

GUIDED IMAGERY

AGES 4 - 6

TIME

5 - 8 minutes for
each of 4 parts

Young children imagine the life of a salmon in the wild.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Develop listening skills.
- Understand a life process and that it is a cycle.
- Begin to understand how pollution can do harm.
- Cultivate an interest in learning more.

WHAT TO DO

1. Make one copy of "Guided Imagery: A Salmon's Life in the Wild."
2. Gather children on the rug and tell them to get into a comfortable position to listen to a story.
3. Read slowly enough for children to imagine being the main character.
4. Invite observations and questions about what was in the story and about the experience of listening and imagining.

NOTES

The story is divided into four parts for flexibility. Based on children's ability to stay focused, you may read one or two parts a day or read the whole story at one sitting.

Add as inflection as you wish to make the story come alive.

GUIDED IMAGERY: A SALMON'S LIFE IN THE WILD

I will be reading a story about salmon in a stream. Try to imagine that the things happening in the story are happening to you. You see what the salmon sees, feel what the salmon feels, do what the salmon does. Now get comfortable. And close your eyes.

PART 1

It's dark and you feel water rushing above you. You are curled up and so tiny that you could fit inside a green pea. You feel cool, clear water small rocks against your thin shell. Once in awhile, the water rushes past you a little faster and nudges you gently back and forth in the bottom of the stream. Rest, little egg.....

One day, as you are trying to stretch inside your shell, your head pops through! And so does your tail! You've hatched!!! Welcome to the world, little alevin!

You see other shapes in the dim light. Some move and others hold still. You understand that those that move are little salmon just like you. Cool water slides through your gills and your gills flap back and forth. You are breathing!

Something is holding you down, though. You can h-a-r-d-l-y move. You bounce in the current as if you had a ball on your belly. You look down with your giant black eyes and see that your belly IS a ball!

How weird. But you don't care. You are alive and you are not hungry. You work on swishing your tail to see what you can see around you, staying snug in the small rocks where you feel safe.

One day you feel that your big belly is going-going-gone. You have grown to become a fry. You are hungry and know it's time to leave space between small rocks and figure out how to find food in this stream. Nobody tells you how to do it. You just seem to know.

You wriggle this way and that and finally shoot towards the light. Suddenly, the bright water is pushing you, pushing you. You turn your nose into it so that it flows past your gills, letting you breathe. Hooray! You learned something right away!!!

Soon you find a place between a log and the side of the stream where the water barely moves and you can rest. You like it here and feel safe. And you wonder what more adventures are ahead.

PART 2

As a fry, you have learned to swim out from your hiding spot, grab a tiny bug floating by, and rush back to safety. Oh, that bug tasted good! It seems like you're always hungry, always eating, always hiding. You take time to rest, too, lazing against the side of the stream where the water is slow and no one can see you.

After many weeks, you notice that you have grown some more. You have become a fingerling - about the size of a person's finger. But you've never seen a person and you don't care what a person would call you! All you know is that you're able to dart quickly, quickly everywhere in the stream to find food. You hug the side only when the rain comes, making the water flow fast - fast enough to wash away a little salmon who isn't careful!

Many of the other salmon who hatched with you have not been so good at hiding. Once, you saw a flash above the water. The long beak of a bird followed. The bird caught and ate many fingerlings. You were quick to get out of sight.

The days grow shorter and winter comes to the stream. You don't find as much food but that's okay. You're not as hungry. You mostly rest in your favorite hiding places as more and more rain falls and the stream runs fast and muddy.

New water comes into the stream as the rain falls. Usually it's okay but, one time, it smelled awful. You don't know what's in it but you know it's not good, so you quickly swim upstream to get away from it.

Finally, the days grow longer and you start exploring again. You eat bugs that live on rocks and wood in the stream. Those are really juicy! And more bugs show up in the air as the weather warms. Those that die over the water and those that aren't such good flyers float past. You grab as many as you can and feel them crunch in your mouth. You also nibble moss off the rocks and find teeny, tiny bugs there that taste good, too.

