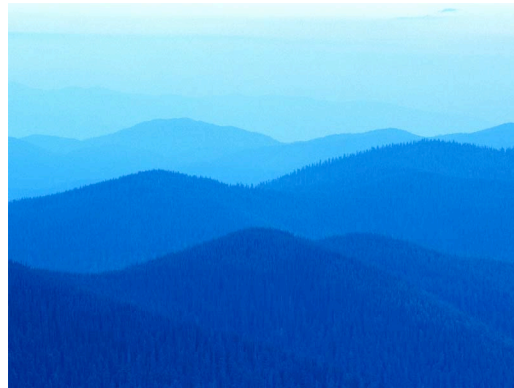


Teacher Training Packet for Spirit Play

Adapted by Kimberly Wootan



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The Value of Breathing Exercises

By controlling our breathing, we can control chemical balances in our blood that prepare the body for heightened or diminished activity. When we breathe in less – slower or shallower inhalations – there is a decrease in the supply of oxygen and an increase in carbon dioxide. Thus, the activities of the nerves and the brain slow down, and the body is geared for rest and relaxation.

The exercises given here are planned for children from three to eight years of age. They are meant to bring about a moderate sense of relaxation and self-awareness and to maintain that level rather than to aim toward deeper trancelike, meditative states. The operating principle is to begin with a short series of slow, deep breaths followed by a longer sequence of short, shallow breaths. You must take great care not to overdo these exercises with children. Too great an increase of carbon dioxide in the system will result in a reflexive action causing us to inhale deeply – even gasp for breath. This gasping for breath instantly changes the chemical balance in the blood as the oxygen in the blood increases, stimulating the nerves and brain.

Heart Breathe – Techniques for Inner Awareness

Heart breathe is what I call simple meditative experiences for young children. The experiences involve being very quiet, listening to the inner self, and becoming aware of the heart beat and the breathing rhythm. Some heart breathe exercises are breathing experiences. Some are listening experiences. And some are a combination of controlled breathing and listening. All should be done with children seated. Aside from the tranquility to which the exercises themselves can lead, when children become aware of their own inner body functions they tend to develop a greater sensitivity to others. Experiences which help persons to become more sensitive to each other give hope to the possibility of a future I which there is deeper understanding, and thus less stress, between all living beings.

▷ Heart Breathe Number One Have the children find comfortable places to sit and say: “While I count to three, I want you to take a very deep breath and fill your entire body with air. Try to get the air into all the parts of your body. Then hold your breath until I count back to one again. While I count backward, I want you to let all the air out slowly. After we do that three times, we’ll do the same thing except that I’ll count to two very quickly, and you will take very short breaths. Get ready now. One, two, three. Breathe the air into all parts of your body and hold it. Now, three, two, one. All the air is out.

Again

One, two three. Hold your breath now. (Pause) Now, three, two one. All the air is out.

Now we will take little breaths.

One, two

One, two

One, two (Repeat six more times)

Now we will take one more deep breath.

One, two, three. Hold it. (Pause) Now, three, two, one. All the air is again out of your body.

Now we will take little breaths again.

One, two; two, one (Repeat twelve times)

(Pause)

Now, just listen quietly to your own breathing, and just let yourself float around inside of yourself right there where you are sitting. Keep your eyes closed and listen to your own heart beat and your own breathing.

▷ Heart Breathe Number Two Do Heart Breathe Number one, and while the children are still seated, say “Now, just listen quietly to your own breathing while I tell you a story. Keep your eyes gently closed. Let your eyes look

DEVELOPING INNER AWARENESS (Good meditation for class)

“Let’s be very quiet and try to listen to sounds coming from outside the room”

I had gathered a small group of children around me and had asked each one to find a comfortable spot to sit down. I told them we were going to look for our own quiet, and that it might be easier to find it if our eyes were closed. After approximately one minute, I said:

“I closed the door and the windows. Now, let us listen only to the sounds coming from inside the room (Pause.) Try to figure out what those sounds are. Don’t tell me about them. Just think about them to yourself.” (Pause)

