

# Attention, Balance, Compassion

*Fourth Grade + ELA and Dance*

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## CORE SUBJECT AREA

ELA

## ART FORM + ELEMENTS

Dance

Body

Action

Energy

## MSCCR STANDARDS

RL.4.1, RL.4.3, RL.4.7, RI.4.7, RF.4.4a, W.4.3, W.4.3a,

W.4.4, SL.4.1c, SL.4.4, L.4.1, L.4.3a,

## MSCCR CREATIVE ARTS STANDARDS

DA: Pr5.1.4a: Demonstrate fundamental dance skills (for example, alignment, coordination, balance, core support, kinesthetic awareness) and movement qualities when replicating and recalling patterns and sequences of locomotor and non-locomotor movements.

## DURATION

5 days, 1 hour per day

## OBJECTIVES

ELA Unit Objectives: Mindfulness practices, visualization, yoga, meditation, storytelling, body/mind/energy(emotion), and writing personal stories  
Dance Unit Objectives: Students will learn all dance elements through the BrainDance and several creative movement explorations within the unit. Overall, they will cultivate a new appreciation for their bodies, their energy, the body/mind/spirit connection, and their care of each. This unit fulfills dance and larger education standards in that it directly addresses National Standard #7 (dance and healthy living), three NDEO national standards (creating, connecting, responding), and the 4 C's of the 21st Century Skills (communicating, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity).

## MATERIALS NEEDED

Trade books: *The Lemonade Hurricane*, *What Does It Mean to be Present?*, *Visiting Emotions*, *Ahn's Anger*

## VOCABULARY

Tadasana (mountain pose), Compassion, Mindfulness, Meditation, Yoga, Visualization, Mirroring, Balance

## RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=maNqp3g2H18>, <https://www.yogajournal.com/poses/5steps-master-tadasana>

Questionnaire Name \_\_\_\_\_

1. Something that stresses me out in life (right now) is:
2. Something that relaxes me in life (right now) is
3. When I get mad or sad, I do this to feel better
4. I do the following activities after school every week:
5. I feel tired (circle one): All of the time    Some of the time    Very rarely
6. I feel great about myself (circle one): All of the time    Some of the time    Very rarely
7. I eat healthy food and sitting at a table (circle one): All of the time    Some of the time    Very rarely
8. I play tech (tablets, wii, xbox, etc.) and watch TV this many hours each day: \_\_\_\_\_ hours
9. If I could do anything for one day, I would:

I have a hard time sitting still and paying attention (circle one):      YES or NO

## LESSON SEQUENCE

### Day One •

#### Welcome:

The Teacher will teach students her cue for attention (call and response), and explain her expectations for volunteers and selection of these. She will also explain that they will be learning movement, not training in dance techniques. She will share a bit of her background and explain that during this unit they will learn a lot about how to be mindful in the classroom and in their larger lives.

#### • Introduction of Mindfulness & Introduction of Attention:

The teacher will explain that mindfulness involves attention, balance, and compassion and will briefly define mindfulness (being fully present without judgment). She will share that today's class will focus on attention. In order to experience this, she will ask students to have a mindful body (sitting tall, energized). She will then explain that they will learn mindful listening with the help of a Tibetan singing bowl. She will ask them to first listen to the sound, then listen again and raise their hand when the sound ends, and then repeat this with eyes closed for greater focus and concentration. Finally, she will ring the bowl asking students to listen for a full minute to the sounds in the room and larger school and note these details. Afterwards, she'll ask for volunteers to share this information.

#### • Introduction to Breathing:

The TA will explain that many mindfulness practices involve breathing. She will teach students how to do "counted breathing" – inhale for four, exhale for four, inhale for eight, exhale for eight. Hands will be placed on the chest and the belly alternately. The TA will also ask students to close their eyes for several breaths for full focus.

