**It’s All in the Details**

Extension Activity for grades 2-8

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One of the most challenging things about writing is getting the details down. Believe it or not, this is usually not because we are not writing well enough, but because we are not observing carefully enough. Careful observation is a valuable skill for the writer and the scientist. Here is an activity which hones the skills of observation.

SPEED 10

Prepare either the image or a pile of 10 natural objects hidden under a large piece of paper. Explain to the students that you will allow them to look at the objects for just 10 seconds (or 8 seconds if you like). They should use all of that time to observe the objects carefully. When time is up, cover the objects/image and ask the students to list the items and as many details as they can about each one. [Note: If you are using the image provided, make it as large as possible.]

* Show the image on a screen or the pile of objects for only 10 seconds.
* Ask students to write down everything that they saw.
* Suggest that they close their eyes to try to help picture the items.
* Ask them to add details to their list. After they have worked in silence, you might want to use some of these prompts:
  + color
  + shape
  + size
  + texture
  + patterns
  + location
  + what it was next to
  + what it reminds them of
  + what it looks like to them
  + what other things have a similar color/shape/texture…
  + what it might be used for
  + what it might be connected to
  + what might it sound like if knocked on a table?
  + what might it smell like?
* Go around the room and let each student list one item they noticed or one detail about an item they noticed.
* Uncover the items/reveal the image and let them see what they missed.
* Was it harder to remember things they could identify or easier?
* Encourage students to pick one item and add to their description of that item.
* When in nature would quick observation be important?

Items (clockwise from upper left corner): Eastern box turtle shell, shriveled fruit of a passion fruit (maypop), canine skull, leaf of a purple plum tree, black walnut, berry cluster from staghorn sumac bush, lower jawbone of a young deer (center), tail of eastern cottontail rabbit, driftwood, stems/leaves/berries of beauty berry bush

