



The Nature of Mindfulness – 15 minute activities – Primary

Teacher Preparation

Overarching learning goal:

An inquiry based approach to fully engage each child is shared in these 15 minute activities. Opportunities are shared for first hand experiences to make mindful connections and insights to deepen students' relationships with nature.

Teacher's background information:

Video: Mindfulness in Schools: Richard Burnett (https://youtu.be/6mlk6xD_xAQ)

The benefits of mindfulness

We are a culture increasingly becoming addicted to instant communication and ever-changing technologies. While technologies such as mobile phones bring wonderful opportunities, children are spending more and more time being passively engaged in these technologies rather than actively engaging in the world around them. This includes the natural world and our environment. There is growing concern about the lack of time young people spend in nature and the consequences of this disconnect.

The practices of mindfulness and meditation offer people of all ages an effective path to develop healthy responses to the chaotic world around





them (and often inside of them). The key benefit of meditation and mindfulness is developing self-knowledge, or learning about what's going on inside. This positively influences student well being, emotional intelligence and resilience. Other benefits include improved concentration, sharpened focusing abilities and simply being calm and still.

It is important to clarify the differences between relaxation and mindfulness:

- **Relaxation.** Activities such as reading a book, eating an ice-cream or lying in the shade can be considered relaxation activities.
- **Mindfulness.** These same relaxation activities can become mindful activities by becoming more aware. Learning to observe the self and bringing attention fully to the present moment is key to mindful activities. Mindfulness requires practice (although some would argue that the same could be said of relaxation!)

Find out more by reading:

- [Benefits of Spending Time in Nature Factsheet](#)
- [The Benefits of Mindfulness Infographic](#)
- [Tips for Getting Your Class Outside](#)

Hot tips:

- Have a go at these practices and feel the benefits for yourself.
- Where possible complete these activities outside in nature.
- When it comes to taking classes outside, support is key. For best results team up with fellow teachers and share ideas and materials.

Teaching sequence



15 Minute Activities: Discovering the Colours, Shapes and Elements of Nature

Activity 1. Discovering Colour in Nature

'Nature is infinitely creative. It is always producing the possibility of new beginnings' - Marianne Williamson.

Resources:

- Sketch pad for each child
- Coloured pencils and crayons to share
- Your choice of flowers and specimens from nature (depending on what is available in the school grounds)

Preparation:

- Gather materials
- Choose a suitable space in the school grounds to share this activity

Introduction:

Remind students that nature is the ultimate designer: a limitless palette of colours and tones can be found everywhere. Looking up, we can see a range of blues, grey and white in the sky. When we pause and carefully look down, we can discover all kinds of greens, purples, browns and other colours in a little patch of the garden.

To truly notice, we need to be quiet and look at one space at a time. Then we can notice that different colours can make us feel different things. In this activity we are going to notice which colours make us feel happy, calm and peaceful.



Procedure:

Step 1. Depending on the age of children, ask them to write feelings in different areas of the page: calm, joy, happy, peaceful; or draw simple faces with different eyes and mouth lines to show feelings (draw some examples for them to look at).

Step 2. Settle children in an appropriate area in the school grounds.

Step 3. Remind students to look up, out and down to see all kinds of colours.

Step 4. Invite students to take a coloured pencil or crayon and colour in the space underneath the word or face. Let students know that this does not have to be 'artwork'. It is an activity to notice how the colours of nature make us feel. There is no 'right' or 'wrong' drawing.

Step 5. Gather students together in a circle with their coloured sheets in front of them.

Step 6. Share discoveries about how colours may feel different to different students.

Step 7. Pin up coloured sheets as a display in the classroom.

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections:

- Remind students that everyone sees with different eyes and feels differently.
- The discovery of how colours change the way we feel can be used to help connect to happy, calm states of mind.

Activity 2. Nature Statues



*'Never say there is nothing beautiful in the world anymore. There is always something to make you wonder in the shape of a tree, the trembling of a leaf' -
Albert Schweitzer.*

Resources:

- Your choice of instrument to provide a strong, clear sound: singing bowl, chimes, drum, etc.

Preparation:

Find a suitable time and suitable outdoor location for this quiet, reflective practice with your students. If appropriate and possible, it is great to do this activity with bare feet (and kids love to get their shoes off!)

Introduction:

Ask students if they have ever played the game 'Musical Statues'. Explain that this activity involves a different set of guidelines. During this activity they will experience being outside and quietly, slowly walking around in a set space. But in this case, they will 'freeze' when there is a sound (that you provide with your choice of instrument), instead of when the music stops.

