**Activity: Building language using the outdoors**

These activities have a language focus and can be conducted in the school grounds or any other safe outdoor setting e.g. area of native bush.

All of the activities can be linked to appropriate fictional and non-fiction reading material.

**Activity 1: What can I see, what can I feel?**

**Learning Intention**

Students practise their observation and description writing and drawing skills as they participate in a trust exercise in a selected outdoor environment.

**Description**

**Part 1: The human camera**

* Explain to students that this part of the activity involves students working in pairs as a sighted partner, the photographer, who leads an unsighted partner, the camera, to three different scenes. Each student will have a turn as the photographer and as the camera.
* Have each student work out a safe route for their unsighted partner and select three scenes that will make a suitable photograph for their unsighted partner.
* Have one student in the pair put on a blindfold (or keep their eyes shut) and be led to the first photograph site. The photographer can allow the camera to open their eyes for three to five seconds as they take in as many details of the scene as possible.
* Have the photographer lead the camera to the second and third scenes and repeat the process.
* Ask the pair to swop roles and take photographs of the three scenes the new photographer has selected.
* Ask each student to recall the three photographs and select the one that interests them the most. The student then draws and/or describes the scene in the photograph.
* Have each pair discuss the scenes they have drawn and /or described and add any other details they can recall.
* Have the students revisit the places where the photographs were taken and add other details to their description if they want to.
* Have each student create a poem, song, rap or creative visual presentation using their description of a photograph.

**Part 2: How does it feel?**

* Explain to students that this part of the activity involves students working in pairs as a sighted partner that leads an unsighted partner on a journey. At selected places on the journey the sighted partner allows the unsighted partner to feel an object.
* Spend a few minutes with the students examining and describing textures like the ground beneath them, a leaf or a tree trunk.
* Have each student work out a safe route for their unsighted partner and select five objects they will get their partner to feel.
* Have one student in the pair put on a blindfold, or close their eyes, and be led on the journey to the first object.
* Have the sighted partner write down all the adjectives and phrases the unsighted partner uses to describe the object.
* After the students complete the journey, with the unsighted student touching and responding to all five objects, have the students swop roles and repeat the experience.
* Each student can then retrace their blindfolded journey with their eyes open and identify the objects they touched.
* Have each student create a poem, song, rap or creative visual presentation using their words they used to describe one object or the objects.

**Safety considerations**

Students need to select suitable places to lead unsighted partners.

Students need to keep their unsighted partners safe and offer them support and encouragement as required.

Blindfolds should fit comfortably. Any student uncomfortable with a blindfold may need to shut their eyes instead.

**Equipment**

* Material to record information e.g. felt pens or coloured pencils.
* Blindfolds

**Location**  
Suitable outdoors environment e.g. school ground or area of native bush

**Time**

One hour

**Student processing /reflection**

**Students can reflect on:**

* the experience of being responsible to lead an unsighted person and the experience of trusting someone to lead you
* the experience of responding to the environment using the senses of sight and touch.

**Possible adaptations:**

* Students could create a story, poem, songs, rap or drama about not being able to see and relying on other senses such as touch or about trusting others to lead or direct you.
* Students could create a multi-media display of their experience.

**Activity 2: ABC Outdoors**

**Learning Intention**

Students practise their observation and descriptive language skills as they participate in an activity in a selected outdoor environment.

**Description**

* Give each student or pair of students an A3 sheet that is divided into a 5x5 grid (25 squares) and has the letters of the alphabet in each square, with X and Z sharing the 25th square.
* Explain to students that their task is to find a very unusual plant, animal or object that starts with each letter of the alphabet. When they find their plant, animal or object they are to write down its name and then describe it in words, phrases or sentences.
* When the students have completed the task, or have completed a significant number of entries, bring the class together or into groups of 6- 8 students.
* Have each student or pair of students give their description of their most unusual plant animal or object and have the other students guess what it is from the description.
* Have each student or pair of student select a plant, animal or object that they want to write about. They may want to go back and draw or photograph the plant, animal or object and then use their words, illustration or photograph to create a story or a poem.

