Sound Travels

Celebrating Sound with the Public



Introduction



Sound Travels leaders and partners are keen to have colleagues, friends, fellow artists and the public tune into sound. During 2024-2025, we experimented with a variety of ways to invite public audiences to tune their senses and appreciate the soundscapes surrounding them. Soundscapes are composed of a variety of sounds which are usually layered at different pitches, such as a high-pitched bird or insect chirp and a low-pitched traffic rumble).

Here we describe the activities and facilitated explorations, including our goals, audience, and ideas for next time. We hope museum educators, environmental educators, and exhibit designers will adopt and adapt activities to:

- Inspire awareness of sound and its impact on attention, attraction, and social and emotional states that affect learning.
- Build professionals' understanding of how their visitors and audiences perceive sound.
- Influence design choices, both for programming in a given soundscape and in shaping a multisensory experience.

Read on to travel with us through past events. Check the Sound Travels website for more resources, including a deeper dive into the world of acoustic ecology. Consult the International Network for Sound in Education for their 10-step framework to building learners' knowledge base.

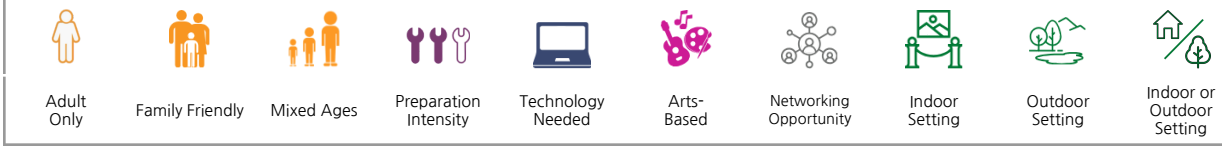
The Sound Travels Team thanks its research partners!

Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens
NORTH PARK VILLAGE NATURE CENTER
Audubon
COLUMBUS ZOO AND AQUARIUM
Metro Parks

Your Guide to Planning Outreach and Events

Use the list below to locate an activity that is a fit for your audience, tech capacity, and setting or read through them all and get inspired!

Icon Key



Walks	Embodied Sound Walk	A mindful, embodied listening activity that invites the audience to tune into sounds of interest in a natural environment.
	Summer Soundtrack	A curated neighborhood soundwalk.
	Creating the Eliza Howell Soundmap	A GPS-triggered sound experience created by educators and sound artists using field recordings, community voices, and experimental music.
Talks	Tune Up! Breaking the Sound Barrier	A virtual event that brings together people interested in sound to engage with a panel of speakers to discuss World Listening Day
	World Listening Day	Local artists, musicians, and sound enthusiasts gather for experimental noise performances and discussion.
	ReSounding Success: Celebration of Sound	A public celebration of sound & science featuring activities and a panel discussion about training, equipment, & cultural listening.
On Tabletops	Sound2Sight	Narrators and artists use verbal and visual language to interpret the sounds around them.
	Recordable Sound Buttons: A Learning Tool for Youth Engagement	Programmable, re-usable sound buttons present a variety of sound-related activities.

Listening Missions	Listening Launchpad 	A spy-themed activity to engage families with sound.
	Sound Search 	A sonic challenge that can be offered to visitors in an indoor or outdoor exhibit space.
Sounds Make Up Stories	Story of Your Life through Sound 	Telling the story of one's life with sound as the main feature. Then listening to a partner's version.
	Focus and Feelings 	Four Sound Travels independent study students asked their peers to react to sounds.
	SoniCexhibit 	A curated exhibit featuring drawings and reflections on how sound shapes focus and attention.
	Placeholder Event 	Description of event.

Walks

Embodied Sound Walk

09/16/2023 Humbug Marsh
Detroit River Int'l Wildlife Refuge, Trenton, Michigan
Submitted by Ériu Martinez

Image source



Overview: A mindful, embodied listening activity that invited the audience to tune into sounds of interest in a natural environment.

Goals: Listeners attended to nature-based sounds, 'hearing' with more than their ears

Program Type: Community event
Duration: approx. 40 minutes
Demographic: Adults

Process

- Participants walked along marsh and forest trails of the Humbug Marsh. The facilitator asked them to listen with ears attuned to the environmental sounds.
- After 20 minutes, the facilitator invited participants to sit in a scenic spot.
- The facilitator gently offered suggestions for mindful breathing and progressed to an invitation to listen openly and broadly to all sounds.
- After approximately 2 minutes of 'open listening', the listeners were invited to narrow auditory focus to one sound of interest.
- After another few minutes of listening, participants were prompted to discern where in their bodies the sound was resonating most clearly.
- Participants shared reflections on the experience.

Embodied Sound Walk Reflections

Why Do It

Embodied is used here to describe the practice of engaging all of one's senses to experience sonic stimuli. By varying the amounts of time spent mindfully tuning in to sounds and other sensory stimuli, this activity can be adopted to audiences of different ages and attention spans. With an emphasis on 'listening' with other senses, this activity welcomes those who are hearing impaired to engage with sound using other senses. Because all sound is produced through vibration (movement) of molecules, it is possible to perceive it through touch, such as through the movement of air across skin or the sensation of sonic waves from the ground through our feet. When practiced, the skill of listening with the whole body can be honed so the listener is increasingly able to perceive subtle sounds. With more practice, sensory processing and integration can grow.

> "As a guide for several children who are formally or informally diagnosed with ASD, ADHD, and PTSD, I have found that opening our forest learning time with a mindful listening and sensory scan grounds children in their bodies and in place, allowing them to be more focused and present to our shared activities.

With those who are hypo- or hyper-sensitive to sensory stimuli, mindful sensory exercises such as embodied sound walking can be very supportive. Those who struggle with processing information may find that over time, they are better able to both interpret sensory experiences produced in their environments, and to subsequently understand what type of stimuli they need to thrive. Effective sensory integration can have an impact in many spheres of a person's life, including activities of daily living, social interactions, and school or work engagement.

