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Small  
steps  
in  
teaching  
children  
how  
to  
be  
silent  
and  
still  
for  
Prayer

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# Notes for Teachers about explicit teaching about Silence and Stillness

Plan for times of silence throughout the day and set up clear guidelines and expectations. Look at embedding these times in to the day at the beginning and ending of the day; before and after breaks and at transition times between lessons or classes.

Establish with the class what silence will look like, sound like and feel like. Create a class Y chart and add to this or change it as the practice continues over time. Talk about the fact that there will always be noise but that we can't change this and we have to find silence within ourselves. Set up for success e.g. move our chairs back from the table or desk and place our hands either on our tables or on our knees.

Negotiate this with the class and talk to students about the possible benefits of silence and stillness.

Make sure that students know how long the silence will last.

Begin with 10 seconds and gradually increase the times for silence.

Give strategies to assist students to enter into the silence e.g. Relaxation of the body or simple breathing exercises.

Teach about silence as a positive experience and as something we need to do.

This may be as simple as putting heads on desks and closing eyes and resting.

## Lighting a Prayer Candle

Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor, back straight and hands resting.

We are going to take some time to be very still and quiet.

As we sit here quietly, watch as I light the prayer candle ... (Pause)

Why do we light a candle when we pray? ...

Look at the flame of the candle as it flickers ...

Watch the flame grow and move ...

Close your eyes gently and think about how much God loves you ...

Notice your breath going in and out of your body... in, out, in, out.

**Note to teacher: (Give them some time. Suggest they count 1 on the in breath and 2 on the out breath and keep going till they get to 10)**

Open your eyes and let us watch as the candle is put out (Use a candle snuffer) .....

Watch the smoke rise until you can't see it anymore. It is like our prayers going up and out to God.

Let us say together Amen ... AMEN!

## Listening Exercise

(You might like to use the following words)

Let us be silent ...

Let us be still ...

Let us remember that God loves us.

Sit up tall and make sure you can feel your back resting against your chair.

Place your feet on the floor and let them feel the floor. Look down at them and see how still they are.

Rest your hands gently in your lap or on your knees or on the table in front of you.

Close your eyes gently.

Listen to the sounds outside the room (15 seconds)

Listen to the sounds inside the room (15 seconds)

After I count to 3 slowly open your eyes.

Tell me one of the sounds you heard outside.

Tell me one of the sounds you heard inside.

Let us say together: Thank you God.

## **Breathing Exercise**

(The following words are a guide.)

Let us place ourselves in the presence of our Loving God ...

Sit your back resting against your chair.

Put your feet on the floor and let them feel the floor.

Rest your hands gently in your lap. You may like to rest them on your knees.

Close your eyes.

Listen to the sounds outside the room (15 seconds)

Listen to the sounds inside the room (15 seconds)

Listen to your breathing ...

Notice the gentle rise and fall of your chest as you breathe in and out (30 seconds)

Breathe in...

Breathe out ...

Breathe in ...

Breathe out ...

Listen to the sounds outside the room (15 seconds)

Listen to the sounds inside the room (15 seconds)

After I count slowly to 3, open your eyes gently.

Let us thank God for our breath.

## Closing Eyes

In this quiet/prayer time, we are going to begin by closing our eyes.

Show me what it looks like when your eyes are wide open....

Show me what it looks like when your eyes are all scrunched up....

And now, let me see what it looks like when your eyes are gently closed.

When our eyes are closed, our eye-lids are resting and covering our eyes. We can still see: our eyes are looking at the back of our eyelids and everything appears quite dark.

**(Note to Teacher:** Always remember to invite children to close their eyes... it is difficult for some children to do this.)

If you find it hard to keep your eyes closed, just look down and keep your eyes on your hands. In this way, everyone can be still and silent and not be distracted.

Let us close our eyes while I count to 10.

How did that make you feel? (Allow for any feedback)

Let's see if we can now close our eyes while I count to twenty.

Each time we do this we will get better at being silent and still and knowing God is with us.

