

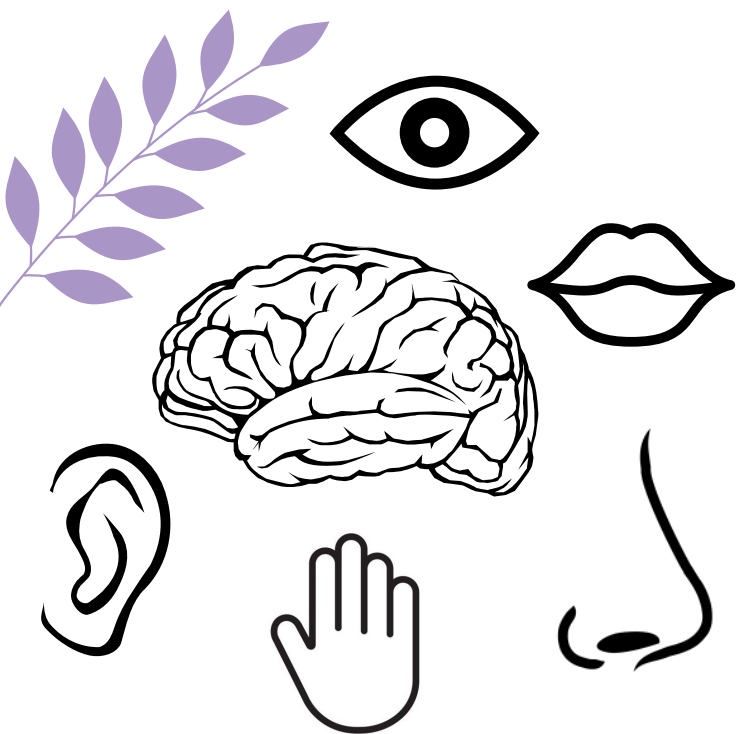
ENGAGING THE SENSES TO PRACTICE MINDFULNESS

A 5-Activity Guidebook for Integrating Mindfulness into the Classroom

What is Mindfulness?

Mindfulness is achieved when we are aware and focused on the present moment. While we focus on the current moment, we acknowledge and accept our thoughts, emotional feelings, and physical feelings. We can use our 5 senses (sight, smell, taste, hearing, and touch) to help us engage with the present moment.

It is important to remember that mindfulness is an individual journey and may look a little different for everyone! This is the beauty of mindfulness; there are no rights or wrongs!



Benefits of Mindfulness in the Classroom

Practicing mindfulness can allow us to slow down and take notice of the world around us! You may be surprised by all of the little details you typically overlook in your daily life. By implementing mindfulness into your classroom, you can help students look at their surrounding environment from a new perspective. This can lead to new observations and can be a catalyst for curiosity.

The following guidebook includes 5 activities that engage the senses to help students practice mindfulness. These activities can be used with students of all ages and we encourage you to modify the activities to best fit the needs of your students. We hope these activities help your students develop a deeper connection with nature and inspire inquiry in your classroom!

SIGHT

Have you paid much attention to the microenvironment underneath your feet? In this activity, students will use their eyes to observe the smallest things in their environment.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- 1-2 foot section of string, yarn, or rope (preferably a bright color so it is easy to find)
- Objects like rocks to mark landmarks
- Magnifying glass (optional)



