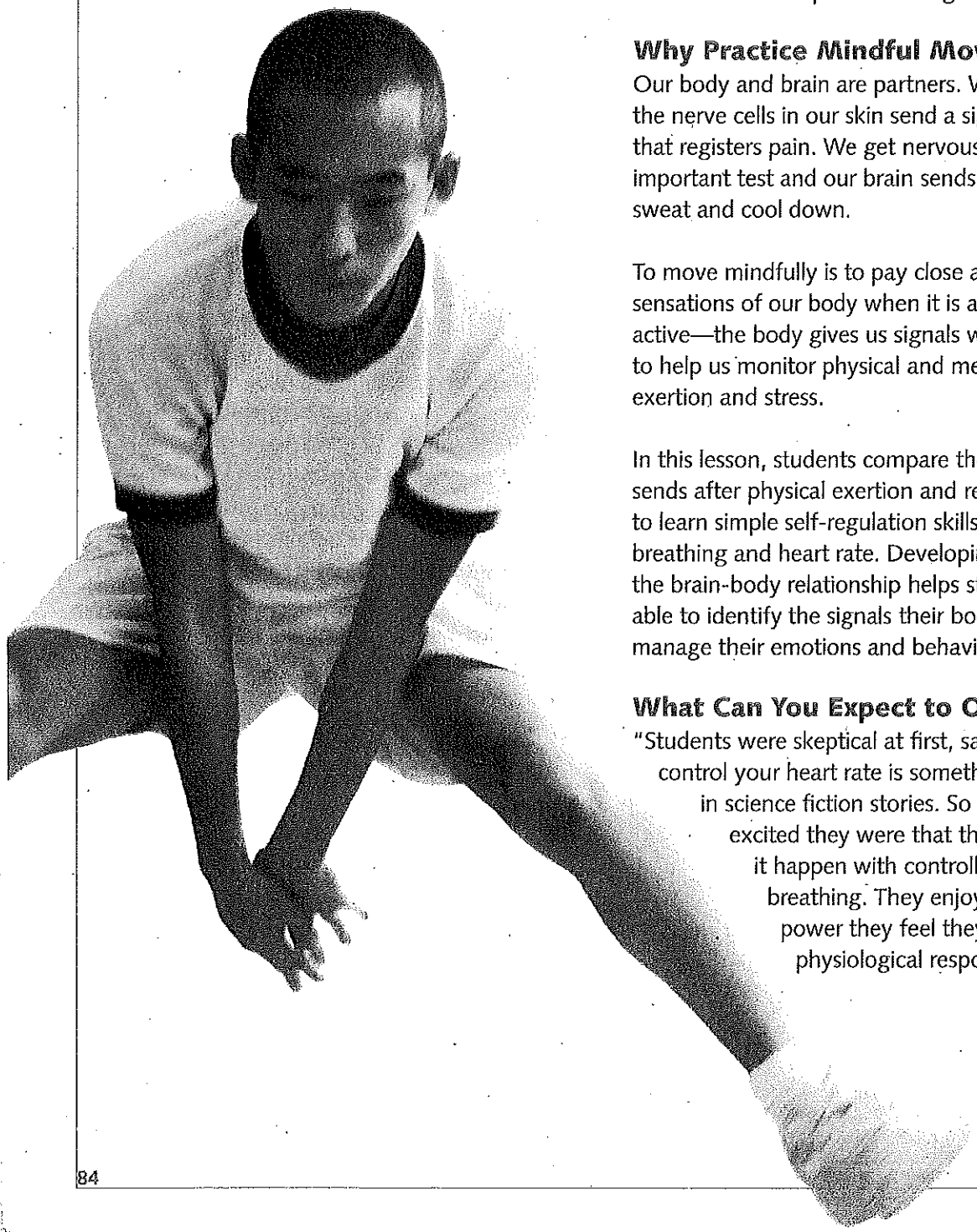
Mindful Movement I



What is Mindful Movement?

How often are we conscious of putting weight on each part of the sole of our foot as we walk? Being alert to the sensations of the body, whether we are active or at rest, is a fundamental step in increasing mindful awareness.

Why Practice Mindful Movement?

Our body and brain are partners. We get burned and the nerve cells in our skin send a signal to our brain that registers pain. We get nervous and tense about an important test and our brain sends a signal to our body to sweat and cool down.

To move mindfully is to pay close attention to the sensations of our body when it is at rest and when it is active—the body gives us signals we can easily recognize to help us monitor physical and mental states such as exertion and stress.

In this lesson, students compare the signals their body sends after physical exertion and relaxation. They begin to learn simple self-regulation skills by controlling their breathing and heart rate. Developing an understanding of the brain-body relationship helps students become better able to identify the signals their body is sending and to manage their emotions and behaviors in response.

What Can You Expect to Observe?

"Students were skeptical at first, saying that being able to control your heart rate is something that only happens in science fiction stories. So you can imagine how excited they were that they were able to make it happen with controlled movement and breathing. They enjoy this practice and the power they feel they are gaining over their physiological responses."

—Sixth-grade teacher

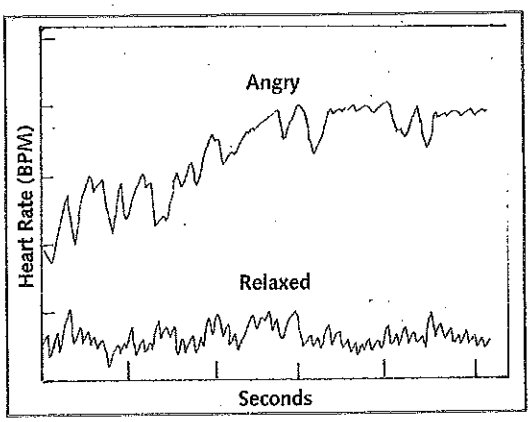
Linking to Brain Research

Cortisol, the Stress Hormone

During a period of severe or persistent threat—perceived or real—the adrenal glands release extra cortisol, a hormone. Low levels of cortisol in the brain help us remain alert, and a sudden surge of the stress hormone is important in dealing with immediate danger. However, too much cortisol for too long can harm the brain and impair thinking, memory, and learning. High cortisol levels interfere with the function of neurotransmitters and can damage the hippocampus, which makes and stores memories. Excessive cortisol can make it hard to think and remember—"going blank" during a crisis may be an example of cortisol interference.

