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5 ALIVE – Perceptual Awareness

*Activities to Enhance Sensory Awareness, a Tool
for Developing Our Connection to the Natural Environment*

Subject Area: Humanities

Core Curriculum Content Standards: 3.3.A, 3.4.A, 5.1.A, 5.5.A, 9.2.C

SESSION DESCRIPTION

The session helps students note how four of our senses (sight, smell, touch, and hearing) can be useful tools in learning about the natural environment. The class consists of indoor and outdoor activities that will foster exercising one, or several, senses at a time. Comparisons are also made to how plants and animals use senses to interact with each other and the environment. Students conclude their experiences by reflecting orally, and/or in writing, on how sensory information connects them with the natural environment.

OBJECTIVES

1. Students will infer information about the natural environment by seeing, smelling, touching, and listening.
2. Students will examine and explain how sensory input from the environment creates a relationship between the individual and the natural world.
3. Students will practice self-expression about their experiences.

MATERIALS

Teaching materials for this class and instructions on how to use them can be found in the large gray field bags stored in the hallway closets of Kittatinny Hall.

Envelopes in field bags are labeled with titles in bold lettering indicated below and contain the following objects and/or laminated teaching tool cards:

- Unnatural Trail/Objects
- 5 Alive – Biology
- Feely Bags
- Blindfolds
- Guess What I Am
- Sound Shakers
- Smell Jars Activity
- Color Patches
- Which Rock is Your Rock?
- Sensory Questions
- Photographs
- Adjective Hunt cards
- peppermint oil
- Non-verbal Communication cards
- paper and pencils

PROCEDURES

1. Begin the session by randomly distributing the seven *Sensory Question* cards to incite students' interest about the senses.
2. Explain that the activities they will be doing, both indoors and outdoors, are designed to help them develop their sensory awareness, a skill that can be of use in exploring the natural world.
3. Choose a variety of sensory activities from the activity lists below.

ACTIVITIES

Touch

Feely Bags – Natural objects of various shapes and textures are in cloth bags. The students will feel one object, or each object, then guess what it is. They describe the way it feels, verbally or in writing. They can also draw the mystery object as accurately as they can just by handling it.

Meet a Tree – Use the technique from Acclimatization (Van Matre, 1972) entitled: “Find Your Friend in the Forest.” Pair up the students and blindfold one of the pair. The blindfolded student is spun around to be disoriented, and is then led to a tree which s/he must investigate thoroughly. *Feel the tree’s skin. Is it smooth or rough? Is there anything growing on it? How wide is the tree at your head height? At your knee level?* After a full investigation, the student is led back to the starting point. Spin the student once more, take off their blindfold, and have him/her go out to find their tree. Observations can be recorded in their journals. Have them switch partners and do it again.

Recognize Your Discovery – Give each student a bag (brown bag, manila envelope, or cloth bag). Instruct them to separate and go a short distance to look for a unique natural object from the land. Encourage them to both respect the forest and not destroy plants, as well as be creative. After they select their object, they are to place it in the bag, close it, and return it to you. The teacher then randomly selects a bag, uses adjectives to describe its contents, and as soon as the student realizes that it is his/her object, s/he is to let you know.

Sight

Blindfolded Walk – Students get into pairs. One student is blindfolded and led on a gentle walk by his/her partner. During this walk they are to receive, through their 4 available senses, as much information as they can. They then switch partners and offer their partner a similar opportunity. Afterwards, they can write a list of, or describe what they sensed during the walk. Also, the entire group could be blindfolded, except for one person in front who is sighted. The selected person leads the group on a gentle walk. The teacher keeps an eye out for safety.

Photography / Awareness Walk – Select a set of laminated photographs of SOC buildings and sites, either the set for the Sequoia campus or for the Wapalanne campus. Give each student a photo and take them on a quiet walk through the site areas. Ask them to observe their surroundings as they walk. Have them stop the group when they sight the object(s) in their photo. (*Answer Key* map included in the photograph set. W = Wapalanne and S = Sequoia.)

One of a Kind – Distribute one particular type of leaf or a rock to each person. Tell them they must familiarize themselves with their item so that they can pick it out of a pile of similar ones. Give them time to become acquainted with their item, then compile all of them together, with some additional ones mixed in. Each student must find his or her rock or leaf.

Cloud Gazing – Take students to an open view area, such as the Corral. Ask them to lie down on the grass, if possible. Suggest that they consider the shapes of the cloud patterns and what they bring to mind - animals, people, objects, and events. Ask them to compose a story based on what they have seen and imagined and share it with classmates.

Color Chips – Give each student a color patch. While walking to sites for other sensory awareness activities, ask them to notice and point out any objects that match their color patches.

Guess What I Am – Show SOC’s partially hidden pictures. (Picture glued to cardboard with sheet of construction paper stapled in the corner. Construction paper has deliberate cut-out areas over distinctive sections of picture.) Students are to make comments about noticeable features, including colors, shapes, and features of the natural area/ object/ animal in the picture. They then guess what the picture is.

