



## My Body Tells a Story

Curriculum Unit 12.03.05  
by Shaunquetta N. Johnson

### Content Objectives

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#### Introduction

The literacy block of my class schedule is a very long stretch of time. The students are involved in literacy activities from 9:20am until 11:20am. In this block of time, students are involved in whole and small group activities. At the second grade level, students have reading centers in which they take part in reading alone, reading with a buddy or small guided groups to reinforce comprehension and fluency skills. I observe my students becoming restless with the reading activities. They begin to get distracted by what other students are doing. Some will get "off task" and bother others with conversation and jokes. Others will begin moving around the classroom or in the space they are occupying which often times lead them to invade other students' space.

The book, *The ABC of Yoga*, inspired me to teach kids about health and fitness in a fun but yet educational way. This book also reinforces letter recognition that can develop into phonics and storytelling lessons. Yoga is a technique that enhances concentration, positive social behavior, self-discipline, and coordination while promoting mental and physical health. I thought yoga would be a great technique to teach young children because it's a tool and exercise they can use in adulthood. Yoga is a great way to incorporate physical fitness, social and emotional development, and cognitive skills across the curriculum. Yoga can benefit students by providing more exercise as a supplement to gym class that meets typically twice a week. Additionally, yoga can give students a well-deserved energy break in between lessons to recapture students' attention and focus, as well as to release any stored energy from seatwork.

I expect to teach students how to release their energy in a positive way without being a distraction to their self and others. My goal is to increase student participation by maintaining their attention and focus during group lessons. I want to provide students an awareness of their space while respecting the space of others. In promoting yoga as a self-control technique for students, I wish to incorporate learning and New Haven's curriculum into exercising. The poses performed in yoga can be in alphabet and animal form. Thus, yoga can reinforce language arts and science topics. Yoga also reinforces social behavior, health, and math (spatial awareness). Yoga is beneficial in childhood and can be carried on into adulthood to build stamina, flexibility and healthy habits.

## Background

Yoga is a Hindu practice influenced by Buddhist philosophy. It was first mentioned in ancient Hindu scripture approximately 5000 years ago. <sup>1</sup>The word yoga, meaning yoke, is derived from the Sanskrit word yuj which means to join, unify, or attach. <sup>2</sup>The traditional purpose of yoga was to aid in transformation or transcending the self. The goal of yoga was to provide wholeness, happiness and wellbeing. Today, this purpose can be translated into aligning the body, breathing and the mind. <sup>3</sup>

## Foundations of Yoga: The Eight Limbs of Yoga

The Eight Limbs of Yoga are techniques that guide self-discipline and self-control. The Eight Limbs of Yoga, also referred to as the eightfold path of yoga, are rules for living more consciously and healthily. These techniques were written in the Yoga Sutras by Patanjali, the greatest classical text from the yoga school of Indian philosophy. Originally, the Eight Limbs were taught orally and easily memorized, recited, or chanted. They are practiced in no particular order and intertwine to lead to the ultimate goal of Samadhi, self-realization. <sup>4</sup>

1. *Yama* (restraint) is abstaining from the bad habits. The five abstentions are violence, lying, theft, gluttony, and greed.
2. *Niyama* (observance) is a perception to acquire the good habits. The five perceptions are purity, contentment, self-discipline, self-directed learning, and devotion.
3. *Asana* (postures/poses) is focused on improving and developing the physical body. There are exercises that promote physical health, strength, and suppleness to achieve mastery of the body that leads to mastery of the mind (how and what you think).
4. *Pranayama* (breath control) gains control of energy to increase vitality.
5. *Pratyahara* (sense withdrawal) directs attention inward, independent of the senses, helps induce emotional rest.
6. *Dharana* (concentration) focuses on a specific point or image in order to increase spiritual strength include a candle flame, flower, or mantra.
7. *Dhyana* (meditation) helps prevent disturbing thoughts from disrupting the concentration.
8. *Samadhi* (self-realization) forms true knowledge or enlightenment, conscious awareness of one's unity with the universe or God, unrestricted by judgment.

