

Making 'Sense' of Nature

Humans have five senses...taste, touch, sight, smell and hearing. These senses provide our brains with information all the time. The information from our senses are like clues that help us figure out the world around us. Can we use our senses when we explore nature? Absolutely! Here are some easy ways to use each of your senses in an adventure to make sense of nature!

Listen!

California is home to more than 600 species of birds. Take a moment to be still and listen to the chorus right outside your front door. You might even hear frogs and insects 'singing' too!

Try to imitate a bird call that you hear. What bird do you think makes that call? What message do you think the bird is sending? Can you hear other birds 'responding'?

Look!

Wildlife can be found everywhere in California -- in our urban cities and across our farmlands. You'll even find wildlife under rocks and rotting trees and plants.

Find a partner and play "I Spy" as you spot wildlife together. Start off by saying "I spy a scrub jay." Your partner tries to find the creature you're spying. They might need some clues about where to look. Take turns spying things flying in the sky, perched in the trees, creeping along in the soil, or scurrying across the grass.

Smell!

There are so many different smells in the air! Some plants have flowers that only open up at night so you can only smell their fragrance after dark. And what about after it rains? Wet soil smells really different than hot, dry soil.

Put your nose to work to help you make sense of nature! Sniff all the different flowers in your neighborhood or schoolyard. Many plants that look like ordinary weeds are actually wild varieties of spices we use in our everyday cooking -- wild sage (used in roasting chicken), wild fennel (which tastes like licorice), and wild bay (think pizza sauce) can be found growing all over California!

Touch!

Wow! Check out that tree! All it takes is a keen eye and a gentle touch. Every tree species has a unique bark pattern and texture -- some have deep grooves with rough edges while others are smooth and feel like paper.

Try this with a friend...choose two different kinds of tree that are near one another. Close your eyes and use your fingertips to explore the bark of the tree. What does your sense of touch tell your brain about the tree? What is the pattern like? Take turns describing for each other what you feel. Use as many creative words as you can think of...words like rough, smooth, warm, cool, gritty, etc.

Taste!

Did you know that you can explore nature in your own grocery store or farmers' market? Take a walk around all of the fruits and veggies. Think about the different things you've tasted before...crispy carrots, leafy lettuce, juicy peaches. Each one is unique!

Now find a fruit or veggie that you've never tasted before. Maybe some jicama or a tangelo. Can you guess how the fruit or veggie would taste? Does the way it looks remind you of something you have tasted? Next time you help plan dinner in your house, try a new fruit or veggie and let your taste buds help you make sense of nature!

