



Observation Activities for Everyone

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~ Reverse Pictionary – Part A ~

(Full-class version)

Purpose: Learn the importance of accuracy in observation and verbal communication. Scientists must describe, for instance, a new species of plant or insect found in the field in order to differentiate between those species that are already cataloged and newly discovered species. Drawing and careful note taking is key here.

This exercise will test student skill in using only words to describe a picture. To differentiate from our “Descriptive” activity, the test for success in this challenge will be evident in a drawing that is created based on those descriptions. The descriptions are in words only, no pantomiming, or giving away the name of an object in the photo (e.g., “This is a deer,” or, “This object has fins.”).

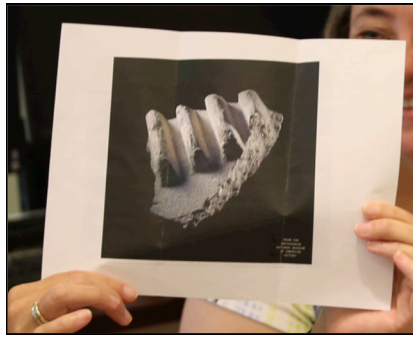
It is important to make clear that this exercise is about accuracy, not about beautiful works of art. The student who is chosen to draw will be following the descriptions of the other participants in their groups. The resulting drawing will be an indication of the success of each group’s collective description. In a way, the “Describers” can think of their task as describing a new species!

In the classroom:

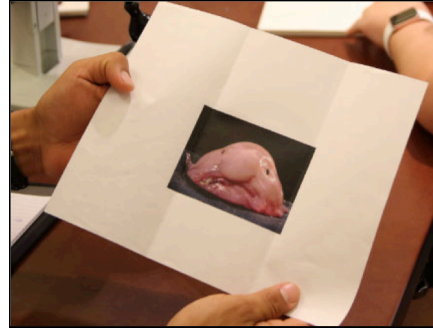
Materials:

1. Blackboard (or whiteboard) or an easel. If an easel is preferred, then you’ll need a large pad of paper that can be seen clearly from the back of the room.
2. A photograph of an object found in a magazine or on the Internet, either taken from nature or a simple manmade artifact. It can be a simple object such as a plant, an insect, or an animal, or something like a tool, or an artifact like a clay pot, arrowhead, or even just a pottery shard. Make enough copies of this photograph for everyone in the class.
3. A magic marker or large Sharpie
4. A timer

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a pottery shard



a blobfish

Some Reverse Pictionary Ideas

Method:

1. Choose someone to draw (we'll call them the "Pencil Pusher") either on the board or on the large pad of paper mounted on the easel at the front of the room. Provide that person with the marker.
2. For everyone else (the "Describers"), hand out copies of the photograph. Make sure to instruct those with the photograph **not to share it with the person chosen to draw!**
3. The Describers will take turns describing a characteristic for the object in the photo, while the person at the front of the room tries to draw, following each clue. Clues can include things like: the number of objects in the photo, orientation of the object or objects, shape, size (or relative sizes), any pattern on or around the object(s).
4. Time this for 10-15 minutes.

****Note:** As the students describe this photograph to the person drawing, they **must not** do any of the following:

- a. use the actual name of the object or use the name of any part of the object in the photo;
- b. use words like "petal," "leg," "fin," or any other noun to describe the object(s) in the photo;
- c. gesture or pantomime any part of any object in the photo

The describers **can**, among other ideas:

1. use angles to describe direction or orientation
2. use names of basic shapes in their description of the photo

Questions:

1. How would you rate your success during this exercise?
2. How close does the drawn picture resemble the photograph?
3. Did some students say that they missed details noticed by others?
4. Did the descriptive clues improve in accuracy and detail during the allotted time?

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~ **Reverse Pictionary – Part B** ~
(Group version)

Materials:

1. In dealing with multiple groups, it's a good idea to find different photographs of objects as described in **Part A**. Using a different image for each group helps to avoid accidentally showing that group's photo to the "Pencil Pusher" in a neighboring group.
2. Sheets of paper for each "Pencil Pusher"
3. A pencil and eraser for each "Pencil Pusher"
4. A timer

Method:

1. Break up the class into small, manageable groups (4 people, for instance).
2. Delegate one person to be the "Pencil Pusher."
3. Hand out copies of the same photo to the other 3 people, the "Describers." *Instruct them they must not share the photo with the Pencil Pusher!*
4. Each team's Describers must describe their photo to their Pencil Pusher without naming the object. The Pencil Pusher must draw that object based on what is described. The team has 10-15 minutes to accomplish this.

Additional Questions:

1. How would you rate your success during this exercise?
2. What kept you on track?
3. What got in the way?
4. How could each participant have improved the outcome in this game?

Online:

To prepare for classes online, collect a few good-quality photos of various simple objects.

In conducting an online exercise like this, you have a couple of possibilities:

- 1- Choose one photo from your collection, designate your entire class as Pencil Pushers and act as the sole Descriptor, or
- 2- Prepare this approach in advance:
 - a. Break up your class into groups of 4, as described above for the in-class group version of this exercise **Part B**).
 - b. Select the Pencil Pusher for each group ahead of class time.
 - c. Send (in advance) to each of the Describers in each group a copy of the photograph you have selected for them.
 - d. At class time, send each group to its own "Break-out Room" for the allotted time.

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Note: Either version of this online activity can produce useful results. Using the same photo for the entire classroom (option 1) can inspire a discussion, even a debate, comparing the list provided by each student. If you're able to use option 2, you can consider using the list of prompts in the question list following **Part B**.

Once classrooms meet in-person, use of physical objects will provide a more thorough way to examine them: provide more, 3-dimensional information, provide the ability to feel surface texture (another descriptive feature), inspect 3-D objects more thoroughly, note shape more accurately.

