

Lesson 4: Energize and Release

Introduction:

Many children arrive at school each day sleep deprived and hungry and stressed from home circumstances beyond their control. Before we ask them to get ready to learn, we need to attend to their more basic needs. Presumably, these children receive a free breakfast, so after that, a few exercises to help them wake up their systems and release excess stress can help.

Goals of the Lesson:

1. Children will learn how to use their body to wake up and get going.
2. Children will learn that being in charge of their body and emotions feels good.
3. Children will develop a daily routine of activities to help them be alert.

Lesson Materials:

Chime

Drum

Mini boxes of raisins for each child

Exercises:

The Breath:

Horse Prancing

Elephant Shower Breath

The Body:

1. Desk Doggies

2. Rhythmic Clapping

3. Drum Beats

The Senses

Eating a Raisin



Silent Walk

Rainbow Visualization

Let's Start the Lesson:

Begin with the chime to get the brain ready to learn something new, followed by a short breathing exercise. Review the brain parts, reminding students what jobs each part has. When the brain parts are tired, they need to find some energy. When they have been sitting for a long time, they need to release some energy. Then they will be able to refocus and work together again.

The Breath

Horse Prancing

This exercise is based loosely on a horse's gait and wild breath, but it's also about feeling free and strong, like a wild horse. Guaranteed to get blood and oxygen flowing to all parts of the body.

Start by having the kids "prance" in place. Lift knees high, move the head up and down like a proud horse, and breathe in and out deep breaths.

While prancing, lift arms like a horse rearing back. Whinny if you want!

Pick up the prancing pace to a trot, lifting legs higher, swinging arms, and shaking head, panting short, fast breaths.

Ok. Time to gallop! Use your imagination!

Return to slow prance, slowing movements down: head back and forth, legs lower, arms swinging at sides, and slow the breathing.

Finish by having your "herd" move around each other saying "thank you for the wake-up call."

Elephant Shower Breath

A favorite with kids, Elephant Shower Breath, involves both the breath and the body. It is especially effective at both calming the nervous system while energizing the body. Children love the motion and the shower sounds made during the exercise. Raising the arms over the body allows room in the torso for deeper breaths. All that oxygen is brain and body food, and also brings the stress hormone, cortisol, down!

1. Begin in standing position, feet slightly wider than shoulder width. Take three deep breaths (you lead).
2. Ask the children if they know how an elephant takes a shower. You may get some silly responses!
3. Demonstrate: Drop your arms clasping your hands together. Allow your head to drop and hang loose.
4. Take a deep breath, slurping if you want, like you are taking a drink of water.
5. Stand up quickly, allowing your arms to come up over, and behind your head (like a trunk) and release the air with a loud, long, s-w-i-s-h.



Invite the class to do it with you.

Repeat as many times as you want.

Ask your students about their experience while practicing the Elephant Shower breath.

- How did it feel to be upside down full of air?
- Could you imagine your breath as water pouring over your back?
- What other feeling did you have?
- Where?
- How does your brain feel right now?

The Body

Desk Doggies

This exercise is stretch and release for muscles in the back, arms and legs. When you release muscles, you also release stress causing the cortisol level to drop. Lowering your head between the arms while breathing slowly, increases oxygen and blood flow to the brain, giving it a chance to reset.

Stand behind your desk with the chair pushed in. Place palms flat on a desk. Take a step back and bend forward so that your head is between your arms. Make sure your back is flat, and your arms and legs are straight. Feet are flat on the floor. Feel your muscles stretch. Take three deep breaths, and let your muscles relax. Slowly step forward, and roll your back up to stand straight. Shake out your arms and legs.



Rhythmic Clapping

So many games are competitive, but hand clapping encourages cooperative effort and unification. In addition to fun and focus, rhythmic games have a positive effect on cognition. Research shows that they increase hand-eye coordination, body awareness, proprioception, memory, and reasoning skills. Hand rhythms require sustained focused concentration. We truly do have to pay attention.

Have the kids sit in a circle facing you. Explain that we are going to create rhythms by clapping our hands. Have Guard Dog clap. Start by clapping slowly three times. Ask them to emulate what you did. Add more claps with different rhythms. Have the kids copy each one. If some are having trouble with this, give everyone time to practice. Use the puppets to assist.

Drum Beats:

Micky Hart of the Grateful Dead used drum beats to revive his Alzheimers-riddled grandmother. She had not recognized him in 6 months, but when he beat the drum for her in the rhythm of the heart, she “woke up” and said “Micky?” They now use drums with children who have ADHD, or who are on the spectrum to stimulate their awareness and focusing ability. For this activity, the students will use drum cues from the teacher to do certain body movements. The teacher will give instructions and beat the drum.

When the drum plays, clap or stomp.

