

Exploring Your Senses

Exploring Your Senses is a great science activity for children of all ages. It can be handled as a combination of teacher-led and family-led activities, as outlined below, or any way that works well for your group.

Ask five families to volunteer for this activity. Each family teaches the whole group about one of the **five senses: smell, taste, touch, hearing, and sight**. They may teach through lecture, question-answer, a video, demonstrations, or other activities of their choice. Each sense should take no more than **10-15 minutes**.

Following the families' teaching sessions, the group is **divided into five smaller groups** and **rotates between five stations** at 10-15 minute intervals, depending on how much time you have available. Bring a bell or referee's whistle to facilitate station changes.

Each station offers **a hands-on activity** related to one of the senses. The same families who taught about the senses earlier may set up these stations, or the coordinator or another volunteer may organize them. **Each station will, however, require one or more facilitators** to work with the children at their station. Teens are a great resource for this project! Families should move from station to station together so that parents and older siblings may assist younger children.

Station 1: Smell

Supplies: Paper/pencil for each child; small containers for foods (baby food jars, small yogurt cups, small paper cups); foods or household items with a scent (see list below).

Place one familiar food such as chocolate, a lemon or orange slice, or tuna in each container. Cover it with cheesecloth so the children can smell the food but cannot see what it is. (An alternate to this would be to blindfold the children.) Have them write or tell what they think each food is. Other smelling options: laundry soap, perfume, flowers, soil, fallen leaves (if it is autumn), etc.

A group of 5-7 children can complete about 5-8 different “sniff” tests in a 10-15 minute interval. The key is in how quickly they can write their answers.

Station 2: Taste

Blindfold Tasting

Supplies: Blindfold (a wide knit headband could be used, or a sleep mask); small cups of water for participants to cleanse the palate; toothpicks to offer tastes; different foods/spices (see below). Participants can use the same paper they used at earlier station.

Since the children will be blindfolded at this station, have them whisper their answers for moms to write. Having extra moms or teens to help will keep things moving along. Blindfold the child and have him pinch his nose shut so he cannot see or smell the foods he is testing. Have him try to identify foods by their taste alone.

Some possibilities: mushrooms, bananas, two different kinds of crackers, orange juice, lemon juice, bouillon cubes, vanilla, almond flavoring, coffee, cinnamon, garlic, parsley, onion, vinegar, bubble gum, etc.

Allow him to sip water between tastings to clear his palate. Use toothpicks to serve the various foods and liquid samples—no double dunking, please! You might have him taste the same foods again without pinching his nose.

IMPORTANT: Check for food allergies with parents before their children participate in this activity.

Tongue Mapping

Supplies: You will need four small plastic containers, 1 tsp. and ½ tsp. measuring spoons, one-cup measure, sugar, salt, vinegar, alum, water, cotton swabs, drinking cups of water, paper, and pencils.

Mix 1 tsp. of sugar and 1 C. of water; label it #1.

Mix 1 tsp of table salt and 1 C. of water; label it #2.

Mix 1 tsp. of vinegar and 1 C. of water; label it #3.

Mix ½ tsp. powdered alum and 1 C. water; label it #4.

Place all of the containers on a table within reach of your participants.

The children will work with partners: one will be the taster, the other will be the recorder of results. Have the taster in each pair rinse his mouth with clear water before beginning the tasting. The recorder dips a cotton swab into one of the solutions, not revealing which one he is using. The taster holds out his tongue and the recorder touches various locations on the taster's tongue—tip, side edges, center, and back—with the swab. He records on the paper where the taster could detect that particular taste. (Drawing a tongue and writing the solution's number on the location(s) it could be tasted is the simplest way to record the results.)

The taster rinses his mouth with clear water and the recorder uses a fresh cotton swab to test the next solution. Continue until all the solutions have been tried. Then switch roles: the taster becomes the recorder and the recorder becomes the taster.

Analyze your results: which areas of the tongue are sensitive to which flavors?