## Yamas (Restraints)

There are five forms of restraints (in which I have described in the positive) students will learn to deepen their knowledge and appreciate the yoga experience. Yamas teaches how to live in society and to refrain from bad habits. <sup>5</sup>

1. *Ahimsa* (non-violence) promotes self-love and positive interactions with others and anything; not wanting to harm anyone or anything, including yourself and living in a society that is peaceful, kind, and loving.
2. *Satya* (honesty) is being true to and honest with yourself and others and encompasses honesty in speech and action that leads to trust and integrity.
3. *Asteya* (not stealing) is taking and using things that are freely given to you, i.e. possessions, ideas, and time, and refraining from jealousy and coveting realizing that what you have is enough and all you need.
4. *Brahmacarya* (conservation): develops and maintains self-control in all aspects of life including physical, sexual, and mental and not allowing wants and desires to disrespect or diminish others, including yourself; controlling your senses. It's refraining from over-indulgences.
5. *Aparigraha* (avoiding greed) distinguishes needs from wants to live off of what you need, i.e. food, objects, time, attention. It's learning to live simple and respecting the environment.

## Niyamas (Perceptions)

There are five forms of perceptions students will learn about themselves and others. Students will learn to be accepting of themselves and others with judgment. <sup>6</sup>

1. *Saucha* (cleanliness) is maintaining a clean body and environment that includes good hygiene, clean house and room, eating fresh and healthy foods, and creating a life based on a foundation of pure words, actions and thoughts.
2. *Santosha* (contentment) is being happy with who you are, where you are, and with what you have. It's being simple and frugal, maintaining a calm attitude, and accepting that what you have is enough.
3. *Tapas* (self-discipline) is setting goals and not giving up easily, putting forth all your effort to make the most of yourself, being a hard worker, and developing perseverance. It's making commitments and upholding them.

4. *Svadyaya* (self-directed learning) is becoming a life-long learner, having openness to new ideas and approaches, and completing class and homework assignments while exploring topics of interests, self-study and personal thinking.

5. *Ishvara pranidhana* (devotion) is letting go of preconceived judgments of self, others, and situations; thinking and committing to a higher power or divinity and living with love and recognizing positive energy in life.

## **Hatha Yoga**

This unit will concentrate on Hatha yoga, which is age appropriate for children. Ha means "sun" and tha means "moon". Hatha yoga is the union of the sun and moon, healthy joining of the two opposites the mind and the body leading to strength, vitality, and tranquility. Hatha yoga is physical yoga that involves numerous postures or poses (asanas), breathing exercises (pranayama) and relaxation. There are numerous variations of yoga practiced today including Jnana yoga, study and meditation; Bhakti yoga, prayer; Karma yoga, selfless actions; Mantra yoga, sacred sounds; and Raja yoga, Eight Limbs-Yoga Sutras. <sup>7</sup> There are several styles of yoga that are more appropriate for adults because of the physical demand and state of consciousness required. For example, Ashtanga yoga is physically demanding and requires a rigorous workout of jumps and breathing techniques to develop strength, flexibility, and stamina. Svaroopa yoga strives for an inner experience with greater consciousness. This form of yoga focuses on opening the spine, and not performing athletic postures. Hatha yoga is kid-friendly and is not an athletic or mentally demanding. It's a form of yoga that concentrates on relaxing through breathing and postures performed to a person's ability.

## **Learning Objectives**

Students will recount stories, fables, to determine the central message, lesson or moral.

Students will explain how the lesson or moral is conveyed through key details in the text.

