Focus on Senses

The mind is a wonderful organ but lives in a dark enclosed space! To access the computing power of the mind we must make sure that it receives input. Those inputs are **the 5 senses**  we have and these must be exercised, broadened and reinforced from a young age. Below are suggestions on how individual senses can be used in the exploration of our natural surroundings:

Try to also expand your vocabulary when being descriptive – you can look to the internet for word lists and I will also be including them for your reference on this site.

1. **To See:**
   1. **Watch the ripples in a small stream** and see how the water runs over, around or under obstacles such as small pebbles, twigs or rocks that dam the flow. Those observations can then be applied to larger rivers where you might want to fish or canoe/kayak/raft on and the same water flow characteristics will manifest as the river flows over rocks , under tree trunks or submerged features.
   2. **Look at an object and predict** how it would feel, smell, sound when hit or perhaps even taste, thereby reinforcing the cross-pollination of the senses – You begin to associate a certain looks with a other sensory characteristics.
   3. **Change perspectives** for your point of view – lie on the ground under a tree and look at the branches and leaves. How does the sun come through the leaves? What shadows are cast by them? Don’t just do it in the sun, do it in the rain as well and see how the leaves disperse the falling energy of the water/raindrops. (Look at the leaf shape and tips)How are the leaves affected by the wind? Do all leaves (from different trees) move the same way in the wind (Specific trees have certain locations they favor and have adapted their leaves to contend with the wind found in such locations)?
   4. **Look down at your feet** and notice what you can see (place a hula hoop on the ground to focus the area to be looked at) now get down on your knees or sit and see what you can see – move taller plants and look under them. Now what can you see when you get even closer and look with a magnifying glass – do you see small animals that you didn’t see when you were standing? What about plants, flowers, insect entrances to small homes?
   5. **Place 100” piece of string** along the ground in a random location and then examine the ground along it by going on a “100” Safari. Move the string to other kinds of ground cover and try to identify the differences.
   6. **Locate an ant hill,** place a drop of sugar water or a crumb of food on their trail and see what happens. What if you place it further off the trail?
   7. **Bees and wasps** are also fun to watch as long as you approach slowly and don’t make any quick moves where they might think that you are going to attack them or they are in some sort of danger.(Wasps are a bit harder to observe because they have an enclosed hive but they carry insect larva to feed their young so you can watch what they bring home for lunch. Do they always approach from the same direction? Do they “talk” with each other by touching antennae or other parts of their bodies? Do bees have pollen on their back legs? Do they stand at the hive entrance in rows moving their wings toward the opening (they are trying to cool the hive with moving air)? Can you identify the guard bees?
   8. **Look for nuts and seeds** on the forest floor that show evidence of having been eaten by animals. Can you see the difference between the marks left by mice, by squirrels, by birds? By insects? (Using a magnifying lens the size of teeth marks should show the difference between mice and squirrels; birds have no teeth and tend to crack the nuts in half with the point of their beak and insects enter the nut through the shell with a hole and then digest the insides.)
   9. **Examine plants and flowers** with a magnifying lens to see the detail of coloration (guides for pollinating insects who see these lines in infrared), structure, reproduction systems (pollen, stamen, set seed, pistel, etc can all be identified by carefully taking a flower head apart), defense systems (stinging nettle hairs – handle with care by using rubber gloves), seed ejection systems (jewel weed explodes sending seed in all directions)
   10. **Watch clouds** – get an identification sheet, try to identify them and predict the weather they might be bringing in the coming days. [Old adages of weather prediction were based on long-term observations through-out the seasons by people that depended on weather for food (farmers), sailors (travel & safety) or travel (herders, travelling salesmen)] The internet has many references to these predictive signs and its fun to read them and then see if they hold true today.
2. **To Hear:**
   1. **Sit in one spot**, close your eyes and listen for sounds that you can hear. Take a sheet of paper, mark your position in the center of the paper with an ‘X’ and then add the sound locations and what you think made them. You can either simply note them as “Bird 1”; “Bird 2”; “Car 1”;” Car 2” or be more specific by naming the sources – chickadee, cardinal, ambulance, firetruck etc. By working toward being more exact, you train the brain to differentiate the small differences that will help you identify in greater detail.
   2. **Very young children** can simply be asked to raise fingers for each new sound and then after a certain time of listening , be asked what they heard, showing the direction by pointing.
   3. **Take a thin stick while walking** in the woods and lightly tap different objects to see how they sound – do live trees sound the same as dead snags? Do different rocks or boulders give off different sounds? Tapping braches of different trees, do different leaves sound the same? When tapping a bare boulder or one with moss on it is there a difference? This simple action applied across a wide range of objects can lead to many questions and discussions with a young explorer!
   4. **In fall, sit in the woods** and listen to how the leaves sound as they fall from the trees
   5. **Find woods that have too many worms** you can actually sit and listen to them munching on the debris that is found on the forest floor (forest duff). A forest that is overrun by worms has almost no duff layer since the worms eat it all. This leads to erosion, low rejuvenation of plants and the degeneration of forest health over the long term.
   6. **Put your ear on various objects** and tap them. Listen to the different sounds they make. Do they travel better in certain materials than others?
   7. **Tell the outside temperature** Just count the number of chirps of a cricket in 14 seconds, then add 40. The number you get will be an approximation of the outside temperature. To convert cricket chirps to **degrees Celsius**: Count the number of chirps in 25 seconds, divide by 3, then add 4 to get the temperature.
3. **To Touch:**
   1. **When taking a walk,** stop to touch a variety of things – describe the way they feel and perhaps compare them other things that have already been touched.
   2. **Touch different patches of moss** – does they way they feel correspond to the way they look – compact, hard, soft, wet etc.)
   3. **Wave your arms** through the air and see how it feels on your bare hand/arm. Do the same thing in water and in loose snow. Compare how the material flows over your skin You can do the same by moving your arm through a cedar bush, a leafy tree branch a loose pile of hay etc.
   4. **Apply a blindfold** and lead the person to a tree or other object and let them explore it through touch only. Return them to a point away from the object, turn them around several times, remove the blindfold and have them try and identify the object they had touched.
   5. **Explore tree types** and make the touching of the bark a part of the identification process
   6. **Saw grass** – blades of grass with tiny serrated edges, are rough to the touch and can be examined under a magnifying lense to see its hooking structure.
4. **To Smell:**
   1. **When walking in a mixed coniferous area**, stop at different trees and take a needle bundle between fore-finger and thumb, crush and roll it and then smell it. By identifying the tree you can now associate its unique smell with it. We often say a Balsam Fir smells like Christmas if we celebrate Christmas with a traditional natural tree the room smells of Balsam Fir.
   2. **Go into the woods after a rain** and try to smell the various aromas – moisture enhances the ability of the nose to pick up smells. It is for this reason that animals often lick their nostrils in order to better pick up the scents of prey, predator or other food sources growing nearby.
   3. **If you remove a bit of bark from a yellow birch** twig and smell it you can identify the scent of wintergreen.
   4. **Do an inventory of smells** by crushing fresh leaves/needles or scraping twigs down to the cambium ( the soft layer under the bark)
5. **To Taste – A caution regarding tasting things found in Nature – it must be stressed to children that nothing should be eaten or tasted without the consent and knowledge of a grown-up who should be present.**