Learning and Adapting

In leading this walk, I realized that attempting to find where a sound is resonating in the body is not an easy or clear task for everyone. Some seemed readily able to interpret and engage in the invitation to do so, while others expressed feeling perplexed and perhaps confused by the endeavor.

Providing a reminder that sound travels with vibration and waves, and though our ears are specially developed instruments, listening doesn't start and end above the neck.

› Back to list

To increase participants' comfort with the instructions, facilitators could:

- Open this activity with a 'tuning' of the senses, inviting people to notice what they see, smell, feel, and even taste, in addition to hearing. Beginning in this way may help to integrate the senses. Once invited to tune in, participants may find greater ease in locating the resonance of a particular sound in their bodies when invited to try that.

- Guide listeners first to find the quietest sound, loudest sound, furthest away sound, nearest sound, a sound of their own body/breathing, a pleasing sound, etc. as a way to tune the ear prior to the embodied listening activity,
- Nest this listening invitation within a nature therapy walk.
- Give options and use the language of invitation, which might allow those who feel perplexed to opt for another way to listen deeply, of their own choosing. The goal is to avoid anyone shutting down or feeling alienated.
- Offer an open invitation to find a sound of interest, and then allow listeners to wander to a place of their own choosing to sit for an extended time with that sound, away from others, where focus can deepen with less distraction from other listeners.

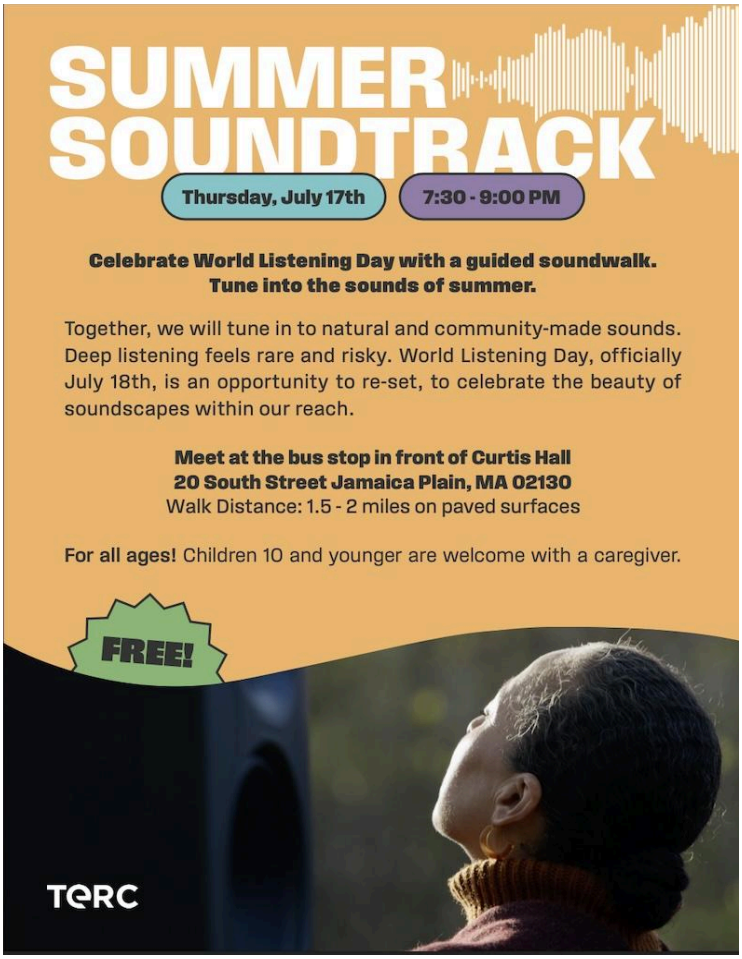
Summer Soundtrack

07/17/2025
Jamaica Plain,
Boston MA
Submitted by Amanda McCluskey

Overview: A curated soundwalk through a Boston neighborhood.

Program Type: Soundwalk and discussion
Duration: 1.5 hours
Demographic: Adults and high school students

Goals: To offer a new sonic perspective on the neighborhood. To record a collection of sounds that represent summer evenings in Jamaica Plain in 2025.



Process

- The group gathered in front of a community center and moved together to outdoor public spaces in the neighborhood, including:
  The Loring Greenough House, the South Street courts, a school garden, English High basketball courts, and a grove of trees on the Southwest Corridor.
- At the locations, the facilitator asked participants to listen.
- South Street Youth Center students and mentors attended, bringing a mic and headphones for recording sounds.
- Others recorded on phones using the voice memo app.
- The group held a closing discussion about the spoken languages we heard, the ways sound ebbed and flowed, the physical progression through space and sound, and ideas on the future soundscape of Jamaica Plain.

Summer Soundtrack Reflections

Why Do It

Focused listening at the curated set of locations presented the group with jumping off points for conversation about our vibrant neighborhood including what and who contributes to the soundscape. Participants can collect a wide range of sounds for personal projects or to contribute to a collection of neighborhood sounds like footsteps on leaves and exuberant basketball players.

In the wrap up discussion, participants mentioned a few of their impressions



- They felt their observational skills open up.
- They mentioned walking with intention.
- They said noticing sound makes time slow down.

Learning and Adapting

Leading a walk is fairly simple, but preparing and planning can elevate the experience.

- Visit the sites ahead of time at the same hour as the walk is scheduled. Listen for sonic diversity at each individual stop and the set of stops.
- Plan an intro activity to be followed by a more formal gathering and introduction that can accommodate both punctual participants and latecomers.
- Seek permission ahead of time, even for public spaces to avoid last minute changes. The Boston Public Library, with an iconic soundscape, preferred not to have our group stop inside.
- Produce a large map that would give participants a sense of the plan and a smaller printed version at an easy size to hold, or a shared digital version.
- Make a plan and a backup plan for recording and sharing files.
- Plan discussion prompts for each stop and a wrap-up discussion.

