Podcast Name: Imagine This

Episode Title: How do we smell?

Duration: 9’08

[ABC Podcast sting - This is an ABC Podcast]

Bri: Hello, my name's Bri. Today on Imagine This, we're going to discover one of the five senses. What do we use to see with? Do we use our ears to see?

[Curious music]

Kids: No.

 Eyes.

Bri: We use our eyes to see. And what do we use to hear?

Kids: Ears.

 Ears.

Bri: We use our ears to hear. What about smell?

Kids: Noses.

 We use our noses.

Bri: We use our noses to smell. Well today's question is about smell and it comes from Audrey.

Audrey: How do we smell?

Bri: Audrey wants to know how our noses do all that smelling. So today on the show, Dr. Rodrigo Suarez is going to help us find out how we smell. Now, I know he's around here somewhere. I'm just going to have to sniff him out.

[Bri and kids sniff]

Bri: Rodrigo! I know you're around here somewhere. There you are. Hi Rodrigo.

Rodrigo: Hi.

Bri: Wow. You smell great.

Rodrigo: Thank you.

Bri: Is that a new shampoo?

Rodrigo: Yes.

Bri: I'm getting mint and a little spice. Is that a good one?

Rodrigo: Yes. That's a good one.

Bri: Rodrigo, do we need our nose to smell?

Rodrigo: Yes, of course. We smell with our nose.

Bri: So where are all these smells?

[Mystical music]

[Kids sniff]

Rodrigo: Smells are in the air.

Bri: So how do they get from the air into our nose?

Kids: Breathe.

Rodrigo: Yep. Smells are in the air we breathe.

Bri: So how does a banana smell get into the air?

Rodrigo: Teeny tiny bits of the banana are floating in the air.

Kids: Banana!

Rodrigo: These bits are so small that we can't even see them, but we can smell them.

Kids: It smells like banana.

 I want to smell.

Bri: Oo, I want to have a smell.

[Bri sniffs]

Bri: Banana.

Rodrigo: When we smell something, and we would like to see what it is, we actually sniff like a dog.

[Everyone sniffs, kids giggle]

Rodrigo: That banana air goes into our nose.

Kids: Yeah. In our nose.

Bri: You mean, little bits of that banana are going inside our noses?

Rodrigo: Yes, but not the chunky bits. Only the teeny, tiny, invisible bits that are floating in the air.

Bri: Phew. I don't want chunky banana in my nose. Do you?

Kids: No. Not me.

Rodrigo: Not really.

Bri: So what does that smelly air do when it goes inside our noses?

Rodrigo: When it gets to the back of our nose,

[Rodrigo sniffs]

[Mystical chime]

Rodrigo: our nose takes all of those hundreds and thousands of little smells and sends a signal into our brains.

Bri: How does that happen?

Rodrigo: A banana have lots of different types of smells, but our brain puts all those smells together and says it's a banana.

Kids: Yummy.

 It's bananas.

Rodrigo: Yes. Our brain decides if it's yucky or yummy.

Bri: Ooh, what's a yummy smell?

Rodrigo: Chocolate!

Bri: What does chocolate smell like?

Kids: It smells like chocolate.

 Yum.

Bri: What else smells good?

Kids: Pizza.

 Yummy!

[Dramatic music]

Rodrigo: When I smell pizza, I get really hungry.

Kids: Yummy in my tummy.

Rodrigo: Because I love pizza.

Bri: Me too.

Kids: Yum.

Bri: What's a yucky smell?

Kids: Poo.

 Yeah!

 You can't eat poo.

Bri: No, you can't.

Rodrigo: Eeew. I definitely wouldn't want to eat that.

Kids: It's yucky.

Bri: So our brains don't want us to eat yucky things.

Rodrigo: No.

Bri: What else is a yucky smell?

Rodrigo: Rotten milk is really horrible.

Bri: Rotten milk?

Rodrigo: That smells like vinegar.

Kids: Yuck.

 Yuck.

Rodrigo: I definitely wouldn't want to drink that.

Bri: So we don't like the smell of yucky things.

Rodrigo: Yeah. Smells help us know which food is fresh and which food is not.

Bri: So we don't get sick.

Rodrigo: Yes. Our sense of smell helps to keep us alive.

Bri: What else can smell do?

Rodrigo: Smells can warn us of danger.

[Dramatic scary orchestral music]

Bri: We can smell danger?

Rodrigo: Yep. Like fire.

[Fire crackling]

Bri: Ah, fire. Like smoke.

Kids: Yeah.

 Smells like dust.

Bri: Wow. Our sense of smell is like a superpower.

Rodrigo: Yep. Smells also help us remember.

Bri: How?

[Nostalgic classical music]

Rodrigo: When we have a favorite thing, like a blanket or a toy, whenever we smell it, we feel good, and we remember a safe place.

[Electrical buzzing]

Bri: So our brains help us do all that smelling.

Rodrigo: Absolutely. The part of our brain that knows what smell is, is called the olfactory system.

Kids: Old factory.

Bri: An old factory?

Rodrigo: Sort of. It's kind of like an old factory because it's been there for millions of years.

Bri: So humans have been smelling with our-

Rodrigo: Olfactory system.

Kids: Olfactory.

 Old factory!

Bri: Olfactory system, for a really long time.

[Gentle piano]

[baby gurgles, cries]

Rodrigo: Yep. Smell is the first sense we use when we are born. When we are babies, before we can think or talk, we use smell to know who our mother is.

Bri: Do other animals use smell to know who their families are?

Rodrigo: Yep. Baby koalas use their sense of smell to find their way into the pouch.

Bri: So they know where home is.

Rodrigo: Yes. Animals are really good at smelling.

Bri: You think animals can smell more than us?

Rodrigo: Yep. Most animals smell better than humans. That's why dogs like to smell you.

[Sniffing]

Bri: Have you ever been sniffed by a dog?

Kids: Yes.

Rodrigo: Even fish and sharks can smell underwater.

[Waves crash on a beach]

Bri: They have an olfactory system?

Rodrigo: Yes, but theirs is an underwater olfactory system.

Bri: So we all need smells.

Rodrigo: Smells are very important for all animals.

[Cat meows, dog barks]

[Nostalgic classical music]

Bri: So Audrey, when it comes to smelling, we use our noses and our brains. And when we breathe in that air, all of the tiny smells go up into our nose and a special part of our brain-

Kids: Old factory!

Bri: Helps us make sense of all of those smells, so we know what things are.

Kids: Banana!

Bri: And our sense of smell is one of the oldest senses that we have. It helps to keep us safe and it helps us know what foods are yucky-

Kids: Yucky. Yuck.

Bri: and what foods are yummy.

Kids: Yummy.

Bri: And it can even help us remember important things about the world. So the next time your pet wants to give you a big sniff [dog sniffs], he wants to know who you are so it can remember you forever.

[Cat meows, dog barks]

[Music concludes]

Bri: Imagine This is a co-production brought to you by ABC Kids listen and The Conversation. I'd like to thank Rodrigo Suarez from the University of Queensland, Hamish Camilleri for mixing, and all the kids who had their say on today's show. I'm your host and producer, Brianna Peterson. To find more episodes of Imagine This, you can download the free ABC Kids listen app, or find them wherever you get your podcasts.