Unnatural Trail – Before class starts, set up the “Unnatural Trail” at a selected site in the forest. During the class, take the students into the area where you have them form a single file line and instruct them to walk down the trail in silence until they reach the end. (Space them so that they are at least four feet apart.) They are to stay on the trail, take a mental count of how many objects, not native to a forest area, they see. They are not to point to objects or give any hint of discovery if they see them. When they reach the end of the trail, they tell the number of objects they saw. When every student has done this, select one student at a time to slowly walk through the area, pick up one object, and show the site where it was positioned.

Predator/Prey Camouflage – One student is selected to be predator and wears a blindfold. Remaining students begin the game with one finger touching the predator. While predator begins counting down loudly from 10, prey run away and hide. When finished counting, predator removes blindfold and remains in the same position while sighting prey. When a classmate is sighted, predator calls out his/her name and specifies where they hiding. Students return to predator’s den after they are found.

Perceptual Clues – One person with a boxed (or bagged) natural item goes into another room, studies the object, and returns to main room. The person then uses adjectives to describe the object, without saying its name. Classmates begin guessing.

Adjective Hunt – Assign descriptive adjective word cards to pairs of students *e.g. scaly, diamond-shaped, eroded, textured, peeling, encrusted*. Have them collect 3-4 natural objects that have these characteristics, without destroying the environment, and display their examples to the group. They can give verbal clues. The rest of the students will attempt to guess their selected adjective.

Hearing

Noah’s Ark – Each student is secretly given the name of an animal, then blindfolded. By imitating the sound the animal makes, the group must line up from the smallest to the largest.

Bat and Moth – Ask students: *Describe the relationship between the bat and the moth. How does the bat locate its food?* A bat uses echolocation and sends out a high-pitched sound which bounces off the moth and back to the bat’s highly sensitive ears. Then the bat zeros in on the sound. Tell students that they are going to do some role playing. One student will be a bat and will be blindfolded. Another student will be a moth and be able to see. The remaining students form a large circle around the bat and the moth. Their job is to keep the bat and moth inside the (habitat) circle. The bat attempts to catch the moth by tagging it. In order to find the moth, the bat says “bat.” Every time the bat says “bat,” the moth must say “moth.” The game continues until every student has a chance to play the bat or the moth role.

Sound Shakers – The teacher distributes pairs off sound shakers (film containers holding a matching set of items *e.g. 2 paper clips, 2 small pine cones*) and gives one sound shaker to each student. Students then walk around, shaking their container, until they find their partner shaking the container holding the same object.

Smell

Olfactory “Smell” Containers – The teacher distributes small glass containers, filled with dried herbs. Students are asked to use words to describe the smell or state what it reminds them of. After a few attempts at guessing, students can look at the laminated picture of the herb contained in that jar.

Forest Odors – While outdoors, teacher shows students plants in the forest that are odiferous, *e.g. birch branch, teaberry, and skunk cabbage*.

Peppermint Oil – Teacher sprays several trees on Piney Point with peppermint oil at the approximate head height of students. Students follow the trail by sniffing. (*Not effective during the winter.*)

Multi-sensory activities

Sense Chart or Sensory Hike – Have students use their notebooks or give them a sheet of paper to record observations. Leave a blank column down the left side of the chart. Across the top, head four columns with words: see, hear, touch, and smell. In the left-hand column, record objects observed on the sensory hike. In the columns below each of the senses, record sensory words which are descriptive of the object. *e.g. A tree which looks tall and straight, sounds wispy in the breeze, has scaly bark and pointy needles that have a pungent smell when crushed.*

Non-verbal Communication – Distribute cards to students. Ask individual students to pantomime the sentence message on their card. Classmates try to guess what the sentence says.

From the Journalist's Perspective – Go out on a hike on SOC's land. Observe the area. Look for healthy environmental signals, such as animal tracks or droppings, and plant varieties. Also, listen for the variety (or absence) of sounds. Ask students to enter a time warp machine and step back in time 500 years. Ask them to describe the land at that time. Jump ahead 500 years and enter the community. Discuss and/or describe it. (e.g. Stokes State Forest is a protected land area, BUT the land will be different, probably due to climate change...new plants and animals... BUT not developed.)

SUMMARY

We get our information about the environment through our senses. By fully utilizing all senses, we can enhance our enjoyment of nature. Engage students in a discussion and ask them to describe how they feel about having increased sensory awareness. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings about the usefulness of the activities, and how they will apply increased skills to their future learning experiences in other subject areas. *e.g. When walking through my neighborhood, I will be more alert to spotting signs of animal life, including humans, and visit the library to find out more about the animal life population volume. I will get figures for two time periods: 1. early settlers' arrival and 2. current population data.*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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