

Storytime Yoga: Kids Love It And So Will You!

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Yoga is...

- To “yoke”, “unite”, “be whole”
- The connection between the body, mind and spirit
- Adaptable to almost any level of physical or development ability
- A gentle, noncompetitive form of exercise that all children can enjoy!

Yoga is not...

- A religion

Jodi Komitor, author of *Idiots Guide to Yoga with Kids* (p. 46) describes it in terms of yoga for children. She states,

“Rather than enforcing a doctrine, yoga instead gives kids a tool for spiritual exploration. Kids may have big questions and yoga doesn’t seek to answer those questions. That is the parents’ job, or the job of your religion. Yoga simply encourages kids to find their own spiritual identity. What a wonderful gift for a child!”

Benefits of Yoga

- Lisa Flynn, founder and director of ChildLight Yoga and Yoga4Classrooms, recognizes the following benefits for kids:

Benefits to the Body

- Assists neuromuscular-development
- Promotes development of the vestibular system
- Encourages midline crossing motions
- Develops a strong and flexible body
- Increases balance, body awareness and coordination
- Improves posture and alignment
- Reduces injuries and improves performance
- Strengthens the immune system
- Relaxes the body, promoting better sleep

Benefits to the Mind

- Calms and clears the mind, bringing us into the present moment
- Relieves tension and stress
- Increases concentration, focus and attention span
- Promotes thinking and memory
- Stimulates auditory processing responsiveness
- Expands imagination and creativity
- Reduces stress and anxiety
- Balances energy (high or low)

Benefits to the Spirit

- Builds confidence and self-esteem
- Supports character development and emotional intelligence
- Enhances team skills and social interaction
- Develops discipline and self-control
- Supports individuality and self-expression
- Encourages social and environmental awareness and responsibility
- Inspires respect for self and others

Overall Benefits

- Improves mind/body connection
- Encourages a fit and healthy lifestyle
- Promotes an overall sense of well-being

What Do You Need?

- While yoga for adults often has lots of “stuff” (mats, bolsters, straps, etc.)...all you really need to do yoga with kids is
- A child
- A little space
- Imagination and creativity
- Many items you already have can be used for props to add to the yoga fun!

Yoga Mats?

- Yoga mats are not necessary but can be helpful to define each child's space.
- Yoga dots are fast and simple!

A Balanced Yoga Approach

- Focus on the breath as it helps calm the parasympathetic nervous system while helping students to release tensions in the body and mind.
- Yoga is not just “poses”. It includes what happens along the way...how you breathe, how you are listening to your body, and how your mind is focused on the present moment.
- Yoga is a personal activity that looks different with each child.
- Yoga is not about how we “look” on the outside, it is about how we “feel” on the inside.

Tips for teaching kids yoga

- Add a creative twist to familiar “adult” yoga practices. For example, you might tell adults that full belly breathing is like expanding a balloon. Ask kids what color the balloon is, and let them pop it to exhale!
- Keep poses and games short. For younger kids, each exercise may take only 30 seconds to a minute.
- Use themes or stories to link the poses and games. A trip through a garden can inspire poses and games related to nature. Picture books can provide great ideas for class themes.
- Alternate periods of focus and quiet with opportunities for the kids to move, make noise or be “silly.”
- Provide structure. Younger kids love repetition, themes and defined activities. Older children welcome the familiarity of social support and of class “rituals” like guided visualization during final relaxation.
- Leave room for self-expression and creativity. Ask questions and use the names of poses to inspire play-acting. For instance, when doing hero pose, ask, “What kind of hero are you?”

- Pay attention to transitions. With kids, something as simple as finding a partner or returning a prop can become a major event. Give clear directions to avoid chaos.
- Focus on poses and exercises that most kids can do safely. Leave out poses with a higher risk of injury (e.g., headstand and shoulderstand) and exercises that involve holding the breath. Breath-holding can have an agitating effect on kids and unintentionally turn into a competition of who can hold the breath the longest.
- Don't underestimate kids' need for quiet and rest. Many teachers are surprised to find that many kids' favorite part of yoga class is a guided relaxation.
- Involve parents. Provide handouts, host a family yoga workshop, and ask kids to teach their parents what they learned in class.

Spring Yoga Sequences

- **The Thunderstorm**

- This game, taught in the Yogadoodles™ teacher training, is played in boat pose, a balancing seated posture. Kids love this game because it allows them to express their exuberance. Teachers love it because it balances that release of energy with self-control. Lead the class by modeling the movements and sounds.
- “A storm is coming. . . . Here comes the rain.” Lightly tap the floor with your feet, like the pitter-patter of rain. Tap your face and head with your fingers, like raindrops.
- “It’s raining harder—it’s pouring!” Stomp the floor with your feet. Row the boat through the puddles, using your arms.
- “Here come the big gusts of wind!” Wave your arms and make whooshing noises.
- “Here come the thunder and lightning!” Slap your legs or clap.
- After the noise and movement have peaked, “Freeze!” Everyone balances in boat pose and tries to be as still and quiet as possible—embodying the peaceful silence after the storm.

