

# Sample Grounding Lesson Plan

**Date:** February 1, 2009

**Population:** Grade 5 Classroom

**Teacher:** Lynea Gillen

**Time:** 30 minutes

**Yoga Calm Principle/Lesson Goal:** Grounding

## LESSON PLAN

### CALM

- *Belly Breathing*, feeling the weight of your body in your chair. Make your legs heavy, feel the gravity holding you to the earth. Picture a solid rock that goes deep into the earth and imagine how heavy that rock is.
- *Pulse Count* – find your pulse, then listen to the rhythm of your heart. Picture a big drum with a large stick and each time you hear your heart beat, imagine playing that big deep note on the drum. Play that drum for 20 beats of your heart.

### ACTIVE

- *Volcano Breath* standing – Imagine your breath rising up deep from the earth, like a volcano.
- *Mountain Pose* – Feel your feet rooted to the ground, heavy and grounded.
- *Warrior I Pose* with a focus on holding the pose for a 10 count to help your body feel strong and grounded (both sides).
- Stand in a circle – *Roots* activity – Feel yourself anchored to the ground. With your eyes shut, think of all people in your world who help you feel safe. Imagine them holding your feet to the ground.
- *Trees in a Circle* activity to the count of 10 on each foot. Feel how your partner's support helps you to root your foot into the earth.

### CALM

- *Back Breathing*.
- Read the following *Mindful Moment Card on Grounding*: “Think of your favorite tree. Now imagine that you can plant that tree in a special place. Go to that place, dig a big hole and plant the tree. Imagine that you can see into the future and watch the tree grow tall.”

**BENEFITS**

Calms, focuses, and helps to self-regulate. Oxygenates the body. Teaches healthy, diaphragmatic breathing and draws awareness inward.

**TIME**

1 to 2 minutes

**ACTIVITY**

- Students lie on their backs, stand, or sit in a chair with feet on the ground, hip-width apart. Hands are placed on the belly.
- Breathe into your belly so that hands go up and down with the breath like waves in the ocean.
- Relax all muscles to slow the breath even further.

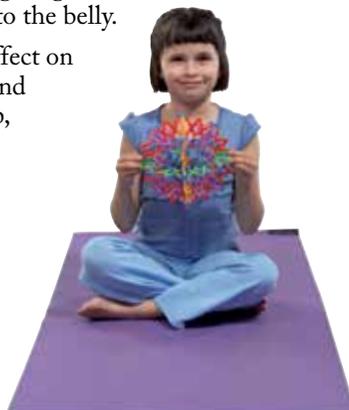
**VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION**

- Have a student demonstrate deep breathing while expanding and contracting the Hoberman Sphere as the class follows. This also develops group awareness and students' sensitivity to each other.
- Keeping one hand on the belly, bring the other hand up to the chest. Breathe from belly hand to heart hand.
- From seated position, place both palms on low back above hips. Breathe into the low back and hands (similar to Back Breathing, p. 61).
- From supine position, place a small flat stone or object on the belly. Move the object up and down with the breath.
- Take Pulse Count (p. 83) before and after Belly Breathing, and then do both at the same time to notice the relationship between breath and pulse.
- Use in health lessons on stress. Have students notice what happens to their breath during daily activities and when they are under stress.
- Use the imagery or sounds of slow-moving waves or wind to help slow the mind and breathing.
- Use slow, relaxing music (50 to 60 beats per minute).
- Teach a lesson or read a story about oxygen and why it is so important to the body.
- Anatomy inquiry: "Do you know what your lungs look like? Do you know where they are? What bones protect the lungs? What is your diaphragm?" Expand inquiry into the importance of clean air and protecting the environment.

**NOTES**

Even though the lungs physically extend only from under the collarbones to the lowest ribs, the abdominal organs move down and out with the diaphragm's action to help draw air into the body, giving the appearance and the sense that we are breathing into the belly.

Relaxed, diaphragmatic breathing has a positive effect on the cardiovascular, neurological, gastrointestinal, and muscular systems, and has a general effect on sleep, memory, energy levels, and concentration. For more information, see chapter 4.



# BELLY BREATHING: SEATED, STANDING, OR PRONE



# PULSE COUNT



## BENEFITS

Quiets and calms. Develops inner listening and personal awareness. Educates about the heart and circulatory system. Teaches about bodily rhythms and cycles of nature. Develops awareness that we do have control over our bodies.

