

# Leaf Artistry

**Parent Notes:** This activity takes only your child's imagination (and maybe yours too 😊) to complete. While it is geared for younger children, the creativity in this activity is fun for all ages. It can be a fun family/group activity. Complete this in your own back yard, a designated picnic area or campsite. There is no clean up or supplies to carry which makes it a perfect activity while exploring.

**Considerations:** Stay on the trail to complete this activity, not only for your safety but to protect wildlife and their habitat. **Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles - Travel and Camp on Durable surfaces, Leave What You Find and Be Considerate of Other Visitors.** Dress for the weather, check the area for poison ivy first and check for ticks when you are done. (Windy days may not be the best for this 😊!)

## Let's Begin:

- Find an area where leaves from several different types of trees have fallen. This is a great way to start tree identification or learn about different forest types. Are you in a Beech Maple Forest? An Oak Hickory Forest? Maybe there is a very diverse group of trees that contains poplars, maples, sweetgums, hickories etc.
- Have your child describe the shape and texture. Leaves can be elliptical, star shaped, oval, heart shaped, lobed, serrated or toothy, hairy, smooth or round.
- Once you have found a location with lots of leaves on the ground it is time to create! Choose leaves and create pictures by arranging them on the ground. Create individual items such as a fox, rabbit, house, bike etc. Or you can create a complete scene (i.e. a person catching a fish, playing a sport, walking a dog). Use a phone or camera to take pictures of your creations and remember to **LNT - Leave What You Find**. Scatter the leaves when you are done so it looks like no one was there.

## Extension:

- Leaf Man by Lois Ehlert, can be read at home. Have your children write their own story about their leaf artistry.
- Take a photograph of your leaf creation, print it and frame it as a keepsake.
- If you would like to create a more permanent piece of art, collect leaves at home, arrange and glue them onto poster board or heavy paper. **REMEMBER: Leave What You Find at the park for others to enjoy.**



# SHHH!! QUIET PLEASE

**Parent Notes:** This activity focuses on predator/prey relationships. Only supplies needed is the outdoors. Just take a hike, find a picnic area, or complete this activity where you are staying in the Hocking Hills. It is fun to include different surfaces such as a grass lawn, gravel, pavement, leaves, bare soil, wet and dry surfaces if available. (Oh, and you may get a few moments of quiet too 😊)!

**Considerations:** Follow all **Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles**. **Stay on the trail; LNT Principle - Travel and Camp on durable surfaces.** If you are moving slow along a trail as part of this activity, step to the side and let other visitors pass. **LNT Principle - Be Considerate of Other Visitors.**

## Let's Begin

Most predator/prey relationships rely on the predator being sneaky in some ways. A predator is an animal that hunts prey for its food. A prey is the animal being hunted. Name a type of predator. Name a type of prey.

Even when we try our very best to walk quietly, we are probably not as quiet as we think. Surrounding sounds like the wind, birds singing, water running and other hikers may mask the noise we are making or we may be so busy going on our way, we are unaware of how loud we really are being.

While you are hiking or having a picnic, have everyone try to walk on different surfaces without making a sound. Try walking on different parts of your feet; heel to toe, only on your toes, along the sides of your feet. Ask the following questions;

- Which method worked best? Can you name an animal that uses this method of walking?
- Who in your group is the quietest? The loudest?
- Does the speed you walk make a difference?
- What about shoe types? Boots vs. tennis shoes vs. sandals
- What if you were barefoot? (Only do this on surfaces free of debris/litter/broken glass and other sharp objects). Scout the area before trying this.
- What surface was the easiest to be quiet on? What was the loudest?
- Are there any other factors that come into play?

A predator's ears are usually oriented forward to catch the sounds of the prey they are hunting. Prey usually have ears that are oriented in the middle or side of the head and may move forward or backward to listen for predators. There are many adaptations for different types of animals. What others can you think of? Specialized feathers, camouflage etc...

**Extension:** Find an area where one person (prey) can sit down in the middle of everyone else with a stick or small stone in front of them. Have one person (acting as a predator) in your group try to sneak up and take it before they hear you. If the "prey" person hears a noise, they point in the direction of the noise. If it is the "predator" that is sneaking, they must go back. Take turns. A bandana will help cover the eyes (ONLY if the person is comfortable with this), and reduce the urge to peek!

