil sharpener, sandpaper block, vinyl and kneaded erasers

Spruce trees come in many shapes and sizes (Figure 1). Even though their proportions are different, they all look like spruce trees – so you can draw your tree any size or shape you want.

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.**

The border around Figure 2 (on the next page) shows you the rectangular shape of the drawing space used to draw the tree in this tutorial.



ArtSpeak

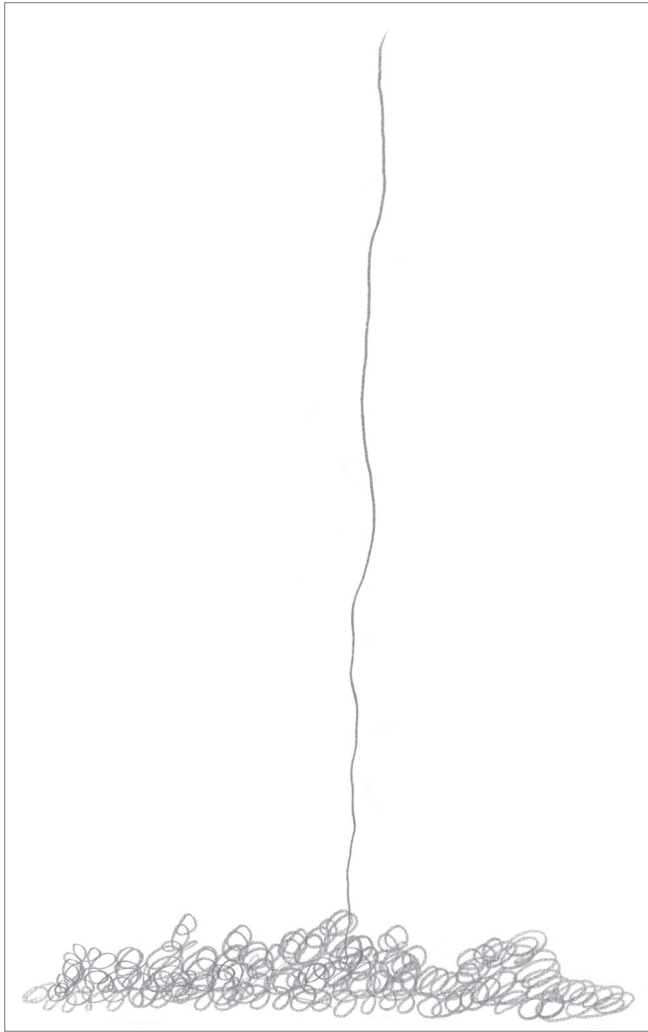
Foreshortening: A component of perspective that describes the distortion of objects and life forms when viewed from extreme angles.

The term “foreshortening” applies to a single object or figure, whereas the term “perspective” refers to an entire scene.

Figure 1



Figure 2



Don't try to draw the line perfectly straight; trees look more natural with a few bends and curves in their trunks.

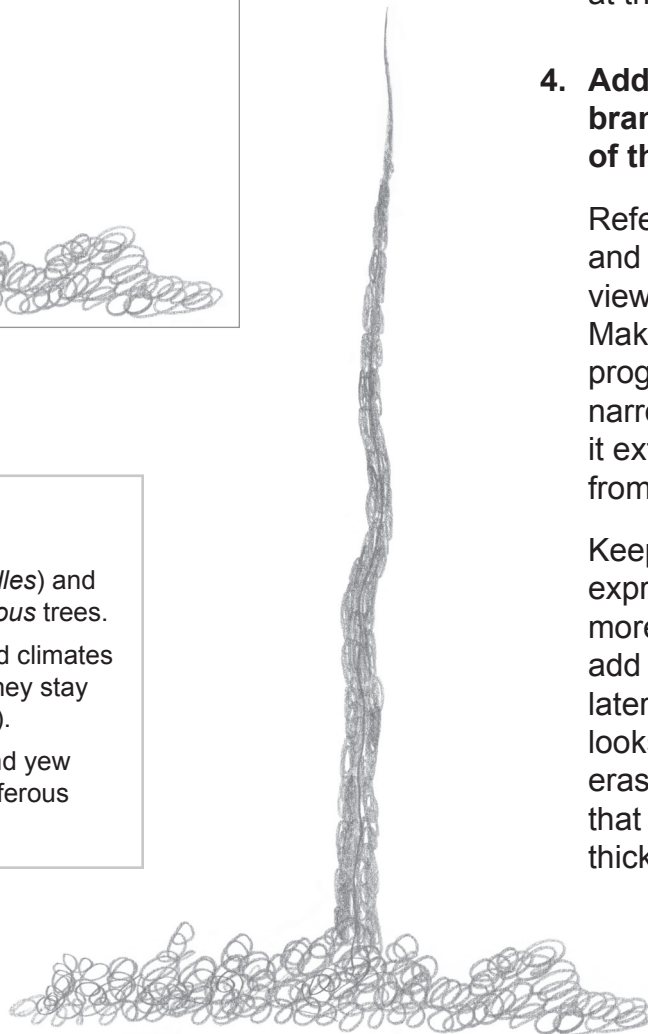
2. Use squirkles to add the ground or base from which the tree grows.

