

BREATHE AND BE

Story Hour Kit

Host a mindfulness story hour in your library, bookstore, classroom—or right at home!

Teaching mindfulness to children at an early age can help them learn to stay calm, regulate their emotions, reduce anxiety, increase curiosity and engagement, and appreciate the world around them.

With *Breathe and Be*, author Kate Coombs and illustrator Anna Emilia Laitinen team up to present a book of poetry and art for young readers to make mindfulness easy, natural, and beautiful. It lovingly blends illustrated nature imagery with elegant verse about living with awareness and inner peace.



AGES 4-8
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Seven activities
that build upon the
book's poems and
nature images



Story Hour Tips

1. **Promote your story time event.** Use the story hour sign on the last page. Post it in prominent locations and use it as a bag stuffer or check-out flyer.
2. **Prepare a comfortable story hour space.** Some activities encourage you to be outside if that is a possibility.
3. **Read the book from start to finish.** Allow the children to get acquainted with the style, poetry, nature images, and its overall feel.
4. **Engage in complementary activities, each focused on a poem.** Lead the children through any of the activities in this kit, which vary for children ages 4–8. You can do one or two activities within the story hour time and come back to this book often to try new ones.
5. **Share the kit with parents and caregivers.** You can also provide the URL so that they can download it to practice the activities with their children at home: soundstrue.com/store/breatheandbe.html
6. **Bonus Activity:** Watch the book-reading video. This is also available at the URL above, or you can search “Breathe and Be” on YouTube.

What Am I Thinking?

What am I thinking?
What comes and goes in my mind?
I watch my thoughts.
They swim by like little fish.
They shine blue, green, red, yellow.





Activity: What Am I Thinking?

Read the poem to the children.

Let the children know that there are many ways that thoughts are illustrated in the book; here in this illustration, they are fish swimming by. Then discuss the following:

1. Our thoughts are not permanent. They come and they go, they change, and they do not define who you are. It's how you react to them that matters most.
2. For example, you might be thinking something negative about a friend because he or she upset you. Take a deep breath in and a deep breath out. Observe the thought, then allow it time to pass. You can also name the emotion you felt (for example, anger, frustration, sadness).
3. If it's a happy thought—something that made you feel good—sit with it, take a deep breath in and a deep breath out, and feel gratitude toward it (as those moments can fill you up with a feeling of joy that sticks around).

Read the book again, and ask children how they see thoughts represented in the artwork (for example, floating dandelions, clouds, lightning, rain, birds, leaves, butterflies).

When you finish reading the book, ask if there are other ways they can visualize the idea of thoughts coming and going.

I See the World New



I see the world new—
my friends with bright sneakers,
the fresh smell of grass,
a line of ants winding by.
I see each for the first time.



Activity: I See the World New

If possible, take the children outside. If not, you can do this exercise inside. Read the poem to the children and then walk them through the activity.

1. Look around and find a different place to sit.
2. Now sit in a different position than you normally do (for example, lie on your stomach like the children in the image). Close your eyes and take a couple of deep breaths (breathe slowly in, breathe slowly out).
3. When you open your eyes, take your time scanning your surroundings.
 - What can you notice that is new to you?
 - Can you see new details?
 - What can you smell, touch, or hear that you haven't before?
 - What can you see if you look straight up or way down low?
4. Take note of (or write down) three to five things that you hadn't noticed before. They can be about the people around you, the room you're sitting in, or nature (if you're outside).

Ask each child to take turns sharing their observations with the group at large, or have them break up into pairs to share with each other. Discuss why it is good to sometimes see the world new.



Leaves Float Away

I watch the stream.
Each thought is a floating leaf.
One leaf is worry,
another leaf is sadness.
The leaves drift softly away.



Activity: Leaves Float Away

Conduct the following meditation exercise with children after reading the poem. They can be sitting or lying on the rug, or take them outside if possible.

1. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and let the breath out. Do this again. And again.
2. Now think about your thoughts and the feelings that come with them. Though we have many happy thoughts, sometimes we have sad thoughts about the past or worries about the future. For example, you might feel sad you had a fight with your sister yesterday or worried about the spelling test in a few days. Choose three sad thoughts or worries. Do not share them with anyone else—just think them.
3. Imagine three fall leaves on a tree branch hanging over a stream. Are they yellow? Red? Orange? Brown? Assign one of your three thoughts to each leaf.
4. Imagine the three leaves falling into the stream one by one. Then imagine the leaves floating away downstream.
5. Let go of the leaves with your heart and mind. Even say goodbye to them softly.
6. What is left? Today is left, this very minute. And right now, in this minute, you are okay. You are peaceful.
7. Take a deep breath in and let the breath out. Breathe again. And again.

Explain to the children that they can use this exercise in their daily lives when they are feeling sad, upset, or worried and would like to feel more peaceful.



Quiet Place Tanka

I see myself
by the ocean, toes touching sand,
fingers finding a shell
at the edge of blue water.
Where is your quiet place?



Activity: Quiet Place Tanka

The poems in *Breathe and Be* are written using a Japanese poetry form called tanka, an earlier version of the haiku. After reading the poem, help children write their own tankas.