“ Now (quietly) this is very hard. Put away all of the sounds that you heard from outside the room. (Pause) Did you do that? (Pause) Now put away all of the sounds that you hear inside the room. (Pause) Have you put all those sounds away? (Pause.) Now, (in a hushed tone) close your eyes. Make yourself very loose and still. I’ll count to three and then we can all listen to our own quiet (Pause) One (Pause.) Two. (Pause) Three.” (Pause Wait at least two minutes)

“Now I’m going to ask you to open your eyes very, very slowly. (Pause) Look around at all your friends. Feel good inside of yourself. (Pause)”

After this initial experience, I could intrude on a noisy, restless group and simply say, “Let’s close our eyes and listen to our own quiet.” Within two or three minutes, the entire group would become relaxed and refreshed.

Supporting the Response Time: Wondering

Why we wonder together:

- The wondering as a group deepens the story in the lives of the children and stimulates the creative process.
- It helps us clarify our identity as Unitarian Universalists.
- Because of the deliberately open-ended nature of the wondering questions, children will continue to wonder about the lesson for many days after they first hear it.

The Storytellers' role during group wondering:

- Signal with your body that the story is over and just sit for a moment...allowing the story to be.
- Begin to wonder. Remember...silence is not a bad thing! Silence reminds us of the unspoken mystery.
- Model how you find your own meaning. (Examples: "I hadn't thought of that." "I wonder about that too." "Hmmm.")
- Affirm each response from the children – good open-ended affirmations from you like, "Hmmm," or "I wonder if it could be.." or "I wonder..."
- Good replies to negative responses like "I hate this story!" or "I don't like that part": "There is something about this you don't like," or "I can see this is hard for you."
- If the children disagree with one another you could say: "But he (or she) thinks something different."
- Remember that the story's meaning is deeply personal. The teachers do not give a story its meaning; the individual child discovers it.
- What are some ways that we might shut down wondering?

Beyond Rainbows and Crosses Ways to Encourage Deeper Art responses in Spirit Play

Use wondering questions as a springboard

One of the purposes of wondering after the lesson is as an entry into the response time. Remind students who have trouble deciding what to make or do that wondering questions can show them the way. Everyone processes what they hear and see at a different rate. Some learners have little to say during the wondering time because they are still forming impressions of the lesson. Try restating the wondering questions to individual students who are having difficulty deciding on an art response. Or ask the student privately if she can remember anything particularly interesting that was said by others during the group wondering.

Sprinkle in some suggestions when introducing the response time

Showing specific examples of completed art projects may inhibit creativity because some children feel they should please the teacher by duplicating the example. Nevertheless, verbal suggestions about ideas that might be pursued as an art response can sometimes be helpful for children whose imaginations need a nudge.

Lessons that use two-dimensional materials can provide natural inspirations for art response activities. The Gift of Creation, The Advent Cycle, The Glorious Impossible, and The Faces of the Journey are lessons that particularly lend themselves to meaningful recreation of lesson materials during response time. For example, after telling the Days of Creation story, when the wondering has drawn to a close, you may want to say, "What would you like your activity to be today? You may want to draw or paint a picture of how this story made you feel. You may decide to make your own set of creation cards. You might want to use magazine pictures of the sun and the water and the green growing things, or fold origami figures for each card. You may want to make your own pup-up book about all seven days. There is so much you can do, but only you can decide."

Art Response Ideas for the Older Child

1. Sculpey or other clay that will harden when baked.
2. Tubes of acrylic paint for painting clay creations
3. Journals for writing and sketching
4. Markers of all sizes and colors, remember to find multicultural colors
5. Poster paints in cups with lids for easel painting with various size brushes
6. Clay tools (demonstrate their use.)
7. Watercolors, small brushes and watercolor paper
8. Wooden eggs to paint for Egg Lesson

9. Mosaic tiles and appropriate backing and glue
10. Wood scraps, carpenter's wood glue, popsicle sticks
11. Glue sticks
12. Tissue paper of all colors
13. Stained glass scraps, chain, glue for glass, small clear glass
14. Felt and fabric scraps with white glue
15. Colored pencils (keep sharpened), charcoal pencils, nice pens
16. Rubbings-Celtic ones available through Printery House Catalog
17. Decorate candles, can be used in church, colored was from Hearthsong
18. Foam core, poster board for building

