

## Let's explore the nearby forests with our senses!



**Target group:** Recommended for grades 5–9 (10-15 years old)

The idea of this workshop is to raise awareness by engaging the five human senses -sight, sound, touch, smell, and sometimes taste to deepen and develop a relationship with the forest and the natural environment. This exploration is a form of experiential, mindfulness-based learning that encourages observation, curiosity, and emotional connection to nature -particularly to forests. The workshop also places a strong focus on supporting mental health and well-being, as nature-based mindfulness activities have been shown to reduce stress, increase focus, and promote emotional resilience.

## 1. Awakening the Senses



Photo: Maire Turunen, Capilano Watershed, Vancouver, Canada.

*“Imagine a forest: In this forest, there are all the trees in the world, and they all rustle in different ways when the wind blows over them. They sing different songs. In this forest, the roots of the trees are deep, and in the earth’s embrace, they intertwine with each other. The roots are myths that have been told for centuries and millennia. In the center of this forest stands a massive oak, an ancient tree, the Satalatva.”*

*(Excerpt from Kalevala uusin silmin ‘Finnish national epic Kalevala with new eyes’, ed. Salla Simukka, Siri Kolu,)*

## 2. Introduction

It is a scientifically proven fact that spending just 20 minutes a day in nature or the forest significantly improves mood. It reduces stress and the feeling of rush, as being in nature brings our thoughts to the present moment. Birdsongs ground us in the now and help us observe our surroundings, allowing worries to fade. The forest is a free mood booster for everyone!

### Guiding Questions:

Do you regularly spend time in the forest? Does anyone go every day? What do you do there? What are your favourite forest activities? How does being in the forest make you feel? What comes to mind when you hear the word "relationship with nature"?

Next, we will go on a sensory walk. We will go through the five human senses:

SIGHT – HEARING – TOUCH – TASTE – SMELL

### 3. Sensory Walk

Let the journey begin! We head into the forest. Walk silently. Stop when the teacher gives a pre-agreed hand signal (e.g. hands out to the sides).

#### **SENSE: Hearing**

##### *LISTENING EXERCISE*

- Choose a comfortable spot in the forest where you can still see the teacher/adult. Sit or stand comfortably, close your eyes, and focus on the sounds around you. What do you hear?
- Guided listening: Are the sounds natural or human-made? First focus on nearby sounds, then gradually expand your attention outward. Afterwards, discuss what was heard.



Listening exercise. Photo: Enviroement Online ENO

#### **SENSE: Sight**

##### OBSERVATION SQUARE OR CIRCLE

Materials: red string (or any noticeable color), notebook, camera.

Use string to mark a square or circle area in the forest. Adjust the difficulty by changing the square's/circles size. Students work in small groups.

First observe colors. What colors can you see in the area?

What shapes can you identify?

Observe plant species. How many different plants are there? Can you name them?

Look up. What do you see – trees, clouds? Look down – any movement, bugs?

Take a photo of each square.

Record observations in a notebook or by drawing or photographing.



Observation square or circle. Photo: Environment Online ENO



### SENSE: Touch

#### NATURE ARTWORK

Create an artwork or installation using materials found in nature. Work in small groups. The subject is free. Listen to the instructions first.

Choose a nice spot for your piece, e.g. on the ground or a tree stump.

Collect materials with different textures: hard, soft, rough/spiky, smooth, wet, dry, etc.

Discuss each artwork together afterwards.

**NOTE:** Students must be instructed to collect materials responsibly. Avoid picking mushrooms or moss/lichens unless permitted. No permanent impact should be made. Be careful with trash – avoid sharp objects.

**TIP:** Collect artworks on a white cloth to make them visually striking. Photograph and then return materials to nature.



Some ideas for creating nature art on platforms or on the ground. Photos: Environment Online ENO

## SENSE: Smell

### SCENT JARS

Give students jars or cups to collect forest scents such as needles, cones, grass, berries, etc. (Use reusable containers if possible.)

Smell the jars together. Place them on the ground and vote for the best scent.



Scent jars. Photos: Environment Online ENO

## SENSE: Taste

### FLAVORS OF NATURE:

Discuss what edible things could be found in the forest. What have students tasted before? What flavors might be present in this environment?

If safe, try tasting e.g. berries, spruce tips... whatever you are sure is eatable in your country.

Are all five basic tastes present in the forest? (Salty, sweet, bitter, sour, umami)

A full flavor experience combines at least three of these, ideally all five.

#### Guiding Questions:

How are smell and taste connected?

What do smell and taste tell us about food (e.g. edibility, spoilage, poison)?



### SNACK BREAK

Eat your own snacks. Discuss taste, nutrition, and energy content.

Guiding Question: Why does food often taste better outdoors?