

Leaf Man

by Lois Ehlert • Harcourt, 2005



Reviewed by
Marjie
Van Gunten

The first time I saw this book I knew it had a home in my classroom. It is a work of art, an invitation to dance, a text that begs for a musical interpretation, a joyous invitation to run

outside and celebrate the changing colors in your neighborhood, a science lesson, and a great read-aloud or lap-time picture book for young children.

In her author's note, Ehlert tells us, "Whenever I see a beautiful leaf, I have to pick it up. I can't help myself..." Her leaf collection finds its way into this book on visually stunning die-cut pages that create layers in an autumn landscape. A collage of life-sized leaves is arranged as an autumn harvest of pumpkins and squash. Elsewhere, leaves create darting birds and butterflies. Images of rolling fields and forests stand out on boldly colored, textured paper. The simplicity of the technique, so artfully conceived, is an invitation to run outside to gather your own art supplies as they fall from the trees.

The text is also beautiful in its simplicity: "Leaf man used to live near me, in a pile of leaves. But yesterday the wind blew Leaf Man away. He left no travel plans." The rest of the story imagines the fanciful flight of Leaf Man as he blows "past the chickens, toward the marsh ... over the prairie meadows ... past the spotted cows." The refrain: "A Leaf Man's got to go where the wind blows" punctuates the narrative and provides unity to the theme. The end papers of the book identify all of the leaves that are used in the illustrations and serve as a field guide for a walk in the woods.

There are many ways to incorporate this lovely book into the music classroom. Leaf dances can begin and end with bodies posed in the crinkled shapes of fallen leaves and trace the pathway of a leaf as it falls from a tree or floats on the wind. The dance may need an accompaniment and the text invites exploration of soft dynamics even when the leaf is rushing along on a stiff breeze. In your classroom the refrain may call out for a melody, or it may serve as an A section for a leaf rondo. The layered pages may suggest a study in

musical texture or individual pages may become the "score" for variations on a theme. The aesthetic quality of this beautiful book will heighten the artistic sensitivity of your students as they explore its many music and movement possibilities. "So listen for a rustle in the leaves. Maybe you'll find Leaf Man waiting to go home with you."

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