

# Nature in the City



Figure 1 and 2: Photographing nature in the city, Roton nursery school, Charleroi, Belgium

# Nature in the City

An idea from:

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**Age:** 4-5 years

**Keywords:** #nature #photography #sound #environment #mediaeducation

**Key question:** *How to convey a sound and visual environment?*

**General objectives:**

- Observe one's environment
- Recognise sounds and sound effects and associate them with a photo/a corresponding image
- Introduction to the technical use of the tablet and its camera and Dictaphone features
- Take, sort and choose photos for a specific goal
- Identify sounds and record them
- Develop the children's creative autonomy through the use of a camera and a Dictaphone
- Foster intra-family discussions through the observation of photographs
- Create a sound bingo for the parents and/or other classes

**Time:** Approximately 4 hours split over 7 activities at home, as well as 3 activities at home.

## Materials

At school	At home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Projection system</li><li>● Tablets (or camera, or offline smartphones)</li><li>● Dictaphone (or tablet or smartphone)</li><li>● Loudspeakers or speaker system</li><li>● 2 panels representing the city and nature</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Camera, or tablet or smartphone equipped to take photos</li><li>● Internet connection and connected device to share activities done at home with the educator.</li></ul>

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## Software/Apps:

[www.soundjay.com](http://www.soundjay.com)

**Objective:**  
Online royalty-free sound bank

**Media:**  
Computer, smartphone or tablet

**Alternatives:**

[www.lasonotheque.org](http://www.lasonotheque.org)

YouTube sound library available at [www.studio.youtube.com](http://www.studio.youtube.com)

The sound library may also be compiled by the educator.

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## Short Presentation

During this workshop, pupils explore the themes of sound and image. There are encouraged to observe their immediate environment: their school or home neighbourhood. Is this environment rather urban or natural? What elements are associated with the city? And with nature? What do they see? What do they hear? What does a sound say? How can sound and images complete one another? Walking through different places together, the children capture these environments in sounds and images using a camera and a Dictaphone. At the end of the workshop, the children make a "sound bingo" to be played with the family and other classes.





## Step by step

### Step 1

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*At school*

#### Discovering one's environment

The educator organises a school outing in the immediate vicinity of the school:

- *What can we observe?*
- *What are the elements that are typical to nature?* (grass, a tree, bushes, clouds, the sky, etc. ).
- *What elements belong to the city?* (the pavement, the road, the pedestrian crossing, the traffic signs, the buildings, vehicles, etc.)

Beforehand, the educator will have prepared 2 panels, one identifying nature and the other the city, on which the children will sketch the elements they identified in either environment.



Figure 3: School outing around the school, Roton nursery school, Charleroi, Belgium

#### For distance learning

The educator suggests that the parents carry out the same activity with their child in the immediate vicinity of their *home* and have the child draw the elements identified, indicating whether the context is urban or natural. Online class session to put both the urban and nature elements in common.

<p><b>Step 2</b> --- <i>At school</i></p>	<p><b>Sound quiz: Listen to the sounds and identify them</b></p> <p>Using an online ready-to-use sound bank (cf. App section) or a recording, the educator plays sounds for the children who must guess what they correspond to (running water, playground, door slamming, crumpled paper, bird song, moving car, etc.): <i>Do you recognise this sound? What is it?</i></p> <p>If the educator has the corresponding illustrations, he or she asks the group to associate the sound with its image.</p> <p>The educator also plays "sound effects", which are sound creations using a variety of objects to produce specific sounds. For example, stirring the water in a bucket to imitate the sound of a river; crumpling a plastic bag at regular intervals to imitate the sound of footsteps in gravel; using empty plastic tubs to imitate the gallop of a horse, etc.</p> <p>Pupils discover that sound effects are not necessarily the result of an action similar to the one which is illustrated and that they may be produced using objects repurposed for the occasion.</p>
	<p><b>For distance learning</b></p> <p>The activity is carried out during a group video conference.</p>
<p><b>Step 3</b> --- <i>At home</i></p>	<p><b>Sound quiz at home</b></p> <p>The educator forwards several sounds to the parents digitally (mp3 files, sound or video links).</p> <p>Parents and children listen to the different sounds. Parents ask their child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Do you recognise that sound? What is it?</i></li> </ul> <p>The child draws the object or the situation that produces each sound, or associates them with the corresponding image, if provided by the educator. Together, material environment allowing, they can try to reproduce the same type of sound (water running from a faucet, hands clapping, washing machine, etc.)</p>

## Step 4

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At school

### Handling the tablet and the camera feature

The educator shows the children how to use a tablet optimally, starting by how to switch it on and off and how to handle it.

- *Where do you press to turn this tablet on?*
- *You must leave this button pressed down for a little while. Up to how much do you need to count?*
- *What button must you press on to switch it off?*
- *To use the tablet once it's switched on, there are several useful gestures: sweeping, lightly touching, brushing, etc.*

Then, the educator explores the camera feature with the children:

- *How should the tablet be positioned? How should it be held?*
- *Where do you press to take a picture?*
- *How do you zoom in or zoom out?*
- *How do you see the picture taken?*

The children handle the tablet on their own.