INSTRUCTIONS

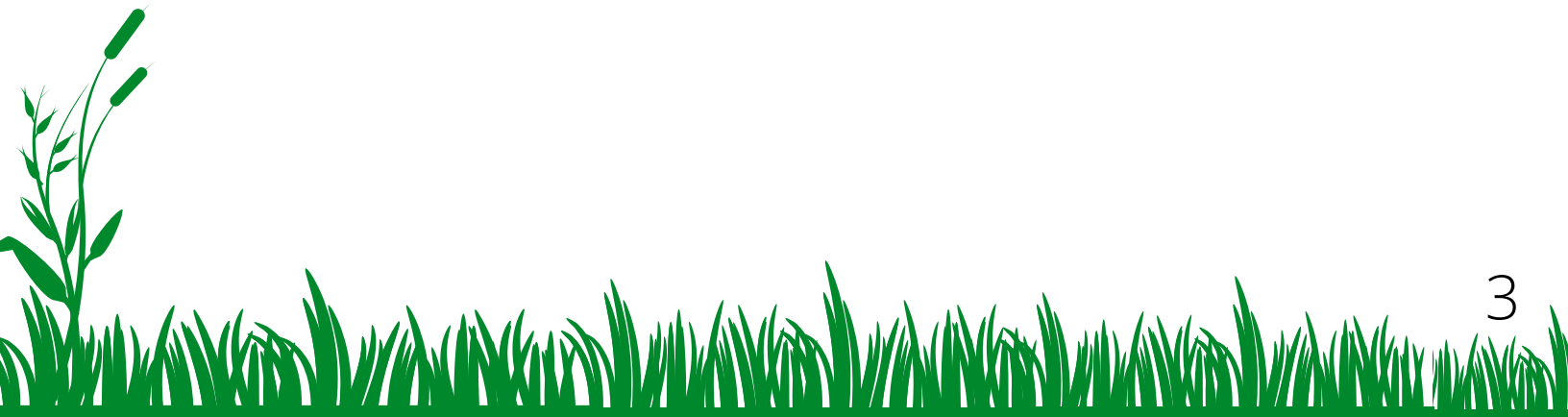
- Imagine you are an ant, slug, beetle, or other small creature. What adventures might you have during your wanderings? What places would you like to visit? How might places familiar to you as a human look different if you were a much smaller creature?
- Get down on the ground and create a microhike trail with your string that represents the path your creature takes as it explores. Does it look for food, water, and shelter, or does it go on adventures? Use your magnifying glass to see everything that is in the area.
- If you collected small objects to mark landmarks, place them on interesting points of your trail.
- You might invite others to tour your microhike trail, using the small objects you placed to remind you of important landmarks, like a water source or a mossy rock that your creature explored. Remember to collect your string when you are finished.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What did you see that you didn't know was there before?
- What landmarks do you use to find your way around indoors and outdoors?
- How might the world look different if you were a much larger creature, like a giraffe or a whale?

EXTENSIONS

- Draw a map of where your creature traveled; remember to draw important landmarks from the perspective of the creature – objects that appear small to you might appear large to the creature!
- Come up with a name for the trail. Write a story about the adventure your creature went on. What did they see? What did they do? Who did they meet?



SMELL

Have you ever tried to describe a smell? What if you couldn't use any words? In this activity, students will use art to depict a scent!

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Room spray/air freshener
- Art medium (paper, canvas, poster board, tiles, wooden blocks, etc.)
- Art utensils (colored pencils, markers, crayons, oil pastels, paint, etc.)



INSTRUCTIONS

- Pass out a type of art medium and utensils to your students. All students can use the same materials or you can allow your students to choose their materials.
- Have your students find a comfortable place to sit. Students should close their eyes and the room should be quiet. This will allow the students to better focus on their sense of smell.
- Walk around the room and spray the fragrance.
- As you walk around the room, ask your students to internally reflect on the scent. Does this scent bring up any memories? What do they "see" when they smell this scent? What colors come to mind? If they had to describe this smell with a shape, which shape would they choose?
- Have your students open their eyes. Ask your students to reflect on how they would describe the scent to someone if they were not allowed to use any words. Then, ask them to create a visual representation of the scent using the art materials in front of them.

- Stress to your students that they should create an image that represents the scent, not what the scent comes from. For example, if the scent is pine, students should not draw a pine tree.
- Once your students are done, have them share their creations with the class and guess the scent. You can use the reflection questions below to facilitate a discussion.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS



- Did everyone identify the same scent? Why do you think everyone identified the same scent? OR Why do you think people identified the scent differently?
- What similarities do you see in your classmates' creations? (color, shape, etc.)
- What differences do you see in your classmates' creations? (color, shape, etc.)
- How does scent impact our memories?
- Would your art look different if you kept your eyes open while smelling the fragrance?

ADAPTATIONS

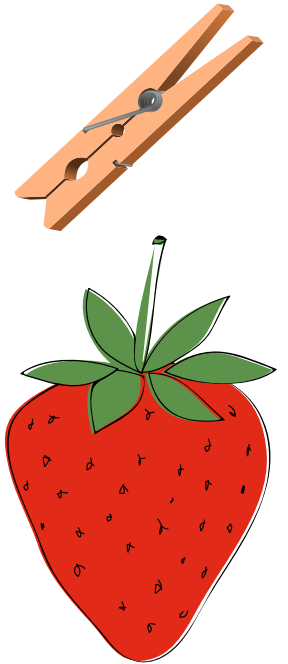
- Want to complete this lesson outdoors? Have your students create their visual representations with sidewalk chalk!
- Instead of spraying a fragrance, have your students smell the real thing! Walk up to each student and allow them to smell what you are holding, but don't let them touch it! You could use a flower, cinnamon stick, fruit, etc.
- Complete this activity with another class and use different scents. Have the classes guess each other's scents by looking at their art!

