

*Whenever I feel blue, I start breathing again.*

—L. Frank Baum



# EMPOWERING EDUCATION

*Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning*

## MINDFUL BREATHING

**Level:** Lower Elementary (K-2)

**Timeframe:** 15-20 minutes

**Concepts:**

- Breathing
- Focus
- Mindfulness



### Big Ideas For This Lesson

Mindfulness can be defined most succinctly as paying attention. Mindful breathing, then, just means paying attention to our breath. The practical benefits of mindful breathing may surprise you: study after study reveals that mindful breathing and other mindfulness practices are effective methods for increasing positive emotions, focus, memory, attention, and compassion while decreasing stress and negative emotions.<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Many new studies have even demonstrated that mindful breathing boosts the immune system, increases the density of gray matter in the brain, and is an effective treatment for depression, anxiety, PTSD and obesity!<sup>6</sup> Sound too good to be true? Try it for yourself!

Whenever a student practices mindful breathing, the student is improving their ability to focus. Sports, exams, art, reading, math, and many other activities grow students' focus too. Mindful breathing is unique, however, in that it requires zero setup. All that is needed for mindful breathing is to pause and pay attention to each moment of breath. No additional understanding, set-up, effort, or technique is needed. Simply bring awareness to the natural rhythm of your breath. Mindful breathing is the most important, and simple, mindfulness skill you and your students will learn this year. It is the cornerstone to all other mindfulness practices and an immediate gateway to mindful awareness.

Today we will guide students in practicing mindful breathing. There is a script to lead the activity; yet, we encourage teachers to read the script, become familiar with the pace and practice, then loosely follow the script for the actual activity. As an alternative, if you would like to have structure beyond our script, then consider using a free [audio guided mindful breathing practice for children](#).<sup>7</sup> There are several more audio guided mindful breathing practice links in the academic extensions for this lesson.



## Essential Vocabulary

Attention  
Focus  
Mindful Breathing  
Mindfulness  
Practice

## Materials

- Chime, bell, or app with chime sound.
- Mindful Breathing: SEL Journal Page
- Mindful Breathing Themed Read-Aloud (Optional):  
[Peaceful Piggy Meditation](#) by Kerry Lee MacLean
- Video: [Reading of Peaceful Piggy Meditation](#)<sup>8</sup> (6:19)



## Preparation

Become comfortable leading students through a mindful breathing practice. Lead someone else through the practice. Practice on your own before attempting with students.



## Teaching Script

### **BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE & CONCEPT MODELING (I DO)**

Open with a discussion about what the students have learned so far to help calm them down. Hopefully, you'll get responses such as:

- *Use my belly breath and breathing buddy.*
- *Get in my mindful body.*
- *Listen mindfully to a bell or other sound.*
- *Use an I-Statement.*

*Today we are going to learn a few more ways to breathe that will help us calm down and focus. To help us get started, we are going to read a story called [Peaceful Piggy Meditation](#) by Kerry Lee McLean.*

Read students the story, pausing to take their comments or to ask questions to check for understanding. Ultimately, we want students to understand the world is a busy and sometimes frustrating place, but everyone has a peaceful place inside of them that they can use to help calm down.

*Today we are going to learn about a few different kinds of mindful breathing that you can do when you use your peaceful place or your mindful body. You already know one kind of breath, the belly breath, that we practiced last week with our breathing buddies. Let's try our belly breath right here together without our buddies. Put your hand on your belly and breathe in so deeply that your hand moves. Great! Breathe in...1 2 3 4...and out 1 2 3 4.*



## GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

Next, introduce at least 3 different kinds of breaths to the students. Explain that we call them Mindful Breathing because we are being very aware of how we are breathing. We are paying attention to our breath.

Here are a few to choose from. Pick ones that you think your students will really connect to and practice regularly.

**Mindful Breathing Exercises** from: [4 Breathing Exercises for Kids to Empower, Calm, and Self-Regulate](#).<sup>9</sup>

**Flower Breath:** Imagine smelling a beautiful flower. Breathe in through the nose and out the mouth, releasing any tension. Stop and smell the roses, daffodils, daisies or any other flower they like. This is a simple way to connect kids to their breath and how it helps them to feel.

**Hissing [Snake] Breath:** Breathe in the nose, long deep inhale, and out the mouth on a hissing sound, slow and long. Extending the exhale will allow kids to slow down their inner speed. It's wonderful to connect kids to their exhale to help them learn to slow themselves down, mentally and physically.

**Bear Breath:** Inhale through the nose, pause; exhale out the nose, pause. Breathe in to a count of 3 or 4, pause for a count of 1 or 2; breathe out for a count of 3 or 4, pause for a count of 1 or 2. Repeat a few times. This will help ground and settle kids. Wonderful for restful, reflective time. Imagine a bear hibernating. Helpful before nap time, story time or any creative activity.

**Bunny Breath:** Just 3 quick sniffs in the nose and one long exhale out the nose. Invite kids to pretend to be bunnies, sniffing the air for other bunnies, carrots to eat, or safety. It can be a lovely cleansing breath when you use it in this way. You can also use it when kids are very upset and can't find their breath, because it will help them connect to their exhale, so that they breathe instead of spin out.