The educator suggests taking pictures of specific objects that were distributed to the pupils or groups of pupils.

- *How do you take a picture to properly represent what you want to show?*
- *Where should you stand to frame the picture?*
- *How do you take a wide shot?*
- *How do you photograph a detail? By zooming in or coming closer?*
- *Is it interesting to photograph the object from above or below? Framing, wide shot/details, high-angle/low-angle shot, etc.)*

Pupils understand that the content of a photo is not random but that it is the result of a specific intention (choice of the angle of view, framing, etc.). At this point, pupils are not expected to use the proper terminology (framing, wide shot, close-up) but to be able to talk about them in their own words.



Figure 4: Handling the tablet, Roton nursery school, Charleroi, Belgium

### **For distance learning**

The educator invites parents to handle their smartphone or tablet with their child and to discover the camera feature together.

Start by showing how to switch it on and off and how to handle it.

- *Where do you press to turn this tablet on?*
- *You must leave this button pressed down for a little while. Up to how much do you need to count?*
- *What button must you press on to switch it off?*
- *To use the tablet once it's switched on, there are several useful gestures: sweeping, lightly touching, brushing, etc.*

Then, explore the camera feature:

- *How should the tablet be positioned? How should it be held?*
- *Where do you press to take a picture?*
- *How do you zoom in or zoom out?*
- *How do you see the picture taken?*

### **Step 5**

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*At home*

### **Taking pictures around one's home**

The educator invites parents to help their child become familiar with handling their smartphone or tablet. The child can then explain/demonstrate what he or she has learnt in class.

Parents and children are invited to walk around their neighbourhood with the tablet or smartphone.

The purpose of the outing is to look for and photograph one or several elements both urban and natural, regardless of the initial environment. The parents encourage the child to take the picture on his/her own and to keep the photos that are considered "bad".

The parents forward the photos taken, both good and bad, to the educator.

### **Step 6**

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*At school*

### **Observing the photos**

The educator projects the photos received and invites the group to observe them with the following discussion points:

- *What do you see?*
- *Is it a photo of nature? Why?*
- *Is it a photo of the city? Why?*
- *Is it a little bit of both?*

*On a more technical level, they identify and sort the photos according to quality:*

- *Is the subject of the photo clearly visible? Why? (light, focus, framing...)*
- *How could it have been improved? What should have been done?*

## Step 7

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*At school*

### **Discovering the sounds around us**

The group sets off again, this time with tablets.

The educator invites the children to listen to the sounds around them during the outing and to identify one or the other sound:

- *What do we hear?*
- *Where does that sound come from?*
- *What could it be?*
- *Is it more of a nature or a city sound?*

Using the tablet's Dictaphone feature, they record that sound if the source is accessible and clear.

The educator asks a student to take a picture of the sound's source element for the next the sound bingo

For example:

- The sound of engines: Photo of the cars
- Bird songs: Photo of one or several birds
- Barking: Photo of a dog
- The school bell: Photo of the school
- The sound of the playground: Photo of the playground
- Etc.

The group may also complete with elements recorded and photographed inside the school itself (lavatory, sound in the school cafeteria, etc.)

By associating sound and image, pupils build a media representation and learn how to choose which information to communicate.

## Step 8

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*At home*

### **Recording and photographing a sound at home**

At home, children and parents look for elements that produce an identifiable sound situation: the sound of a pet, a toy, an instrument, a kitchen appliance, etc.

With the help of their parents, the children record this sound using the dictaphone feature and take the picture of the object/animal in question.

The parents forward this sound and the corresponding photo to the educator.

### Step 9

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At school

#### Sound bingo using the sounds and photos recorded with the family

The educator plays the collected sounds in class while projecting all the images received.

- *What do we hear?*
- *What could that be?*
- *With what image do we associate this sound?*

The group guesses which sound is associated to which image. The student who took the picture and recorded the sound validates his or her classmates' answers.



Figure 5: Photographing and recording water running from the faucet.

### Step 10

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At school

#### Creation of a sound bingo for the parents and/or the pupils from other classes

Together, the group chooses the "sound and image" pairs they wish to use for the bingo game: some produced at school and others produced at home on the topic of "nature and the city"

The educator formats them into a PPT type file that allows for the easy integration of soundtracks and images.

This sound bingo is then played with other classes and/or with the parents.

## Conclusion

After this initial approach to taking pictures— by selecting them according to the message to be conveyed and recording a sound to be associated with an image—the educator may repeat the experiment in various ways, and even prolong it. Why not create a sound bingo of numbers or a sound bingo of names together? Just like for a school outing, the group can take several pictures to illustrate what they discover and also record different atmospheric sounds to help memorise the moment. There is a host of avenues to explore to prolong the activity all-year-round, a little, a lot, passionately... or madly!

Presence	Virtual
Creation of a sound bingo for the parents and/or pupils from other classes on the topic "Nature and the City".	Virtual exhibition of the selected snapshots (slide show, or book creator). A sound folder may be included with the exhibition so as to create a virtual sound bingo.