Brains in a constant state of alert due to physical, environmental, or emotional stress can have chronically elevated cortisol levels. During the crucial early years of brain development, high cortisol levels sustained over prolonged periods can cause significant damage and result in emotional dysfunction. Twenty-first century life brings many stressors to children at an early age: lack of downtime, parental stresses, pressures to achieve, exposure to violence, over-stimulating or noisy environments, families dealing with substance abuse, unrealistic expectations, and poverty. As children learn to mindfully regulate their own breathing and heart rate, they learn to lessen their stress level and enable a healthy emotional balance.

Regulate breathing helps w/ stress



Our state of mind affects heart rate. The heart of someone who is angry can beat twice as fast as that of a relaxed person.

Clarify for the Class

Tell students they'll observe the connection between mind and body by measuring their heart rate before and after controlled breathing, which can slow our heart rate. Have them find their pulse after active small-group work, when heart rates may be slightly elevated. Then have them measure heart rates again immediately after doing the core practices. (Need to know how to take a pulse? See page 87, Warm-Up, and page 88, Explore.)

Discuss: Did the controlled breathing exercise alter heart rates? By how much, on average? What situations make your heart beat quickly? How could controlled breathing help you think clearly and make decisions during times of stress?

Getting Ready

Pulse Awareness
Students learn to take a pulse in several ways.

GOALS

- Students will focus their attention on internal physical sensations, in both a relaxed and an active state.
- Students will monitor their own heart rate and exercise control over breathing and heart rate.

MATERIALS

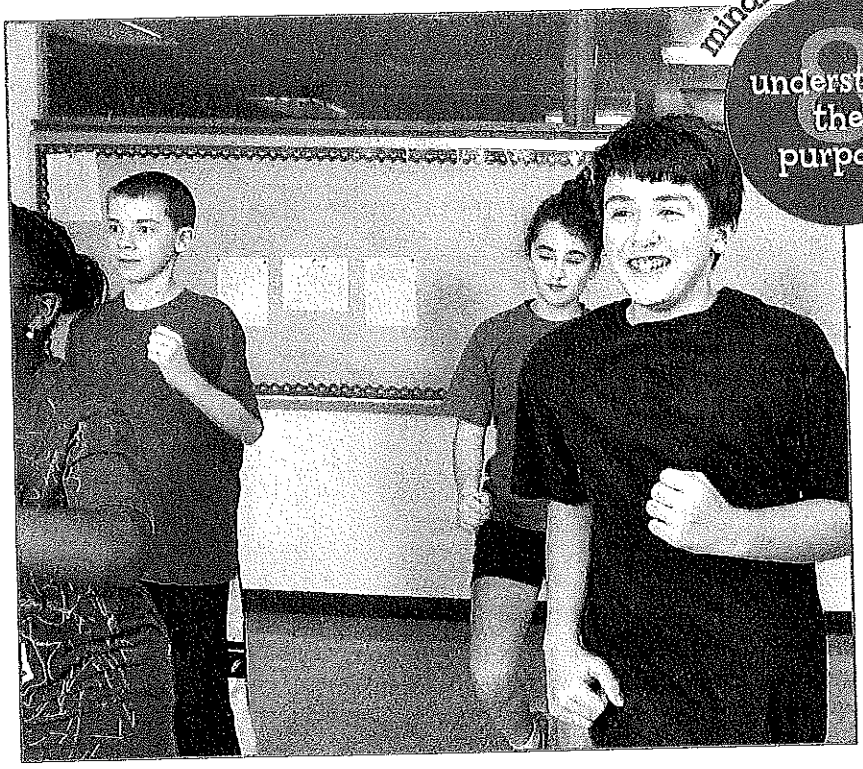
- chart paper
- clock with second hand or stop watch

PREPARATION TIPS

- Make space in the classroom for students to do simple exercises safely around their desks, or find a clear area such as the gym or an outdoor court.
- For students with special physical needs, discuss appropriate adjustments for the active part of this lesson with the PE teacher, nurse, and parents, as needed.

CREATING THE OPTIMISTIC CLASSROOM

English Language Learners ELLs are especially prone to overactive amygdala functions and elevated cortisol levels. This is because it takes extra effort to communicate in a language in which you are not yet fluent, which often generates anxiety about missing important information. Between higher-intensity activities, help ELLs and all students rebuild positive neurotransmitters with a short "brain break," such as listening to music, having a discussion with classmates, or doing some free reading. This allows the brain to return to an optimal state for learning.



Exercise Calms You Down?
Students can take their resting pulse before and after exercise to determine whether exercise helped them relax and feel better.

MINDUP Warm-Up

True and Pulse

Ask students to decide if the following heart facts are true or false: 1. The body's blood vessels are 60,000 miles long—more than long enough to circle the globe twice! 2. It only takes 20 seconds for blood to circulate through the entire vascular system. 3. The heart beats about 100,000 times a day. Believe it or not, all those facts are true!

Tell students that they are going to learn to do what good athletes do: find and monitor their pulse without the need for any special equipment.

Demonstrate and have students practice finding their own heartbeat in any of these ways:

- Hold one hand palm up; press the index and middle finger of the other hand on your wrist just below your palm;
- Press the index and middle finger of one hand at the top of your neck, just under your jaw (about midway between your earlobe and chin):
- Press your index and middle finger firmly at the center of the base of the throat.