**Safety considerations**

* Area selected for the students to work in must be safe and students must be close enough to respond, if required, to the teacher’s emergency instruction.
* Students need to recognise the boundaries of the area they are working in.
* Students need be reminded of environmental care rules and not remove living plants or animals or damage the environment they locate plants, animals or objects in.

**Equipment**  
Worksheet, material to record information, possibly felt pens or coloured pencils.

**Location**  
Suitable outdoors environment e.g. school grounds, or an area of native bush.

**Time**

Up to one hour for outdoor work, further time for resulting written language work.

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* what senses they relied on to describe the plants, animals or objects.
* what sorts of words they used in their description.
* things that were similar and things that were different between their descriptions of different plants, animals or objects and between their descriptions and the descriptions that other students or pairs.
* what makes a description of living or non-living things interesting.
* what was easy or more difficult for them as they turned their descriptions into a poem or a story.

**Possible adaptations:**

**Using a smaller range of letters**

If a teacher wants to reduce the number of letters students use students can make selections like:

* the letters in your name.
* the letters in our school, or local area.

Students could be given a maximum of six letters and a quarter of an hour to investigate and see how many plants, animals or objects they can find starting with those letters. They can then select two or three of the most interesting to describe.

**Consonants and vowels**

The teacher could write the following consonants *s, r, t, l, g, b, m* on separate cards and place them in a bag.

They could write the vowels *a* and *e* on cards and place them in a different bag.

A student or pair of students can then select one consonant and one vowel and search making three word lists of plants, animals and objects whose names that:

* contain the consonant
* contain the vowel
* contain the consonant and the vowel.

The students can then review their word lists and decide which three plants, animals or objects they want to revisit and describe. Alternatively two teams could be given the same consonant and vowel pairing and compete to find the most words. Words with the consonant or vowel only would score one point, and words with both the vowel and the consonant would score five points.

**Adjective hunt**

After the students have completed their descriptions build a word bank of adjectives that are useful in describing plants, animals and objects in the outdoors.

Make some cards that contain 9 or 16 squares and write combinations of words from the word bank in each square.

Students can work individually or in pairs, work with one card and go back outdoors and find plants, animals or objects that each adjective on the card applies to. They must write a sentence to explain why the adjective applies to that plant, animal or object e.g. *The stick we found had a* ***jagged*** *end* or *The tree bark was* ***rough.***

Students could combine two or three of the adjectives from the card in one sentence about a plant, animal or object they identify, e.g. *The stick was* ***hollow****, about as* ***thick*** *as a pencil with a* ***sharp, jagged*** *point at one end.*

**Treasure hunt**

After the students have completed their descriptions they could make their own 9 or 16 square card. In each square they could write down something they would like to find when they return to the outdoors.

Categories could include:

* something smooth
* something that tickles against my skin
* something shiny
* something with many small parts
* something transparent
* something elastic
* something spotted
* something with a pattern of scratched lines
* something multi-coloured.

Students can go out and find a plant, animal or object that fits the description and either draw or photograph it. They could combine parts of different drawings to make an artwork that is pleasing to them/ has meaning for them. It could include words.

**Activity 3: A Group Tale**

**Learning Intention**

Students practise their oral story telling skills.

**Description**

* Students gather around an identified plant animal or object as a class or in groups.
* Explain to the students that they are going to tell an ongoing story about the plant, animal or object. Each student, in turn, is going to add a sentence to the story. The students will need to listen to the sentence before them and build on from the idea in the sentence but add a new idea of their own. The group must go with the journey of the story and see where it takes them. They can decide when the story has reached a good ending.
* Students can tell more than one story about the plant, animal or object and then compare the stories. This activity is usually more successful after the students have become comfortable with the process.

