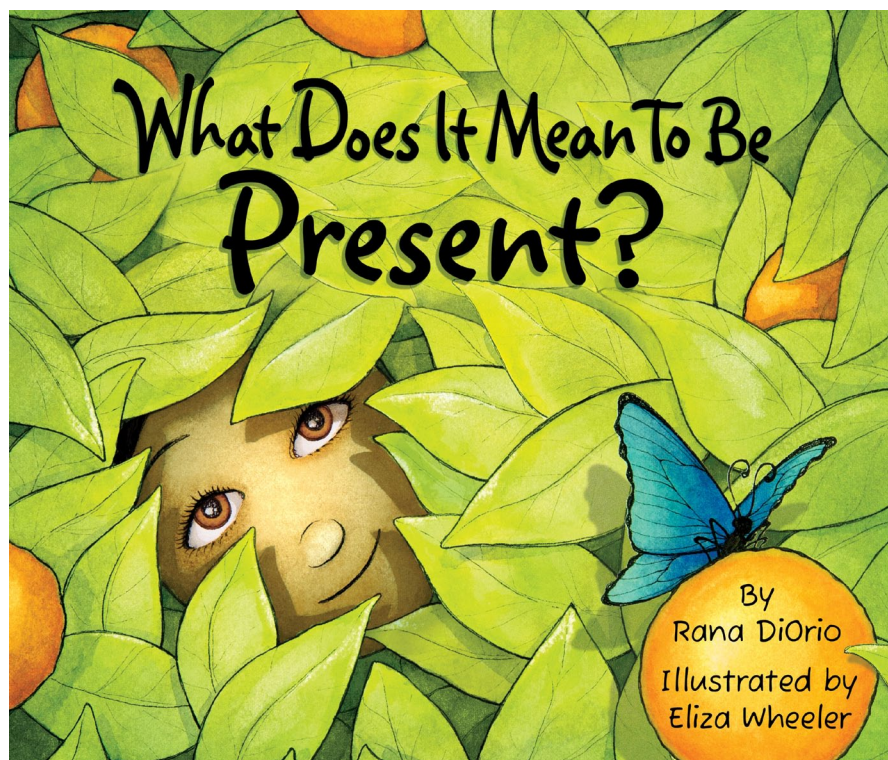


Little Pickle Press



Lesson Plans for Teachers **Kindergarten - Grade 3**

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Overview

In *What Does It Mean To Be Present?*, author Rana DiOrio shares diverse opportunities through which children can think and act consciously in the present moment. In a lighthearted way, the book begins with several examples of what being present is NOT.

From there the book addresses more serious topics and offers a springboard for teachers to develop children's exploration of what it means to be "present," including making mindful choices to:

- Be more aware of others, and their needs, through listening and observation
- Patiently focus on what is happening in the moment
- Enjoy the opportunities that new experiences provide
- Persevere through difficult times as a way to learn and grow
- Express gratitude for the joy that others bring to our lives
- Pause to consider the treasures offered by sensory experiences
- Spread the word about being present

The text provides an entry point for teachers to introduce children to the habits of mind and action that facilitate living in the moment. *What Does It Mean To Be Present?* promotes the essential message that by being mindful of our present thoughts, actions, and surroundings, we can live more fully in each moment.

Classroom activities in this instructional unit encourage children to slow down and consider what they can do to be more mindful of living in the moment each day of their lives. These activities draw on students' experiences as individuals, as well as their experiences as members of a family, a classroom, a school, and a community. Projects transition students from consideration of how to be present internally through how to be present externally, moving from mental awareness to sensory experiences to demonstrations of patience and gratitude. The instructional activities also enable teachers to cultivate children's character development through the pillars of communication, mindfulness, and responsibility.

This unit includes three lesson plans as well as supplemental online resources to augment the more straightforward projects. The design of each plan allows teachers to build and embellish the activities to a level that best suits the needs of their classroom. Each lesson can be taught in class as described, though options for extension and an integrated community project are included.

At each grade level, the lessons align with the Common Core State Standards Initiative for Speaking and Listening (<http://bit.ly/corecurriculumstandards>). The Common Core was recently adopted by the majority of states and is especially pertinent for educators in the United States.

