



Michigan Nature Association

Protecting Michigan's Natural Heritage Since 1952

www.michigannature.org 517-655-5655

Observation Skills

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

1. Identify the 5 senses (sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell)
2. Give examples of how wildlife use their senses in nature.

Overview: By participating in several short sensory-oriented activities, students use listen carefully, take visual “snapshots,” and look closely, to gather information about the world around them.

Materials Needed

- Cards with descriptive words (see below)
- Egg cartons
- Paper Bags
- Film canister with paper clips inside
- Film canisters filled with cotton balls & scents (2 of each scent, you can use perfume, cologne, air freshener, spices etc.).

Introduction (5 min.)

Tell the participants we are going to explore the forest today.

What will we find in the forest? (Have them name animals and plants that they think might live in this forest).

What senses do animals use to find food, escape from predators, etc.?

Do they know the five senses?

The five senses are taste, touch, hearing, smell, and vision.

Which senses do you feel are most important to humans? We are going to do some activities that use our senses.

Activity: Sound Map

What do we call the part of an animal that hears sounds?

Do all animals' ears look the same?

Give a few examples (rabbits, elephants, dogs, cats, etc.).

Why would it be important for animals to be able to hear well?

Ask students what kinds of sounds we might hear in the forest. Peak their interests by asking who thinks they will be able to hear 5 or more different sounds? Ask students to close their eyes, sit quietly and listen. Each time they hear a sound, they should point in the direction that the sound comes from. Continue sitting until students have heard at least five sounds. Have students open their eyes and share with each other a description of the different sounds that they heard. Could they accurately identify each sound?

Activity: Forest Foray

Students use their senses of smell, touch, and sight to observe the variety of objects in the forest. Students work in pairs, and each pair has a container (plastic shoe box or paper bag) for collecting their objects. Distribute a card with one of the following descriptive words, and have each pair find several *examples* of each:

- a) soft/hard
- b) dull/sharp
- c) wet/dry
- d) smooth/rough
- e) three odors
- f) five different colors
- g) shiny/dull
- h) fuzzy/no hair

Instruct students to NOT pick flowers, as they won't know which might be sensitive species (such as orchids/lady slippers in the spring). Avoid collecting insects—although it is fine to look at them! The item has to fit in the container. After 5-10 minutes of collecting, have students sit in a circle, and share their collections with the other students. Repeat as many times as you like, giving pairs new cards.

Activity: Fox & Mouse Game

Tell the students that now we are going to play a game that illustrates how a fox uses sound to catch its dinner! First, ask students if they know what foxes like to eat. Next, ask how foxes are able to locate mice or rabbits---using their ears!

Have the students stand in a big circle, and model how the "Fox & Mouse" game is played. Have the fox close their eyes so it can't see; the mouse's eyes remain open. The mouse must be constantly shaking a small film canister with paper clips inside to make noise which allows the fox to know where the mouse is and to try and catch it. At the end, discuss how predators find their food, and how prey keep from getting eaten.

Activity: Camera

Organize students into groups of two, with one person's eyes closed. The person with their eyes open leads their partner to a special location, taps their shoulder, and the partner opens their eyes for 30 seconds 'to take a picture' of whatever is in front of them. Then the partner closes their eyes again and gets led back to the starting point. Share with the group what they took a picture of: bark of a tree, sky and treetops overhead, a flower, fallen leaves on the ground, etc. Repeat with the other person.

Activity: Get in Touch with Trees

Organize students into groups of two, with one person's eyes closed. The non-blindfolded person leads their partner to a tree and allows the blindfolded person to feel the tree for 5 minutes gathering as much info about the tree as they can (location and height of branches, feel of bark, shape and size of leaves, etc.). Then both partners return to the starting point. Remove the blindfold from the one partner and see if they can find their special tree. Repeat with the other person blindfolded.

Activity: Smell-y Game

Pass out one film canister to each person. Have them use their noses to find the other student that has a canister with the same smell as they do. After everyone has found their partner, have students find something in nature that has a strong smell (pine needles, soil, flower, etc.). Allow students to share their “smelly” items in a “smelling session.”

Test What You Learned!

Ask students to list their five senses.

Did we use all five of our senses today?

Which one(s) did we *not* use?

Would it be hard if you couldn't see, hear, taste, smell or feel?

Do different animals rely on some senses more than others?

Today, we used our senses and careful observation skills to learn about the world around us, just like scientists do!

Sources

Cornell, Joseph. /Sharing Nature with Children/. 1998 (2nd Edition). Dawn Publications, Nevada City, CA.

Cornell, Joseph. /Sharing Nature with Children II/. 1989. Dawn Publications, Nevada City, CA.

American Forest Foundation. /Project Learning Tree/. 1997. Fifth Edition. American Forest Foundation, Washington, D.C.

Smells	No Smell
Soft	Hard
Shiny	Dull
Smooth	Rough
Wet	Dry
Fuzzy	No Fuzz
Green	Yellow
Small	Large
Red	Round
Square	Triangle