



# The MINDFUL STUDIO

## **Practicing Mindful Art Education: A Guide to Artful Approaches for Teachers and Students**

### **PRESENTERS**

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Both mindfulness and art cultivate “present moment” awareness of the breath, the body, thoughts, emotions, and creative impulse. The aim of the Mindful Studio is to provide purposeful experiences to enhance self-awareness by participating in mindful making without judgment to strengthen imagination and enhance the creative process.

Mindfulness can redirect attention away from the restless and wandering mind by sustaining attention on the neutral breath that provides awareness and connection to the present moment. This shift in attention can cultivate emotional regulatory processes essential to well-being and help students to stay on task, focus, and be present. In fact, recent medical research has shown that deep breathing can have a positive impact on the physiology and can increase energy levels, promote muscle relaxation, and decrease feelings of stress.



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## Body Scan Drawing

### Introduction

Body scanning is a technique often used in mindfulness practice to help soften, settle, and calm both the body and mind. This is a great way to help students connect with their bodies as a means of bringing full attention to real-time experiences that happen in the present moment. It can be used by students and teachers alike as a self-regulation technique when emotions or thoughts feel wild or uncontrollable. By paying attention to our bodies, we are able to acknowledge both the pleasant and unpleasant sensations by learning to notice without judgment.

Creating body scan drawings is a great way to help students practice a traditional body scan through the creation of artwork. This allows students to check-in with themselves while focusing attention and warming up for the day's creative activities.

### Instructions

Reference the **Prepare** section in the sidebar of this hand-out for steps to begin this exercise, material you will need, and more information on blind contour drawings.

Ask students to take three deep cleansing breaths.

Instruct students to look at their feet, close their eyes, or soften their gaze so they do not focus on how the drawing looks as they work.

Prompt students to notice their bodies. Consider the following statements to help students focus:

- *With your eyes closed, bring your attention to your feet.*
- *Consider the ground under you. Press your feet gently into the floor, notice how the ground supports you.*



## Instructions (continued)

- *Pay attention to how your feet feel inside your shoes.*
- *Notice the space your foot inhabits in your shoe. Is it tight? Comfortable? Loose? Can it move easily?*
- *Are your feet tired? Ready to run? Tight? Tingling?*

Guide students through capturing the feelings they notice through their bodies in the drawing by using lines to describe both the form and the feeling.

Next, ask students to imagine their mind as a scanner. Once they've scanned their feet, move onto the calves.

After a few breaths at the calves, move onto the knees, thighs, up through the torso, chest, shoulders, arms, and hands. Prompt students to move back through the arms to the neck, and then to the skull. Ask them to soften their jaw and relax their cheeks. You can gauge the amount of time needed at each step and adjust with additional prompts and supports as needed.

As you prompt students to move through their bodies, ask them to notice where the body feels good, tense, warm, cold, or tired and, as needed, prompt them to breathe into these areas of the body providing support and energy. The drawings can document how the body feels and help students focus where they need support or a moment of care.

To finish, ask students to put down their drawing tools, close their eyes (or soften their gaze if they are not comfortable closing their eyes) and notice how they feel about their bodies. Ask students to consider how their awareness of their bodies has changed.

Encourage students to take a few moments to stretch, breathe, or exercise the parts of their bodies that need attention. Invite them to indicate areas of need on their drawings or work back into them as they see fit. Emphasize drawing without judgment.

End the exercise with three cleansing breaths and collectively give thanks to your bodies for all they do!

## Prepare

Ask students to sit comfortably in front of a large piece of paper (the larger the better).

Provide students with drawing tools that will flow easily over the paper.

- charcoal
- pastel
- chalk

Ask students to take a moment to notice how the drawing tool feels in their hand.

Explain to students that they will be making a blind contour drawing starting at their feet.

## Blind Contour Drawing

*A drawing that uses a continuous line to express the forms being observed. When creating a blind contour drawing, the artist does not look at the drawing while making marks; instead, they look at the object being observed, keep their eyes closed, or soften their gaze to avoid looking at the page until finished. Although the drawings are often fun and gestural, the emphasis is on the observations rather than the finished product.*



# Tips for Incorporating Mindful Practices into the Art Classroom

1. Try an arrival meditation or ritual to help students transition into the art classroom. This can be as simple as implementing a sketchbook prompt that begins with "Today I am..."
2. Mindful activities don't have to last long to be meaningful. Start each day or class with three deep breaths. If you need to refocus during the class, revisit the three breaths.
3. Set intentions. Start on a positive note and ask students to think of one thing they want to accomplish during the class. This could be as simple as "take risks with my artwork," "try a new material," "stay focused," or "challenge myself to create something new."
4. Implement mindful moments. Ask students to pause before responding to prompts, even if it is just to take a deep breath before answering a question or responding in their sketchbook.
5. Implement mindful minutes. Refocus to the present by asking students to engage with the five senses. Notice what they see, touch, smell, taste, and hear.
6. Observe the present as it is without judgment. Encourage students to draw or document their experiences as they are. The focus is on process versus product.
7. Try hand breathing. For students who need help focusing on breathing, ask them to trace their hand (they can use a pencil/paper or just their finger). Starting at the wrist, trace up one finger (start with the pinky or thumb) while you breathe in, and down (in between fingers) as you breathe out. Repeat for each finger, breathing in as you trace up to the tip of the finger, and out as you trace down.
8. Encourage opportunities for students to practice mindful listening. They should focus on what the other person is saying, silently acknowledging their own reactions by making note of their own thoughts and feelings to communicate later. Ask them to reflect back what they are hearing and to be curious about the other person by asking friendly, open-ended clarifying and extension questions. Students can be encouraged to document what they are hearing from the other person through artwork.
9. Practice mindful looking. Employ techniques that ask students to look closely and deeply at a piece of artwork.
10. Use mindful exit tickets. Reflecting on the art class and activities that just transpired, ask students to think of something they are thankful for and document that in their sketchbook, journal, or as an exit ticket. This could be a comment, a moment, an experience, an art supply, the support of their friend or anything that made them feel good.



Want more about mindfulness in the art room? Read Jane Dalton's article *The Mindful Studio: Breath* in the April issue of *SchoolArts* magazine! Pick up your copy at the Davis Booth #1002.



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