

Miriam Haenen

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# The Breathing Circle

*Learning through the movement of the natural breath*

Nell Smyth



Hawthorn Press

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## Foreword

Breathing has always played an important role in human history. Indeed, the word for what animates every human being – ‘spirit’ – derives from the Latin word for breath. Our life span runs from the first breath to the last. Still, in the western world, there is little interest in the quality of this precious function. But it has not always been so. This lack of interest is only found in the modern, industrialised world. Until a hundred or so years ago, the way people breathe played an important role in medicine.

In classical Greece breathing exercises were prescribed as a cure for illness. Aristotle based his scientific school on ‘pneuma’, which translates as ‘cosmic breathing’. In Egypt too, this life-energy found in the breath was central in many religious rituals and a key element of mythology. This ancient knowledge was common throughout Europe until modern medicine did what it could to wipe out such ‘unscientific’ knowledge.

Fortunately, modern western science did not have the same influence over Asian cultures. Both India and China also have a very long tradition of using the breath as part of their traditional medicine, and this knowledge has remained almost intact: in China mainly through Chi Gong and T’ai Chi which are breathing exercises or breathwork, and in India through Pranayama, yogic breathing exercises and specific breathing exercises in traditional Ayurvedic medicine.

Breathwork can be defined as inner healing, both physical and mental, brought about by attending to, nurturing and naturally deepening the breath. But is not a question of controlling the breath. On the contrary it is allowing the body to return to or rediscover its natural breathing pattern. But why, you may wonder, do we need to rediscover our natural breathing pattern?

The reasons may be many of course, but most often it has to do with our ignorance of what proper breathing means and what restricts our natural breathing. Many things may start to go wrong with the very first breath we take. Normal medical procedures require that we cut the newborn child's umbilical cord as soon as possible. This may mean that the child is forced to start breathing before he is ready to do so, or to take a deeper breath than the lungs are able to cope with – potentially such a painful experience that it leaves a life-long memory of pain related to breathing.

Even if we are fortunate enough to have an ideal birth, this does not mean that our breathing will be perfect from then on. Breathing closely responds to stress by growing shallower and more restricted, often in an attempt to limit the effects of the stress on our inner environment.

In our modern industrialised world, stress comes in many forms, ranging from air pollution, chemicals in our environment, processed food and other physical stress triggers to mental stress in the form of anything from financial worries to alarming images on TV. For most of us this means that we reach adulthood suffering from some degree of insufficient breathing. Requiring children to be too sedentary at school exacerbates the problem, particularly as they often develop bad postural habits while hunched over their work.

Through ignorance of its importance, modern western medicine does little to deal with this problem. This is not to say that it does not exist. American studies in the 1980s showed that 60 percent of all emergency ambulance transports in America's larger cities were caused by some kind of breathing disorder. Another study showed that at least 25 percent of all Americans suffer from some form of breath-related illness. Keeping in mind that it is still very unusual to make direct links between insufficient breathing and illness, the real figures are likely to be much higher.

Poor breathing is often the cause of a wide range of common

physical ailments such as allergies, anorexia and obesity, asthma, cancer, circulatory disorders, diabetes, epilepsy, colds, weakened immune system, heart conditions, skin disorders, headache, migraine, hypertension (constantly tightened muscles – often leading to high blood pressure), menstruation disorders, rheumatism, back problems and sexual disorders. All these ailments are rapidly increasing in both children and adults all over the world.

To change this vicious circle of poor breathing and illness we need to start as early as possible and teach our children to find their own full breath flow. But there is a problem here: breath lives in a half-conscious realm that is closely connected with feeling. We cannot improve breathing by intellectual awareness alone, or by strict adherence to exercises, but its natural flow must come from our true depths and from a sense of free movement. Nell Smyth's work in this field is invaluable, not just because it will help younger generations to a healthier life, but also because learning to free your natural breathing pattern and to know how to maintain this openness throughout life are the most precious gifts we can give our children. A free-flowing and natural breathing pattern also leads to increased inner harmony and a more positive outlook on life. It improves creativity and artistic expression. In short it helps us to a better life.

I wish Nell all success with her work. I hope that this very instructive and reader-friendly guide to helping young children find their natural breath will raise awareness of good breathing and make it a natural and important part of teaching in all schools.

*Gunnel Minett,*  
*author of Breath & Spirit*  
*and Exhale – an overview of Breathwork*

# Preface

*The Breathing Circle*, this marvelous book by Nell Smyth is a great gift. Not only does it offer much variety for children to experience breathing but, above all, the lively creative tension which sustains the entire book brings much joy. Immediately one wants to join in with the activities she describes.

It is of the greatest importance that children learn about breathing in a way that playfully stimulates their own creativity and already at a young age, guides them towards trusting in their own power. In this regard, the teacher's wealth of imagination, and her understanding of a child's nature, play a crucial role.

This book outstandingly demonstrates this quality. My own experiences of breathwork with children were based on awakening awareness of breathing via the imagination, using little stories and simple things like balls and jump ropes. The experience of breath lays the foundation for healthy life forces and a development that can support a positive feeling life and a permeability of the physical body. Having found the breath in childhood play, it will gain much depth in adulthood and its qualities will become life-enhancing. For her work that inspires so much joy, I want to express my gratitude to the author.

*Ilse Middendorf*  
(Berlin 2004)

# *Introduction*

## *Working with the natural breath to support learning through movement, song, verse and story*

This is a book aimed primarily at teachers of young children aged between one-and-a half and seven. It grew out of working with my own daughter and many different groups of young children over time, exploring how movement and language can creatively kindle each other, especially when experienced through the sustaining flow of the natural breath.

When we support the first seven years of a child's life we lay the foundation which will serve as a reference for the rest of that life as the child unfolds to meet the world. If we ground and strengthen the child's own experience in rhythms that connect to his<sup>1</sup> emerging sense of being and the relationship to the outer world we offer the keys to joy, greater self knowing, creative play, and communication.

Natural joyous movement is not only fundamental in the development of language but creates a ground that can knit us together in our unfolding human expression. For the very young child, movement, expression, language, and communication are not separate. They are the womb out of which the child continues

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<sup>1</sup> To avoid awkwardness, the 'adult' will be given the female gender throughout the book, and the 'child' the male gender.

to be formed, find form, become himself, and find connection and integration.

The verses and stories of *The Breathing Circle* offer an approach where the unifying thread is the natural rhythm of our breath-rich in universal and personal meaning, knitting us to life itself. This breath offers us connection with the world and with others, giving us the physical sensation of our body alive and in movement. Language, which is carried upon the breath itself, is richest when embodied feeling gives it vivid reality.

Our breath lives in the realm of movement. The quality of our breath changes, deepens and becomes more substantial through enjoyable movement. Different qualities of movement intimately affect how we breathe. As our breath flows more freely, the breath rhythm can come into greater balance and our body can feel more spacious and receptive. When this starts to take place, we become refreshed and feel greater integration and increased awareness of the mediating boundary between ourselves and the world in which we participate. To breathe with greater depth is to be more present, and to be more present is to be awake, with more resources available for learning.

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*The most important measures in education will involve paying attention to all that properly organises the breathing process and integrates it into the nerve-sense process. In a higher sense, a child has to learn to take up into his spirit what is bestowed on him by the fact that he is born to breathe.*

Rudolf Steiner *Study of Man*

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At the heart of the book is a natural simplicity. I call the breath 'the lens of perception'. To be attuned to the breath is to be more available as a reader of what is happening in the present moment. As the body starts to relax, the breath drops, becoming deeper and more free-flowing. Children who live so strongly in the realm of imitation will also start to live closer to their own natural rhythms. When we breathe fully stress falls away, contracted bodies start to open and find more flow and joyous ease. A sense of balance and groundedness can then naturally start to permeate and affect the entire room.

My experience has been, in myself, in the children with whom I have worked, and also in working with teachers, that as these more naturally attuned and relaxed states of being become predominant, better learning takes place. The monkey mind, chattering of what I think I am supposed to be doing, the attitudes and thoughts that are so often fuelled by anxiety, can release and evaporate, thus creating a space for greater spontaneity and our own shaping, creative spirit.

### *The structure of the book*

The book covers ways to start a class by bringing children towards an enlivened and engaged state of being, based on gentle invitations to enter the shared space and to stretch and warm. By building an atmosphere out of images and colour, out of warmth and the growing movement of the expansion and contraction of the breath, we evoke for the child a place of safe and inviting exploration. Basing our lesson on the archetypal movement of growing wide, as we expand, and returning home, as we contract, means that even in the most lively parts of the class, there will always be a safe ground to which we can return. Our body offers us a home and the breath, mediated by the senses, offers us both anchor and wings.

In this book you will find four principal sections.

#### SECTION ONE

The first section offers four introductory chapters to describe the underlying principles that lie behind this approach. Descriptions of a lesson and ideas on how to create and design your own lessons are included in detail. At the end of each chapter summaries are offered to give an essential picture of what is covered.

This section shows the teacher how a range of movements and verses can be sequenced to build in the most effective way. The features of the book and how to use it are expanded upon at greater length with commentaries on some of the terms used.

#### SECTION TWO

The second section offers the actual verses in three main categories: verses for movement, story and circle verses. The verses for

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movement category is the most extensive, offering seven different kinds of movement with specific benefits for building sensory awareness, warmth, and lively breathing. Guidelines and explanations are offered at the beginning of this section, and are also given for each type of movement in its sequence of appearance. The benefits are explained for each category of movement, and some suggested points of focus for observation are given which can be helpful for a teacher.

## SECTION THREE

The third section of the book offers the teacher ways to find inspiration for her own stories. This looks at how to create a story space simply. It also suggests how stories can be developed to meet different needs in your children, or class as a whole, for healing, creating wholeness, and teaching at the deepest level. Included are ways to find inspiration and trust in your own intuition as a storyteller and how to find help by stitching your stories into the kingdoms and rhythms of creation itself.

The third section of the book provides a number of stories with examples of what needs each story can meet, how to stage them as simple puppet shows and what follow-up activities can arise organically from the story.

## SECTION FOUR

The final and fourth section of the book includes a chapter on sleep and resting, and how to support good rhythms in both children and adults. The last chapter offers some easy movements for the adult, in order to prepare and strengthen her own relationship to the body and breath, the space out of which we can teach. Each movement done with children can also bring benefits for the teacher. However by focusing on ourselves alone, without the children present, we hugely strengthen our own awareness and skill in preparation for leading a large group. The range of exercises offered will help to build relaxation and stamina for both you as teacher and the children.

## APPENDICES

The book also includes some explanatory appendices. Appendix 1 gives a brief overview of the inspiring teachers who have helped me in developing this work: Rudolf Steiner, Dorothy Heathcote, and Ilse Middendorf. Steiner's work has been primary in shaping my creative teaching life, but I have given more scope to Ilse since her



work is still unknown to many and her development of breathwork is so extraordinary. This approach to the breath, which underlies the book, relies on principles that serve as a guide rather than aiming for specific and controlled outcomes.

The Middendorf approach is placed in context relative to other forms of working with the breath primarily to indicate its insistence on not guiding or manipulating the breath externally, but rather allowing the breath's own rhythm to come into its own.

### *Sources and uses*

Within this book you will find many examples of stories and verses, mostly original but a few from traditional sources. The asterisk after specific verses indicates traditional materials and from other sources. Traditions are wonderful resources for all of us, because they carry the old rhythms of melody and meaning that connect us as humans to the community of people who have gone before and to the wisdom of activities forged over generations. Time-honoured children's games such as hopping, skipping, and jumping, offer clear kinds of physical integration which can support balance, lateralisation, dexterity, coordination, and ways of playing with each other. They enrich and nourish imaginative potential, and mitigate deprivation and difficulty.

As a whole, you will find that you can dip into this book and, up to a certain point, use its material selectively. However, in the first section, guidelines are given to indicate how the maximum benefits will come when you follow certain sequences of movements in order to build and tune your class. Underlying this work are clear principles that much experience and time has proven to be most effective in supporting the sense of delight and growing freedom in our own bodies, in our own expression, and in relation to each other as social beings.

The book is also very helpful for teachers who are involved in teaching English as a second language. The movements immediately offer young children a physically active and playful way of feeling animated by the flavour of the language and

consequently, of being more involved through the physical activity. The rhythmic way of working with language offered here strengthens learning and retention, while the playfulness of this approach to language learning and the sense of pattern and rhyme also help children find the language appealing. The sounds and particular melodies of the English language are easily learnt and effortlessly remembered through movements, rhythm, images and sounds. Children are meant to inhale language and to rejoice in shared expression. This book attempts to show how.

# Section One

- CHAPTER ONE *Connecting to the Breath*
- CHAPTER TWO *Movement Out of the Breath*
- CHAPTER THREE *Creating the Space*
- CHAPTER FOUR *Finding the Thread*

This section includes four chapters. The first, **Connecting to the Breath**, introduces a few of the principles that are fundamental to this approach. In the second chapter, **Movement Out of the Breath**, you will find a description and explanation of the benefits of the movements which accompany the verses given in **Section Two**. Chapter Three, called **Creating the Space**, offers guidelines on how to establish a welcoming learning space for the very young child, illustrating how different phases of a class can be choreographed for fulfilling and lively learning. The final chapter, **Finding the Thread**, supports you the teacher in going more deeply into the ideas and material contained in the book, so that as the principles are absorbed and integrated you can become infinitely creative in forming your own lessons, sequences and verses.

## How to use this section

Section One also offers you a guide to the material contained in both Sections Two and Three. Underpinning all of the suggestions and descriptions of how to weave a lesson, how to tell a story and how to plan a successful sequence of verses and movements, is the guiding wisdom of the natural breath. This first section of the book encourages you to go more deeply into understanding and experiencing for yourself how the breath moves, how it supports vitality and how it inspires expression as the natural flowering of a healthy being. When adults are in touch with and supported by their own breath rhythm then there is a profound acceptance of the present moment, a sense of contentment and a heightened perception of the world around us. In this way, attuning to the movement of the breath actually lays the foundations for joyful learning.

## CHAPTER ONE

# *Connecting to the Breath*

*The approach:  
the young child learns through the body*

Connecting  
to the  
Breathing  
Rhythm

This book seeks to offer you as teacher or parent a way to connect yourself and your children to the innate breathing rhythm which is unique in every individual. All skilful performing artists depend on the body for expressing their gift. Teachers and parents are equally dependent on their bodies and rely on the body and the breath to sustain the myriad human communications involved in parenting and teaching. In neglecting the physical and breathing basis of our lives in this head-focused age we easily miss the goal and overlook the fact that being here means being earthed, fully embodied. The loss is poignant because physical, sensory life is an essential point of contact between the teacher and young children, who drink in the world through their senses and perceptions.

To approach our own breath is not such a hard task. If we visit our breath on a regular and daily basis we are more likely to develop a good habit for this. It is as if we were to take our breath by the hand and let it be a companion as we take a pleasant walk. Our breath and our body rarely thrive on over-exertion, or attention that is too sharply focused. To build gentle familiarity with the rhythm of our breath in quiet places and also in the midst of queues and traffic jams can bring a sense of harmony which can be our cushion, our guide and grounding rhythm throughout the day.

Everything offered in this section, as in the rest of the book, is designed to support full, easy movement that flows from a natural

breathing rhythm. This chapter is meant to clarify the fundamental ways in which our natural breath rhythm can be understood as it comes into greater consciousness, free of control and the inhibiting structures that block us from the deep wells of sustaining life.

*Beginning:  
entering the world as child and adult*

Before entering any space where you are inviting young children to play and learn, try asking yourself where you are in your mind and in your body. In this situation it is very common to dart hither and thither through the check list of what is to be done; your mental monkey swinging adeptly through the trees of all your tasks, giving aerial overviews and rapid reassurances, planning, multitasking and proactive. Most teachers and many parents gain assurance from a sense that nothing has been overlooked, that things are under control. Or has something been overlooked? What really lies beneath this notion of control?