## TIME

2 to 20 minutes

## ACTIVITY

- Take two fingers to the side of the mouth.
- Tip head slightly back and draw a line down with fingers into groove along the neck.
- Press gently to find pulse.
- Raise other hand when pulse is found.
- Count pulse beats silently to self.
- Now, count the pulse for 15 seconds. Later, expand to 30 seconds, and then 1 minute.
- Ask students what their count was. (*Note: Counts will vary and some students may have trouble counting or may make up exceptionally low or high counts.*)

## VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Run in place for one minute, then take pulse again. Discuss the reasons the pulse is different after running. Then try the opposite. Relax the muscles, slow the breathing, and concentrate on “thinking” your heart rate lower. Try playing relaxing music. What happens to the pulse?
- Time the group for 30 seconds, then have them do the math to calculate their pulse rate per minute.
- Older students can track their pulse and daily activities. Graph results, determine averages, and explore the relationships between activities and pulse.
- Take the pulse when students come in from recess and again after a 5-minute relaxation.
- Take the pulse when students are watching television, playing video games, and so on.
- Use as an introduction to a health lesson on the heart or stress. Include information on healthy resting and active heart rates.
- Show physical education charts for healthy aerobic heart training rates. Calculate each student’s optimal training heart rate for their age.

## NOTES

Pulse Count and breath awareness are simple biofeedback tools for determining healthy activities and for training the sympathetic nervous system to be less reactive to stressors. Athletes use pulse and breathing rate information to set their workout difficulty levels, and to gauge their condition and recovery rates.

An 8- to 10-year-old child’s resting pulse rate is usually about 90 beats per minute, with rates varying from 60 to 110. Resting pulse rates much above 120 or much below 50 are uncommon and should be checked by a doctor (Lawrence Hall of Science, Family Health Program, 2001). Children’s maximal heart rate is much higher than adults, and is generally 200 to 205 contractions per minute (Riner & Sabath, 2003).



# VOLCANO BREATH

## BENEFITS

Calms and centers. Develops inner imagery. Develops group movement and awareness. Releases tension, regulates breath, and develops compassion and sensitivity.

## TIME

2 to 5 minutes

## ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet hip-width apart, or sit in a chair or cross-legged on the floor.
- Place palms together at the heart.
- Take a slow, deep breath through the nose and pause when the lungs are full.
- Hold the pause and bring the arms up over the head.
- Exhale and slowly “explode the volcano,” moving arms out to the side and then back together at heart.

## VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Think of someone or something you would like to send your heart thoughts to. Get the image of that person, animal, or place strongly in mind. On the next Volcano Breath, send your thoughts out to that person. Allow students to share who they sent their thoughts to.
- Ask students to think of something they would like to bring into their life. As they exhale, they can shower this image around them.
- Use stories of children sending positive thoughts to one another.

## NOTES

Volcano breath with “heart thoughts” can also help to access and release underlying emotions that might inhibit the learning process (see p. 141).



# MOUNTAIN

## BENEFITS

Grounds, strengthens, and centers. Develops focus and postural awareness. Good beginning pose for new students.

## TIME

1 to 2 minutes

## ACTIVITY

- Stand with feet hip-width apart, pointing straight ahead, and press them down into the earth. Hands can be alongside the body, or palms together at heart.
- Lift belly, head, and heart. Shoulders are back and down.
- Look straight ahead.
- Body is Activated (firmed toward the centerline).

## VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Ask students to press their feet into the ground in order to lift the top of their head toward the sky: “Feel the strength and stability of the mountain inside.”
- Have students stand with head and shoulders slumped versus standing in Mountain. Discuss how these different postures feel and what they communicate to others.
- Have students test the difference in stability between a feet-together stance versus hip-width Activated stance by gently pressing each other’s shoulders from the side.
- Combine with Strong Voice activity (p. 122).
- Encourage students to close their eyes while performing the pose and think of someone they are strong for. Then invite students to share their thoughts.
- Provide photos of famous mountains to help students develop imagery and connect them to places in the world. Try being Mount Everest or Mount Fuji, then find those mountains on the map.
- Use the mountain theme through a sequence of standing poses. End with a Guided Relaxation (chapter 7) that includes visiting a mountaintop.

## NOTES

Mountain is traditionally taught as one of the first yoga poses.

See Alignment (p. 54).

Over time, poor posture, with head and shoulders slumped forward, can result in neck, shoulder, and low back problems. Mountain supports good posture.



# WARRIOR I



## BENEFITS

Energizes and grounds. Quickly warms the body. Develops strength, endurance, and flexibility. Good confidence builder before a test or a major challenge.