#### • BrainDance:

The TA will share that the BrainDance mirrors patterns that developed one at a time in their brain when they were babies and that by moving through each in the order that they occurred, they wake up their brain, get it communicating closely with their body, and are able to refocus their attention. The TA will ask students to pay particular attention to following her lead as clearly as they can. BrainDance patterns/order: Breath, Tactile, Core/Distal, Head/Tail, Upper/Lower, Right/Left, Cross-Lateral, Vestibular. After the students dance this, she will suggest that they continue to do this in their own lives, and encourage the teacher to continue including it in daily practices in the classroom when needed.

#### • Storytelling:

The TA will read two books on mindfulness: *The Lemonade Hurricane* and *What Does It Mean to Be Present?* She will pause for discussion at certain points, specifically asking students (by a show of hands) if they have ever experienced any of the things discussed in these two books. She will also point out that mindfulness helped the characters in the books feel more centered and present in their days.

#### • Connection:

The TA will ask if they have any family members whom they are close to, and in their opinion, live (or lived) interesting lives. The TA will share a great story about her great grandfather and point out that the greatest story

we ever tell is the story of our own life = that we write this story, and we are largely responsible for whether it is interesting, happy, and full of great people. The TA will lead a brief discussion on the circumstances that can make life challenges, both expected and unexpected, (calling on student volunteers) and the choices we can make in reaction to these events. In other words, the idea of “it’s not what happens to us but how we handle what happens to us” will be shared, along with how mindfulness can help us here.

- Yoga:

The TA will lead students in the basic asana of *tadasana*, or standing mountain pose. She will explain that this is a centering exercise – when one finds stillness in the body, one finds stillness in the mind. Students will spread out in the room and stand in their own space, and incorporate intentional breathing into this position.

- Closure:

The TA will distribute a mandala for coloring to each student and explain that focusing one’s attention on the task at hand (in a creative way) can alone help them to center. She will encourage the students to do this when they have a break in their learning during the day, or at home when they need quiet and stillness for whatever reason.

## Day Two

- Review & Introduction of Balance:

The TA will review the definition of mindfulness and specifically attention. She will ask student volunteers to share ways that we can center that were learned in our last class (yoga, breathing, mindful listening). She will then define balance in the body, mind, and spirit as finding a calm and connected center between two opposites. She will point out that extremes on the continuum are not “bad” but out of balance, and share with the students that today will focus on how to deal with these extremes in life with mindfulness.

- Movement Exploration of Opposites:

The TA will briefly follow this introduction of balance by asking the students to explore opposites in movement (sitting at desks and using gestures) = fast/slow, strong/light, high/low, smooth/sharp, etc. Time allowing she will ask students to try to do both at the same time (very difficult) and explain that this is hard in life too, and that the ideal is to find stillness in the middle and “go with the flow” in life.

- Dance and Body Language:

The TA will lead a discussion on body language and how our body, without the aid of words, can convey what we are thinking and feeling. She will ask students to show her with their bodies the following emotions: tired, happy, sad, scared, mad, relaxed, curious, etc. She will explain how in dance, the dancers share what is happening in the story and what their feelings and thoughts are (the theme of the dance and their role in it) with movement only and for this reason, thus must be clear, confident, and very present in the moment, so this intention can be known to the audience. The TA will encourage students to do this in their movement in the classroom.

- Breathing:

The TA will teach students “balloon breathing” which is four quick-accented inhales for four counts, followed by

a smooth and steady exhale for four counts. The students will do this four times and then reverse the inhale and exhale. She will explain that this type of breathing is especially helpful when they are feeling emotional or anxious about anything. She will remind students that mindfulness is about being in the present and that looking back involves worrying and fretting about the future involves fear, thus part of mindfulness practices is intentionally releasing a tendency to worry or be fearful for any reason and instead to trust the moment and flow with the circumstances of the day.

