

# W.A.T.E.R. WORKSHEETS



## MAPPING THE INVISIBLE

*A lesson for exploring the environment through sensory mapping and feelings-based observation of the natural world*

### BIG PICTURE CONCEPT

Research shows that time in nature offers an abundance of psychological and physiological benefits. However, according to data gathered by Statista, over half of the world's population lived in urban areas in 2021, with around 82% of North Americans, 80% of Latin Americans, and 75% of Europeans residing in cities. Luckily, even if you don't have easy access to lush forests or fresh sea air, opening up to the benefits of nature is as simple as tapping into your five senses.

### ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION

A sensory map is a creative and reflective way to explore an environment using all five senses: sight, sound, touch, smell, and taste (if safe and applicable). This activity encourages students to deepen their connection with the natural world by documenting their sensory experiences in a stormwater park or other outdoor setting. By mapping their observations, students gain a greater awareness of their surroundings and how different elements of the landscape interact.

Students will work individually or in small groups to observe, document, and map sensory experiences at different locations within the park. They will create a visual representation of their environment based on what they perceive through their senses. This lesson provides an interactive and reflective way for students to connect with their environment while developing observation, artistic, and critical thinking skills.

### ACTIVITY VITALS

- **Activity Time:** 45 minutes
- **Subject Areas:** Science, Art, Geography, Language Arts
- **Grade Levels:** 7th–12th grade
- **Skills:** Observation, critical thinking, artistic representation, mindfulness
- **Key Vocabulary:** Sensory mapping, perception, landscape, ecosystem, observation
- **Jobs & Careers:** Environmental Designer, Ecologist, Landscape Architect, Urban Planner

### SUGGESTED CURRICULUM APPLICATIONS

**Science:** Ecology, environmental awareness, sensory biology.

**Art:** Sketching, cartography, creative expression.

**Language Arts:** Descriptive writing, poetry, journaling.

**Geography:** Mapping techniques, place-based learning.

### ACTIVITY OBJECTIVES

Engage students in mindful observation and reflection.

Explore how different environmental features contribute to a multi-sensory experience.  
Develop creative mapping skills by representing sensory input visually.

Connect sensory perception to ecological awareness and environmental design.

# LET'S GET STARTED

THIS ACTIVITY CAN BE DONE USING A VARIETY OF MAPPING TYPES - VISUAL, WRITTEN, COLLAGE, MUSIC, OR OTHERS MODES OF EXPRESSION

## ACTIVITY MATERIALS

- Clipboards & pencils
- Blank paper or printed sensory mapping templates
- Colored pencils, crayons, or markers
- Optional: Field guides for identifying natural elements
- Optional: Small containers for collecting natural items (leaves, soil, etc.)

## ACTIVITY PROCEDURE

### Preparation (Before the Activity)

- Choose a location within the stormwater park where students can sit quietly and observe their surroundings.
- Provide a brief introduction to sensory mapping, explaining how it involves documenting what they perceive with each of their five senses.
- Encourage students to slow down and engage fully with their environment.

### Step 1: Guided Discussion and Grounding Exercise as a Group

- Ask students to close their eyes for a moment and take a few deep breaths.
- Guide them to focus on each sense one at a time:
  - **Sight:** What colors, shapes, and patterns do you see?
  - **Sound:** What natural and human-made sounds can you hear?
  - **Touch:** What textures can you feel around you?
  - **Smell:** What scents are present in the air?
  - **Taste** (if applicable): Is there moisture, dust, or a distinct taste in the air?

### Step 2: Mapping the Sensory Experience

Students may perform the following individually, in small groups, or as a class.

- Students sketch a simple map of the area they are exploring.

- Using colors, symbols, and labels, they document their sensory experiences in different locations on the map.

Encourage creativity! For example:

- Wavy lines to represent the sound of rustling leaves.
- Dots to symbolize bird songs in the distance.
- Textures drawn or shaded to represent smooth rocks or rough bark.
- Colors to capture mood or atmosphere (e.g., warm for sunlight, cool for shadows).

Set sensory Goals or Guidelines for Mapping such as:

- Map at least 1 of each of your 5 senses
- Map at least 1 uncomfortable feeling
- Map at least 1 exciting feeling

### Step 3: Reflection & Discussion

- Have students share their maps with a partner or small group.
- Discuss how different people noticed different things—why might that be?

*Ask reflection questions:*

- What sense provided the strongest connection to this place?
- Did anything surprise you about what you noticed?
- How might weather, time of day, or season change your sensory experience?
- How can sensory mapping help us design and build better outdoor spaces?

## STUDENT WORK + DATA SHEETS

*Sensory Mapping Template*  
*Observation & Reflection Questions*

### EXTENSIONS:

**Art Connection:** Create a watercolor or pastel drawing inspired by the sensory experience.

**Poetry & Writing:** Write a descriptive paragraph, poem, or short story inspired by what was observed.

**Science Investigation:** Compare sensory observations in different weather conditions or seasons.

**Community Engagement:** Create a public sensory map for display at the park to encourage others to explore.