

Creating a Sound Map

- (1) Find a place outside where you can comfortably sit or stand. Try to select a spot distant from other human beings by at least two body lengths. Ideally, choose a location where anthropogenic sounds do not dominate (i.e., try to avoid busy roads, running machinery, or construction sites).
- (2) Imagine yourself at the center of a space, depicted by the symbolic “map” on the back of this page. Place yourself at the center (X) of the map. Define the top of the map as sources of sound in front of you as far away as you can hear. Similarly, define the bottom of the map as sources of sound behind you as far away as you can hear. Treat the left and right sides of the map analogously.
- (3) Turn off your phone or any other devices that might distract your attention for the next 5-10 minutes. Spend at least one minute with your eyes closed, silently listening to the world around you.
- (4) Open your eyes and mark on the map relative locations of each sound you heard. By “relative location” include both direction and rough distance. You do not need to measure distances, just mark locations close to, distant from, or intermediate relative to the limit of your hearing. Feel free to label the locations with words, symbols, drawings, or icons depicting each sound source.
- (5) Close your eyes again and listen for 5 more minutes. When you hear a sound, open your eyes briefly to mark its relative location on the map, then close your eyes and resume listening.
- (6) Consider the following questions.

Which sounds were easy to hear and identify? Which sound qualities made them so?

Which sounds were difficult to hear or identify? Which sound qualities made them so?

Were most sounds near or distant from you? In front, behind, left, or right?

Which sounds originated from living organisms? Which originated from non-living sources?

Did sound pitch differ among living vs. non-living sources?

Were any sounds surprising or unexpected? Why or why not?

How does your sound map compare with a visual map that you could draw from your location?

How might your sound map differ if you listened at a different time of day, different season, or different location?

Bring your sound map to the next class to compare with maps created by others.

(Some material in this activity was adapted from material by Sarah Hooper and Charles M. Sumner)

front; distant

X

behind; distant