

Oliver, Ollie, and Mila's Leaf Painting Adventure

Materials Needed

- A variety of leaves (collected from outside, with different shapes and textures)
- Large sheet of paper (butcher paper or easel paper taped to the floor or a low table)
- Non-toxic, washable, taste-safe paint (e.g., tempera paint or homemade flour/cornstarch paint) in fall colors like red, yellow, and orange
- Paper plates or a tray to hold the paint
- A smock or old t-shirt to protect clothing
- A high chair or booster seat with a tray, or a protected floor area
- Wipes and a small basin of warm, soapy water for easy cleanup

Learning Objectives

By the end of this sensory play session, the child will have an opportunity to:

- **Explore different textures** by touching and manipulating smooth, bumpy, and crunchy leaves.
- **Practice fine motor skills**, such as the pincer grasp (picking up leaves) and palmar grasp (holding a leaf to paint).
- **Discover cause and effect** by observing that pressing a painted leaf onto paper leaves a colorful print.
- **Engage in creative expression** by choosing where to place colors and making their own unique marks on the paper.

Lesson Procedure

Part 1: The Leaf Hunt (5-10 minutes)

Goal: To engage the senses and connect the art material to the natural world.

1. Take Oliver, Ollie, or Mila outside for a short walk in the yard or to a nearby park.
2. Talk about what you see and feel. Say things like, "Feel the bumpy bark on this tree!" or "Wow, this leaf is so bright red!"
3. Encourage the child to help you gather a few interesting leaves. Guide their hand to touch different types. Let them hold a sturdy leaf as you walk. This part is about the experience, not just collecting materials.

Part 2: Sensory Setup & Introduction (5 minutes)

Goal: To introduce the materials in a calm, curious way before combining them.

1. Secure the large paper to the floor or a low table where the child can easily reach it.
2. Pour small puddles of paint onto the paper plates.
3. Sit with the child and present the leaves. Let them touch, crinkle, and explore them without paint. Use descriptive words: "This leaf feels smooth," or "Listen! This one is crunchy."
4. Next, let them touch the paint with one finger. Describe the sensation: "Ooh, the paint feels cool and squishy!"

Part 3: Creative Painting! (10-15 minutes)

Goal: To facilitate a process-focused art experience where exploration is celebrated.

1. **Model the action:** Take a large, sturdy leaf. Show the child how you press it into the paint. Say, "Let's give the leaf some yellow paint. Pat, pat, pat."
2. **Make a print:** Press the painted leaf onto the paper. Lift it to reveal the print and show your excitement! "Wow, look! Mila, we made a leaf print!"
3. **Hand it over:** Offer a leaf to the child and let them explore. There are no rules here. They might:
 - Stamp the leaf correctly.
 - Use the leaf as a paintbrush to smear paint.
 - Abandon the leaf and use their hands to paint.
 - Mix the colors together.
4. **Celebrate their process:** Whatever they do is wonderful. Narrate their actions positively: "I see you are swirling the red paint with your fingers!" or "Ollie is making big, strong pats on the paper!" This builds confidence and values their creative choices. Let this be child-led.

Part 4: Clean-Up & Reflection (5 minutes)

Goal: To create a positive transition away from the activity.

1. When you notice interest starting to fade, give a gentle 2-minute warning. "We will be all done with painting in a moment."
2. Make cleanup part of the fun. Bring over the small basin of warm water and let the child splash their hands to get clean.
3. Briefly look at the finished artwork together. Point to a mark they made: "Look at that beautiful red spot Oliver made right here!"

Differentiation and Helpful Tips

- **For a hesitant child:** If the child is unsure about the texture of the paint, don't force it. You can put the paint in a sealed zip-top bag with a leaf inside for a mess-free sensory experience. They can squish the paint onto the leaf through the bag.
- **For the child who puts everything in their mouth:** Use taste-safe, edible finger paint (you can make this easily with flour, water, and food coloring). Always supervise closely. Gently redirect their hand from their mouth to the paper, saying, "The paint goes on the paper."
- **For varying attention spans:** This activity can last 5 minutes or 20 minutes. Follow the child's lead and end the activity on a positive note before they become frustrated or overly tired.
- **Extend the learning:** For an older toddler, you can talk about the names of the colors or count the leaf prints they made.

Observational Assessment

This is a play-based activity, so assessment is informal and observational. While the child plays, notice:

- **Engagement:** Did the child show curiosity toward the materials? Did they touch the leaves and the paint?
- **Motor Skills:** Did they attempt to pick up a leaf? Did they use their whole hand (palmar grasp) or fingers to manipulate the materials?
- **Discovery:** Did they seem to notice the prints they were making on the paper? Did they

experiment with smearing, patting, or stamping?

- **Sensory Response:** How did they react to the different textures? Did they enjoy the feeling of the paint?