

Shenandoah National Park Education Program Conducting Sensory Awareness Activities

Why should you incorporate sensory awareness activities?

- By using sensory awareness activities, students learn observational skills and practice critical thinking.
- Sensory awareness activities help build excitement and enthusiasm for learning.
- Children will begin to understand and value their natural environment by using their senses.

Tips for conducting sensory awareness activities:

1. Guide the students to make their own observations and discoveries using their senses. Avoid “telling” them what they are observing.
2. Don’t be afraid to admit that you don’t know the answer to a question. Search for the answer together, and you will both learn!
3. Use good questioning strategies to get the students thinking about their discoveries. Don’t just concentrate on what it is, get them to think about why it is. Concepts are more important than just names and facts. Remember: No living or non-living thing on this planet had a name until humans began sorting and classifying. Experience in the natural world will always be primary.
4. Find facts later. If students are motivated, encourage them to research information when they return to school. Memories of the object can remain vivid if students jot down observations and/or draw pictures.

Example of a sensory awareness activity when a student discovers a plant gall:

Child: (pointing) What’s that?

Teacher: Look what you found! What would you call that shape?

Child: Round, like a ball!

Teacher: You’re right! Do you think it’s some kind of animal?

Child: No way!

Teacher: Why not?

Child: It looks like it’s growing right on this plant. There are flowers here, too!

Teacher: Why don’t you touch it? Is it soft or hard?

Child: (touching) It’s hard.

Teacher: Does it smell like a flower?

Child: (sniffing) It doesn’t have a smell.

Teacher: Why do you think the ball grew on this plant?

Child: Maybe it’s sick.

Teacher: Look around. Do you see other plants with lumps like this?

Child: (checking) Here’s one.... and here! Oh there’s another!

Teacher: See the hole in this ball? How do you suppose it got there?

Child: Maybe a bird pecked it.

Teacher: Good idea. How else?

Child: Maybe a bug lives inside and the hole is the door.

Teacher: That sounds good, too. Let’s draw a picture of it. You can help me find out more about this ball when we get back to school. We can look in a book.