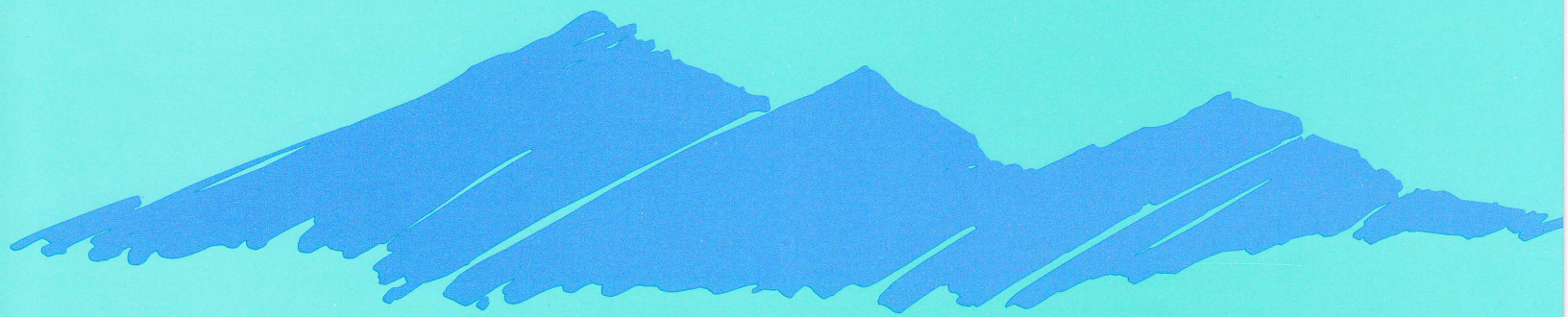


SETTING THE MOOD

FieldGuide

Colorado Outdoor Education Center



Setting the Mood

Live awhile in the natural world. Take time to relax and wonder — to notice the shape of the trees, the color of the grass, the smell of the soil, the feel of the rocks, the movement of the sun and clouds. Here we can learn first-hand about the interconnections of nature, of which we are a very important part. If we work together, we can make this an unforgettable time of learning, friendship and great fun in the out-of-doors.

This is my Classroom
I have trees for walls
I have the sky for a roof
I have the ground for a floor.
The wind is like an
air conditioner
The sun is like a heater
The rock that I am sitting on
is like a desk.
— Sixth Grader at High Trails

Have you ever noticed a small white cloud dissolve into a background of blue space? My search is for the kind of consciousness which could do just that to the causes of world friction. — Cedric Wright



Setting the Mood

The introductory program is designed to set the tone of Discovery Group learning and to build anticipation for the time ahead. The activities are varied, but together are designed to stretch our senses and increase our awareness and perspective of the world around us. In this meeting we hope to use these activities to give a students a sense of the immensity, beauty, and wonder of the outdoors.

In addition to our relationship with the natural world, High Trails is also about our relationships with one another. In the Setting the Mood group we will also try to build a feeling of friendship and cooperation, and encourage each student to set personal goals. The use of the journal to record experiences and feelings is encouraged.

Activity

Concept or skill

Introductions

Expectations for the time here
Introduction to role-playing

Nature Scavenger Hunt

Increased observational skills

Six Senses

Exercising the senses
Sense of wonder

Blindfold Hike/
Find Your Tree

Appreciation of differences in individuals

Blindfold Trust Walk

Trust and cooperation

High Point

Importance of perspectives
Appreciation of nature

Universal Journey

Magnitude of the universe
Interrelationships with the cosmos/earth

Special Spots

A closer look at nature
Opportunity for creative writing

The Blob

Cooperation among people
Belonging to a group

Concluding Discussion

Defining and setting goals

Props: Blindfolds, scavenger hunt sheets, pencils, journals

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INTRODUCTIONS

Expectations for the week

Introduction to role-playing

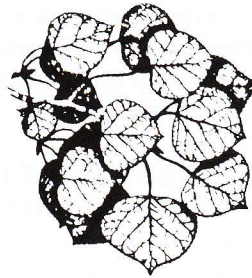
After taking roll at the meeting stake, introduce the teacher, the High Trails staff member and the counsellors. Ask the students to turn and introduce themselves to the person next to them. Divide into groups of 6-8 students, each led by a counsellor. Because they have just arrived at High Trails, the children will be excited and energetic. It is important to stress at the outset that we are here to have fun and to learn in the outdoors and, because we are going to be doing so much, they will need to pay attention to the directions of the leaders.