Discuss: Which pulse point do you find easiest to use? When is it easier to find your pulse, when you have just been active or when you are resting?

Leading the Lesson

Pulse Power

Engage

What to Do

Review finding a pulse point from the warm-up activity. Explain that an elevated, or stronger and faster, pulse shows the heart is working hard to supply oxygenated blood. The body does this when it is active because the muscles have a greater need for oxygen. The heart beats faster during times of emotional stress too. It's how the amygdala gets you ready for flight or fight. Just as we learned to control our breathing and clear our minds, we can also learn to bring down our heart rates.

- A normal pulse rate can be anywhere from 60 to 100 beats per minute. How fast do you predict your heart is beating right now?
- How could we change our pulse rates from slower to faster? How could we change from faster to slower?

Write down their ideas for slowing their pulse and elevating it. (Students will likely suggest some exercise, such as jumping jacks, to elevate their pulse and breathing exercises or the Core Practices to slow it down.)

Why It's Important

This can be an exciting scientific experiment for students who have been learning about the Core Practice. Until now, all the evidence that the Core Practice works has been subjective and anecdotal. This will be the first opportunity for students to see objective evidence of what mindful focusing can do and how much more in control of their bodies they can be.

Explore

Have students vote on the pulse-raising activity. Then have students engage in a few minutes of a pulse-elevating activity. Jumping jacks, running in place, even dancing would all work. Before students begin, have them take and record their resting pulse. Then have them take their pulse again after it's been elevated.

- First, find your pulse point and count the beats for 10 seconds. Your partner can keep time while you do this. Multiply this by six to get your beats per minute. Record your resting pulse.
- When I give the signal to start, you'll begin moving in order to elevate your pulse. When I give the signal to stop, stop and take your pulse again.

Here's where the science comes in. Divide the class into two groups. Have one group sit quietly. They can do free reading or some other seat work. Have the other group do a mindful breathing exercise. Have them sit comfortably with their eyes cast down or closed. Remind them to relax their muscles and focus on deep breathing. Ask the group of mindful breathers to open their eyes and look up at you when they feel their pulse slow down. Then have all the students retest their pulse rates.

Students enjoy discussing and comparing heart rates with peers and helping each other check their pulses. Generally, those who are fitter tend to have a lower resting pulse and quicker recovery rate. But students should not worry too much or feel competitive with others because pulse rates can vary a lot from day to day, even for the same person.

From the Research

Exercise . . . optimizes your mind-set to improve alertness, attention, and motivation. (Ratey, 2008)

Reflect

Invite students to discuss the way they created physical changes in their body through movement and mindful focus.

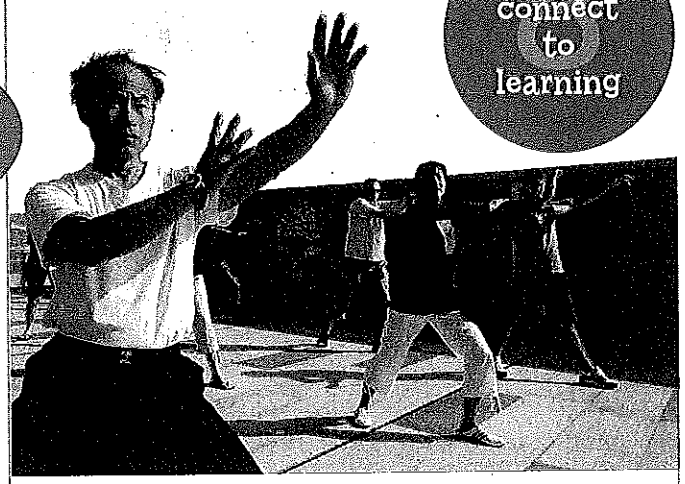
- You were able to drive your pulse to a fast rate and also slow it down. What other signals did you detect as you exercised more and your heart rate rose?

Students will likely answer that their skin got sweaty, their faces got flushed, and their whole body felt warmer. Guide students to understand that the brain signaled these changes to help the body cool down in order to perform better as it exercised. Review the changes they experienced as they slowed down.

- Which group had a lower pulse after five minutes, the group that sat quietly or the group that breathed mindfully?

- Are there other times when you're not exercising, but when your emotions may be taking charge, that your body might be sending similar signals? What can you do to help yourself?

Brainstorm reasons for any unexpected results. For example, recovery rate (the time it takes your pulse to return to normal) is a measure of physical fitness. As fitness improves, the recovery rate gets quicker. Explain that although exercise and anxiety both raise the pulse, exercise is also a good technique for reducing anxiety, because it leads to the release of dopamine, the natural feel-good chemical, in the brain.



MINDUP In the Real World

Career Connection

A tai chi (Tie-CHEE) instructor teaches the ancient art of "meditation in motion," which connects mind and body and promotes serenity through gentle movements. Originally developed in ancient China for self-defense, tai chi has evolved into a noncompetitive, self-paced system of postures or movements performed in a slow, mindful manner. Each posture flows into the next without pause; there are more than 100 possible movements and positions, all of them coordinated with breathing.

Discuss: If you have a dream job, what types of movement does it require—fine eye-hand coordination (visual arts) or some kind of physical presentation? How would doing that movement mindfully help you do that job well?

Once a Day

Notice students' posture after they've been working in one place for a while—how well they hold themselves upright reflects their degree of alertness. Take short breaks to allow them to move (e.g., shaking out or doing a few jumping jacks), refresh, and refocus as needed.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Mindful movement supports students' connection to their own learning process and to the content areas and literature.

Journal Writing

Encourage your students to reflect on what they've learned about mindful movement and to record questions to explore at another time. They may also enjoy responding to these prompts:

- How many meanings are there for the word *heart*? Look it up in the dictionary. You'll find a number of meanings and expressions. Try to come up with an original sentence for each meaning. Can you use any of the expressions, too?
- Keep an exercise diary for a week. Write down how you feel before and after you do exercise of any kind. Summarize your results.
- Diagram the signals you get from your body when you raise your pulse through some kind of movement. Draw an outline of your body, with callouts to label the changes it goes through.
- Does a part of your body not feel quite right? Maybe you have an upset stomach, a banged toe, or even a bad haircut! Imagine this body part could talk. Write an imaginary dialogue you might have with it.