**Safety considerations**

* The area selected for the students to work in must be safe and students must be close enough to respond, if required, to the teacher’s emergency instruction.
* Students need to recognise the boundaries of the area they are working in.
* Students need be reminded of environmental care rules and not remove animals or damage the environment they locate the animals in.

**Equipment**  
None required

**Location**  
Suitable outdoors environment e.g. school grounds or area of native bush

**Time**

Half hour to one hour

**Student processing / reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* what it was like to make a group story
* how hard it was to go with the changing direction of the story
* what shape the story took
* if and how the story built up drama
* how the story reached an ending
* ‘good bits’ in the story and why they were successful.

**Possible adaptations:**

**A Tall Tale**

The teacher could make some cards that have some phrases that have no connection at all to the environment e.g. *red shoes* or *an alligator* or *a hovercraft* and place them in a pile.

Every third student could select a card and then use that phrase in their sentence.

The students could see what effect introducing random odd ideas has on the journey of the story.

Word sketching using the word sketching scope

**Learning intention**

Students practise their observation and description skills while identifying nouns and adjectives.

**Description**

* Have students build a word sketching scope using large cans or cardboard cylinders. Ideally create enough word sketching scopes of the same size so that every pair of students has one. Have the students divide the cylinder into four by taping a piece of string tightly across one end of the cylinder from (on a clock face) 12 o’clock to six o’clock and a second piece of string from 9 o’clock to 3 o’clock.
* Give the students a sheet of A3 or A4 paper that has a circle drawn using as much of the page as possible and with the lines crossing the circle to match the word sketching scope.
* Establish pairs of students in a suitable outdoor environment and have them focus their sketching scope on an object e.g. a tree. They need to focus the centre of the sighting/ sketching scope on a noticeable feature e.g. a fork in the tree so they can recreate the same sketch if they lower the sketch scope.
* The students can work in pairs and use words to sketch the scene writing the words in the correct area of the scene,
* The students can use different colours to indicate the noun they are identifying and the adjectives they are using to describe it e.g. fluffy white cloud or grey storm cloud.
* The students may need to have a practice at ‘word describing’ what they see this before they complete the activity on paper.
* Students swop their word sketch with another pair of students. Each pair tries to locate the spot where the sketch was taken and check that they have the correct location using their word-sketching scope. Students may want to make a drawing from the word sketch and use this to help them find the location.

**Safety considerations**

* The area selected for the students to work in must be safe and students must be close enough to respond, if required, to the teacher’s emergency instruction.
* Students need to recognise the boundaries of the area they are working in.
* Students need be reminded of environmental care rules and not damage the environment they are in.

**Equipment**  
Word-sketching scope

**Location**  
Suitable outdoors environment e.g. school grounds or other local area

**Time**

Half hour to one hour

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* what it was like to transfer what they can see into a word description.

**Possible adaptations:**

**Mystery Object**

Students could choose one thing they observed and create a mystery object for a word quiz. They will write three sentences.

The first sentence will have two clues in it. The second sentence gives the number of letters in the word and its first letter. The third question always asks ‘What is it?’

Example: ‘We found something that is hard and cracked and found on trees. It is a four letter word starting with the letter “b”.

What is it?‘ The answer is ‘bark’.

The students will need to go back to where they sketched their scene and select an object and develop the two clues.

Pairs of students can describe their mystery objects and the other students can see how many objects they can recognise.

**Big journey, small animal**

**Learning Intention**

Students practise their observation and imaginative descriptive writing skills

**Description**

* Explain the task to your students in this way.
* ’Imagine you have shrunk to the size of an ant. You are going to travel what will be to you a great distance, the length of a piece of string. Your task is to write a short story as if you were a tiny person or an animal like an ant on that journey. You can use your imagination to create one meeting with an animal that belongs in the environment.
* The teacher can place lengths of rope on areas of the ground that have at least different and interesting surfaces e.g. grass, soil, pebbles, or students can be given the string and place it themselves.
* The students move slowly along the string imaging they are very small and recording what they might see, hear, taste and feel.

