



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

MINDFUL SEEING FOR ELEMENTARY STUDENTS

"Curiosity is the thirst of the soul."

—Samuel Johnson

OVERVIEW

A mindfulness practice in which students develop their ability to focus by closely observing the shape and contours of a small rock.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily, for at least one week or longer
- At the start of a school day, during a transition between classes, to close a class
- When you would like your students to practice skills of observation and attention
- To introduce a science lesson, as relevant

TIME REQUIRED

- 10-15 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK-Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- A rock or a stone—one per student

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice focusing their attention on an object

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practices Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Spend a couple of minutes at home or during a break in the school day to focus your attention on a small object like a stone, a leaf, or a shell. Take time to observe its color/s, shape, lines, and patterns.
- What do you notice about this object when you take the time to really focus on it?
- How did respond to this exercise? What do you notice in yourself as you practice "seeing"?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

Before leading this practice, find a small rock or stone for children to use as a "focus rock." (You can make a fun outing of going on a walk to find a special rock!)

[For the audio file, [click here](#)]

For this exercise, we're going to pay attention to seeing.

We'll pay attention to what it's like to look very closely at something, noticing all the details of what we see right now in this moment.

Before we begin, make sure you have a small rock or stone ready to use for this activity.

And we'll call it our focus rock.

Now let's begin.

Sit on the floor with your legs crossed, or you can sit in a chair if that's more comfortable.

*Place your focus rock on the floor in front of you—a little ways from your body—about two feet away.
Rest your hands gently on your knees and sit up tall like a mountain, but keep your neck and shoulders relaxed.
Feel your feet touching the floor.
Feel your legs touching the floor or the chair.
Feel your hands touching your legs.
Feel your back tall and strong.
Let's start with our eyes closed (if that's comfortable for you—or feel free to gaze downward).
Close your eyes, and just notice what it feels like to breathe in and out right now in this moment.*

[PAUSE for 10 seconds]

*Now open your eyes and look at your focus rock.
What does it look like?
Do you see spots or lines?
You might notice the shape of it—or the outline.
You might notice its color.
Or you might notice it's not just one color, but has different colors.
Sometimes when you look at something very closely, you notice new things about it that you never noticed before.
And they might change too ... the longer you look.
That's all natural and normal and part of the experience of mindfulness.
So, keep looking at your focus rock.
Make sure your body is still tall like a mountain and also relaxed.
Relax your shoulders and your neck.
And now I'm going to be quiet for a moment, so we can be very still together and just look at our focus rocks for a little bit longer.
I'll ring the bell, and we'll look at our focus rocks together for about thirty seconds.
And then I'll ring the bell when it's time to stop.*

[PAUSE for 30 seconds]

*You've probably never looked this closely at a rock before, right?
We see rocks all the time, every day, but I bet you almost never notice all the little details like we did today.*

*Let's finish by taking big breath in and reaching our hands up to the sky.
And breathe out and place your hands back on your legs again.
If you enjoyed that, you can come back later and look at your focus rock again.
Or you can try mindful seeing with a leaf, a shell, or another object if you want to.
Thanks for sitting and practicing mindfulness with me today.
It was fun looking at our focus rocks together.*

CLOSURE

- Ask students:
 - *What was it like to spend a few minutes focusing on your rock? What did you notice while you observed your rock? Did you see something new? Did you view your rock differently?*

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Where might you try it again? When might it be most well-received?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

While research on the effects of mindfulness on children is still in the early stages, a [2016 review of 12 studies](#) suggests some promising outcomes for young children relative to attention, self-regulation, and motor skills.

A [2014 meta-analysis](#) that focuses on 24 studies of K-12 students demonstrated changes in students' attention and resilience to stress, including positive emotions, self-esteem, and self-concept. Apart from affecting student well-being, some research studies suggest that mindfulness practices can also foster [curiosity and learning](#).

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many mindfulness practices involve turning inward to observe thoughts, breath patterns, and body sensations. However, mindful seeing, as an alternative, prompts students to turn outward and engage with their world. In this case, students are practicing being fully present to what is right in front of them.

Children may benefit from mindful seeing because this practice asks them to focus on one thing and notice all of its facets and details—a skill that may ultimately improve their [executive function](#) (e.g., attention, self-control, memory) and [academic achievement](#).

SOURCE

[Annaka Harris](#) and [Waking Up](#)