MATH

Heart Rate Data Analysis

What to Do

Everyone's heart rate is unique, and collecting that data is a good opportunity to practice some statistical analysis. Students should know that that the mean, or average, is the total divided by the number of participants. They can find the median by lining up the data in order and counting to the midpoint. If there is an even number in the set, the two midpoints are averaged. The mode is the most frequent pulse rate.

What to Say

Have students use the data that they collected during the lesson's main activity and apply the mean, median, and mode to do a statistical analysis. If that data has already been lost, students can replicate the main activity as it is or simplify it by simply recording their resting pulses. Encourage students to chart the results on a line graph.

Why It's Important

This activity gives students a practical application for math. Capitalize on their fascination with gathering data from their own efforts and comparing their data with that of their peers. In addition to finding the mean, median, and mode, the presentation of the data in graph form is another useful application of important math skills.

SCIENCE

Look Into Your Heart

What to Do

Have students do some research on the amazing human heart. You may wish to have students find their own resources online or in the library.

What to Say

Work with a partner to do some research on the human heart, taking notes when you find something interesting. It is such an amazing organ that you should have no trouble making a top-ten list of fascinating heart facts. Make your list in the style of a countdown, saving the most interesting fact of all for last. Create visual aids to go with your presentation, if you wish.

Why It's Important

Learning how the heart works is a great way to motivate students to care for their heart health. Point out that smoking is linked to heart disease. Other mood-altering substances can damage the heart by causing it to beat too quickly or to stop beating altogether. Students can use this information to make better choices about their health.

LANGUAGE ARTS

A Poem from the Heart

What to Do

Choose a few examples of poems with pronounced rhythms. You could choose any sonnet by Shakespeare or Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven." Explain that poems written in meter have a pattern of stressed (/) and unstressed syllables (x). Some common patterns are iambic (x/) or troachic (/x). Other patterns include anapestic (xx/) or dactylic (/xx). Point out how everyone's heartbeat is also in a pattern of stressed and unstressed beats.

What to Say

You will need someone to listen to your heartbeat. A tube from a roll of paper towels works very well for this purpose. Have them say the beat out loud using nonsense words, like ba-DUM-bum. Write down what you hear. Turn that rhythm into a poetic meter. See if you can change the nonsense words into a poem.

Why It's Important

Some students find poetry very abstract. This activity lets them connect physically with their own internal music and be inspired by it. It is also a fun introduction to classic works that are written in meter.

If students are not comfortable having a classmate close enough to listen to their heartbeat, allow them to gather this data at home.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

Couch Potato Blues

What to Do

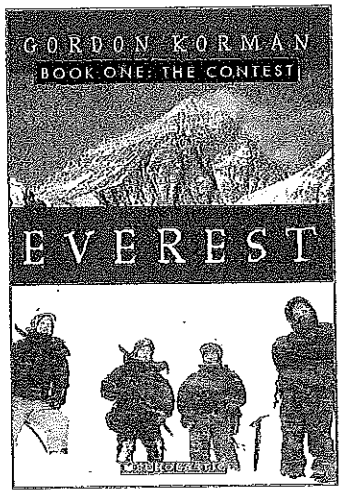
Brainstorm with students activities that can counteract their sedentary habits, and assess the relative merits of inactive and active choices. Being active helps maintain a healthy weight, reduces blood pressure, raises good cholesterol, reduces the risk of diabetes and some kinds of cancer, and improves coordination and emotional well-being.

What to Say

Since being active keeps our hearts and brains healthy, let's brainstorm some ordinary after-school activities. Let's put our ideas onto a T-chart, dividing them into "active" and "inactive." Then we can rate them on a scale from zero to ten. Zero is not moving at all; ten is working very hard.

Why It's Important

Childhood obesity and lack of fitness are serious public health problems. Young people are leading a more sedentary existence than any previous generation. Teaching students the importance of physical activity can help them address the problem.



Literature Link
Everest, Book 1 (The Contest)

by Gordon Korman
(2002). New York: Scholastic.

Talk about your ultimate physical challenge. But that's not all. It's a mental challenge as well. Find out who will be the youngest person to climb Mount Everest. Is winning the contest worth everything—even if lives are at stake?

Connect this exciting adventure story to the mind/body connection students learned about in this lesson. Discuss how people can prepare for extreme physical tests by training their bodies with exercise and training their minds with focus.

