

Weekly Message from the Principal
Mary Ann McQueen
March 16, 2017



Dear Parents,

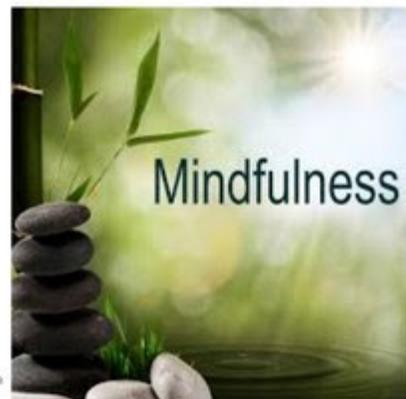
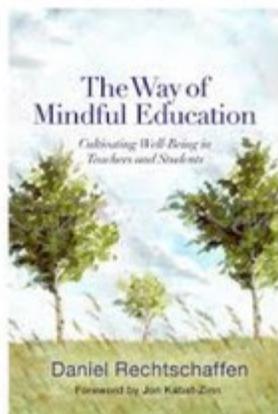
Please see below! Cary Salsgaver sends me a summary of the curriculum covered in each classroom each week. Below is a description of what students are doing with our students as she provides mindfulness instruction. Two weeks ago the students focused on mindful eating with Cary. Last week they focused on mindful breathing and the connection that that has to mindful attention.

Discussing these sessions with your children and asking them about them would be a great way to reinforce what they are learning and to provide additional practice. Teachers are seeing the impact that this practice is having on student writing. For example, a kindergarten student shared how "storming inside" was occurring and that with deep breathing that "storm" was quieted.

Life skills are so important to acquire from a young age. Self control, the ability to focus and sustain attention and being able to be empathetic towards others are all important. Mindfulness practices support these areas of growth, too much time on devices and periods of constant stimulus and distraction erode these skills. Helping children to get in the moment and being in that moment with them is vital. Something to think about for sure!

Thank you for reviewing these descriptions. Please feel free to let the teachers know about any feedback you are receiving at home about these sessions. It has been such a wonderful initiative to see lived out. Charlie Allen is working with several grades each week, including the 7th and 8th grades! We are so grateful!

Once again, if you are interested in learning more about this program I would suggest that you pick up the book, *The Way of Mindful Education* by Daniel Rechtschaffen .



St. Mark School
March 2, 2017
Mindfulness

When walking, walk. When eating, eat. -Zen proverb

Appreciations

Thank you Maria and Mary Ann W. for starting the day with mindful breathing!

Thank you Theresa and 6th grade for reading the poem, It Takes Courage

Thank you Victoria for sharing the book, Penguin Problems by Jory John

Thank you Judy for our conversation about mindfulness and music

Mindful Eating

The intention in this practice is to become aware of the pleasure and beauty that can be experienced in a normal daily activity. This is a sensory based experience where we explore our sense of sight, smell, hearing, touch, and taste. This practice can help us bring sensory awareness to everything in our lives, from eating a meal to getting dressed.

Sight

Look at your raisins like mindful scientists. Look at the color, the shape, compare and contrast...

What color is it?

"Brown, white, orange, amber"

What shape is it?

"Oval, circle, triangle"

How are the raisins the same? How are they different?

"Wrinkles, lighter/darker, bumps, same, different, fat, little, big, small, long, skinny"

Smell

Bring one raisin to your nose, close your eyes, smell the raisin

What does it smell like?

"Rotten eggs, grapes, coffee, maple syrup, popcorn, cinnamon, peaches, sweet, sweet wood"

Hearing

Bring one raisin to your ear, close your eyes, roll it between your fingers

What do you hear?

"Nothing, boom, crinkle, rubbery, crackle, static, fire crackling, like having soap in your ear, like when you step on a cockroach, like when you are stirring pasta"

Touch

Roll the raisins between your fingers

What does it feel like?

"Squishy, sticky, grandma, slimy, skin, scratchy, soft, hard, wrinkly, waxy, like it's going to pop"

Taste

Now the moment you've been waiting for...put the raisins on your tongue. Move the raisins around with your tongue. Now take one bite

What does it taste like?

