

Are You My Pup?



Objective

Students will be able to demonstrate how sea lions use their senses of smell and hearing to locate their pups.

Materials

per 24 students:

- 24 small containers with lids
- 24 cotton balls
- 12 pairs of noisemakers (kazoos, whistles, party favors, etc.)
- 10 extracts (chocolate, mint, almond, vanilla, maple, etc.)
- peanut butter
- 2 types of perfume
- 24 blindfolds

Background

When breeding and giving birth, sea lions gather in large groups called “rookeries” along sandy or rocky beaches. Mother sea lions leave their pups ashore while they forage for food in the ocean. When mothers return, the mother and pup must find each other. Instead of just looking for each other in a crowded rookery, mothers and pups depend on voice (vocalizations) and smell recognition.

Action

1. Before the activity, prepare the scented containers. Make two of each aromatic. For peanut butter, put a small amount of peanut butter in two containers, add a cotton ball, close the lid, and label the bottom of the container. For the extracts, place cotton balls in the containers and saturate with the extract liquid. Close lids and label bottoms. Repeat for the two perfumes. When finished, you should have 12 pairs of scented containers. Separate scents and noisemakers into two groups.
2. Begin activity by reviewing background information about sea lion rookeries. Imagine what a rookery might look like. Noisy? Crowded? Empty? Quiet?
3. Divide the class into two groups with each side having 12 students. One group will be the “pups” and the other the “mothers.” Give each student one scent container and one noisemaker (the matching pair should be in the other group). Ask students to smell their scent and make their noise.
4. In an open area of the room, blindfold students and ask them to slowly walk around the area trying to find their mother or their pup. When pairs meet, they should smell their containers to make sure they’ve found the right partner.
5. After all students have found their partners, review the activity. Have students describe their experiences. Did they find it difficult? Easy? Which sounds and smells were easiest to locate (strongest, sweet, loud, high-pitched, etc.)?