



My Rock

Time: 20 minutes

Domain(s): Natural, Spiritual

Configuration and setting: Participants seated in a circle on the classroom rug with altar in the middle.

Learning Goal(s): Communion with the Natural World: Understanding our interconnection with the natural world. Cultivating a reverence for Life

The intended purpose: To deepen our connection to the earth. To practice deep mindfulness through our sensory experiences. To understand the interconnectedness of nature. To cultivate our spiritual awareness and exploration.

Materials:

- Classroom altar, basket of stones wrapped in silk, selected literature, soothing nature sounds as background music.

Description of activity:

1. Children gather in circle and we perform our centering rituals: finding our strong foundation (physical positioning of our bodies), choosing name from wooden box, child chooses word to light the altar candle, deep, mindful breathing to the sound of the chime.
2. Children will be told a creation story from the Cherokee Tradition, "*The Coming of Earth* "
3. We will discuss the many types of rock, from pebble to mighty mountain. We will create a space of reverence in honoring the wisdom of the Appalachian Mountains that surround us.
4. Each child will be given a stone wrapped in silk with the invitation to get to know their rock using only their sense of touch. Children will turn the stones over in their hands, learning the texture, size and shape without ever looking at it. They will be guided to seek out crevices, cracks and imperfections and wonder how these aspects of their rock might have come to be. After some guided time, as well as silence, the rocks will be placed back into the basket.
5. One by one, the teacher will place the rocks on a cloth in the middle of the circle, in plain sight of all children.
6. Children will be asked if they could find their special rock after seeing it with their eyes for the first time. Children will point to, or gently touch, the rock they believe to be theirs.
7. We will end with a reflection on the experience and close with deep breathing to the sound of the chime and blow out our candle.

Curriculum Integration: This centering will integrate key elements of the 1st grade science curriculum related to our study of the 3 main classifications of rocks and the Appalachian mountain region.

Alternative Approach: The book *Everybody Needs a Rock* by Byrd Baylor could be read aloud as a substitute for the telling of the Cherokee story.



Sharing Strengths

Time: 25 Minutes

Domain(s): Social, Emotional

Configuration and setting: Circle in a Classroom

Learning Goal(s): Social Awareness: *The ability to see and respect varying perspectives, to understand social and ethical norms, and to recognize community resources and support. (CASEL GUIDE, 2013, p.9).*

The intended purpose: This centering activity is intended to illuminate the power of words and perspective. Repetition of this activity builds self-confidence and appreciation for others.

Materials:

- For Facilitator
 - Singing bowl/ chime
 - Candle/ matches
 - Quote connected to “creation”
- Each participant needs
 - Journal
 - Writing utensil

Description of activity

1. As participants enter circle, each writes quote in journal
2. Once everyone is ready, pencils are placed down and each participant finds a still space
3. Ring singing bowl/ chime- remain in silence until sound dissipates
4. Ask for a volunteer to light the candle and offer a word inspired by the quote
5. Ask for volunteer to read quote
6. Ask for reflection of quote- thoughts, interpretations, questions, connections
7. Teacher gives following instructions:
 - a. Write a list of strengths you have

- b. Circle the strength that you are most proud of
8. Teacher will instruct students to whisper the word into their clasped hands and then place their hands over their hearts
9. Teacher rings bell as students place that strength in their heart in preparation to share
10. Students count off by twos
11. Ones form an inner circle and twos form an outer circle
12. Students in center circle turn to their right so that their left hands can all reach into center of circle.
13. Students in outer circle take a place next to a classmate in the center circle.
14. Students in outer circle will whisper their strength into their classmates ear in the inner circle and move onto student to right when the teacher rings chime to 'share' strengths
15. Once all outer students share, the inner circle changes places with the outer circle
16. Again, outer circle shares strengths with inner circle
17. Once all students have shared strengths, return to circle
18. Ask students to share the following:
 - a. A strength they received that they perceive as a weakness and why
 - b. A strength they received that they share
 - c. A strength they received that they would like to nurture and call their own
19. Students then write that strength in their journal with their own list of strengths
20. Ask volunteer who lit candle to extinguish candle

Curriculum Integration: This could integrate into any novel unit as an analysis of strengths of a character. It could also connect to an Anatomy unit by noting where ones strengths lie in their own body.