Students will retell fables through yoga, as well as create an awareness of their bodies and personal space. Students will read and understand moral conclusions of fables while applying asanas (postures/poses) during a retell. Additionally, students will apply the Eight Limbs of Yoga to fables, specifically yamas (restraints) and niyamas (perceptions). See Appendix A Implementing District Standards

## Teaching Strategies

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As a new teacher, my greatest concern and worry was how to keep a classroom of eager and busybodied second graders focused and attentive. I was very nervous on implementing my behavior management techniques, not knowing if the students would respond in a positive or negative manner. At times, I find keeping students attention and interest in the subject matter challenging. I teach students with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and learning disabilities, as well as students that are constantly moving around in their seat or on the carpet. I quickly lose their attention and focus, and regaining their interest in lessons is a difficult task. My reactions and behavior management techniques are predictable to the students; therefore I need a different and fresh approach to capture and hold all students attention.

Moreover, my unit will address internal issues that can challenge change in young children. These challenges include outside stressors (in the home/community), peer pressure, and mental health illnesses. Yoga will provide an inward calmness to allow students to focus on class assignments, homework, and positive interactions with others. My unit will integrate health and social development with concepts in literacy (retelling fables and meanings).

### **The Benefits of Yoga**

The benefits of yoga have been described by Freeman in the book *Once Upon a Pose*.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Flexibility*

Yoga safely stretches the muscles and releases lactic acid that builds up with muscle use. Stiffness, tension, pain, and fatigue can result without stretching. While practicing yoga, flexibility increases rapidly as opposing muscles are trained and work together. Yoga increases range of motion in joints. Additionally, it stretches muscles and soft tissue in the body, including ligaments and tendons.

#### *Strength and Resiliency*

Yoga poses (asanas) build core strength that develops a healthy body. Muscle tone is improved by requiring the support of body weight in different ways that include standing poses, balancing poses, and inversions. Yoga develops long, strong muscles. Yoga poses involves muscle control by activating large and small muscles, and a full body workout by holding poses. Yoga renews, invigorates, and heals the body. Energy levels and endurance are increased.

#### *Balance*

Yoga develops balance and creates symmetry throughout the body: right and left, front and back, high and low. Several asanas focus on balancing on one leg at a time. In younger children, the need to develop and practice is essential. Older children have acquired a basic skill of balance and therefore needs a challenge on a more difficult level. Older people seek more mental and emotional balance. In her book *Once Upon a Pose*, Donna Freeman states, "Learning when to push, control and be assertive and when to yield, submit, and be passive, is a part of the yoga experience."<sup>9</sup>

#### *Concentration*

Yoga centers on the present, which develops focus, concentration, and discipline. It increases the attention span, memory, and learning efficiency, which can lead to improved academic development. <sup>10</sup> Yoga helps train the mind and builds attention to detail by mindfully performing breathing exercises and meditation. Eye-hand coordination, reaction time, dexterity, and fine motor skills are enhanced. Moreover, guided relaxation contributes to the relaxation response to allow the body to release stress while the mind focuses to define and fulfill personal destiny.

### *Breathing*

Yoga places great emphasis on deepening and lengthening the breath. The chest wall expansion and forced expiratory lung volumes are increased. Lung capacity improves and respiratory efficiency increases. This results in better sports performance and endurance, as well as provides release for those with asthma.

### *Body-Awareness and Self-Image*

Yoga increases awareness of the body that requires defined placement of body parts in combination with small subtle movements that improves body alignment. An increase comfort with one's own body and spatial awareness and understanding develops. Better posture and greater self-confidence evolves due to improved muscle tone, a longer and stronger body, and an awareness of body and space. Children can begin to understand and appreciate their bodies by learning basic anatomy. This knowledge brings a sense of peace and contentment that enriches personal awareness and self-acceptance.

### *Stress*

Yoga decreases the hormones and neurotransmitters produced in response to stress to create a sense of calm. <sup>11</sup> Yoga increases hormones that make the body feel good such as oxytocin, which is associated with feeling relaxed and connected to others. Therefore, one's mood improves and the subjective well-being increases. Lastly, yoga promotes calm and clear thinking, even in quick reaction situations.