What Does It Mean To Be Present? is a picture book printed on recycled materials using soy inks and is an excellent addition to every school library. Please visit the links at the end of the lesson plans to see all of our products.



Project 1

Being Present through Focus and Awareness



Background

Did you notice the blue butterfly that reappears throughout *What Does It Mean To Be Present?* What does this butterfly make you think of? The simple act of noticing what is occurring in our environment is an easy way to become more present in our daily lives. How does the world around us change as one season passes to the next? What symbols do you see displayed during various holidays? What changes can you observe in a puppy as he grows into a dog? Children and adults may easily overlook these small changes in their present moments. Listening, noticing, and being aware of what is happening in the moment are key strategies that all of us can develop to be more present every day. By focusing on and enjoying the present, we can make more meaningful use of our time.

Objectives

- Students will develop an understanding of how effective communication and awareness of others and of the world around them facilitate living more consciously in the present.
- Students will engage in a series of activities to develop communication and awareness skills that enable them to live more fully in each moment.
- Students will feel empowered to develop a present-focused lifestyle through positive communication and awareness of the time and space in which they live.

Focal Activities

Guiding Questions:

- What does it look/sound like when you talk to your friends? To your family? To your teacher?
- What happens when multiple people start talking at once?
- What does it mean to communicate?
- What makes someone a good listener?
- Why do you think it is important to listen to others?
- Can you communicate without talking? How?
- Why do you think it is important to notice and observe others?



Classroom Activity:

Lead students in a discussion of accepted norms for polite and productive conversation, including listening to others, avoiding interruptions, facing the person to whom you are speaking, making appropriate eye contact, observing other speakers' body language, etc. (See <http://bit.ly/KeAG0I> for communication hints that might be used in this activity. Also note that communication norms may vary widely across students' cultures). Emphasize the importance of maintaining focus within a conversation and noticing the verbal and non-verbal cues that others provide. Students can role-play polite and impolite conversation techniques for the class. Encourage students to provide feedback on which elements of the conversation role-plays were more and less effective. As an extension, design an art project in which students draw or collect images from magazines that depict various types of body language (e.g. happy, angry, stand-offish, in need of help, etc.) and incorporate these pictures into a collage. Students can discuss which conversation strategies they might use to respond to the expressions depicted in their collage.

<http://bit.ly/LJ6VqM>

Extension Activity:

To help students increase their understanding of the passage of time and the importance of being present in the moment, invite them to participate in a series of activities that focus on consideration of the "length" of time: 1) Invite students to draw or write on a simple topic (i.e. what they did on the way to school that morning) for three minutes. You might increase or decrease this time period according to your students' developmental level. Ask students to turn their paper over and stop working after they believe that three minutes have passed; 2) As an alternative, ask students to line up patiently along one wall of the classroom for three minutes. Invite them to return to their seats individually as they believe three minutes have passed (Note: It will be important to cover the classroom clock and watches for this activity to be effective). Once all students have turned over their paper (or returned to their seats), follow the activities with a group discussion:

- What were you concentrating on during that time?
- What made you think three minutes had passed?
- Did the actual three minutes seem long or short to you?
- What else might you be able to do with three minutes (or five, ten, etc.)?
- Is your perception of time influenced by others?
- Did you stop/start when others did, or did you focus on your own idea of time?

You might provide a small prize for students whose perception of time came closest to three minutes.



Comprehensive Community Project:

Help students notice the passage of time and the importance of being aware in the moment by creating a journal or chart to track their activities for one week (See Appendix A for an example). How much time do you think you spend eating, sleeping, playing, bathing, reading, doing chores, learning, etc.? You might have students provide an estimate of time spent at the beginning of the week and then compare it to the actual time they measure. At the end of a week, invite students to share their journals or charts with the class. Identify what activities members of the class spent the most or least time doing. Invite students to consider the quality of how they spend their time and share whether it is easier to stay present when doing something they like or something they don't like (i.e. "Do you daydream about playing baseball when you're helping wash the dishes?").