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*To be in time is a lovely expression.*

*It means to live in the present, here and now.*

Veronika van Duin *Homemaking as a Social Art*

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The busy lives we lead easily distract us from the presence of this moment, now, as the imagined future pours in upon us. Our awareness can often be elsewhere when we walk into the room, not present to the room, its atmosphere, smells, and the response of body and spirit. What if we lived our lives as if each moment could be trusted and surrendered to, allowing the rhythms of body and breath to guide and sustain us? Being here presupposes embodiment. It is our feet that have walked us into the room, and our feet connect us to the reality of time and rhythm.

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The simple act of turning our attention to our feet can ground us and bring us into to present time instantly and effectively.

## EXERCISE INVITING THE FEET INTO GREATER AWARENESS

- Try to sense your feet as they carry you into the room.
- Sense how the floor underneath supports and grounds you.
- Sense in that moment of attention that you are breathing and the relief that this can bring.
- Feel how much of each foot there is to make contact with the earth.
- Let your weight sink into the heels of the feet and breathe.
- Now let your weight shift to the balls of the feet and the pads of the toes; and again, breathe.
- Let a little bit of pressure come into one foot as you inhale, and release as you exhale.
- Do this for several cycles of your breath and then do the same with the other foot.
- Can you sense a springing quality that comes through your feet and legs and even up your spine when you feel the ground of the earth supporting you? Do your feet feel more alive?
- Let yourself stay with this for a few moments, resonating. In this way, you distill what you have let your breath bring into focus and enable other subtler ongoing effects to take place.

You can also try shifting your weight to alternate sides of the foot and sense what this brings in terms of release and an easier breath flow.

*Presence brings receptivity,  
receptivity brings presence*

As soon as we turn our attention to present time, to sensing what comes through the body and allowing it to permeate us, we open ourselves to the breath itself and to rhythms that move through the body, massaging, releasing tension and grounding us. With each breath cycle, as our breath grows wider, we have the chance to feel

revitalised and supported by a rhythm that can open us to a more expansive sense of space. The cycle of a freer flowing breath has the power to strengthen us in the moment as the breath penetrates all the way through to the bones. Our vitality and sense of connection can grow, and with that a deep sense of repose in whatever we are doing. Now we are ready to welcome our children!

As a parent it is not hard to be awake to the miracle of life. Holding an infant in your arms you embrace the pulse of life: body, breath and all the myriad processes that support life. The infant's sucking, sleeping, deep trust, deep attention and deep feeding directly attune us to this experience of complete absorption and dedication to the task at hand. The infant's entire being gives itself to the activity, whether crying, gazing or feeding. What a wonderful lesson an infant offers us! Even if we do not consciously remember it, all of us have been infants. And what we can see so palpably in the body of a baby is also true for the adult. As we trust, and sense ourselves supported, the breath can flow through the entire body, creating balance and integration, tuning us for receptive states of learning and joy.

We can know our children and ourselves through what repeatedly attracts wonder, and through the rhythm of attention, as it expands and contracts with the breath. A child's breathing rhythm and posture is deeply affected and shaped by surrounding patterns. There is a sense of ease and flow when the natural breathing rhythm guides our day, anchoring the child and offering a sense of safety through the serenity that the breath brings, whatever the activity and focus.

As parents we are responsible for guiding our children and feeding their true nature, for helping them truly unfold. As teachers we have to meet young children and develop their trust in a larger, more social environment. Ideally, in a lesson a teacher greets the children, meets them, holds them, enlivens them, calms them, delights them, nourishes them, inspires them, teaches them, and above all is with and alongside them. If we can sustain connection to the seed place from which we all have come, and which offers our lives a foundation and reference point, then we can create attuned environments for learning.



## *The natural rhythm of the breath sustains deep learning*

### **Sustaining the Natural Rhythm**

When sustained by our own healthy rhythm we can become effective guardians against the kinds of interference that undermine connection to children's natural rhythms. These kinds of interference pervade the modern world and are soaked up like a sponge by young children unless they are sustained by natural rhythms that connect deeply to their own being.

The healthy rhythm of a natural free-flowing breath can mediate and support our own sensory development and take us vividly and delightfully into our bodies, helping us in turn, to become awakened and delighted observers of our children.

Our times challenge both children and adults in their connection to the natural rhythms of creation and even to our own breathing rhythm. The mechanical rhythms of technology and the pace of modern life catches nearly all of us in its net – we gasp like landed fish and wonder what happened to the medium in which we can best swim. Some don't even know they are gasping. As a teacher and breath practitioner, over the past twenty-five years I have seen an extraordinary escalation in levels of stress, asthmatic and breathing difficulties, and in challenges to the capacity for containment and focus, often referred to as 'attention deficit'.

Modern bombardment of our senses threatens the sense of silence and disturbs ways of regulating and organising natural processes of the body such as movement, digestion, and breathing. Sense development is compromised and interrupted rather than harmonised. Increasingly impulsive and uncontrolled forms of behaviour in young children indicate an impatience with the time things need to take. Learning patience requires the imbibing of natural rhythms, and an organic sense of sequence and time.

The rhythm of our breath can organise sensory integration, as Rudolf Steiner was aware, bringing equanimity, receptivity and a readiness to learn. The body itself, the rhythms of nature and our breath teach us this. These rhythms are friends and guides, to be sensed and not overridden.

The way the world pulses through a child, attuning, enlivening, and nourishing, leads to self-expression that contributes to the

child's self-knowledge, self-mastery, and sense of freedom, inner calm, and repose. The ability to inhabit places of repose is especially important for supporting learning on a profound and personal level and also for creating tolerance, patience, and enthusiasm for what we do not yet know!

The teacher can lead the way for the child by being at home in his/her own true tempo and so support a deeper quality of breathing throughout the room. The sense of a wonderfully supportive, cushioning earth under our feet comes as we learn to trust the breath and sense its movement.

When we let go to the breath, we loosen the grip of unconscious controls and enable vitality and support to arise from sources at once intimate and universal.

## EXERCISE SENSING YOUR BREATH BRINGS EQUANIMITY

Before reading any further you might like to try the following as a simple way to connect with your own breath and discover what offers as you sense your own breath moving.

- Place your hand between your heart and abdomen, and sense under your hand the movement that you feel. It might be a slight rising and falling or even a sense of swinging.
- If this is hard, try placing your hands on your ribs and stay there, sensing the movement that you can feel, the life that pulses there all the time whether or not we give it attention!
- Stay for a little longer and then take your hands away and ask yourself what you feel. Is it as if the support of your hands were still there? Do you feel any more grounded or at peace with yourself? Allow time to register these subtle incremental changes of bodily sensation and mood because they do in fact portend small doorways to vast worlds of subtle experience!

By experiencing the sensation of the breath, by allowing the breath to come and go on its own, we open ourselves to our breath's vitalising power. This can teach us the joy of inhabiting our own skin, of knowing our own pulse and tempo and of discovering a deep trust in the ground of the earth and the blessings of the cosmos. A conscious breath also helps us to mediate between the

worlds of what is unconscious and what is awake, what is dark and what is light, what is dormant creativity and what is ripe for manifestation. The breath can clear old baggage, open us up towards our next steps and help us to feel at once more substantial and yet lighter, clearer and more effective.

For teachers this can clear out and release frozen, ineffective patterns that block the sense of fluid freedom and buoyant vitality in how we work. We can become more essential and simpler, finding new pathways and surprising possibilities. We may find we have more courage to take risks as we move away from a preconceived, less conscious sense of how things are done. Letting the inspiration of our innate breath move through us and guide our expression can also open us to the creative possibilities of inspiration in our work, as the boundaries of our awareness dance with the rhythm of our breath. Imagination can expand as old patterns thaw. A natural and conscious breath can integrate and transform past experience through the pathway of the body. A growing sensory awareness and transparency to the movement of our breath can draw us more fully into the enjoyment and fullness of the present moment. At the same time the sense of ground, substance and enthusiasm, which the breath brings, can help us to trust the future as it moves towards us and we towards it!

*Children live through embracing present time;  
and so can we!*

Can you recall moments when you dropped your adult focus to follow a child's delight? Letting yourself be taken to a frog pond, sharing with the child the pleasure of wading through swampy shallows, enjoying the textures, the sounds and the smells – dank, deep smells of stagnant and burgeoning life; and perhaps even enjoyed the child falling down in the mud – the most total immersion possible in the whole experience, all accompanied with exuberance and giggling! This can all be very nourishing for the breath, both the child's and adult's. At times like this we let ourselves enter fully into the sense experience and the elements of nature as we

join the child's joyful participation. It is as if, for now, nothing else exists. We have let ourselves follow what is before us and all around us and allowed direct and rich experience to fill the moment.

We have also helped the child to discover, in a relatively contained way, an experience of the world as safe. When we feel safe then trust grows and there is a natural enlarging of the possibilities for joy, vitality and learning. It is this immersion and delight in the present that will, in turn, enlarge and deepen our breath.

As we begin to feel more at home in the rhythm of the body and the breath grows bigger, it is immediately comforting and attractive to feel that more of us is invited to come into the body. The body is sensed as home, an anchor. Such anchoring helps the child to learn the bounds of his/her own capacities; to sense when there can be more and when s/he has had enough. This feeling of being supported and rooted in goodness and beauty can in turn kindle and inspire a child to journey as far as he/she can to the heart of the world, over a lifetime. When the world is perceived as safe, good and worthy of trust, we can commit to being here fully.

Many adults resist sensing their bodies and discovering the freedoms and possibilities of embodiment because of unconscious patterns and a belief held somewhere in the body and the soul that it might not be safe. I have worked with adults who uncovered old patterns and histories that were hidden, even frozen in time, which became conscious only when they sensed that the movement of the breath made it feel safe to release the experience. Depending on the adult individual this might happen gently over time or cathartically and suddenly.

When we let the breath mediate, we can, step by step and cycle by cycle, find our way through residual ambivalence towards a fuller physical life. An equanimity comes that calms excessive activity, and simplicity clears a pathway through the undergrowth and overwhelm. The child does not yet have the self-awareness to support complex processes of therapeutic integration and self-understanding. But, he/she knows how things feel, what feels good and what feels bad, what offers an attractive ambience and the kind of nourishment that invites the soul and spirit to enter. A child responds to such qualities and so does our breath.

## *The foundations of natural breath: attention, sensing and breathing*

In this chapter we have been exploring how we can come into greater presence through sensing the breath and body. The way in which we allow our attention to help us in this is fundamental since this is how we can perceive what is changing, where we are unconscious and what is being learnt. When we offer attention – in our culture we often say, paying attention – we heighten awareness. If we develop attention out of the breath, attuned to the movement of the breath, we can develop a soft focus that allows experience to permeate and illuminate us.

### EXERCISE

#### SIMPLY GIVING ATTENTION CHANGES AWARENESS AND CREATES MORE BREATH

It is a good idea to do this sitting fairly far forward on a chair, or even better a stool; but ensure that both feet make firm contact with the ground and that you feel supported and upright.

- Become aware of your hands. Take turns rubbing and stroking them and allow the hand to open softly, from the centre of the palm. Let this movement fill all the way to the fingers on the inhale and swing back on the exhale, so that the palm and fingers softly contract.
- Place one hand on your right or left thigh and sense both the hand and the leg under your hand.
- Stay there for a few breath cycles and sense your breath moving.
- Sense, if you can, the inhale and the exhale as you stay there.
- Move your hand down your leg to above the knee and again stay there for a few breath cycles, giving attention to this part of the leg, sensing the breath and the quality of sensation this contact brings.
- Move the hand to the knee and continue sensing and attending to this whole part of your leg. You might like to hold the knee with both hands. Do what is comfortable and comforting, always bringing your attention to the breathing and the sensation of the body where you have placed your hands.

- Now move the hands to the lower part of the leg and repeat the cycle.
- Continue to the ankle joint.
- Complete this by holding your foot and let yourself experience the whole hand over the foot, bringing contact more deeply to the floor as the heel, the arch and the ball of the foot release tensions.
- Take all the time you need to give attention to each area of the leg and foot.

#### Resonating:

- When you have finished come back into the sitting position and sense the leg you have just been attending to. Sense in what ways it feels different from the other leg and foot.
- Do you feel a sense of space, or vibrancy? Do you feel more alive? You may even have awakened areas of discomfort that are waiting for acknowledgment and transformation. All kinds of things happen when we give attention and experience the contrasts that emerge. It is a big step to learn how this way of attending changes awareness.

### *The cycle of the breath*

#### Connecting to the Breath

The way of working with the breath, fundamental to so much of this work, was developed by Ilse Middendorf in the early twentieth century. She calls the work *The Perceptible Breath* and it is based on the three essential capacities we have been describing: sensing, breathing, and giving attention or focusing. Together they strengthen and grow through mutual enhancement, and reflect the extraordinary strength and suppleness of our own life rhythm. When we attune to our breath in this way we are permeated by the substance of the breath – a profound healing force, bringing balance to our day and vividness to our expression, whether it be storytelling, singing, movement or simple conversation.

This connection to our breath means to touch and in turn be

touched by what has been given to us. Our breath brings presence and shifts how we sense our body and being, connecting us with our own innate metabolic signature. Young children actually invite us to become more aware since the healthy child lives so buoyantly in the present moment. Once we move towards this awareness, the conscious adult opens to his/her natural, fundamentally simple and self-balancing breathing rhythm.

Within the breath cycle itself we have an inhalation, exhalation and a pause. Between each of these phases there are also subtle places of transition. In a healthy and balanced life we take steps towards what interests, stimulates and attracts us; this is also the character of inhalation. The body walls grow wide, the ribs swing wide and the movement of expansion throughout the body indicates the receptive and welcoming gesture of the entire body towards the life forces of oxygen that can flow into it. A good healthy inhalation can permeate the entire being.

Inhalation is followed by exhalation. In exhalation we have the possibility of sensing what the inhale has brought us as the body walls swing back. In this approach to discovering the breath, the exhale can show us a sense of definition and clarity, resolution and ground. Try to sense the movement of your ribs by placing your hands there for a few breath cycles. Feel the fundamental movement of growing wide and swinging back.

The movement quality of a free and lively natural breath is a swinging motion. The ribs are one of the best places to tune in and feel this, for there we can clearly sense a movement that also takes place in different ways throughout the body. By letting the inhale fill us without pushing or pulling, expansion takes place, and the ribs and the walls of the body grow wide. As we exhale in an easy unforced way, the ribs and the walls of the body swing back, and offer the possibility of a sense of renewal and a different sense of vitality. This swinging, enlivening movement can penetrate the body: joints, limbs, spine, the pelvis, and the head. Subtler movements penetrate the organs and the bloodstream, as the pulse of life – oxygenated breath – builds with each cycle to release endorphins, which strengthen our sense of peace, wellbeing and vitality.

The more we find this within our own experience as adults, the more we enable the children in our care to move away from

constriction and anxiety towards the places of deep and sustaining attention that enrich learning.

In a full, healthy breath rhythm we also find, besides inhalation and exhalation, a resting place or pause. Before we go to the next experience and our next breath cycle, this pause supports the digestion of experience. Parents and teachers who let the pause inform their lives through a balanced breathing rhythm create intervals of rest in their speaking patterns and storytelling that quite literally shape the breathing of the children in their care.

It is in the resting place that the deepest sense of the unknown can be found as a place of deep trust, if we know how to let it be. This place of pause also cradles the next impulse – a seed for the next cycle of breath, beginning with the inhale. The more deeply we allow ourselves the qualities of the pause, the more we let each cycle deepen and find balance, the more a fundamental sense of repose can allow intuition and inspiration to suffuse our work.

