

## The Skill of Observation

Fill a clear glass container half full with water. The container can be a small fish bowl, a jar, a large drinking glass or anything similar. Add enough vanilla extract to the water to discolor it to resemble tea. You should be able to see through the water. Also make sure enough extract is used to provide a fragrance to the water. Adding a rock or a floating leaf adds to the misdirection of the observer but is not necessary.

Put a sign next to the container with the single word "Observe". Situate the sign and the container so that they are noticeable as youth enter your room. Do not draw any other attention to them. When making the sign, print the letters black except for the 'e's. Use different colors for each; for example, one green, one red. Use the following questions and instruction on a handout to test the observation skills of your student. No introduction is necessary, just begin providing the handout and ask them to complete it as best as they can. Make sure the sign and container are now out of sight of the students.

- What was on the sign as you came into the room?
- What were the colors used in the wording?
- What was the color of the first letter 'e'?
- What was the color of the second letter 'e'?
- Describe the object next to the sign with as much detail as you can.

Many of your students will not even see the sign, giving you a good lead-in to observation skills and the need to enhance them. For those who did see the sign and the container, many will not have observed it closely to complete each question. Assure them that it is alright and they will soon be told the answers. Have the students continue to complete as much as possible without discussing it. Encourage individual work. When all are finished, ask for someone to tell you what was on the sign. Begin a brief discussion on what it means to observe. From there, ask for an answer to the other questions.

When the questions concerning the sign are completed, show the students the sign without showing the container yet. Explain to them that each question becomes more detailed about the sign requiring sharper observation skills.

Next ask for volunteers to read aloud their description of the container and its contents. Don't allow conclusions at this time, just descriptions. When everyone has given their descriptions, show the container and ask "What are your conclusions to the source of this liquid? Where did I get it?". Listen but don't give away the correct answer even if someone is sharp enough to get it right away. Following these answers, discuss with the students how we must fully observe using as many of our senses as possible when observing natural resources. We must do this so that we reach the correct conclusions about our observations.

Tell the students that you will give them another chance to observe the container but only for a few seconds each. Before allowing them to do so, ask them to keep their observations quiet and do not discuss any new

conclusions out loud so that all will have the opportunity to observe and come to their own conclusion. The best way to facilitate this second observation is to maintain a hold on the container and take it around to each student. After everyone has observed again, ask for volunteers to share their observations and conclusions. Hold onto the correct conclusion as long as you like. It's fun to watch them think.

Follow up with a recap on observation, the necessity to use as many of our senses as possible, and the need to observe natural resources over and over due to their dynamic nature. Encourage the students to always be observant but to be smart about using their sense of taste and touch since some things in nature can be harmful when touched or ingested.

Developing good observation skills are important enough to begin any natural resource study with this activity or something similar to stimulate that natural skill in your students.

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