TASTE

How does your nose affect your ability to taste? What about your sense of sight, hearing, or touch - do they impact your sense of taste? In this activity, students will explore how their other senses influence the taste of food!

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Plates, napkins, or paper towels
- Forks
- Strawberries (2 per student). Can be replaced by a fruit or vegetable of your choice. Make sure to check student allergies.
- Clothespins



INSTRUCTIONS

- Pass out a plate, fork, and clothespin to every student.
- Have each student place a clothespin on their nose. Tell them to sit with their eyes closed and a fork in hand. The room should be quiet so the students can better focus on their sense of taste.
- Place a strawberry on each student's plate and ask them to use the fork to taste the food on their plate.
- Have them focus on chewing and taking time to taste the food. Does the taste change as they chew? How does the texture of the food change?
- Before the students open their eyes, see if they can guess the food that was on their plate.
- Have them open their eyes.
- Give each student another strawberry and ask them to eat it using their hands instead of a fork.
- Use the reflection questions below to facilitate a discussion.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Which eating experience did you enjoy more? Why?
- Did blocking your other senses allow you to better taste the strawberry?
- Which sense (smell, hearing, touch, or sight) made the greatest impact on the taste of the strawberry?
- Which sense (smell, hearing, touch, or sight) made the least impact on the taste of the strawberry?
- How often are you mindful when you are eating?
- Do you ever think about where the food you are eating comes from? What had to happen for these strawberries to make it to the classroom? How many people do you think were involved in harvesting these strawberries?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

- Have your students research the process of harvesting strawberries. Based on their findings, have them create a storybook to describe the journey the strawberries take to the grocery store. Have them focus on the people the strawberries “meet” along the way.



HEARING

What do you hear when you go outside? Do you hear different sounds in different places? Can you decipher them? In this activity, students will sit and mindfully listen. They will close their eyes while actively listening to their surroundings to try to discover the sounds of nature

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Sound clips of various nature sounds (birds, frogs, water, trees rustling, bees buzzing, etc.)
- Earbuds or headphones for those with difficulty hearing
- Flashcards of the various sounds
- Answer sheet or paper to draw or write what is heard



INSTRUCTIONS

- This is a two-part activity: in class and in nature.
- Introduce students to the different sounds so they may be able to identify the species that can be heard in nature. Play different bird and frog calls and match them to flashcards.
- Have students sit quietly, hands in their lap and eyes closed.
- Play the different sound clips while instructing students to clear their minds. Prior to the clips, a meditation or relaxation sign can be played to help students relax.
- Have students draw or write what they hear.
- Next, take students to an urban area and then a more secluded park. Complete the same activity (sitting, eyes closed, hands in lap, and listen for a few minutes to the sounds around)
- Have students write or draw what they hear.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What species can you identify?
- What sounds did you hear in both places? What sounds were different?
- What does this tell you about the different species in the different areas?
- How did these sounds make you feel?

EXTENSIONS

- This activity can accompany a lecture about the biodiversity of urban areas versus more natural areas.
- Another form of this activity that inspires mindfulness and creativity is a free draw activity. Play different sounds from different environments (sea sounds, forest sounds, etc.) and have students draw how they feel as they listen. Then, compare the students' drawings as they talk about why they felt the sounds in this way. This can encourage empathy as students see how others perceive the same sounds differently.



TOUCH

It's time to get our hands (and feet) dirty! We touch things everyday, but how often do we really feel what we touch? This activity is designed to encourage inquiry and exploration through mindful touch.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- A box large enough to place objects and hands in. A shoebox is a great option as it has a lid and can be completely closed.
- Various objects of different textures (squishy, soft, rough, hard, smooth, sticky, pokey, etc.) The more textures the better!
- Scissors
- Blindfold



