PHENOLOGICAL LITERACY

UNDERSTANDING THROUGH SCIENCE & STEWARDSHIP

Secret Observations Game

By Alisa Hove and Sara Healey[1]
University of California, Santa Barbara

Materials

1. Banana
2. Enough brown bags for each student
3. Enough natural items for each student (shell, rock, feather, snake skins, leaves, seeds, acorns, etc.)
4. Pencils
5. Index card that have been filled in that look like this:

- Color:
- Shape:
- Smell:
- Height:
- Width:
- Weight:
- Texture:
- Location found:
- Other observations:

Goals

- Teach students what observations are and how to make them, with focus on including detail.
- Show students that careful observations play a key role in scientific research.

Activity

1. Prepare bags with one different natural item each bag. This should be done ahead of time.

2. Sit in a circle. We did this with 12 people and sat outside on the playground at a local Boys and Girls Club.

[1] Based on an activity developed by the Kids In Nature program at UC Santa Barbara

3. Show the group a banana and go around the circle, asking each student to make one observation about it. For example, the banana is long, yellow, smooth, etc.
4. Hand each student one bag that contains a natural item. Explain that each item must be kept secret from the rest of the group: "Do not take out of bag."
5. Hand each student a prepared index card and a pencil.
6. Ask the students to record their observations on the card (e.g., texture, shape, smell, height). Some students may ask for help with this and encourage them to use their own words to record their observations.
7. Allow 5-7 minutes for students to make their observations
8. Have each student hand his or her observation card to the student to the left. Now each student should be holding an observation card describing his or her neighbor's item on one side and that is blank on the other side.
9. Ask each student to read the description on their card and then to draw an image of what they think their neighbor's secret object looks like on the blank side of the index card.
10. Allow 3-5 minutes for drawing
11. Go around the circle one at a time, each student can show their drawing while their neighbor shows the object.
12. To generate discussion, ask students which observations were good and ask them to why some were better than others. This is an excellent time to emphasize the level of detail required to make careful observations that can be interpreted by other people.

Post-Activity Reflection and Evaluation

- Facilitate a discussion on the importance of observations:
  - When we should take them? How might observations change over time?
  - Why they are needed in the first place?
  - How much detail should be included in observations?

- Get up and move! Have students make observations of their natural environment: plants, flowers, rocks, birds, and more.