We often see adults and children who are in fact very over-stimulated and so are not digesting or resonating sufficiently deeply with what they have experienced. This shows up very clearly in the breath rhythm, where we might see a tightness or control's emphasis on the inhalation. This in turn, can limit the full potential of the exhale which may be curtailed and flattened, thus losing the benefit of the full movement and penetration of the breath as it swings back with the body walls. In consequence the pause or resting place at the end of the breathing cycle may not be evident at all, creating many kinds of difficulties in both children and adults.

When we see behavioural indications that a child's attention is fatigued or distracted, something is needed to help the child recover connection with the breath. A break, a short movement activity, even specific individual support can lead the child's attention back into the rhythm and metabolism of the social group. Anyone who feels they are not getting enough, not enjoying a sense of fullness or of contentment, experiences anxiety, and anxiety breeds restlessness.



## *Supporting the child through the breath*

An understanding on the adult's part of how a relationship to the breath changes consciousness and offers a different level of integration, will support the child immeasurably. When we allow a natural flow and rhythm to occur we support the child in his/her own unfolding breath rhythm and its potential fullness. But we have to allow our own natural breath rhythm to flow for this to really happen in our classrooms or with our children at home.

Rudolf Steiner, the inspired founder of Waldorf education, speaks of the flow of the natural breath supporting both the digestion and the 'nerve-sense processes', those parts of our being that help us to assimilate, integrate and understand experience.

The process of digestion begins with our conscious participation and enjoyment, while substantial nourishment depends on deeper phases of which we are mostly unaware. Applying the idea of digestion to learning can illustrate the sense in which the breath mediates between conscious and unconscious process. Its rhythm carries what is to be learned into the depths of our being, resembling the way in which peristalsis carries food to places of assimilation. As with the food we eat, learning can only bring health and wholeness when we make room for its deeper, quieter, phases. When a rhythmic flow mediates and permeates our life, we can allow the world to penetrate our own bodies deeply and in turn, we can penetrate and understand the world in which we live.

That is why, after any dynamic and enlivening activity, a child needs to be given the contrast of a soothing and quieting interlude. In this way the child can become very familiar with the different but complementary qualities of activity and rest. Excellent classroom management happens when the teacher and the child ride on the waves of a rhythm that nourishes everybody in the room.

Based on the organizing principles of the natural breath, we as teachers and parents can develop a lens of perception both for ourselves and for our children. By breathing more effortlessly and more consciously we can work with greater vitality and find that our faculties develop and sharpen. Intuition grows, and like the breath

itself, inspiration comes, allowing our imaginative life to be seeded by the rhythms of nature. Strength and suppleness are the characteristic of a present and vital breath. Uncontrolled and freely flowing, a natural breath does not need to push or exert itself to be here. Like a strong tree it roots, unfolds and revels in its expressive gifts, uniting itself at the same time with the larger rhythms of the cosmos.

### *Summary of Chapter One*

The organising principles of the natural breath and the experience of its qualities and transforming power enable us as teachers and parents to become a lens of perception both for ourselves and our children. This first chapter discusses how

- to attune to and rely upon the natural breath rhythm
- to deepen our understanding of the breath cycle
- to discover its huge benefits
- to support young children
- to support ourselves as teachers
- to begin to strengthen our capacities for assimilation, digestion, integration and contentment in living and learning

## CHAPTER TWO

# *Movement Out of the Breath*

### *The meanings of movements*

#### The Movement of the Breath

Our breath lives in the realm of movement. When we engage in enjoyable movement the quality of our breath changes, deepening and becoming more substantial. Different qualities of movement intimately affect how we breathe. Vital, strong and dynamic movement is as important in our range of expression as fluid, gentle movement. Each come from different needs and each affect the breath differently.

Movement is fundamental to being alive and when our movement comes out of connection to our natural breath and the way we inhabit our body, we connect ourselves to the full potential and ease of our own rhythm. That rhythm is our spark and guide, helping us find our tempo as an individual in relation to the larger whole. The movement of the breath also supports and strengthens the senses, the essential ground of learning for the young child. So the more deeply we can let ourselves experience the ways in which our senses are mediated by the breath, the more vital and vivid our own sense of life can be and the livelier the connection to both ourselves and the children in our care.

As breath flows more easily, the breath rhythm will come into greater balance. When this starts to happen we become refreshed and reinvigorated, we feel more integrated and more aware of the boundary between ourselves and the rest of the world in which we participate. As adults this means we are less likely to be pulled out

of what roots us and grounds us, less likely to be reactive and therefore less likely to move to anger or discover delayed feeling, fatigue and collapse – because from moment to moment we can be more in touch with ourselves. Our sense of well-being is heightened, our blood and nerves more oxygenated with breath.

When the teacher breathes and moves within this place of balance and awareness, children will absorb these qualities through their entire being. They also will experience, in the ease and contentment that can pervade the room, the invitation to breathe deeply in their own innate rhythm. To breathe more deeply is to be more present and to be more present is to be awake with more resources available for learning.

Being in the natural flow of our own rhythm as much as possible supports our full engagement with everything that we do. As we become more present this becomes easier. This chapter seeks to clarify how the kinds of movements for children presented in the later section, Verses and Movement, can work archetypally. Before reading on, try this exercise to attune yourself to the flow of your inhalation and exhalation.

## EXERCISE BREATHING WITH THE HANDS

- Either standing, or in a comfortable sitting position where you are supported in finding your feet on the floor and your spine naturally upright, take a few moments to sense your breath.
- Open your hand, looking at it, palm upwards.
- Let the hand gently open as you allow your inhalation to arrive without any straining or reaching.
- Now let the fingers move back gently, contracting and drawing them towards the palm of your hand, as you exhale.
- Repeat this movement several times letting yourself sense your palm as the starting point for your breath to enter you.
- As you develop this, over several breath cycles, allow yourself to sense, as well, the place where the breath starts to swing back on the exhalation. This indicates a fullness of the inhalation and the readiness of the exhalation to find its place in the rhythm.
- Try this with the other hand for several cycles and then if you wish, try both hands together.

- When you have done a few of these cycles, resonate **with what** you feel. This is very important in order to sense what **is subtly** changing.

#### Resonating:

- Do you feel more awareness of your moving breath?
- Do you feel more expansive and settled as the ribs **swing wider**?
- How do your hands and arms feel?

A good deal of the time we use our hands, like **our** feet, unconsciously. They reach into the world, they **manipulate**, they shape and do, serving us marvelously. But like the feet, they are also rich in pressure points and are made to receive, sense, **probe** and stroke. Touch is our first and fundamental sense. We can **learn** a great deal about the breath when we tune our attention this way **and** sense how much is available for us to learn. As surface tensions **shift**, we settle into a deeper rhythm and a more buoyant breath that **supports** us effortlessly, connecting us more deeply to the roots of **our** being.

When your movements connect to this natural source of free-flowing, buoyant life, the benefits naturally extend to your children as well as yourself. The later chapter in Section Four specifically addresses breath and movement activities for the adult. **The** more deeply you allow yourself to experience the flow of the **breath**, the more naturally everything else in the book will flow. For now let's look at the movement sequences used with children and the reasons why we use them.

#### *An exploration of principles: the effects of certain movements in supporting integration and effective learning*

Clear principles underlie how we can build and tune our bodies through our senses and our breathing rhythm. Certain sequences provide the most effective kind of awakening and receptivity. Gentle, flowing and easy stretching can bring a new sense of

freedom, opening up the body and offering a sense of space and well-being. Tapping and brushing stimulates and creates a sense of warmth and boundary. The movements of circling and rolling naturally open up the way in which breath can flow through the different parts of the body, into the blood stream and the organs, penetrating body tissue and encouraging deep levels of integration.

This book offers a series of playful stretching verses to begin any lesson of working together but it can be really wonderful for you as the teacher to stretch just for yourself before the children enter the space in which you are working. This prepares and tunes you with a different kind of receptivity. Old habits that derive from kinds of contraction and unconsciousness, and that dog us all, can fall away, giving rise to a sense of refreshment and renewal, both within our own body and also permeating our external surroundings.

Stretching movements open us in a more spacious way through deeper movement and for penetration of the breath throughout the body. We start to feel expansive, more open and alive and more present. Stretching needs to be done softly and easily with no overreaching or forcing at all. As we stretch, we release tightness and tensions. We permeate the muscles with breath. We have all the time in the world to start to experience the pleasure of just being. Big sighs and yawns are to be encouraged. Every one of us and every part of us is invited to enjoy the ease of a stretch; especially the teacher, who can then infect everyone else with the qualities of a more deeply experienced breath rhythm! The sense of life, our sense of well-being can shift and grow through this fundamental activity, creating a sense of ease and softness in the room as a whole.

Tapping, stomping, and clapping helps us come to our senses. Through these variously light but pleasant ways of touching we stimulate and build vitality. The nerves pass on pleasant and enlivening messages, muscles can awaken and the blood flows, even the bones hear the call. The boundaries of the body, felt from the inside as the body walls, become more alive. A tingling quality can grow, and make us more aware of where we are in relation to the world outside.

Working in this way with touch, we activate our sense of proprioception. This sensibility is essential in telling us how to move and where our body meets the world. It gives us the sense of boundaries through contrast and resistance. These are vital for

children to help them find healthy and comfortable interactions, especially in the classroom where larger numbers create more complex dynamics. The more an adult can experience this sense in her<sup>1</sup> own body, the more effectively it can be conveyed to children through the movements and verses.

We all probably know a child who is unaware of the boundary of his space and that of the other children. The child who bumps into other people's desks, chairs and backpacks., who can cause a cascade of coats to fall off pegs, just by blinking, and so draw towards him intense irritation. This inability to feel clearly where he ends and the rest of the world begins, creates challenges in lining up or getting into a circle in a classroom and can gradually erode the tolerance of a teacher. In past times that child would have been labeled clumsy. Now we try to discover why this is happening and how that child can be helped to gain a better awareness of his body.

Consequently, like the stretching activity, patting and stroking games are fundamentally important. These can gently awaken the body all over, and variations of these games are offered in a number of the verses. These are verses that support the developmental need to build kinaesthetic awareness, as do the swaddling games and rolling games which offer firm but gentle feedback to the child. These games naturally follow after the stretching games and offer a sense of boundary, a contrast to the expansive sensing of space and greater inner freedom given by stretching activities.

Rocking, circling and rolling movements are all excellent kinds of movement for freeing up a deeper and more flowing breath. When we rock backwards and forwards in see-sawing motions, we engage the legs and feet and the sacral area at the base of the spine. Massaging motions of the breath can ripple through the entire spine. In partnership, we also engage the arms. Rocking a child on our laps or in our arms can take them right back to that supported primal rhythm of the infant and very young child where he feels trust and is deeply held. This experience usually means that we let go and enjoy that profound sense of what it is to be held.

This love of being held is something I have experienced with teachers as well as children. Even fully grown adults can enjoy being swaddled and rolled and rocked in the *We Wrap, Wrap our Little Bundle* verse (page 78)! However, children who are reluctant to be held are showing us important resistances that we will need to work

with differently as we invite them gradually towards places of increased comfort and trust.

Circling movements are wonderful for opening up the body of its horizontal planes and really getting the breath to move through and open up places where we are stuck. The *Hippo Song* (page 71), offers a lot of circling, as well as rocking in its range. Sitting on the floor, we circle around the pelvis, letting the circling go all the way up to the rib cage and upper body. Very quickly vitality, ease and laughter can fill the room. This open ease is a marked and characteristic benefit that comes with such circling and it also creates a wonderful foundation for the next teaching step. Different axes of the body become more porous to the breath, tissue becomes more elastic and vitality grows. Circling movements also give a clear sense of space, connection, containment and boundary and so are very good for offering a sense of vitality without causing unmanageable exuberance.

Rolling movements can be done on the floor or standing up, with different benefits. When we roll ourselves up or down in standing, attending to doing it slowly, we can allow time for the joints and bones to participate more fully as we open up for a deeper, more penetrative breath. Rolling down and then up the spine -slowly- in standing, will also subtly open and shift alignment and posture, each vertebra finding its place as we come into the upright. A verse such as *Looking Through the Garden Gate* (page 94) which has the children stretching and looking down, can be done quite slowly, especially when they are curling upwards, to ensure maximum benefits.

When we roll on the floor, with legs extended and the front, back, and sides making contact with the ground, the sense of support from the floor and the resistance it can offer as we move across it, is strengthening and toning. Rolling in general is a wonderful stimulation for the whole body and breath. This movement echoes early infant stages of movement development and can be very helpful for children who are still integrating early reflexes and the sense of body boundary. The body tone changes as the floor's support helps the body yield and trust, and the entire skin surface rejoices in contact. The breath, meanwhile, grows deeper. Done often enough, this will help to refine and differentiate qualities of contact. Developing sensitivity to touch at an early age



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When we roll on the floor, with legs extended and the front, back, and sides making contact with the ground, the sense of support from the floor and the resistance it can offer as we move across it, is strengthening and toning. Rolling in general is a wonderful stimulation for the whole body and breath. This movement echoes early infant stages of movement development and can be very helpful for children who are still integrating early reflexes and the sense of body boundary. The body tone changes as the floor's support helps the body yield and trust, and the entire skin surface rejoices in contact. The breath, meanwhile, grows deeper. Done often enough, this will help to refine and differentiate qualities of contact. Developing sensitivity to touch at an early age

can lay tremendous foundations for trust and sensitivity and even strengthens the capacity for tact as a social skill. Tact after all derives from the same root as touch, suggesting the profoundly physical way in which our sense of the other grows and how dependent is our social sense on the body's developing sensitivity and awareness. Children who become habituated to subtle and varying ways of sensing, will be better able to reciprocate in nuanced, trusting and empathic relationships.

Whirling and twirling movements are very good, in moderation, for heightening the sense of balance and spatial orientation, as well as being very stimulating for the breath. Helping children find their feet and so become more anchored to the ground after this kind of movement is very important. Even a simple 'Ah, here's the earth!' will do the job for most children. As the feet are sensed in contact with the earth, the breath flows downward, anchoring and stabilising, offering a way to consolidate equilibrium and balance. Reminding children, as they move playfully, of their contact with the earth is a way to encourage resonance and recalls for them a time when all their movement was closely 'earthed'.

Babies when given daily opportunities to explore their own movement and space in their own time, will be able to absorb and integrate the world through their own bodies much more deeply. This is, after all, what we are designed to do. When the adult comes down to the floor and is with the child she can sense more directly how that child's world is perceived. This is a different experience from that involved in an upright adult signalling to a child from a higher altitude. As adults we can forget, growing away from the grounding and fundamental experience that the earth offers all of us. The earth is the first plane for knowing our world and the support that it offers us. Confident children trust the earth.

Between our ears we have the finely calibrated vestibular system. Situated in a delicate canal which is coiled in the inner ear, the fluid of the vestibular system serves as an inner gauge which moves in response to changes in direction. The vertical posture unique to human beings makes unusually refined use of vestibular sensibility in helping us find ourselves in space. Vestibular function is fundamental to how we find ourselves in balance and to our sense of orientation.

How well the child incorporates vestibular function into his own sense of movement is crucial. Consequently, young children who are driven in cars a lot may not be as clear about the beginnings and endings of their own movements and may start to experience problems in this area. Children who have had a history of ear infections may experience difficulties here also. This will affect how children hear and process what is said to them and how children find a sense of balance. As children grow and move into classroom environments this can present challenges relating to the sense of movement, developing eye movements, and sometimes also tie in with auditory processing. Vestibular function also enables the translation of visual frames of reference. When this function is weak, the transitions in a classroom which involve repeated movements of looking at a blackboard and then looking down at a page, can be very difficult and create all kinds of resistance to writing and learning.

