



Sense Test

Grade Level: K-6
Length: 10-30 Minutes
www.pwsrcac.org/lessons

NGSS Standards

Foundational sensory awareness that allows students to better observe nature.

Crosscutting Concepts

Patterns Observed patterns in nature guide organization and classification and prompt questions about relationships and causes underlying them.

Related Resources

Pair With Meet a Tree Lesson;
Local Plant Studies Lesson

Overview

All five human senses are important in observing nature.

Objectives

- Students will use senses other than sight to observe natural objects.
- Students will become familiar with differences and similarities between natural objects.

Materials

- 3-5 Cloth or Paper Bags
- 3-5 Natural Objects to Feel (shells, fur, feathers, etc.)
- 3-5 Small, Opaque Containers (film canisters work well)
- 3-5 Natural Objects to Smell (spruce needles, soil, algae, etc.)
- 3-5 Natural Objects to Taste (mint, spruce needles, berries, etc.)
- Blindfolds

Background

This activity is meant to foster sensory exploration in a classroom environment when outside exploration is not possible. It works well in conjunction with outdoor activities.

Preparation

1. Place one “feely object” in each of the cloth bags.
2. Place one “smelly object” in each of the opaque containers.

Notes

3. Keep the “tasty objects” hidden for now. Check student allergies to make sure that the “tasty objects” are okay for the students to consume.

Introducing the Lesson

Tell the story of the elephant in the dark, based on an ancient Indian parable and widely adapted throughout the world. An elephant was brought into a dark room and a group of people that had never seen or experienced an elephant before were brought in to describe it. The person who touched the elephant’s tail described the creature as a rope. The person who touched the elephant’s leg said it was like a pillar. The one who touched the trunk described a tree branch. The one who felt the elephant’s ear thought of it as a fan, and the one who touched the tusk described the elephant as a water pipe. Explain how everyone will have a different understanding of an object depending on his or her own observations, and that it is important to use many senses when exploring nature. The more senses a person uses, the more they will discover in the natural world.

Activity

1. Begin with the feely bags. Have all students sit in a circle. Before you pass around the first bag, ask students to use their sense of touch to observe the object in the bag. They should not look into the bag and should keep their observations to themselves rather than saying anything out loud as the bag goes around. Once the bag has been passed completely around the circle, ask the students to describe—not identify—the feel of the object with one word.

>>Educator Tip: It is helpful to demonstrate examples of descriptive words and make sure students don’t try to name the object. Frequently remind students not to “give it away” if they think they know what the object is.

2. Students can share their descriptive words one at a time or everyone can say it at the same time. Reveal the object to the group and pass it around. Ask students if it feels different once they can see it. Pass around the remaining 2-4 bags.
3. Move on to the smellies. Have students sit or stand in a circle. Remind students not to look in the canisters (you may want to poke holes in the tops so you can leave them on and reduce the temptation to peek) and to make their observations silently. Pass the first smelly around. Once it has gone all the way around the circle, have students share a descriptive word about the smell.

Reveal the object to the world and pass it around. Ask students if it smells different now that they can feel and see it. Pass around the remaining 2-4 smellies.

4. End with the taste test. Have students wash their hands. Sit in a circle. Explain that they do not have to taste anything that they don't want to, but that everything is safe to eat. Have each student put on a blindfold. Give each student a sample of the first food to taste; ask them to think, without speaking, of a word to describe the taste of the food. Then have the group share their descriptions. Tell the students what the food is. Continue with 2-4 more things to taste.

Wrap-up

Asks students if they were surprised by the taste, smell, or feel of anything. Remind them how important it is to use all of their senses when observing the natural world. Give examples of how senses are important to understanding the whole picture—the sound of birds calling, the smell of sap from a freshly cut tree, the feel of spongy ground beneath your feet.

If you would like to include sensory exploration of hearing, ask students to construct a “sound map.” This activity works best outdoors but can be conducted in a classroom as well. Spread students out as much as feasible and have them sit quietly with an index card and pencil. Instruct students to put an “x” in the middle of the card to represent themselves and mark the sounds they hear on their map over the next 2-3 minutes. Each student should use their own symbols (exclamation point, bird, star, etc.) to mark the sounds on the map, arranged around the “x” based on the location of the sound relative to the student. If a similar sound is heard from different directions, the student should use the same symbol in both locations. Ask students to share their sound maps at the end.

Pair With

- Meet a Tree Lesson Plan
- Local Plant Studies Lesson Plan