Character Building Connections

The key character value to cultivate in this project is responsibility. Children can be encouraged to think consciously about how they can develop respectful awareness of others and the world:

- How can I commit to being more focused and aware in the present?
- In what ways can I pledge to be more conscious of how I spend my time?
- How can I show respect by being focused during my interactions with others?

Additional Online Resources

Communication:

- <http://bit.ly/MpnMO3>
- <http://bit.ly/L3jZbt>
- <http://bit.ly/KZJhDe>

Time Management for Kids:

- <http://bit.ly/LGuCN0>

Social Awareness and Observation Skills:

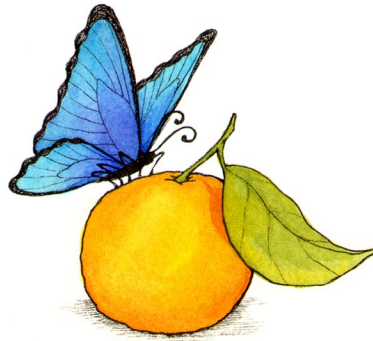
- <http://bit.ly/KdkrUG>
- <http://bit.ly/L622FG>





Project 2

Being Present through Sensory Experiences



Background

Attending to the observations we make through the five senses of sight, smell, sound, taste, and touch provides a central avenue for increasing our ability to be present in day-to-day activities. Being present through our sensory experiences helps cultivate mindfulness, which can be defined as consciousness, attention, observation, and awareness of the environment around us. Using our senses and attending to how our bodies move about in the world can increase our ability to be both mindful and present.

Objectives

- Students will develop an understanding of how attention to the details of their sensory experiences facilitates living more consciously in the present.
- Students will engage in a series of sensory activities and observations that enable them to live more fully in each moment.
- Students will feel empowered to develop a present-focused lifestyle through attentive engagement to the sensory experiences they encounter every day.

Focal Activities

Guiding Questions:

- What are your five senses?
- How do you use your senses on a daily basis?
- Are you aware of when you use your senses?
- What are some things you can do to help yourself relax?
- What are some things you can do to help yourself concentrate?



Classroom Activity:

Develop a classroom demonstration gallery with objects and activities that encourage students to focus on sensory experiences. Some suggestions include a tactile table with objects of different textures (e.g. silk, sand paper, fur, sand, pebbles, liquid, etc.); recordings of various noises for which students can guess the source of each sound; jars of food, plants, perfume, etc. for which students can discuss what smells pleasant or unpleasant and why (See <http://bit.ly/LGv7Xp> for additional ideas on what to include in the demonstration gallery). You might also engage the class in a taste test to help students focus on savoring the food they eat. Present foods with similar textures (e.g. apples and pears, yogurt and pudding, etc.). Ask students to sample the foods while closing their eyes and attempting to differentiate among the various kinds of food presented. As an extension activity, introduce samples of the braille alphabet and explain how people read using diverse sensory mechanisms.

Extension Activity:

Engage students in a series of yoga, breathing, and relaxation activities. A simple relaxation activity could involve having students close their eyes and focus on individual parts of the body one at a time (e.g. toes, legs, arms, fingers, shoulders, neck, head, etc.) by tightening and then relaxing each area. Encourage students to share what they thought about while focused on relaxation and how it made them feel.

Comprehensive Community Project:

Take students on a field trip to a petting zoo, aquarium, science museum, or museum of natural history. These venues offer a wealth of sensory experiences and opportunities for students to touch living things and observe their habitats. You might bring along drawing or writing materials and encourage students to record their sensory observations while on the visit.

Character Building Connections

The key character value to cultivate in this project is mindfulness. Children can be encouraged to acknowledge and wonder about the wealth of sensory experiences in their world:

- What do I notice in my environment when I am conscious of using my eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and hands?
- How do I feel when I am mindful of my experiences in the world?



