



Listen, Pair, Share Educational Activity

Objective

The group will practice focusing on the sounds around them in the soundscape. They will think about why it's important to listen for individual layers. During small group conversations, they can sort the sounds into categories. Each small group then shares their thoughts and memories.

Ages	10+
Group Size	10–20 students
Setting	Indoors or outdoors
Duration	45 minutes
Subject(s)	Environmental Science

Overview

When first learning to discuss sound, people need structure. The design of this activity helps the group develop their active listening skills. They will learn to focus their attention on parts of the soundscape. This process is like peeling layers of an onion. It involves separating human-made and natural sounds.

Active listening takes practice. For your first try with a group, just focus on how to listen. After that, the activity is flexible. Leaders can use it to discuss various listening topics. We provide a few suggested prompts, but feel free to create your own.

Adapting the Think-Pair-Share method encourages active learning. Small group discussions allow people to develop their ideas first. They are then more confident when sharing with the larger group.

Logistics

When choosing a location, think about the size of the group and how you will ask people to arrange themselves at each step. During the listening phase, people may wish to spread out or sit down. During the pairing phase, people need to be close enough to have a conversation with their partner. During the sharing step, it works best when everyone can form a circle, either seated or standing. This shows that everyone has something to offer the group. Choose a location that can support all these arrangements.

During the Pair (Step 2) and Share (Step 3) stages, the leader will need to decide who speaks first. We've all experienced an eager volunteer who always wants to talk first. Picking someone with a silly question helps get more people involved and avoids anyone dominating the conversation. Here are some suggestions:

- Whose birthday is the closest (or farthest) to today?
- Which group has the biggest (or smallest) difference in age?
- Whose last name has the most (or fewest) letters in it?
- Which group has the most items in their pockets combined?
- Who was born the farthest away from (or closest to) our current location?
- Which group has the most siblings (or pets) combined?

Important Vocabulary

Anthropophony	The sounds created by humans and machines, such as car horns or airplanes.
Biophony	The sounds of plants and animals, such as frogs croaking or birds chirping.
Extrinsic Sounds	Sounds not forming an essential part of the experience of a location.
Geophony	The sounds of the earth, such as wind blowing or waves crashing.
Intrinsic Sounds	Cultural, historic, and natural sounds that belong within the experience of a location.
Noise	Unwanted or disruptive sound. The difference between sound and noise often depends upon who is listening and the situation.
Sound	Vibrations that travel through the air or another medium. These vibrations can be heard when they reach a person's or animal's ear.
Soundscape	The sounds heard in a particular location, considered as a whole.

Procedures

Step 1. Listen

Spread out. Everyone needs space but should be close enough to regroup when asked. Allow the group to get comfortable. Some people may want to sit while others remain standing.

Say

“Let's start by being as silent as possible. That means we need to be still, silence our phones and watches, and breathe comfortably. This will help us focus on the soundscape around us. The soundscape includes all the sounds in this location, like a landscape of sound. How long do you think we can silently listen to the soundscape?”

Pause for some discussion about this question.

Say

“We are going to listen for 60 seconds. I will start a timer when we begin, and I will let you know when the time is up. You might want to close your eyes to help focus your attention on the soundscape. You can sit or stand, whichever is more comfortable for you. Is everyone comfortable and ready? Let's give our full attention to the soundscape.”

Start the timer. At the end of 60 seconds, gently regain everyone's attention. Do not make any sudden or loud sounds.

Procedures (continued)

Step 2. Pair

Tell everyone to pair up with someone nearby, but don't let small groups grow beyond two or three people. This will help keep everyone engaged. Choose one or two of these discussion questions to guide their conversations:

- What individual sounds did you hear?
- What individual sounds did you like/dislike?
- What was the loudest/quietest sound that you heard?
- What was the closest/farthest sound that you heard?

Give the small groups five minutes to talk about the prompt with their partners. Watch the time closely and provide a halfway warning so everyone has an opportunity to contribute equally.

