How-to-do Activity - Bark & Leaf Rubbings

Making Rubbings

Make a Leaf Rubbing

- Find a leaf within easy reach for drawing on a clipboard. The best leaves for rubbings have distinctive veins and leaf edges, and are fairly thick. Red alder, false lily of the valley, sword fern and deer fern are good examples and make good rubbings.
- Place clipboard under leaf, and ‘sandwich’ leaf with a piece of paper. If possible, place the bottom side up to reveal leaf veins or other details.
- Gently rub leaf with the side, or long edge, of crayon (not the point). Make sure to especially rub the veins and edge of the leaf.
- Gently disengage from the leaf, leaving it on the plant.

Make a Bark Rubbing on a Plant

- Find exposed bark on a tree or shrub. Textured bark will create the most interesting rubbings. Good examples include Douglas fir, bitter cherry, big leaf maple and red cedar.
- Place paper directly on the bark.
- Use the side of the crayon (long edge, not the point) to rub across the paper.

Simple Leaf Terminology

- Toothed edge
- Lobed edge
- Smooth edge
- Net Veining
- Parallel Veining

Materials

Paper: Any copy paper will do (avoid heavy paper) This is a good place to reuse paper that is printed on one side. White or pastel colors will work best. Cut the paper to fit the clipboard (1/2 page if using foam core clipboards from kit). Note: Consider discussing with students that paper comes from plants, particularly from the bark and wood of trees (red alder is the primary native paper tree from our region).

Crayons: Assemble any size or color of crayons, though darker colors work best. This is a good place to use broken or short crayons. Remove the paper wrapping so that students can use the side of the crayon for making the rubbing. Students may use more than one color while making a rubbing for added interest. Older students may use drawing pencils or charcoal which require more skills for proper handling.

Clipboards: A lightweight flat surface is necessary in order to use leaves on the plant, and for labeling the drawings with student names. Foam core clipboards are ideal for this. Standard wood clipboards or other similar surface will also work. Consider preparing the clipboards with several sheets of paper, held in place with rubber bands or clips.

Leaves and Bark: Using bark and leaves while still on the plant role models appropriate behavior (i.e., do not pick leaves or harm plants), and creates an opportunity for students to directly interact with a living plant. Though this activity is not focused on plant identification, students will naturally observe characteristics that are useful in plant ID (For ideas about how to extend this activity, see Leaf Discovery I and II, Second Grade). Leaves that have fallen to the ground and bark from fallen logs or branches can also be used for rubbings.