

## What role can/does mindfulness play in a standards-based classroom?

or

## How can I teach the practice of mindfulness as a tool for building the “moreness” of student writing?

### Background:

This inquiry project reflects an ongoing mission embraced in attempt to balance astride two, often conflicting professional and personal calls to action. Teaching to standards. Teaching humans (who have hearts and all the gifts that come with them). That is to say, it is my aim to make centered progress toward *teaching from authentic, standards-based units that build in time for humanity.*

My current assignment at McMinnville High includes the seemingly disparate roles of sophomore Language and Literature teacher, yoga teacher, and instructional coach. Nearing the two decade mark in our profession, many aspects of my approach to teaching teenagers, but one has remained foundational - these humans - young and fresh and new at life as they may be - are wise beyond their years, even if they don't yet know it. It is my privilege to help them acquire the skills that will propel them over the mountains and through the doors ahead. I have long and firmly believed that language arts skills *are* life skills. Complex and rich, sometimes tedious and sticky, but sometimes so is life. Knowing how to communicate effectively *is* key to every relationship, every career. For a quarter of a century I have also been both a student and teacher of yoga. On and off the mat I have learned, and learned, and learned again that another vital life practice is mindfulness - that ability to calm and focus and listen and trust whether the challenge at hand is physical, mental, or emotional. We humans - both students and teacher - benefit from regularly growing our capacity of both language arts and mindfulness. Indeed, their relationship is reciprocal.

For many of my sophomores - who struggle for equilibrium, tossed about on a sea of emotions and hormones and new responsibilities while sailing for the new, their as of yet uncharted Land of Adulthood - it's near impossible to focus on writing in high school, not to mention be compelled to do so at the bidding of impersonal local, state, or national high stakes tests that show up more like “the man” and which profess to measure readiness for lives in college or career (which must sound like the quest for the Great Northwest Passage to their imaginations) by way of contrived “engaging scenarios”, rather than present students with authentic needs and applications for their skills as communicators and burgeoning adult citizens. What a prime and vital time to offer them the practice Meena Srinivasan in *Teach Breathe Learn* describes as “energy we cultivate through kind, present-moment awareness.” (p.27) It's the practice of mindfulness. Perhaps it's the most important language art there is - communication with self. Certainly, it's been the root of some of our most treasured literary tomes...*Odyssey*, anyone?

In the end, by way of **context and objectives**, the lesson that follows means to make an argument for mindfulness in the classroom, and aspires to do so by guiding learners through the development of a claim statement and collection of evidence to support it using graphic organizers, academic discussion, and sentence frames. Additionally, this lesson is a call consideration of how we educators might practice mindfulness to the extent that we protect and expand our hearts in this vocation, and how we might offer this tool to our learners of all ages, in all subjects.

“Knowledge is not the same as wisdom.” - *The Peaceful Warrior*, Dan Milmann

### Content Standards:

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.A - Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.B - Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

## Lesson:

### Anticipatory Set

- Freewrite - Use the graphic organizer to explain and describe your snack.

### Direct instruction

- Context
  - Captured between CCSS/SBAC and my own intuition/experience as an educator
  - Argumentation
    - Critical thinking/academic language to convey and support a position
    - CCSS - unpack
  - Video - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KpvzGO2aQzE>
    - formula - topic + position + controlling idea
    - listen to identify the band director's claim
    - Agree or disagree?
      - Freewrite - why?
      - Discussion cards

### Activity

- Mindfulness
  - Define
  - Practice - Insight Timer
  - Mindful eating - Clementine
  - Complete graphic organizer - explain and describe

### Independent Practice

- Compare and contrast the experience of eating and eating mindfully
  - Graphic organizer / sentence frames
- Develop a claim and brief points of support
  - Topic - mindfulness in the classroom

### Resources:

<http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/9-10/>

Meena Srinivasan, *Teach Breathe Learn: Mindfulness In and Out of the Classroom* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2014)

Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998)

Satish Kumar, *The Buddha and the Terrorist* (Chapel Hill: Algonquin Books, 2004)

Ellen Levy and Susana Dutro, *Constructing Meaning: Explicit Language for Content Instruction, A Handbook for Secondary Teachers* (San Juan Capistrano: E.L. Achieve, 2013)

Manel Baucells and Rakesh Sarin, *Engineering Happiness: A New Approach for Building a Joyful Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012)

O'Brien, Catharine, Sustainable Happiness ( website <http://www.sustainablehappinesscourse.com/>)

Pandora stations: Liquid Mind, Yoga

App: Insight Timer