Responsibilities of the Greeter

- Get milk crate from the RE Closet in the Parsonage (2nd floor)
- Check out the art supplies and shelves then restock if necessary.
- Get out the clipboard, review any notes, and prepare to greet the children. Make nametags for children.
- Slow down the children as they come into the room. Help them to “get ready.” Close the door when it is time. Be ready to work with latecomers and children who come to you from the circle.
- When children choose their activity, listen so you can help them help themselves to get out their own work.
- Help the children help themselves to put the work away and help the children get ready who are going to serve the feast.
- Sit with the children during the feast.
- Greet parents and call the names of children who are ready to leave.
- If a child starts to the door without saying good-bye to the storyteller, remind him/her to say good-bye.
- When all the children have gone, check the art supplies and shelves, straightening as necessary. Return feast supplies to the kitchen upstairs.
- This is an important step for the next class! Discuss the class as a whole with your co-teacher/story teller. Fill out weekly sheet.

Thank you so very much!

STORYTELLER ~ GETTING READY

PRACTICING

- Your goal is to make the story your own
- Choose a lesson you love or are familiar with
- Begin by reading through the script
- Use the lesson materials or substitutes so you learn the story with your body.
- Practice with cue cards. Highlight key words. As you practice without notes, use the cards when you forget.
- Audio tape yourself and listen to the story over and over.
- Practice in front of a mirror and watch the movements
- Practice telling the story to a safe audience.

DEVELOPING YOUR STYLE

- Be patient with yourself, it takes time
- You have your own unique style
- The story belongs to all people and the children need to know that.
- Just do it.

MAKING MISTAKES

- It happens
- Just keep doing
- Make a choice leave it or correct it when you can
- Use them to learn.

THE ART OF MANAGING THE CIRCLE

Becki Stewart

GETTING READY

- Make the story your own
- Ready yourself on the inside (be calm, confident, patient w/the process)
- Prepare the lesson materials and the room. The environment is an unspoken lesson
- Be clear about your role/duties. Communicate with the other teacher
- MODEL how to enter the language
- SHOW your love of the language
- RESPECT the power of the language, the presence of The Spirit, and the relationship with the Holy One.

MAKING THE CIRCLE

- Begin at the threshold. Help the children get ready BEFORE they enter the room.
- Greet and seat each child individually
- Help the children make a circle, “Let’s make our circle big enough so everyone can see” “Would you be the anchor today?” “Do you remember how to get ready?”
- Model the ready position (legs folded & hands on lap or on knees)
- Check to see if the whole circle is ready.

SET THE TONE WITH RITUAL

- Informal greeting/visiting as the children enter.
- Greet one another formally, “The Lord be with you. And also with you.”
- Change the calendar; remember where you are in the church year.

5 Responses to Disruptions in the Circle

Goal: To maintain the community of children in the circle and present an atmosphere of safety and consistency. Children will test to see if the teacher is truly in charge. (Think of yourself as a substitute teacher for the first few weeks.)

First Level:

- Both teachers deepen their concentration on the story materials. Check: are you deeply involved?
- Change the tone of your voice to a whisper
- Pause unexpectedly.
- Point to the story materials or move figures with emphasis to refocus wiggly children.
- Do not look up and acknowledge a fidgeting child-this often reinforces the attention-getting behavior
- Lean into the materials on the underlay and examine the materials carefully, hold up close to your eyes.

Second Level:

- Briefly and nonchalantly look up from the lesson (at no one child in particular) and say to everyone, “We need to get ready again. Watch. This is how we get ready.”
- Show children how your legs are crossed and hands resting on your ankles.
- Acknowledge those children who are ready, “I see that Jonas is ready, and Sara, and .”
- “We have all the time we need to get ready”
- You can even sit back away from the story “oh, we still are not ready. It’s hard to begin when we are not all ready.”