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

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

The trunk is very thin at the top and wide at the bottom.

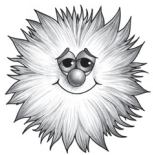
Figure 3



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

Refer to Figure 5 and the close-up view in Figure 6. Make each branch progressively narrower the farther it extends outward 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.



As an Aside

Trees that have thin leaves (*needles*) and produce cones are called *coniferous* trees.

Traditional Christmas trees in cold climates are usually coniferous because they stay green all year round (*evergreens*).

Pine, fir, juniper, larch, spruce, and yew trees are all members of the coniferous family.

As you draw, constantly remind yourself that the branches of a spruce tree also grow outward from the trunk at the front and back – not just from the sides.

For instance, when viewing a tree from a single vantage point, you can't tell how wide or long the branches closest to you really are.

An element of perspective called *foreshortening* creates the illusion that the branches that are growing toward you are much shorter than they really are.

In addition, the branches at the back are growing away from you and therefore appear smaller than those on the front and sides.

These rear branches are also partially hidden from view by other branches and the tree trunk.

Figure 4



Figure 5

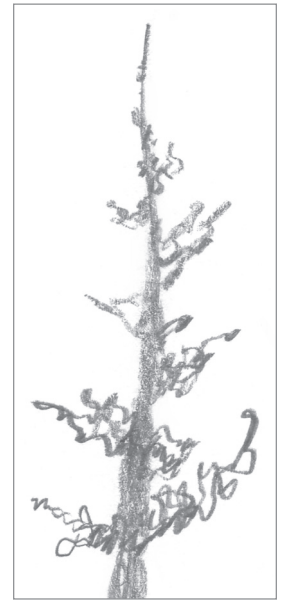
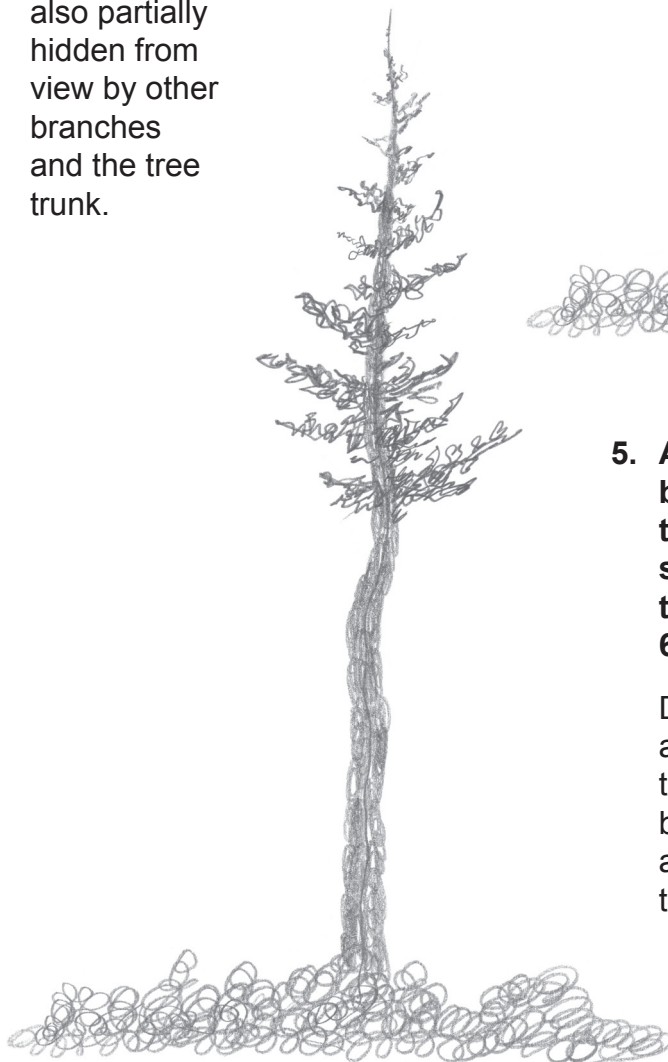


