



# Soundscape Activity

## Create Your Own Soundscape

Begin by asking participants to list all the intrinsic sounds of your park. (Intrinsic sounds belong to a park by its very nature, based on the park unit purposes, values, and establishing legislation. In addition to natural sounds, intrinsic sounds can include cultural and historic sounds that contribute to the acoustical environment of a park.) Challenge them to recreate this soundscape by vocally mimicking or finding items that represent individual sounds. Many bird songs have been likened to English phrases. For instance, barred owls seem to say, “Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all?” Frog calls, as well, seem to mimic many human made sounds. For more ideas the teacher may want to refer to wildlife field guides and <http://www.nature.nps.gov/sound/protect>.

### The following is a list of ideas for replicating sounds:

*Spring peepers* – a set of sleigh bells or Christmas bells  
*Bullfrog* – blow into a bottle  
*Chorus frog* – run fingers over a comb  
*Cricket* – blow lightly on a whistle  
*Thunder* – rattling heavy construction paper, or beat a drum  
*Soft rain* – snap fingers  
*Hard rain* – slap thighs  
*Leaves rustling* – crumple paper  
*Waterfall* – stomp the floor (especially effective on a stage)  
*Stream flowing* – empty water from one container into another

Let visitors explore their own ideas for recreating various sounds, as well. This allows them to stretch their imaginations and better appreciate the qualities of each sound.

Make the activity more specific by imitating the sounds of a thunderstorm. This common activity is often used in children’s classrooms, involves no materials and stirs children’s imagination. It can be adapted here to augment a discussion about natural sounds and to encourage children to practice attentive listening when outside. The idea is to imitate the sounds of a thunderstorm as it approaches, hits, and tapers off again.

To begin, have everyone in a seated position and instruct them to follow your actions. Begin by rubbing your hands together. Allow everyone to do this for about 15 seconds, then begin snapping the fingers of both hands. Again, have everyone do this for another 15 seconds. If children are having trouble paying attention to your actions, walk around the group so everyone sees what you are doing. Next, switch to clapping hands to imitate a hard rain. Follow with slapping your thighs, indicating that the thunderstorm has hit. Then gradually back off the sounds. Begin hand clapping for a few seconds, followed by finger snapping and finally hand rubbing to indicate the storm tapering off. Put your hands in your lap to indicate the end of the storm.

When all hands are silent again, discuss the experience with the children. You may even decide not to tell them what they are imitating at the beginning, then let them guess when they are finished. Ask questions about what each activity sounded like and what they felt while they were creating the sounds. You can discuss how the children feel about rain and the sound of thunder. Encourage them to explore their feelings about the

sound of rain: does it make them happy, sad, or anxious? Ask them what they do if they are outside when they hear thunder. Help them realize that thunder can serve as a warning to find shelter. This can lead to a discussion about how important natural sounds are for wildlife as well. (Refer to the discussion questions in the activity, “Communicating in the Wild” at <http://www.nps.gov/sound/youth> for examples of how animals rely on natural sounds.)

If time allows, you can conclude the activity by taking them outside to listen to nature (see ideas in the activity “Silent Hike/Silent Sit” at <http://www.nps.gov/sound/youth>).



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*The Natural Sounds Program works to protect, maintain, or restore acoustical environments throughout the National Park System. We fulfill this mission by working in partnership with parks and others to increase scientific and public understanding of the value and character of soundscapes and to eliminate or minimize noise intrusions.*

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