Alternative Approach: If students may not be serious or confident enough to share their own strengths, collect the words from class and re-write them on slips of paper that are redistributed to group randomly so that they may share someone else's strength. If time permits, have students state who they believe the strength they chose belong to and why.



Return with the Elixir

Time: 45 minutes to 1 hour

Configuration and Setting: Students and facilitator are seated together in a circle. This activity is best suited as a reflection upon the ending of a curriculum unit, calendar year or school year.

Domains: Social, Emotional, Mental, Creative

Learning Goals: *Myths and Stories:* Exposure to and crafting stories that foster a sense of magic, wonder and archetypal human experience.

Intended Purpose: Facilitate reflection upon completing a unit of study or transition (such as then end of the school year). Invite students to reflect upon and share their knowledge and gifts with each other and the larger community. Inspire empathy and connectedness by reflecting upon archetypal experiences across time and cultures.

Materials:

Facilitator: Hero's Quest map, guided visualization script. colored paper, glitter or colored sand,

For each participant: Glass bottle or vial with cork stopper (available at arts and crafts supply stores or discount stores), colored paper, colored pencils or watercolor paints, glitter or colored sand.

Description of Activity:

1. Invite students to examine hero's journey map. Draw attention to the end of the map, as the hero returns home with the elixir. Explain that in mythology, this is often literally a magic potion or object. Symbolically, it represents a special knowledge or wisdom to share. Invite examples from stories (*Wizard of Oz, Star Wars*) as well as real-life examples (Wangari Maathai, Martin Luther King, Jr).
2. Lead students in a guided meditation (see sample script)
3. Explain that each student will receive a glass vial in which they will put their elixir. This can be a written word, phrase, or image placed on a piece of paper and sealed in the bottle. They may use colored sand, glitter, small pebbles or shells in the bottle to "activate" the magic of their special elixir.
4. Explain that students will work in silence to create space for reflection, but that they will have a chance to share their elixir with their classmates once everyone has completed the task.
5. Hand each student a bottle or vial. As students receive their bottles, they may find a table set up with art supplies and begin working on their elixir bottles.
6. Allow 15-20 minutes for individual work.
7. Students who finish early may draw or list in their journals additional lessons, skills and knowledge acquired as they reflect upon this important transition in their lives.
8. Students return to the circle. One by one, have students place their elixir on a windowsill or other central location to symbolize sharing their elixir with the classroom community. Invite students to share a word, phrase or short anecdote that represents their elixir.
9. Final reflection: (This can be done orally, as a group discussion, or in writing, as a journal prompt) How will you share your gift with the world? How can you use your elixir to benefit yourself, family, community, or the world?

Curriculum Integration: Peace Jam unit: students study the lives and achievements of Nobel Peace Prize laureates. Ancient Cultures: students study the history and mythology of Ancient India, China and MesoAmerica, Greece and Rome.

Alternative Approach:

Glass jars or vials aren't necessary – students can also create scrolls using paper tied with string or ribbon, or create a collage using images from magazines. **For younger children:** Hero's Journey map isn't necessary. Use examples of lessons learned from familiar folktales or fairytales to provide context.

Resources: A Hero's Journey Map can be downloaded at www.thewritersjourney.com

Sample script for guided reflection upon the end of a school year:

(After reviewing Hero's Journey map)... "Now we're going to take a few minutes to reflect upon the journey we're about to complete. Sit up straight and tall. Let your eyes gently close, or find a spot to direct your gaze. Bring your attention to your breath as it flows in and out. Take three slow, deep breaths (Pause). Now, think back over your journey this year. Remember how you felt at the beginning of the school year, as you prepared to leave the ordinary world of summer vacation, and cross the threshold into a new experience (Pause to allow for reflection). Think back upon some of the friends and allies you met on the way – teachers, coaches, old and new friends and acquaintances. (Pause) Now, reflect upon some of the challenges and obstacles you faced over the course of the year. Perhaps your challenge was a conflict with a friend, a difficult school assignment, or an injury or illness. How did you feel when you encountered this challenge? How did you overcome these obstacles? (Pause) You also experienced many successes and joys over the course of the year. What special joys and successes come to mind? Take a moment to savor them. (Pause) As the school year (or curriculum unit, or season) draws to a close, you are about to complete this journey. What lessons, skills or knowledge have you gained along the way? What elixir will you bring into the world? Take a few moments to notice words, phrases or images that come up (Pause). Hold this image, word or phrase in your heart as you gently open your eyes and bring your attention back to the circle. "





