Talking sense!
Using spoken language to explore senses

Learning Outcomes:

This activity uses exploratory learning activities to develop pupils' spoken language skills. By interacting with a natural environment and taking part in a series of activities that explore their senses, pupils will articulate answers and opinions, give well-structured descriptions and narratives, and participate in discussions.

By the end of this activity pupils will have:

- Contributed to discussions and small group work, gaining and maintaining attention from listeners.
- Articulated spoken answers to the group, provided structured descriptions and explanations, and justified their opinions.
- Explored how they interpret the world through their senses.

What you'll need:

- Blindfolds
- Equipment for the games you choose (see activity notes)
- Paper and flip chart
- Marker pens

Note: some activities work best in groups of approximately 12, so additional adult help will be useful.

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Activity:

Introduce...

What? What is a sense?

How? Inform the group that they will be exploring the environment by using their senses. Use a 'Think, Pair, Share' activity to try and define what a sense is. They must do this without simply listing the senses they are aware of. What senses do we have? In small groups can the class define each of the five main senses?

Demonstrate...

What? We use a variety of senses all the time, often without being aware of it.

How? A great activity to show this is tree hugging. Split the group into pairs. One partner is blindfolded, while the other guides them (via a circuitous route) to a tree. Explore the tree through touch for 30 seconds, before returning to the start. Remove the blindfold and ask them to locate their tree. Once it has been located, ask them how they identified it. In addition to the physical feel of the tree, participants should be able to highlight other factors – relative position to sources of noise (such as roads), intensity of light through their blindfold as they turn past the sun, the feel of the surface under their feet and so on. These factors combine to give a broader idea of location than touch alone.

Explain...

What? What do our senses tell us about the world around us?

How? Split the class into small groups. Each group is given an everyday location, and each member of the group becomes one sense. They must explain what their sense is 'sensing'. Using all the information provided, the rest of the class work out where the location is. Good examples of locations include the beach, a swimming pool or a farm.

Apply...

What? Explore senses in more detail.

How? Use games and activities designed to focus on particular senses and language skills. See the activity notes for a selection of great games.

Summarise...

What? Which sense is most important and why?

How? Now that pupils have spent time exploring their senses, ask them which they think is the most important. There is no right or wrong answer but pupils should form an opinion and then express it to the group. Facilitate this by allowing thinking time, before asking the class to split into groups based on their opinion, ie all those who favour 'sight' in one group, all who favour 'taste' in another. In these groups they must then try to persuade the class to change their opinion.

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Activity notes

Each of the following games focuses on a different sense. In addition, they are designed to develop different areas of pupils' spoken language skills. This includes responding to instructions, asking relevant questions, articulating answers and opinions, giving structured descriptions and explanations, participating in discussions, and gaining and maintaining the attention of listeners.

Great sensory games
Sound mapping

Sense: hearing
Skills: responding to instructions, participating in discussion.

What you'll need:
- An outdoor space
- A2 or A3 sheets of paper
- Marker pens

How to play:
Ask pupils to lie on the ground looking at the sky. Then ask them to close their eyes and spend 60 seconds listening. Ask them to count how many sounds they can hear. Pupils typically find that the longer they wait, the more sounds they notice.

Then, working in small groups, ask pupils to create a map of all the sounds they heard. Create the maps on large sheets of paper. Draw the outline of a person in the centre and write all the sounds the group heard in the surrounding space, drawing arrows from the person to each sound. The length of the arrow should represent the distance from the source of the sound (short for close, long for far away) and the thickness of the arrow should represent the volume (thick for loud and thin for quiet).

Feely bags

Sense: touch
Skills: asking relevant questions, giving structured descriptions, participating in discussions.

What you'll need:
- Items from nature – pine cones, tree bark, pebbles, sticks, leaves and so on.
- A large bag

How to play:
Fill a bag with a number of natural items. There should be five different types of item and enough in total for each pupil to have three items each. However, ensure that you have an unequal number of each item, eg seven pine cones, nine pebbles, seven sticks, eight leaves and five pieces of tree bark.

Blindfold the pupils and pass the bag around. Each pupil picks the first three items they touch. Pupils can touch and investigate all of their items (without looking at them) but cannot pass them to anyone else. Through discussion, pupils must determine the five different types of item and the quantity of each.

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Crisp tasting

Sense: taste

Skills: asking relevant questions, articulating answers and opinions.

What you'll need:
- Bags of crisps (assorted flavours).
- Small plastic containers or bags eg yoghurt pots or zip-lock bags.

How to play:

You will need a few large bags of different flavoured crisps. Split the crisps into small containers (without pupils seeing what the flavours are), and distribute the containers among the class so each pupil has three or more different containers. Everyone must then work out how many different flavours of crisps there are, and what flavours they have in their containers.

The catch is that pupils cannot eat their own crisps! They must approach a classmate, ask them to eat one of their crisps and then ask them questions about the crisp for the classmate to answer. They can then return the favour with one of their crisps. There should be a list of 'taboo' words to stop pupils simply saying 'it's cheese and onion!'

Pongy perfumes

Sense: smell

Skills: gaining and maintaining the attention of listeners, giving structured descriptions and explanations.

What you'll need:
- Plastic cups.
- Strongly scented items from nature – flowers, pine needles and so on.

How to play:

Split the class into pairs and give each pair a plastic cup. The task is for pairs to create a unique perfume in their cup by finding natural items and mixing them all together with some 'pixie juice' (water with food colouring!). When they have created their perfumes, each pair must then come up with a sales pitch to try and persuade the teacher to buy their perfume. The pitch should describe the scent, explain why they picked the ingredients they did and convince the teacher that this is the next big thing.

Un-nature trail

Sense: sight

Skills: articulating answers, giving structured explanations.

What you'll need:
- An outdoor space to plan a short trail.
- Man-made objects – bricks, toys, cardboard boxes and so on.

How to play:

Choose a short route to follow for your trail – through some woods or a green space. Along the trail, place a number of un-natural things: bricks, toys, cardboard boxes and so on. Take the class on a walk along the route. Each pupil must spot as many un-natural items as they can. Then ask pupils to clean up all the unnatural items, but only by picking items that answer your questions. For example, ask them to bring back the most useful item they can find. When they have returned ask pupils to explain why they selected that item ('it's all that was left' is not a good enough answer!).

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