



What Does It Mean to Be Present?

Overview

The book *What Does It Mean to Be Present?* by Rana DiOrio demonstrates what it means to be present and how being present makes life “richer, fuller and happier.”



45 minutes



Elementary (ages 6-11)



Newcomer Friendly

Aims & Objectives

Reading this story and wondering with the children about it will provide an opportunity to introduce the concepts of being present, feeling gratitude, listening to one’s inner voice, being peaceful and more.

Reading List

Sparkling Still provides tools for teachers of children ages 3-12. Included are sample lessons, a master lesson plan, ideas for building classroom community, an introduction to wondering questions and more.

Sparkling Still provides useful instructions on:

- Creating the circle and other components of your time together: pages 5-22
- Reading out loud with children: pages 16-17
- Wondering with children and adults: pages vii-xi and 6-7
- Individual Art Responses: page 7
- Art Supplies: pages 20-22

Credits: Anne Collins, Sally Farneth, Susan Hopkins,
and Erika Mittag, Exercise Authors

Materials & Setup

Book: *What Does It Mean to Be Present* by Rana DiOrio
([link to purchase book: http://tinyurl.com/jgxp3df](http://tinyurl.com/jgxp3df))

Video: 3 minutes (password = deepen) ([video link: https://vimeo.com/183923312](https://vimeo.com/183923312))

Summary of the Story

Two school-age children, with the help of a recurring butterfly, explore the meaning of “being present.” They show ways they can be present, how it makes life more peaceful and how it helps them hear their inner voices.

Suggestions for reading for teacher spiritual preparation before exercise/lesson

Psalm 46: 10 “Be still and know that I am God.”

Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal

#272 George Fox (first verse and chorus or chorus only)

#218 God’s Love is A Light

#1 All Things Bright and Beautiful

Materials for Art Responses

For Individual Art Response:

- drawing paper
- crayons, markers, or pastels
- other supplies

For Teacher-directed Activities:

- Paper for drawing, construction paper cut into 1” wide strips for gratitude chain, stapler crayons, markers, scissors, other decorative materials as available for art
- Jar with water and glitter – prepared ahead of time. This resource describes several combinations of materials with different settling times.

Take Home Notes (one per family)

Note for children to take home after exercise/lesson or to email to parents during week prior to this lesson:

Today we read *What Does It Mean to Be Present?* by Rana DiOrio. We learned about the meaning of being present and how it makes life “richer, fuller and happier.” We practiced some of the ways the children in the story are present for each other.

Instructions

Welcome the children to the circle. Be sure to introduce everyone, if visitors are present.

Invite children and adults to go around the circle sharing one or two pluses and minuses from their day or week. It helps to ask for 2 items only, either 2 of one or one of each. Children are comfortable with a limit, unless another person's comment sparks another one for an individual child.

Sing a centering song, such as "God's Love is a Light," hymn #218, *Worship in Song, A Friends Hymnal*, and/or one of the songs previously suggested under Materials. In addition, or instead of, use breathing or other exercise to center the group. The simplest way is to breathe deeply three times. Adding lifting arms up and down with the breath or holding tummy during deep breaths can help.

Show the cover of the book, read the title and author's name. Ask the children a question that invites them to wonder about the story.

"I wonder why the child is hiding in the leaves. I wonder if the blue butterfly is part of the story. Let's see what happens."

Read the story, holding the book so all can see. Depending on reader's comfort level with the children, allow comments during the story, especially from younger children.

After reading the story, invite the children to wonder about the story with you.

Wondering Questions

I wonder what you liked in the story today.

I wonder what part of the story is really important for you?

I wonder where you are in the story or what part of the story is about you.

I wonder which way of being present is your favorite or one you really like?

After the children have finished wondering and are ready to go to the next activity, introduce the option for Individual Reflective Art Response or a Teacher-directed Activity.

Individual Reflective Art Response

Children choose from a collection of attractive art supplies and work individually for about 15 minutes to create something of importance to the child. It may or may not be a direct reflection on the story they just heard and wondered about. See page 7, *Sparkling Still*, for more information and references.

Options for Teacher-directed Activity

If you haven't used pluses and minuses before, introduce them as a way of practicing being present. Direct the children to practice listening to their friends as their friends share their joys and sorrows. Discuss what it feels like to be listened to carefully.

Make a gratitude chain or notes. Children can express their gratitude towards anyone or their gratitude in general. Some children might like to draw pictures showing someone or something they are grateful for.

Practice listening by lying on the floor or sitting quietly in their chairs and focusing on their breathing. Listen to each breath going in and out, in and out. How does it feel?

Practice closing eyes and being still enough to hear their inner voice. Use a jar with water and glitter. Shake the jar to swirl the glitter around. Set it down and use the settling of the glitter as a metaphor for the children as they settle. Sit in the silence for a few minutes, and then ask the children what worked or didn't work as they practiced listening for their inner voice.

Closing

Provide a 5-minute warning before the children need to clean up. After clean up, gather the children in a circle and ask them to name one thing for which they are grateful. Sing songs while waiting for their parents to pick them up, or before joining the adults after the rise of Meeting for Worship.

If the children join their loved ones while Meeting for Worship is still in progress, before you lead them back to the meeting room, invite them to remember how they still themselves and some things about the morning that they may want to think about during the final moments of Meeting for Worship.

Hand out the Take Home Notes, if using, as parents pick up the children in the First Day School room, or after the rise of Meeting for Worship, if joining loved ones in worship.