



Sense Walk

Going on a nature walk is always an adventure for young learners. The world is full of wonders and keen investigators make discoveries with enthusiasm. From the smallest insect to the biggest tree, children are willing and ready to learn all that they can.

Activity Time:

15 minutes

Setting:

Outdoors

Materials:

None required

Grade Level:

Grade K-2

Subject Areas:

Fine arts, physical education, science

Group Size:

Any

Keywords:

Animals, plants, vertebrates, invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds, mammals, fish, producers, consumers, decomposers

Summary

Students are directed to use their five senses one at a time to experience and observe things differently. Student experiences can be recorded in a journal.

Objectives

Students will:

- Use the five senses to make and interpret observations
- Share with others information obtained by observing
- Communicate their observations, experiences, and thinking in a variety of ways
- Demonstrate the ability to observe their surroundings
- Describe features of their immediate environment
- Describe features and basic needs of local plants and animals

Making Connections

Learning to observe the smaller details of the surrounding environment is an important skill to develop. An ability to truly observe what is seen is crucial to understanding the complexities and wonders of nature. The natural world is too often seen as a green

blur and as such, when changes occur they can go unnoticed. An invasion of non-native plant or the sudden disappearance of a once common bird species are important indicators of environmental disruption. Noticing when the first buds of spring arrive or the last leaves of autumn fall bring a sense of continuity and connection with the natural world and add a richness to daily life.

Background

Humans are predominately visual creatures. Often many experiences are lost due to a reduction in the use of our other four senses. Part of appreciating and knowing nature comes from enjoying and learning about experiences such as the smell of rain in a forest after a long dry spell or the way wind feels on a cheek. Many plants in the forest have distinct smells and some are even edible.

Every child should learn to “shake hands” with a spruce and to feel Douglas fir bark. Birding by sound is also a unique and valuable skill and easy to learn if practiced. Many bird sounds are unique to seasons and coincide with plant berry formation. A familiar sound in the forest comes from the Swainson’s



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Thrush who is also called the salmonberry bird because its arrival in our coastal forests occurs around the same time as the salmon berry bushes are just bearing fruit. Its song consists of upwardly spiraling notes creating an echoing type of sound that is repeated often and can be heard late after sunset. The bird is rarely seen but its song is, for some, the hallmark of childhood memories of our western forests.

Procedure

Warm Up

Select an appropriate short trail or walk for the students. If possible walk the route a few days before and just before the activity (first thing in the morning) to ensure a safe and dependable trail. No one likes an unexpected interruption in a guided walk because of a fallen tree, washed out trail, or construction. If conducting the activity on the schoolyard be aware of and set the timing so that the schedules of other users will not distract the students during their sense walk.

The Activity

1. Tell your students they will be **going on a sense walk to observe and investigate the local environment. Review what the five senses** are and

what they are used for.

2. When you get outside, **begin the observations with the weather.**

Ask students if they can:

SMELL wind, rain, sun.

HEAR wind, rain

SEE sun, clouds, rain, wind,

TOUCH sun, rain, wind,

TASTE sun, wind, cloud, rain/snow

3. Walk to the trail or to an area where there are trees, shrubs or other plants.

Ask students to:

SMELL a tree or bush

HEAR a tree or bush

SEE a tree or bush

TOUCH— how do the different trees feel, ask students to close eyes while feeling and describe the feeling.

TASTE – teacher lead. Best choices for tasting are tree needles (Western hemlock, Spruce, grand fir or Douglas fir). They are very flavourful and have a high citrus content. Although conifers, Western Red and Yellow Cedars have flat scaly type needles and a property that make their wood a natural insect repellent is present in the needles and as such they are not fit for eating. Poison hemlock is not a tree and not related at all to the Western hemlock.

In First Nations history, tree needles were eaten to help prevent scurvy in the winter. Try several varieties and ages. Are the students able to determine a different taste among the three conifers, what of young growth verses old, do they taste different?

Be sure to select a tree that is at least 35 meters from roads as conifers are good at cleaning air and you want to select needles that are clean and fresh.

Or try licorice fern root from the ferns that grow on Maples, if you can find one low enough to sample. A little piece of the root goes a long way.

NOTE: *If you are not completely certain about the plants you are observing, do not sample them. Instead, bring something you can give to students to taste. Have them close their eyes and give them a little piece of something, licorice for example, and ask them to identify what it is. Students should also be aware that tasting of wild plants should be done only with the supervision and help of an adult.*

4. At this point you may wish to wrap up the activity. However, **if time allows move on to another place and repeat the observations** for hearing, sight, smell and touch. Ask the students

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to look for something they have not noticed before.

Wrap Up

Allow time for a **short sharing circle**. Ask students if they saw/heard/smelled/ touched something they had not noticed before.

Assessment

Create a six-page booklet for each student. On each page students make one sensory observation. For younger students, a drawing is enough. Older students should use pictures and words. On the sixth page, have students record something they had not noticed before or their favourite observation. Assess for understanding of the differences and uses of each of the five senses.

Extensions

Make props for color, shape and pattern card walks:

- Cut up color chip paint cards (from local paint store samples) and glue onto card stock, laminate if desired.
- Shapes can be drawn onto card stock with help of the shape outline ruler and

colored in using pencil crayons then laminated.

- Create pattern cards for spirals, circles, horizontal and vertical lines, squares (spruce bark), etc.

Hand these cards out to the students during the walk and have them try to match them with things found in the local environment.

You can also create cloud formation cards and star identification cards for different seasons and daytime/night-time observations.

Try this observation and memory activity.

- Take a small bag or box along on the nature walk and gather samples of common natural items from the local environment – rocks, fallen leaves, cones, fallen moss, etc.
- At some point along the way, gather students around so everyone can see. Take 5 to 10 things (depending on student ability) from the box. The students have 10 to 20 seconds to look and memorize the objects, and then the objects are put back in the box.
- Students are given 1 or 2 minutes to scatter and find as many of the same items as

they can.

- Call students back into a circle and have them place their objects on the ground in front of them.
- One by one, pull out the items from the box and have the students show the similar items they found.
- Then take 15 seconds for everyone to return their items to where they were found.

