SCIENCE CENTER X: SENSES

Steps

1. **Start with a theme.**
You may think you can easily put things together that would represent senses. However, you need a theme to tie them together. Some might include:
- My body: nutrition and health
- Nature: exploring with senses
- Live with disabilities
- Senses challenge

As you work on your theme, you'll find that ideas for different sensory experiments and hands-on activities come a lot easier.

2. **Not just senses.**
Learning about your senses can be more than exploring them. Try finding a song, game or play that has to do with the senses. Can you include this in an exhibit or activity?

3. **Describe in senses.**
Create word cards or magnets with words that describe items that you present. Let your visitors sort or write the words under the sense that the word describes. For example, rough would go under touch and loud would go under sound.

4. **Take a hike.**
Use your senses and take a hike. You can see, hear, smell and feel the area around your trail. In addition, take the hike during different parts of the day to see how it changes.

SEE

5. **Seeing skills.**
From identifying shapes and colors to stacking blocks, seeing is how we interpret the world first. Brainstorm exhibit ideas that feature sight. You might want to add an element of building, sorting, matching, etc. to make it more interactive.

6. **Find your blind spot.**
www.exploratorium.edu/snacks/blind_spot/index.html
Use the above link to find a couple ways to find your blind spot. How can this be adapted into an activity or exhibit for your Science Center? What other ways can you find your blind spot?

7. **Peripheral vision.**
www.exploratorium.edu/snacks/peripheral_vision/index.html
Everyone's peripheral vision is not the same. Check out the link for this step. In addition to the experiment, place a board where visitors can mark their own peripheral vision data so they can compare themselves to others.

Science Center X: Senses

For younger visitors, using the senses to explore their world is a great way to start experimenting with science. Let's look at how we can incorporate our senses into activities for our Science Center.

NOTE: Only general ideas are given for this theme. Be sure to explore ideas online or at your local library.

8. **Light at night.**
Compare the brightness of a light in the dark and daylight. Perhaps create an exhibit where the distance of observable light is measured in these two extremes. Create a maze to solve in the dark with a few pinpoints of light along the way. What other ideas might you come up with to play with light in the darkness?

9. **Illusions.**
Try wavy mirrors or movable walls with mirrors so people can see themselves into infinity. Of course all the wonderful tricks such as holding your fingers in front of your face or paper illusions can be incorporated as well. Take these ideas and discuss how you might make an exhibit out of them.

10. **No sight.**
Start with a blindfold or a room that's dark. Try to get through a "fun house" maze without seeing. Or perhaps make a game out of who can guess an item first without seeing it. Prepare to discuss issues that occur for people who cannot see.

Hear

11. **Minimal noise.**
Use hearing skills with a small group or individuals. The more people you have the more "noise pollution" distorts our hearing. Explore ways to minimize the acoustics around where you plan to place your exhibit or activity area.

12. **Hearing skills.**
From guessing the noise of different items to pointing in the direction you think the sound is coming from, you can do a lot of simple activities that start your visitors thinking about sound. Be sure to vary the loudness, location and pitch to make your exhibits more challenging.

NOTE: With surround sound speakers, you can simulate this by recording the sounds or playing arrangements that take advantage of this feature. Start with Pink Floyd's Dark Side of the Moon.

13. **Sound and music.**
Making music can be a lot of fun. You can incorporate building and let your participants make instruments with a variety of items like jingle bells, sticks, cans, pots, etc. Experiment with ways to change sounds the instruments make. Challenge them to play a song. Explore the many handmade instruments online for a greater variety of choices.

14. **Vibrations.**
All sounds are vibrations. This is more observable with stringed instruments. Create a cuica (laughing cup) as a simple way to show this. Putting your hand on your throat while talking also allows you to feel vibrations. What other ways might you create vibrations for sound?

15. **Auditory play.**
Games such as Marco Polo use sounds to find others. Alternatively, you can give two players the same set of sticks, have one lay them down and then explain with words only how to construct the same shape to his or her partner. What other auditory play might be interesting for your visitors?

16. **No hearing.**
Experiment with trying to communicate without being able to hear. Challenge your visitors to perform a task in a small group without speaking. When they are done, discuss how they communicated to complete the task.

Smell

17. **What do you smell?**
Collect similar, opaque containers. Put a sample of a different item in each. Provide a blindfold for each visitor and see how many can guess what each sample is.

We used film containers for this, but they are becoming hard to find. Items to smell include herbs, spices, outdoor trimmings and more. Be sure each has a distinctive scent. Also, be sure to test the items to make sure they smell pungent enough for identification purposes.

18. **Sense of smell.**
Most of your taste sensation is smell. Experiment with different spices or oils. How does it smell? What do you think it will taste like? You need to go beyond the identification of smells. Link the smell with the taste you expect.

Of course, your sense of smell affects more than what you eat. It helps you identify animals and plants, tell if it going to rain and more. Find ways to experiment with the sense of smell.

19. **Perfume you.**
Mixing scents can make a unique one . . . or it can make you gag. Experiment with mixing oils, making scented water, creating car air fresheners or other scent items that can improve the odors around you.

Touch

20. **Touch bags.**
Use similar items like paper lunch bags or drawstring bags (which are quick to sew) and put items with different textures in each. Ask the kids to describe what they feel before guessing what it is. You can use blindfolds. Alternatively, you might make a sign with texture words to help and just let them feel around without looking.

21. **Materials.**
Your skin is the largest part of your body and it is constantly in touch with your environment. Some materials are more comfortable than others. Some items affect our sense of touch. Experiment with using more than your hands to touch items in your environment.

22. **Feet.**
Usually, we touch with our hands. Experiment with your feet. Remove your shoes and walk over various surfaces. Describe how it feels.

23. **Lips and mouth.**
When you eat, the texture of the food is part of your experience. Discover different areas of your tongue. Try a taste test for tastes, textures and more. You can use flavored Lifesavers, items that stimulate the different parts of the tongue with salty, sweet, sour and bitter items.

24. **Explore more!**
Senses are more for younger visitors, but it can be fun for everyone. Explore more ways to incorporate senses into your Science Center.

Supplements

SUPP_Cards_Senses.pdf
Senses cards: senses (5), sense words (40) and a sheet of blanks
SUPP_Discovery Bottles.pdf
Tips and ideas for making discovery bottles
SUPP_MBD_Senses.pdf
Minibook: A Bit About Senses
SUPP_SCR_Senses.pdf
Scramble: Senses
SUPP_Sensory Bags.pdf
Ideas for making sensory bags
SUPP_WF_Senses.pdf
Word Find: Senses

SUPP_Exhibit Planner.pdf
Exhibit Planner — Pre-planning and testing questions
SUPP_Scientific Inquiry.pdf
Scientific Inquiry — Printables for use with any exhibit theme

Sites to Explore

www.kidactivities.net/post/School-Age-Science-Center-Supply-List.aspx
www.eatplaygrow.org
www.naturalearning.org/kids-dig-dirt-green-paper
www.exploratorium.edu/afterschool
www.sharonmacdonald.com/center-activities-archive.aspx

Check out larajla's Enrichment Project to start your own adventure.