Gratitude Jars

Time: 30 minutes

Domain(s): Creative, Social, Emotional and Spiritual

Learning Goal(s): Spiritual Virtues: *Explore and embody elements that enhance spiritual virtues such as compassion and acceptance of self and others.* **Class and**

Community Celebration & Ritual: *Shared celebrations, ceremonies and rites of passage that empower students to be a part of an integral community.*

The intended purpose: The purpose of this activity is to create a foundation and culture of appreciation in the classroom. It is designed to create a tool for students that they can return to on days that are particularly hard or challenging. It also serves as a model for how to give appreciation to others.

Materials:

For Facilitator:

Letter explaining to families the purpose of a gratitude jar and a request for gratitude entries for their child.

Each participant needs

A glass jar (recycled or mason jar works well)

Multicolored tissue paper

Water and glue mixture

Paintbrush

Description of activity:

This activity begins with an email to families requesting that they send the teacher a personalized gratitude for their child. This can be as simple or complex as a family would like it to be. A sample parent request could sound like:

The fourth graders will be making gratitude jars on Friday of this week. I would like to have a gratitude from their family to put in the jar. A gratitude is an opportunity for you to appreciate some specific things about your child. It can be something as simple as, "I appreciate the way you show love to your brother by reading him books every night." to something more lengthy if you wish. Parents can write one gratitude, or each write separately. You can also ask other members of the family to contribute a gratitude if you would like.

Once you have collected the gratitudes, set aside a time for the students to create their jars. Open the centering with an opportunity to focus on the power of gratitude, and the sacred practice of slowing down and appreciating the special people and experiences in our lives.

Explain that the jars that you are about to create will be collection vessels all year long for gratitude and appreciation. These jars will be a great grounding resources to return to throughout the year when a child may need to refocus on a positive energy.

Guide students to use the collection of tissue paper to create their jar. Students can make them stripes, multicolored or monochromatic. It works best if pieces of tissue paper are no bigger than a square inch and applied to the outside of the glass jar with the glue solution. Teachers can help with smoothing down the paper and preventing air bubbles.

This centering concludes with the completion of the jars and they will dry overnight.

The next day, the teacher has secretly placed the family gratitudes inside each jar and hosts a follow up centering on gratitude. In this centering students are again encouraged to meditate on the power of gratitude possible sharing in a group or with a partner the answer to the following considerations...

Why might gratitude be considered contagious? What type of energy does gratitude spread? If gratitude were a color what color would it be and why?

Have the group come back together and place their jars in front of each child. Again introduce this as a sacred time where children are allowed to personally digest the gift of gratitude that is presented from their family. This is not a time when sharing is necessary...instead encourage the students to place the notes back in the jar when finished reading them.

These jars are reintroduced throughout the year with notes from teachers and others students as deemed necessary and appropriate by the teacher.

Curriculum Integration: A natural link to social/emotional domain





Circle of WOW

Time: 25-35 minutes

Domain(s): Mental, Emotional, Social, Natural

Configuration and setting: Participants are seated in a circle on the rug

Learning Goal(s): **Mystery and contemplation:** *Awakening, nurturing, and experiencing the sacred and unknown; seeking meaning and purpose.* **Communion with the Natural World:** *Understanding our interconnection with the natural world. Cultivating a reverence for Life*

The intended purpose: Deep exploration of a given topic of study and an opportunity to reflect on the types of images we are drawn, important questions we want to explore related to the topic to or what concepts particularly interest us about the topic.

Materials: Collection of photography books about any given topic chosen in advance.

- For Facilitator: chime
- Each participant needs: Participants will take turns exploring photography books

Description of activity

1. Facilitator begins by leading a discussion of the current area of investigation (Weather, Marine life, Native American tribes, Abstract art, a specific geographic location, etc)
2. Each participant will begin with a photography book placed in front of them (if it is a large group or there are only a few books then this can be done in partners).
3. Facilitator will instruct participants to open the book and began to explore the photos within. After looking through the book for a while, they should choose a picture that particularly resonates with them, intrigues them or makes them say "Wow!".
4. Facilitator will ring the chime signaling participants to open their books and begin exploring.
5. After a few minutes the chime will be rung again and participants will pass their book to the person on their right. The book will be open to the picture chosen by the previous person. Everyone takes a moment to look at the chosen picture and think about why their friend/classmate may have chosen that particular image. After appreciating the choice, they will then begin to explore the book on their own until the next chime sounds.
6. This continues for a set length of time or until each book has been explored by every participant.
7. A reflection round will allow participants the opportunity to share something about the experience such as their favorite picture or a question that arose for them.

