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

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:

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

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 reach in a bag and 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 the blindfold, and have him/her go out to find the same 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
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.
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 to 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 of 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; I will 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

LESSON CONTRIBUTORS
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