"Grapes, coffee, jelly, sour, sweet, salty, exploded in my mouth, shivers inside"

Isn't it amazing how much taste is in one raisin? When we slow down and bring our attention to what we are eating, we really taste and enjoy our food! When we eat, we are often thinking of other things, talking to people, watching TV, and not really enjoying our food. So when you eat snack, or dinner, or your favorite food, practice mindful eating and really taste and enjoy your food!

Next week we move into attention lessons. We are going to explore mindful breathing by witnessing the natural breath experience.

St. Mark School

March 9, 2017

Mindfulness

"You can't stop the waves but you can learn how to surf." -Jon Kabat-Zinn

Appreciations

Thank you Toni for sharing student work with me :)

Thank you Caroline for our conversations about student needs.

Thank you Marie for initiating a 3 minute mindful breathing experience!

Attention Lessons

So often we tell students to pay attention, however, we don't teach them how to pay attention. To excel at reading, writing, math, science, art, music, dance, sports...the ability to pay attention is key. Instead of being controlled by our distracted thoughts, the mindful attention practices help harness the mind. Once the mind is focused, it works with our still and balanced awareness. When students don't know how to pay attention or how to regulate their emotions, they fall into distracting behavior, often from frustration.

Anchor Breath

Anchor breathing is a core lesson in mindfulness practice. It is called the anchor breath because the breath can be an anchor, a home base, to which we can return at any time. When the waves of life come, there is a stillness at the bottom of the ocean. Our anchor breath can be our connection to that calm inside our bodies.

The breath is a biological function that is both conscious and unconscious. We don't need to think about breathing. If we want to, however, we can consciously control our breath.

We started by talking about attention.

Have you noticed that sometimes it's hard to pay attention? Like when you're listening to a teacher or playing a game outside? Our minds are thinking all of the time. It's easy to get distracted.

The practices we will explore will strengthen our attention muscles. One way to strengthen our attention muscles is by practicing the anchor breath.

We can use our anchor breath like the anchor to a ship. The anchor is what keeps the ship grounded so the ship doesn't blow away. If a storm comes, the wind and waves may blow the ship around, but the anchor is still underneath the waves.

Sometimes waves of emotion come over us...sad, mad, scared. When these waves of emotion come, we can remember our anchor breath and take a few breaths to help calm our mind and our body. Make waves with your hands and swoop them down to your belly. Close your eyes and breathe in and out. Notice what your belly is doing as you breathe in and out. What did you notice?

TK

"My belly was twitching, my belly was wiggling, my belly was moving in and out"

K

"Calm, it felt good, my eyes were open but it felt like they were closed, all the thoughts were starting to slow down, my belly was going in and out"

1st

"Breathing slowly, feeling calm, when I breathe in my belly is facing in and when I breathe out my belly is facing out, going in and out slowly and peacefully"

2nd

"Darkness, my head was moving, I feel sleepy, my belly was moving in and out"

3rd

"Calm, earth stood still, time stopped, my belly was moving in and out, my stomach moved more when we did it as a group and less when we did it on our own"

4th

"Stomach expanding, breath in and out of my nose, I feel tired, I noticed I was thinking of a tsunami"
*the practice is noticing when your mind wanders and gently bringing it back to the breath

5th

"Calm, like I was floating, I feel tired, I felt the air move into my nose into my sinuses and into my chest, I noticed my mind got distracted and started thinking about other things"

6th

"I noticed when I breathe in my belly goes out, after you turned your voice off I heard your voice in my mind and it helped, I noticed how sleep deprived I am, I noticed my breathing is shallow, I was falling asleep, I was thinking about the basketball game, it felt like I was floating on a raft...it felt really nice, when I breathe in I feel it in my lungs"

Isn't that amazing that when we breathe in and out, our bellies move in and out? So the next time you feel a wave of emotion like feeling sad, mad, scared...remember your anchor breath. Your anchor breath can help calm your mind and your body.
Next week, we are going to practice mindful listening by being aware of the sounds that are all around us.

With gratitude,

Cary

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