

Treasure Leaves



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Connect with nature's riches and create a one-of-a-kind masterpiece

(art + science)

It's difficult to comprehend the diversity and complexity of nature. A forest of a thousand trees that have the same genetic make-up will not produce two trees that are alike. Even more amazing is that each tree produces perhaps hundreds of thousands of leaves - and not a single leaf will be a replica of another. They are all unique and have their own special form, color, and texture.

"Biodiversity" is the term for this amazing variety: not just in trees, but in all life - from the tiniest organism to the complex ecosystem that makes up forests and oceans. Such variety is crucial to humans to assure we have enough food. It's a priceless treasure.

Many artists today are working alongside nature, museums, and communities with the goal of building awareness and visualizing the wonders of biodiversity. Science presents factual information, but art is a story teller.

Pick up a leaf and the biodiversity story is clear. They keep the ratio of oxygen and carbon dioxide in balance. They provide food for many species. They help cool the air by absorbing the sun's energy and releasing water. They are useful sources of medicine, dyes, and fibers for humans and essential to the life cycle of a plant.

As a celebration of the vital importance of leaves and their diversity, this lesson views them as a fine canvas on which to create art. Working in tandem with nature and materials that preserve and beautify, students paint and decorate leaves while sealing and strengthening them for lasting enjoyment.

Painted leaves can be shared or returned to nature. They can be displayed and admired as fine artwork often is, in frames and mountings on a wall. Or, leaves can simply be kept as a reminder that the biodiversity of life is incredible, beautiful, and precious.

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.



Materials (required)

Fresh, natural leaves of varying sizes and shapes

Blickrylic Gel Medium, 16 oz (00711-1006); share one across class

Jacquard Lumiere Acrylic Paints, assorted colors, 2.25 oz (01246-); share 4-5 colors across class

DecoArt Americana (00769-) and **Galaxy Glitter Acrylic Paints** (81900-), asst. colors, 2 oz; share 6-8 across class

Plaid Mod Podge, assorted finishes including Gloss, Paper, Outdoor, and more (02916-); share two 8 oz containers across class

We R Memory Keepers Gem Stickers, set of 144, assorted colors (83724-1001)

Sakura Gelly Roll Metallic Pens, assorted set of 10 (20713-1010); share 3-4 sets across class

Faber-Castell Pitt Artists' Pens, assorted colors including White (20759-1001) and Black (20759-2002); need one per student

Optional Materials

Blick Studio Wood Panels, Gallery 1-1/2" cradle, assorted sizes (07045-)



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Preparation

1. View and discuss works by artists working with nature and for its benefit. For example:
 - Site specific, transient sculptures and installations created with natural materials. View works by artists such as Andy Goldsworthy, Nils-Udo, Richard Shilling and Agnes Denes.
 - Underwater sculpture parks, such as the Molinere Bay in Grenada, an island in the Caribbean. Artist Jason deCaires Taylor first created and installed sculptures that have become homes for new coral reefs.
 - Leaf-specific artwork, such as the cut-out designs of artist Lorenzo M. Duran and the assemblages of Walter Mason.
2. Collect a variety of leaves, such tree leaves, vegetable leaves, house plants, wildflowers, weeds - any leaf that has an interesting shape. A flat, broad leaf will provide the best surface for drawing and painting designs, but smaller, more delicate leaves will provide a variety of forms. Do not dry leaves first - they should be used as fresh as possible to maintain their best shape.

Process

1. Leaves will need to be primed and sealed with acrylic gel medium first. Place leaf on a piece of palette paper and cover as thoroughly as possible, brushing over edges and stems. Allow to dry, then repeat on the other side. For most permanent results, apply a second coat.
2. Paint leaves with metallic and pearlescent acrylic colors. Add glitter paint for extra sparkle. Gel pens and opaque markers can be used to add patterns and drawings.
3. Finished leaves can be sprayed with a fixative or brushed with a final coating of Mod Podge to make longer-lasting, if desired.
4. What to do with a painted leaf? Here are some suggestions:
 - Enjoy the leaf as a reminder of the amazing gifts of nature.
 - As a special gesture, return the leaf to nature by tying it back onto a tree branch.
 - Treat the leaf as the valuable work of art that it is. Make a shadow box frame by painting the back side of a cradled wooden painting panel.

Options

As an option to the theme of environmental art, this project could also be used as an illustration of diversity in human culture. Branches could be hung with decorated leaves to create a "diversity tree".



Step 1: Gather fresh leaves of varying sizes and shapes. Prime and seal on both sides, using acrylic medium or acrylic color.



Step 2: Decorate the leaf with drawings or designs using a soft nib or brush.



Step 3: Mount and display, or give the leaf away.

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National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

Creating

Anchor Standard 2: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

Presenting

Anchor Standard 6: Convey meaning through the presentation of artwork.

Connecting

Anchor Standard 11: Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding.