› Back to list

Creating the Eliza Howell Soundmap

October 4, 2025
Eliza Howell Park, Detroit, Michigan
Created by Billy Mark, Na Bonsai, Zekkereya El-Magharbel, and Natalie Gallagher



Overview: Educators and sound artists composed a living, GPS-triggered sound experience in Eliza Howell Park using field recordings, community voices, experimental music, and graphic scores. An ArcGIS-based digital platform, enabled parkgoers' movements to unlock sound compositions that composers planned (paired) with particular locations.

Program Type: Walk
Duration: About an hour
Demographic: Mixed age participants, local artists, educators, park users, and members of the general public. Participants included both invited contributors and visitors encountering the soundmap while moving through the park.

Goals: Build an evolving sonic archive that functions as a resource for developing tools to encourage sonic inquiry; explore how sound, movement, and location influence perception and understanding of place.

Process

- Five composers collected sounds through field recording sessions in and around Eliza Howell Park, including environmental sounds and oral memory fragments. They edited and composed to create the sonic archive.
- Recordings were assigned to GPS locations. As visitors moved through the park, they triggered the recordings.
- Parkgoers experienced the work by walking, pausing, and changing direction, listening for shifts in sound related to position and proximity.

Talks

Tune Up! Breaking the Sound Barrier

7/10/25
On zoom
Submitted by Amanda McCluskey and Isabella Febbroriello (Logo designed by Teagan Far)



Overview: A virtual event that brought together a wide range of people interested in sound to engage with a panel of speakers and to join in discussion about World Listening Day.

Program Type: Virtual Panel
Duration: 2 hours
Demographic: Professionals like museum educators, informal educators, and artists, Sound Travels partners and advisors

Goals: To inspire listening programming for public audiences, highlight innovative sound-based practices, build visibility for sound as an important element of life and learning, plan as a community for World Listening Day, and provide educators and others with interactive suggestions for related activities.

Process

- The facilitator introduced the speakers and the session with a project leader giving some history of R. Murray Schafer, whose work World Listening Day commemorates.
- Notable Human Films co-founder shared film excerpts from documentary photo shoots of artists and researchers in Boston, Detroit, and Chicago.
- The panel of experts each spoke about their practice including Victor Minces, Erin Marbarger, and Isabella Febbroriello.
- In breakout rooms, participants continued conversations with the speakers.

› Back to list

Tune Up! Breaking the Sound Barrier Reflections

Why Do It

Many people can talk about sound. Hearing from those who have made it their area of expertise and exploration makes for rich discussion. Bringing people together is especially meaningful because sound is both invisible and an everyday experience. It's an opportunity to share resources. Some of our favorites are HERE.

Learning and Adapting

To plan an online event with a panel to raise awareness of World Listening Day consider whether your audience's interests lean toward music production, career options, or wildlife. We recruited panelists with varied expertise, including sound artists, a museum educator, and learning designer. Here are some ways you might begin to compose a panel:

- Ask a local musician or composer who mixes in found sounds
- Include a sound production team member (e.g., for concerts or conventions)
- Involve an exhibit designer for a science center or nature center
- Seek out an author who has written on bird calls or noise pollution. The local Audubon might have ideas.
- Include a speech therapist
- Contact a professional group like the Midwest Society for Acoustic Ecology for ideas

Craft questions for special guests to respond to during a panel, such as:

- What soundscape project have you worked on recently?
- How did it/you incorporate learnings from past projects?
- What are you hoping for in terms of response and impact from an audience?
- What do you wish someone had told you when you started this work?
- What is one thing the audience could do today that has the possibility of improving "tuning up" their listening muscles in preparation for World Listening Day?

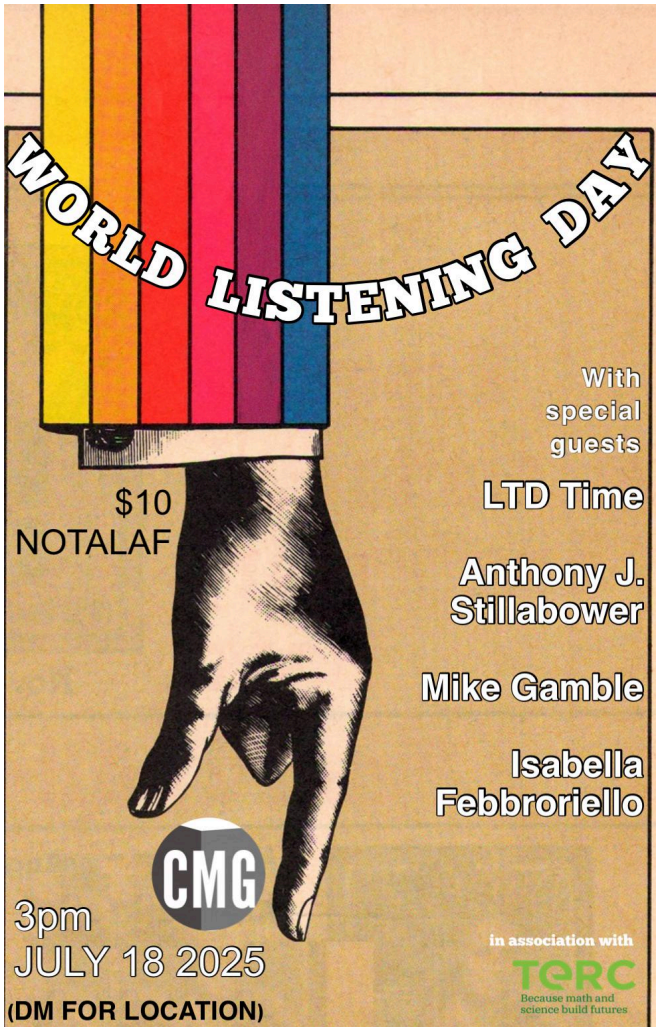
Some points worth remembering: Talk about sound AND experience it. Test audio speakers. Check acoustics, settings, etc. You might ask participants to wear headphones. Also, design the program to include audience interaction. Pose a question such as:

- What one thing will you do to mark World Listening Day personally?
- What could you do to mark World Listening Day professionally?

