

Garden Sense:
Exploring the Five Senses

Grades: K-2

Portland Japanese Garden
Lesson Plans for the Classroom



Four Seasons ♦ Five Senses ♦ One Extraordinary Experience



Introductory Information for Teachers

The Goju-no-To or Five-Story Pagoda

Walking through the Wisteria Arbor in the heart of the Portland Japanese Garden, students find a “picture-frame” view of one of the Garden’s special treasures—the Goju-no-To or Five-Story Pagoda. The Goju-no-To is nearly 100 years old and was a gift given in 1963 to this Garden from the Mayor of Sapporo, our Sister City on the northern island of Hokkaido, Japan. The Goju-no-To is 18 feet high, weighs two tons, and is made of granite. It is a lantern-style pagoda and serves as a reminder of one of the spiritual traditions associated with Japanese gardens (see Further Information to learn more).

Each of the five stories of the pagoda represents one of the five elements: earth, water, fire, wind, and sky. The pagoda also serves to represent the five directions: north, east, south, west, and center; or the five colors: red, yellow, blue, black and white; or the five great virtues: humanity, justice, respect, wisdom, and fidelity. While the five elementary forces (ever-producing and ever-destroying) are: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water. This symbolic use of the number five can serve as a departure point for introducing the five senses with children.

A stroll through a Japanese garden is expected to be a total sensory experience. Approaching the Goju-no-To, we can appreciate the way in which the Japanese garden designer consciously shapes and directs this sensory experience. Views are intentionally directed using such devices as framing, hide-and-reveal, and screening. The sounds of the nearby waterfall and the crunch of footsteps on gravel, the touch underfoot of the Belgian blocks giving way to gravel, all engage the senses and contribute to the appreciation of this special spot.

Further Information

A pagoda is a symbolic tower that has historic roots in India where ancient Buddhist reliquaries called stupa are believed to enshrine relics of Gautama Siddhartha, the historic Buddha. As Buddhism traveled from India to China and beyond, symbolic reliquaries were built in many different forms and shapes (including towers in brick, wood, or stone) depending upon the country of origin and the historic period.

The nine rings on the top represent the nine heavens in Buddhist belief. The top is in the shape of a lotus blossom, a flower that blooms in muddy waters—a symbol that represents the belief that enlightenment is attainable even amid an often troubled existence.

In design terms, the framed view of the Goju-no-To through the Wisteria Arbor at the Portland Japanese Garden is a visual and conceptual vehicle for appreciating the Japanese artistic preference for asymmetry. Odd numbers are preferred over even, as the five groupings of shrubs and trees around the pagoda demonstrate. The varying heights of the yew hedges that form the backdrop to the pagoda lead the eye up and over the pagoda itself. The natural balance and harmony possible through asymmetry is a key element of Japanese art and design.

Lesson Plan

Introduction to the Lesson

The following Lesson Plan and Activity will guide students through an exploration of the five senses. A stroll through a Japanese garden is intended to be a total sensory experience. The Portland Japanese Garden is a vehicle through which to introduce and explore the five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. The only sense that is not readily apparent is that of taste. If you were a guest at a tea ceremony in the Garden's Kashin-Tei Tea House, you would taste the unique flavor of a frothy bowl of green tea called matcha. The slightly bitter flavor of the tea is offset by a sweet confection that accompanies it. And one of the delights of an ordinary spring day at the Garden is the invigorating taste of rain in the air.

Lesson Overview

Japanese garden design thoughtfully engages the five senses (taste: tea from tea ceremony in tea garden) of the observer. In this lesson, students will take a sensory tour of the Portland Japanese Garden. On the sensory tour children will pick a sense (other than taste) to focus on while they experience the natural setting. This lesson will encourage children to expand their vocabularies and hone their observation skills.

*This lesson can be an excellent introduction to the Haiku: Poetry in the Garden Lesson.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Name the five senses.
- Articulate words and phrases relating to the senses.
- Interact appropriately in a natural space.
- Observe a natural space with a focus on a particular sense and articulate the words they associated with their experience.