Now tell the students that we will often be role-playing while we learn this week, pretending to be people we are not. Right now, as we walk away from the stake, let's pretend that we have never seen anything around us before— as if we have just landed here from another planet. What an amazing place! Look at all the rocks and trees, the birds, the grasses, etc. It is important that the counsellors lead the students in an enthusiastic, imaginative investigation of the area, starting with the Nature Scavenger Hunt.

NATURE SCAVENGER HUNT:

Increased observational skills

Something red in nature
Something scary
The oldest thing you can find
The youngest thing you can find
Something you can feel but cannot see
Something with a smooth texture
Something with a rough texture
Something beautiful
Something amazing
Two seeds
A piece of litter
Evidence of an animal
Three different kinds of grass
Something that makes a noise
Something humans could not live without
Something natural which has no purpose



Once the group has found all the items (it is important that they keep moving in the general direction of the High Point) have a short wrap-up discussion to allow the students to show their finds. *What do all the objects have in common? How are they interrelated?* Point out how we all have different opinions on what is amazing, what is beautiful— even what is red. Talk about the senses we have which allowed us to find these items. *Would a dog be able to find something red?* (Probably not). *Would a bat be able to hear the same things we found which made a noise? Would it be able to hear things we can't?* (Yes, using sonar). *What things would animals be able to find better than we can?* (Birds could probably find seeds and different kinds of grass; a coyote might be very adept at finding evidence of animals).

SIX SENSES

Exercising the senses

Sense of wonder

In order to really appreciate nature, we are going to practice using all five senses, concentrating on one sense at a time.

SIGHT: Ask the students to look in one direction for 60 seconds. Then have them close their eyes and ask questions about the area they just looked at. *Are there clouds in the sky? How many kinds of trees did they see? Was there a fence or a road? Any signs of animals? How many colors did they see? Now have the students open their eyes and look at the area again. What do they see this time that they didn't see last time?*

HEARING: Ask the students to close their eyes and imagine they are sitting here, alone, on a very dark night, straining their ears to hear every sound. After a minute or two of silence, have them open their eyes and discuss the sounds they heard. *Would they have heard them if they hadn't been concentrating on listening?*

TOUCH: Next ask the students to close their eyes and their ears and concentrate on feeling. *Here you are again, alone on a dark night. What would you feel? The ground or rock you are sitting on? Is it rough or smooth? Cold or hot? Wet or dry? The breeze on your face? Would you be able to sense the presence of your counsellor sneaking silently up behind you?*

SMELL: Now ask everyone to concentrate on their sense of smell. *Can you smell the soil? Fresh air? What about the plants and trees? Have you noticed any other smells today?* There will be many good things to smell in nature in the next activity and all through their time at High Trails.

TASTE: What other sense is there? Pick up a blade of grass or a pine needle and taste it. There are many interesting natural tastes around High Trails – rosehips, “wild garlic”, aspen twigs, pine seeds, mountain mahogany, etc. The Indians, of course, lived off these native plants and the native animals. You will have more opportunities to taste some of these plants. but we do have a few poisonous plants here too – so don't nibble on unknown plants.

Everyone knows about these five senses, but has anyone ever heard of the term “sixth sense”? What do you think it means? It often means an ability to sense the unknown, to predict events, to ‘sense’ things. In our case it could mean a sense of wonder. Ask the students what they think a sense of wonder is.