Ask students to notice all kinds of shapes in nature: clouds and birds in the sky, trees, sticks and leaves, grasses and insects, etc. Explain to students that each time they slowly move, they will notice what their next 'Nature Statue' shape will be: a leaf, a spider, a cloud, the sun, a piece of grass, etc. When they notice the sound, they freeze into the nature shape and imagine that they are a leaf, cloud, bug, etc. When they hear the sound again, they will return to quiet walking.



Procedure:

Step 1. Assemble students in the appropriate area.

Step 2. Remind them of the intention and guidelines of the activity (in the Introduction).

Step 3. Share the quote “Never say there is nothing beautiful in the world anymore. There is always something to make you wonder in the shape of a tree, the trembling of a leaf” - Albert Schweitzer.

Step 4. Remind students that this is a quiet practice: their mouths will be silent, so that they can notice with their eyes, ears and bodies.

Step 5. Invite students to slowly, quietly walk in the space.

Step 6. Choose your intervals of walking/freezing (a suggestion is 40 seconds walking; 20 seconds freezing into statues) and enjoy the activity.

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections:

- Ask students how they feel when they return to the classroom. Did they notice that they felt calmer and happier when they were carefully observing themselves and the natural world around them?
- Ask students to share things that they observed or realised during the activity. Which shapes did they enjoy being the most? Why?

Activity 3. Discovering a Quiet, Still Natural Space



'Don't underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can't hear, and not bothering' - Winnie the Pooh.

Preparation:

Locate a suitable area in the school grounds or nearby park.

Resources:

- Your choice of loud, clear instrument: cymbal, gong, drum, etc
- You may like to source a copy of the *Winnie the Pooh* book titled 'The House at Pooh Corner' written by A. A. Milne and illustrated by E. H. Shepard and read a simple story with students before introducing this activity.

Introduction:

Explain to the students that although we are called 'human beings', most people for most of the time are busy doing things. When we pause to notice, being happy, contented and calm are not things that we have to do. We can just be happy and just be calm. Often the best place to be happy and calm is in nature.

Ask students to think about different animals and where they like to be: cats, dogs, mice, rabbits, guinea pigs, birds and bats. Share with the children that in this activity, they will quietly explore spaces and places in nature where they can just be: finding spaces where they can enjoy doing nothing, just like Winnie the Pooh, and be peaceful in nature. Discuss the possibilities: sitting against a tree, lying in the grass and looking at the sky, sitting next to a flower bed, sitting on a fence or standing still in the middle of a space and feeling the wind!



Procedure:

Step 1. Share the conversation above and the quote: “Don’t underestimate the value of Doing Nothing, of just going along, listening to all the things you can’t hear, and not bothering” - Winnie the Pooh.

Step 2. Discuss with students the possibilities for them to find their own quiet space to be in nature, in the area you have chosen.

Step 3. Explain to students that this is a private, quiet practice. A special practice that enables them to listen to all the sounds, see all the details, feel the touch of grass, rocks, sand or wood and smell natural fragrances.

Step 4. Demonstrate the sound of the instrument that you have chosen and explain that the first sound will begin the practice of finding a special quiet place. When they hear the next sound, they will return to the group at a pre-arranged spot.

Step 5. Agree with children to leave the classroom in silence, to let their minds and bodies get ready to ‘do nothing’ and just be in nature.

Step 6. Ask students to respect the natural landscape and be sure not to disturb insects, plants or animal habitats.

Step 7. Enjoy the practice!

Invite students to share their feedback and reflections:

- Ask students if any of them practice this at home or on holidays.
- Ask them if they would like to share how they felt like during this practice.
- Kindly invite students to share any other discoveries, observations or comments.



Reflection

Conduct a class discussion about how students felt before, during and after each of the activities.

- Did their attention wander? Were they able to bring their attention back to the meditation practice?
- How did they feel emotionally? What did they think of the activities? Which aspects did they enjoy? Why?
- Have they noticed any changes within themselves, in others or in the class as a whole?

Extension

- Discuss with students how this practice can be done at home – on a verandah, balcony or in the backyard. Explain how this simple practice can help clear the mind and help the body feel better.
- Encourage older children to keep a mindfulness journal so they can record their feelings, observations and drawings - noting any changes they have observed in themselves, in others or in the class as a whole. Alternatively, younger children could conduct one-on-one interviews with each other to reflect on how they feel and any changes they may have observed in themselves and in each other.