## Leaf Litter Critters

**Parent Notes:** If available the following items make good tools for this activity; Four closely sized sticks, a magnifying glass, pencil and field guides. However, they are not necessary to explore leaf litter critters. You can use the back of this sheet to document what you find in each square.

**Considerations:** Follow Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles; Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces, Respect Other Visitors, and Leave what you find. Be sure to scatter the leaves or cover the critters back up in the area you explored when you are done. LNT Principle - Respect Wildlife

### Let's Begin:

Find 4 sticks that are about 12" - 18" long or close to similar length and arrange them in a square on top of the leaves. Then take some time to slowly go through the leaves in the square to discover what leaf litter critters might be hiding. If you have access to an insect field guide, use it to identify what you are seeing; centipedes, millipedes, worms, ants, potato bugs (rollie pollie's), and maybe an amphibian like the red backed salamander. Soil and leaf critters play a vital role in helping to break down the leaf litter and improve soil quality by creating space in the soil for water and air to flow through.

After searching through the square, return the leaf material back and move to a different spot. You can do this several times. Compare your findings;

- Did you find anything new in a different spot?
- Sunny vs Shady location?
- Hillside vs. Flat area?
- Grassy area vs. Wooded area?
- Wet vs Dry area?
- Fall vs. Spring? Do you think you would get different results? Why?
- Heavily traffic area vs. low traffic area (referring to the number of people that walk/hike, picnic, play in that area).
- What about other wildlife in the area? Could they affect what you find; birds, squirrels, raccoon sign, opossum sign, etc.

**Fun Fact:** Many species of pollinators, including bees, butterflies, and flies, etc. will utilize leaves & other dead plants for overwintering/hibernating. So, while many people rake and remove all the leaves from an area, it is important to leave some areas with this type of habitat for those special critters. Leave the Leaves!

## Pictures in the Sky

**Parent Notes:** This is a wonderful way to relax and still engage the senses after a long day of hiking and exploring. All you need is a place to lay back and gaze at the sky. Clouds are a must. A blanket and being dressed for the weather make this activity more comfortable. No other supplies needed. The Cloud Appreciation Society (yes, that is a group that I belong to) along with several other groups have apps that can be downloaded to identify cloud types. However, this activity does NOT have to be that formal and can just be fun!

**Considerations:** Dress for the weather! Be sure you can identify plants like poison ivy, that may cause skin irritation if you are laying on the ground. And always check for ticks after every outdoor activity. A blanket, large beach towel or lounge lawn chair at your cabin are perfect for comfort. **Follow all Leave No Trace Principles while completing this activity in a public space; Be considerate of other visitors**

Let's Begin:

The instructions are simple. Let your imagination roam across the sky.

What pictures do you see in the clouds? Can you spot a dog, fish, person, insect, boat, car, etc? Share your findings with others who are cloud picture spotting. Do you see the same things? It is fun to look at clouds through the perspective of others.

### **Extensions:**

- You can practice identifying cloud types by utilizing a field guide or an app if you choose.  
Describe the clouds you see: White, Grey, High in the Sky, Low in the sky, Wispy, Cotton ball like, Layered, Thick, Fast moving, Slow moving, etc.
- Fall can have the most spectacular sunset when clouds are present. Be sure to look up what time sunset is and step outside for a magnificent display.



## Leaf Print T-shirts

When my children were small, I found this activity in a Family Fun Magazine. We did it while camping and since then, I have used this activity with many camp kids. Even adults love this activity. This is one of the few activities that will require supplies and a bit of preparation; **Leave No Trace (LNT) Principle - Plan Ahead and Prepare**, but it is always a favorite.

**Parent Notes:** Supplies needed for this activity; small spray bottle, a tiny amount of bleach, a 100% cotton t-shirt, a clothes line and clothes pins: After many years of doing this, I have found that Navy Blue, Black or Dark Purple work best. Other colors do not take to the bleach as well.

