

LEAF RUBBINGS

TREE ID Grades: K-8

Overview: (communicated by teacher)

Exploring the fine details in the leaves of a tree can help you identify tree species. Knowing if the leaf is simple or compound, if the leaf margin is smooth, serrated, or lobed, and venation (leaf vein) patterns are all helpful clues to pay attention to. A simple and fun way to start recognizing these differences is by creating leaf rubbings. Take your class on a nature walk and have students collect an assortment of leaves. In the classroom, students can utilize the leaf rubbing pages to help categorize the leaves they found.

Method:

1. Explore Campus and Collect Leaves:

Explore your campus and collect leaves. Have students look for different leaf shapes, leaf margins, and venation patterns. Try to find freshly fallen leaves, as the more alive or “green” your leaves are, the more details you will see in the rubbings. Please avoid pulling leaves off the tree!

2. Categorize Leaves:

Back in the classroom, encourage students to find ways to categorize their leaves. Consider looking at the leaf margins, leaf veins, or base and apex (tip) of the leaf.

3. Create Leaf Rubbings:

As students create their leaf rubbings, they will use a clipboard to secure the stem in place, attaching a sheet of paper on top. Have the back side of the leaf (abaxial) touching the paper.

4. Etching and Finishing the Rubbings:

Remove the paper wrapping off your crayon and use the side of the crayon to create an etching. It takes some practice keeping the leaf still, but students can create a fun print of their leaves that they can use to identify different shapes and patterns!

At a glance

Skills:

Critical Thinking
Teamwork
Discussion
Urban Forestry

Lesson Delivery:

(Best/Suggested method in bold)

- Whole group
- **Small group**
- **Independent work**

Location:

(Best/Suggested location in bold)

- **Outdoor**
- **Indoors**

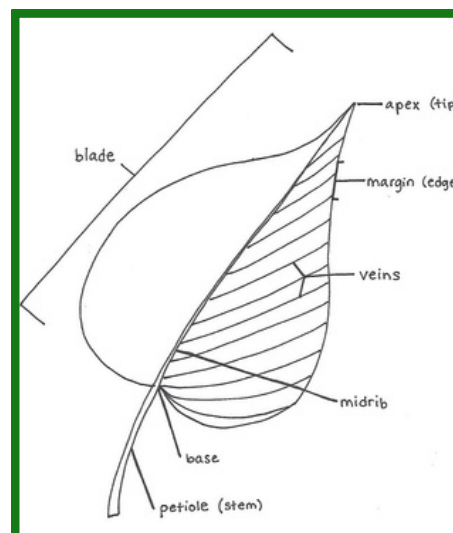
Materials:

Necessary

- Paper
- Crayons
- Clip Boards
- Assortment of leaves

Optional

- Blank paper
- Chart paper
- Sticky notes
- Colored Pencils



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Modifications & Extensions

K-2*

Modification: Use Pre-Printed Leaf Sorting Cards with Visual Cues

Provide students with picture-based sorting mats labeled with "Smooth Edge," "Pointy Edge," or "Wavy Edge" to help them classify their leaves after rubbing. Use large clipboards or tape the paper down to assist with motor skills during the rubbing process.

Extension: Make a Leaf Rubbing Nature Book

Allow students to glue their leaf rubbings into a small, stapled booklet. On each page, they can draw the tree it came from (or imagine it), write a simple label (e.g., "This leaf has bumpy edges"), and decorate the pages to create their own leaf storybook.

3-5*

Modification: Provide a Leaf Traits Reference Guide

Distribute a simplified classification chart with illustrations of margin types, vein patterns, and leaf types. Students can use this as a reference while analyzing and categorizing their leaf rubbings in a science notebook.

Extension: Create a Leaf Rubbing Display with Scientific Labels

Have students mount their best rubbings on construction paper, labeling the leaf type, margin style, and venation. Add fun facts about the species if known, and display the gallery for other classes or parents to view.

6-8*

Modification: Model Scientific Descriptions and Comparative Observations

Support students by modeling how to use descriptive scientific language (e.g., "pinnate venation," "serrated margin"). Provide sentence starters or a rubric to help structure detailed observations and encourage comparative analysis between species.

Extension: Design a Leaf Identification Guide for Your School

After completing the rubbings and categorizing leaves, students can compile their work into a digital or printed field guide for local trees. Include leaf rubbings, scientific names, photos, descriptions, and distribution notes. Optionally, use iNaturalist or Trees of Texas to assist in species identification.

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Using the leaves you found, create a rubbing of a leaf that fits in each category.

1. A leaf with a serrated margin.

Serrate
Margin Leaf



2. A leaf that is lobed.

Lobed Margin
Leaf



3. A leaf with a different type of margin.

4. Your favorite leaf.



Leaf Rubbings



Create a different leaf rubbing in each square



Four Seasons



Draw a picture of the same tree in each square. How does your tree change throughout the seasons?

Spring

Summer

Fall

Winter