

READING CHALLENGE

The Oldest Tree in the World

A tiny tree in Sweden has been alive for 9,500 years — longer than any city, any country, or any written language

True Stories | A2 Level | ~12 min read | 5 Quiz Questions

Level	A2 (Elementary)
Age Group	Teens (11–16)
Skill	Reading
Topic	Nature & Animals
Duration	~15 minutes
Vocabulary	15 words with definitions
Quiz	5 multiple-choice questions

Article

In a cold forest in Sweden, there is a small tree. It does not look very special. It is only about five metres tall. Its **trunk** is thin. Its branches are small. But this tree has an incredible secret. It is 9,500 years old. Scientists say it is the most **ancient** living tree on Earth. They call it Old Tjikko. It has **survived** ice, snow, storms, and thousands of winters. While this tree was already alive, humans were learning to build their first cities. Old Tjikko is older than writing. It is older than the pyramids of Egypt. It is one of the most extraordinary living things on our planet.

Where Is Old Tjikko?

Old Tjikko grows on a mountain called Fulufjället, in the country of Sweden in northern Europe. This part of Sweden is very cold. In winter, the **temperature** often drops below minus 20 degrees Celsius. There is a lot of snow. The mountain is quite far from big cities. For this reason, not many people visit the tree. The Swedish government has decided to **protect** the area around the tree. There is a national park near Fulufjället. The **soil** on the mountain is rocky and thin. It is difficult for most trees to **survive** there. But Old Tjikko has found a way.

Who Found the Tree?

A **scientist** named Leif Kullman **discovered** Old Tjikko in 2004. He is a professor at Umeå University in Sweden. He was studying Norway spruce trees — a **species** that is very common in Sweden. He found this small tree on the mountain and was curious about it. He took a small piece of the tree's **roots** and sent it to a laboratory. In the laboratory, scientists used a method called **carbon dating**. This method can tell you how old something is by looking at special atoms inside it. The result was incredible. The roots were 9,500 years old. Leif Kullman was very surprised. He named the tree after his dog, whose name was Tjikko.

How Can a Tree Live So Long?

You might ask: how is it possible? Most trees do not live for thousands of years. The answer is interesting. The **trunk** and the branches of Old Tjikko are not 9,500 years old. They are actually quite new — only a few hundred years old. The secret is in the **roots**. The roots underground are **ancient**. They are 9,500 years old. When an old trunk dies, the roots do not die. They simply grow a new trunk. And then the new trunk grows new branches. This is called vegetative reproduction. It means the tree can **reproduce** without seeds. It grows a copy of itself from its old roots. In simple words: the tree is like a **clone** of itself. It keeps living, over and over again. The roots are the key to everything. They hold the memory of thousands of years.

What Was the World Like When Old Tjikko Was Born?

Old Tjikko started to grow around 7,500 BC. That was a very different world. The last ice age had just ended. Huge areas of Europe were covered in ice. As the ice melted, trees slowly moved north. Old Tjikko was one of the first trees to grow in that cold part of Sweden. At that time, there were no cities anywhere in the world. People lived in small groups. They hunted animals and collected food from the forest. They did not have writing. They did not have metal tools. The **ancient** city of Jericho — one of the oldest cities in the world — was just beginning. The pyramids of Egypt would not be built for another 4,000 years. Old Tjikko has seen all of human history. It was there before history even began.

Is Old Tjikko Really the Oldest?

Some people ask: is Old Tjikko really the oldest tree in the world? This is a good question. It depends on how you count. Some trees have very old **trunks**. A giant sequoia tree in California called General Sherman is about 2,700 years old. That is old! But its trunk has been alive for all 2,700 years. Old Tjikko is different. Its **roots** are **ancient**, but the trunk is much younger. Another tree called Pando in Utah, USA, is a colony of trees. All the trees in Pando share the same roots underground. Scientists believe Pando could be 80,000 years old. But Pando is a colony, not one single tree. Old Tjikko holds the **record** for the oldest single living tree with one set of roots. That is why it is famous. Every **species** has its own way of surviving. Old Tjikko chose roots.

Why Is Old Tjikko Important?

Old Tjikko is important for many reasons. First, it shows us how strong nature can be. A small tree on a cold mountain has **survived** 9,500 years of ice, storms, and change. Second, it teaches **scientists** about the past. By studying the tree, they can learn about the **temperature** and climate of Sweden thousands of years ago. The tree is like a **record** of history written in wood and **soil**. Third, it is a symbol. When we feel small or weak, we can remember Old Tjikko. Even the smallest living thing can survive for a very long time, if its **roots** are strong. Today, the tree is healthy. Scientists continue to study it and **protect** it. If you visit Fulufjället National Park in Sweden, you can see it with your own eyes. It does not look very exciting from the outside. But now you know its secret.

Vocabulary

These 15 words appear in the article. Learn them to help your reading.

Word	Definition
ancient	very, very old — from thousands of years ago
survive	to stay alive, especially in a difficult situation
clone	an exact copy of a living thing that has the same DNA
roots	the parts of a plant that grow underground and take in water
trunk	the thick main stem of a tree
scientist	a person who studies nature, animals, or the physical world
discover	to find something for the first time
carbon dating	a scientific method used to find out how old something is
species	a group of animals or plants that are the same type
continent	one of the seven large areas of land on Earth, such as Europe or Asia
temperature	how hot or cold something is
reproduce	to make a new plant or animal of the same type
protect	to keep someone or something safe from danger or harm
soil	the top layer of the ground where plants grow
record	the best or most extreme example of something ever measured or known

Comprehension Quiz

Choose the best answer (A, B, C or D) for each question.

1. How old is Old Tjikko?

- A. About 2,700 years old
- B. About 5,000 years old
- C. About 9,500 years old
- D. About 80,000 years old

2. Who discovered Old Tjikko in 2004?

- A. A hunter named Tjikko
- B. A professor named Leif Kullman
- C. A student from Stockholm
- D. A farmer on the mountain

3. Why can Old Tjikko live for so long?

- A. Because the climate in Sweden is warm and sunny
- B. Because scientists give it special water every year
- C. Because its ancient roots grow new trunks when old ones die
- D. Because it produces thousands of seeds every winter

4. What scientific method did scientists use to find the age of the tree?

- A. Carbon dating
- B. DNA testing
- C. X-ray scanning
- D. Ring counting

5. What does Old Tjikko help scientists learn about?

- A. How to build better cities
- B. The temperature and climate of Sweden in the past
- C. How animals lived in ancient Europe

D. Why people stopped hunting 9,500 years ago

Answer Key

#	Answer	Correct Option
1	C	About 9,500 years old
2	B	A professor named Leif Kullman
3	C	Because its ancient roots grow new trunks when old ones die
4	A	Carbon dating
5	B	The temperature and climate of Sweden in the past