**Considerations:** Eye protection is a good idea and some type of protective gloves, especially for sensitive skin. Wear old clothes in case you get the bleach/water mix on you. **Remember LNT Principles - Plan Ahead and Prepare, Respect Wildlife, Dispose of Waste Properly.** Be sure to be able to identify and avoid poison ivy before starting this activity. This activity should be done OUTDOORS at the campsite, cabin, lodge or at home.

### Let's Begin

Each person creating a nature t-shirt collects several leaves that have fallen to the ground (5 - 7 leaves are usually plenty). **DO NOT pick leaves from a tree or shrub.** **LNT Principle; Leave What You Find.**

- Lay your 100% cotton t-shirt on gravel or hard surface where it can lay flat. Use a tarp, plastic covering or large piece of cardboard to protect surfaces like wood decks. If you do not want the back of the t-shirt to get bleach on it, use a piece of cardboard or poster board in between the front and back to keep it from running through. (NOTE: A t-shirt made of mixed fibers may not fade, stick to 100% cotton)
- Arrange the leaves on the front of the shirt. You can create a design, pattern or it can be random.
- Fill a small spray bottle with approximately 2/3 water and 1/3 bleach, hold the bottle 12" - 18" away from the shirt and **lightly** mist. Use a rock to hold the leaves down and in place.
- Start with a very light mist. It doesn't take much. Wait a few minutes and watch as the t-shirt begins to fade around the leaves. If it is not fading after a few minutes, lightly mist a little more of the solution. The mist may pool on the leaves. Use a paper towel to dab the leaves dry to prevent bleach dripping on the t-shirt when you remove them. Use the clothesline and clothes pins to hang it up. Let it dry. Bleached leaves should be rinsed thoroughly before returning to nature or thrown in trashcan.
- Dispose of the leftover water/bleach solution down a sink, not in the grass. (**LNT Principles: Dispose of Waste Properly & Respect Wildlife**)
- Wash your t-shirt creation before wearing. Then take a hike on one of "Natures Runways" (designated trail) to show it off.

You are sure to get a lot of compliments on your new shirt and have a pretty cool keepsake of your trip to the Hocking Hills.

## Animal Tracks & Sign\*

**Parent Notes:** Tools for this activity can be just your eyes. A magnifying glass, field guides, or an app on your phone can also be great tools, but not necessary.

**Considerations:** Remember to follow all **Leave No Trace (LNT) Principles; Travel and Camp on durable surfaces (Stay on the trail), Respect Wildlife, Be Considerate of Other Visitors, Dispose of Waste Properly, and Leave What You Find** (Unless it is trash and then you can be a good steward and help clean it up 😊)!

### Let's Begin

When visiting public lands such as parks, preserves, and forest land, visitors often hope to catch a glimpse of wildlife. But the reality is, with so much human presence, sometimes that can be a difficult task. Animal sign, however, is plentiful if you know what to look for. The little details can tell you a story. Below is a list of the different types of wildlife sign. As you are hiking the trails or exploring the property around the place you are camping/lodging, check off as many of these as you can find.

#### Food Sign:

- Chewed leaves & twigs
- Remains of fruits, empty shells, chewed pine cones, seed caches etc.
- Chewed Tree trunk

#### Shelter Sign:

- Dens and burrows (Below Ground)
- Tree cavities (Any level of the tree)
- Nests (on the ground, shrubs, anywhere on a tree)

#### Signs of the Animal itself:

- Calls and Songs (birds, frogs, some mammals)
- Shed skin, fur feathers or exoskeletons
- Scat (droppings or poop)
- Tracks and trails
- Buck rubbings (on the trunk of trees) or scrapes (Areas under a tree where the leaves have been scraped away)
- Dust baths (birds will roll in dust to clean their feathers)
- Woodpecker holes
- Slides near a pond

Ask yourself these questions; What animal/animals created this sign? Is there more than one type of sign that gives you a clue to what the animal was? Location of the track, trail, and scat.

**Extensions:** Use the back of this paper to write and illustrate a story about the sign or clues you found.

\*This activity has been modified from booklet Scat, Tracks & Other Signs produced by the National Association for Interpretation, Region 4, newsletter, FourThought. Edited by NAI Region@ 2001. Submitted by Debra Shankland & Phoebe Atkinson