

Art is in the House



— ACTIVITY

Observing light and shadow in your neighbourhood activity name

By Daniel Bennet

Go for a stroll in your neighbourhood and notice the various characteristics of light.

In this activity, you'll get together with your household and go for a walk taking pictures and describing the different lighting in your neighbourhood. After sunset is recommended.

The Beauty of Light and Shadow

The rods, cones, and retinal ganglion cells in our retina are constantly converting light into electrical signals for our brain to interpret. This process known as visual phototransduction happens unconsciously and we gather valuable information such as colour, movement, and depth perception - all from light! Our perception of light in various lighting states can affect us subconsciously.

Why does the bogeyman come out at night? I would hypothesize because the absence of light makes things less visible and the fear of what could be lurking in the shadows takes over inducing a cortisol response making you more vigilant for possible danger.

Blue wavelengths in light can boost attention, reactions times and mood making them disruptive near bedtime. My evening lighting is orange and yellow as to have as little effect on my circadian rhythms!

Lighting Designers for theatre manipulate the intensity, direction/angle, colour, and movement of light to evoke mood, direct focus, set the time or place and ensure that what needs to be visible can be seen. They help tell a visual story to give information to the audience both consciously and unconsciously.

Together, I hope we can notice the beauty of lighting and begin to make the unconscious, conscious. Who knows? Maybe with our new found appreciation, the shadows will be slightly less scary.

What you need:

- A way to take photos: Can be as simple as a phone camera or a DSLR if you are feeling fancy.
- A notebook and writing utensil to take notes.
- Appropriate clothing to ensure you are comfortable for your walk.

Before your walk

1. **Plan your route.** If possible, look for environments that may have different types of lighting. Is there a way to both see a residential area and an industrial area? The bustling lights of downtown and a forested path?
2. **Take a moment to add some vocabulary around the properties of light to help with your descriptions.**
 - a) You can learn about colour temperature [here](#). Warmer lights like candle light are lower on the Kelvin scale while cooler light like daylight are higher on the Kelvin scale.
 - b) You can learn about the various direction and angles of light used in theatre [here](#).
 - c) There is some information on colour that can be found [here](#).
 - d) Here are some great [lighting adjectives](#).

During your walk

1. **Start walking your route and find the first place you would like to observe lighting.**

How will you know when to start to observe? You'll know when the inspiration hits. Maybe it is a particularly inviting porch light or a streetlight creating a spooky tree shadow on the ground. The opportunities for inspiration are endless. Look around!

2. **Take a moment to get mindful.**

Deep observation requires a concentrated, directed awareness to what we are looking at. Take a moment to get in the zone. Stop chatting and spread out from the members of your household, take a few deep breaths, and bring your focus to the location.

3. **Start writing a physical description of the light.**

Write what you are observing. Some questions to get you started:

What colour temperature is the light?

What colour is the light? Try to be specific like saying 'sage green' or 'marigold orange' instead just the colour name.

What direction is the light coming from? How is it hitting the objects around it? Is it creating shadows on the ground? Are the shadows longer or shorter than the real like object?

Are lights being reflected in the road or the street?

How bright is the light from a scale of 1 to 10?

Is the light direct or indirect? Can you see the light source?

4. **Take a moment to write an emotional description of the lighting.**

How does the light make you feel? Is it inviting? Cozy? Scared? Sad?

Write down a few adjectives about the light? For example, is it scintillating? Iridescent? Stark?

Does the lighting evoke an image from your memory?

5. **Snap a photo to remember the light for later.**

This will help you and your household compare notes once you are back home.

6. **Continue walking and repeat steps 2 through 5 for the next places you would like to observe.**

Reflections – After Your Walk

1. **Talk about what made you choose each location.** What sparked each location choice? Were you all inspired by similar or different types of environments?

2. **Compare descriptions.** Gather at home with your photos and your descriptions and compare.

a. Did the lighting evoke the same types of adjectives for everyone?

b. Were the types of memories recalled similar?

c. How did you everyone describe the colour and brightness of the light?

d. What was everyone's most favourite or least favourite lighting location and why?

It can be amazing how we perceive things differently!

3. **Look around.** Do you notice the lighting in the room you are in? Do you observe something new after doing the exercise?

I hope you feel illuminated after taking a moment to observe light in your neighbourhood. These times are strange but I hope these brief moments of appreciation and observation can add joy to your daily routine. There is natural and artificial beauty in the lighting all around us. Let it shine on in 2021!