Oregon Department of Education

Common Curriculum Goals

Language Arts

- Writing: Students will identify and write various parts of speech.
- Speaking: Students will describe people, places, and things.
- Vocabulary: Students will classify categories of words.

Classroom Preparation

Begin classroom preparation sufficiently far enough in advance of the trip to the Portland Japanese Garden so that the children are familiar with the five senses, are accustomed to being asked to focus on a sense, and are comfortable using adjectives to describe the senses. Once the children are familiar with the concept of the five senses, the advance preparation can be accomplished in 2-3 minute activities, repeated at various times throughout the days leading up to the Garden visit.

In preparation for your trip to the Portland Japanese Garden (detailed information follows):

1. Teach or review the five senses.
 2. Keep an ongoing list of words describing each sense.
 3. Provide many opportunities for short, repetitive activities focusing on the senses.
 4. Explain the purpose of the visit to the Japanese Garden and the behavioral expectations.
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1. Teach or review the five senses: sight, hearing, smell, touch, taste (Be sure the children understand that the sense of touch can be experienced by all parts of the body, not just the hands.)
 2. Develop, on large chart paper, an ongoing class list of adjectives that might be used to describe objects and experiences related to each of the senses. Encourage the children to think of words and continue to add to this list as you prepare for the visit to the Portland Japanese Garden. Encourage very descriptive adjectives or phrases and, if you are comfortable, accept non-traditional descriptions (such as yucky to describe taste, screechy to describe sound).
 3. Take many opportunities throughout the day to draw short, focused attention to sensory activities (2-3 minutes each). Continue to add the descriptive words and phrases that result from these activities to your class list. Some ideas:
 - At various times during the day ask the children to close their eyes and describe what they hear or smell. Remember to add to your chart.
 - After lunch, ask them to describe the taste of one food that they ate and to describe what it felt like in their mouth and on their tongue.
 - Put an object in a paper bag. Pass it around and have the children put their hand in the bag and feel the object without looking. Ask them to describe the object and try to guess what it is.
 - Sing a song in a high voice, then in a low voice; in a quiet voice and then a loud voice; in a squeaky voice and then a growly voice.
 - Have a child describe something in the classroom. The other children try to identify the object from the description.
 4. The day before the visit, explain that the children will be taking a “sensory tour” to the Portland Japanese Garden, concentrating on how it looks, sounds, feels and smells. Discuss the behavioral expectations with the children:
 - It is important to stay on the path.
 - They will not use the sense of taste in the Garden, except in an imaginary way.
 - It is okay to feel the rocks underfoot, touch the railing of the bridge, etc. but grabbing or picking the plants is forbidden.

The Visit to the Garden

When you visit the Portland Japanese Garden, the children will make a “sensory tour” of the Garden i.e. they will walk through the Garden focusing on one (or more) sense and will articulate words that they associate with the experience. The senses of sight, hearing, and touch will be the most accessible. The sense of smell is less obvious and the sense of taste is not used, except in an imaginary way at the Tea Garden.

The Tour

Your tour through the Garden will be led by a Garden Guide who has been trained to engage the children in this lesson. You will need to tell your Guide the format you have chosen and how you have decided to record the children’s descriptions. Your guide will review the behavioral expectations with the children, before beginning the stroll through the Garden.

Decisions for the Teacher to Make Before the Visit

1. Before your visit, please decide the most appropriate format for your group. Some options you might consider:
 - Choose one sense for the entire class to focus on. You might choose one sense for the first half of the Garden and one sense for the second half of the Garden.
 - Choose two, three, or five senses for the entire class to focus on.
 - Assign a specific sense to each child.
 - Let each child choose a sense to focus on.
2. Decide how you want to record the children’s descriptions. Two options are:
 - Have the teachers and chaperones record the objects and the sensory descriptions of all the children. For example, under the sense of touch, they would record “bridge railing-rough.” This is the preferred method for all children and is essential for pre-writing children. Be prepared with paper and pencils for all adults.
 - Older children can record their own descriptions. (The attached Sensory Tour Worksheet can be used for this purpose.) Keep in mind that most children will be very distracted from the sensory experience by the need to do their own recording. This method should probably only be chosen if you have a highly focused group with highly independent writing ability or you do not have enough adult chaperones to handle the recording for the group. Be prepared with paper and pencils.

