



Looking for leaf shapes

Nature is full of patterns and shapes. We can observe these shapes to help us understand the variety of plants that grow around us.

This activity is an opportunity to take your learners outside, explore your environment together and observe the different shapes and patterns you can find in leaves on the ground. This offers the opportunity to discuss what this shows us about the variety of life around us, how it makes us feel, and if you like, start to identify the plants, including trees, that these leaf shapes belong to.

Teaching time

30 minutes

Learning outcomes

- Make close observations of nature with noticing similarities and difference between features
- Spend time outdoors in nature and share how they feel when interacting with nature

Step by step

Assign learners into pairs or small groups to explore your outside in your learning site. Give each pair/group a sheet of plain paper and a 'Looking for leaf shapes' worksheet on clipboards, with pencils. Can they find different shaped leaves lying on the ground?

On their plain sheet of paper, ask learners to draw as many different leaves as they can find – encourage learners to look closely at the differences and draw them as accurately as possible, taking notice of the lines, shapes and patterns. (For younger learners or less confident drawers, can they draw around the leaves with their pencils to replicate the outline?)

A fun fact for this step! Did you know that the number of different plant species in a hedge can help to date old hedgerows? The higher the diversity of trees and shrubs growing in the hedge, the older the hedge may be!

After 10 minutes exploring leaf shapes, gather learners back together. Ask the groups to share how many different leaf shapes they found – there is space to fill this in on their worksheet. Are they surprised by how many different shapes and kinds there are in your site? Are there any shapes they found particularly interesting or unusual?

To continue the discussion, lay out everyone's leaf drawings (this might work best inside to stop your drawings blowing away!) - can learners notice any differences or similarities between the shapes they found? Did any groups/pairs draw the same leaf shapes as each other? There is a table on their worksheet to take note of any interesting differences and similarities they notice.

Green Skills



Suitable for

Key Stage 1
Key Stage 2

Location

Outdoors

Season

Autum
Winter

What you'll need

Plain paper
'Looking for leaf shapes'
worksheets
Clipboards
Pencils and/or crayons

Key vocabulary

Look closely
Names of plants
Feelings

Support and extension opportunities

Can you ask learners to continue this activity outside of the learning day? Ask learners to look at the trees on their route home or to school or nursery, and see if any of the leaf shapes match those they've observed. Can they identify which trees grow which leaves?

A fun fact for this step! Many animal species rely on leaf colour change to time their migration as well as to identify food sources. This means that delayed autumn leaf colour change could have big impacts on local ecosystems.



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Step by step (continued)

Next, ask learners, ‘What do these leaves and their patterns and shapes remind you of? How do the shapes make you feel?’ - Do some shapes look like something else? Are there repetitive patterns in any of them? There is space on their worksheet to note down any thoughts or feelings for this step.

A fun fact for this step! Studies have shown that the most relaxing patterns are those with repetition that our brains can process easily. These are called *fractals*, and include patterns in seedheads, tree branches, ferns, and pinecones.



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