By now, you have lived in the stream almost a year. The colors on your body seem to change before your very eyes. Since you popped out of the rocks, you've been dark green with large black streaks on your side. Now you see that the spots are fading and the green is turning bright silver. What a pretty smolt you have become!

PART 3

Now that you are a teenage salmon, something tells you, "Go downstream." You don't know what's there, just that it's where you belong. To keep water flowing over your gills so you can breathe, you let the current carry you out of the stream backwards. Yes, backwards! To stay safe, you rest during the day and move during the night. What a way to go!

The stream joins a river and you continue down, down until the water begins to feel different. And you feel a pounding, pounding in the distance. You reach a place where your body is changing, getting ready to leave the freshwater you have known for the saltwater that is new. You do not forget, though, the sweet smell of your home stream.

You soon discover that the pounding is from waves of water washing the beach with a mighty force. There you find a pool where freshwater and saltwater mix. Ah, another rest.

Soon you leave the pool and find a magical place. Thousands of small fish are swimming around - just the right size for lunch! Strange white blobs are floating through the water - jellyfish! And crabs with skinny long legs are walking along the sandy bottom. You just know that not everything here is smaller than you are, so you hide in water grasses - and even find things to eat there. Too bad most of the salmon that hatched with you didn't make it this far.

You grow faster this summer than ever before. And as you get bigger, you become more and more curious about the deep water away from the beach. Should you look for food there? One day you say yes! You swing your tail back and forth, back and forth. My, how strong you are and fast you can swim! Soon you find small, shiny herring fish. Very tasty! Sometimes you catch a squid - slippery to swallow but s-o-o-o good.

You also find things in the water that you know not to eat. Plastic bags and old balloons that look like jellyfish but aren't. You also find water that smells bad and doesn't feel right in your gills. Swim away fast!

One day, a swoosh of water pushes you to the side. Whatever it making the water move like that is getting closer, closer. You turn around to see something that is black and white and bigger than anything you have ever seen. A-a-a-r-r-g-g-h! An orca whale is swimming right at you, with its mouth open!!! You see hundreds of white teeth in that big mouth and you swim as hard as you can. Whee! A v-e-r-y close call.

On another day, you feel something else big in the water. Lots of other fish are moving but they don't look like they are swimming. Then you see the net and watch is being pulled out of the water. You were lucky not to be among the many fish inside. You will live to have more adventures.

PART 4

After years of being in the ocean, you know one day that it's time to go back. You swim and swim toward the beach where you once hid in the water grass. There you wait until the water is high enough to leap into the river that smells a little like home. You feel your body changing to welcome the freshwater. You aren't hungry anymore - and you know that's okay. You feel your body filling with eggs.

Other salmon are swimming with you against the fast river current. You swim past rocks and fallen trees and streams that don't smell like yours. Finally you come to the one that smells like home. So does another salmon and you both turn in together. You remember the big rocks. And look, there are some of your old hiding places! You keep swimming until the water is so shallow that your back sticks out of the water.

Then you notice that your sides have red on them - and that the salmon who came in with you has even more red. You also see how beaten up you are from your journey home and feel how very tired you are.

You sniff the sides of the stream, searching for a spot where fresh, cold water come in. When you find it, and just the right small rocks, you begin to beat the water with your tail to make a nest. The other salmon swirls around, waiting for you to finish. Then you both do a slow dance over this bowl in the small rocks. Finally, you are ready to spawn. Out of you come hundreds of bright orange eggs. At the same time, a white cloud of sperm comes out of your mate.

You beat the water again to cover the eggs. Now the fresh, cold water will bubble through them as your babies hatch and continue the cycle of life.

The last thing you do is find a place of quiet water near your eggs. There you breath your last, knowing that your body will feed the stream so your children will be able to grow and have adventures as wonderful as yours.

Remember the things you saw during your salmon life, the places you went, the smells you smelled, the ways you felt. When you have thought about all those things, you may open your eyes. No rush.