› Back to list

World Listening Day

7/18/25
Color TherapyPortland, OR
Submitted by Isabella Febbroriello



Overview: Local Portland artists, musicians, and people interested in deepening their understanding of sound gathered for nontraditional noise performance and discussion.

Program Type: Event, performance & discussion
Duration: 2 hours
Demographic: Adults and youth, musicians and nonmusicians

Goals: To celebrate and honor active listening, share sonic experiences and specific noises that trigger curiosity in a mixed group (e.g., mixed ages, musicians and non musicians)

Process

- Introductions and an overview
- Two musical/non traditional noise performances that produced sounds and sights many in the audience had not seen or heard before.
- Discussion. The facilitator asked participants to name specific sounds one hears in Portland. Audience members offered sounds such as the freight train, crow calls, and rain. Some people shared sounds that soothe them.
- The conversation concluded with the pledge to go out into the world and choose to stay grounded in sonic realities around us, and to take the time to appreciate them.

World Listening Day Reflections

Why Do It

The event gave musicians a platform to speak about their upcoming shows, and the sounds, frequencies, and sonic philosophies that most strongly inform their practice. The conversation turned toward AI technology and sound making. The musicians and artists, performers and makers in the room spoke openly about the uneasiness and influence of AI on their practice and digestion of sound, music, and media.



Learning and Adapting

Forming a team with a network of performers was key to the event's success. Having a team, in this case, an artist and musician, to book, facilitate, and promote the event, made the workload lighter for each.

Posing questions and inviting all voices encouraged a dialogue with many participants adding to the conversation. Virtually no one wrote in response to a prompt introduced in the beginning of the event, but it is unclear if the prompt hadn't connected with the participants or if the task wasn't explained well.

> After the event, an audience member expressed her gratitude for "the opportunity to speak and think deeply with others about something as seemingly trivial as listening."

› Back to list

ReSounding Success: Celebration of Sound

05/10/25
Eden Place Farms, Chicago IL
Submitted by Martha Merson



Overview: A public celebration of sound and science with a panel of sound artists and engineers from Chicago and Detroit spoke about their training, equipment, barriers, and cultural sounds that intrigue them.

Goals: To engage the Chicago community with opportunities to play, shape, experience, and understand the effects of sound. To celebrate 75 years of the National Science Foundation.

Program Type: Community Event
Duration: 4 hours
Demographic: Families with young children and teens, sound artists, and educators

Process

A sequence of activities including

- On-site workshops in beatmaking with a DJ and sketching with sound artists in Sound2Sight activity and gallery walk
- A 20-minute sound walk
- A panel on sound-related career paths with sound engineers, DJs, and others
- Experience original composition through an ambisonic system
- A selection of 3-minute long films on STEM learning outside of school

ReSounding Success: Celebration of Sound Reflections

Why Do It

ReSounding Success layered many approaches described in other sections, a soundwalk, panel, and immersive 3D experience. Activities like beatmaking and drawing sounds engaged young participants. ReSounding Success introduced participants to new ideas for career pathways. Taken together with the celebration of the National Science Foundation after a stressful winter and spring for many in the arts, science, or doing work to advance equity in educational settings, there was a sense of profound relief in being together.

One of the facilitators commented:

> I'm watching them [the participants] discover rhythm. ⋯ But it's really cool watching [young people] work through it and then gain confidence as they're playing with it.

The sensory walk built community and culminated in an original immersive experience that the leader of the Midwest Society for Acoustic Ecology called extraordinary. Ambisonic experiences, where recorded and played sound create a whole spherical surround environment, are still rare and especially so in an outdoor setting.

> We were kind of connected for all the experiences we just had. ⋯ We had an affinity just through the rituals we went through to prepare for the sound walk. So we were very much a community in this space in terms of our attitude and a level of special kind of trust, a sort of bond that was formed so quickly. ⋯ Yeah, so it was very special.

Learning and Adapting

Locating the event on the South Side of Chicago on reclaimed land stewarded by African American growers lent a special quality to the event. Concerning the positive energy that this event generated, a project advisor commented,

> ⋯ The issues that we're trying to address are really important. And the climate, socially and globally is changing in ways that are disturbing too. So good that we could keep a positive and open approach to this to include a lot of different people from different backgrounds, young people, the elders. Yeah. Yeah. Smell the earth, fuel the earth, breathe the air. Yeah. And listen.

› Back to list

On Tabletops

Sound2Sight

May2025
Chicago, IL
Submitted by Amanda McCluskey and Isabella Febbroriello



Overview: Narrators and artists use verbal and visual language to interpret the soundscape.
Goals: To tune into sound and find a visual language to express elements of the soundscape

Program Type: Tabletop
Duration: 15 minutes
Demographic: Mixed ages

Process

The facilitator set up crayons, colored pencils, markers, and paper. Participants took one of two roles: artist(s) or narrator. Partners took turns. The facilitator gave instructions:

- To the Narrator: Close your eyes. Feel yourself grounded in the moment. Open your ears to all you can hear. Begin to describe the present soundscape to The Artist.
- To The Artist(s): Listen to The Narrator, illustrate their vision on paper. Use a variety of tools to make marks. Interpret their description with color, shape, and texture.

The facilitator asked questions during and after the narrators and artists finished.

