

Activities to Support Conceptual Understanding

Autumn Leaves

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Leaf Sensory Tray & Exploration:

Bring together leaves of different sizes, shapes, textures (smooth, wrinkled, wet/dry), and colors. Let students handle them. Provide verbal descriptions:

"This leaf has a bumpy underside, like tiny veins weaving beneath your fingertips."

"This leaf is long and narrow, its edge is smooth on this side, jagged on that side."

Allow for smelling dry leaves, crinkling them, holding them to feel weight and dry texture. Add Braille labels where possible to identify features like stem, tip, veins, edge.

Discovering Wind & Movement:

Use a branch with leaves attached (safe branch, real if possible). Use a fan on a switch or gentle breeze. Students can feel air movement, hear leaves rustle, see motion if possible. Describe the motion: "The leaves flutter and twist, casting soft shadows. They move gently or sharply depending on wind."

Tactile: Feel the breeze from the fan.

Audio: Hear leaves rustle.

Visual (if possible): Watch leaves twist and flutter.

Verbal Descriptions: "The leaves flutter and twist..."

Leaf Sorting & Matching:

Provide a set of leaves and matching tactile/color swatches (if vision allows) or textured cards. Sort by one salient feature at a time: color (if vision), shape (oval, round, pointy), size, texture (smooth, rough, waxy). Use verbal prompts emphasizing features: e.g., "Which leaf has rounded lobes? Which leaf feels smooth...rough?"

Leaf Craft with Real Objects + Tactile Add-Ons:

Collect leaves, or use real ones you brought. Use them in art: rubbings (leaf under paper, feeling where veins are), collage (gluing leaves + adding textured materials around them like felt, fabric, foil). Add raised outlines or tactile borders. Encourage language: "see/feel the ridge pattern," "edges: smooth vs rough," "stem feels firm," "veins feel like raised lines."

Leaf Experience Book:

Co-create a small tactile/print/Braille book about leaves. Include real leaf pieces or rubbings, textured paper, raised outlines. For each leaf, include a sentence with rich verbal description and salient features: "This leaf is soft, smooth, about the size of your palm. Its edge has gentle points." This becomes a reference the student can revisit, helping reinforce concepts of color, shape, texture, and vocabulary.

Parent Tip: Use real leaves whenever possible. Encourage touch, sound, and smell while describing what makes each leaf unique.

About these Materials

These activities build on strategies shared by teachers of students with visual impairments, families, and organizations such as Perkins School for the Blind and Paths to Literacy.