**Many of the berries & mushrooms can be confused, might be poisonous & should only be taken by someone that is knowledgeable in foraging wild edibles.**

* 1. **The red fruiting berries of the Staghorn Sumac** (the poisonous Sumac has white berries) may, in late August, may be used to make a tea that has a lemon flavor. Take the berries and immerse in water that has been brought to a boil or that will be placed in the sun. Allow to steep then drain and strain the fruits. Drink over ice.
  2. **Wild strawberries, blueberries, blackberries** can all be gathered at the appropriate times of the summer and enjoyed
  3. **Wild leek and fiddleheads,** gathered in the Spring of the year make delicious meals when prepared in a number of ways found in many foraging handbooks. Don’t over-pick an area to ensure that the plants can regenerate the following year.
  4. **Dandelion greens** for salad, flowers fried in batter, roots ground up for coffee substitute make this plant a versatile and vitamin –rich food source.
  5. **Tasting Sweet grass,** something that every child is familiar with, is knowledge that is passed on from one friend to another early on. **Sweet grass** has proven to be a sacred, powerful plant believed by many to dispel negative energy, elicit emotional strength, and engage our minds and senses
  6. **Spruce tips** have a bright, citrus flavor that works well in both savory and sweet dishes. Almost all conifer tips are edible, and the only exception is yew trees. ... A **spruce** tip is the new spring growth at the end of a branch