- The Narrator, you may hear a bicycle, but what does that sound LOOK like, interpret the sound to The Artist. Is it bumpy? Wavy? Blue? Long?
- The Artist, you may be told there's a bird, but what does that sound LOOK like, interpret the sound on paper. Is it little? Sharp? Brown? Repetitive?
- What was it like, narrators and artists? What are the drawings similar to or different from what you imagined? Point to something you like.
- What was it like to listen to someone else describe sound? Were you able to focus only on what they were saying? Were you also listening to the soundscape? Did it influence your drawings?

Sound2Sight Reflections

Why Do It

The activity builds deep listening, invites creativity, and promotes the idea that we are all capable of interpreting the soundscape. The activity offers a chance to use visual expression, which can open discussion of other visual representations, such as sonograms or written music.

The role of narrator brings focus to the sense of sound and both narrators and artists are invited to be present and attentive. The partner activity fosters communication and a sense of connection through the shared experience of deep listening,

> A mother told us she was just having a really fun time doing the activity with her young son. And there was so much laughter during the event. It was the most blatantly positive and joyous immersive activities I've ever done or facilitated.

Learning and Adapting

Posting the art for all to see was another opportunity for the artists and narrators to see sound visually and observe different ways of notating sound.

You could take a similar approach with movement in the place of drawing.



› Back to list

Recordable Sound Buttons: A Learning Tool for Youth Engagement

6/15/2026
Franklin Park Conservatory and Botanical Gardens, Columbus, Ohio
Submitted by Jessie Mace-Froehlich



Overview: Programmable, re-usable sound buttons present a variety of sound-related activities.

Goals: Invite open-ended exploration of creatures and communication, add an audio component to complement nature-based learning activities.

Program Type: Youth programs, field trips, and events e.g., Homeschool Day
Duration: Varied
Demographic: Youth (Pre-K through grade 12) and their families

Process

Educators purchased buttons typically used for pet communication (available online and at pet stores). They set up a tabletop activity with signs that invited visitors to explore:

- A nighttime soundscape experience: learners pressed the buttons and heard pre-recorded sounds from nocturnal animals like owls, frogs, and crickets.
- Insect communication. Learners listened to short samples of insect calls played on a laptop, then used the buttons to replicate the pattern, rhythm, and tones they heard. (Three different short, singular insect sounds were pre-recorded onto the buttons.)
- Rhythms by matching the rhythm of a long call. Participants pressed the button, attempting to match the cadence they heard on the recording.
- Audio/ visual matching game: learners matched images of various animals and/or habitats to the sounds they make, as recorded onto each sound button.

Facilitators and participants discussed why insects use sound and how they create it.

Recordable Sound Button Reflections

Why Do It

The sound buttons enabled educators to bring sound into a learning experience without expensive equipment or extensive knowledge of sound or recording. The buttons were especially useful for indoor events where we "brought some of the outdoors inside with us," as one educator explained. The hands-on aspect of the activities increased engagement and encouraged collaborative learning. Educators noted that children were eager to play with the buttons, often pulling in friends or family to try the activities, as well. The learners explored different aspects of sound, listening for pitch or tonal quality to match sounds on the buttons to the samples on the laptop. They paid attention to pattern and speed when they replicated different rhythms.

When asked why the sound buttons are a valuable learning tool, one educator explained,

> "Sound enhances learning by engaging students' attention, strengthening memory, and helping them make meaningful connections between what they see and hear.

Learning and Adapting

Since the buttons are easy to use, portable and re-recordable, they could be re-purposed for a variety of activities.

Learners created layered soundscapes through an open-ended, organic process, but prompts could also be introduced to add a challenge or to provide scaffolding.

Future areas to explore include using sound buttons to increase program accessibility, especially for learners who are blind or have low vision. There is also potential to use the sound buttons for adult programming.

Further learning could also include allowing participants to record their own sounds on the buttons. They might "take the buttons for a walk" and record sounds they encounter or use their own bodies to create sounds they record.

› Back to list

Listening Missions

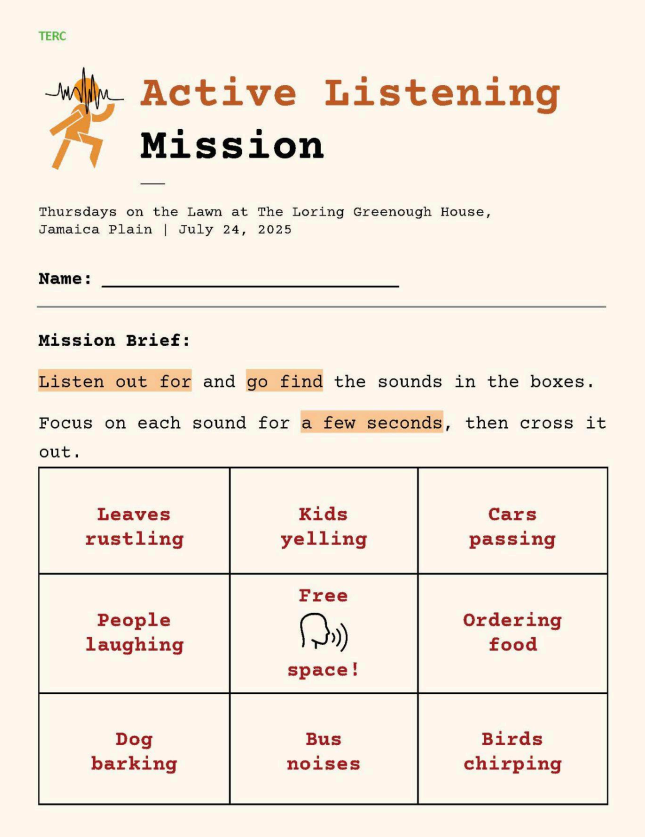
Listening Launchpad

07/24/25
Jamaica Plain, Boston MA
Submitted by Amanda McCluskey

Overview: An activity with a spy theme to engage families in sound activities.

