



Soundscape Activity

Sound Appreciation

Theme:

Acoustical environments are an endangered resource.

Goals:

1. Foster audience appreciation for park acoustical environments.
2. Teach audience that acoustical environments are a unique resource that deserves protection.

Objectives:

1. Audience can define “acoustical environment.” (refer to <http://www.nature.nps.gov/sound/science.cfm> for the definition)
2. Audience mutes electronic equipment or avoids using it altogether while in park.



Red Fox. Image by John Mosesso/NBII.

Tools:

Recordings of various sounds, available at:
www.nature.nps.gov/sound/gallery.cfm
Bat locator (optional)

Body:

Begin by explaining that sound is a part of the environment, just like air or water. Every place has its own unique sounds associated with it. This is known as an acoustical environment. Encourage the group to close their eyes and imagine what a bus or a rooster sounds like and the appropriate place they would hear them. An example to use could be a rooster crowing. Explain that roosters are typically part of a farm’s acoustical environment, and if they were to hear a rooster in your classroom, it might seem out of place.

Subtheme – Acoustical environments are made up of unique sounds.

Clarify further by explaining that an acoustical environment is like a landscape except it is everything one can hear instead of everything one can see.

Have the group participate in a 2-minute listening exercise. During the 2 minutes they should remain as still as possible and listen to all the different sounds they hear. Have them raise a finger every time they hear a different sound.

At the conclusion of the 2 minutes ask them to list what they heard. Ask if they would know where they are if they heard only those noises. Help them understand that the sounds they hear tell a lot about where one is, and that this is a place’s acoustical environment. Explain that a park’s acoustical environment is unlike

any other because of the unique sounds that are present there. Introduce the idea of wildlife communication as an important part of an acoustical environment.

Subtheme – Wildlife, like us, can communicate with sound

Explain that animals rely on communication. They need to communicate warning signals if a predator has been spotted, alerting others about food, and in order to find a mate. Oftentimes, animal conversations enrich the acoustical environment of an area. List an appropriate animal for the park location, such as elk bugling, or geese migrating. Follow with the fact that although humans can hear a lot of animal communication, there are many animals that communicate so high or low that human ears can’t pick up on it. You can use an example of a dog whistle and explain that a dog whistle is at a

pitch that humans can't hear, but dogs can. This type of communication is constantly occurring among insects, birds, and mammals, but humans are oblivious to it.

Follow by playing bat calls, then slow them down so that they're audible. Lead into the idea that as humans, we are no exception to the acoustical environment because we make noise too. However, our noise can smother (or mask) subtle sounds, especially naturally occurring sounds. For this reason acoustical environments may become an endangered resource. Explain that by talking on a phone, or buzzing through on a snowmobile, we scare off animals that may be trying to communicate to one another. We also cover up the calming sounds of a trickling brook or wind rushing through leaves.

Activity:

Play a recording you have previously made with approximately 10 different natural and human-made sounds. Have the group identify each sound and order them from most calming to least calming. Discuss why they chose the way they did. Conclude the activity by stating that in order to see more wildlife and experience natural sounds we can "eavesdrop on nature" by talking softly, muting electrical equipment when out in nature, and practicing attentive listening. Remind the group that sound is an endangered resource and in order to protect it, we must be aware of how much sound we are making.



National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

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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