

GIVE SPARK · HANDS-ON NATURE LAB

Leaf Story Studio

Can you tell a story with leaves and no words?

Teacher Guide

Grades 1–3 · Nature, art and storytelling · 60 to 90 minutes

FREE LAB

OVERVIEW

The lab at a glance

One lesson, one driving question and a picture that another pair reads before the artists explain it.

THE DRIVING QUESTION

Can you tell a story with leaves and no words?

Several readings of a picture can be reasonable. Children are not trying to win a guessing game or copy a model.

What children do

Pairs collect fallen leaves and look closely at their shapes, edges and veins. They arrange the same few leaves in two different ways, then use leaves to show one moment in a story. Another pair looks at the picture and says what they think is happening before the artists explain. The artists then decide what to change or keep before anything is glued.

What children learn

Leaves differ in ways you can observe and name. The same leaves can suggest different things when you turn them or move them apart, and viewers use visible clues to work out a meaning.

Success looks like

1. I described a leaf by something I could see, such as its shape, edge or veins.
2. I tried different ways to use my leaves.
3. I can point to a choice and explain why I made it.
4. I listened to a viewer and decided what to change or keep.

The challenge to share with children

"Our class is making a gallery of stories told with leaves. Your picture needs to show a moment when something is happening. Someone might be hiding, helping or searching. Before you explain your idea, another pair will tell you what they think is happening. You can then decide whether to change anything before you glue."

The leaf rule

Leaves make every character and every important object. Pencil is for small details only, such as eyes, legs and a ground line. To check, a child covers the pencil marks with a hand. A viewer should still be able to tell who is in the picture.

AT A GLANCE

Time: 90 minutes if children collect leaves outdoors. 60 minutes with a prepared collection, as set out on page 6.

Grouping: pairs. A group of three can absorb an odd number.

Standards link: an art and observation lesson. It practices the close observing that life science relies on. It does not cover an NGSS performance expectation.

SESSION PLAN

STAGE	MIN
Opening comparison	5
Collect and notice	15
Two arrangements	10
Turn, overlap, space	5
Create the scene	20
First viewers	10
Reconsider and finish	15
Gallery and reflection	10
Total	**90**

THE STUDENT RESOURCE

A separate two-page PDF. Page 1 is for writers. Page 2 is a draw-and-circle version for grade 1.

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PREPARATION

Get ready

Fallen leaves with a useful range of shapes, a practice mat and a final sheet for each pair, and three leaves for the opening.

Materials

For each pair

- About 10 to 15 fallen leaves with a range of shapes and sizes
- A plain practice mat or a sheet of scrap paper
- One sheet of firm white or pale paper for the final picture. An 11 × 17 inch sheet gives two children room to work.
- Pencils, a dark marker and a few crayons
- A glue stick, with small tape loops for thicker leaves
- Blunt scissors, kept back until the design stage

For you

- A checked collection area, or a prepared tray of leaves if going outside is not practical
- A demonstration set: one broad oval leaf and two narrower pointed leaves
- One student page for each child, in the version that suits them
- A place to lay finished pictures flat while the glue dries



A tray of varied leaves, a final sheet and drawing tools. Glue and scissors come out later.

SAFETY

Collect fallen leaves only, from an area you have checked. Avoid sharp, moldy or unfamiliar plants that could irritate skin.

Supervise scissors. Children wash their hands after handling leaves.

Choosing leaves

Any fallen leaves from your area will work, and a green collection is as useful as an autumn one. Choose leaves that are fairly flat, dry on the surface and flexible enough to move. Very brittle leaves break before children have finished exploring. Offer paper leaf shapes when real leaves are hard to find or hard for a child to handle.

The opening arrangements

The photo on page 4 shows both. For the first, lay the broad leaf on its side with the two narrow leaves forming a tail at one end. For the second, keep the same three leaves and move one narrow leaf above the body and the other to the front. If you have no leaves to hand, show the photo itself.

Keep glue off the tables until after the viewers have spoken.