Program Type: Table event
Duration: 4 hours
Demographic: Children (5-12) and adults (30-50)

Goals: To pique interest in sound, challenge participants to fully invest their attention, and encourage discussion.


TERC

Active Listening Mission

Thursdays on the Lawn at The Loring Greenough House, Jamaica Plain | July 24, 2025

Name: _____

Mission Brief:

Listen out for and go find the sounds in the boxes.

Focus on each sound for a few seconds, then cross it out.

Leaves rustling	Kids yelling	Cars passing
People laughing	Free space!	Ordering food
Dog barking	Bus noises	Birds chirping

Process

- "Agent M", played by Amanda, invited children and caregivers to accept a mission. The theme score from Mission Impossible played softly on a speaker.
- Agent M introduced the "Active Listening Mission", a variation of a scavenger hunt.
- Listening spies were instructed to report back to receive an official stamp of completion.
- The table setup included the question "How do you work best?" To express their preference, participants dropped a pompom in one of the jars, either "independently" or "with a group." Agent M asked young people and adults to explain what they chose and how they would describe the results of the voting.

Listening Launchpad Reflections

Why Do It

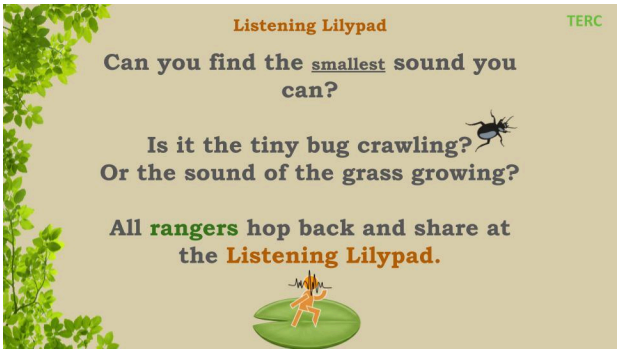
Exploring the soundscape, listening and finding sounds is fun!

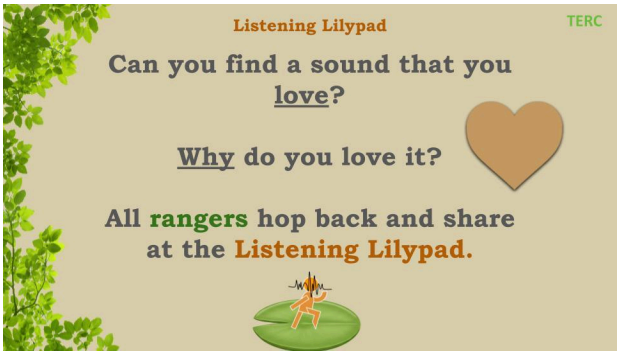
Learning and Adapting

There were varied levels of engagement. A select few participants were highly engaged, returning to the Launchpad multiple times, asking for more tasks.
Ideas for next time:

- Bring two sets of challenges.
- Offer a stamp or sticker as a reward.
- Staff the table to allow for one adult to give instructions and another to debrief with participants following their Mission.
- Consider how to involve adults and teens with prompts designed to engage a more sophisticated audience.
- Create a listening challenge that relies on empathy and emotional connection.

Subsequently we revised the activity to send rangers out on a listening mission. In an outdoor setting you could try one of these.

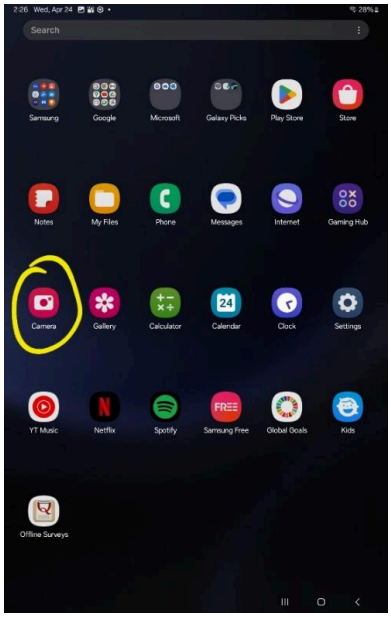




› Back to list

Sound Search

Summer 2024
Columbus, OH,
Submitted by the Center for Research and Evaluation at COSI



Overview: A sonic challenge that can be offered to visitors in an indoor or outdoor exhibit space.

Program Type: Self-directed
Duration: 20 minutes
Demographic: Adults and families

Goals: To consider the emotions we associate with specific sound features of an environment. To bring awareness to sounds that might increase or decrease STEM learning.

Process

The facilitator

- Invited visitors to find four sounds in a particular space and to record them. The sounds to record: ones that made them feel curious, energized, uneasy, and peaceful.
- Prior to sending visitors off, encouraged visitors to enjoy their time, explained there was no time limit, and asked them to take a short video: "When you find a sound that represents one of these four feelings, aim your tablet toward it and take a brief video with the camera app."
- Advised participants to try to keep each video to ten seconds or shorter.
- Prepare participants for debrief. "Come back ready to share the sources and sounds identified (remembering which sound goes with which feeling).
- Gave some tech tips, for example, to record your videos, click on the Camera app. Once in the Camera app, select Video at the bottom of the screen. To start recording, click the red circle on the side of the screen. To stop recording, click the square.

Sound Search Reflections

Why Do It

Sound is subjective. Think of all the people who love opera and all the people who hate it. Age and cultural background play a role. Whether the sound is identifiable or mysterious can also affect whether it commands attention or disappears into the background. As educators and designers, predicting how visitors will react to the sounds could make your exhibits more powerful. Sound Travelers researchers reasoned that generally, having curious, energized visitors would lead to more conversations and investigation and self-reports of a positive learning experience. Collecting and understanding how the visitors who come to you react to the sounds in your spaces could provide new ideas for how to shape the learning environment.