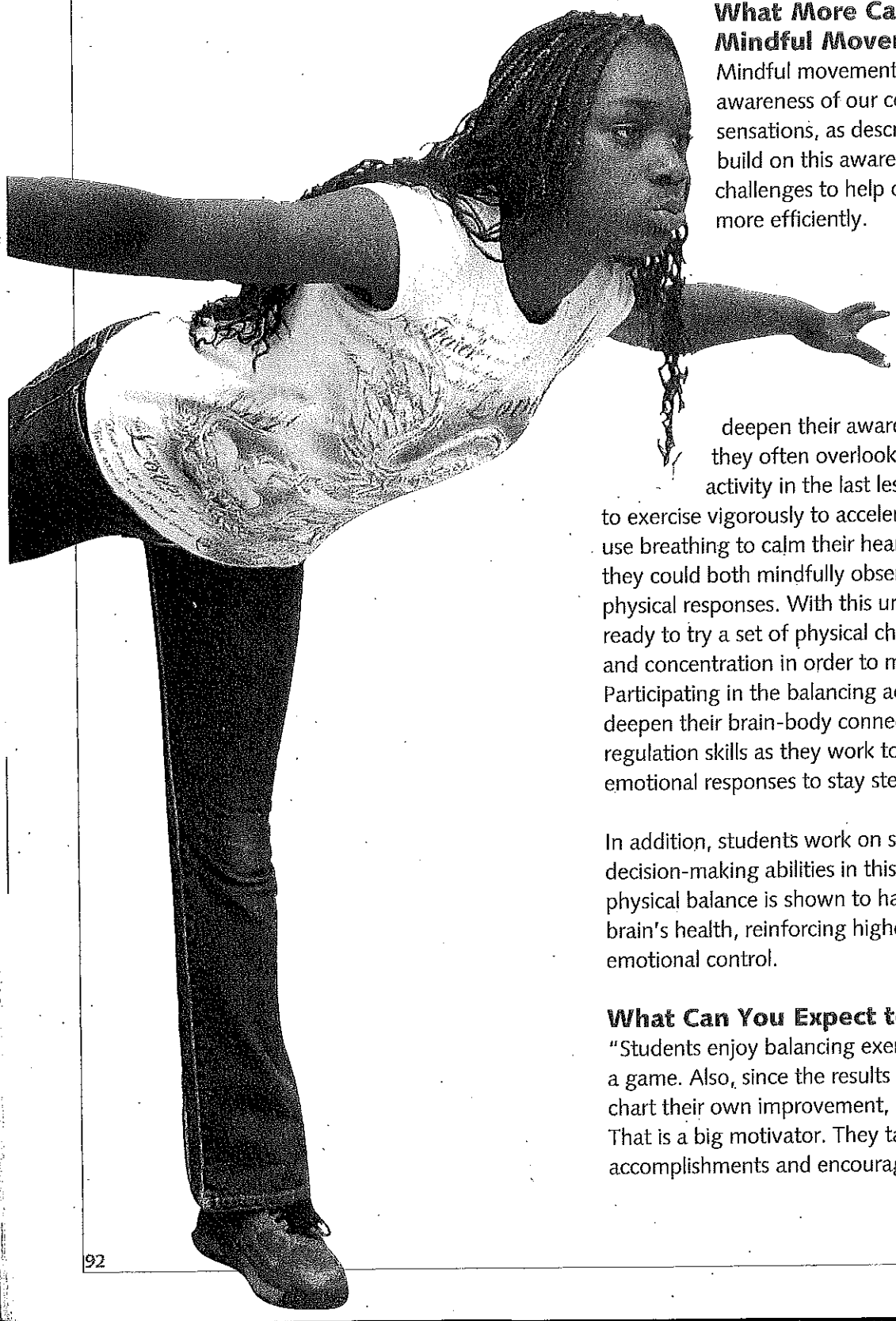
More Books to Share

Corbin, Charles, Guy Le Masurier, and Dolly Lambdin. (2007). *Fitness for Life Middle School*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Giovanni, Nikki. (2008). *Hip Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat*. Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks Jabberwocky.

Nixon, Shelley. (1999). *From Where I Sit: Making My Way with Cerebral Palsy*. New York: Scholastic.

Mindful Movement II



What More Can We Learn About Mindful Movement?

Mindful movement begins with the awareness of our constantly changing physical sensations, as described in Lesson 8. We can build on this awareness by using movement challenges to help our brains focus and work more efficiently.

Why Revisit Mindful Movement?

In this second lesson on mindful movement, students continue to deepen their awareness of physical sensations they often overlook. From their Pulse Power activity in the last lesson, students learned how to exercise vigorously to accelerate their heart rate and use breathing to calm their heart; they discovered that they could both mindfully observe and help control their physical responses. With this understanding, students are ready to try a set of physical challenges that require focus and concentration in order to maintain their balance. Participating in the balancing activity helps students deepen their brain-body connection and build self-regulation skills as they work to control their physical and emotional responses to stay steady.

In addition, students work on strengthening their decision-making abilities in this lesson. Working on our physical balance is shown to have positive effects on our brain's health, reinforcing higher-order thinking skills and emotional control.

What Can You Expect to Observe?

"Students enjoy balancing exercises because they're like a game. Also, since the results are visible, students can chart their own improvement, literally by the second. That is a big motivator. They take pride in their own accomplishments and encourage their classmates too."

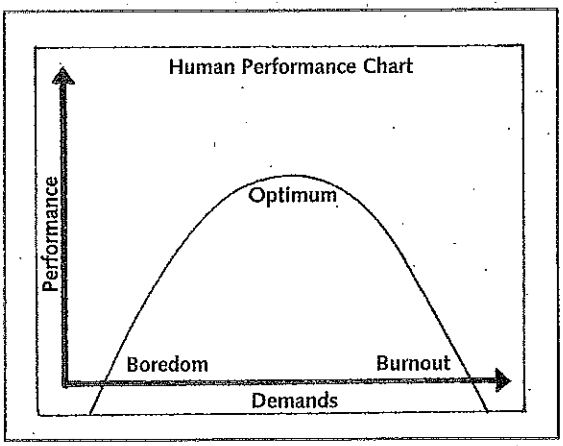
—Seventh-grade teacher

Linking to Brain Research

Emotional Balance: Key to Efficient Executive Function

Executive function is mental management that takes the big picture into account. Executive function comprises many higher-order skills that depend upon the thinker's ability to reflect before reacting. Among these skills are evaluating information, organizing, focusing attention, prioritizing, planning, and problem solving. The control of executive functions is guided by our prefrontal cortex, proportionally the largest of any primate. Executive function skills are affected by our emotional state in part because the neural networks for emotional response overlap with the neural networks for executive functions. Thanks to the brain's neuroplasticity, both of these overlapping networks in the prefrontal cortex are strengthened when the brain is engaged in either an emotional response or an executive function.