**Safety considerations**

* The area selected for the students to work in must be safe and students must be close enough to respond, if required, to the teacher’s emergency instruction.
* Students need to recognise the boundaries of the area they are working in.
* Students need be reminded of environmental care rules and not damage the environment they are in.

**Equipment**  
Paper and pen or pencil to record information.

Art material to illustrate the story.

**Location**  
Suitable outdoors environment e.g. school grounds or other local area.

**Time**

15 to 30 minutes for class to record information plus further time to write and illustrate story.

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* what it was like to imagine themselves as very small.
* what the world they know might be like if they were very small, very large or they were a named animal.
* what it was like writing an imaginative story about the outdoors from a different perspective.
* what was easy, hard, fun or interesting about writing this story.

**Possible adaptations**

Students could work in groups and turn one or more stories into a play and present it to the class or a wider school audience.

**I say, I say, what have we got here?**

**Learning Intention**

Students practise their observation and description writing and drawing skills.

* Explain to students that early explorers, scientists and botanists didn’t have cameras to record their findings so they had to make very accurate records about a new place, or plant or animal. They made drawings and measurements and noted and described every small feature of the place, plant or animal.
* Explain to the students that they are going to imagine they are a botanist out exploring before cameras were invented. Their task is to go somewhere in the school grounds and make a new discovery of a flower or plant no–one has seen before. The students are to find a plant or flower and say ‘I say, I say, what have we got here’ and then record every detail of the flower or plant. Botanists can name any new plant they discover so the students can name the plant they discover.
* Discuss with the students what they think they should record about their new plant or flower.
* Have the students go into the school grounds, find a flower or plant and record all the details of their discovery.
* Have students swop the description of their discovery with a partner and then have each student go out into the school grounds and find the new plant or flower.

**Safety considerations**

* Students need to stay within designated boundaries of the school grounds and be able to respond to instructions from the teacher.

**Equipment**  
Material to record information, rulers to take measurements, possibly felt pens or coloured pencils

**Location**  
School grounds

**Time**

One hour

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* the experience of closely observing one object and describing it in detail
* what it would be like to be the first person to observe and describe a plant or animal.

**Possible adaptations**

The activity can be the basis of a literacy unit as:

* there are articles about scientists finding new species of plant and animals in the sea and on land
* students could write imaginative stories about being an explorer in the past, now or in the future
* students could research an explorer or a botanist or zoologist who made important discoveries and retell their story in words, illustration, drama, song or rap.

Students could use their imagination and describe finding their plant or flower from the perspective of a small animal like a spider or a large, rather hungry, herbivorous animal.

**If this object could talk**

**Learning Intention**

Students use a dramatic or literary convention of giving an object a voice to convey a story to their audience.

**Description**

* Ask students to work in groups with an object or a photograph or video of the object that interests them.
* Have the students discuss what they would like to know about the object and carry out research to answer their questions.
* Have students use the information they obtain and their imaginations to create a story for the object that could:
* place the object in time
* explain its purpose
* convey who used it or valued it
* highlight a time when the object was important to someone or to a specific event
* indicate what has happened to the object over time
* reflect what it was like living at that time.
* Have the students present the object’s story in an oral or written format. If the presentation is oral the student representing the object may stay in character as the object and answer questions from the audience. The student may confer with their group before giving the object’s answer to a students’ question.

**Safety considerations**  
None required

**Equipment**  
Objects or photographs of objects

**Location**  
Inside classroom or in school grounds or at a campsite

**Time**

One hour plus

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* what they learnt when they used an object to tell the story of a moment in time.
* the role(s) they took in a group discussion, research and presentation and how they supported themselves and others during the group process.

**Possible adaptations:**

This activity can be used as part of a learning programme that has an outside the classroom component as demonstrated in the case study Poriria Our Place (link)

The activity can be used during an outdoor experience when students use an object like a plant or tree to describe how they are adapted to living in a particular environment.

