

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.

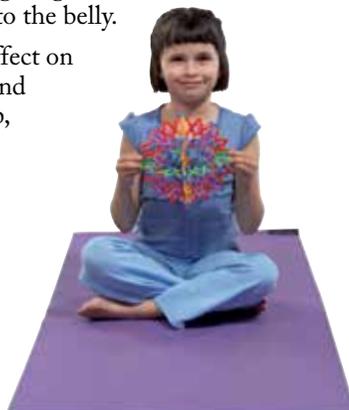
VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- 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



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).



UPWARD MOUNTAIN AND CRESCENT MOON



BENEFITS

Grounds and energizes. Stretches and strengthens shoulders. Opens side ribs for a fuller breath. Wakes students up. Good after long periods of sitting and in preparation for testing.

TIME

1 to 2 minutes

ACTIVITY

UPWARD MOUNTAIN

- Stand with feet hip-width apart and arms straight up overhead.
- Palms face each other and fingers extend up.
- Press feet down and lift belly, head, and heart; shoulders back and down.
- Looks like football touchdown!

CRESCENT MOON

- From Upward Mountain, breathe in, press feet down, and stretch to the right slightly, curving into the shape of a crescent moon.
- Lengthen both sides of body.
- On an exhale, come back to center.
- Now stretch into Crescent Moon to the left.

VARIATIONS & INTEGRATION

- Imagine sending laser beams out through your fingertips.
- As you reach up to the sky, imagine sending energy from the center of the earth to the sun.

NOTES

Upward Mountain and Crescent Moon teach the basic alignment principles of Activating, Expanding, and pressing out through the four corners of the feet (p. 56). They are also excellent preparation for Tree (p. 91) and other standing balance poses.



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).