- Storytelling:

The TA will read two books – *Visiting Emotions* and *Ahn's Anger*. She will point out that the hardest area to find balance in can sometimes be emotions (both books deal with this topic). The second story encourages the main character to go “sit with his anger” and not “judge it” but instead meet it, be with it, and then release it. The TA will ask students (by a show of hands) if they have ever experienced a strong emotion that made it hard for them to think of or do anything else. She will then encourage them to use breathing and finding a personal space the next time this happens. She will also once again reiterate that feelings aren't “bad,” but that they also are not “who they are”...the goal is to feel them fully, listen to what they are telling us, and then let them go so we can move forward in our day.

- Yoga:

The TA will ask students to spread out on their mats and will teach them a few new yoga asanas that encourage a balance between having a strong and flexible body and that also directly challenge their ability to balance (tadasana, warrior #1, warrior #2, and tree pose.)

- Meditation:

The TA will ask students to sit in a crossed-legged position on their mats, demonstrate a mindful body, and close their eyes. She will lead them through the “Thought and Feeling River” meditation which asks students to imagine a river running through their thoughts and then their feelings, carrying emotions away and cleansing the water.

- Connection & Closure:

The TA will ask students to become aware of emotions in their lives before their next class, and to practice mindfulness in reaction to the emotions if they are able. She will ask students to teach these practices to their family/loved ones if possible. She will let them know that she will ask students to share instances where this happened with their peers at the beginning of their next session. The TA will give each student a river rock and tell them that this is a reminder of staying mindful during their week = to keep it in their pocket, and touch it as a reminder that they ultimately choose what their day is like, how the story of their week unfolds, and whether this is a pleasant experience or not. The TA will end class by ringing the Tibetan singing bowl and thank them for their participation. Day Three

- Review:

The TA will quickly review the idea of balance with students – body (strong and flexible), mind (productive and relaxed, open and closed), and emotions (full and released). She will ask students to volunteer stories of emotions and using mindfulness to handle them more effectively. She will share the idea that if time were money and they were given \$1440 (1440 is the amount of minutes in a day) in cash to spend however they chose with no strings attached, would they throw away \$1400 if they lost \$40? No, they would value the remaining

money and spend it thoughtfully. In this way, if they lose balance for whatever reason during their day, to recover from this and make the most of what remains is a great goal to have.

- Introduction of Compassion:

The TA will define compassion as an awareness of oneself, one's surroundings, and others and feeling connected, appreciation, and empathy for all. She will reiterate that mindfulness practices center on non-judgment and that especially when dealing with unfamiliar or different things, that listening, observing, questioning, and finding points of connection despite these initial impressions, help us to cultivate compassion. The TA will hand everyone a green grape and ask them to take a moment to notice everything about it. She will then ask students to take a bite out of it and notice the taste, texture, and feel of the grape in their mouth. Finally, she will ask what it looks like on the inside and how this is different than its outside appearance. She will further explain that compassion requires us to understand that what we see is not enough = there are always layers to a person and a situation, and in order to be compassionate, we must pursue knowing everything we can before making a judgment if we make a judgment at all.

- The "I See" Exercise:

The TA will tell students that this exercise helps us to practice not making judgments or attaching feelings to something. The exercise asks that students simply point out what they see in the room (i.e. Frances' shirt is red vs. I like Frances' shirt). Each student will make an observation, with the TA correcting any attached judgments or opinions. She will encourage students to do this if they are feeling particularly critical of themselves, others, or a current situation in order to center back into a place of compassion.

- Mirroring:

The TA will lead the class in mirroring asking students to follow what she does. She will point out that movement needs to be slow, clear, and steady so, she can be easily followed. She will then have students partner up and lead and follow each other (each student does both roles, identified as A and B within the partnership), explaining that in life it is important to do both.

- Follow the Leader:

As an extension of the mirroring exercise, the TA will ask all A students to dance to the music and all B students to pick a person in the room (near or far) to follow. The movement can be more complex and faster now, and the follower is simply trying to capture what they can instead of doing what they see exactly. The groups will switch so all students have a chance to do both. The TA will ask (by a show of hands) who prefers to lead and who prefers to follow and remind them that this is a strength of theirs in their larger lives and to not shy away from doing it well in all arenas.