Gentle, playful movements that support the integration of the vestibular system can therefore, like many movements, strengthen the development of more than one area of the body. Typically, rocking, rolling and whirling movements will get the vestibular fluid moving and bring experiences of change, gentle awakening and integration. We can also start to see the wisdom of many traditional or archetypal movements found in children's natural movements and games, which effortlessly support development and integration. Allowed to find the way, both the body and the breath more often than not know what is good for them. All of the older children I have worked with who needed therapeutic support clearly benefited from developmental movement that echoed stages of very early movement development. Being able to explore in a playful and non-threatening environment, children often discover and very quickly integrate what is missing that will bring them into balance. The range and types of movement that children are offered is crucial to supporting integration. Repeating certain kinds of movement on a regular basis builds confidence and familiarity as pathways are cleared and connected, making the dialogue between the nervous system, the brain and the body smoother and clearer.

The root of a number of imbalances and difficulties for children today can be addressed by help in the area of vestibular function. A

deep and free-flowing breath will connect the limbs, the trunk and the head, making the body more aware of movement. Breath and movement together can also heighten awareness of the resistance that the ground offers to the whole body and so strengthen the child's own relationship to time and space. The body and breath can bring head and feet, heaven and earth together, as the upper body and lower body find integration. This sense of connection builds confidence and strength. Therefore it is beneficial to offer children opportunities to explore the world, avoiding vast amounts of driving and carrying – where they feel, too often, propelled by the adult's overriding will.

Whirling and twirling, swinging and see-sawing, rocking and rolling are all tremendous exercises for strengthening the integration of the vestibular system, and many of these will also support the integration of both sensory and motor needs in the young child.

Sensory motor integration happens as sensation increasingly engages more of our natural responsiveness and can better guide and mediate movement. Vitality and the sense of presence and well-being can grow. Fundamental to Breathing Circle work is the way in which we support sensing, so that other kinds of flow – the blood and the breathing – can deepen and support life processes. Enjoyment fuels this way of working, reducing stress and favouring the autonomic nervous system's parasympathetic response of relaxing, so facilitating more comfortable receptivity.

The term 'sensory-motor' describes the process that takes place when all of our senses are involved in any physical movement. All physical learning is sensory-motor learning when the feedback loops move between the senses, the muscles and the brain. When our body moves, our sense of touch, sight and balance send messages to the brain about where our body is in space and the muscular activity that is taking place. Information moves back and forth between the body and the brain. Effective learning and intelligence help our movement to become more refined and efficient, reducing unnecessary and counterproductive muscular effort in our body. This also lays the ground for greater vitality and less fatigue.

The term 'sensory-motor' integration has been used variously in different kinds of somatic work which aims to support integration

of the human being through the body. The work of June Ayers, and of Moshe Feldenkrais, are distinguished examples. To put a very subtle process simply, as certain kinds of physical sensing are encouraged and cultivated, in safe and pleasant environments, the habitual responses that might involve unnecessary effort, or limiting or defensive ways of meeting the world, can be neutralised. We are then more receptive to activity that can strengthen, transform and reinforce modes of coordination, and so support overall integration. It makes sense that as long as one part of ourselves is working against another we are less effective and efficient; that we are in a sense, working too hard and that we are at some level therefore, less content.

As soon as a child starts to discover how to work with his particular configuration and ways of being and doing, he has been given keys to a kingdom. A different level of freedom can be experienced which will allow a child to move more easily between one-on-one dialogue and the larger group. As a child senses the individual patterning and learning style that is fundamentally his own, a separation from the reactions and inefficiencies that may have accrued over time can take place. Then a freedom can be found from the defensive, often negative perceptions of himself which may well derive from these very inefficiencies and reactions.

Becoming more sensory aware of our backs, our legs and our feet can support a more joyful way of being here. To experience this is to feel simply that there is suddenly more there, and that it is alive and responsive. To become more sense-aware is to let natural sensations arrive. These will come as soon as we experience our breath moving, in the ribs, in the chest and later, in places that subtly correspond to our specific patterns of activity.

You can experiment with becoming more sensory aware by trying the following.

## EXERCISE

### CREATING SENSORY AWARENESS IN THE BACK

- Sit with your feet apart and touching the ground, fairly far forwards on a chair or stool. Now place your hands on your belly and sense, if you can, movement or the quality of feeling that arises when you make contact in this way.
- Stay there at least for seven breath cycles. Letting your inhale

come, and the exhale swing back; and if you can sense a pause between them, then so much the better!

- Now place your hands on your lower back in the sacral lumbar area at the very base of the spine. Let yourself give in, swinging very gently into this area of the sacrum, the sacred bone as it is called.
- With each breath cycle let your head roll down to the chest as the sacrum receives the inhalation. This will support the sacrum releasing as the head also gives in.
- Let yourself swing upright as the exhalation carries you back, head and spine straightening. Try this for several breath cycles. As you give into the sacrum on inhale, let the head and chin curl down towards the chest. Then swing back up as the spine straightens on exhalation.
- Do this several times and try to avoid over-riding your breath, pushing or pulling or aiming for some perfect posture. Give in to the breath and let it lead you.

N.B. These exercises are all offered as movements that enhance the sense of flow and a dynamic ease, therefore any pushing or exertion, especially if it causes discomfort or pain, needs to be avoided.

#### **Resonating:**

- How do you feel? Is there a different quality of sensation in your body?
- Do you feel more movement?

Wherever you bring attention and start to open to the breath you are offering the gift of sensing more and feeling more alive. Even just placing a hand on a knee or a thigh and staying there for a while sensing the contact and the breath will change awareness. You can prove this by contrasting the experience of how one leg feels relative to another when you create this kind of contact.

Becoming more physically attuned to our breath and how it moves and permeates the substance of our body changes our state of being. As the busyness that is inside our heads drops away, we have more chance to experience joyful simplicity. All of this, in turn, is supported at a more fundamental level by being more in

touch with the individual breath rhythm. This is **the fundamental integrating source**.

Many of the movements in this book work with the two sides of the body, left and right. The ways in which two sides of a person work together at higher levels of integration – how a person is ‘lateralised’ – is very individual. Movements that integrate the way a person is lateralised occur in the stretching and also in the rolling and rocking games in particular, as well as some of the finger games. Most of us have a dominant side, although a large number of us are mixed in our laterality dominance. Experiencing both sides, waking them up and finding ways for them to play together and talk together helps to facilitate lateral integration, and coordination of the right and left brain hemispheres. This is crucial in balancing how we perceive, how we function and how we enjoy our pathway in the world.

Children who have lots of opportunity to play and move, climbing trees, monkey bars and walls, who swing and see-saw, hop, skip and jump and play in the sand, are wide open to finding roots in natural rhythm. The traditional games that children have evolved meet many of the developmental needs that support healthy integration. Games such as hopscotch, throwing and catching a ball, freeze tag and running games; and also activities such as horseback riding, swimming and hiking strengthen and support many areas of development. These include spatial awareness, a sense of balance, lateral integration and the integration of the midline. The ‘midline’ is understood as the point where movement crosses between the right and left side, and is represented as a vertical line down the middle of the body.

The natural rhythm of our breath is the key to our own individual rhythm, our metabolic signature. The more this is supported and strengthened, the easier it becomes to find a relationship to the group rhythm. Our job as teachers is to ensure that children sustain their connection to the natural rhythms as much as possible, becoming neither hardened nor contracted, nor anxious and neurotic. These more negative states push children out of joyfully experiencing the body into a place of knots and struggle, preventing them finding flow through the natural resistances and joys that life offers.

This section explored the benefits and underlying importance

of the movements, and the meaning of many of the terms used. In the next section called *Creating the Space* we look at a sample lesson as an example of how to use some of the material offered in Section Two. The next chapter describes how to set up a group for two- to four-year-olds, based on a weekly group also attended by parents.

## *Summary of Chapter Two*

To breathe more easily is to be more present and to be more present is to be more awake with more resources for learning. This second chapter shows:

### WHY:

- we need to support a range of movement and expression in learning, from soft and gentle to vital and dynamic

### HOW:

- movement organises the breath rhythm...
- movements that are orchestrated around clear principles of breathing can assist sensory-motor integration in development...
- stretching; tapping, stroking and clapping; rocking, circling and rolling, whirling and twirling, are examples of some of these activities...
- expanding our own sensory-motor awareness can improve our approach to teaching
- teachers can support learning environments by understanding how touch can teach about our own breath and boundaries



## CHAPTER THREE

# *Creating the Space*

### *Setting up and teaching a class for the young child with rhythm, repetition and ritual*

This description of how to create a space for your playgroup is based on a form which I have found worked wonderfully for the young child in groups which included parents, and worked well too in groups led by a single teacher. You will not find here an exact prescription for how it should be, but, in this chapter and the next, a picture is offered of one kind of group teaching, together with essential principles and key qualities that can guide and animate many different kinds of effective teaching situations.

The format can work very well with toddlers and pre-schoolers and is easily adaptable for a kindergarten circle time. The form and flow of the sequence described here is designed to build a certain inviting, nourishing atmosphere. The aesthetic aspects of this format offer a simplicity that invites the child's imagination to explore and learn at many different levels

Being at ease with oneself is one of the first palpable benefits we experience with the freely flowing movement of the breath. Each of the activities is offered in a particular sequence. The sequence of movements – which are accompanied by rhythmic and pictorial language, borne on the rhythms of the words – is also geared to create deep receptivity and to offer simultaneous dreaminess and alertness. This lays the foundation for rich and expressive language use and a deep capacity for attention in how the world is absorbed.

## *Preparing the space*

A circle of cloths placed in a rainbow of overlapping colours and soft textures on the floor defines a space around which children can gather, either with or without parents. In the centre of this circle there may be a few very simple toys (see appendix 2) which the children have been exploring in imaginative play, finding their way towards them in their own time as they enter the space and find their bearings. The adults also need time to come in, time to just observe and learn; gradually adjusting to the tempo of the children's world and letting their own busyness and chatter drop away. This time of free play and adjustment is very beneficial and needs a good chunk allowed for it. Allowing no less than twenty minutes and even up to half an hour can be positive and productive. The adults in the room also need to feel nourished, and that they are learning. Very often I have given adults a small handout to read as they come into the room to guide their observation of their children, and deepen the knowledge of what we are witnessing, keeping adult conversation until later on.

## *Singing and beginning: finding effective flow*

After a period of free play and observation, it is time to invite the children into the rhythmic part of the morning. Perhaps the children are each involved in their own play activities, in small groups or individually. How does the teacher call even the youngest of children into an awareness that something is shifting and changing? A song or simple melody played on a flute or lyre offers the harmony of a pentatonic scale (see Appendix Two). This will draw children, as if from a dream, towards the focus that the teacher is calling for, inviting them into a flowing transition. In this way we subtly teach the children about how this space, like the rest of the outer world, is for exploration and how this can change as we are called into different ways of meeting and interacting.

We are also teaching the children about time. A singing voice or

a melody invites the child to make necessary changes or easier, ~~more~~ fluid transitions. For many children, transitions can be acutely painful and the screams that come from a child unwillingly disrupted are in themselves a marvellous clarion call of outrage against having their focus interrupted. It is potentially an intrinsic strength therefore and need not be a social embarrassment. We need to help children to be at ease and in tune with their own rhythms, and to find a relationship to the loud pulse of all the other insistent rhythms in the world without feeling dislocated. Whether we are a child or an adult, this kind of learning goes to the roots of how we live a breathing social life and find our own learning tempo. As the teacher sings, toys are scooped into baskets at the side of the room while children and adults gather in sitting outside that circle. In this way we make space for our movement without spending too much time and without breaking the social space. Formalised clean-up comes later.

### *Greeting and meeting*

The group begins with a greeting. Now we are formally meeting and greeting ourselves and each other, beginning with the body, and extending out towards the room and each other. Through imitation children learn the importance of meeting, making eye contact, and handshakes, as adults lead the way in modelling an important social skill. *We Stretch Right up to the Star of our Birth* (page 56) is a great stretch for reaching towards the heavens and then curling back down to the floor. *The Sun Above is Bright* (page 58) is also a wonderful opening verse as arms are stretched overhead first in sitting and then in standing. Everyone is then invited to start to wake up their bodies with gentle tapping and stroking verses such as *Good Morning Feet* (page 65) and *Pitter Patter Raindrops* (page 67). Often children and parents go round the room and greet each other, especially if this is a group that meets weekly, or people are still unsure of each others' names.

## *From warming and waking to rocking and rolling*

The vitality can increase very quickly as the stretching movements and rocking and rolling verses build and grow. Not so many verses are needed to bring the class to an enlivened place, eager for the next step. Many of the verses need repetition three or four times for young children to feel satisfied. If you have adults with you in the room they will also be eager to learn and absorb the verses. Repetition will also support memorising for further practice at home, and show the different rhythms and possibilities of playing with language.

A small child of one-and-a-half or even two, may decide to finally wander towards the hub of activity, leaving his own play activity to explore the larger interaction. Each child is allowed to respond.

The aim now is to open up the body and the breath, further releasing and softening patterns of tension and unease. Laughter and a sense of lightness can easily build and grow, as everyone in the room feels more open and sits on the floor. The teacher needs to be aware of what is shifting and changing. A teacher's attunement can then affect what needs to happen next. This will guide how the pace changes, the tempo varies and how the teacher guides the attention to what is happening: fast here, slower there, a pause, a thrilling surge and another pause, all helping to digest experience. I love to play with how long the pauses can be sustained before the dynamic is lost. Mood and receptivity changes and the room starts to feel more alive.

Eagerly getting ready for the *Boating Song* (page 74) the group follows the teacher's lead and places imaginary oars in the imagined water. One or two children prompt a dreamier child, while a father picks up his small son and places him, his legs extended on the floor, in his lap. Together, he and his son will row, paddle, sail and steam through the lively verse that some children greet with welcoming familiarity and anticipation. After we have done this verse at least twice it is clear that the group is ready for a more vigorous rocking verse. So we go to *The Door's Shut Tight* (page 73), a partnered rocking verse with a strong and vital rhythm to encourage a full rocking from the base of the spine and all the way through, legs, arms and up the back. The warmth and vitality has grown palpably in the room and faces are flushed and happy.

The circling and rocking games offer tremendous benefits and are a good follow-on activity after the stretching. The back and legs derive huge support in some of the pushing and pulling games which build a sense of tone and substance throughout the body and which can especially be felt in the limbs. The growing sensation of the body and the flowing movement of the breath together, soften and give a denser, more heightened sense of well-being, a glow and happiness.

Circling movements and rocking movements are found together in the *Hippo Song* (page 71), another full-bodied circling and rocking verse with a dramatic final roll at the end. As in the *Boating Song* (page 74) these are all very strong verses to help build inner freedom as the diaphragm swings, the thoracic and pelvic areas of the body open and the spine and inner organs are massaged and toned by free flowing breath and movement. So much vitality can flow with these verses that, even with an extremely phlegmatic group, I could not imagine doing all of these verses in one class. It would be far too stimulating!

From this fundamental, freer-swinging movement of circling and rocking, we invite other areas of the body to engage and open, strengthening the sense of their substantiality and vitality. Here we sit and circle around on the floor, the pelvic bones making contact with the floor, making a partner of the ground itself. Engaging the legs and arms with a partner we open and soften and connect with our backs as we rock forwards or roll backwards. We also build tremendous liveliness as the breath and body together signal we are alive and awake: for the moving breath connects us to ourselves and to the sense of wholeness of our bodies and the world around us.