Curriculum Integration: This activity is an excellent opening activity for any new unit of study.



Chakra Yoga

Time: 30 minutes

Domain(s): Physical, Spiritual, Mental

Learning Goal(s): Spiritual Virtues: *Explore and enhance elements that embody spiritual virtues such as compassion, and acceptance of self and others.*

Intended Purpose: to introduce or reinforce the concept of chakras, or energy centers of the body. (Curriculum tie-in to study of human anatomy or Indian civilization).

Materials: visual images of chakra colors, symbols and location in the body.

Intro: Ask if students are familiar with the term chakras, explain that chakra is a Sanskrit word originating from India, but the idea of energy centers in the body is present across many cultures. Chakras also correspond to nerve plexus', glands, and organ systems in the human body.

Practice:

Root Chakra: Grounding, Stability. Yoga Pose: Mountain Pose, Tree Pose, Child's Pose

Sacral Chakra: Creativity, enthusiasm. Yoga poses: goddess pose, squat.

Solar Plexus Chakra: Personal Power, digestion. Yoga pose: wind reliever, boat pose.

Heart Chakra: Love, relationships, immune system. Yoga pose: Camel pose, triangle pose.

Throat Chakra: Expression, communication. Yoga pose: Fish pose.

Third Eye Chakra: intuition. Yoga pose: Child's pose, rabbit pose.

Crown Chakra: universal consciousness, meditation. Yoga pose: half lotus, mindful breathing.

Reflection: Discuss why it is important to understand about different energy centers in the body, and what are some practical ways yoga poses could be used to develop different chakras in the body.



Creation Activity: Analysis of Creation Myths and Impact

Time: 40 Minutes

Domain(s): Spiritual

Configuration and setting: Circle in a Classroom

Learning Goal(s): **Mystery and Contemplation: *Awakening, nurturing, and experiencing the sacred and unknown; seeking meaning and purpose. **Myths and Stories:** Exposure to and crafting stories that foster a sense of magic, wonder and archetypal human experience.***

The intended purpose: This centering activity is intended to bring attention to the idea of creation, creation myths, and our place in this world. The item from the natural world represents Earth, the figurines are the animals, and the blocks are intended to represent humans/ human development.

Materials:

- For Facilitator
 - Singing bowl/ chime
 - Candle/ matches
 - Quote connected to “creation”
- Each participant needs
 - Journal
 - Writing utensil
 - Outdoors to gather an element from nature (rock, stick, leaf)
 - Will be collected in a silent walk at start of centering activity
 - A block
 - A model animal

Description of activity:

1. As participants enter circle, each writes quote in journal
2. Once everyone is ready, pencils are placed down and each participant finds a still space
3. Ring singing bowl/ chime- remain in silence until sound dissipates
4. Ask for a volunteer to light the candle and offer a word inspired by the quote
5. Ask for volunteer to read quote
6. Ask for reflection of quote- thoughts, interpretations, questions, connections
7. Teacher gives following instructions:
 - a. We will go outside for the first 2 minutes of centering
 - b. Find a quiet space and sit down silently
 - c. Look around you and find a piece of the natural world to bring inside
 - d. Ring the bell, silently line up at the door and return to circle
8. Return to circle
9. Teacher starts the silent creation by placing their piece from nature in center of circle