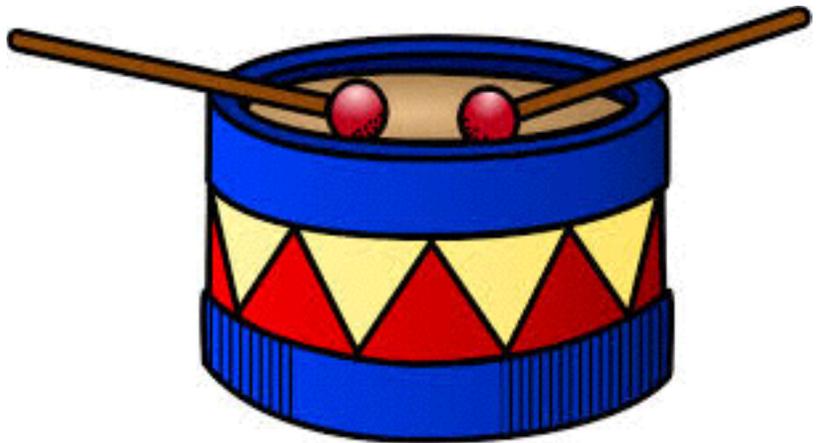
When the drum plays slowly, walk around the room slowly.

When the drum plays quickly, walk around quickly.

When the drum plays quickly, walk around slowly.

When the drum plays slowly, walk around quickly.

Make up more of your own.



The Senses

Ask children to imagine that they are scientists examining their food for the first time. Give each child a raisin.

Eating a Raisin

1. Start by looking at your raisin. What do you see?
2. Now, smell your raisin carefully. What do you notice?
3. Try holding it close to your ear as you squeeze it gently. Do you hear anything?
4. What do you feel with your fingers? Is it smooth, rough, or sticky?
Is the raisin warm or cold?
5. Now, put the raisin on your tongue, but don't chew it yet. Just leave it on your tongue and notice how it feels in your mouth. Do you taste anything yet?
Roll it around with your tongue.
What is happening in your mouth?
6. Now bite down on your raisin, slowly, very slowly. Notice if the taste changes as you chew.
7. Try to notice when you swallow, and see how far you can feel the food into your body.
8. Process with the kids what they liked or didn't like about this exercise.

Rainbow Meditation

This visualization uses nature, where you see rainbows and colors to help children feel relaxed and confident. Colors often have particular feelings associated with them. For example, Blue is calming, Yellow is energizing, and Red is often power and strength. In this visualization, children relax in their rainbow and different colors that represent different mind states. Afterward, children feel both relaxed and energized.



1. Lay in a comfortable position on the floor, using a pillow under the head, and a blanket to cover you if desired.
2. Allow the body to relax, feet falling apart, arms at rest by your body. Close your eyes, or gaze towards your feet, and take a deep breath all the way into your tummy.
3. Now take another breath, this time slower. (Do this with the children.)
4. Imagine there is a rainbow right in front of you. Because we are imagining, you can walk over to the rainbow, and walk up to the top of it. Is it easy to walk on? Slippery? Or easy?
5. Notice all the colors in the rainbow.

Is there

Red?	Powerful, Strong
Orange?	Joyful
Yellow?	Sure of yourself
Green?	Kind, loving
Blue?	Calm, Honest

Purple? Loyal and Smart

6. Now lay down in your favorite color. What does this color remind you of? How does it feel when you touch it? What does it smell like? Is it saying anything? Can you taste it?
7. Now, just relax in your color. (30 seconds)
8. When you are ready, imagine standing up, and sliding down one end of the rainbow.
9. What was it like being in the rainbow?
10. Would you like to draw your rainbow?

What We Learned

You can learn to be more present while you eat or walk, or clap, or pretend you are taking a shower! You have learned that releasing extra energy can help us feel renewed and ready for the next thing. You can use your imagination to help gather yourself.

Integrating the Lesson

Mindfully walking or eating, clapping, breathing, and visualizing are all readily accessible exercises for use at any time. Helping your children remember them, practicing with them, and placing them into the routine will move them towards healthy emotional and physical regulation. Visualization is a great way to stimulate positive feelings about self and others, as well as the things around you. Likely the next time your child sees a rainbow, it will be a much more powerful and pleasant experience. Over time, as this happens, the positive is being integrated.

Resources for Learning More About This Lesson

Little Flower Yoga for Kids by Jennifer Cohen Harper. Reprinted with permission by New Harbinger Publications, Inc.

Yoga Cards

Starbright--Meditations for Children, by Maureen Garth

Sitting Still Like a Frog, Eline Snell

Yoga Pretzels (Yoga Cards), by Tara Guber and Leah Kalish

Mindful Schools, <http://www.mindfulschools.org>