



## ANALYZE VISUALS

Study the photographs on this page and on pages 497 and 498. What qualities of autumn leaves are brought out in each photo?

small cells, lying at right angles to the axis of the petiole, react with water, then  
90 come apart, leaving the petioles hanging on by only a few threads of xylem.  
A light breeze, and the leaves are airborne. They glide and swoop, rocking in  
invisible cradles. They are all wing and may flutter from yard to yard on small  
whirlwinds or updrafts, swiveling as they go. Firmly tethered<sup>6</sup> to earth, we **G**  
love to see things rise up and fly—soap bubbles, balloons, birds, fall leaves.  
They remind us that the end of a season is **capricious**, as is the end of life. We  
especially like the way leaves rock, careen, and swoop as they fall. Everyone  
knows the motion. Pilots sometimes do a maneuver called a “falling leaf,” in  
which the plane loses altitude quickly and on purpose, by slipping first to the  
right, then to the left. The machine weighs a ton or more, but in one pilot’s  
100 mind it is a weightless thing, a falling leaf. She has seen the motion before, in  
the Vermont woods where she played as a child. Below her the trees radiate  
gold, copper, and red. Leaves are falling, although she can’t see them fall, as she  
falls, swooping down for a closer view.

At last the leaves leave. But first they turn color and thrill us for weeks  
on end. Then they crunch and crackle under foot. They *shush*, as children  
drag their small feet through the leaves heaped along the curb. Dark, slimy  
mats of leaves cling to one’s heels after a rain. A damp, stuccolike mortar<sup>7</sup> of  
semidecayed leaves protects the tender shoots with a roof until spring, and  
makes a rich humus.<sup>8</sup> An occasional bulge or ripple in the leafy mounds signals  
110 a shrew or a field mouse tunneling out of sight. Sometimes one finds in fossil  
stones the imprint of a leaf, long since disintegrated, whose outlines remind us  
how detailed, vibrant, and alive are the things of this earth that perish. **H**

## **G** GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Reread lines 91–93.

Ackerman effectively uses the **participial phrases** “rocking in invisible cradles” and “swiveling as they go” to vividly describe the falling leaves.

## **capricious**

(kə-prīsh’əs)

*adj.* impulsive,  
unpredictable

## **H** AUTHOR’S PURPOSE

Think about Ackerman’s purpose in the last paragraph. How is her purpose supported by her **diction** and use of **imagery**?

6. **tethered**: fastened, as if with a rope.

7. **stuccolike mortar**: a bonding material that is like a soft, sticky plaster.

8. **humus**: decomposed organic matter that provides nutrients for plants.