Learners who can recognize and control their own emotional state become confident and successful, both socially and academically. Neuroscientist Adele Diamond notes that "activities that often get squeezed out of school curricula, such as the arts and physical exercise, are excellent for developing executive function skills, improving children's emotional state and social skills, and can be critical for academic success and for success later in life" (2009). Engaging in physical challenges, the arts, and mindful practices that enhance learning and reduce stress activate both emotional response and executive function networks simultaneously.



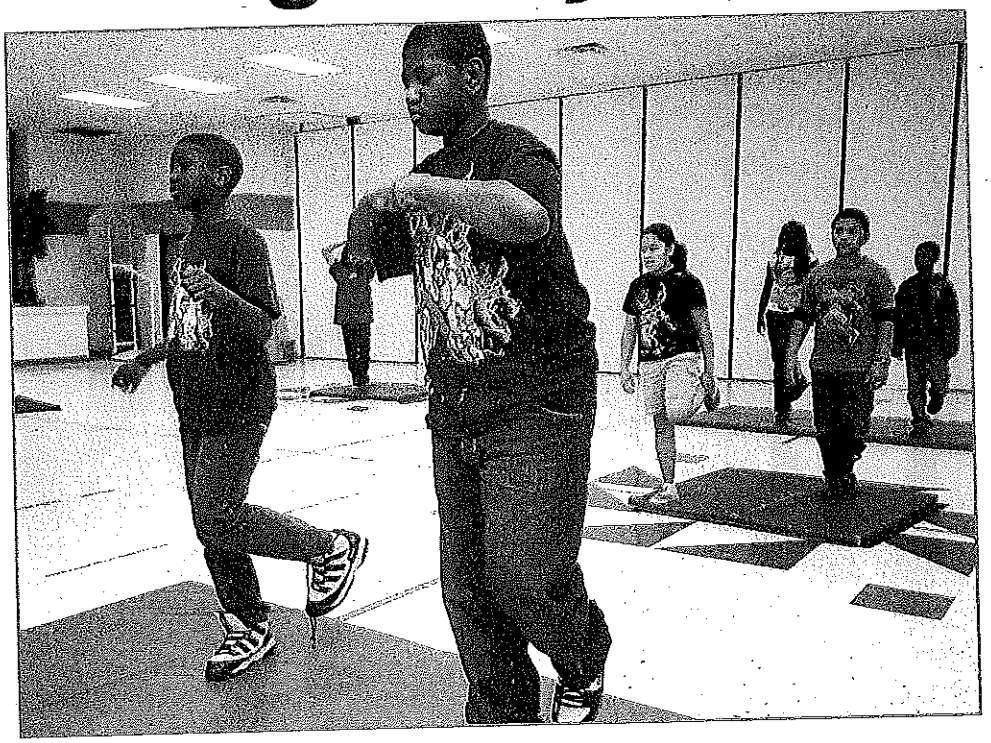
Some stress is necessary to normal functioning, but ever increasing amounts of stress produce diminishing returns on learning, achieving, socializing, and living.

Clarify for the Class

Mindful walking combines mindfulness with movement. Model how to walk with good posture, and count your breaths coming in through your nose and going out through the mouth. Count out loud so that students can see how you match the counts for inhalation and exhalation. Do a talk-aloud as you notice each step, how each foot comes down, what your arms are doing, and how your posture is. Demonstrate how to bring stray thoughts back to your breathing and moving body.

Discuss: What effect do you think mindful walking has on the emotions? Explain. Why do you think physical movement can help us process information? Does it help you?

Getting Ready



Straight and Tall
Bring balance practice that begins in the gym back to the classroom. Balance breaks taken beside a desk can improve focus and posture.

GOALS

- Students mindfully control their balance and describe the sensations they experience.
- Students will connect mindful balancing to being well balanced in life.

MATERIALS

- four of each: plastic spoons, cups of water, empty cups

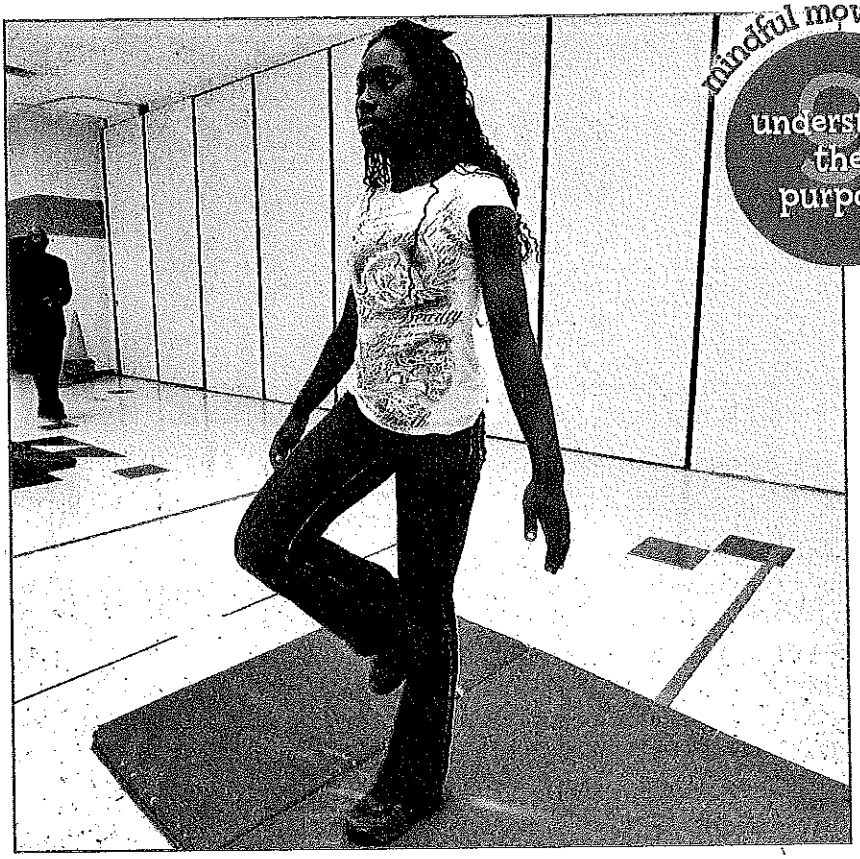
PREPARATION TIPS

- Make space in the classroom for students to do simple exercises safely around their desks, or find a clear area such as the gym or an outdoor court.
- Students will need comfortable, non-slip shoes, such as sneakers, for this activity. If done in bare feet, non-slip mats might be helpful.
- For those with special physical needs, seek advice from the PE teacher, nurse, and/or parents.