WONDER: Your sense of wonder can be increased by being more aware of what is around you, by observing habits and patterns in nature, by learning as much as you can about the outdoors, and by sharing discoveries with each other.

BLINDFOLD HIKE/FIND YOUR TREE

Appreciation for individual differences in nature—and people

Again divide into four counsellor-led groups for a blindfold hike. Each counsellor can blindfold the students in his/her group and lead them on a short walk.

Walk first in an open grassy area, listening to the sound of walking.

Concentrate on your sense of hearing. Relax. What noises do you hear? First try to identify the source of each sound you hear, then imagine yourself in the middle of a symphony orchestra, with all the noises playing at once. Can you notice the changes underfoot as you walk from a grassy area into a wooded area. Feel the difference between sun and shade, openness and having something above you.

If it is snowing, can you feel the trees protecting you? If it is cloudy, how much change in temperature do you feel in the forest? Do you think this temperature change would be more noticeable on a sunny day?

Leave each blindfolded student at a different tree. In a little while, they will be able to remove their blindfolds and be asked to identify their trees — so, at this time, they should learn all they can about them. Have them feel the bark and branches and soil under the tree. Have them listen to the bark, smell the tree, use every sense they can to explore and get to know their tree. *Does their tree smell like chocolate? Like vanilla? Crush some needles or leaves and smell them. Pick up whatever you are stepping on and smell the soil and dried matter on the forest floor. Smell the air again. Can you identify pleasant smells? Unpleasant smells? Does the forest smell differ from the open meadow?* When you are sure you really know your tree, signal the counsellor and wait for her or him to come get you and lead you away from the tree. Now, take off the blindfolds and see if you can find your tree.

Follow up with a short discussion. *How many people found their tree? What senses helped them identify it? Did being blindfolded help them use their other senses better? Ask each student to look again at his/her tree. Is it exactly like any other tree in the forest? Look carefully! What about humans? Are any two humans exactly alike? Different kinds of trees have similar needs — water, sunlight, soil, etc. Do humans have similar needs? What are some of these needs? Food? Shelter? Friendship? Understanding? Fun? Love? Others?*



BLINDFOLD TRUST WALK

Trust and cooperation

One need most humans have is to trust others and be trusted by them. The blindfold trust walk incorporates increased sensory awareness with an attitude of trust for one another.

Divide the group into pairs. Within each pair, one partner is blindfolded and the other serves as guide. The guide leads the "blind" partner on a short walk, helping him/her to become aware of the surroundings. The guide may describe the area they are walking through and give the blind partner objects to touch or smell – cones, leaves, sticks, grass, stones, etc. After about five minutes, have the partners change roles.

At the end of this activity, ask everyone to remove their blindfolds and meet together for a brief discussion. *Were students more sensitive to their surroundings before or after being the guide? Were they more aware when guiding someone else than if they had been walking through the same area by themselves? Why or why not?*

HIGH POINT

Understanding of the importance of perspectives

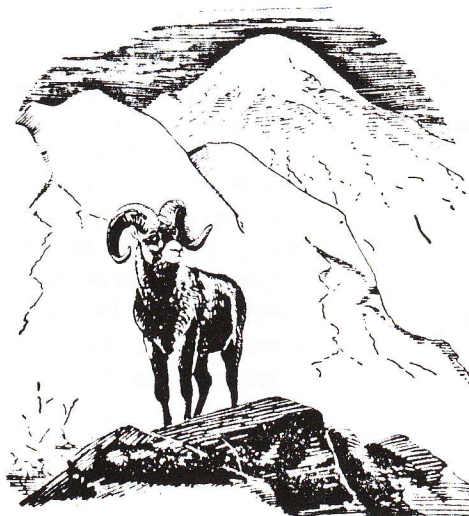
Appreciation of nature

Hike to the high point in counsellor groups with everyone making an effort to be especially observant. Encourage students to share interesting or beautiful finds with other members of the group – animal homes, unusual trees, unique rocks, etc.

