



SMELL YOUR WAY HOME

Background:

Salmon spend their early life in rivers and then swim out to sea to spend their adult life. When they reach maturity, they return to the same river where they were born.

How do they find their way back?

There are a few theories on how they find their way home.
The most common theory is they use a combination of magnetoreception plus smell

Pacific salmon 'home' to their natal streams to reproduce!
Adults return to the same streams that their parents used.
They imprint when they are young to remember their home stream.
Scientists believe that homing is accomplished by tracing 'pheromones' or chemical signatures of the home stream!
Salmon have an extremely keen sense of smell - they can smell chemicals down to one part per million.
Salmon smell thousands of times better than humans.

Materials:

- Several different short trails in a park or mark out several "river systems" in a large area.
- Variety of strongly scented substances that children will recognize or are clearly different (if children have known allergies to scents use natural ones).
- Some examples are jars with spices, scented candles that all look the same.
- Strips of cloth that you can tie to trees or shrubs dipped in different essential oils.
- Cotton balls dipped in different essential oils within small containers.

Method:

- Create the scented cloths.
- Tie the cloth on different trails prior to starting the game.
- Start with all the different smells at the beginning.
- Ask children what are some smells that you can remember if you closed your eyes?
- Share some background about how Salmon smell their way home.
- Assign each group of different salmon their river system or stream each a distinct smell (let them smell the cloth to remember).
- Let them try to smell their way to their particular river system.
- Come back and share their experience.

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