



# Teacher's Corner Lesson Plans

*Helping Teachers and Students Make the Most of  
their Outdoor Classroom*

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## Sound Portraits<sup>\*†</sup>

Steven Lott

**Grade level:** Grade 1 - 8.

**Provincial curriculum links:** Ontario.

**Subject:** Language - Oral and Visual Communication.

**Keywords:** Sound.

### Description

Students observe a variety of sounds, which can be heard within their school-yard habitat by sitting quietly by themselves for five minutes, listening, and then recording the sounds around them by drawing them.

### Curriculum Framework

Topic: Language

Strand: Oral and Visual Communication, 1e41 2e49 3e50 4e52 5e45 6e50  
7e69 8e47

Specific Lesson Goals:

- Students will investigate the sounds around them as they sit quietly in a chosen location within their schoolyard habitat.
- Students will communicate the results of their investigation by sketching the sounds they have heard. Some students may choose to record the sounds on cassette or camcorder.
- Students will share their work within a small group.

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<sup>\*</sup>This exercise is adapted from Lott, Steven *Patterns, Plants and Playgrounds, Educational Activities for School Grounds, Intermediate Grades 4 to 7*. Evergreen, 2000.

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## Preparation

**Preparation time:** 10 minutes

**Length of lesson:** 40 minutes

**Resources required:**

- outdoor habitat locations where students can sit undisturbed for a short period of time
- clip boards
- paper
- pencils
- pencil crayons
- camcorder or cassette recorder (optional)

## Procedure

### Part 1

1. Present the class with a cassette or CD from Dan Gibson's Nature Series (or similar nature sounds). Play selections from the cassette for the class. Encourage discussion regarding the various sounds, which have been recorded.
2. The students will be going outside to find a comfortable spot within the schoolyard habitat area. Students will sit far enough apart from their peers so as not to be disrupted; however, all students must remain within hearing distance of the teacher.
3. Students will close their eyes for two minutes to give their ears time to adjust and to become more acute. Students will then open their eyes and begin to record the sounds they hear during the next five minutes. The students are encouraged to be creative in their sketching. Older students may be permitted to record the sounds at their location. Students are also encouraged to make "animal ears" (by cupping their hands behind their ears and turning to face a sound they want to hear) for better identification of soft sounds. Have the student's practice making "animal ears" before they go outside- emphasize turning the head to face the sound.
4. Following their investigation, the students will gather together in a central location to share their drawings and to respond to directed questions from the teacher.

5. Take the students outside and perform the investigation.

## Discussion and Questions

- What did you hear and draw first?
- Why did you hear more things with your eyes closed?
- Could you tell the direction from which the sound was coming? Could you tell if the sound maker was moving?
- What sounds came to you only after you had been listening for awhile?
- Was there any improvement when you used “animal ears” ? Explain your response.
- If you repeated this investigation in a rural area, what differences in sound might you experience? Explain.
- If you repeated this investigation during a different time of day or night, what differences in sound might you expect to experience? Explain.
- Is there anything that can be done to buffer the sounds of “noise pollution” which sometimes fill our lives?

## Student Evaluation

Develop a rating scale for students to determine how well they have completed the goals of the lesson.

## Enrichment and Extension Activities

- Use a cassette recorder and experiment with recording under a tree, against or under a bush, beside a building, at a corner of a building, into the wind, etc., to see how the transmission of sound differs depending upon the local conditions. To determine how sound travels, divide the class in half, providing noise makers or rhythm band instruments to some. Ask the “band” to begin playing on one side of the school while the rest of the class stand on the other side of the building to listen for sound (the building is between the two groups). Can the second half hear the first half? If both groups move beyond the building but remain at the same distance from each other, can the

”band” be heard? Reverse the experiment, and ask the new “band” members to turn their backs to the class and to play. Can they be heard? What conclusions can the class make about the way in which sounds travel?

- Create a sound production using suitable music and nature sounds from the schoolyard habitat to share with the class, or the school community.

## Connections to the Outdoor Environment

How important is it for us to be able to hear the sounds of nature, even if we live in the middle of the city?

How can we help to prevent noise pollution in our homes, neighbourhoods, and schools?

## References

Russell, Helen Ross *10-Minute Field Trips - Using The School Grounds For Environmental Studies*. National Science Teacher’s Association - Washington, DC, 1990, p. 105.