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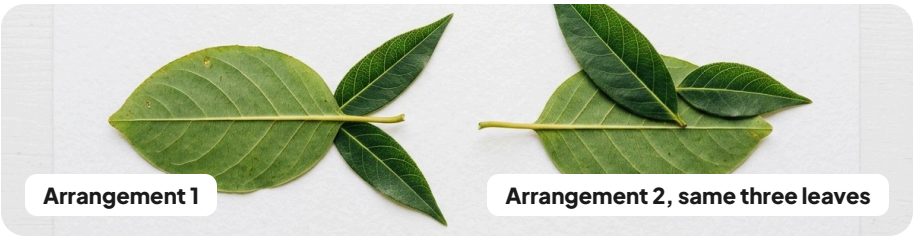
Look, collect and try

A three-leaf comparison, a close look at real leaves and two arrangements from the same small set.

Opening comparison 5 MINUTES



DO Lay out arrangement 1 without naming it. Give children a short quiet look, then invite them to tell a partner what they see. Move the two narrow leaves to make arrangement 2.

ASK "What could this be? Point to the clue you used. What changed when I moved this leaf?"

Then introduce the gallery challenge and the leaf rule.

Collect and notice 15 MINUTES

DO Allow about 10 minutes to collect and return, then 5 minutes to spread the leaves out and look closely. Each child chooses one leaf, draws it on the student page and tells a partner something specific about it.

SAY *"Look at your leaf the way a scientist would. What is its shape? Is the edge smooth, wavy or jagged? Can you see lines running through it?"*

ASK

- "How are these two leaves different? How are they alike?"
- "What could that curved edge help you show in a picture?"

The same leaves in two arrangements 10 MINUTES

DO Each pair chooses four to six leaves and uses that same set for two different arrangements on the practice mat. Leaves stay whole and loose. One child places the leaves first while the other suggests ideas, then they swap.

Turn, overlap, space 5 MINUTES

SHOW	EXPLAIN	ASK
Turn one leaf so its point faces a different way	"Turning a leaf can change the way a character seems to face or move."	"Which way is it looking now?"
Move a large leaf partly over a smaller one	"Overlap means one thing partly covers another. It can show something behind or underneath."	"What could be happening here?"
Move two leaf characters close together, then apart	"The space between things can change how we think they feel about each other."	"What story fits each one?"

LOOK FOR

Children linking something they can see to a possible use. If a child says "It is nice", ask which part caught their attention.

POSSIBILITIES, NOT RULES

Two close characters could be helping, arguing or hiding together. Model language such as "This might suggest".

WHY TWO ARRANGEMENTS

Using the same set twice makes the arrangement the only thing that changes. Children see that the meaning came from their choices and not from finding the right leaf.

IF THIS HAPPENS

A pair gets stuck on the second arrangement. Ask them to turn the largest leaf, move one piece to a new place or begin with an action such as hiding. Offer a move to try and not a finished picture to copy.

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Create, share and decide

Twenty minutes to arrange one moment, a first reading from another pair and a decision before anything is glued.

Create the scene 20 MINUTES

DO Each pair agrees on a moment and says it aloud as "In our picture, ___ is ___." They arrange the scene with the leaves still loose. Possible starting points are a character hiding, helping, searching or reaching. Remind them of the leaf rule: leaves make the characters and pencil adds small details.

ASK

- "What do you want the viewer to notice first?"
- "What might happen if you move this one closer?"

First viewers 10 MINUTES

DO Pair each team with another pair who have not heard its story. Keep the pictures on the tables so the loose leaves stay in place. Allow about 4 minutes for each picture.

Viewers

1. Look quietly for about 15 seconds.
2. Take turns saying "I think ___ is happening because I can see ___."
3. Ask about anything that puzzles you. "I wonder ___."

Artists

1. Listen while the viewers explain. Wait before you tell your story.
2. Explain what you wanted to show.
3. Name something you might change or choose to keep.

Viewers describe the clues they notice. They do not rate the picture or tell the artists it is wrong. Help children move from "I like it" to a useful observation, such as "I thought the small animal was hiding because the larger leaf covered most of it."

Reconsider and finish 15 MINUTES

SAY *"Think about what your viewers noticed. Is there anything you want to help them see more clearly? You can change something, or keep it and explain why."*

DO Children can turn a leaf, change the space between characters, add an overlap or take away a detail that does not help. A decision to keep the design is valid when they can give a reason. Then they lift and glue one leaf at a time so the arrangement holds its shape.

Gallery and reflection 10 MINUTES

DO Hold a short gallery walk or a table swap. Each child finishes one sentence aloud, in a drawing or in writing: "I chose to ___ because ___." They complete their version of the student page.

