

Sharp Eyes

Objective

- To help students practice observation skills in a fun, mildly competitive game
- To help students practice group activities and cooperation
- To help student have a respectful exploration of living organisms

Materials

- Some animal(s) (or any object) to be the focus of the investigation
Mealworms, crickets, ants, pillbugs, hamsters, for examples
- A secure place for the activity to take place
This could be indoors or outdoors, but, if you use live, captive animals, the outdoors can be very distracting for children
A clean surface and container for the animals – for mealworms a plastic plate or plastic shoebox lid will do the job

Procedure

This activity is focused on *observation skills* and *respectful interactions*.

Children should work in teams of three or four. Each team should have an observation subject (an animal(s) or natural area). The game starts with one person making an observation about the subject. Then each person in turn makes an additional observation gaining a point for each novel observation. One player functions as scorekeeper. Any player is allowed to pass their turn in any round and receives no score. Observations cannot be repeated, though they can be built upon.

For example, one player may notice that the subject has legs. Another may note that its legs are short – or that it has six legs. The game continues until the students run out of observations or (most likely) when a particular time limit has been reached.

The person with the most observations gets to present the team's results to the class after the game is over.

This sort of group observation activity also requires certain skills from the teacher (or in inquiry-based activities, the 'facilitator'). While the students are 'playing' the game, the teacher's job is to wander around and look in on each team. Things to pay attention to when wandering:

- Are students focused on the activity (this should rarely be an issue with bugs)
- Is any group having difficulty determining whether or not an observation is 'good'
 - there are really no 'bad' observations, but some may not be appropriate for this activity
- Which group is generating the longest list
 - During the sharing discussion at the end of the game, start with the group that has the *shortest* list. If you begin with the long lists, the last groups will have nothing new to share.
- Everyone is 'following the rules' and 'playing well with other children' (no matter their age!)
 - Timing on an activity like this is important. There are no real clear guidelines, but there is a point at which the 'slowest' group has gotten on track and the 'fastest' hasn't lost focus – that is when to stop!

After you collect the bugs – you can never teach when bugs are out (try it sometime and you'll see!) – be sure to leave enough time to review the observations. It is important to get to each group (should be no more than 4 or 5 groups) and make sure at least a couple of observations are directly addressed.

- The lists may become particularly big – you might have the first group (with the shortest list) present ten observations and then have each groups add five that haven't been mentioned

Extensions

The situations in which an activity like this can be used effectively are limitless. Any subject you want your students to focus on can be the subject of a game like this one. During an outdoor walk or a playground period this will help them focus on natural scenes or habitats. Any objects in the classroom – a box of crayons, a pile of papers, a section of cubbies – are excellent opportunities for this observation focus game.