Upon arriving at the high point, have all the students sit in a group and give them a moment to appreciate the view. This is a good time to discuss "perspective". Ask the students what they think perspective means. Tell them to lie flat on their stomachs. Look at the world as an ant would. *How would a tree look? How far away would Pikes Peak be? Would they be able to see it? Now stand up and look down. Pretend to be a hawk. How would a tree, grass, Pikes Peak look to a soaring bird?*

Ask the students to make a circle of their thumb and forefingers. Hold this "magic eye" close to their own eye and look through it. *What do they see? Now have them stretch their arms out slowly, always looking through the magic eye. Do they see anything differently now? Do they see things they didn't see before?*

Perspective is the way we look at things. It is extremely important because our perspective often shapes our attitudes about things. For instance, if we only think about our needs when we cut down a tree, we ignore the perspective of the insects, birds and animals who depend on the tree. Many of man's mistakes with the environment – and with each other – have been made because our perspective has been wrong or too narrow. *Is it possible for us to gain a perspective on the views of people in other countries? In other parts of our own country?*



One way to gain perspective is to understand the things which we all share. Ask the students to make themselves comfortable and close their eyes. We are going to go on a big trip—a universal journey.

UNIVERSAL JOURNEY

Magnitude of the universe

Our interrelationships with the cosmos and earth

Let's consider where we are right now from several different perspectives. Imagine that you are able to leave your body and look at this whole group from the outside. First we are going to expand our perspectives.

Right now we are sitting on a hill at High Trails. We are floating above, looking down at ourselves. But High Trails is in Colorado. Now we are floating high enough so we can see the whole state. Do we look bigger or smaller from this perspective?

Now let's float even higher so we can see the whole United States. There is Texas-Florida-California. I can see trucks carrying oranges from Florida and trains carrying steel from Pittsburgh. There are coal trains and rail cars filled with wheat moving East and manufactured goods moving West. The whole country is tied together by highways, railroad tracks, airplanes. How do we look from this perspective?

As we float even higher, we can see the whole Earth. Wow, is it beautiful! Can you see Africa and India? China and France? There are students in these countries, too. What do you think they are doing right now? What are they thinking about? When we look at them from this perspective, they seem closer to us.

Now we are really going on a trip! First we see our whole Solar System — the sun and its 9 planets. As we continue to move away, the Earth and even the sun grow smaller and smaller. If the Earth were the size of a pebble, 1 inch in circumference, the sun would be about 100 yards away. On this same scale, the nearest star would be 341 miles distant! If we could travel at the speed of light (180,000 miles a second) it would take us over 4 years to get to the nearest star! Traveling at this speed, a billion years could pass on earth in what seems like an instant to us!

But in our imagination we are going to travel much faster, through the 100 million stars of the Milky Way galaxy — until we can see the whole galaxy. It looks like a giant pinwheel of light. A dense cluster of stars in the center is circled by spiraling arms of stars. We know our sun is on one of these arms. Perhaps we could see it if we had telescopic eyes.

But our trip isn't over yet. We are going to zoom away from the Milky Way galaxy, through perhaps 100 billion other galaxies, each containing hundreds of millions or hundreds of billions of stars, to the edge of the Universe. Look toward Earth now. What do you see? We have reached the broadest perspective we know about. From this point of view, even our galaxy would seem like a tiny speck in the strongest telescope.

We're ready for the return trip. Close your eyes so our tremendous speed won't make you dizzy. Through the Universe and billions of whirling galaxies — back to the Milky Way galaxy and then to our own solar system. Look, there is the Earth! How do you feel about the Earth now? Does it seem bigger or smaller than it did before?

We're continuing our zoom — there is the United States — then Colorado — then High Trails. Let's bring our imaginations back to our bodies and look at things again from this perspective. Do they look any different to you now?