The activity could be used as a way to describe the safe use and maintenance and storage of personal and group outdoor equipment.

**Using freeze frames to tell a story**

**Learning Intention**

Students use a drama convention, freeze frames, to convey a story to their audience.

**Description**

Freeze frames are a series of static poses made by students to communicate a story or idea. The students convey a story or sequence of events using a series of fixed or static poses (statues) that represent dramatic moments.

**To use freeze frames to tell a story**

* Performers work in groups and plan and practise four to six dramatic moments or freezes that tell the story they have selected.
* The audience closes their eyes.
* Performers create their drama moment or freeze frame and hold their position for 10 to 30 seconds as the audience views the freeze frame.
* The audience closes their eyes until the students are ready to present the next freeze frame.

**Using freeze frames to capture moments from acted dramas**

* + Students complete a drama then review it and decide on 3 to 6 freeze frames that would best tell the story of the drama.
  + The actors create these moments or restage them as freeze frames.
  + These freeze frames can be photographed and used to describe, highlight, review or assess the drama and provide material for classroom display.

**Safety considerations**  
Students need to construct poses that are safe for all participating actors.

**Equipment**  
None required

**Location**  
Inside classroom or in school grounds or at a campsite

**Time**

One hour plus

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* the group process they used to decide on what frames would best tell the story and the creation of the actual poses.
* their own participation in the creation of the finished drama presentation.

**Possible adaptations:**

* Freeze frames can be used to capture moments from dramas to add to wall displays or timelines as demonstrated in the case study **Poirirua Our Place** (link to case study)
* Freeze frames can be used as a tool to reflect on an outdoor experience.
* Freeze frames can be used as a visual component of students’ assessment of an outdoor experience they have participated in.
* Freeze frames can be created that model a scientific process e.g. photosynthesis, respiration, the water cycle or water treatment or the process to create a named product.

**So how do they move?**

**Learning Intention**

Students practise their observation and descriptive language skills as they mime the movement of an animal in a group role-play.

Note this activity can be used as a language activity or used to meet objectives in the Science curriculum as students explore how animals are suited to their environment.

**Description**

* Have students work in groups of 4 to 6 students.
* Explain to the students that they are going to explore the environment looking for living creatures. They are going to select one animal to observe and later they are going to role-play how the animal detects features in its environment and moves.
* Have the students observe a selected animal e.g. spider or beetle. They need to consider what parts of the animal are involved in moving and how the animal detects what is happening in its environment.
* Have the students work out how they can create the animal’s body and then create a movement sequence that demonstrates how the animal moves and how it uses its senses. The movement sequence must involve all members of the group.
* When the groups have practised their role plays they present them to the rest of the class who guess the identity of the animal.
* Students can create a sound track to accompany the movement sequence. This can contain sounds and words and must relate to the movement. It could be a song, rap, tell a story or be an orchestrated collection of sounds that convey the movement sequence.

**Safety considerations**

* The area selected for the students to work in must be safe and students must be close enough to respond, if required, to the teacher’s emergency instruction.
* Students need to recognise the boundaries of the area they are working in.
* Students need be reminded of environmental care rules and not remove animals or damage the environment they locate the animals in.

**Equipment**  
Magnifying glasses may be useful.

**Location**  
Suitable outdoors environment e.g. school grounds or area of native bush that has a range of animals in it e.g. insects, birds, reptiles.

**Time**

Half hour to one hour

**Student processing /reflection**

Students can reflect on:

* what words they used to describe how the animal was aware of its environment and how it moved.
* how their group worked together to create the animal and the movement sequence.
* roles individuals in the group took.
* what they learnt from doing the activity.

**Possible adaptations:**

* Students can extend their investigation to explore the habitat of the animal and the features the animal has that suits it to living in its natural habitat.
* This investigation can involve observation and research.
* Students can present information about the animal in any selected presentation format.

***Acknowledgement***

*These activities are modified from activities gathered from a range of sources. It is not possible to attribute authorship for these activities.*