As a final step, ask each group to nominate a spokesperson. Explain that they will summarize the group's discussions for everyone. Then, give them another minute to prepare their report.

Step 3. Share

Gather everyone together in a circle with the leader in the center. Remind people that there are no wrong answers. We need to refrain from judging the quality of responses. Use the earlier suggestions (under Logistics) to determine which spokesperson will report first. After the first report, proceed clockwise or counterclockwise around the circle. Make sure that every spokesperson has a chance to share what their group discussed.

After the initial reports, use any of these topics to extend the discussion:

- Discuss the differences between human sounds and natural sounds. Ask participants to ignore any human sounds and only focus on the natural sounds.
- Introduce the terms biophony, geophony, and anthropophony. These are three categories of sounds proposed by Dr. Bernie Krause. Ask participants to identify one example of each that is present in this soundscape.
- Introduce the difference between sound and noise (unwanted sound). Ask participants to consider whether specific sounds they mentioned were sound or noise.
- Introduce the concept of intrinsic and extrinsic sounds for the area. Ask the group to listen for examples of intrinsic sounds that help define this area. Identify and discuss extrinsic sounds that might interfere with their listening.

Fun Fact

"A man in Anaktuvuk Pass [an Alaska Native village within the borders of Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Alaska], in response to a question about what he did when he visited a new place, said..., "I listen." That's all. I listen, he meant, to what the land is saying. I walk around in it and strain my senses in appreciation of it for a long time before I, myself, ever speak a word."

Barry Lopez, Arctic Dreams



Procedures (continued)

Final Discussion

You can engage the group in further conversation by asking any of the following questions:

- What can we understand about this area after listening to the soundscape?
- Were there any individual sounds that your group could not identify the source of? How did you talk about the sound without knowing its source? Were you able to point out certain features?
- How difficult was it to ignore human sounds and pay attention to natural sounds? Why do you think human sounds dominate our attention so easily?
- Imagine you are one of the birds found in this area. How might features in the local geophony and anthropophony affect your communication with other birds? How might you adapt to improve communication?
- Did your group disagree with another group's classification of a specific sound as noise? Why did your group reach a different conclusion?

Fun Fact

What is the difference between hearing and listening? Hearing is the function or power of perceiving a sound. Listening is the ability to perceive with thoughtful attention. Listening requires focus, meaning it's active. Hearing is passive because it is a mechanical function of the body. Listening allows understanding to happen.

Keywords in Sound



Resources

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Listen Pair Share Field Notes

Preparation

- Choose one to five listening locations for the group to visit.
- During travel between locations, the group is free to engage in conversations and make other appropriate sounds.
- While at a designated listening location, the group will need to be as silent as possible.
- At each location, complete Steps 1–3.
- Before the first iteration, explain soundscape as the sounds heard in a location, considered as a whole.

Step 1. Listen

- Remind everyone about active listening and the need to be as silent as possible.
- Ask for feedback from the group about how long to listen (30 seconds, 60 seconds, or more?) and arrive at consensus on the duration.
- Allow participants to spread out and find a comfortable spot.
- Remind the group that you will watch the clock so they can focus on listening and begin monitoring time.

Step 2. Pair

- After listening for the full duration, gently regain everyone's attention.
- Have participants select a partner for discussion, but no more than three in each group.
- Provide one or two question prompts to guide their conversations.
- Give the groups five minutes to discuss and begin monitoring time. Announce the halfway point to ensure everyone has a turn to talk.
- Ask each group to select a spokesperson.

Step 3. Share

- Gather everybody together again, forming a circle.
- Remind everyone that there are no wrong answers.
- Proceed around the circle, giving each spokesperson an opportunity to report on their pair's conversation.
- After the last spokesperson, summarize the major points you want the group to take away.
- Travel to the next location and return to Step 1, or proceed with final discussion.

Final Discussion

- What can we understand about each listening location through its soundscape?
- Do you think any features of this local soundscape affect animal communication?
- Were there any disagreements in your conversations about specific sounds? How did you navigate them to reach consensus?