### *Practicality*

Yoga is simple to learn and perform, costs little to no money, and is accessible. It is non-competitive which allows individuals to work at their own pace and within their capabilities. Yoga is something everyone can do and feel good about doing. Accommodations can be made for those with physical limitations and challenges. Yoga can be practiced with little to no equipment. Yoga practice can vary in time from 5 minutes of relaxation to a 30-minute workout. Both are acceptable, practical and effective.

## **Classroom Applications**

### *Theory*

Yoga can be applied in all subject area across the curriculum. Yoga can be incorporated in language arts through storytelling, rhymes and chants. In mathematics, students can create patterns and shapes with their bodies and learn positional vocabulary. Yoga can be applied in science through anatomy, biology, and studying various aspects of nature. In physical education students can develop physical ability, playing and working cooperatively, and working within the safe zone in understanding under- and over- exertion. In health and life skills, yoga is beneficial by celebrating individuality, uniqueness, gifts, and talents, developing respect for self and other, and learning body and personal care. Uniquely, yoga can be applied in foreign language

through translating Sanskrit terms and vocabulary and translating stories in other languages. Yoga can infuse creativity and beauty in performing yoga poses and visual arts by drawing or photographing yoga or what the poses bring to mind in art class. Yoga can be applied in music class through songs and chants used during yoga. Lastly, drama class can incorporate yoga through performing personal stories by using yoga postures and poses. <sup>12</sup>

Yoga can promote greater learning by simultaneously incorporating numerous abilities and senses. Howard Gardner, Harvard University professor who described various ways in which children process information, described multiple intelligences in which teachers can tap into to approach different learning styles in students. <sup>13</sup> The multiple intelligences are based on children's personalities and interests that motivate behavior and actions. Yoga can be applied throughout all aspects of subjects and curriculum, as well as supporting different types of learner and learning styles. The verbal/linguistic intelligence describes learners who enjoy words, talking, language and writing. The logical/mathematical intelligence describes learners who like to make patterns, can conceptualize abstract ideas, and scientific investigation. The visual/spatial intelligence pertains to learners who take enjoyment in visualizing and drawing, paying attention to details, and has good spatial awareness. The bodily/kinesthetic intelligence involves learners using their bodies to solve problems. This learner has good balance, coordination and agility. The musical/rhythmic intelligence pertains to learners who enjoy making up songs and follows musical patterns and rhythms. The interpersonal intelligence pertains to learners who love to socialize, take leadership roles, and working in teams. The intrapersonal intelligence describes learners who are thinkers, self reflects, and likes to work alone or with a partner or small group. Learners possessing this intelligence take time to process new information before answering questions and invent new ways of approaching a problem. The naturalist intelligence describes learners who love animals, plants and flowers, and nature and the outdoors as a whole. <sup>14</sup>

Thus, yoga stretches into each domain of intelligence to involve children despite learning style. Children may possess a combination of these intelligences to activate learning and retention of information. Students who possess the verbal/linguistic intelligence may enjoy reading and writing stories that incorporate yoga poses. Learners of the logical/mathematics intelligence may enjoy making and counting triangles made with their arms and legs while performing poses. The visual/spatial learner may draw a series of yoga postures or take pride in being aware of the size of the physical space in which yoga is practiced. They are aware of the constraints and boundaries to perform yoga. Learners of the bodily/kinesthetic intelligence use their bodies to enhance their coordination and balance. They enjoy the body movement of the yoga poses. The musical/rhythmic learner will find enjoyment in performing yoga to music. Yoga provides the interpersonal learner to teach peers in yoga poses and perform yoga in groups. The intrapersonal learner will self-reflect and build self-confidence during yoga. Lastly, the naturalist learner will enjoy learning different animal yoga poses as they may learn different facts about animals and nature.