CREATING THE OPTIMISTIC CLASSROOM

Classroom Management Here are some ideas for creating a relaxed, brain-friendly classroom environment:

- limit periods of sitting and listening
- plan time for peer-talk to cement learning
- when possible allow students choice of activities and materials
- when appropriate and not at the expense of anyone else, encourage laughter
- offer immediate positive feedback when possible



Challenge Me!
Students with well-developed balancing skills can try more difficult moves on a thick mat while keeping a beanbag steady on their head.

MINDUP Warm-Up

Steady as You Go

Divide the class into four teams. Each team gets a spoon, a cup of water, and an empty cup. The object is to fill the spoon with water, walk it from one point in the room to another, and dump the water in the empty cup.

Explain that this activity is a bit like a relay race, but speed is not important. Mindful balance is. Introduce the terms *balance, steady,* and *stable*. Tell students that each member of the team will get a chance to walk with the spoonful from the beginning point to the end point. If each team does not have an even number of students, choose a student who will go twice.

Discuss: Which group has transferred the most water into the empty cup? What was your best strategy for holding the spoon steady? How did you keep it stable in your hand? What did you learn about mindful balance from this activity?

Leading the Lesson

Stable and Able

Engage

What to Do

Review how students have learned to observe the sensation signals their body sends and how to use their breath and mindful focus to calm down when needed. Relate the mindful walking in the warm-up to the next movement experience.

- Think about everything you've learned from your Core Practices and mindful control over your movement and senses.
- To get us started, think about how you carried a spoonful of water for you team. What helped you feel balanced and steady? When did you feel shaky and unstable?

Encourage students to share times when they've felt both balanced and unbalanced. Make sure they can connect focusing and paying close attention to being able to be balanced and steady.

Why It's Important

Learning how to apply what they've learned to physical balance has several healthy benefits. It teaches good posture, without which it would be very difficult to balance. It strengthens core muscles. But most importantly, good balance helps to prevent accidents.

Explore

Guide students through the first balancing exercise. Encourage them to stand in an open space and focus by taking a few deep breaths and feeling their feet on the ground. Then have them stand on tiptoes for 60 seconds.

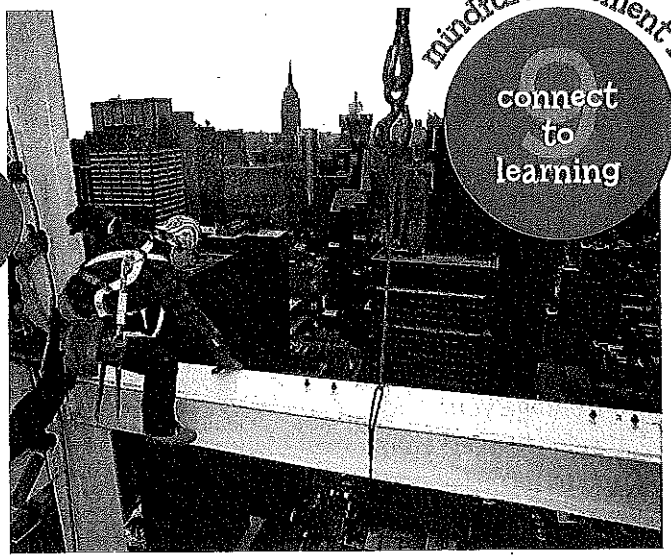
- Remember to breathe deeply and pay close attention to the sensations in your feet and legs. You can touch your heels down, if your leg muscles get too tired or feel unsteady.
- If you are having trouble balancing, focus your eyes on one spot. Don't look over at anyone else.
- Does it help you balance if your mind is quiet?

For the second exercise, have students balance on one leg for 60 seconds. Repeat coaching.

Starting with an easier challenge builds students' confidence. Allow students who are feeling very challenged to repeat the first activity, until they feel comfortable trying the next one; tell them that when they find a less wobbly position they can add to the challenge by closing their eyes. Encourage students with experience in yoga, dance, gymnastics, martial arts, or skateboarding to share tips with peers.

From the Research

Research shows that activities ... such as the arts and physical exercise, are excellent for developing executive function skills ... and can be critical for academic success and for success later in life. (Diamond, 2009)



Reflect

nvite students to discuss the increased challenge of the second activity and what they did to help hemselves stay steady.

- Did this activity get difficult for you at any point? Did focusing your eyes on a single point help you balance? Was anyone able to close their eyes?
- What did your brain say to you during this activity? Did it help to focus your mind on breathing to quiet it down?
- When could you practice mindful balancing? Why might that help you?

Make sure the class covers these key points:

- When our bodies and brains work together, we can focus and think clearly.
- When we pay attention to the signals our body sends, our brain's ability to focus improves.
- Like all the other mindful activities, mindful movement and balancing helps our prefrontal cortex practice focusing.

As students master easy balance challenges, they may want to push their brain and body further. Encourage students to extend the time they spend in each balancing position. Teach advanced students a new balancing pose or have them invent some of their own. Check back with students and allow them to teach new poses to their classmates.

MINDUP In the Real World

Career Connection

Imagine walking on a narrow beam of steel more than 1,000 feet in the air. If you're a high-rise ironworker, mindful movement—combining graceful agility with a keen sense of balance—not only enables you to do your job, but also helps guarantee your survival. When you're 100 flights up, overlooking a busy city street, one false step could mean a tumble to your death. While ironworkers take safety precautions such as ropes, harnesses, and safety nets, their best hope for survival is their own mindful movement—while being completely tuned in to all that's going on around them.