Additional Online Resources

Mindfulness:

- <http://bit.ly/Juvq6O>
- <http://bit.ly/JAqRg6>
- <http://mindfulkids.wordpress.com/>

Yoga/Meditation/Breathing:

- <http://kidsrelaxation.com/>
- <http://yhoo.it/KILW67>
- <http://bit.ly/LTWyzO>
- <http://bit.ly/KInQIf>



Project 3

Being Present through Patience and Gratitude

Background

Our daily interactions in the world necessitate patience – waiting patiently for our turn in line, waiting patiently for someone to answer the phone when we call, waiting patiently while a pedestrian crosses the road. Patience is not always easy, but it certainly makes our world a happier place, and is one of the key ways we can be both polite and present. Another way to be both polite and present is with gratitude. Gratitude is the art of showing thanks to others and can take many forms, from a simple wave of the hand when someone allows you to pass in front of them to more formal gestures such as personal written letters. Being present through patience and gratitude helps us live each day of our lives more happily.

Objectives

- Students will develop an understanding of how patience, delayed gratification, and gratitude for our experiences facilitate living more consciously in the present.
- Students will engage in a series of activities to develop their facility with patience, delayed gratification, and gratitude so they are able to live more fully in each moment.
- Students will feel empowered to develop a present-focused lifestyle through patience and gratitude for the myriad gifts we receive.





Focal Activities

Guiding Questions:

- What does it mean to be patient?
- Is it easy to be patient?
- Why do you think it might be important to be patient?
- Are you aware of when you are being patient?
- What does it mean to be thankful/demonstrate gratitude?
- Is it easy to be thankful/demonstrate gratitude?
- Why do you think it might be important to be thankful/show gratitude?
- Are you aware of when you are being patient/showing gratitude?

Classroom Activity:

Talk to students about the concept of delayed gratification:

- Does it feel better to receive something right away or to look forward to it and/or earn it over time?
- When you have to wait for something, how does it make you feel?
- How do you feel when someone around you doesn't wait patiently (i.e. pushing or cutting in line)?
- When do you see adults waiting patiently (or not!)?
- How has receiving "things" (even communication) changed over time with the advance of technology?

Lead students in a delayed gratification task, where they can opt to have a smaller reward immediately or a larger reward after waiting for a set period of time. (See the description of the Stanford marshmallow study for additional relevant information: <http://bit.ly/Nftm60>.) You might use intangible rewards such as extended recess, free reading, or free in-class time.

Extension Activity:

Invite students to make a list of things (tangible or intangible) that they already have or still want in their lives. How do the things you have in your life make you feel? Why do you think you want what you don't yet have? How would receiving these things make you feel? Talk to students about the concept of a "gift." Does a gift have to be something you can hold in your hand? Lead students in a discussion about cultivating an attitude of gratitude for all the gifts they have in their lives, no matter how big or small, tangible or intangible. You might provide a short amount of time each day for students to draw or write in a "gratitude journal."



Comprehensive Community Project:

Help students understand how communication represents our primary avenue for expressing gratitude. Explain that gratitude is a demonstration of both manners and appreciation. Encourage students to brainstorm different ways they can express gratitude (e.g. verbally, with a card or note, with a hug). When would you use these different forms of gratitude? Ask students to reflect on people they would like to thank and why their gratitude is important. Invite students to design and deliver thank you cards to one or more of these people. You might also have students in the class collaborate on a thank you poster for a group or organization that has been influential in their learning (This activity pairs nicely with the field trip suggestion in the previous project).

Character Building Connections

The key character value to cultivate in this project is communication. Children can be encouraged to consider how their thoughts and actions affect those around them:

- How does listening to others help improve my communication skills?
- How can I better focus on how and what others say in conversation?
- How can I be more patient when I interact with others?
- How can I best communicate my gratitude for the gifts and resources I have in my life?

Additional Online Resources

Delayed Gratification:

- <http://bit.ly/JNtjRy>

Lessons in Gratitude:

- <http://bit.ly/Ogllw4>
- <http://bit.ly/M8cVM8>

Patience:

- <http://bit.ly/KlOjRjt>



Little Pickle Resources

This concludes our lesson plan for *What Does It Mean To Be Present?*. If you have comments, questions, or other ideas please share them with us at the special blog link we have created:

<http://bit.ly/bloglessonplans>

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- o *Mom's Choice Gold Award 2011*
- o *eLit Silver Award 2012, New Age/Mind-Body-Spirit Category*

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