



Learning to Look, Looking to See

TEACHER RESOURCE



Grade Level: Pre-K, K-4
Subject Areas: Language Arts, Environmental Education
Duration: one 20-40 minute session
Group Size: Any
Setting: outdoors, indoors, the Alaska Zoo
Key Terms: observe, see, appreciate, sense

Objectives

Students will (1) describe differences seen in the environment as the result of casual and detailed observation and (2) give reasons for the importance of looking closely at any environment.

Method

Students write what they remember seeing in a familiar setting, then check their accuracy and discuss the results. Next the students apply those experiences and new skills to an unfamiliar outdoor setting (e.g. the Alaska Zoo).

Materials

- Note pads or paper.
- Clipboards.
- Pens or pencils.

Background

Looking and seeing can be entirely different things depending on the purpose for looking. Students look at classrooms every day at school, but if questioned about simple details, they may find that they are totally unaware of the existence of certain objects, colors, sounds and textures. As students walk through a neighborhood, they probably have learned to notice only those things that are necessary in getting to and from a certain destination.

Students may not see a soaring hawk although they may be looking at the sky. Students may not see a community of ants even though they are looking at the sidewalk. During a walk in the woods, students may leave the trail to see a tree better—and then not see the wildflower even though they are looking at the forest floor.

Observation skills are acquired easily. The three elements of observation are (1) to learn to be a careful observer, even if there is no sight to see; (2) to be aware of the surroundings; and (3) to recognize any part of the environment as being part of a larger whole. At a certain level, people are members of any community. When entering an ecological community, people are a part of that community just as if it were a school community or a neighborhood community. As a result, people have an opportunity and an obligation to be responsible members of each community.

Procedure

1. *For formal classroom setting:* Begin this activity by covering a familiar spot such as a desk, bulletin board, other wall display or table with a large sheet before the students come into the room.
For informal setting: Begin this activity with a discussion on observation; then ask the students to leave the room or just cover their eyes. Place a sheet over something that had been very visible to the students during the observation discussion.
For both settings: Distribute paper to each student and ask them to write down all the things they think are being covered by the sheet. When their lists are completed, ask them to turn their paper over on the desk. Remove the sheet. On the other side of the paper, have the students make a list of what is actually under the sheet. What kinds of things did they remember? What kinds of things were most often missed? Ask why they think this happened.



Learning to Look, Looking to See

TEACHER RESOURCE

2. Have the students go outdoors and pick one spot near a tree, a fence, a playground or a field. Each student should find a spot alone, at least 50 feet from the neighboring student. Allow approximately five minutes for the observation. The students should look in a broad sense of the word—seeing, touching, listening and smelling. Instruct them to record everything they “see” (on paper or in their minds).
3. After the observation period, bring the students together for a discussion, centering on the process they went through as well as their list of sightings. Did they focus on any one area for a long time? Did they continue to shift their gaze? How did they focus their hearing and smelling? Cupping hands around their ears to simulate animal hearing has a dramatic effect on abilities to hear. Blindfolding a person seems to encourage better hearing as well. Moistening the undersurface of the nose and the entire upper lip area increases smelling ability. REMINDER: The role of an educator is to teach students how to look and see without telling them what to see.
4. Discuss with the students about the joy and importance of seeing as fully as possible. This is a way of appreciating, respecting and learning more about the world.

Technology Connection

- Use the Internet to find out what wildlife lives in your area.

Classroom Extensions

1. Squint your eyes. What patterns and shapes do you see?
2. What else did you see? Any living things? What were they? Were they plant or animal?
3. Categorize what was observed as living or nonliving—and/or as animal, plant or mineral.
4. Distinguish between qualitative and quantitative observations. Describe the differences between inferences and observations.

Alaska Zoo Extension

Have the students complete one of the scavenger hunt worksheets while on your field trip at the Alaska Zoo.

Aquatic Extension

What is the closest water source? It might be a drinking fountain, a sprinkler hose, a pond, a stream or a beach. Try to imagine it clearly in your mind. Draw a picture showing as much detail as possible of the water and its immediate environment. Include any wildlife and vegetation that may be in the environment near and in the water. Now, or as soon as possible, go to the place in the picture. Make a written list of anything you did not include in your drawing. Add to your drawing to make it complete.

Evaluation

1. Think of three people in your life. Using your memory, write down the color of their eyes or hair and a description of what they were wearing the last time you were together.
2. Without disturbing, find and observe an insect. Pretend that you are making a report about what you observed to an entomologist (insect biologist). Include detailed observations. Explain the potential value of such detailed observations for two audiences: scientists and the general public.

Reprinted with permission from Project WILD, *Project WILD K-12 Curriculum & Activity Guide* [or *Project WILD Aquatic K-12 Curriculum & Activity Guide* as applicable]. © Copyright 2009, 2008, 2007, 2006, 2005, 2004, 2003, 2002, 2001, 2000, 1992, 1985, and 1983 by the Council for Environmental Education. The complete Activity Guide can be obtained by attending a Project WILD workshop. For more information, contact the Project WILD Office in your state. For contact information, please visit our national web site, www.projectwild.org. **For local information about Project WILD in Alaska, contact Brenda Duty** brenda.duty@alaska.gov (907)267-2216.