

Paper Explorers: A lesson for children aged 4 – 5

Teacher Guide

This lesson comprises a presentation and six paper-based craft activities.

The presentation introduces young children to where paper comes from and how it is made. They will also learn about 'special forests' (sustainably managed forests).

As a follow-up activity, you might like to create a role-play area outdoors where the children can imagine they are caring for a sustainably managed forest, looking after the trees and animals, harvesting older trees when they are ready, and planting new trees to keep the forest healthy and full of life.

The six forest-themed craft activities provide opportunities for children to develop their knowledge and understanding of the natural world, practise their fine motor skills, and explore creating with materials.

There are also plenty of opportunities to take the learning outside and let children experience the benefits of spending time in nature. Some of the activities can be done outside, and others require items to be sourced from the natural environment, such as leaves and twigs.

All the activities in this project pack involve paper. Where possible, try to use responsibly sourced paper and additional materials.



Forest Animal Masks



Leaf Rubbing



Triangle Trees



Folded Forest



Loop-the-loop Trees



Leaf Printing

Forest Animal Masks

For this activity, you will need:

- Templates of forest animal masks (ideally printed on thick paper)
- Child-safe scissors
- Glue sticks or tape
- Crayons, coloured pencils or felt tips
- Lollipop sticks, string or elastic (for holding or wearing the masks)
- Additional papers and other materials, such as fabrics, feathers and pipe cleaners to decorate the masks

Main activity

Children will create their own forest animal masks using paper. Begin by discussing some of the animals that live in forests, showing pictures if possible. Ask the children to think about what features those animals have on their faces — e.g. pointy ears, fluffy cheeks, big round eyes, whiskers.

Provide children with pre-drawn templates to colour, decorate and cut out, or allow them to create their own designs from scratch using paper shapes. This is a fantastic opportunity to talk about the textures and colours of animals' fur or feathers.

Once coloured and cut out, the masks can be stuck onto lollipop sticks to hold in front of their faces or attached to string or elastic so they can be worn. Encourage children to try on their masks and move like the animals they've chosen — this adds a lovely element of imaginative play and drama.



Leaf Rubbing

For this activity, you will need:

- A selection of real leaves (ensure they're clean and dry)
- A4 or A3 sheets of plain paper
- Wax crayons with the paper peeled off (chunky crayons work well for little hands)
- Optional: tape to help hold leaves in place

Main activity

In this activity, children will explore natural textures by creating rubbings of real leaves using paper and crayons. Ideally, the children will gather these from the school grounds or from a nature walk, or you might ask children to bring leaves into school.

Begin by looking closely at the leaves together — notice their shapes, edges, and especially the veins. Ask the children if they can feel the lines and bumps on the leaves.

Place a leaf flat on the table with the veiny side facing up and lay a sheet of paper over the top. Hold it steady (or gently tape it down), then use the side of a wax crayon to rub over the paper. The shape and pattern of the leaf will magically appear! You may need to tell children to press quite firmly with their crayon on the paper.

Children can experiment with different leaves, colours and arrangements — encouraging creativity and careful observation. They might even make a forest-themed collage of all their rubbings on a larger sheet.

You could also talk briefly about how trees lose their leaves in autumn and grow them back in spring — another way forests are full of life and change.



Triangle Trees

For this activity, you will need:

- A selection of green papers in different shades and textures (e.g. sugar paper, tissue paper, wrapping paper, magazine pages)
- Brown paper or card (for tree trunks – or children can draw their own)
- A4 or A3 backing paper for each child (or pair of children)
- Child-safe scissors
- Glue sticks
- Optional: stickers, printed animal pictures or natural materials for children to add to their tree pictures

Main activity

In this creative collage activity, children will make their own tree pictures using triangle shapes. Begin by showing a simple example or real photo of a conifer tree (like a fir or pine tree), pointing out how it's widest at the bottom and narrower at the top — just like stacking triangle shapes.

Children will cut out different-sized triangles from green paper and layer them to create their own triangle trees. You can provide wooden, plastic or cardboard triangle shapes in different sizes for the children to draw round.

Once they have cut out their triangles, show the children how they can make small snips with their scissors along the longest side of the triangle to create a fringed effect, mimicking fir trees.

