

ARTS • BASED SKILLS & STRATEGIES

• middle school •
• elementary •

title **Environmental Soundscapes**

skill



music

about the strategy

Objects found in different environments such as the beach, forest pathway, or night sky can be used to provide graphic notation for a soundscape. This Soundscape can then be used to enhance the setting in a story or drama, or to enhance the mood of a poem. The concept of sound-symbol correspondence is reinforced by the strong emotional impact of the activity.

v i s u a l

Finding, creating, and arranging objects

a u d i t o r y

Choosing sounds that match the characteristics of objects

instructional steps

objective Students arrange objects to create a land/ocean/skyscape, then interpret the visual scape as a Soundscape.

materials Large piece of fabric (brown or tan for land, blue for water, black for night sky)

Natural objects

Examples:

Landscape - pinecones, acorns, leaves, sticks, etc.

(taking care to not disturb any living things)

Seascape - shells, coral, driftwood, etc.

Night sky - students make stars, moon, comets, nebula, planets, satellites, etc.

Alternate - packaged potpourri

Sound sources - found sounds, unpitched instruments, and/or pitched instruments

Puppet, stuffed animal, or conducting stick

procedure

1. Collecting and Identifying

- Take a field trip or walk to collect the objects, create them, or display the object in a basket.
- Look at each type of object and categorize it.

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2. Creating a Visual Pathway

- Spread a large fabric pathway on the floor. Each student chooses and places one object on the path, watching for interesting or effective visual combinations or relationships.
- Sit, stand, or kneel “in front” of the pathway.
- Pass the puppet (or a stuffed animal or conducting stick) slowly over the pathway. Students clap once when the puppet passes by their object.

3. Finding Sounds to Match Objects

- Explore a variety of sound sources and have students choose one to match the characteristic of their object, e.g., shiny, rough, scratchy, small, large, jagged, long, and so on.
- Have students play their sound when the puppet (or conducting stick) passes by their object.
- Take turns being the “conductor,” trying out different ways of indicating sound clusters and combinations.

4. Reflecting

- Ask students to explain their sound choices.
- Discuss the experience of being the conductor.
- Consider how the new soundscapes might be used in the classroom (to accompany poetry readings, to create a mood for a story, to represent vocabulary or characters, etc.)

Environmental Soundscapes

strategy for curricular connections



social studies

- Provide a box of artifacts that represent the different stages of the Westward Expansion. Have each student choose an artifact to place on the pathway to represent the journey across North America. Students then choose sounds to represent objects and take turns conducting the resulting soundscape. Songs, poems, or stories of the move west can also be incorporated.



science

- Expand the soundscape strategy to explore other environments, or categories of natural elements (types of leaves, rocks, seeds, etc.).
- Create a pollution soundscape. Gather up litter, junk, sources of sound pollution, and clutter up the pathway. Use the pathway as a starter for discussing environmental issues.



mathematics



music



technology

- Conduct and play graphs, or place geometric shapes on the fabric and play the number of sides for each shape.
- Objects can be arranged on the pathway in sets of 3, 4, 5 or more. Instruments play once for each object in the set (e.g., five acorns are represented by five taps on a woodblock).
- Represent shapes or symbols musically. For instance, a rectangle represented through sound for each respective side would be represented by the length of the tone. Going around the perimeter of the shape would be short-long-short-long or long-short-long-short, depending on which side you start with. Using MIDI technology or the transport on a virtual tape deck, calculate the amount of time each side would need in seconds or frames to proportionally represent the shape in the Soundscape.
- Triangles, circles, squares all have mathematical properties dimensionally. Size of the shape could also contribute to the proportions (duration/timbre)—large squares, small circles, medium rectangles.



language arts

- Use the soundscapes as accompaniments to unmetered poems related to the environment. For example: “Secret Song” by Margaret Wise Brown, “Until I Saw the Sea” by Lilian Moore, or “Sky Dwellers” by Sr. Lorna Lunz. The Soundscape can also be used as an introduction to set the stage for a story or drama.

Environmental Soundscapes

strategy for curricular connections



music

- Explore the characteristics of each instrument carefully for the sound quality, or tone color. Each instrument can be played many ways, and provide a range of interesting sounds.



visual arts

- Create a collage by gluing the objects on the pathway, and hanging it up as a wall decoration. Have the students write a description of how the art was created, and the Soundscape that resulted. A cassette tape of the Soundscape could be included.



dance

- Interpret the visual “scape” in movement rather than sound, or in addition to the sounds.



theatre

- Use the Soundscape to set a mood for a dramatization or improvisation.

ARTS • BASED SKILLS & STRATEGIES

Environmental Soundscapes

multiple intelligences target



naturalist



musical



visual • spatial



intrapersonal

adaptations

to simplify

- Limit the number of different objects available, and the number of sound sources.

to challenge

- Have small groups create motifs or short compositions for each object; then when the objects are arranged on the pathway, they will represent a musical suite.

special needs

- This is a wonderful activity to build sound-symbol correspondence in emergent readers of all ages.