> “ We, the Sound Travels visitor research team, originally designed the Sound Search as a data collection method to more directly assess visitor sound experiences through short audio and video recordings that visitors made. Visitors seemed to enjoy the Sound Search task as a part of their museum visit.

Learning and Adapting

Recording the sound and the source is important if you want to look back across the collection of sounds. Just having the sound made the task of compiling the results difficult. Type or write notes to make sure you have the sources and the name of the sound or a description of the sound visitors intended to record.

The Sound Travels team paired the sound search with a short survey. With an item on self-reported learning outcomes, we could match visitors’ positive and negative learning outcomes and the emotions they mentioned experiencing in the exhibit. For more on the sounds visitors collected and how they correlated with their reports of learning, check www.terc.edu/soundtravels.

› Back to list

Sounds Make Up Stories

Story of Your Life through Sound

February 20, 2025
Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston MA,
Submitted by Martha Merson

Overview: Telling the story of one's life with sound as the main feature. Then listening to a partner's version.
Goals: To bring awareness to the way sounds signify important moments and help solidify memory

Program Type: Icebreaker and discussion
Duration: 10-20 minutes
Demographic: 18+ yo; doable with 7 and up



Process
The facilitator set the stage with a rationale and then guided reflection.

To start: most humans have keen hearing, but often our strong visual sense means sound is overlooked or short-changed. Sounds can Prompts for the guided reflection could include:

- Think of a moment when you changed course, when your life took a turn. Identify the sound that went with the moment, a thud or the sound of something breaking
- Try starting a sentence with the sound: "The doorbell rang and" or "A siren sound was so close" or "Watch out, someone yelled."
- Who were you in that moment—a child, a student? A mom? A worker?
- What was your reaction? —Goosebumps, chills, mouth went dry, felt hot?
- What was about to change? What did change? What might be different if that moment hadn't happened? Why was it important?

Facilitators asked participants to pair up and tell their life story to a partner keeping to a time limit of 3 minutes. The facilitator gave additional instructions:

- Tellers use words and make the sounds that caused or accompanied significant events. Partners, your job is to listen and maintain eye contact.
- Partners take [3] mins. to ask questions or share some common experiences.
- Pairs switch roles!

Story of Your Life Reflections

Why Do It

Most humans have keen hearing, but often our strong visual sense means sound is overlooked or short-changed. The activity brings attention to our keen sense of hearing. It highlights the sounds that are tied to culture and place and allows conversations about them to emerge.

The act of producing sounds can make people feel self-conscious, but in a relaxed environment, this will likely translate to shared vulnerability and laughter.

Learning and Adapting

The original life story activity was a 1-minute story. The short time limit forces tellers to choose and edit. That turns out to be too condensed if you're making the sounds, so here a 3-minute story is recommended.

The facilitator might pose specific questions targeted to learning or to the control.

- On learning and teaching: Does that sound help you focus or distract you? Does it trigger memories for you nowadays?
- On pairing learning with sound: Is there a lesson in a particular sound that has stayed with you?
- On the changing soundscape and who controls it: Are there sounds you miss or do not miss? Can you get them back? Why or why not?

Questions like these can deepen appreciation for the auditory elements that shape our lives. To go deeper, ask listeners to complete the sentences:

- I wanted to hear more about …
- I was curious about …
- I want to understand …

› Back to list

Focus and Feelings

February 20, 2025

Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston MA, Seminar for Studio for Interrelated Media (SIM) Majors

Submitted by Martha Merson & Amanda McCluskey

Overview: Four Sound Travels independent study students asked their peers to react to sounds.

Goals: Find commonalities in responses; gain insight into sounds that intensify focus.

Program Type: Presentation, activity, and discussion

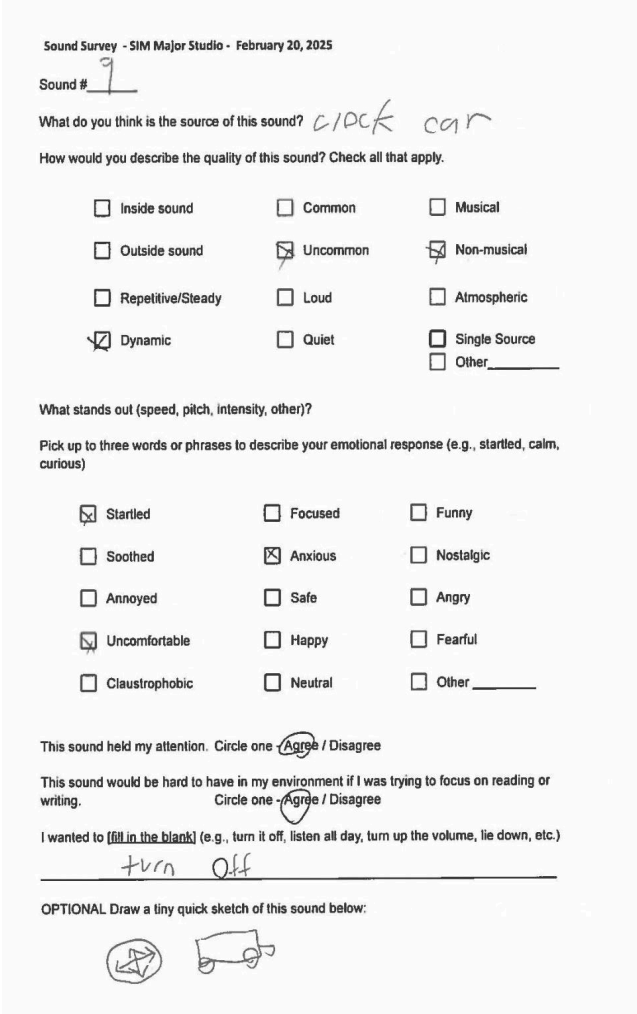
Duration: 3 hours

Demographic: College students, 18-28+ years old

Process

Facilitators invited peers and faculty (approx. 60 total) to:

- Listen to 12 recordings with a mix of sounds
- Respond to seven questions on a worksheet after listening for 30 seconds. There were two minutes in between sound recordings.
- Meet and reflect in smaller groups.