ASK "If you turned one important leaf in your picture, what might change about the story?"



Still loose. The scene stays movable until the viewers have spoken and the artists have decided.

A SAMPLE EXCHANGE

A pair wants to show a bird sheltering its chick. The viewers see two birds standing together. The artists notice that the large wing leaf sits beside the chick. They could try overlapping it above the smaller bird, or keep the first design if they have a reason.

IF THIS HAPPENS

Partners disagree. Have each arrange the disputed part while the other watches, then compare what each version suggests.

A viewer's reading upsets the artist. Say, "Your picture helped them notice something different. You still decide what you want to show."

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See the learning

What to look for, the leaf science you may be asked about and ways to fit the lesson to your class.

What to look for

LOOK FOR	USEFUL EVIDENCE	IF THE CHILD NEEDS SUPPORT
Close observation	Names or points to a particular leaf feature	Ask them to trace its edge or compare two contrasting leaves
Trying possibilities	Makes a second arrangement from the same leaves	Offer one move, such as turning the largest leaf
Purposeful choices	Links a placement to the intended action	Ask what they want the viewer to notice first
Reading clues	Gives a reading supported by a visible detail	Ask “What do you see that makes you think that?”
Using feedback	Explains a change or a reason for keeping something	Offer two possible changes and ask which fits their idea

Listen to each child. A strong shared picture does not show what both partners understand.

The leaf science behind it

A leaf is where a plant makes its food, using light, air and water. The flat part is called the blade. The lines you can see are veins. Veins carry water into the leaf and carry the food the leaf makes out to the rest of the plant. They also help hold the blade flat so it can catch light.

Leaves from different plants differ in shape, size and edge, and those differences help scientists tell plants apart. An edge can be smooth, toothed like a saw or lobed with deep curves, as on an oak leaf.

Many trees drop their leaves before a cold or dry season. The green color fades first, which lets yellow and orange colors that were already in the leaf show through. Evergreen trees also shed leaves, a few at a time through the year.

Adjusting for your class

CLASS	ADJUSTMENT
Grade 1	One character doing one thing. Use larger leaves, a prepared collection and student page 2. Children draw, circle and tell you their reason.
Grade 2	Invite two characters, or a character and an important object. Ask how their positions show a link between them.
Grade 3	Invite more than one possible reading. Ask which visual clues support each one before the artists decide.

60-MINUTE VERSION

Choose this version when you supply the leaves. Use the 90-minute plan when children collect outdoors, and for grade 1.

STAGE	MIN
Opening comparison	5
Notice and two arrangements	10
Turn, overlap, space	5
Create the scene	15
First viewers	10
Reconsider and finish	10
Reflection and cleanup	5
Total	**60**



The gallery. Finished pictures laid flat to dry.

IDEAS CHILDREN OFTEN BRING

“Leaves fall because they die.” The tree sheds them and grows new ones later.

“The veins are just a pattern.” Ask what the lines remind them of. They work like tiny pipes.

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My leaf story thinking

Can you tell a story with leaves and no words?

Name _____ Date _____

1 Look closely at one leaf

Draw it. Show its shape, its edge and the lines inside.

2 My leaf words

Circle the words that fit, or add your own.

smooth wavy jagged pointed round long

_____

The leaf rule. Leaves make the characters and the important objects. Pencil is only for small details, like eyes and legs.

3 Our story moment

In our picture,

_____

4 A choice I made

I used or moved _____ to show

_____



5 What our viewers noticed

They thought _____

because they saw

_____

6 What we decided

Changed Kept

We _____ because

_____

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GIVE SPARK

My leaf story

Can you tell a story with leaves and no words?

Name _____ **Date** _____

Draw and circle. Tell your teacher or your partner the rest.

1 Draw one leaf

Show its shape and its edge.

2 Circle the words that fit my leaf

smooth · wavy · jagged · pointed · round · long

3 In our picture, someone is

Circle one.

hiding · helping · looking for something · reaching · something else

4 Draw the leaf you moved or turned

Tell someone why you moved it.

5 After our viewers looked, we

changed something · kept it the same

For the adult. Ask, “Why did you move that leaf?” and “What did your viewers think was happening?” Write a few of the child’s words here if you want a record.

_____

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