### *Precautions and Safety*

Yoga is not intended to cause discomfort or injury. Children should not strain or strive to do a pose perfectly. There is no competition or comparison to others while performing yoga. It is an individual practice. Teachers and children should keep in mind all safety measures and precautions while implementing yoga lessons. Yoga should be practiced in a spacious and unrestrictive environment. A comfortable room temperature should be maintained. Poses should be performed on level ground without distraction to encourage focus and attention. A yoga mat can be used to prevent slipping. Poses can be done on a carpet. Movement should be slow and within capability without straining. Yoga should not be performed on a full stomach. Performing certain some poses can induce vomiting if done too soon after eating. The general rule is to wait two to four hours after

eating a large meal or one to two hours after eating a light meal or snack. Yoga should be avoided if a student is ill or have serious challenges in which a posture or breathing exercise is difficult to achieve. Poses or breathing can be modified to fit a student's needs or not performed at all. <sup>15</sup>

Yoga may have religious and spiritual connotations. For application in the classroom, yoga is solely performed for fun and enjoyment only.

## Classroom Activities

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### Phase I: Exploring feelings and character education

It is essential for students to become aware of their feelings and moods. Students will gain the ability to verbalize their thoughts and feelings rather than internalizing them. Also, students will understand good character and how to live as a good citizen. The sample activities are a guide to introduce the yamas and niyamas of yoga. In addition, students are encouraged to keep a journal throughout the entire unit. Students are encouraged to share their thoughts and feelings in written form as well as verbal discussion.

Objectives: Students will be able to describe and explain their feelings and emotions. Students will be able to explain the yamas (restraints) and niyamas (perceptions) of yoga.

#### Sample Activities:

Each yama and niyama is posted on a large poster-sized paper. The teacher will write the meaning of the yamas and niyamas and the students will illustrate each yama and niyama. Students will write a paragraph explaining how the illustration defines the yama and niyama. Students will record their illustrations and paragraphs in a yoga journal. Teacher will model illustration and explanatory paragraph of a yama and niyama.

Students can role play the yamas and niyamas. Class can have a discussion on the scenarios and explain the meaning of the yamas and niyamas.

Each student can keep a journal to record their feelings and emotions. Students can illustrate their feelings and/or write at least a paragraph on how they feel and why.

Teacher can have a class meeting in which students are encouraged to verbalize their moods and feelings. This meeting can be held in the morning, midday, and/or at the end of the day. Class is encouraged to sit in a circle if space is allotted. Student arrangement is contingent upon space. Teacher will guide students to describe their mood/feelings. Students will answer the sentence starter, "I feel \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_." Teacher will model how to complete sentence starter. Students will follow teacher's lead. (Students are encouraged to participate. It may take some students a little longer to get comfortable in sharing their feelings in a large group. Students should not be forced to share.)

### Phase II: Exploring yoga exercises

Students will learn Hatha yoga by performing yoga poses/postures, breathing techniques, and relaxation



exercises. Hatha yoga is a healthy form of yoga that joins the mind and body. Students gain strength, focus, tranquility, and stamina. Students perform yoga within their own capabilities. Teacher should not expect or promote perfection.

Objective: Students will demonstrate yoga exercises and breathing techniques.

### **Sample Activities:**

Teacher should always practice poses and postures before teaching students. Teacher will demonstrate a yoga exercise to students. Students will repeat exercise. Teacher and students will practice exercise together.

Note: There is no one correct way to do a yoga pose. Students will practice poses within their abilities. Teacher should encourage students to try each pose. It is acceptable for students to decline.

Warm-up (5-10 minutes): Teacher will demonstrate various breathing techniques such as belly breathing or bunny breathing (inhaling 4-6 quick breathes through the nose and exhaling through the mouth saying 'aah'). Students will practice breathing techniques. Teacher will model non-strenuous stretches such as raising arms in the air and stretching arms to the ceiling. Students will practice simple stretches.