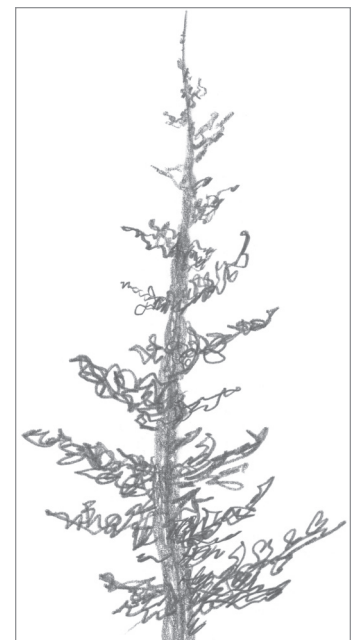
Figure 6



5. Add additional branches to the middle section of the trunk (Figures 6 to 9).

Don't forget to add branches that appear to be in front of and behind the trunk.

Figure 7



**Tip!**

For a more realistic looking spruce tree, draw the lower branches wider and longer than the higher branches.

**Tip!**

Keep a pencil sharpener and sandpaper block handy so you can keep your pencil points sharp.

Figure 9

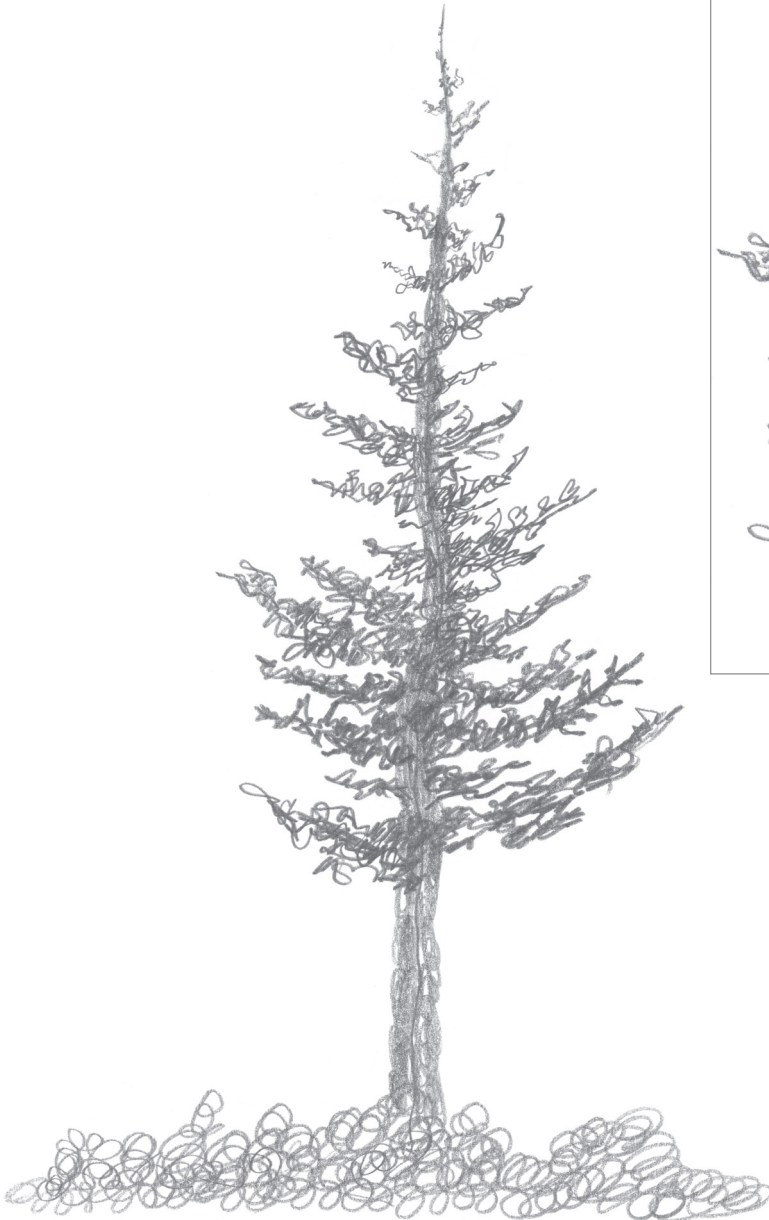
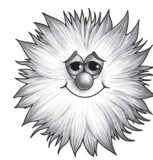


Figure 8

**As an Aside**

With lots of practice squircling and examining spruce trees in nature, you can easily learn to sketch a tree in a couple of minutes.

However, you should work your way through this exercise slowly to give yourself a chance to fully understand the process.

Figure 10



A couple of the lowest branches appear shorter than those above them. These branches are either in front of or behind the trunk.