Third Level:

- It is important to continue to keep your voice neutral and not react strongly, or engage in excess talking. Try not to make the child the center of attention!
- Storyteller again stops and looks up, this time directly at the disruptive child, “, that is not fair. All the others are ready and waiting for the story. You need to be ready, too. Let us try again. Good, that’s the way.”
- I sometimes direct a wiggly child to switch to a different place in the circle to separate from other wiggly neighbors.

- The doorkeeper may sit in the circle and remain silent. Even though you would like to assist the storyteller and child in the circle. Nita Penfold suggests that this adds another disruption to the circle, and should be avoided.

Fourth Level:

- Ask the child to go SLOWLY across the room and to carefully sit by the doorkeeper. Avoid engaging in reasoning or explaining with the child.
- it will be easier for you to be ready if you sit over by the doorkeeper. Please stand up, walk slowly to where the doorkeeper is, and sit down. Find a place where you can see and hear.”
- Continue using a neutral voice without charging your words. This manner communicates your confidence and allows the child to save face and not feel punished.
- If the child refuses, you must move decisively to Level 5, which is the last card that you would like to use. I attempt to keep the child in the circle until I feel that the disruption is affecting the other children’s ability to be ready.

Fifth Level:

- The storyteller will then say “It’s time for you to go over to sit with the doorkeeper now, S/he will help you to get ready. I will start the story and you can listen from there.”
- It is ideal if the child can walk independently to the door, as this makes them in charge of themselves rather than being overpowered by you. However, you may have to offer help. I prefer to have the doorkeeper help the child walk over to the door rather than the storyteller, as then the “anchor” in the circle is lost. Nita disagrees, but you can try both and see which works best for you and your group.
- The storyteller can then take a few deep, cleansing breaths (and can lead the children in this too) and then start again.
- Make sure that the child with the doorkeeper can truly see and hear the story, which might mean moving the doorkeeper’s chair in toward the circle a bit. Once I know the group, I might invite the child back into the circle at a natural break in

the story (like before the wondering questions). This is a judgment call on the part of the storyteller, and it requires a lot of concentration to assess while you are in the midst of the story circle.

- As you dismiss the children to activity time, be sure to ask the child at the door what they would like to choose for their project today as you go around the circle. This brings them back into the community. You then try to sit with this child at some point during the activity time to re-establish a caring relationship and communicate interest in their project.
- During the feast, give this child some extra reinforcement for their positive participation. They might even enjoy being a feast helper

MANAGING THE CIRCLE TOGETHER

Managing the Circle or classroom management is one of the essential elements in the success of the Spirit Play Session. It is a subtle thing and one that takes time to develop. Since each child is different and the make-up of each class varies from week to week, year to year the use of these skills takes time to develop. Be patient with yourself. Perfecting the tools and skills takes time, but it is well worth the effort.

STORYTELLER & DOORPERSON

There are two adults in the Spirit Play room both are of equal importance. The Storyteller and Doorperson provide the invisible support system which enables children to explore all the possibilities in a Spirit Play session and room. Together they make everything ready the room, material, and time for the children to come close to the Mystery. These two skilled adults, working closely together, nurture the community of children, guiding them as a group and as individuals.

The Doorperson sets the stage for all that takes place in the spirit Play time. They handle the critical entering time by greeting each child before they enter the room. Making sure that the child is ready for the Spirit Play experience is crucial to the success of the time spent together. If the child is not quite ready or needs help, separating from a parent the Doorperson facilitates the process with a gentle, but firm manner. Checking the activity materials and teaching the children how to use the materials properly is another part of this job. He/she arranges the set up and distribution of the feast by the children. Managing the end of the class departing is also a crucial role of the Doorperson Finally, the Doorperson serves as a safe, neutral place/person for those who are not ready or able to join the circle or community.

The Storyteller presents the lesson and manages the circle. He/she checks the story materials to be given that day and reviews the shelves quickly to make sure all the lessons are in their proper place. S/he is also a timekeeper. The Storyteller sets the pace and cues the children when to move from one part of the session to the next. The actual management of the circle is the responsibility of the Storyteller. S/he controls the formation, entering and leaving the Circle, as well as handling any disruptions within the Circle.