10. Students each take a turn placing item in circle
11. Once all items are in circle, give students 15 seconds to reflect on what they notice and write one word in journal
12. Next, teacher passes animal figurines around circle
13. Silently, each participant takes one randomly
14. Once all participants have figurine, teacher places hers in circle amongst the items from the natural world
15. Students then each take a turn placing figurine in circle
16. Once all figurines are in circle, give students 15 seconds to reflect on what they notice and write one word in journal
17. Teacher then passes blocks around circle
18. Silently, each participant takes one block
19. Once all participants have a block, the teacher places hers in circle amongst the items from the natural world and the figurines
20. Students then each take a turn placing block in circle
21. Once all blocks are in circle, give students 15 seconds to reflect on what they notice and write one word in journal
22. In reverse order of placing items, students then silently remove their block from the center
23. Once all blocks are removed from the circle, give students 15 seconds to reflect on what they notice and write one word in journal
24. In reverse order of placing items, students then silently remove their figurine from the center
25. Once all figurines are removed from the circle, give students 15 seconds to reflect on what they notice and write one word in journal
26. In reverse order of placing items, students then silently remove their piece of the natural world from the center
27. Once all pieces of the natural world are removed from the circle, give students 15 seconds to reflect on what they notice and write one word in journal
28. Students share their six words
29. If time permits, reflect
30. Ask volunteer who lit candle to extinguish candle

Curriculum Integration: This integrates with Astronomy and Mythology as it is an activity meant to mimic both the creation and destruction of the world, the good and the bad, and what can be discovered when breaking our surroundings down into separate entities or looking at all elements as one.

Alternative Approach: Since this activity could take time, all items could be given to students at the start of the activity to shorten activity if group is large. There is something lost when students do not have the opportunity to select their own animal and block, for even though they are instructed to randomly choose, what they select says a lot about their own personality. Additionally, this activity could be done in two sessions, with the creation being the first, and the breakdown being the second.



Yin Yang Centering: Integration of Opposites

Time: 45 minutes

Domain(s): Spiritual, Emotional, Physical, Mental, Creative

Configuration and setting: 6th grade classroom, seated and standing in circle in front of fireplace.

Learning Goal(s): *World Religions and Traditions:* Exposure to and appreciation for diverse approaches to religion, culture and spirituality. Practice different vehicles for meditation, Learn about beliefs of spiritual traditions related to thematic unit (Ancient China)

The intended purpose: To develop body awareness through mindful Tai Chi movements, to understand the Chinese philosophy represented by the Yin Yang symbol, to explore the dynamic interplay of opposites in students' own lives.

Materials:

- 2" circles of black and white cardstock, at least 20 of each color
- Black ink pens, white ink pens (white chalk or colored pencil will also work)
- Large Yin Yang symbol outline on foam core, cardboard or wood)

Description of activity:

1. Student centering leader guides class in three mindful breaths
2. Student centering leader lights candle and shares word for the day.
3. Energy Ball practice: Students begin with palms pressed together, begin rubbing hands to create friction, slowly separate hands to feel energy between palms, visualize and sense a ball of energy between hands.
4. Explain that this energy is what Chinese philosophers called "Chi", and that today we will be exploring this concept through examination of an ancient symbol, known as the Yin Yang.
5. In pairs, students write two pairs of opposite words on circles of black and white paper, using white ink on black and black ink on white. For example: the word "hot" in black ink on white paper, and "cold" in white ink on black paper.
6. Display the large Yin Yang outline and tell a brief version of the origin of the Yin Yang symbol - in the beginning was a void, full of possibility. Out of this void arose raw, vital energies - "Yin" and "Yang".
7. Share examples of traditional Yin and Yang qualities, written on circles of paper and placed on the large Yin Yang template.
8. Have students share their pairs of opposite and place their circles on the large Yin Yang symbol.
9. After all pairs of students have shared, briefly reflect as a group on the interplay between the pairs for opposites. For example, how does "hot" relate to "cold" - can one exist without the other?

10. Transition to mindful movement: This interplay of opposites can also be experienced in our own bodies, in the movement of our breath and limbs. Ancient Chinese philosophers developed the practice of Tai Chi to help strengthen and balance energies of Yin and Yang in the body - we will now explore two mindful movement practices to explore and balance the energy in our bodies.

11. Exercise One: energy wheels

12. Exercise Two: movement mantra: in/out, open/close, up/down

13. Questions for closing reflection: How did these movements feel in your body? What does it feel like when your energy is balanced? How does it feel when you're out of balance... too much strong "yang" energy, or too much soft "yin" energy? What practices help you return to your center when you're feeling out of balance?

14. Conclude with three deep breaths led by student centering leader.

15. Student leader repeats word for the day and blows out centering candle.

Curriculum Integration: Ancient Chinese Civilization unit

Alternative Approach: This centering activity could be shortened and simplified by not having students write pairs of opposites on colored paper. Students could list opposites while teacher records on board or chart paper. This activity could be extended through practicing more Tai Chi movements.