

Falling for Clay Leaves

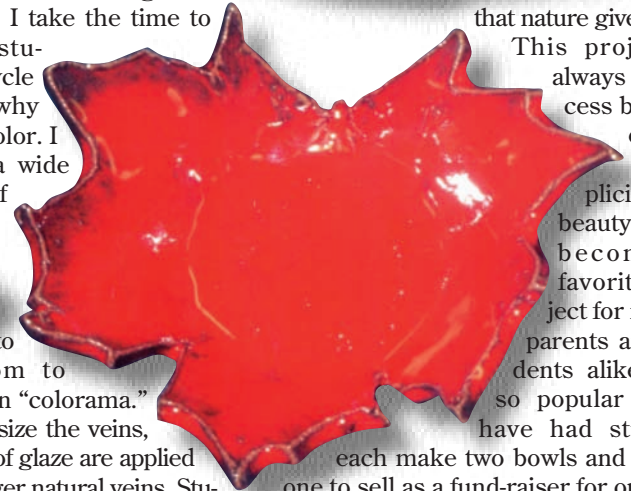
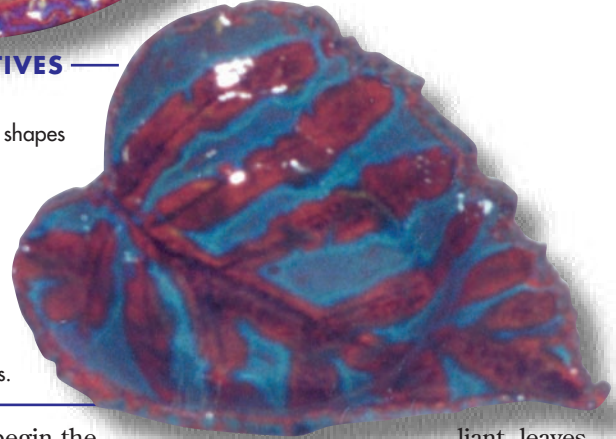
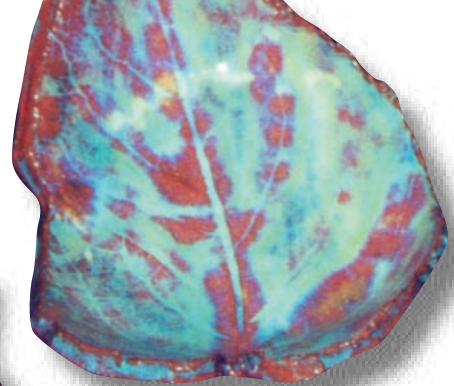
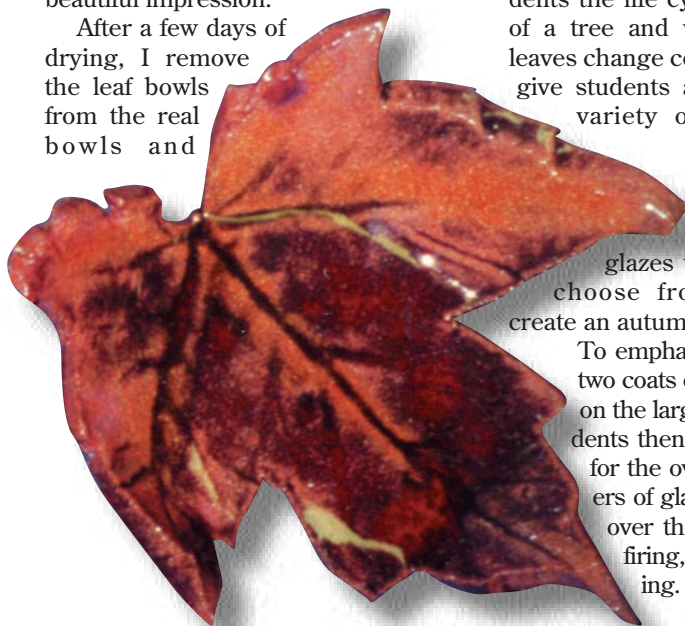
by Christine Kernan

A few years ago, I was browsing in the library searching for project ideas that would tie into our school's science curriculum when I ran across an old clay hand-building book, circa 1950. In it was a project in which ceramic bowls were made, using real leaves. I decided to tailor the project to my needs and give it a try, since many classrooms study the life cycle of a tree. Plus, I feel it's important for students to explore organic shapes in their art work.

The process begins by collecting leaves that were adequate for creating a bowl shape. Rounder, fuller leaves work best, and they should also be fresh and pliable. Dried leaves will not work: they crumble. Red terra-cotta clay is then slabbed out to about 1/4-inch thickness and a leaf is gently rolled onto it.

A potter's needle or a bent paper clip is used to trace around the leaf. The leaf is then set into a shallow bowl. Discarded dessert bowls from our school's cafeteria work great. It is important for students to make sure that they press the leaf gently, but firmly, into the bowl, especially the bottom to avoid it from rocking when finished. The real leaf is then pulled off of the clay, leaving a beautiful impression.

After a few days of drying, I remove the leaf bowls from the real bowls and



LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will...

- observe and examine organic shapes as a source for creating art.
- explore the hand-building technique of slabbing.
- experience a variety of glazing techniques.
- learn basic vocabulary associated with slabbing and glazing.
- understand the life cycle of trees.

MATERIALS

- Fresh leaves
- Rolling pins
- Red-bodied clay
- Potter's needles or bent paper clips
- Small, shallow bowls
- A variety of fall-colored glazes

bisque-fire them. Before I begin the glazing process, I take the time to discuss with students the life cycle of a tree and why leaves change color. I give students a wide variety of

glazes to choose from to create an autumn "colorama."

To emphasize the veins, two coats of glaze are applied on the larger natural veins. Students then choose a second color for the overall top coat. Two layers of glaze can be applied right over the veins. After a second firing, the results are amazing. They look like the bril-

liant leaves that nature gives us.

This project is always a success because of its simplicity and beauty. It has become a favorite project for myself, parents and students alike. It is so popular that I have had students each make two bowls and donate one to sell as a fund-raiser for our local humane society. It's a winner all around. ■

Christine Kernan is the art specialist at Tomahawk (Wisconsin) Elementary School.