### *Containing vitality, resonating and resting*

After a lot of vitality has been built it is crucial for the teacher to take time to resonate with what has been achieved. While you observe the changes: the colour of faces, the sounds in the room, the mood and dynamics, you are creating a space for everyone to digest. This process is crucial since so many of the attention and

listening disorders in school-age children can be traced back to an inability to be truly receptive.

As a teacher develops her own capacity to be receptive, to absorb and sense what is happening, her observation and resonance can teach children and parents by example. Attuning in this way, by sensing our own breath, develops a faculty for discerning and assimilating the essential amidst welters of information. The natural cycle of the breath contains within it this quality of the receptive as well as the dynamic.

Transitions from one activity to another are greatly helped by the sense of flow that comes from a teacher being in touch with her own breath. A deeper trust and ease can enhance perceiving and tuning to others' breathing patterns. This capacity works like an extended sense of touch to sense and support children's needs. This is tremendously important in a world where families are often caught up in hurried rhythms that are disconnected and busy to the point of creating stress. Stress always shows up directly in the breathing rhythm, a clear mirror of who we are and where we are at.

When we develop the feeling for flexibility, variation and healthy contrast, as distinct moods and modes of learning, we offer children a way to breathe and develop attention which can be interesting without being over-stimulating. Over-stimulation feeds the appetite for unceasing bombardment and can distort the natural breathing rhythm. Sensing satisfaction and contentment within oneself, knowing that this is enough for now, is a tremendous gift. When we allow a gestation period we also enhance the clarity of the signals that tell the body it is alive, vital and awake. To strengthen these capacities and root them in the rhythm of the breath itself is like strengthening the immune system through healthy diet and exercise.

We finish the movement sequence with a rolling and swaddling game (page 77). As coloured cloths are spread out over the floor, some children eagerly lie down waiting to be wrapped up tightly while other children might hang back waiting for an adult to lead the way. Not all children may want to do this activity, preferring to wrap a doll or another adult in cloths first and letting the sense of this experience gradually build confidence so that they can also receive it later. One child has resisted swaddling games since he arrived in the group, although he has been coming to the group for

a year. He resists strongly even at home but now his mother rolls him across the floor – without a tight cloth wrapped around him – as he develops more ease and comfort for trusting on his own terms. As he gets older and absorbs more of the infectious social joy his peers experience with this game, he may become more willing to trust and to try.

These are wonderful activities to be repeated over and over and for many children – they simply can't get enough. The tactile pleasure of rolling over the floor while the body is swaddled in tight cloths, experiencing the floor as we roll over it, helps many children come more deeply into themselves and into a calmer and quieter state. The body boundary, the sense of the proprioceptive and the functioning of the vestibular, are all strengthened through these kinds of rolling activity. Watching how your children respond differently, learning through the signals of the body and breath and observing others, will teach you a great deal about what each individual needs.

Much of what has been established so far has been focused on building a bigger, deeper breath. At the same time, sensing where the body experiences its boundary, and its sense of fullness, deepens the capacity for a more flowing, less constrained breathing. All of the rolling and rocking games will strengthen the gross motor skills which help the physical body come into balance and integration. At any point after a certain vitality and tone has been developed in the room, you can introduce, with great contrast in focus, the hand and finger games. These offer a different quality and support the fine motor skills. Fine motor skills are needed for drawing, writing and using our hands. Playful finger and hand activities have been proven to stimulate pathways in the brain, preparing for subsequent dexterity and control.

There are many ways in which we can use hand and finger games to refine the organs of touch and connect us to our breath flow. We can support growing dexterity in playful ways that build sensitivity and strength without causing excessive tension. Shaking or holding a child's hand can help us appreciate if the muscle tone is tight and somewhat unyielding or, alternatively, slack and under-toned. The joy of a really satisfying handshake can wake us up to the contrasting differences of what each of us brings when we shake hands.

The hands and fingers are made for much more than simply

reaching into and manipulating the world. A baby's hand has an openness and innocent purity as it extends into the world. For a period of time in a baby's development, the hand is a pure sense organ. Different kinds of integration and neurological development are strengthened and supported as we wake the hands up to greater dexterity and sensitivity. Many traditions also acknowledge that the hand, like the foot, can access the entire body: fingers acting as pressure points to key areas of the body. To have the experience of our hands as sensing, playful, receptive extensions of ourselves which can act as tuning forks to both inner and outer worlds, is a gift in a world that beckons to us to press ever more buttons, switch controls and let our 'fingers do the walking'. We are at risk of creating imbalance with the overemphasis on eye- and hand-dominant activities at the expense of other senses and faculties.

You might choose to offer a hand and finger game at the beginning to wake the children up and deepen the focus on a part of the body directly in front of them. When we sit in a circle and do this all together there is a wonderful social aspect to the activity. If it comes early in the lesson you would do this, most likely, in a very lively way. However, hand and finger games can also be done at this later stage to support a mood of quiet, closer-to-the-body composure and focus. They are especially useful, as well, in groups where you are the only adult and where the children may be getting over-excited and starting to get out of themselves. Placing hands, fingers and feet in front of you can bring an immediate grounding. Knowing how to do this can mitigate a teacher's anxiety about using highly stimulating verses, giving her confidence that she will get children back 'in' if they become too excited.

### *Sensing the shift: cleaning up and closing*

To bring the group together, when you decide to close the movement sequence, everyone may hold hands and do one of the circle story verses in standing. The teacher observes the laughter and allows a resonating to fill the room after each verse. In this way the pace of the class can teach everyone, without needing any words,



that a resting place, a space of time, a moment of **silence**, is crucial for that full sense of satisfaction and digestion. We **make** space for sensing the quality of what we have just experienced rather than rushing towards the next delightful and stimulating **event**.

A simple clean-up song signifies that now the **class** is making another transition. It is time for all the toys and cloths to be placed in baskets at the side of the room. Rhythmically and together, connected by a melody, preferably sung by the teacher with others joining in, each one sorts and sifts, creating a **new order** and making space for a story. Where the cloths once were is now an invisible circle of colour. The children find seats with anticipation. A new song indicates that the story is soon to follow and that the space for that story is to be established. A few very simple props indicate the scene, a candle is lit, and the mood is set.

Perhaps this is the second week of your story and you are telling it again and will do so for a third time so that the story settles and meets the young child's love of repetition and consistency.

Halfway through the story, one child may start to become very restless and perhaps disturb the others who are rapt. Luckily it is a story about a creature, and a quick sound effect of a squawk and a nut cracking on a stone immediately redirects the restless child's focus and takes the other children deeper in. How many senses can be engaged here? How can a child, however young, be warmed by words and sounds and melody so that it all slides home, vividly but as if in a dream, much as a song might. Fully awake understanding is a grown-up thing, but a deep readiness for attention is there at birth.

### *Creating and crafting: further expression*

When the story ends, the children help to blow out the candle, again letting that resonating time come to full expression. Gradually the group moves towards a creative activity that comes out of the children themselves. This could be a drawing activity, painting, working with felt, baking, candle decorating, making lavender bags or any other seasonal activities with a thematic link to the story you told.

## *A nourishing interlude*

After cleaning up the previous activity the children may very well be hungry. Setting the space and defining clearly how a transition from one activity to another can flow easily, is best marked by a song for washing hands and preparing to eat. Snack time is a good time for conversation to flow between the adults and around the children. Digestion happens on many levels and in our world children need deep experiences of eating, enjoyment, taking time, and the delights of socialising.

## *Saying goodbye*

At the end of the class, one of the simple circle verses is a good way to bring gentle closure. A verse such as *The Tide Comes In and the Tide Goes Out* (page 104) is excellent for laughter and the contrasts of soft and loud, slow and fast. I have yet to meet a child who didn't love the verse. The whole circle holds hands and begins to move in and out. Some children may choose to go inside the circle in order to experience the waves from another perspective. This leads very easily into a goodbye song and a positive and happy note for both adults and children.

Obviously for older children the transition can happen differently as you shift into a different part of the morning. I have worked with pre-school groups where the transition went from movement and story to a closing, after which I handed the class back for the main teacher to take them to snack and free play. You are the choreographer, play with your possibilities!

## *Summary of Chapter Three*

To be at home with oneself is to be in an **undefensive and receptive** state for learning. Rhythm always helps us to find the sense of home. The third chapter shows

### HOW:

- to set up and teach a class for the young child using rhythm, repetition and ritual
- to prepare the space
- to begin and how to find effective flow
- to greet and meet the others and my own breath and body
- to wake up and warm up the group and support a vital dynamic breathing from stretching to rocking and rolling
- to contain vitality, resonate and ensure places of resting and contrast
- to roll and swaddle and deepen the qualities already introduced
- to sense the shift; how to clean up and close
- to introduce a nourishing interlude: snack time
- to say goodbye and close the class

## CHAPTER FOUR

# *Finding the Thread*

This chapter supports teachers in finding their way more specifically into the ideas and material which the book offers. Outlined a little later on in this chapter are some key principles and guidelines to help you as teacher plan many varied lessons. As you deepen in your understanding of the approach, so your sense of the principles can also support you in eventually developing effective lessons based on your own inspiration.

### *Who can join the dance?*

The songs, verses and stories provided in the following two sections are all designed to support the teacher in creating possibilities for varied kinds of movement and play in the classroom, but they also work very well for a parent and child at home. Indeed, parents participating in a parent and toddler group have often found that a child becomes attached to certain movements and verses, repeating these endlessly at home, although they may barely participate in the larger group. This seems to indicate how individual are the ways of learning if we are allowed to find our own healthy tempo and style of integration. After a while, as the child absorbs and builds

confidence and practices at home, he will typically come to join the group more fully.

All of the movements here offer specific benefits and as described later, a certain sequence will ensure maximum benefits. There is typically no limitation on which of these movements can be done with which specific age. Each movement offers archetypal developmental patterns of integration and therapeutic benefits which older children may have missed or simply need more of. I once adapted *Galloping Horses* (page 75) for eleven year olds, and certainly when you look around the room and see how much pleasure and vitality adults can derive from these movements, much can be learned about how playful movement frees our breath, whatever the age. However, this book came out of working with children under the age of seven, and the language and fundamental approach reflects this.

Children under three will typically not grasp the significance of a circle as such but they may still enjoy the flow of movement in which they can participate. Equally, the child before the age of three and even four, may not wish to participate in all of the movements or verses. I have taught groups where a child has chosen to play alongside rather than in the group for much of the time. I choose to observe this and always extend the invitation to the child at certain opportunities but never insist that the child come into the form before he was ready. In these instances, with young children's groups attended by parents, you will need to reassure the parent who can easily experience anxiety about how the child is/is not becoming socialised. The teacher needs to sustain the whole, integrating different levels of participation and learning and creating a fundamentally cradling web of calm and trust.

### *How to hold the dance*

The Breathing Circle work offers a particular sequence of development based on a classic approach to freeing and then strengthening the breath so that we find our way into true expression, one that comes from our roots.

Using the guideline of fundamental principles which are outlined below can support you as teacher in designing many different kinds of lessons. These can apply whether you are planning a whole morning or a shorter class of an hour or less. Whatever the circumstance there is always an opportunity to open and connect the body and the breath out of a suggested sequence of movements and so heighten the capacity to be present. Following a sequence will maximise the benefits for building and strengthening body and breath together, and help to rhythmically choreograph a class and support fluid learning.

### *Fundamental principles in the structure of a lesson*

Every good lesson will follow a pathway of initially opening and waking up the body and breath so that the sensation of the body is enlivened and tensions are released.

After this we develop a sense of warmth and vitality, through tapping the body or stimulating movement that may noticeably increase the power of the exhalation.

Next, in order to support the growing sense of space which the breath offers us we can do a circling or rolling movement.

Eventually as the breath deepens and strengthens, a deeper swell can build. The breath grows more substantial and the sense of movement between inner and outer worlds may even be palpable. This is characterised by a greater alertness and the sense of the body's deeper capacity.

The readiness for greater input moves organically into self-expression. With the young child in this Breathing Circle approach this may well show up later in free play or at home.

All of the sequences are carefully crafted in order to build receptivity for the breath and the accompanying benefits that come with a certain repetition of movement. As you become more practised, it will ultimately be up to you as teacher to determine how to select and integrate the material, always bearing in mind the fundamental principles.

Finding your own inspiration and eventually making up your own verses from the material offered here is one of the desired goals. What language, what moods, what needs do your children have, whether they are three- or six-year-olds? How can you meet their needs? Fundamentally the attuning that allows you to find the rhythm and rapport between movement and language will support dynamism, flow and a freshness that avoids any monotony in how you use your voice.

### *The starting place: building presence*

The success of your class and of the relationship and rapport you establish will always depend on your own presence. This in turn depends on how much you are yourself in the movement, in the rhythm of the language, sensing your body in the movement of breath and inviting others to come along. One thing feeds another. The more aware you are of your breath, the more present you become as teacher. Imaginative insight and attunement to those children in your midst grows. Inspiration gives courage for taking risks and following impulses. Intuition guides the steps that need to follow.

Presence is the natural realm of a healthy childhood. Children are creatures of the present moment and have something to teach us about the kind of absorption and learning that can come when we fully inhabit each moment. Merely observe young children at play to see the kind of dedication and intensity that they can bring to the moment. The quality of presence then of the teacher is crucial in how deeply the invitation you offer can be shared, absorbed and understood. When we allow ourselves to become more receptive we naturally open the doorway to becoming more fully present. This will also affect how you as teacher experience vitality and well-being as you teach. The capacity for presence also affects profoundly the atmosphere in the room and the sense of something more than a collection of separate individuals.

When constructing a lesson, it can help to follow a basic thread which allows opening and subsequent strengthening of the flowing

rhythm of breath. This supports all its integrating benefits and wisdom. The breath is a guide that will help you to sense how to build mood and rhythm, enjoyment and profound absorption.

### *Opening up and making space: Let's stretch*

Stretching exercises are essential for opening up the body, shedding patterns of tension and constriction and letting us breathe in the new day. Stretching is a very good way to begin a class and I never begin any other way, whatever age I am teaching. By stretching we take in the space we share together and wake more fully to the present moment.

The quality of movement as we stretch, is easy and animal-like, taking in the ground, as we stretch down and the heavens, as we stretch up. The limbs, the back, the neck and head and face, the fingers and toes can all join in. As we let the breath flow more deeply we let muscles open, tissues soften and strengthen and more oxygen permeate everywhere, including the brain. The skin is the largest organ of the body and every pore yearns to breathe. So all the time given to stretching lays the ground for tremendous benefits!

Young children crave and need repetition, and so with toddlers the same stretching activities might last a whole season. However, with an older group of kindergarten children, a month with one or two of the same stretching verses might be sufficient. Sensing what is enough, what is right, is part of our intuitive artistry as teachers and we need to beware of prescriptions.

Through the stretching exercise we have opened the body and breath for greater receptivity. Now, in order to be more open for the new day, we next need to ease tension by freeing and opening up and releasing places of held tension. This is about becoming present to where we are and is usually a bigger challenge for adults, involved as we are in the world of schedules and responsibilities. From a very young age many children have already started to imbibe the tension patterns in their parents. So everyone, both children and adults, benefits from this release. Stretching and circling verses and



movements offer the opportunity to focus playfully and light-heartedly on an image, on the rhythms of the verses and the growing sense of lightness and uplift in the group, which I also call 'levity', while the breath silently opens, eases and connects us.

*Getting underway:  
warming and awakening awareness*

Tapping, patting and stroking will bring awareness to the body and the breath after the stretching and easing of tensions, so helping us to become more receptive. After this, different kinds of touch can penetrate more deeply as the nerve ends and tissue expand more deeply and are permeated by oxygen. In the contacts we make with our fingers, I always talk about finger pads rather than finger tips, so that the fleshier, softer part of the finger will be what taps and strokes, offering different kinds of sensitivity and pressure. Modulating and varying contact, while working rhythmically will build, over time, a tremendously subtle appreciation for touch which can be integrated and assimilated into other levels of sensibility and feeling, ultimately nourishing the sense for the other that is the true sense of 'tact'.