Prompts to engage the children

While it is important not to deprive the children of the opportunity to make independent observations, there are many prompts that you and the Tour Guide can use to engage the children and focus their observations when necessary. Some ideas:

- Close your eyes and listen. What do you hear?
- What words describe the water?
- Turn all the way around in a circle, look up and down. How is the view different?
- Do objects look different in the sun and in the shade?
- Does it feel different when you walk on different surfaces?
- How many shades of green do you see?
- Keep track of all the colors that we see today.
- Can you hear something that you can't see? Can you identify it?
- Pretend you are drinking tea at a tea ceremony. How does it taste?
- Can you see any reflections? How does an object look in its reflection?
- What do the two shapes in the Flat Garden look like?
- How does the railing on the Moon Bridge feel? What about the finials at the ends?
- Describe the shape of the railing on the veranda in front of the Flat Garden.
- What was your favorite smell?
- Watch for places that have "big views" and places that have "small views."
- How does the air feel? Do you feel wind, dampness in the air, rain?
- Close your eyes. How do the footsteps on the gravel sound? Can you walk on the gravel without making any sound?
- Describe the colors and patterns of the *koi*.
- How does it feel to sit on the ground or the stone benches at the Sand and Stone Garden?

Consolidation

Back at school, share thoughts about the Garden experience and make a classroom chart of all of the objects and descriptive words that were compiled on the tour.

Write a group story about the visit. (Older children may be able to write individual stories.) Some story starters might be:

- Did anything surprise you?
- Did you hear or see or smell or touch something you didn't expect?
- What did you like best about the Garden?
- Which sense did we experience in an imaginary way?

Sensory Tour Worksheet

Directions: Circle the sense you want to focus on during your walk. Write about or draw what you observe.



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Expansions of this Lesson Plan for Other Levels

Grades 3-5

Students in this age group can experience a sensory tour with more defined expectations. Possibilities for expansion include:

- Students record their own observations.
- Students tour the Garden with assigned and defined expectations for observation and comparison such as:
 - Describe the differences in the ground surfaces in the garden: how do they look, feel, sound?
 - Describe and compare several stone lanterns, or other artifacts such as bridges.
 - Compare the look, sound, smell and feel of two different gardens.
- Students classify the sensory attributes they experienced in the Garden with more defined guidelines. For example, choose an object (such as the waterfall) and indicate from which location it could be heard but not seen, from which location it could be both seen and heard, and from which it could be neither seen nor heard. Or choose a location (such as the Moon Bridge) and indicate what could be heard but not seen from the bridge, what could be heard and seen, and what could be neither heard nor seen.
- In the classroom, students produce an original piece of creative writing based on their sensory experience in the Portland Japanese Garden.

Grades 6-8

Students in this age group can approach the tour from the point of view of a Japanese garden designer's intention to provide a total sensory experience. They will try to find examples of how the designer of the Portland Japanese Garden manipulated the environment to provide a total sensory experience.

- What methods and materials did the designer use to direct the view—framing, natural screening, hide-and-reveal, winding paths, asymmetry? Portland Japanese Garden Guides are trained to lead the children in these observations.
- What methods and materials did the designer use to provide sound—materials, location of the origin of the sound?
- What methods and materials did the designer use to incorporate the sense of touch—touching is not just with the hands, ground surface underfoot, contrast of rough railing on the Moon Bridge with smooth bronze finials at the end of the railing?
- Creative writing assignment: How I Would Design a Japanese Garden, etc.