

*Colors, like features, follow the changes of the emotions.*

—Pablo Picasso



## EMPOWERING EDUCATION

*Mindfulness-Based Social & Emotional Learning*

### Mindful Coloring

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

**Timeframe:** 20 minutes

**Concepts:**

- Calming Strategy
- Mindfulness
- Self-Compassion



### Big Ideas For This Lesson

The trend of mindfulness in popular culture has taken many forms, not the least of which is the flood of adult coloring books lining the shelves of nearly every bookstore or gift shop in town. From business executives to college students, adults everywhere are embracing their inner child and taking to coloring as a form of coping and relaxation. So, why is this trend so popular, and does it have any merit for stress reduction?

Numerous scientific studies point to 'yes.'<sup>1,2,3,4,5</sup> Although preliminary scientific and anecdotal evidence support 'mindful coloring' as an effective coping skill, the actual mechanism remains open to further investigation. Some suggest that the nature of the activity - familiar, accessible, structured, low-risk, with clear progression and immediate feedback - mimics the conditions necessary to enter flow state.<sup>6</sup> Research supports this hypothesis: participants in controlled trials who colored complex patterns similar to those in adult coloring books experienced significantly greater anxiety reduction than those who simply colored a blank page.<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>

In short, mindful coloring provides a uniquely accessible opportunity to let the mind wander freely while focusing attention on a simple, engaging task – it is a 'hack' for present moment awareness. While mindfulness lessons can often be abstract or thought-based, this lesson appeals to tactile and visual learners alike. By providing students the chance to get hands-on and color we provide them with a fun, concrete experience that they can reconnect with in times of escalation. It provides a tangible coping strategy that students can use at home, at their desks, or any other time they need to calm down.

The best part? No introduction, theory, or complex explanation is needed – simply provide time and space to color. This is mindfulness!



## Essential Vocabulary

Anxiety  
Body Scan  
Emotion  
Mindful Coloring  
Thought



## Preparation

There is a design provided in the **Mindful Coloring: SEL Journal Page** or you can print copies of coloring pages for each student (see google 'free coloring pages'). Make sure to have a variety of skill levels and interests so that all students will be engaged.

## Materials

- Colored supplies for each student/table.
- Mindful Coloring: SEL Journal Page or printed copies of coloring pages for each student.



## Teaching Script

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

Begin by facilitating a brief body scan. Use the script below or your own variation. Students will engage in the body scan before and after practicing mindful coloring to help them identify any changes in their emotions.

*Today we are going to color! Believe it or not, coloring is a useful way to practice mindfulness and has been shown to help kids calm down. Even adults have coloring books now to help them calm down! There is a reason these are so popular - by focusing all of your attention on one thing - coloring - you can easily clear your mind of difficult thoughts and emotions.*

*So I'm going to challenge you today. You're going to get a chance to just color, but we're going to do it silently. We're all going to focus just on our coloring, not on talking. It's going to be hard but I think you all are ready for it! We've been practicing our mindfulness all year! Before we jump into coloring, we are going to do a quick body scan to identify any emotions we are currently feeling. After coloring, we will do the same body scan to decide if mindful coloring changed our emotions in any way.*

#### Body Scan Script:

- a. Cue students to find their mindful bodies and take several deep breaths.
- b. "Close your eyes and take some deep, belly breaths."
- c. "Keep your eyes closed and put your hands on your head. Think about how your head is feeling. Do you feel any emotions? One deep, belly breath. Keep your eyes closed!"
- d. "Now put your hands on your heart. Think about how your heart is feeling. Do you feel any emotions? One deep, belly breath. Keep your eyes closed!"
- e. "Now put your hands on your thighs. Think about how your legs are feeling. Do you feel any emotions? One deep, belly breath."
- f. "Okay, you can open your eyes. Who would like to share what feelings they noticed in their body?"

Allow a few students to share.



## GUIDED PRACTICE (WE DO)

*Now that you know how you are feeling, we are going to practice mindful coloring. In a moment, I will pass out coloring pages and supplies. I will give you 10-minutes\* just to color. Remember: the practice of mindfulness involves focusing all of our attention on one thing at a time, so your goal for this practice is to focus all of your attention on coloring. That means we will be quiet.*

**Teaching Note:** \*Decide on an appropriate time limit for your class. We recommend providing a minimum of 7 – 10 minutes of uninterrupted coloring time to allow students plenty of time to let go of thoughts and immerse themselves in the experience. Extending the time can provide a deeper experience, as time and interest allows.

Handout coloring supplies and remind students of expectations for mindfulness time as needed. Provide quiet class time for coloring.

**Teaching Note:** Playing soft music without lyrics may aid students in concentration and focus.



## REINFORCING LESSON CONCEPTS (YOU DO)

Following the coloring activity, facilitate the same body scan used in step one of this lesson. Encourage students to notice any changes in their emotions and physical sensations.

**Teaching Note:** Some students may actually experience an increase in stress and anxiety when coloring. This is particularly true for students with perfectionistic tendencies. Rather than assuming the activity did not ‘work’ for these students, encourage students to approach this from a growth mindset. What about the experience caused more stress? How can they approach coloring with more flexibility and creativity? You may even encourage these students to color outside the lines! Ask them why it is so important to complete the task perfectly, and what it might be like to embrace imperfections and have fun with the activity

Facilitate a class, small group, or journaling reflection on the experience of mindful coloring as it relates to the experience of emotions. Possible reflection questions could include:

- *What differences did you notice in your emotions before and after coloring?*
- *Describe your experience with mindful coloring.*
- *What emotions did you notice before, during, or after mindful coloring?*
- *Were you able to be totally present and focused on coloring, or did you find yourself distracted by thoughts or worries or wanting to talk?*
- *Did you enjoy mindful coloring? Why or why not?*
- *Will you use mindful coloring in the future? Why or why not?*



## EVIDENCE OF CONCEPT ATTAINMENT

### *Reflect on it*

- *What differences did you notice in your emotions before and after coloring?*
- *Describe your experience with mindful coloring.*
- *What emotions did you notice before, during, or after mindful coloring?*
- *Were you able to be totally present and focused on coloring, or did you find yourself distracted by thoughts or worries or wanting to talk?*
- *Did you enjoy mindful coloring? Why or why not?*
- *Will you use mindful coloring in the future? Why or why not?*

### *Journal it*

If students did not use the design on the Mindful Coloring: SEL Journal Page, they can color this one at another time this week.



## EXTENSIONS

### *Classroom*

- Provide time and space for coloring in class.
- Make coloring materials available for students to use as a coping skill.
- Use coloring before/after tests to ease test-anxiety.
- Consider using mindful coloring as a focusing strategy for students who have difficulty sitting still. Assess a student's ability to listen and comprehend while coloring and allow use in class on a case-by-case basis.
- Display students finished products to encourage engagement with mindful coloring.

### *School-wide*

- Provide coloring materials in areas where students are commonly escalated or required to wait (office, nurse's office, counseling office, etc.)
- Coloring is not just for kids! Consider how mindful coloring may support teachers and staff as a self-care tool.



## REFERENCES

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