The Doorperson and Storyteller serve as co-teachers in the spirit Play classroom. There are two adults for a good reason. The Doorperson provides a good beginning to the day, helping children be ready. S/he manages the response time ensuring that the children are able to begin to work effortlessly and use all the materials appropriately and with ease. The Doorperson helps children take responsibility for the feast and clean-up. Most importantly, the child who is not ready always has a person who can gently and lovingly provide one-on-one support. The Storyteller tells the story and artfully shows the use of the lesson materials. S/he shows how to enter the story. The Storyteller keeps control of the Circle, managing the flow of time and the behavior of the children. The firm, gentle manner of the Storyteller provides a clear message that the Spirit Play classroom is a safe place to be where important work takes place.

THE LESSON Are you ready? Keeping Control

- Check your own attitude calm confident
- Make sure each child and the Doorperson are ready. Check the circle as a whole
- Have clear expectations of behavior, consequences, and procedures.
- Know the children and the lesson
- Establish and maintain boundaries. Use language that is appropriate and respectful to the children. “Be ready.” Only you can get yourself ready. Walk around his space. What lesson are you telling in the desert box? When I tell the lesson, I move the pieces. Later it can be your activity.
- VOICE find and develop your own style. Be patient with yourself.
- Show the children the act of making meaning (process/journey)
- Invite the children to enter the language.
- Model how you find your own meaning (“I hadn’t thought of that.” “I wonder about that too.” “Hmmm”)
- Show how you value this language, time, and space.
- Remember, the story’s meaning is deeply personal. Each individual discovers it.

DISRUPTIONS

- Consider the individual. Look for motive and consider the circumstances.
- Provide the boundaries, but realize some children will test these limits. Work hard to provide a SAFE place to explore and discover faith and meaning.
- Teaching The Godly Play by Jerome Berryman offers a five step sequence for handling disruptions. Briefly summarized they are:
 1. Check your own involvement. Ignore the “small stuff.”
 2. Look up briefly. Pause and break from the story . Address the whole group, “We need to get ready again.” Emphasize expected behavior. Help the child into the community.

3. Specifically direct comments to the child, “No, that’s not fair. Look at all the other children. You need to be ready too.” Use a neutral tone of voice.
4. Ask the child to get up and go sit by the door person. “ , please get up now and go find a place near the doorperson where you can still hear the story.”
5. Tell the child, “It’s time to go now.” “May I help you or can you go by yourself?” The goal here is to get the child to go under her/his own power.

ACTIVITY TIME

- Teachers are in control of this time. Boundaries apply to activity do during the lesson. Make this time as orderly as possible, using a routine and organized environment.
- Dismiss children one at a time to do their work.
- Children may want to hear the so try again or wish to work with another lesson. They may choose a different story only if they have heard it before. Encourage them to ask someone else to tell them the story. They may also choose to “work on themselves” or take care of the things in the room. Both are important and appropriate work.
- The Doorperson assists the child to find, gather, and use materials appropriately.
- Some days you may not have adequate time for an activity and you may decide to go directly to the feast from the lesson. Schedule a Activity Day in the coming weeks when no lesson is presented.
- The Doorkeeper calls the children back to the circle for the feast. “It is time to put away your work. We have plenty of time, but you need to stop now and clean up your place. When you’ve done that, please come to the circle for the feast.”
- Children replace all materials/lessons in their proper place. “We need to make it ready for the next person to use.”

FEAST TIME

- Doorperson chooses feast helpers
- Storyteller centers the circle (encouraging others as they finish cleaning up.)

CLOSURE

- Doorperson watches for parents to arrive and calls each child (one at a time) to say good-bye to the Storyteller.
- The Storyteller says good-bye. This time is critical to building a trusting relationship with the child. Support and value that child each and every time you are together.
- Children say good-by to the Doorkeeper.

FINISHING THE DAY

- If possible reflect upon the time spent with the children. Talk with the other teacher about the class that day.
- Clean & straighten the room for the next Spirit Play Class.