

FIND YOUR FAMILY

Most ants have very bad vision and rely on smells to find their way around. Instead of having noses, ants have two antennae on their heads that they feel around with, sensing smells and textures. We all know ants follow each other's scent to find food and their way back home. They also use scent to tell whether or not other insects they encounter are their nestmates. When an ant encounters another ant, she'll touch that ant all over with her antennae to see if the other ant smells like her. If she finds the other ant does smell like her, she may offer her a bite to eat, follow her home, or follow her to food. In this activity, participants will pretend to be ants and use smells to find each other's "nestmates."

MATERIALS

- Cotton balls
- Different Food Extracts (such as vanilla, orange, mint, almond, banana)

PROCEDURE

1. Begin by facilitating a general discussion about smell. Ask the students to share some of the things they know by smell.
2. Explain how some animals, like ants, who can't see very well, use their sense of smell much more than we do.
3. Have them imagine what it would be like to greet each other by sniffing instead of just waving.
4. Give each student a cotton ball saturated with a little scent (such as orange, mint, vanilla, banana, and almond extract.)
5. Let the students walk around and sniff each other's cotton balls until they find people who have the same-smelling cotton balls as they do.
6. After the activity, ask the students what it was like to "see" each other with their noses.

TALK IT OVER

Share: How did smell help you find your "family members"? What would it be like to "see" with your nose?

Reflect: What are the different ways that insects use smells to survive? (find their nests, find a mate, alert nestmates to danger, food sources, etc)

Generalize: How do you use smell to communicate? How is that different or similar to how ants use smells to communicate?