- 7. Add some squiggly and raggedy lines extending from the earth to look like shrubs and grass (Figures 12 and 13).**

- 6. Add larger branches to the bottom section of the tree (Figures 10 and 11).**

Figure 11



Figure 12



Figure 13



Challenge!

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.

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 on the right (closer to the sunlight) are lighter than those in the shadows.

- 8. Use 4B and 6B pencils and squirkles to add shadows to some sections of the branches, trunk, and ground foliage (Figures 14 to 17).**

Figure 14



Figure 15

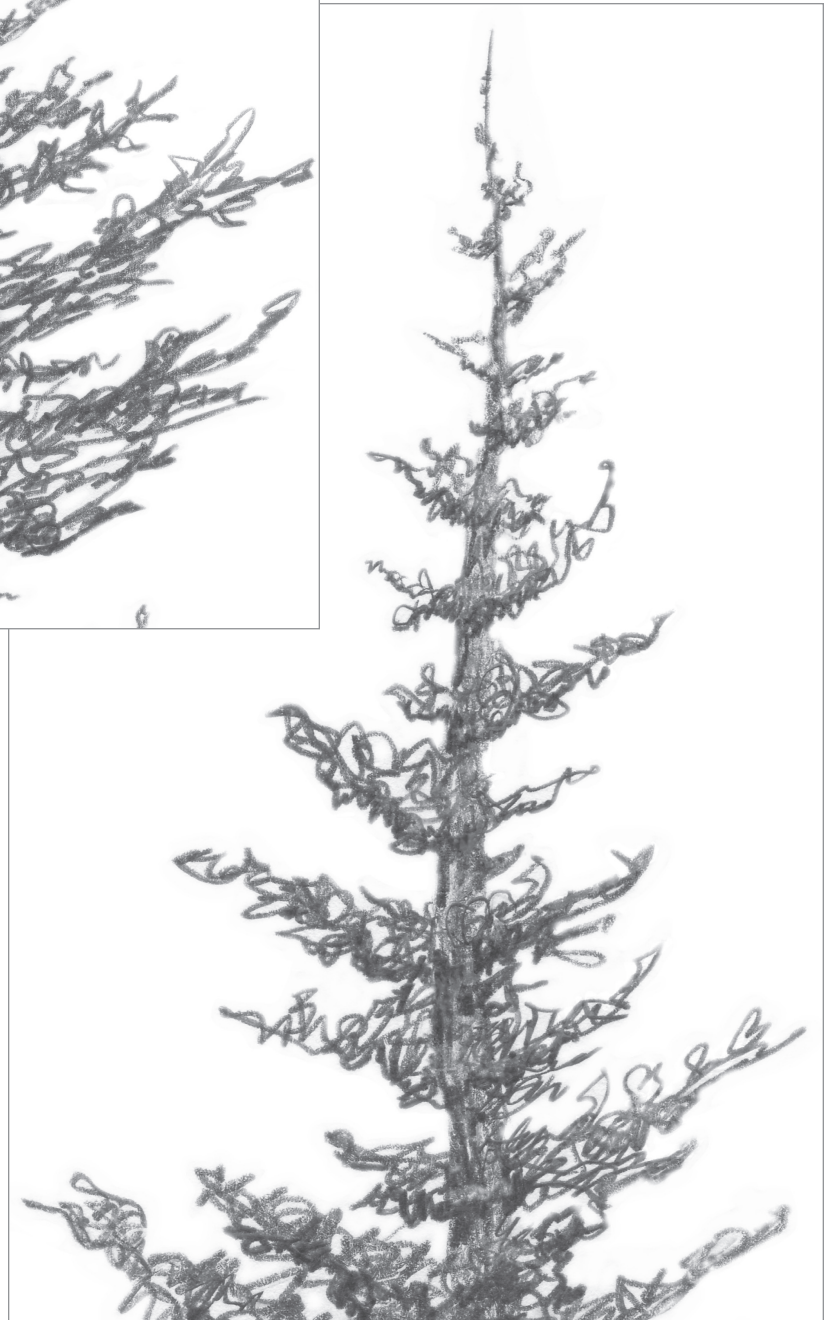


Don't add additional shading to the light sections that are closer to the sun.

Also, be careful not to add too many shadows!

Dark shading should be added sparingly – only to the shadow sections.

Figure 16



Tip!

Whenever you have a chance to visit a wooded area, take time to walk around individual trees and examine their branches from different perspectives.



Challenge!

Take a sketchbook and pencils outside during the late afternoon on a sunny day.

Find a tree and draw it ten times.

Change your position each time you begin a new drawing so that the sunlight appears to be coming from different directions.

Draw the light and shadows exactly as you see them.

Sign and date your drawing, give yourself a big hug, and go hug a tree.

Figure 17

