



Silence Can Be Golden

Interpretive programs are focused on sharing information, meanings, and relationships in nature, but sometimes sharing silence is just as effective.

Joseph Cornell, author of *Sharing Nature with Children*, suggests interpreters teach less and share more. He encourages interpreters to look and experience first—and talk later. Both children and adults can have "an experience of wonder" by just watching (silently) ordinary things. If permitted, participants can become completely absorbed in whatever they are looking at. Often you'll find they gain a better understanding of things "by becoming one with them" rather than from secondhand talk. Your groups will seldom forget a direct experience!

Techniques which you may want to try:

1. On a nature hike, ask everyone to walk without speaking to the next stop.
2. Have participants close their eyes for three minutes and count all the different "nature sounds" or "bird calls."
3. Read a short story (about a tree, bird, mammal, etc.) and then ask everyone to imagine (silently) those characters here.
4. Read an appropriate quotation and have everyone take time to think about that person's perspective.
5. Have everyone find a spot to sit quietly for a few minutes and try to feel what is special about the place.
6. Give everyone a piece of paper and crayons/color pencils and ask them to draw or write a short poem (something that has to do with your program theme, or something they like in the park) for 15 minutes.
7. Stop and ask the group to close their eyes and focus their attention on the sense of smell. What smells do they notice? Can they identify what they smell?
8. Ask participants to count (quietly) how many colors they can see from where they are without moving.
9. At programs after dark, have participants sit and gaze at the sky for 5-10 minutes. Do they see any movement? What do they notice that they may have missed before? Do they see any meteors or satellites?

Keep in mind also that turning off cell phones is extremely important when experiencing silence. It is always helpful to ask people to silence their phones during any program, but especially when your focus is on silence.

These activities, and others, are wonderful ways to make participants aware of the hidden sounds, sights, feel, and stillness of nature. The activities can also help get participants to concentrate more deeply on a natural setting. As an interpreter, you can help your participants know when it's good to be quiet and enjoy the moment--while observing wildlife, a spectacular vista or landscape, or a sunset or moonrise. Enjoy the silence, and learn to appreciate those golden moments.