- Breathing:

The TA will teach students "nostril breathing" (inhale through one nostril, exhale through the other nostril, plugging their nostril with their index finger as needed). She will share that breathing like this brings both sides of the brain and the body into communication and balance, just like compassion asks that we consider and care for ourselves and others equally.

- Connection & Closure:

The TA will ask students to write down stories from their lives where they experience something and through mindfulness practices, were able to approach the situation with greater attention, balance, or compassion – that these stories will be shared and danced in the next class.

### Day Four

- Review:

The TA will ask students to sit on their mats in the common area and use the Tibetan singing bowl to bring students to attention. She will ask student volunteers to share what they wrote about in their journals and tell students that they will be making up a dance to tell these stories today, while they are being read. The TA will then review all three elements of mindfulness through movement:

- o Attention – finger tracking and following the arm as it moves through space

- o Balance – exploring opposites (strong/light, fast/slow, high/low, sharp/smooth)

- o Compassion – mirroring and a Compassion Statement (with assigned gestures) “May I be happy (touch heart). May I be well (touch belly). May I be free (open arms).” Repeat saying “You” and “We” instead of “I”.

- Dancing our Stories:

The TA will ask students to retrieve their journals and find a partner. Each person will read their mindfulness story to the other person. The TA will then share and model how to tell this story through movement.

- o The problem/conflict – find a movement that can capture this and repeat it three times

- o Mindfulness – take a deep breath (one of the three ways we learned to breath) and sink

- o Attention, Balance, Compassion restored – find a shape that shows being at peace The partners will work together to help each other create their own movement for their story. They will do this by making suggestions for movements, and watching them “practice” their final dance and letting them know if their ideas are clear, their movement is confident, and they are ready to perform. The TA will encourage students to create more movement if they would like, beyond what is required.

- Performing our Stories:

The TA will take a moment to share audience/performer expectations with the students, asking them to give their full attention and commitment to each task (additionally, audience members clap and performers bow after each showing). The TA will ask for volunteers (showing is not mandatory) who will share their dances. As the students perform, the TA will read their journal entry. Time allowing, the TA will ask the audience members to offer feedback on what was clear, creative, confident, and memorable.

- Constructive REST:

The TA will model this position on a student volunteer and ask students to spread out and do the same. She will then lead them through a body scan, asking them to release all tension and to relax into their mats. She will then lead them through a brief visualization where she asks them to imagine someone in their lives that loves them

very much – to picture what they look, sound, and feel like. She will ask the students (in their mind’s eye) to “see” that person hug them or give them affection in some way. She will then ask students to think of one thing that they are grateful for in this person and to send that thought in their direction so this person’s energy/spirit will benefit from that message. The TA will tell students that if they are stressed in their day, that constructive rest is a wonderful way to relax the body, mind, and spirit and refresh themselves for what is next – that it is an abbreviated form of a nap that she uses daily.

- Connection and Closure:

The TA will share (and demonstrate) that during their 5th and final class, they will be in a special space (more open without desks and room to move fully) and she will teach them yoga sun salutes and other movements/meditations that they can use in the classroom and in their lives to center themselves. She will let them know that in this last class, they will put into practice all they have learned in the unit, and that attention, balance, and compassion (for oneself) will be required in order to really experience what is asked of them,

## EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

### Day Five

- Yoga class led by local yoga instructor and classroom teacher. The class will be held in a separate space (open, large) and students will be taught a series of yoga poses/asanas that they can use in personal practice. The hour long session will end in a meditation/visualization which will include a body scan and guided breathing.

## SOURCES

Lesson written by Julie White; [www.wigglegenius.com](http://www.wigglegenius.com) Lesson edited and updated by Cristi Clark.