**Another Mindful Breathing Exercise** from: [Kid's Relaxation](#).<sup>10</sup>

**Lion's Breath:** Think of a feeling or thought that you want to let go. Now imagine that you are a mighty lion. You have a giant roar. Sit up tall like a proud lion. Squeeze your hands into fists, holding onto that thought or feeling you want to let go. Scrunch up your face, take a deep breath in, and let your roar out, sticking out your tongue at the same time and stretching your arms out wide in front of you, opening your hands wide too.

Still More Mindful Breathing Exercises from: [Cosmic Kids](#).<sup>11</sup>

**Hot Air Balloon:** Sitting in a comfortable cross-legged position, start by cupping your hands round your mouth. Take a deep breath in through your nose and slowly start to blow out through your mouth, growing your hands outwards in time with your exhale as if you are blowing up an enormous hot air balloon. Once your balloon is as big as it can be (and you've finished your exhale), breathe normally as you sway gently from side to side admiring your big beautiful hot air balloon as it soars through the sky. This long deep exhalation as you blow up your hot air balloon has a relaxing effect and the image is incredibly vivid for kids' imaginations.

**Dragon Fire Breaths:** Interlace the fingers underneath the chin. Inhale and lift the elbows up to frame the face. Exhale, lifting the head up making a whispered 'hah' sound towards the sky, like a dragon breathing fire. At the same time, lower the elbows back down to meet at the bottom again by the end of the 'hah' exhale. This breath technique builds strength and heat within so is a good energizer. It helps us feel brave when we might be nervous or pepped up when we're a bit tired.

**Tumble Dryer:** Sitting in cross-legged position, point your index fingers towards each other and position them so your left finger is pointing to the right and your right finger is pointing to the left overlapping a bit in front of your mouth and blow as you spin your fingers round each other, making a lovely long exhalation and a satisfying swishy sound. Tumble dryer breathing mudra. This works well after washing machine, which involves sitting in a cross-legged position, interlacing your fingers behind your head and twisting from your core side to side going "wishy washy wishy washy" as you twist each way.

**Bumble Bee Breaths:** Sitting comfortably with your legs crossed, breathe in through your nose, then with fingers in your ears hum out your exhalation. The lovely comforting resonance of this has a calming effect and done with eyes closed can make it even more peaceful.



## REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

Debrief the experience as a class. Possible prompts include:

- *How do you feel right now?*
- *What was your favorite kind of breath?*
- *When might you use one of these breaths?*
- *What was it like to pay attention to your breath?*
- *Did anyone notice something about his or her breath that you had not noticed before?*



## EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

### *Reflect on it*

- *How do you feel right now?*
- *What was your favorite kind of breath?*
- *When might you use one of these breaths?*
- *What was it like to pay attention to your breath?*
- *How does mindful breathing help you focus? How does it help you calm down?*
- *Did anyone notice something about his or her breath that you had not noticed before?*

### *Journal it*

Have students complete the Mindful Breathing SEL Journal Page for this lesson.



## EXTENSIONS

### *Classroom*

- Build mindful breathing into daily class routine.
- Encourage students to lead the class in the practice.
- Have students draw a picture of themselves doing one of their favorite mindful breathing exercises.
- Use mindful breathing when transitioning.
- This practice can be useful prior to and during testing.

### *School-wide*

- Make space available for students to use for mindful practices.
- Allow students that want to practice mindfulness to enter classroom early.
- Even if students choose not to use these areas, providing the space ensures it is available when they need it.
- Incorporate use of mindfulness practices into school-wide assemblies and events.



## REFERENCES

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## TEACHER TIPS FOR FACILITATING MINDFUL BREATHING

As you can see by the number of choices available, there is no standardized way to guide mindful breathing practices. You will develop your own style as you continue to guide practice sessions. Here are some general tips to consider:

- Offer prompts slowly, reminding class to breathe normally as they notice each part of a breath. Continue the practice, guiding students to notice each part of the breath and balancing prompts with silence.
- Encourage students to remain silent and take quiet, relaxed breaths.
- Pause frequently and allow for silence. This gives students a chance to script internal dialogue, unique from your guided narration. In this way, less is more.
- If there is a distracting behavior or a student that is not meeting expectations, try to avoid interrupting the practice. A gentle reminder can help,
  - | *“If you find your attention drifting to a friend or sounds in the classroom, that’s okay; bring your focus back to each breath.”*
- For extreme disruptions, gently and non-judgmentally, restart the practice e.g.,
  - | *“Not everyone was meeting expectations. That is okay; we will just have to start over and try again.”*
- Ask questions versus making statements.
  - | *“How does your body feel as your lungs fill with air?”*
  - | vs *“Notice your body tingling as you fill your lungs with air.”*
- Mix and match senses.
  - | *“What does a deep breath look like in your mind? If it had a color, what would it be? Place a hand on your chest; how does each breath feel?”*
- Avoid telling students when to breathe in or out or how many breaths to take. Each student will have a unique breathing rhythm.
- Mirror the practice as you offer prompts. Deliberately focus your own attention on your breathing. The best prompt for breathing is just to breathe!
- Possible prompts are listed below. You are not expected to use all of them, or any of them; choose what fits best with your teaching style.
  - | *“Notice the rise and fall of your chest.”*
  - | *“Notice your belly expanding as you breathe in, relaxing as you breathe out.”*
  - | *“Let your body do the breathing for you.”*
  - | *“How does the air feel passing over your lips or through your nostrils?”*
  - | *“Are you distracted by thoughts or emotions? Just return your attention to your breath.”*