SPECIAL SPOTS

A closer look at nature

Opportunity for creative writing

It is also possible to journey to perspectives which are smaller than normal. We are going to do this in a little different way. In a few minutes we are going to break up and everyone can choose one spot that will become your "Special Place" at High Trails. You will be like a giant in your special spot, so you will need to inspect it closely to discover what is going on there.

When you enter your special spot, you will be entering a little community that already existed before you arrived, so it is important not to do anything which would disturb or damage your spot. Look carefully at rocks and sticks. *What shapes are they? Where do you think they came from? What living things do you find? How do they depend on the non-living things in your spot? What design and textures do you find? What sounds or smells do you experience? Get to know your spot well so you can come back to it again.*

After exploring your special spot, take a few minutes to sketch it and write about it in your journal. *How does your spot make you feel? Why do you like it? What do you think your spot will look like in 10 years? What would you like it to look like in 10 years?*

Following this introduction, counsellors can take their groups a short distance away and help each student find a spot to claim and explore. (Be sure they find safe spots—not on steep rocky places, on tree limbs or other hazardous locations.) Some students may need help in exploring or writing about their spots.

After the students have had sufficient time in their special places, the leader can call the group back together and briefly discuss the students' discoveries and feelings.

THE BLOB

Cooperation among people

Belonging to a group

Before leaving the high point, spend a few moments talking about another type of perspective — the perspective of people around you. When you are living and working with others, it's important to be able to look at things from their perspective sometimes.

What are some situations where it might help to understand another person's point of view? How about with your parents? Brothers? Sisters? Friends? What is cooperation? Where is it important? In families? At school? In games or sports? In the cabin at High Trails? In discovery groups? Why is it important in each of these situations? Is it important to remember you are an individual? Can we be influenced, without thinking, by the power of a group?

All of the students will be in a discovery group and a cabin with the same people during their time at High Trails. They will be able to form a very special group if they cooperate with one another.

Now divide the group in half, and have each group form a circle and join hands. The groups are now blobs, (didn't they notice the super glue on their hands?) inseparable until the leader tells them the glue has worn off. This means they will have to do everything together. Warm up by doing a Blob cheer or a Blob dance; turn the Blob inside out and back again. Now assign the Blob several tasks to perform that will require cooperation, for example:

Walk through a heavily forested area
Move over a fallen limb
Cross a fence
Pick up and move a log
Surround a tree
Squeeze between two trees

Make a pretzel knot of themselves (Have the counsellors cover their eyes while they do this, then tell the counsellors to untangle them).

Sit down without touching the ground—use each other's knees as chairs

CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

Defining and setting goals

Just before arriving back at High Trails, disassemble the Blobs and find a good place to sit for the final discussion. This is a good time to talk about the discovery group tracks and to build anticipation for the groups they will be going on.

It is especially important to consider our goals, in order to help us make the most of the time at High Trails. Ask the students what "goals" are. *What are some of the goals they have now or have had in the past? Improved ability in football or tennis or softball? Learning how to play a musical instrument? Making new friends? Earning money? How did they achieve these goals? Did it take time and planning? Could they accomplish it all at once? What are realistic goals? What are unrealistic goals?*

Next, ask the students what some of their goals for their time at High Trails are.

Would they like to make new friends from other schools? Become better friends with someone from their own schools? Get to know their teachers or counsellors better? What would they like to learn? Something about wild animals or birds? How Indians or homesteaders lived? How to take care of themselves outdoors? Something about the history of the Earth, and how we can take better care of it? What kinds of experiences would they like to have? Hiking? Climbing A-Bluff? Feeding the barnyard animals? Watching wild birds? Looking through a telescope? Folk dancing?

What personal goals do they have? Would they like to become more friendly? Less shy? More self-confident? More independent?

After this discussion give the students some time to write their goals for their time at High Trails in their journals. Explain that at the end of their time at High Trails the group will have a chance to discuss the goals they wrote down and whether or not they were accomplished. This is also a good time for teacher, staff, and counsellors to get together to go over the next morning's discovery group.