

CLASSIFICATION BY SENSES

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Some of the following games have been adapted from the Earth Education publication *Sunship Earth* by Steve Van Matre, and *Sharing Nature with Children* by Joseph Bharat Cornell. Others can be found in the Royal Tasmanian Botanical Gardens/Australian Early Childhood Association publication *From Small Seeds... a green world grows* by Andrew Smith. The latter publication contains a complete program from environmental awareness to tree planting.

Classification of plants can be a daunting prospect for students and their teachers, but in its most simple form is merely the identification of differences. Objects can be classified according to their shape, size, colour, smell, age, location and so on. Of course many of these categories are in fact used in the scientific classification of plants into genus and species. The classification games described here begin at the beginning. They are appropriate for a range of groups, because they relate to the stage of environmental awareness rather than age or year of schooling. Thus a year 7 student may have less understanding than a year 3

student. They also are a good means of extending observation skills in a general sense, encouraging students to look more carefully at the world around them. The session is therefore best used as an introduction to other activities.

HUG - A - TREE

Aim; that children recognise that trees are different.

Divide into pairs. Each pair has a blindfold. One partner is led blindfolded to a tree which he/she must explore using the senses of touch and smell. Use different parts of the body to feel the tree - hands, cheeks, tongue, toes. To determine the size of the tree, give it a hug. Note where branches emerge. Can you feel the depth of shade? Are there identifying lumps, bumps, textures? Return to the beginning point, spin the player and then remove the blindfold. The player must then find the tree.

Why were you able to tell the difference? Why are trees different? Age, location, competition, and type (species) all contribute to making every tree different.

RAINBOW SPLATS

Aim; that children look carefully at minor differences.

First some questions... *Close your eyes. What colour is bark?* (many children will answer brown). *What colour are leaves?* (Most will answer green).

Then a story... *Yesterday there was a fantastic storm over the Las Palmas Garden. While I stood and watched, a beautiful brilliant rainbow formed over the Garden. But then one last gust of wind blew the rainbow to pieces. The rainbow drifted to the ground and soaked into all the trees plants, grass and soil. I managed to capture some of the colours on these cards. Reveal the "rainbow splats" (Cards with colourful splats of colour on them). Give each child a card and ask them to find something which matches the colour exactly. Lets see where the rainbow's colours soaked in.* When students have returned with their matched objects, spend some time congratulating their detective skills. *Now what colour is bark? Answers Brown, grey, green, yellow, orange, black... What colour are leaves? Answers Light green, dark green, black, brown, red...* Possible follow up discussions might include why leaves are usually green, why flowers have different colouring and so on.

GARDEN SYMPHONY

Aim; to increase listening skills and highlight other lifeforms in the forest/garden.

Give each child a sheet of paper and pencil. Ask them to find a quiet place. With eyes closed children listen to the sounds around them, tracing a line on their paper to record the sounds. Loud birdcalls may be a sharp edged scribble, water a wavy line, wind a graceful swirl. Compare records, and describe the sounds to each other. Possible follow up activities might include bird watching to find out why birds are attracted to the area. Identify the source of each sound.

TREE ID

Aim; to introduce the concept of species names.

Label 3 trees with name tags. Use ordinary people names, or colours (eg Rowena, Nieves, Fergus, Red, Yellow). Collect a sample leaf from each tree. This is a race. Call out one of the names. Players must find the tree labelled with that name, check its leaf

shape, return to you and identify the correct leaf sample. Now hold up one of the leaf samples. Ask players to study the leaf closely. Ask someone to describe it. When you say go, players must find the tree with that type of leaf, read it's name, return to you and tell

you its name. Explain that the tags are not the real names of the trees. If you are in a botanic garden, point out the plant labels and explain the difference between Scientific and common names.

The skills practised in this session reflect those used by botanists when identifying plants. How often have you seen botanists *look* at shape, size and

colour, *feel* textures, *smell* and sometimes *taste* a plant before they confidently identify it? Senses such as smell and touch are powerful memory joggers. To properly appreciate the Garden environment children should look closely, touch carefully, smell and listen as they walk through the amazingly vibrant, lively and fragrant world around them.