Children then start their collage by sticking their tree trunk on the backing paper. When they start sticking the triangles on, encourage them to begin with the largest triangle at the bottom and work up to the smallest at the top, overlapping each shape slightly. They can then decorate their trees if they'd like — using stickers, cut-outs or drawings of forest animals.

This activity supports early shape recognition and size comparison, as well as fine motor skills (cutting and sticking), and creativity. It also links nicely with discussions about different kinds of trees found in forests, and how they grow tall and strong over time.



Folded Forest

For this activity, you will need:

- Strips of paper (approx. 10–12 cm wide and A4 length works well)
- Pencils
- Child-safe scissors
- Crayons, colouring pencils or felt tips for decorating

Main activity

This fun craft is inspired by the classic paper doll chain – but instead of people, children will create a connected row of trees! Start by showing an example of a folded forest and explain that they'll be making a whole line of trees that grow side by side, just like in a real forest.

Demonstrate how to fold the strip of paper concertina-style (like a fan). You might want to fold a few strips in advance for children who need support with this step.

Next, on the top panel, help children draw a simple tree shape that reaches to both folded edges – the branches or leaves should touch each side. (This is important so that the trees stay connected when cut out.)

Children then cut around their tree shape, making sure **not to cut along the folds on each side**. When they unfold their paper, they'll reveal a magical row of linked trees — a *Folded Forest*!

They can decorate each tree individually with colour, patterns, or little animals. You might even encourage storytelling — “Who lives in your forest?” or “What season is your forest in?”

This activity supports cutting skills, pattern making, and the understanding of how trees grow together in forests. It also offers a great opportunity to talk about the importance of trees working together as a habitat or ecosystem.

You could display the folded forests in a long line across a wall or around the classroom to create a beautiful forest scene. Or you could use them to create number or alphabet lines.



Loop-the-loop Trees

For this activity, you will need:

- Brown paper (for the trunk and branches), and green, red, orange, and yellow paper (for leaves) or plain paper that children can colour
- A4 or A3 blue or white backing paper
- Child-safe scissors
- Glue sticks
- Optional: pre-cut leaf shapes or templates

Main activity

In this activity, children will create a 3D tree using paper loops to form branches, resulting in a textured and dimensional artwork.

Children cut several long strips from the brown paper. They should take one strip to serve as the trunk and glue one half vertically onto the backing paper.

Next, have the children glue just the ends of additional brown strips to the top of the trunk piece on the backing paper. These will become the branches. For each branch, form a loop by curling the strip and gluing its other end back onto the backing paper. This creates a raised, looped branch. Encourage children to count to ten while pressing each glued end to ensure it sticks well.

Cut out simple leaf shapes from the coloured paper. Glue the leaves onto the branches and around the tree to complete the scene.



Leaf Printing

For this activity, you will need:

- A selection of real leaves (fresh leaves work best – try to collect a variety of shapes and sizes – ensure they're clean and dry)
- Twigs or strips of brown paper (if required, for the tree trunks)
- Sheets of thick plain paper (white or coloured)
- Child-safe paints in autumnal or natural colours (e.g. green, red, orange, yellow, brown)
- Paintbrushes or sponges
- Aprons or protective clothing
- Table coverings and damp cloths for easy clean-up

Main activity

In this sensory-rich activity, children explore natural textures by printing with real leaves to create beautiful forest-themed artwork. Ideally, the children will have collected the leaves themselves from the school grounds, or they could be asked to bring some into school.

Begin by inviting children to examine the leaves closely – noticing the different shapes, veins, and textures. Children then choose a leaf and paint the underside using a brush or sponge, making sure to cover all the raised areas.

Once painted, they gently press the leaf onto their paper and rub the back carefully with their fingers to transfer the print. When the leaf is lifted away, it will reveal a detailed print showing its pattern and shape.

Children can repeat the process with different leaves and colours, creating a forest scene or abstract collage of leaf prints. They can use paintbrushes to add tree trunks and branches. Alternatively, they could add strips of brown paper for the trunks, or even real twigs.

Encourage children to talk about the colours they are using and how some trees' leaves change colour with the changing seasons.

