The drumming of a woodpecker. Wind rushing and roaring through the tree tops. The flute-like call of a hermit thrush. The "buzz" from a nearby hummingbird. Water cascading and singing down a steep, rocky hillside.

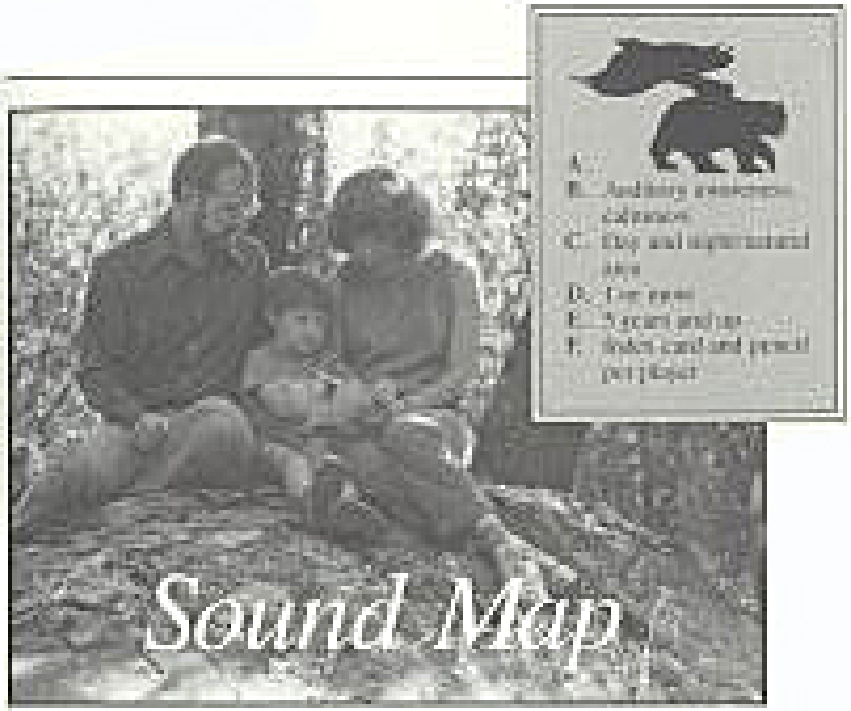
A thrilling chorus of natural sounds delights the players in the Sound Map Game. Children love this activity—they become completely absorbed and sit surprisingly still while making their sound maps.

To play, begin by showing the group a 4 × 6 index card with an X in the center. Tell the players the card is a map, and that the X shows where they're sitting. When they hear a sound, they should make a mark on the card that aptly describes the sound. The mark's location should indicate as accurately as possible the direction and distance of the sound. The marks should be interpretive, not literal: the players don't have to draw pictures of plants and animals, just a few lines that represent the sound—for example, two wavy lines indicating wind, or a musical note indicating a songbird. In other words, they should spend little time drawing and most of the time listening.

Tell the players to keep their eyes closed while they listen. Explain that cupping their hands behind their ears provides a reflective surface for catching sounds, creating a shape like the sensitive ears of a fox or kangaroo. To hear sounds behind them, they needn't turn their heads, but just cup their hands in front of their ears.

Select a site where the group is likely to hear a variety of sounds—meadows, streams, and forests are fine. It's important to have everyone find a special "listening place" quickly, so that some aren't walking around while others are already listening. I usually give the group one minute to find a spot and tell them to stay in the same spot until the end of the game. Giving the players enough time to disperse fairly widely will ensure a diversity of sound maps and greater interest in sharing.

How long you should play depends on the group's age, attention span, and how well-supplied the environment is with sounds. A good basic guideline is 10 minutes for adults, 5–10 minutes for children. I like to call the group back together by imitating a natural sound or



blowing a crow or duck call. As the players assemble, ask them to share their maps with a partner.

It's sometimes hard to find a site that's protected from the sounds of cars and machinery, but those noisy areas are ideal for teaching lessons about noise pollution. Have the children make two sound maps, the first one near a busy street and the second in a quiet, natural spot. After the game, ask them where they felt more comfortable. This is a fine way to build children's conscious appreciation of natural areas.

After the children have drawn their maps and shared them, you can ask questions such as:

- How many different sounds did you hear?
- Which sounds did you like best? Why?
- Which sounds did you like least? Why?
- Which sounds had you never heard before? Do you know what made the sounds?

Instead of having them answer aloud, you can ask them to circle the sounds they'd never heard before, draw one line under sounds they liked best and two lines under the sounds they liked least.