Discuss: Mindful movement on the job may mean the slow, graceful movement of a painter or mindful movement to avoid danger. How do you see both at play in the movements of Olympic athletes?

Once a Day

Try a simple balancing action such as standing on one foot, whenever you or your students are waiting (e.g., in line at the cafeteria, prior to dismissal). Balancing takes no preparation and keeps students focused and aware.

Connecting to the Curriculum

Expanding their experience of mindful movement supports students' connection to their own learning process and to the content areas and literature.

Journal Writing

Encourage your students to reflect on what they've learned about mindful movement and to record questions to explore at another time. They may also enjoy responding to these prompts:

- Think of something in your life that needs more balance. Brainstorm a list of ideas for improving the situation. Use these questions to get yourself started: Can you adjust the time, energy, or brain space you spend?
- Choose a role model for balance. Write a letter to this person. Let them know why they exemplify balance for you. It can be their physical balance you admire or the ability to balance different activities.
- When you get homework in more than one subject, you must learn to balance your effort. Rate yourself on a scale from one to ten. One means there's lots of room for improvement. Ten means that you have perfect balance. Explain your rating and how you can improve it.
- Give yourself a week-long balancing challenge. Take a few minutes to practice a mindful balancing activity. Each day write down the pose you held and how long you held it. At the end of the week, describe any improvements you noticed.

SCIENCE

Zero-G Balance

What to Do

Invite students to research how astronauts prepare for zero gravity. They will find that the inner ear and visual orientation are responsible for balance here on earth. However, in space there is no gravity and no up or down. People in zero gravity often get motion sickness. Astronauts must learn how to adapt so they can get their work done. Check the BBC's "Vomit Comet" video if appropriate (http://www.bbc.co.uk/learningzone/clips/balance-in-zero-gravity/1867.html).

What to Say

If you think mindful balancing exercises are difficult, try floating around in space without any gravity! Here on earth, your sense of balance depends on the downward pull of gravity on your body's mass. So how do astronauts train to find their balance in a zero G environment? Do some research and report back to the class.

Why It's Important

Finding balance in a zero-G environment highlights the interplay of factors that help us find and maintain our balance. This is also a good opportunity to tie balance to the concept of mass and gravity, which helps make it less abstract.

ARTS

Dance It On

What to Do

Dance is an art that embodies balance. Have students make up their own dance moves using the balancing skills they learned. Begin by taking some recommendations from students for a song. (Remind students that the song choices need to be appropriate for a school setting.) Once there are a few acceptable choices, let students vote.

What to Say

Think about your best dance move. Raise you hand if you would like to share it with the class. I'll take down names in alphabetical order. Form a circle, and when the music starts, I'll call the first name. That person will go in the center of the circle and show off their move. Everyone in the circle will try to copy it.

Why It's Important

This activity gives students a chance to practice balance. It also allows volunteers a chance to lead the group, while those not comfortable leading still get to participate. Students who may not normally take a leadership role have a chance to shine.

SOCIAL STUDIES

A Balance of Powers

What to Do

One of the great things about our government is the way the Founding Fathers designed the balance of powers. In fact, James Madison said, "The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elected, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny." Provide some reference materials that students can use.

What to Say

Work with a group to demonstrate the balance of power among the three branches of government. You can be as creative as you like in your presentation. You can make visuals or act out a skit. You could even write a rap. Anything you decide is fine as long as you explain how the powers of government are divided up. Try to incorporate into your explanation something you learned about balancing your body.

Why It's Important

Connecting an abstract idea, such as the balance of powers in government, to a concrete lesson on balance is great way to build a brain connection. The balance of powers is a foundational social studies concept and this is an entertaining and unique way for students to reinforce their knowledge of it.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING

It Takes Two

What to Do

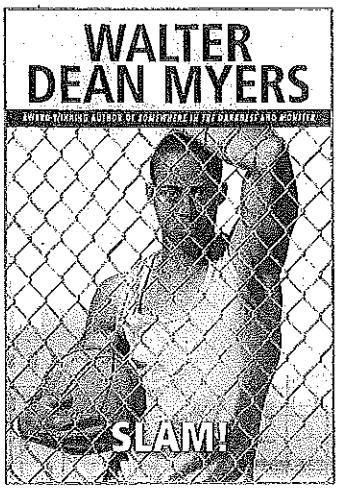
Have partners try a balancing exercise for partners. They might face each other, join hands, lean back in opposite directions, and turn in a circle like that. Or partners can lean into each other back-to-back, then lower down into a squat, holding a book between their backs. Have students invent their own variations.

What to Say

How was it different to balance with a partner than on your own? Was it more difficult or easier? How well did you communicate? How much did you need to trust the other person? What did the exercise teach you about teamwork?

Why It's Important

This activity is a great way to teach teamwork. In a two-person balancing exercise, the effort must be equally shared in order to achieve balance. Neither person can take over or shirk. One person cannot shirk. Be sure students extract the metaphor and apply the lessons to the idea of teamwork during the discussion.



Literature Link
Slam!

by Walter Dean Myers
(1996). New York: Scholastic.

This is a story of Greg "Slam" Harris who has plenty of balance on the basketball court but is struggling to find his balance off it. A high school basketball star, Harris transfers to a more academically challenging school. He has to learn to be a team player, but that's not all. The problems in his family are even harder to balance.

Connect this book to what students have learned about balance on their own and when balance depends on teamwork.

More Books to Share

Hine, Lewis. (1997). *Men at Work.* Mineola, NY: Dover Publications.

Koontz, Robin. (2008). *Tai Chi for Fun.* Mankato, MN: Compass Point Books.

Ramthum, Bonnie. (2008). *White Gates.* New York: Random House.