In an age so dominated by hand-eye reflexes and push-button rhythms it is hard to overstate the case for developing differing qualities of touch, that most primary of senses.

*Letting the breath roll through:  
building space, vitality and strength*

Rocking and rolling gets the breath flowing as we open up a greater sense of space, and with that a deeper breath. The breath of the young child under the age of three is typically much faster than that of the adult, and as we introduce these exercises we offer a profound opening for the growing child to come into his own rhythm and to find in it the spirit of delight and play.

All of the rolling, circling, wrapping and rocking verses bring great benefits that strengthen the breath substance in our bodies. Substance is a primary phenomenon in this approach to the breath, experienced as a quality that is built up over time. It is in some ways analogous to 'chi' or 'prana' in the Chinese and Indian traditions. Substantial breath can arise out of a particular kind of attention and its integration with archetypal movements, benefit sensory development and gross motor skills. Gross motor skills affect movement skills in general and our ability to find ourselves in balance in the larger world. The verses themselves, in both their sounds and the imaginations they evoke, often reflect the bigger expansive quality that goes with this kind of movement.

At this point the crucial fundamentals of the first three principles are in place: releasing tension and opening, waking up, creating a greater awareness and sense of warmth and, lastly, creating the sense of space and vital breath. It is easy to do too much. As a general guide, it is always better to do a few simple exercises and really observe how far you can go with them. This way, over time, you can refine your sense of what happens when you introduce them.

Once you have built this far, your options enlarge and you can really choose any of the verses and movements from any other category. Perhaps a wrapping verse from *Wrapped up Tight* (page 77) or something from *Enjoying the Ground* (page 86) to help the children feel the earth. A verse and movement from *Whirling and Twirling* (page 94) might feel appropriate to support spatial awareness and vision, and vestibular strengthening, or perhaps your class is ready for a finer motor activity with finger and hands or toes and feet. Sense what is needed but always be simple. Simplicity in itself is a marvellous guide in teaching. Many otherwise good teachers over-prepare and so inhibit opportunities for vitality and inspiration.

### *Finding a form and following a thread*

In Section two you will find the verses for movement laid out in categories that are sequenced according to how you might select

them for a lesson. A good way to develop a basic lesson plan would be to take one verse from each of the following sections:

**Let's stretch:** opening up and making space

**Warming up and waking up:** getting underway and then

**Rocking and rolling:** building space, vitality and strength

So for example, after your greeting, you might go into one or two stretching exercises and verses from **Let's stretch** (page 56).

Then to wake up the body, increase the sense of vitality and of the boundary of the body, you could offer one or two tapping or stroking verses. These bring sensation and the awareness of proprioception. This helps you to sense where your body begins and ends which is enormously strengthened by touch and interactive touching games. These are found under **Warming up and waking up** (page 64).

From here it is very easy to move into a verse from **Rocking and rolling gets the breath flowing** (page 70). These circling and stimulating verses build space, vitality and a deeper and more warming breath. In a young child's group for three- and four-year-olds you could do the same verse at least two or three times, but for kindergarten children you might do it just once or twice.

In this section, the rocking and rolling verses of the *Hippo Song* (page 71) or *The Door's Shut Tight* (page 73) are really effective in deepening the benefits that have been built so far. The movement of these verses creates a wonderful flowing of blood, a stronger heartbeat, deep laughter and breath, as well as more sense of space and connection. Children can really start to become aware of what is big with these verses, in clear and vivid experiences of their bodies, the world, and their joy. These verses are all wonderfully beneficial as the breath flows more easily and as the larger motor skills of the body – the gross motor skills – get support and strength while the diaphragm, called by the Ancient Greeks, *the gateway to the soul*, can swing more and more freely.

**Enjoying the Ground** (page 86) is another good place to go for a warming but grounding verse. *Rolling Seals* (page 92) is calming

and offers a whole body and breath massage on the floor while *Pull on My Rain Boots!* (page 88) is enlivening and full of stomping and left-right patterns. *Rumble Rumble, Deep in the Wood* (page 89) brings the children onto all fours as elephants and is also a more calming and grounding verse.

You will find yourself on the floor for many of these verses which develop the young child's attention and flow. For very young children the floor is very important for grounding and strengthening a sense of the body. However, after more than one or two of these verses you may be able to gauge that your children are possibly going to lose focus, go 'out' of their bodies, and get lost in their hilarity. This can happen much more with the five- and six-year-olds. Here imagination is crucial. Lead them back into to the world of the verse and its pictures. How dangerous are hippos after all? Do we know? What might happen if we capsized in the river and we can't swim? Why are we trying to open this door? What is behind it? Who has tried to open doors so hard that they fell backwards? Who is so strong that they can open any door if it isn't locked?

Challenge them, enthrall them and take them deeper and then let go! Build surprise and let them experience different qualities of transitions. Some transitions need to flow gently and easily like swans gliding over still water and others come like a thunder clap, thrilling us with the imperative of immediate attention. Imagination and presence go hand in hand when we truly meet children as a teacher. Simple solutions and delightful turns in the path can make your teaching full of surprise, while classroom management problems can be seen clearly for what they are, a message calling out for some need to be met, some tone to be changed.

When we let the breath flow, we can appreciate its subtleties and sense how we feel different in a good way. Children sense this too and can collect themselves as they resonate with how good they feel, if we offer contrasting interludes. A vigorous verse can be followed by a verse or two from *Not just all fingers and thumbs!* (page 81). These are a series of verses and movements for hands and fingers that offer a different focus, a softer mood. Again depending on the age of the children, you might want to consider how much repetition is needed.

The *pacing* of your class will always need to create *digestion* time, a time for resonance, the echo and tasting of what has just been heard and felt. Experiment with this as you pause between each phase of movement. After vigorous stretching do the children need more of this, or a different verse with a similar activity, or a change? I always like to give plenty of time to pause so that I can sense what is needed next before the dynamic that has been building is allowed to drop.

The following sections **Two** and **Three** – **Verses for Movement, Story Verses and Circle Verses**, and **Simple Storytelling**, respectively, will lead you through verses and stories with further guidelines on their benefits and suggested activities. The stories in **Section Three** are very much designed for young children in playgroups and pre-schools rather than meeting the attention span of the older child.

These sections attempt to demonstrate specific kinds of movement, verses and stories to support different principles in how the natural breath can grow and come into balance. The rhythmic relation between the breath and language is also explored in these later sections, which offer specific and concrete examples.

### *Summary of Chapter Four*

**Chapter Four** looks at how to use this book to create the most effective learning and participation, how to find a form and how to follow a thread in developing lessons.

The activities described in the chapter include:

#### HOW:

- to open up and create ease by stretching
- to get the lesson under way with warming and awakening awareness through tapping, patting and stroking games
- to let the breath 'roll through', supporting vitality and strength with rolling, circling and rocking games; and how to explore choices once the foundation has been built.

This chapter also explains fundamental principles in the structure of a lesson that you can work with and which can underpin everything you do:

HOW:

- to open and wake up the body and breath
- to build warmth and vitality
- to support a developing sense of space and differentiation
- to support the growing substantiality of the breath
- to encourage easy participation and expression
- to work with the pacing of your class to ensure it breathes, so supporting assimilation, digestion and resonance with what has been experienced

The chapter also offers guidance for the next section, **Section Two**, which includes seven major categories of types of movement in **Verses for movement**, along with two other categories of verses: **Story verses** and **Circle verses**.

# Section Two

CHAPTER FIVE *Verses for Movement*

CHAPTER SIX *Story Verses and Circle Verses*

In this section you will find three major categories of verses.

**Verses for movement** come directly out of the rhythms of movement and are designed to support and integrate specific as well as overall needs. **Story verses** are typically more extended and can offer a restful breathing-out time that can help consolidate the movement work. They also help to build the attention span for rhythm and sequence. Both circle verses and story verses encourage and cultivate healthy social participation within the group and can help a shy and dreamy child join the waves of group enjoyment.

## How to use this section

The first chapter of this section, **Verses for movement**, is divided into eight different activities with accompanying verses. The sequence is designed to accord with how you might select verses for a class by preparing the body and breath for the most effective learning. We begin with stretching, and lead subsequently into verses that warm and stimulate the breath. As tensions are released, a new receptivity and ease supports the flow of freer and more natural breath, connecting each one of us more deeply to our own tempo and metabolism

Each new activity begins with a guiding commentary. This is called **Leading the way**, and offers observations and a commentary for the teacher.

Following each verse you will find the benefits offered by the verse. The aim is to offer clarity and quick reference for the teacher who can become more and more familiar with the benefits of each activity over time through her own observation. To support the teacher the section offers a general listing of benefits at the beginning of each category as well as specific kinds of benefits to expect with each individual verse.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# *Verses for Movement*

### *Waking up to Expression*

#### The Benefits of Stretching

##### Stretching:

- Warms us and opens us up
- Makes us more receptive to a breath that flows more freely
- Can penetrate and oxygenate the bloodstream and our entire being as skin, muscle, nerve and tissue can all respond.
- Taking the time to stretch brings a sense of release and receptivity.
- A sense of fullness of the whole body will come when we allow ourselves the time to stretch.

Stretching movements done with a soft, fluid quality will bring the greatest benefits, as patterns of tension can disperse, giving rise to a different quality of vitality.

##### Kinds of stretches can include:

- rolling down to the ground from standing
- stretching like cats on all fours with arms extended
- standing and stretching side to side
- arms and legs extended, stretching up and down, on the diagonal and into the back
- opening<sup>u</sup>p into the legs and feet and toes, and the arms and hands and fingers
- smiling and yawning

## ACTIVITY LET'S STRETCH!

### Five stretches to open up the whole body

#### LEADING THE WAY

The first of the stretching verses, *We Stretch Right Up to the Star of Our Birth* is a wonderful verse for opening a class. The teacher can lead the class in standing and offer a glorious stretch towards the heavens all the way through to the finger tips, and then curl back down to the earth, knees bent and head curled right in. This offers a superb contrast and reinforces the archetypal movement of going out, to receive the treasures of the outer world, and then coming back home! This, like most of the other verses can be repeated for a minimum of three times and sometimes as often as five times. The benefits are huge and the young child typically thrives on repetition.



***We Stretch Right Up to the Star of Our Birth***  
*We stretch right up to the star of our birth!*  
*We curl right down to warm Mother Earth!*

In Spanish:

*Nos estiramos hacia arriba para alcanzar nuestra estrella*  
*Y nos enrollamos para sentir el calor de la madre tierra!*



*We Stretch Right Up To the Star of Our Birth* offers:

- joyful expansion of the breath and body
- release of tension and greater warmth

This next verse is wonderful for stretching – with cats as the inspiration. You can stretch forward on all fours, stretch arms and hands sideways onto the horizontal plane for stripy tigers and let the stretch go all the way through the arms and finger joints but keeping the movement soft and vigorous, not over-extended which can distort the breath.

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***We Stretch Like Cats, We Stretch Like Tigers***

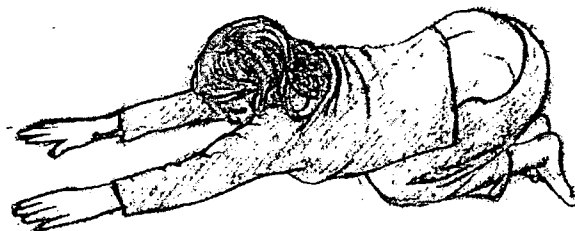
*We stretch like cats, we stretch like tigers*

*We stretch like cats, we stretch like tigers.*

*We stretch like cats, we stretch like tigers.*

*Miaaow! Miaaow! Roar! Roar!*

*Wide, wide and even wider!*



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*We Stretch like Cats, We Stretch Like Tigers* verse offers:

- playful expression
- an excellent stretch for opening up the back, the limbs, the hands and feet, and connecting to the floor

Many very young children come to us with bodies that are under-toned or hyper-toned. Both express different qualities of stress and defence. The benefits of stretching for these children are huge, analogous to digging over the soil in a garden to aerate and prepare for fruitful planting!

Stretching, when done in an easy, unforced but deep way brings benefits that can support everything else we do. Stretching is like stroking the body from the inside and enjoying that big yawn.

The next verse, *The Sun Above is Bright*, is a lovely verse to open with. It invites children to open up to the source of light that sustains and nourishes us. The movement parallels inhalation and exhalation, as we stretch up to the heavens, and then bring back home what we have received, as arms and hands fold back down to the heart.

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### *The Sun Above is Bright*

*The sun above is bright!  
It wakes us with its light,  
Shining from above  
To fill our hearts with warmth and love*

In Spanish:

*El sol arriba esta radiante  
Y nos despierta con su luz brillante  
Desde arriba iluminando  
A nuestros corazones que estan amando.*



Line 1



Line 2



Line 4

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*The Sun Above is Bright* verse offers:

- an opening to the breath and body
- increased joy and warmth
- a sense of containment and expansion which at the same time brings a mood of serenity

**Watch for changes:**

- Watch for a lighter and easier, softer tone to enter the room.
- Experiment with how much time feels good to give to stretching as you observe shifts and changes in the mood.
- Play with this and let yourself sense the benefits as fully as possible. This will help you penetrate the activity deeply and so build your powers of observation and intuition.

As warmth, vitality and a deeper and freer quality of breathing permeates the room, the atmosphere changes and the body becomes more receptive and open to learning.

It is very important for children at this young age – up to at least seven years old – to be immersed in the sense that the world is good, a place to be trusted and a place to explore in safety. In this way, -we are actually laying a moral foundation for later years, as well as a bedrock of confidence in the world. When an archetypal movement accompanies this immersion, such as going out and coming back home, the child is absorbing food for his soul and spirit, taking it directly into the body as a movement of life that has a truth and familiarity like home itself.

The next stretching verse offers the most energizing of stretches and can be done at least two or three times with variations in pace and tempo, depending on how much stamina you want to build. It is a very energizing and vital stretch if done fully with enjoyment and without any pushing or pulling. We are in fact, teaching the body at a deep level the qualities that come with releasing tension and opening up gently to ourselves.

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## *Stretch Me, Stretch Me, Stretch Me High!*

*Stretch me!* (stretch up, feet apart, and arms up)

*Stretch me!*

*Stretch me high!*

*Stretch me up to the big blue sky!*

*Stretch me!* (stretch over to one side)

*Stretch me!*

*Stretch me over!*

*Stretch me!* (stretch over to other side)

*Stretch me!*

*Stretch me over!*

*Stretch me!* (stretch over to first side again)

*Stretch me!*

*Stretch me over!*

*Roll me around!* (circle with arms in foreground)

*Roll me around!*

*Roll me around!*

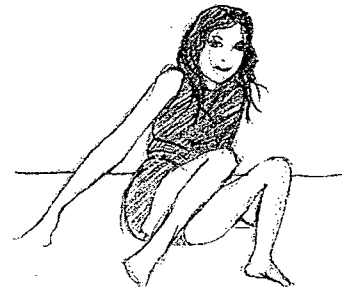
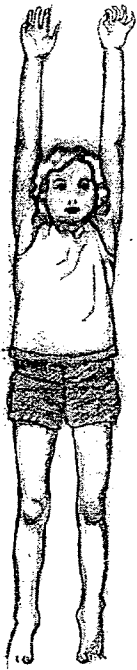
*Till I'm sitting in clover!* (sit on the ground)

*Rolling in clover!* (circle in sitting through the pelvis)

*Rolling in clover!*

*Rolling in clover.* (heels go over the head on roll back)

*Over and over!*



*Stretch Me! Stretch Me High!* verse offers:

- a vigorous and energizing opening for the whole body
- release of tension and increased sense of levity, as the breath becomes more dynamic and free-flowing
- an exploration of varied planes of movement, including: the vertical by standing high, the horizontal by stretching into the sides, and the ground by rolling backwards
- greater flexibility, good spatial orientation and balance as children find their feet through the varied explorations of movement

## The Benefits to the Spine

### Benefits to the spine when we stretch

By rolling forwards or backwards on the ground or by stretching the spine by rolling down from the head to the feet, a much deeper breath is freed up to penetrate and strengthen the spine itself and all of the surrounding tissue.