Station 3: Touch

Finger painting is a wonderful “touchy-feely” art experience.

A simple **finger paint** recipe: Beat together ½ cup of instant cold water starch, ½ cup of soap flakes (not powder), and 5 oz. of water. Stir in food coloring and enjoy. Be sure to cover your tabletops, floors, and children well and bring along appropriate cleaning supplies.

An **alternate activity** for the sense of touch is to place a variety of items in **separate shoeboxes**. Cut a hole in one end so that the child can reach in to touch the item, but not see it. It also works well to use an empty one-pound coffee can; place the ribbing from the top of a man's sock around the top, holding it in place, with a rubber band. The child cannot see what he reaches in to touch. Choose items with contrasting textures such as sandpaper (rough), a ceramic tile (smooth), a pinecone (prickly), a damp cloth (wet), and pudding or oily noodles (slimy—do this one last and offer a paper towel). Or choose items with different shapes: a ball, a pencil, a small box, etc. The children will be surprised at how well they can “see” with their fingers.

A **different approach**: Stitch small items into **opaque cloth bags**, completely closing the opening; children feel the items through the cloth. This would be a good option for little ones since they would not be likely to choke on the small items. Some possibilities: bobby pin, thimble, button, screw, bean, earring, ring, paperclip, rubber band, acorn, whistle, elbow macaroni, tweezers, etc.

Another option: Teach a few letters or words in **sign language**. See your library or encyclopedia for further information. Research the life of Helen Keller, the famous blind and deaf woman who was taught to communicate through sign language signed onto her hand by her teacher. Her story was told in the book and movie *The Miracle Worker*. You may also be able to find a library book written in Braille so the children can feel the letters.

Station 4: Sight

Detective Game. The detective game teaches observation and works best with a large group of children (or parents). One child is chosen to be the detective. Another child leaves the room while the detective is not watching. A third child describes the missing child to the detective using clues related to the child's appearance such as gender, glasses, hair color, etc. The detective attempts to name the missing child. TIP: Do this later in the school year when you are sure that the children or parents know each other's names.

Memory Game. Give each child a paper and pencil. Show the children a tray of about twenty articles for just 30 seconds. Then cover the tray with a cloth or towel. The children should try to name as many items as they can remember from the tray.

After-Images. You will need a stopwatch and one sheet each of red, orange, yellow, green, blue, and white construction paper. Hold the red paper up and instruct the children to stare at it for sixty seconds; they should not take their eyes off of the paper during that time. After the sixty seconds, immediately hold up the white paper for them to look at. It will appear to be blue-green. This is called after-image.

Explanation: Their eyes became tired after staring at one color so long; white reflects all colors in the spectrum, including red; but their eyes were too tired to see the red, so they saw only the opposite side of the spectrum—the blue-green. Try this with the other colors to see which colors of the spectrum are their opposites. Always look at the white paper after staring for sixty seconds at the colored sheet.

Station 5: Sound

Give the children paper and pencil. Stand behind them and tap a spoon on a saucepan, rub sandpaper together, ring a bell, blow a whistle, stack two glasses together, cough, close a door, whistle, hum, clap, etc. Ask them to try to identify what is making the sound they hear. This activity is best done in a quiet room, obviously.

Another fun activity involves **forming an “ear,”** assigning each child to play the role of one part such as the outer ear, eardrum, cochlea, stirrup, or auditory nerve. Detailed directions are available in Volume I of the Character First!™ curriculum. See Resources in Section D [of Marcia's book] for ordering information.

A third option is a **singing game**. One child leaves the room and an item is hidden (for young children, be sure part of the item can be seen). Be sure everyone in the room sees where it is but is reminded not to look at its hiding place. When the child returns to the room, the group's task is to help the child find the missing item by singing louder when he gets closer to the item's location and softer when he moves away from it. A good song for this is “Are You Sleeping?” Be sure the responsibility is on the group to help the child find it, not on the child; this can be a difficult task for some children.

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