1. Close your eyes, take a deep breath in, and let the breath out. Breathe deeply again. And again.
2. Picture a place that makes you feel happy and peaceful. It can be a place in your home or outside, a place that you have visited, or a place in your imagination that you'd like to go to. It should be a quiet place.
3. In your mind, add more details to the picture of your quiet place.
4. Open your eyes. Make a written list of phrases describing the place you pictured.
5. Now you are going to write your own tankas. We usually write a tanka with five lines of five, seven, five, seven, seven syllables, or "short, long, short, long, long." Poets may vary the syllable count a little on occasion, as in a few lines of the poem you just read.
6. Pick the best details from your list and turn them into lines for a tanka.
7. Make the lines specific so they are easier and more fun to picture. For example, "There are lots of trees around" could become "The wind blows tree leaves softly."
8. At least one line can be about how this is your quiet place. What lines in the poems from the book tell you that?
9. Share your poem with a partner or the group.
10. How do you think you will use your quiet place after today? How can it help you in your everyday life?

Discuss how children can breathe deeply and picture their quiet places whenever they are upset or just want to feel peaceful. They can save their poems to help them do that.

Activity Adaptation: For younger children, you can ask them to draw their quiet place in lieu of writing a tanka.

Alive in This World

My feet touch earth.
My hands touch tall grasses.
My face touches sky.
I run through the morning.
I am alive in this world!





Activity: Alive in This World

After reading the poem, use the following guidelines to help children think about what it means to be “alive in this world.”

1. What do you think this poem is about? What are the children in the illustration doing? What are they feeling?
2. How can happiness or joy be a part of mindfulness?
3. Mindfulness means being “in the now,” this very moment, and being aware of the world around us. How can that bring us happiness?
4. Think of times you have felt the joy of being alive in the moment, particularly when you were outside in nature and moving your body. For example, you may have been hiking in the mountains, swimming in a lake, boating on a river or ocean, riding your bike, or running and playing in a park. Share one such experience with the group (or with a partner).
5. Why is it important to find joy in being alive?

Take the children outside and have them act out the lines of the poem. First they can stand still, feeling their feet touch the ground and the air on their faces. What else can they feel? (For example, they may feel the warmth of the sun.) What else in nature can they see, hear, smell, or touch? Next, have children run around the edge of the playground, park, or yard.

If possible, give children the opportunity to paint or draw a picture of themselves “being alive in this world.” You can make a gallery of these pictures or put them up in your home.

Breathe In and Breathe Out



I breathe slowly in,
I breathe slowly out. My breath
is a pathway of peace
moving softly through me.
Each day I can breathe and be.



Activity: Breathe In and Breathe Out

Practice the most basic mindfulness exercise with the children, having them breathe slowly in and breathe slowly out 8 to 12 times so they can feel more peaceful and centered.

This can be especially helpful before or after a transition if you are in a classroom; in fact, you may want to start and end each day with this simple exercise.

Parents can also use the exercise to create a more peaceful, centered feeling in the home.

You may wish to learn additional mindfulness or yoga exercises for your children or your class. Schools and families that use them often experience a greater sense of peace and wholeness. We've included another one on page 16 as part of a history and cultural lesson about mindfulness.



Who Invented Mindfulness?

Where did the idea of mindfulness come from? It began with a religion called Buddhism that a spiritual teacher named Gautama Buddha started about 2,500 years ago in India. Buddhism has a set of guidelines for living rightly called the Eightfold Path.

One of these eight principles is right mindfulness, which means focus on and awareness of what you are doing, feeling, experiencing, and thinking. If you are aware in this way, you will be better able to understand and manage how you are living your life from moment to moment.

Mindfulness is also considered part of the history and practice of Hinduism, a religion that started in India even earlier than Buddhism. Yoga comes from Hinduism and has become a popular physical and spiritual activity in the Western world.

Teachers like Jon Kabat-Zinn and Thich Nhat Hanh have taught the idea of mindfulness throughout the United States for many years.

In our day, mindfulness is an important part of yoga and other meditation practices. (Most often it is no longer taught as part of a religion.) Mindfulness meditation is a good way of finding peace in today's busy world.



Mindfulness Practice

Ask the children to breathe slowly in and breathe slowly out. And again. And again. Then bring their attention to each of the following, one at a time.

1. **BODY:** Can you feel your body, each part doing its job? Feel each part, one by one, from the top of your head down to the tips of your toes. (Note: This is often done as a long guided meditation.)
2. **FEELINGS:** What are you feeling at this moment? Are you feeling happy? Sad? Worried? Silly? Frustrated? Relaxed? Are you feeling more than one thing?
3. **MIND:** What thoughts are going through your mind at this moment? Are you just thinking about this exercise? Are other thoughts flickering through your mind?
4. **WORLD AROUND YOU:** What are you experiencing using your five senses? What is in the world around you? What can you see, smell, hear, touch, or taste at this moment?
5. **MINDFULNESS:** After becoming aware of your body, feelings, thoughts, and the world around you, take a step back from them in your mind and just let them be what they are. Without judgment, just know they are there.

With this awareness, they can be calm, peaceful, alert, and aware in this moment, right now—knowing what's going on, but not shaken or swayed by any of it. That is how mindfulness feels.

BREATHE IN BEAUTY AND BE IN THIS MOMENT



Come to Our Mindfulness
Story Hour for Children!

Date & Time:

Location: