



Discover Science Centre
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DPS Activity Sheet 1

Listening to Nature's Sounds

This activity is simple, straightforward, and a great way of building children's awareness of the natural world. It can also be very calming for children. It can be carried out anywhere that birdsong can be heard. The best months are from February to June.

Suitable age-groups

All primary classes

Essential equipment

None

Optional equipment

Soft-toy birds which play authentic birdsong e.g. robin, blue tit, blackbird (Available from birdwatchireland.ie)

Method

Pre-select a suitable spot where birdsong can normally be heard, preferably away from other loud sounds e.g. traffic.

Stage 1

- Tell the children they are going to a special listening place, and get them to walk or tiptoe quietly to the spot.
- Stand the children in a circle and explain quietly that everyone is going to close their eyes and see how many different sounds they can hear, both natural sounds and man-made sounds.
- For each different sound they hear they raise one finger.
- Everyone closes their eyes and listens, raising a finger for each different sound e.g. different birds, the wind in the trees, man-made sounds like a lorry, a plane or a machine, and sounds close by such as the rustling of a coat.
- After an appropriate time, ask the children to open their eyes and ask individual children to (quietly) name one of the sounds they heard.

Stage 2

- Explain that everyone is going to listen again, but this time they are only going to listen to nature sounds, and in particular are going to see how many different birds they can hear.
- Repeat the procedure.

Stage 3: Optional

If you have soft-toy singing birds, this is well worth a try. It works particularly well with robins, and is magical when it happens.

- Pre-select a spot where a robin has its territory. If the group hears or sees the robin, press the button on the toy robin so it plays its song.
- The real robin thinks the toy is an intruder and will sing back to defend its territory. A song 'conversation' can ensue between the toy robin and real robin.

The soft-toy birds are also a good fall-back if there are few actual birds.

Discussion points

1. Note the striking differences between the songs of different bird species. Even if you can't name the species, you can draw the children's attention to the differences between them. The soft-toy birds help with this, and can be a useful reminder back in the classroom
2. Why do birds sing? Mainly to attract a mate or to proclaim their territory.
3. Why is the spring the best time to listen to birds? Because this is the time that the birds are nesting and rearing their young.

Additional activity

Woodland orchestra After the listening activity each child can choose a woodland sound to make, such as a simple repeated note, a rhythmic chick-chick, or the sound of the wind in the trees. You can then 'conduct' the woodland orchestra: starting with small groups of children making their sounds together, and building up to the whole group.