A Beautiful Sunny Day

by Noah, 3rd grade

I took a walk on a beautiful sunny day. **Hello Sun!** I saw a **tree** with big green leaves. Then I saw an Apple tree. **I reached up high to pick an apple.**

I cleaned the apple with my shirt. I looked at it, **smelled** it and took a bite. **I chewed and chewed.**

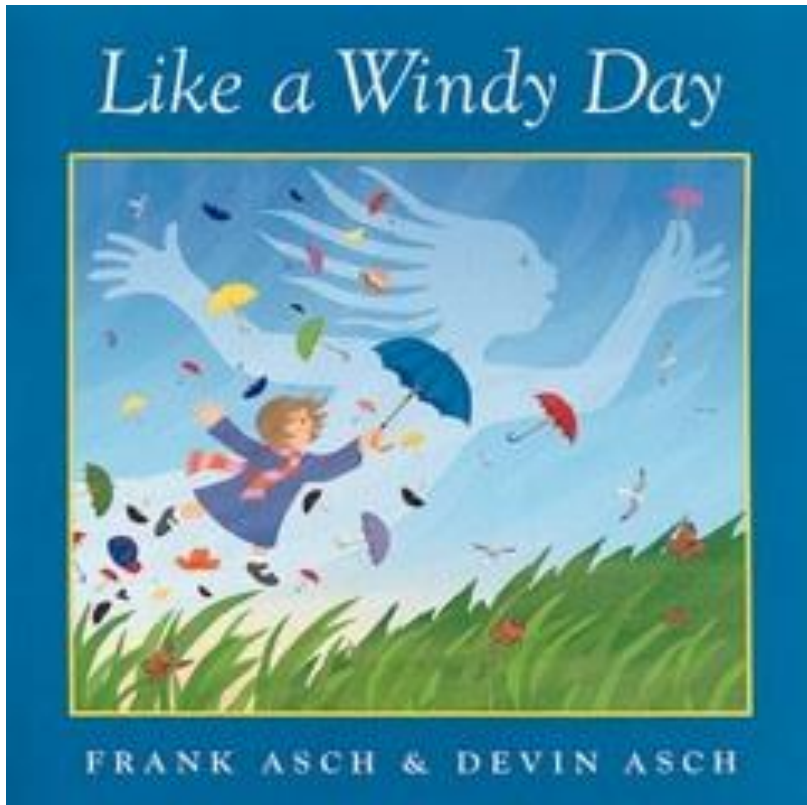
A **bird** came over and took a bite. **Another bird** came over. I liked sharing my apple.

A **butterfly** flew on my shoulder! Then it flew off to a **flower**. I decided to **smell the flower**

A **bumblebee** was also next to the flower. It buzzed and buzzed.

I was tired so I decided to take a **short nap**. **Breathe in and breath out.** Ahhhh.....

I woke up and stretched. When I looked around, I wasn't at the park. I was in my own **bed**. It was all a dream!



They say that Chicago is known as the windy city and in honor my city, I thought it would be fun to teach a yoga class inspired by this book. I have taught this class to students in grades K-3. It is a lot of fun and sparks a lot of creativity!

My friend and author, Giselle Shardlow has a great resources for kids' poses.

<http://www.kidsyogastories.com/kids-yoga-poses/>

I began with several breathing exercises such as blowing pinwheels.

As a warm up we did some seated windmill twists, in which we would lean our bodies over from side to side, with the opposite arm raised as we lean. So, if we were leaning our bodies to the right, our left arm was raised beside our ear.

Here is a list of windy things found on each page and poses we did:

Hillsides - Mountain pose. To test the strength of their mountains, I pretended to be the wind to see if we could knock down their mountain!

Racing Skateboards - We jumped on our skateboards in Warrior II. We also reversed our warrior and did a quick jump switch to do it on the other side of our body.

Scattered Seeds - Standing in mountain pose, with hands in prayer position, we shook our hands up and down “scattering seeds” while twisting our bodies side to side.

Windmills - Standing windmills

Kites & Flags- Warrior III

Snapping Wet Sheets- Using scarves we *snapped* our “sheets” while going into a seated forward fold

Airplane - We went into warrior III

Butterflies- Butterfly pose

Flying Hats – Pretending we have a hot on our head, we held the sides of our hats and reached up and did some side stretches to the left and right holding onto our hats as if it was blown by the wind.

Sailboats – Boat pose

Umbrellas – Creating umbrellas with our bodies through bridge pose

Spider Babies Flying – Spider pose

Blowing Grass – Pretending we were walking through tall grass, we lifted our arm and opposite leg as we lift and pull through the grass while switching arms and legs.

Ocean waves/Surfboard – Just like in skateboard, we surfed in Warrior II. We also reversed our warrior and did a quick jump switch to do it on the other side of our body.

Blowing Leaves – Tree pose

At the end of the book, the fierce wind becomes a gentle breeze. We use this gentle breeze to settle into our Savasana.

References

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Also check out Pinterest and Youtube!