Sound Survey - SIM Major Studio - February 20, 2025

Sound # 9

What do you think is the source of this sound? clock car

How would you describe the quality of this sound? Check all that apply.

- ☐ Inside sound
- ☐ Outside sound
- ☒ Repetitive/Steady
- ☒ Dynamic
- ☐ Common
- ☒ Uncommon
- ☐ Loud
- ☐ Quiet
- ☐ Musical
- ☒ Non-musical
- ☐ Atmospheric
- ☐ Single Source
- ☐ Other_____

What stands out (speed, pitch, intensity, other)?

Pick up to three words or phrases to describe your emotional response (e.g., startled, calm, curious)

- ☒ Startled
- ☐ Soothed
- ☐ Annoyed
- ☒ Uncomfortable
- ☐ Claustrophobic
- ☐ Focused
- ☒ Anxious
- ☐ Safe
- ☐ Happy
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Funny
- ☐ Nostalgic
- ☐ Angry
- ☐ Fearful
- ☐ Other _____

This sound held my attention. Circle one - Agree / Disagree

This sound would be hard to have in my environment if I was trying to focus on reading or writing. Circle one - Agree / Disagree

I wanted to [fill in the blank] (e.g., turn it off, listen all day, turn up the volume, lie down, etc.)

turn Off

OPTIONAL Draw a tiny quick sketch of this sound below:

Focus and Feelings Reflections

Why Do It

Familiarity with others' reactions to sound makes it easier to plan and predict reactions to provocative sounds. Sound is so subjective! Curating sounds to evoke certain reactions is an exciting challenge.

Commenting on the experience of listening to 12 short recordings, not surprisingly, the associations people made with some of the sound samples played depended on their personal experience. For instance, growing up in a vibrant city neighborhood or a rural agricultural setting influenced whether a sound was perceived as alarming or soothing. At least one person found the sounds painful. Each comment reinforced how subjective the interpretations and desires of sound are.

Though not a scientific study, we examined participants' responses for themes and patterns. Participants had the same impressions of the source of the sound (water, vehicle, etc.). The vast majority chose similar descriptors (inside sound vs. an outside sound, continuous vs dynamic, surround or single-source) for each of the 12 sounds. Adjectives chosen to describe emotional responses clustered, but most sounds evoked a spread of reactions.

> Sounds that were traveling, like cars, reminded me of my parents taking me driving. I was struggling to stay awake. A lot of them made me feel sleepy.

> I have a semi-sensory sensitivity. A lot of sounds are unpleasant. Every single time, I check off: I'm anxious and uncomfortable. I want to turn it off.

Learning and Adapting

Inviting peers to comment on the emotional impact of sounds generated lively discussion.

Participants were asked what they listen to in order to relax or focus. Some people listened to the same song repeatedly until they completed their work. Some listened to strictly break beats, while some relied on the white noise of air conditioners. This is a useful question for anyone supporting learning. The preferred soundscape will likely change with the task, is it rote or repetitive?Does it require reading or calculating?

› Back to list

SoniCexhibit

04/24/25
Massachusetts College of Art and Design, Boston MA
Submitted by Amanda McCluskey and Isabella Febbroriello

Overview: An exhibit designed to provide the experience of a sonic sensory refresher. The exhibit incorporated sketches in response to sounds and interactive elements.



Program Type: Exhibition
Duration: 2 hours for the opening reception and 7 gallery hours
Demographic: College students and adults, 18-28+ years old

Goals: To showcase connections between art and science and to offer a sonic comfort at the end of a challenging semester.

Process

The exhibit designers, SIM students Amanda McCluskey, Isabella Febbroriello, Teagan Far, and Rosa Doherty and faculty member Nita Sturiale created several exhibit elements.

- A recording of the sound of a bubbly waterfall played on a loop with students' sketches illustrating the bubbly waterfall enlarged and posted nearby.
- An x-y axis to which participants added their own data points on sticky notes.The x-axis ranged from constant to varied and the y-axis from quiet to loud,
- A spectrogram displayed on an entire wall that changed in real-time according to sounds from a spotlit mic.
- In a dimly lit soundproof room, one salon chair with speakers installed within the hairdryer dome played a variety of outdoor sounds orchestrated into a soundscape on a loop. A student acted as the attendant, lowering the converted hairdryer onto an individual's head and blacking out the person's vision with a curtain. Individuals were invited to remain as long as they liked.

SoniCexhibit Reflections

Why Do It

An exhibit can offer an interpretation and its participants take away something they wouldn't have come to on their own. The spectrogram is an example. In real-time people saw the sound of their voices manifested visually. We noticed people were into it. People would stay with it a super long time.



The exhibit aimed to reveal aspects of sound and the way its effects are subjective. The participants' reactions were data for the artists on the kinds of effects that using sound in their art might provoke. The sonic chair was both an experience of being covered, immersed in sound, and simultaneously of being on display. The chair made some nervous and some very relaxed.

The different elements featured bridged the gap between science and art; stylistically inviting audience members to participate in our research and experimental discovery. Many exited the chair asking "How long was I even in there for?"

Learning and Adapting

The decision to display a wall-sized projection of the spectrogram worked well. People interacted with it. Participants tried out sounds to change the spectrogram's shape and color. They rubbed their sleeves and jangled keys. They gave a challenge to each other, like make it dark blue. They invented new sounds. Of participants' curiosity and willingness to experiment, Teagan observed: "Most people don't do that every day."

› Back to list