INSTRUCTIONS

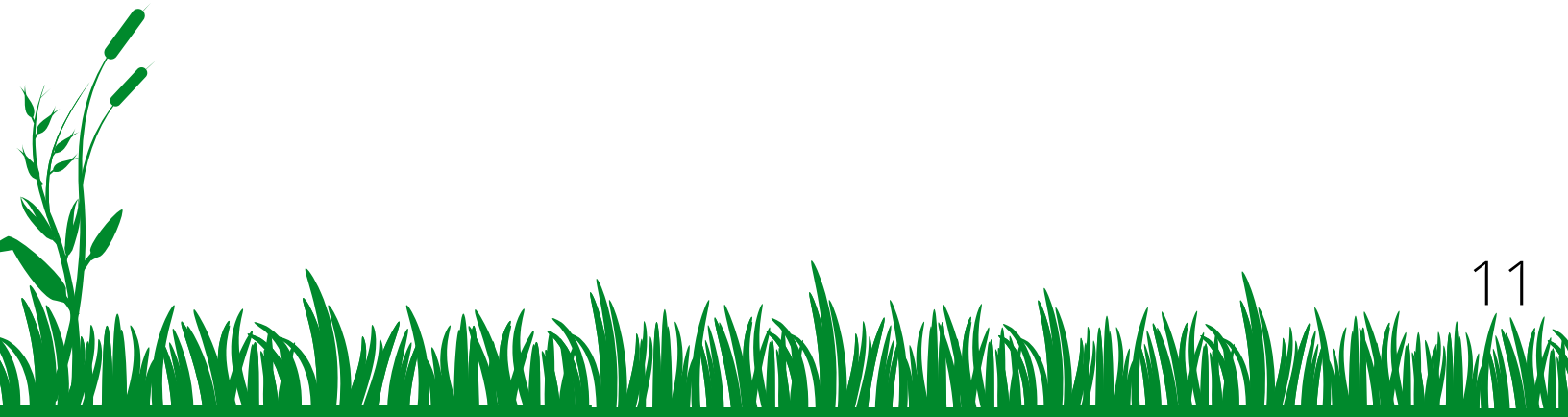
- Cut hand-sized holes in the box. Large enough for hands to fit, but small enough so the students can't see in the box.
- Place different objects into the box. This can be done in a variety of ways. You can place one item in the box at a time and let students feel each one individually or place several items in the box. Please do not put anything that could be harmful if grabbed too harshly
- Have students reach into the box. A blindfold can be used if needed.
- Instruct students to feel the objects and describe them as they are feeling them.
- Have students draw or write what they are physically feeling.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- Describe what you are feeling using sensory words (rough, smooth, hard, soft, etc.)
- What do you think could be in the box?
- Have students compare what they think is in the box. This allows students to see how sensory exploration can differ between individuals.

EXTENSIONS

- Some people may feel objects better with different parts of their body. Try this activity using different parts of the body. Try with elbows, feet, cheeks. Then have students compare the experience of touching objects with different areas of the body.

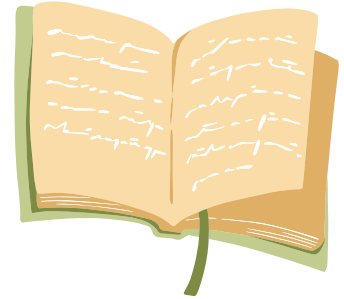


REFLECTION ACTIVITY

This activity will tie all of the mindfulness activities together and show your students that all of their senses rely on one another. By paying close attention to the environment around them, they will feel a closeness to nature.

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Paper
- Pen or pencil
- A comfortable area either outside or inside (preferably near a window)



INSTRUCTIONS

- Have your students pick a spot close to home or in an area where they feel comfortable. If this is not outside, maybe have them choose a spot near a window where they can look outside or on a porch or doorway.
- Have them take a “nature stroll” to their spot. This means to walk at half their normal pace and pay attention to what they are walking by. This could also mean taking a few deep breaths.
- Once they arrive, have them sit down or stand if they prefer. Then start a sense mediation:
 - Close your eyes
 - Take a few deep breaths
 - Relax your body. Starting at your head and ending at your toes. Taking note of each body part.
 - Make a mental note of what you can hear around you.
 - Make a mental note of what you can feel on your skin.
 - Make a mental note of what you can smell.
 - Open your eyes.
 - Make a mental note of what you can see.

- Have them write down a stream of consciousness. Whatever they are thinking or feeling. This can be a jumble of words, bullet points, a few sentences.
- Have them write down the current conditions (weather, local environment, etc.)
- Have them write down any observations
- Have them write down any questions
- Nature mystery (something they don't understand)
- Who, what, when, where, why?
- Have them sketch something or take photos
- Have them write a reflection
- Their feelings
- Most interesting thing they saw or felt
- A focus for the next time
- Have them come up with a name for their sit spot. This could be based on a physical feature or a feeling.



NOTES

