



Looking at Leaves

Background Information:

Looking at leaves engages students in nature exploration through investigation. There are more than 1,000 species of trees in North America and a great way to tell them apart is by their leaves! Sometimes it can be easy to tell them apart such as comparing a maple leaf to a pine needle. Other times it can be hard such as when comparing different species of elm trees. Some trees have leaves that all look the same while, others have leaves with different shapes. Leaves can change as they grow and can be affected by outside forces such as the changing of the seasons from summer to fall to winter. Other things that can change the way leaves look are insects, fungus, or other animals. Animals and some insects eat leaves while some spiders and insects roll leaves for shelter or use them as part of a cocoon. A gall can grow when an insect lays eggs on a leaf and the plant grows over them leaving a bump on the leaf. When the eggs hatch, insects will break through the gall. Most galls are harmless and come in many different shapes, sizes and colors.

Objectives:

1. Observe different shapes and colors of leaves and what makes them unique.
2. Observe if there are any signs of animals or insects on the leaf.

Helpful materials:

- Leaves
- Bag or box
- Colored pencils
- Magnifying lenses
- Glue sticks or contact paper
- Pencil and paper
- Clipboards
- Other desired art supplies

Time: 30 to 60 minutes

Age: Kindergarten through 5th grade

Activity 1: Leaf investigation

1. This activity is done best as summer turns to fall so there are a variety of leaves on the ground.
2. Get outside! Get your students outside to collect a variety of leaves. After each student collects 3-5 leaves bring everyone back inside.
3. Investigate! Have your students look at their leaves. Ask what they notice about their leaves. Is there evidence of insects? What's its texture? How many lobes does it have? Does it have teeth?
4. Have your students pick one leaf to study for one minute. Let them use a magnifying glass if they would like. At the end of one minute have everyone put their one leaf in a box.



Shake that box up and dump them back out on the floor or table. One by one have each student find their leaf.

5. Share and Reflect. Have students share their leaf. Ask questions such as
 - a. What did you observe about your leaf that helped you ID it?
 - b. What are some ways you can tell leaves apart?

Activity 2. Get Creative

1. Once you have worked through activity one allow students to get creative with their leaves. Using a variety of art supplies allow you students to draw their leaves, make leaf prints, make a leaf collage, make a picture frame with leave, etc. The opportunities are unlimited!

Reading Connections:

1. Maestro, B., & Krupinski, L. (2015). *Why Do Leaves Change Color? (Let's-Read-and-Find-Out Science 2)* (Illustrated ed.). HarperCollins.
2. Ehlert, L. (2005). *Leaf Man* (First ed.). Harcourt.

Resources:

Project WILD (Tex.). (2012). *Growing up WILD: Exploring nature with young children, ages 3-7*. Houston, TX: Council for Environmental Education.

****This activity is adapted from the Looking At Leaves activity in the Growing up Wild curriculum. If you are interested in learning more about this curriculum contacted Sarah Roberts at sarah.roberts@unl.edu**