These kinds of movement bring in more of the whole body to which the spine is connected.

When we offer the spine stretching, flexing and extending movements, we:

- bring more oxygen to the brain
- increase the blood flow and oxygenate the surrounding nerve network connected to the entire spine
- include the jaw and teeth, the chest and shoulders, the diaphragm, pelvis and limbs, building greater integration and wholeness
- strengthen the vestibular function when we roll backwards and forwards, in this case from a sitting position to bringing the knees over the head as we roll back

The final stretching verse, *The Leaves are Fluttering*, is clearly a seasonal verse suitable for autumnal and windy days. The verse is done as children wave their arms in the air, hands simulating fluttering leaves. For the blowing winds, children can be invited to move from foot to foot, blowing vigorously. As for the leaves falling, the children can be shown swooping movements with arms that cascade down to the ground. With each refrain of red, gold, and brown, the children can twirl on the spot, but with the last refrain the arms flutter down in a restful mood.

The twirling movement can be included later or not as the teacher wishes, but make sure you pace the movement of the verse so that everyone's feet are firmly planted before moving on to the next verse.

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### ***The Leaves are Fluttering***

*The leaves are fluttering!*

*The leaves are fluttering!*

*The leaves are fluttering!*

*Red, gold and brown!*

(standing, extend arms over head and to side and flutter fingers)

*The wind is blowing!*

*The wind is blowing!*

*The wind is blowing!*

*Leaves, red, gold and brown!*

(move arms around in joyous big swirling movements with blowing sounds)

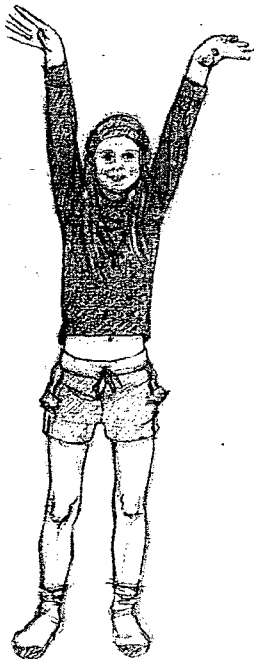
*The leaves are falling!*

*The leaves are falling!*

*The leaves are falling!*

*Down to the ground!*

(arms swing, sweep and flutter down towards the legs and the earth)



Verse 1



Verse 2



Verse 3

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*The Leaves are Fluttering* verse offers:

- a gentle stretch into the limbs, opening up and strengthening all the way through the joints and into the fingertips and toes
- a gentle stretch into the sides, opening up the rib cage and oxygenating and increasing muscle tone
- an increased sense of lightness and social openness
- on the blowing sounds of the wind a wonderful, freer breath can swing through the rib cage and diaphragm, even opening up all the way into the sacrum, refreshing the upper and lower parts of the body simultaneously with the twirling movements, supporting the sense of orientation and balance, and the sense of fun!

In this last stretching verse, children often like to actually join the leaves by falling to the ground as well. This can be encouraged since experiencing the earth as a place of joy and return is a superb lesson element and is extremely grounding!

## The Benefits of Patting, Tapping, Rubbing and Stroking

### Patting, tapping, rubbing and stroking

Patting, tapping, rubbing and stroking all bring warmth to the hands and offer wonderful benefits to both the giver and the receiver.

Using the soft, fleshy pads of the fingers and the open palm helps to soften and open the hand. This helps penetrate the whole hand with breath and engages many of the subtle pressure points in the hands as well as refining and developing the sense of touch.

Touching games and verses offer numerous benefits, including:

- a greater sense of body boundary through touch, strengthening what we call the proprioceptive sense
- warmth that can come to the whole body as arms, legs, feet, backs, bellies, and faces gently awaken
- an increase of sensation of body warmth as the skin tingles, the blood flows more easily and the breath delights in the overall sense of awakening
- increased vitality as the rhythmic pathways of the body expand and contract the flow of both blood and breath
- well-being, enthusiasm, freshness, and increased interest - all can grow as the body and breath are called into greater wakefulness through gentle taps, strokes, and pats

- enhancement of learning, as the blood and breath flow settle into a natural rhythm, enabling absorption of what is being offered to penetrate as deeply as possible

## ACTIVITY

### WARMING UP AND WAKING UP!

**Gentle patting, tapping, rubbing and stroking:  
four verses to warm and enliven the body's boundary**



Greeting  
and  
Waking up  
the  
Whole Body

These kinds of activities, which serve as stimulation when done in a gentle but invigorating way, bring a sense of warmth and vitality to the entire body and the breath. This is the most delightful way to invite the young child into the sensation of his body boundary. The movements offered here progress through a gradual sequence that can engage the whole body.

#### Stimulating the body walls, the boundary of the body

The quality of touch affects how the child is drawn into sensory experience. Sensitive touch includes presence, is devoid of anxiety, and receptive to the person being touched. The importance of touch in supporting development and integration is very well documented. In these touching verses you can build trust in easy and delightful ways, and encourage receptivity. Offer gentle squeezing, kneading and stroking movements as each part of the body is acknowledged and greeted in turn. Really take time here, as if the body and breath were being smiled at and truly met! Encourage the child to spend time. The immediacy of the breath's response to touch will usually be very evident. As the child catches on to the possibilities, the breath will swing more freely and the room come alive in a deeply peaceful way.

**Good Morning Feet!**

Good Morning toes!

Good Morning feet!

Good Morning heels!

Good Morning legs!

Good Morning knees

Let's give them a good squeeze!

Good Morning belly!

Good Morning belly button!

Good Morning chest!

Good Morning shoulders!

Good Morning elbows! (wrists, hands, fingers and thumbs etc.)

Good Morning back! (roll onto back and sides)

Good Morning sides!

Good Morning face!

Good Morning mouth, (nose, eyes, ears, hair, neck etc.)

Good Morning everyone! (Everyone gets up and circulates around the room shaking hands and greeting each other)

In Spanish:

Buenos dias dedos!

Buenos dias pies!

Buenos dias talones!

Buenos dias piernas!

Buenos dias rodillas!

Dejame apretarlas!

Buenos dias pancita!

Buenos dias ombligo!

Buenos dias pecho!

Buenos dias hombros!

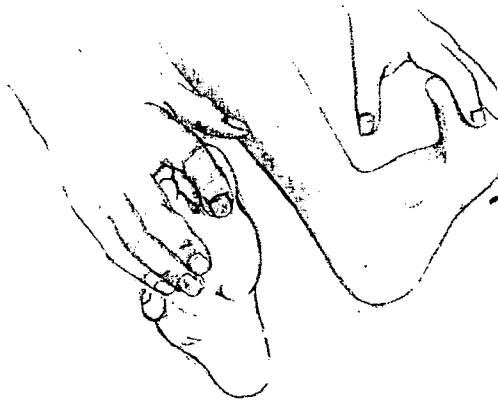
Buenos dias codos! (munecas, manos, dedos, dedo gordito)

Buenos dias espalda!

Buenos dias lados!

Buenos dias cara!

Buenos dias boca,



*Good Morning Feet* verse offers:

- a lively but grounding sense of the body
- an affirmation of the body as a whole
- comfort and a sense of containment as the breath flows more deeply to more areas of the body
- the gentle patting of the face with the finger pads along the upper and lower jaw awakens and integrates the trigeminal nerve which supports connection and relaxation for the teeth, nose, and cranial areas of the head

The skin is the largest organ of the body, and its membrane mediates between inner and outer worlds.

The pleasurable sensations the skin receives can nourish our sense of life and well-being, while reinforcing overall sensation of body boundary.

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### ***Brr it's Cold!***

*Brr it's cold! Brr it's cold! Brr, it's shivery cold!*

*Shivering cold, shivery cold, shivering, shivery cold!*

*Rub me\*all over! Rub me all over! Brr it's shivery cold!*

*Shivering cold, shivery cold, shivery, shivering cold!*

*Chill winds are teasing! Cold ponds are freezing! Brr, it's shivery cold!*

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*Brr It's Cold* verse offers:

- gentle stimulation
- playful expression
- varied movement

For the verse above you can really hug the arms close to the body, rubbing and shivering in mock cold while letting the lips reverberate with the 'brrr' sound vigorously and freely. This offers wonderful and varied stimulation to the breath, creating a very real sense of warmth.

## Stimulation for the body using fingertips and fingerpads

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### **Pitter Patter Raindrops**

*Pitter, patter, pitter, patter  
Ten little raindrops dancing on the walk  
Pitter, patter, pitter, patter,  
This is how they talk*



In Spanish:

*Plity, platy, plity, platy  
Diez pequenas gotitas bailando y caminando,  
Plity, platy, plity, platy  
Asi es como vau hablando*



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*Pitter Patter Raindrop* verse offers:

- joyful and varied kinds of stimulation, depending on the quality and intensity of tapping.
- warming and awakening as the breath responds and a sense of play and participation starts to develop
- increased sensitising of touch through light tapping for the giver, and an increased sense of body boundary for the recipient

In this verse you can tap all over the body with the pads of the fingers, the fleshiest and softest part. Sense what happens as you do it to yourself and vary the quality of pressure and the tempo to draw the children in to the wonder of rain falling and how the senses awaken! Do we not breathe more deeply after a wonderful downpour of refreshing rain?

**Belly Button Baby**

*Belly Button Baby, Belly Button Baby, Belly Button Baby,  
Come out and play!*

*Belly Button Baby, Belly Button Baby, Belly Button Baby  
Don't stay away!*

*Belly Button Baby, Belly Button baby, Belly Button Baby,  
Smiles all day!*

*Belly Button Baby, Belly Button Baby, Belly Button Baby,  
Come out and play!*



*Belly Button Baby* verse offers:

- playful touch
- gentle exhilaration
- soothing

The  
Benefits  
of  
Feathering

**Feathering**

Feathering is a wonderful transitional activity between the previous stretching and stimulating activities which warm and open the breath, and the next section with its much larger and more dynamic movements.

Feathering is an activity in which the breath gently warms and permeates us thoroughly, including the spine, and filling the entire body.

**ACTIVITY****FEATHERING**

**LEADING  
THE WAY**

Imagine fluffing up pillows so that the feathers fill out and the pillow gets plumper. Feathering is a wonderful activity that does just that for the breath. Ankles and knees need to be soft and yielding so that gentle bouncing as the heels 'kiss' the ground feels delightful and moves all the way through the body. This is very important to avoid jarring tensions building up and to open the whole body up to the breath.

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**Feathering Verse**

*Feather, feather feather duster* (3 times)  
*Feather, feather, feather bluster* (3 times)  
*Feather, feather, feather, duster*  
*Let the feathers fly!*

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**The  
Benefits  
of  
Rocking and  
Rolling**

**Rocking and rolling**

Rocking, rolling, and circling movements characterise this section and offer what are called gross motor movements for the body. These kinds of movements engage the feet, legs, back, arms, and hands, and offer a much bigger and fuller sense of the body.

Circling movements that circle through the pelvis, the rib and diaphragm, the neck and head all offer a sense of greater space. Wherever we create more space, the breath happily fills, penetrates, and oxygenates, nourishing and enlarging our sense of life, of well-being and connection. The body and breath together support harmonisation and the sense of connection, easing our small, niggling distractions.

These larger movements stimulate and free the breath so that it becomes much easier for the rhythm of the natural breath to flow and a sense of expansive joy to prevail. Rocking and rolling movements offer support for a deeper, more vital breathing.

Young children who may experience a lot of moving around that is not self-directed, and therefore a little disorienting, such as being driven in cars a lot, can derive great benefit from rocking motions.

Typically, side to side movements tend to be enlivening while the backwards and forwards rocking movements are generally more soothing.

All of the movements in this section ask the vestibular system, found in the inner ear, to become involved and so support the sense of balance and orientation that is so important for a sense of well-being and the ability to focus.

## ROCKING AND ROLLING GETS THE BREATH FLOWING!

### ACTIVITY

#### Seven verses and movements to support gross motor development

#### LEADING THE WAY

The gross motor movements which characterise this section offer growing vitality and wakefulness, and a mood of delight. They make it very easy for the teacher to guide the children towards the next activity if she has done the build-up well. The movements in this section offer a tremendously expansive sense of joy and openness which is an ideal medium for learning, as long as certain key things are remembered.

If you as teacher keep in touch with your own breath you will gradually discover that the exhalation gives a sensation of one's own body, its boundary and its possibilities. By remaining in touch with this yourself and by working rhythmically you can sense what has been developed so far, and what is required when you are in the midst of a class. The body and breath together support our intuitive faculty: refining the sense of timing and receptivity for improving the presentation of a lesson. Like the walls of the body itself, what swings out expansively must swing back and sense itself. Children must be helped to swing back in after they have swung high and wide.

Try to sense this after each movement and after the activity as a whole in order to develop and refine what is being gained and where a contrast is needed. In this way we reinforce the nourishing aspects of working with rhythm. As we support the child in finding his own innate rhythm, he can become increasingly autonomous in sensing how individual rhythm can support not only health and well-being, but effective and rich learning.

The *Hippo Song* is full of different and revitalising movements and can develop vitality very fast. Do it at least two or three times and keep the children's awareness with the pictures and sensations coming from the movement so that highly excited children come in to the activity and feel its benefits rather than escalating into extreme, out-of-body excitement. For example, the line 'Roll, roll,



rolling...' can be spoken slower and more deeply from the belly space, as if to evoke the deep river bottom. The deeper you go into the possibilities for differences through contrast, sensing the verse in your own body and what its pictures offer you, the more effectively you invite participation.

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### Hippo Song

*Down by the river where the hippos love to roll,  
Fishermen in their boats love to come and go,  
Hippos grunt and gurgle, making happy sounds,  
Roll, roll, rolling, rolling all around.*

(in sitting roll through pelvis)

(circle the other direction)

(circle the other direction)

*Fishermen in their boats get tossed and tipped and tossed all over.*

(rock side to side)

*Roll, roll, rolling, rolling, rolling over!*

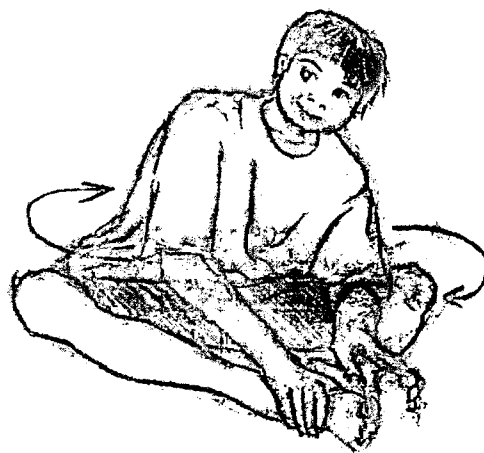
(roll over backwards)



Line 1



Line 2



Line 3

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*Hippo Song* verse offers:

- a mood of joy, lightness and ease
- the breaking up of patterns of tension or stiffness
- creating vitality and openness for the next step in learning

For the *Barnacle Baby* rocking movement verse, you can hold the child in your lap and explore ways of rocking and rolling; gentle, big, side to side, and backwards. Children love endless repetition but also can delight in the element of surprise and varying tempo when they have been cradled for a sufficient time!

