

living-things

A senses hunt in the school garden

Lesson at a glance

Open by wondering what careful looking, listening, touching and smelling might reveal in the school garden. Name the two key words and the four hunt jobs (colourful, sound, rough, smell — no tasting). Partners share one prediction, then the class walks a short loop with four planned stops, naming one shared find aloud at each. Back indoors, pupils fill the Investigation Journal's four sense boxes from real walk memories. Close by sorting living and non-living finds and naming which sense helped most.

Learning objectives

- Use sight, hearing, touch and smell to notice living and non-living things outdoors
- Record what each sense revealed on a simple observation sheet

Before the bell – prep

Check weather and a safe short loop; mark four stop points (hedge/tree, grass, wall/fence, flower bed). Print each pupil's four-box Investigation Journal page (I saw / I heard / I felt / I smelled) or labelled A4; leave clipboards and pencils on desks indoors. Optional fabric gloves. Heavy rain: covered porch or open windows only.

Materials

Item	Qty	Per	Source	Low-cost substitute
clipboard	1	pupil	classroom	a firm book or piece of cardboard to lean on
Investigation Journal page	1	pupil	classroom	a plain A4 sheet with four boxes labelled I saw, I heard, I felt, I smelled
pencil	1	pupil	classroom	crayon
gloves (optional, for wet bark or cold hands)	1	pupil	brought from home	touch only dry safe surfaces the teacher chooses; skip gloves

Safety watch-point

No tasting outdoors; touch only safe surfaces you offer (no thorns, nettles, litter). Head-count at each stop; adult front and back; wash hands on return.

**Teaching moves**

- **Our words:** Keep the board to the two words and tiny examples only. Say them once, then live-model the full noticing chain just before you leave: wonder → think you might hear → stand still eyes closed → name what you really heard. Head off ‘observation means the right name’ — praise careful sensing first.
- **Our hunt jobs:** Show the four icons alone and point as you name each job so early readers hold them without reading. Stress no tasting, no picking unless you say so, stay with the group.
- **What might we notice?:** Partner whispers first, then collect a few ideas under four board heads: see, hear, touch, smell — leave them up for the return. Hand out nothing; empty hands go outside. Rebrief safety in plain words before lining up.
- **Senses hunt outdoors:** Lead four stops (sight → hearing freeze → safe touch → smell lean-in) with 1–2 minutes noticing each. After each stop, choral name-back one shared find (‘Yellow daisy, eyes’) and hold that cue yourself. Outdoor block is 17 minutes including exit/return; if late to stop one, drop to three stops but still gather all four senses. Head-count at every stop; journals stay indoors.
- **Record what our senses found:** Hand out clipboards only now. Oral stems first: I saw... I heard... I felt... I smelled... Replay the shared stop cues so empty boxes get real memories, not guesses. Accept a drawing or one word; give the full eight minutes while the walk is fresh — do not send boxes home.
- **What did our senses help us notice?:** Invite three or four pupils to share one journal box. Compare with the pre-walk board list. Revoice living (bird, daisy, leaf on plant) vs non-living (stone, fence, fallen dry leaf) and that different senses catch different clues. Display-only talk — no extra writing.

What it should show

Most pupils fill four genuine boxes from the walk: a colourful plant or painted object; bird song, wind or footsteps; rough bark, wall or grass; soil, cut grass or a safe flower smell. Living and non-living both count. Empty boxes usually mean the shared stop cue was not replayed — retell it rather than invent a new find. A fallen dry leaf named as living is the common mix-up to gently correct.

Misconceptions & interventions

- **Observation means I have to name the plant or animal correctly.** — Praise the sense first: ‘You felt rough bark — that is the observation.’ Names can come later if known; guessing the species is not required.
- **A fallen dry leaf on the path is living because it came from a tree.** — Hold the key point live: a leaf still on the plant is living; a dry leaf on the path is non-living. Sort two real finds side by side if you can.
- **I can write what I think might be out there if I forgot the walk.** — Replay the class name-back cue for that sense (‘Bird song, ears’) and have them mark that real memory — no invented finds.

Differentiation

Emerging	Developing	Proficient
• Oral rehearsal of each stem with the teacher, then a drawing or dictated word in the box; replay the shared stop cue before they mark.	• After filling four boxes, ask which sense helped most and whether that find was living or non-living.	• Share one find their eyes missed until another sense caught it, and say living or non-living with a reason from the walk.

Cross-curricular hook

Links to Aistear outdoor play and oral language — pupils rehearse ‘I saw / heard / felt / smelled’ stems before marking the journal.