Sorting Smells

Estimated Time: 30-40 minutes

SUMMARY
Human brains are hardwired to identify smells, helping us find food and detect danger. You smell many different things all day long and it's probably easy for you to know what you're smelling, but have you ever put it to the test?

WHAT YOU'LL LEARN

- Your brain is very good at identifying smells.
- The ability to identify scents is the result of integrating sensory input with memories.

Materials Used	

● Blindfold(s)
● Empty glass jars
  ○ Zip-loc bags as an alternative
● Paper and pencil for notes
	● Smelly things! For example…
	  ○ Pickles
	  ○ Lemon juice
	  ○ Coffee grounds
	  ○ Essential oils (a couple drops on a cotton ball will work well)
	  ○ Onion slices
	  ○ Pet food

WHAT TO DO

1. Place each of the strong-smelling items into two jars (or bags).
2. Put a blindfold on each learner and have them smell the different jars. They should try to match up jars with the same smell.
3. Make notes about which scents were easier or harder to match up.
4. Repeat the process with a different set of smells and see how hard it is to match those up.
5. Combine the five most difficult-to-identify smells for an ultimate challenge!

TIPS

- Your sense of smell is also strongly tied to memory. Have older learners memorize a pattern and then try to repeat it after five minutes of distraction. Have them repeat the process while smelling a strong scent, then have them smell it again later while recalling.
- This activity can be extended by mixing scents together. Is it easier to identify a scent when there is something else for contrast or do they mix together too well? Maybe it depends on the scent!