(Begin slowly and practice closing eyes each day gradually increasing the time ... Choose a time that you know will be achievable and age appropriate to begin with e.g. 10 seconds.)Set clear expectations. If they choose to keep eyes open they must agree to respect the right of others to close eyes and not disturb them. It may be a matter of where they sit so that they are not a distraction. Another strategy would be to have an object to look at.)

## Stilling the Body or Body Scan

Let's think about being in charge of our body and teach different parts of our body how to be still.

- We begin with our toes. Wiggle your toes five times.

**Then tell your toes to be still!**

- Now think of your heels. Lift them off the ground two times, keeping your toes on the ground.

**Then tell your heels to be still!**

- Move up to your knees. Wiggle them sideways five times, keeping your feet still.

**Then tell your knees to be still!**

- Think of your stomach. Suck it in and let it out two times.

**Then tell your stomach to be still!**

- Move to your shoulders. Roll your shoulders a few times, keeping the rest of your body still.

**Then tell your shoulders to be still!**

- Think of your hands and fingers. Wiggle your fingers and hands five times.

**Then tell your fingers and hands to be still!**

- Keeping the rest of your body still, slowly move your neck and head from side to side.

**Then tell your head and neck to be still!**

- Think of your nose. Wiggle it from side to side.

**Then tell your nose to be still!**

- Move to your eyes. Flutter them up and down quickly.

**Then tell your eyes to be still!**

- Now, all the parts of your body are still.  
For how long can you keep them all still? Let us see if you can keep your body still while I count to 10/20.30 etc. Let us say thank you to God for our bodies.

# Breathing Exercise

Close your eyes and let your body come to a quietness and stillness.

Listen to your breathing.

Breathe in slowly....

Breathe out slowly. .... (Repeat 3 or 4 times)

Let us take time to think about peace.....

On your in breath, breathe in peace.....

On your out breath, breathe out peace..... (Repeat 3 or 4 times)

Think about a time when you have felt peace.

Breathe in the peace of the trees outside.....

Breathe out peace.....

Breathe in the peace of this room.....

Breathe out peace.....

Imagine yourself totally surrounded by peace e.g slowly wrap yourself in a blanket of peace)

Count in your mind slowly from 5 to 1 and when you are ready, open your eyes.



## Breathing Exercise / Visualisation

Let us take time to be still...

Close your eyes and become aware of your body sitting on the floor/chair.

Feel the ground under your feet and the air touching your nostrils.

Be aware of your nostrils breathing in air.

Listen to the gentle sound of your breathing.

Breathe in slowly...

Breathe out slowly...take a deep breath in and then let it out.

Keep your eyes closed to help you see the following...

Imagine an eagle gliding through the air... (pause)

Imagine the sails of a boat being blown in the wind... (pause)

See the clouds moving quickly across the sky... (pause)

See yourself flying the most colourful kite on a windy day... (pause)

Feel the breeze on your face as you walk on the beach/ up a hill/ in a park... (pause)

Listen to your breathing.

Slowly open your eyes....

## Listening and Stilling

We are going to take time to be still..... Prayer Bell

We will gently close our lips and be silent ..... Prayer Bell

Let us listen to our prayer bell calling us to be silent and still.

Let us listen to God. (Give them time to listen) Prayer Bell

And we all say AMEN (Students echo Amen)

## A Litany

At the end of each of these prayers in a Litany of Thanks, we will respond with ***Thank you God*** and then hear the prayer bell.

For our family and friends.....We thank you God

**ALL: Thank you God**      Prayer Bell

For another new day....We thank you God

**ALL: Thank you God**      Prayer Bell

For learning and imagining .....We thank you God

**ALL: Thank you God**      Prayer Bell

For work and play.....We thank you God

**ALL: Thank you God**      Prayer Bell

## A Blessing

May God bless us and keep us Prayer Bell

May the face of God shine on us and be gracious to us Prayer Bell

May we be blessed with God's Peace: the God we name as Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Prayer Bell

## Listening to music

An easy way to help students relax and soothe the soul is to listen to music. Music that is calming and reflective can help us escape from the busyness and noise of life. You could use “relaxation music” as well as classical music or music which is reflective of the sounds of nature e.g. birdsong, rainforest, water. Practise centred breathing in time with the music.