## TIME

6 seconds to 1 minute

## ACTIVITY

- Stand with legs hip-width apart.
- Take right leg back, placing the knee on floor (bent-knee version), or take right foot back 3 to 4 feet with heel off floor and straighten back leg (straight-leg version).
- Move hips forward and slide the back leg back until the front knee is right over the front ankle.
- Take arms overhead, palms facing each other and fingers extending.
- Lift belly, head, and heart.
- Repeat on other side.

(If the knee is uncomfortable in bent-knee version, double up mat or place padding under it.)

## VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Combine Warrior I pose with Strong Voice activity (p. 122).
- Have students pair up and face each other so they can see each other's strength.
- As students gain strength, increase the holding time.
- Useful cue: "Send lasers from your belly out through your fingers."

## NOTES

The Warrior is a common archetype in many cultures, signifying the passage to adulthood, the protection of family and culture, and the ability to stand up for what one believes.



## ROOTS

**BENEFITS**

Grounds, calms, and centers students. Strengthens ankles, feet, and postural muscles. Develops balance, personal awareness, and a sense of competence. Excellent activity for focusing students before a lesson.

**TIME**

1 to 2 minutes

**ACTIVITY**

- Stand with feet hip-width apart and pointing straight ahead (Mountain, p. 79).
- Rock forward and back with body Activated (firm and straight) and feet firmly on the floor.
- Make the rocking movement smaller and smaller until you balance on the center of your feet.
- Now rock side to side and then slowly return to center.
- Begin making big circles to the right. Notice how your weight shifts to the four edges of each foot as you circle. Notice how the foot muscles work to keep you upright.
- Make the circles smaller and smaller until you again come back to center.
- Make big circles to the left now. Then make circles smaller until back at center.

**VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION**

- Try the same activity with eyes closed.
- Invite students who snowboard, ski, or skateboard to share what they know about using the muscles in their feet to do these sports.
- Ask students to think about what it is that they are circling around, then share their responses.
- Use as a precursor to class lesson on gravity.
- Ask students to discuss what it means to be “centered.”

**NOTES**

Roots is a terrific activity for teaching the alignment principle of grounding the four corners of the feet (p. 56) and is good preparation for teaching Mountain (p. 79) and standing balance poses such as Tree (p. 91) and Dancer (p. 72).



# TREE CIRCLE

## BENEFITS

Develops balance, trust, and teamwork in a fun way. Teaches how to stay centered when challenged.

## TIME

2 to 5 minutes

## ACTIVITY

- Students make a large circle, facing in and standing about 3 feet apart.
- Raise both arms and stretch them out, fingers pointing up.
- Place hands together with the person on each side and lift right leg up in Tree pose.
- Press into each other's hands and use each other for support.
- Switch legs and repeat.

## VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Have several of the students come out of the circle to be "animals" in the forest. Then re-form the circle and have the animals challenge the others by making noises, running in and out of the circle, jumping up and down, and so on (but no touching or blowing on the others). Switch challengers.
- Drop hands and try again without the support of the circle.
- Great sequence: Star Pose/Galaxy variation (p. 88), then Tree Circle, then add animal challengers, then animal challengers without the circle.

## NOTES

In a forest, stands of trees shield each other from the wind, and intertwine their roots for greater support. Trees also provide habitat for animals. These and other themes can be developed from and explored through Tree Circle.



# BACK BREATHING



## BENEFITS

Calms and relaxes. Develops trust and ability to give and receive. Develops sensitivity and compassion for others. A good activity when students are afraid or need emotional support.

## TIME

2 to 5 minutes

## ACTIVITY

- One student takes Child pose (p. 70) while another kneels alongside and places their hands on the first student's low back.
- The student in the Child pose breathes slowly into the low back and into the partner's hands, feeling the hands rise and fall like waves in an ocean, or like a parachute or sail filling with air.
- Continue for several breaths. Move hands up to midback and repeat.
- Continue for several breaths; then move hands to upper back (shoulder blade area) and repeat.
- Switch roles.

## VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- To develop trust and prepare for this activity, use Back Drawing (p. 62) first.
- Combine with lesson on appropriate touch.
- Combine with health lesson about the spine's role in supporting the body or about what it means to feel supported in life.
- Use to teach anatomy of the back body by working in pairs to palpate the shoulder blades, spine, rib cage, kidney area, and so on.

## NOTES

People unconsciously synchronize with each other from many sources including nonverbal cues, emotional energy, and breathing. Watching and feeling another person breathe slowly and deeply helps students to calm, slow their breath, and develop sensitivity and compassion.

If students do not want to be touched, allow them to watch and synchronize with another's breathing as if watching Hoberman Sphere activity (see Belly Breathing, p. 63).

