

Sensory Adventure

Grade K-2

Supplies

- Sniff samples – use numbered containers covered in the same type of paper with small holes in the top so that you can smell the contents. Aromatic contents can be powder, dry leaves, or a cotton ball soaked in fragrant liquid. Use familiar aromas, we recommend the following:
 - Cinnamon (use a cinnamon stick if possible. If using powder, cover it with a small piece of paper, so that the contents won't be inhaled when smelling)
 - mint
 - basil
 - vanilla
 - eucalyptus
- Touch samples – cut the following into leaf shapes of the same size. Put each leaf into a different paper bag.
 - thick plastic
 - fine sandpaper
 - velvet
 - Felt
- Color samples – use 'color chip' samples from a paint store.
 - various greens
 - various browns
 - Flower colors (according to flowers you will be using)
 - Flowers
 - Hand lenses

Background information

Explain the senses to students: hearing, smell, touch, sight. People perceive the world differently from one another. Some people have a really good sense of sight, while others may have a better sense of smell or hearing. Animals have different sense strengths too. Some animals can hear much better than humans and some have extra sharp senses of smell. Some wild animals see very well and others cannot see at all.

If we focus on one sense at a time, we can learn a lot about the places we are visiting.

Activity: Explore the Senses

Listen

Take students outside, and ask them to sit down comfortably, close their eyes, and to be as quiet as possible. Ask them to listen carefully for a few minutes and to try to identify each sound they hear. When instructed, students should open their eyes and raise their hands to share what they heard. What is the sound? Did anyone else hear the same sound? Is it a sound of nature, or one made by humans or by a machine? There are a variety of sounds that you may hear depending on where you are: cars, people talking, birds, squirrels, insects, leaves blowing in the wind.

Now students should cup their hands behind their ears. Ask them if they can hear what's in front of them better. Ask them to turn their heads. What gets louder? Animals such as deer and rabbits, have ears that they can move around to amplify sounds coming from different directions.

Smell

While seated, pass around each numbered sniff container and ask students what they smell. It may be helpful to ask them to discuss with a partner before asking the group for guesses – but ask them to wait until each partner has a chance to smell before sharing their guesses! Train your nose to sense the difference between each container. Depending on the students' age, you can also ask them to write down their guesses for each container and then ask them to share after smelling all the containers. After sharing, tell them what is in each container.

Why do you think some plants smell the way they do? What animals might they be trying to attract or repulse? Do all animals have a sense of smell?

Touch

Ask students to work in pairs. Give each pair of students a bag with the fake 'leaves' and ask them to take turns putting a hand in the bag and feeling a leaf. Describe the feel of the leaf to your partner.

Why do you think different leaves feel different? What have you felt that is similar?

You can also use a box and cover it with a cloth. Put a slit in the cloth so students can put their hands in and feel whatever's inside. Put rocks, leaves, dirt, and other textured objects (seed pods, pine cones, lichens, acorns, and seeds for a bit more of a challenge) and ask students to guess, without looking, what they're feeling in the box.

Sight

Ask students what color the flowers are. Sometimes people see different colors in different ways. For example, some people would argue that a color is red, when others think it looks orange. This can be caused by differences in lighting, but it can also just be that we are seeing things differently. Choose colors that are very similar to each other and explore if students can tell the difference.

What we see is not necessarily the same as what insects or other animals see. Bees, for example, do not see red. Insects can see some colors that humans can't see because insects can also see in the ultra-violet range of the light spectrum. Pollinators look not only at the principal color of the flower, but they are often directed by lines and spots (called nectar guides) that decorate the petals of many flowers.

At the Santa Barbara Botanic Garden

Use your senses to explore! Yerba Buena, different sages, California Bay, and Monardella are just a few of the fragrant plants that can be found at the Garden. Horsetails, lemonadeberry, coast live oak and hummingbird sage have different textures. Be careful when touching that you don't accidentally rub poison oak! Although poison oak is not a good idea to touch, we can see that depending on the time of year, poison oak has a very different color. In different seasons in the garden, different colors that can be found – both on flowers and leaves – look around and describe what you see. If you're quiet and listen, sometimes the rustling of leaves can give away the location of a lizard, bird, or squirrel.

This sensory adventure uses the skills above to explore the Garden in a whole new way and helps students slow down and observe things they may have never noticed before.