(Music that excites, stirs or over stimulates is not the best for this purpose.)

As well as listening, students could be given the opportunity to sketch, write words, feelings, emotions and response during or after listening to the music. DVDs that combine images with music could be used e.g., The ABC series *SWOON* or Download the App *Pandora* and create your own music stations of appropriate music.

Music Lectio: (For older students and adults)

Here is a four step process using the Listening technique associated with Lectio Divina applied to music: The original text can be found at the [Abbey of the Arts](#)

### Preparation

Prepare for your lectio prayer by finding a quiet place and take some time to settle yourself into stillness and rest in silence. Breathe deeply and be present to your body. Become aware of the sacredness of this time you have set aside to be present to God.

### First Hearing

The first moment in lectio is reading God’s word. As in praying with icons, we are dealing with an entirely different kind of sacred “text.” Play the piece of music once to enter into its landscape. Notice the sounds of the notes and silences between them, rest into the movement of the music. Be present to how it rises and falls in your body and imagination. Allow the music to fill you, breathing it in. Slowly become aware if there is a dominant sound or image or feeling that is calling to you in this initial experience. Rest with that image or feeling, taking it in and being fully present to it

## **Second Hearing**

Play the music a second time. This time while listening allow the sound or image or feeling that first called to you to draw you more deeply into the experience of it. Allow it to unfold in your imagination and notice what memories, feelings, images or other sounds are evoked. Notice how the experience of listening to the music touches you and how you might express that touch. Hold the awareness of how the music is flowing through you and what is being evoked.

## **Third Hearing**

Play the music a third time. This time focus on how your heart wants to respond to being touched. What is the invitation present in the unfolding of sounds, images, memories, and feelings for you today? How is God speaking to your life in this moment through this music? What is the “yes” within you that is longing to be expressed? If you feel comfortable, take a moment to express with your voice what you are experiencing in your body. It might be a simple sound or a line from a song or something you have created in the moment.

## **Resting with God**

Spend some time resting in silence and releasing the sounds, feelings, and images that are stirring in you. Close your eyes for a few minutes and rest in the stillness in simple awareness of God’s presence. Allow yourself some time to simply *be*.

## **Closing**

When you have come to the end of your prayer time you may want to play the music again and just experience it anew from the other side of the *lectio* time. Notice if anything else stirs in you and offer a prayer of thanks for the gift of this time and for God’s presence in beauty and stillness.

## Setting up for Meditation

- Play quiet relaxing music prior to meditation as a signal for stillness and silence.
- Close door.
- Turn off lights.
- Take phone off hook.
- Put out sign “Please do not disturb. We are meditating”
- Set up the space e.g. the floor or desks.

*Students at desks need to remove everything off desk – they could roll out individual prayer mats (bamboo placemats cut in half and perhaps a rock or the word Maranatha MA RA NA THA on a coloured /laminated piece of card.)*

*Move chair back from desk when meditation begins.*

*If students are sitting on the floor, it is important to plan this to set up for success. They could sit around a circular prayer mat and have set places to be...*

- Watch as candle is lit...
- Listen for the invitation: “Let us begin the work of Meditation”
- Close Eyes
- Listen for the chime to begin and end the time of stillness and silence.

# Teaching a Mantra

Make cards with the mantra on it ... **MA RA NA THA**

Talk to students about what a mantra is ... a simple word or phrase that is repeated over and over in the mind.

Explain about the story of this word ... teach about it. It is an Aramaic word, the language spoken by Jesus and it means *Come Lord*. It is a very sacred word. For meditation we break this word up into 4 syllables/parts. Show students this word and what it looks like.

Repeat the mantra after teacher.

Vocalise the mantra. Say the word out loud and when teacher stops the children stop and continue to say it in their minds.

Say it 5 times for a week and then increase to 10.

Teach about how to put words/ images into your mind. We do this sometimes with songs.

Clap softly while saying the mantra – close your eyes gently and keep saying it until you hear the chime.

Chant the mantra.

Sing the mantra.