Asana(s) (15-20 minutes): Teacher will model 1-3 poses/postures. Students will practice poses/postures. Teacher will model animal poses as well as postures such as Tree and Volcano.

Cool-down (5-10 minutes): Teacher will model sitting pretzel-style. Teacher will close eyes and model breathing technique. Students will practice sitting pretzel-style and breathing technique. Teacher will focus students on the rhythm of their breathing. Teacher will inform students to relax their bodies and clear their mind.

Students can write in their journal how they feel before and after each yoga lesson. Over time students may revisit their journal entries to determine the effects yoga has on their feelings and moods.

### **Phase III: Exploring Fables**

Objectives: Students will determine the moral of stories and fables. Students will create a dramatization of the stories and fables using yoga poses.

Teacher will choose a fable to read to class.

Teacher will think aloud and retell the fable in his/her own words.

Teacher will connect the fable to a yama or niyama to determine the moral of the fable.

Teacher will explain the moral \lesson of the fable

Teacher will model appropriate poses that coincide with the fable.

In small groups of 3-5 students, teachers will guide students to choose a fable.

Student groups will discuss the details of the fable through retelling important parts.

Groups will connect their fable to a yama or niyama to determine the moral of the fable.

Groups will explain the moral/lesson of the fable.

Students will create a small skit of yoga poses that coincide with the fable.

Groups will present their skit to the whole class.

## Teacher Resources

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[www.pbskids.org](http://www.pbskids.org)

[www.yoga4kids.org](http://www.yoga4kids.org)

[www.yogamountain.com](http://www.yogamountain.com)

[www.aesopfables.com](http://www.aesopfables.com)

YogaKids with Marsha Wenig DVD

Power, Teresa Anne. *The ABCs of Yoga for Kids*. New York, New York. Scholastic Inc., 2009. A book for both students and teachers that describes yoga instruction in simple terms with some illustrations of poses. Poses are represented with all letters of the alphabet.

## Appendix A Implementing District Standards

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In accordance with the Connecticut State Department of Education Science Curriculum Expectations for Pre-Kindergarten-Grade 2, after completing this unit student will be able to:

AINQ 3. Make predictions based on observed patterns.

AINQ 4. Read, write, listen, and speak about observations of the natural world.

AINQ 5. Seek information in books, magazines, and pictures.

AINQ 6. Present information in words and drawings.

In accordance with the New Haven Public Schools Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts Grades 2-3, students will be able to:

Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.

## Bibliography

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Lorenzi, Natalie. "A Passion for Learning." *Schoalstic Parent & Child* 19 (2011): 82-93. An article discussing Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences.

Purperhart, Helen. *The Yoga Zoo Adventure* . Alameda, CA. Hunters House Inc., Publishers, 2006. A comprehensive book of yoga animal poses and games for young children. This book provides fables to incorporate with yoga.

Santangelo White, Laura. "Yoga for Children." *Pediatric Nursing* 35 (2009): 277-283, 295. A guide to using yoga with children.

Satyanarayana, Megha. *Kids Get Health Benefits From Yoga* (Detroit Free Press, 2009), <http://latimes.com/sns-health-kids-yoga-benefits-health,0,6282601.story> (accessed March 31, 2012). Health benefits kids can get from practicing yoga.

"Yoga for Kids: A Good Idea?," Mayo Clinic, November 17. 2010, <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/yoga-for-kids/MY01401> (accessed May 20, 2012).

## End Notes

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1. Laura Santangelo White, "Yoga for Children," 277.
2. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 1 .
3. Laura Santangelo White, "Yoga for Children," 277.
4. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 2.
5. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 5.
6. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 5.
7. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 2.
8. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 8.
9. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 10.
10. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 10.
11. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 11.
12. Donna Freeman, "Once Upon a Pose," 14-15.
13. Natalie Lorenzi, "A Passion for Learning," 82-83.
14. Natalie Lorenzi, "A Passion for Learning," 82-83.
15. <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/yoga-for-kids/MY01401>

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