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### ***Barnacle Baby***

*Barnacle baby, barnacle baby, barnacle baby,* (rocking backwards and forwards)

*Holds very tight!*

*Barnacle baby, barnacle baby, barnacle baby,*

*With all your might!*

*Nothing can loosen you! Nothing can lose you!* (rocking side to side)

*Barnacle baby holds so tight!* (rocking backwards and forwards)

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*Barnacle Baby* verse offers:

- a sense of joy and safety
- rhythm and touch to help allay fear about, and resistance to, joining in
- a heightened sense of body boundary and bigger breath

In this verse, the child is held, ideally facing the chest of the adult for really close contact. This is a wonderful verse for both adult and child to relax into and so experience together the playful nuances of safety, closeness and the bigger world outside.

Rocking and circling movements give tremendous support to building a stronger and freer-flowing breath, thus promoting vitality and ease of the whole body.

The first verse, *Hippo Song*, and the next verse, *The Door's Shut Tight*, are movements allowing you to work very dynamically with the back, the legs, and the arms, either with a partner or in the group. These kinds of movements offer a child a bigger and rounder sense of movement and boundary.

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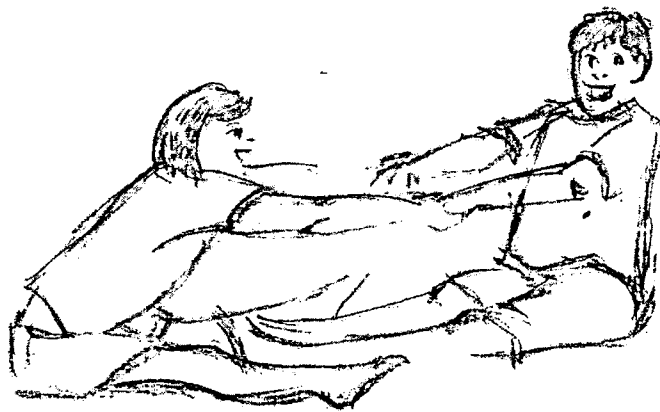
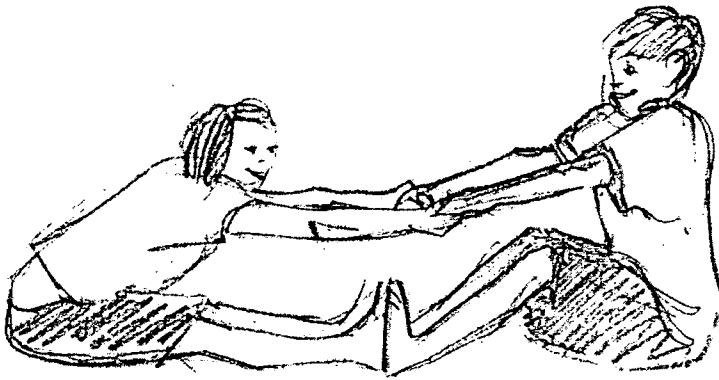
***The Door's Shut Tight!***

*The door won't open, the door won't open, the door won't open  
Though we push and pull!*

*The door's shut tight, the door's shut tight, the door's shut tight  
Though we push and pull!*

*The handle's turning! The handle's turning! The handle's turning!  
As we push and pull!*

*The door is opening! The door is opening! The door is opening!  
As we push and pull!*



---

---

*The Door's Shut Tight* verse offers:

- a much stronger and freer-flowing breath
- a deeper connection to the spine, sacrum, legs, and arms
- lovely engagement with a partner
- a playful mood with lots of laughter

For the next verse, *Boating Song*, children are partnered facing each other, holding hands and sitting on the floor, legs extended. The movement is essentially an easy, back-and-forth swinging. Discourage any forcing or coercive (and usually painful) overstretching. Our aim is to have the children enjoy and benefit from being deeply in their bodies and not to become so over-animated that they go out of their bodies. On the third verse, the partners circle through the pelvic floor, in sitting – first one way and then the other – while holding hands. On the final verse arms open from the centre of the heart-space outwards, and then the children catch hands again.

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### ***Boating Song***

*This is the row boat, this is the row boat,*

*This is the row boat we love to row!*

*This is the row boat we love to row!*

*This is the paddle boat, this is the paddle boat,*

*This is the paddle boat we love to paddle!*

*This is the paddle boat we love to paddle!*

*This is the steam boat, this is the steam boat,*

*This is the steam boat we love to BLOW!*

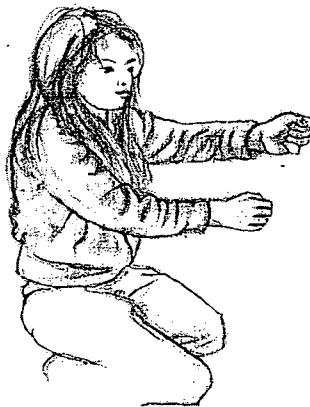
*This is the steam boat we love to BLOW!*

*This is the sail boat, this is the sail boat,*

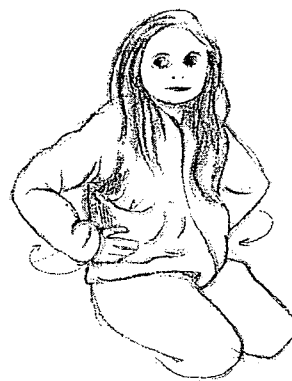
*This is the sail boat we love to sail!*



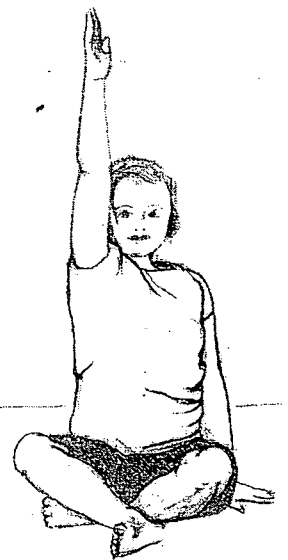
Row boat



Paddle boat



Steamboat



Sail boat

---

This wonderful verse stimulates vital breath throughout the body. Legs are extended, and a rowing movement, with oars on either side, supports the legs, arms, and back. For the paddling movement, we move the paddle from side to side, allowing a good stretch into the sides. The steamboat is often done with legs crossed and with the hands on the ribs as we circle around the middle space of the body, offering the diaphragm a great workout. Circle alternate ways as you repeat. Let a magnificent exhale come through on BLOW, but don't push it, let it build! The sail boat can rock from side to side with as much vigour as you want, arms flying overhead.

*Boating Song* verse offers:

- a mood of exhilaration
- varied movements in sitting
- a deeper breath to support muscle tone and vitality – especially in the upper and middle sections of the body

The next verse, *Galloping Horses*, is done in sitting with legs extended. Arms extend every time we use the word 'galloping', but otherwise they come in to hold the reins. Legs can move up and down to simulate galloping. On the last line one hand goes diagonally to the tree branch above, and one hand goes to the puddle below. As you repeat this verse, alternate the directions of arms on the last verse.

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### **Galloping Horses**

*Galloping horses, galloping wide!*

*Galloping horses, all over the countryside!*

*Hold on to your horses! Stay in the saddle!*

*Watch out for that branch! Watch out for that puddle!*

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*Galloping Horses* verse offers:

- a vigorous and lively stretching
- strengthening of the legs and arms, as well as the rib, chest, and diaphragm area
- a deepening of the breath

The following traditional Jack and Jill verse can also be used for similar rocking back and forth, offering a wonderful opening for the diaphragm and the sacrum, at the base of the spine, as the breath rolls through. One can also roll back on the final line.

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***Jack and Jill Went Up The Hill***

*Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water.*

*Jack fell down and broke his crown*

*And Jill came tumbling after!*

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*Jack and Jill Went up the Hill* verse offers:

- opening up of the diaphragm and a gentle inner massage with the breath; opening up and stimulation of the sacral and spinal areas of the body

For *We Push the Saw, We Pull the Saw*, as in the previous verse, partners face each other, sitting on the floor with legs extended, hands joined, rocking back and forth in a see-saw motion, with all the benefits that come from gentle, rhythmic movement.

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***We Push the Saw, We Pull the Saw***

*We push the saw, we pull the saw, we push the saw, we pull the saw,  
For cutting winter wood.*

*We push the saw, we pull the saw, we push the saw, we pull the saw,  
For working together is good!*

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*We Push the Saw, We Pull the Saw* verse offers:

- rhythmic and lively engagement with a partner, reinforcing cooperative work
- wonderful stretching for the arms, back and sacrum
- exhilaration and laughter as the body wakes up

The  
Benefits  
of  
Wrapping  
Games

**Wrapping games**

Wrapping games offer profound benefits and are wonderful for helping to support a sense of definition and body boundary, as well as a sense of orientation and safety.

These kinds of games can also help children who are experiencing vestibular problems. Rolling can be very strengthening, and helps to relax the head and neck in a secure and safely nurturing environment.

Children who are dealing with problems of imbalance or certain challenges to integration may be accumulating tensions. So being able to release these tensions gently and slowly over a large surface area which includes the muscles, skeleton and skin, as the whole body is rolled over the ground brings great benefits. Long-term adjustments and integration occur through the nervous system and can be organized through the breathing.

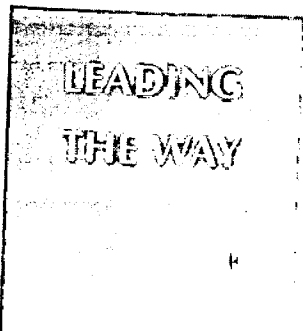
- For the children who enjoy them, swaddling games can create a sense of security and of 'being held'.
- Rolling across the floor helps to ground and bring us deeper into the body. As the gradual building of both strength and trust lays the foundation for more effective learning. These movements can nurture real delight and trust in the child as his breath comes from a deeper place and moves more freely through the body. A deeper quality of listening and a more defined sense of body boundary shows that we learn with our whole bodies, especially when warmed and delighted.

**WRAPPED UP TIGHT! WRAPPING GAMES**

**ACTIVITY**

**Three wrapping games to build a sense of body contour and boundaries**

Wrapping or swaddling games are wonderful games to present in a playful way. Ensure that your cloths are truly soft and a delight to touch. Fabrics such as coloured cheese-cloths or silks work very well. For little ones a yard is usually a sufficient amount. The child can be invited to participate while the cloth is laid out invitingly. Always ensure that the cloth is tight, as flapping or loose cloth can actually be an irritant and counter-productive to the benefits.



In this first wrapping game we wrap the child as a cocoon, tightly secured in the cloth, making sure he is truly swaddled. The timing of the first two lines can help to really give this deep attention. On the third line, we roll the child over the floor away from us, gently supporting with the palm of the hand. I have found the shoulder and hip good, clear places to apply gentle pressure and enable easy gentle rolling to happen. Then you roll the child back towards you, and can even cradle him as he arrives back in your arms. Let the child see if he can wriggle free without your help.

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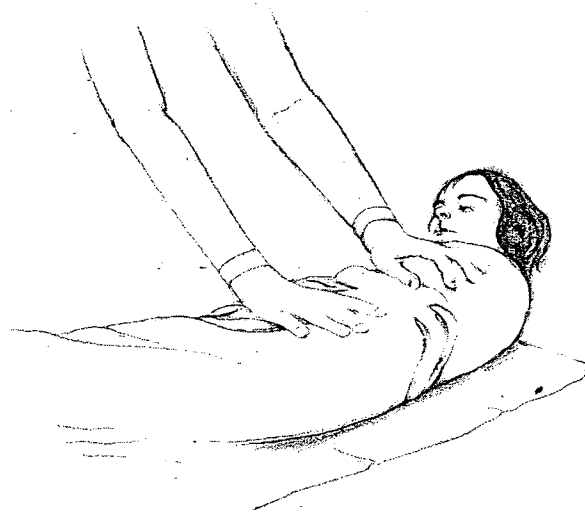
***We Wrap, Wrap, Wrap our Little Bundle Till it's Tight and Cosy***

*We wrap, wrap, wrap our little bundle till it's tight and cosy.*

*We wrap, wrap, wrap our little bundle till it's warm and dozy.*

*We roll, roll, roll our little bundle all over the ground.*

*We roll, roll, roll our little bundle till it's home all safe and sound!*




---

*We Wrap, Wrap, Wrap Our Little Bundle* verse offers:

- affirmation of the body
- a grounding connection to both the floor and to touch
- the release of tension and a deeper flow of the natural breath rhythm
- a sense of safety, trust, and peace – an excellent verse for Caesarean birthed babies



In wrapping games, as mentioned above, it is always good to wrap the child up very tightly and snugly, so that he feels encased and held. These first two verses are wonderful for babies who have been born by Caesarean, and who have missed that primal pressure of resistance coming down the birth canal and so crave it elsewhere. You'll find many children who absolutely love this and quite a few adults will as well! For those children who don't, encourage them to do it to a doll a few times, participate with others, and even to wrap you, and in time they may feel drawn to join in. It is important that the child always feels invited and never forced.

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***Tuck Me in! Tuck Me in Tight!***

*Tuck me in, Tuck me in tight!*

*Fold me in! Fold me in, snug through the night!*

*Rock me to! Rock me to dreams oh so sweet!*

*Keep me safe! Keep me safe from my head to my feet!*

*Wrap me up! Wrap me up and then roll me over!*

*Wrap me up! Wrap me up! Really, really tight!*

*Roll me over this way! Roll me over that way!*

*Pull a scary face and give me such a fright!*

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*Tuck Me In* verse offers:

- enjoyment and a grounding connection to touch
- a deeper breath that brings changes in muscle tone
- opportunities for vestibular changes and more supple joints through the rolling activities

The next verse has a very gentle quality and can encourage a sensitivity in the child's response. A cloth is drifted up and gently over the child who pretends to be the house on the hill that is gradually covered by Lady Fog. On the last line, a gentle wafting breeze blows the cloth away in imitation of the fog dispersing as the sun comes out!

**Lady Fog**

*Lady Fog creeps silently outside my house,  
Soft and stealthy as the night-time mouse.*

*Gently she fingers all of the trees*

*Turning them into a silver frieze.*

*Drifting, covering, blanketing still,*

*Lady Fog breathes outside my window sill!*

*Lady Fog* verse offers:

- contrasting qualities of very light with other, varied kinds of touch
- a sleepy, soft mood, so excellent in preparing for nap time

## The Benefits of Finger and Feet Games

### Finger and feet games

Finger and feet games bring numerous wonderful benefits including strengthening what are called fine motor skills which help us with tasks such as drawing, writing, and general manual dexterity.

It is now generally accepted that neurological development is immensely supported when we offer young children these kinds of playful activities to connect and differentiate hands and feet. All of the games in this section provide a heightened sense of the fingers and hands, and many verses include the pressure points. Developing sensitivity and connection through these points leads to deeper breathing, greater receptivity, and an increased capacity for consolidation of what is being learnt.

When we work regularly with these kinds of verses we also enable the hands to be much more than extensions of our desires or ways of manipulating the world. The hands can be playful, soft, open as a sea anemone and as mischievous as tickling monkeys, offering a world of expression in the palm of your hand! Supporting corresponding dexterity and sensitivity in the feet is an extremely effective way to bring anyone more completely into an experience of their body and enhance overall awareness and integration.

Well-being, increased sensitivity, and physical attunement opens the way for a more flowing breath and easy and delightful participation. Working with finger pads and pressure points also

brings balance, so these exercises can be used very effectively for calming or for supporting a transition from extreme liveliness to a different quality of listening and embodiment.

## ACTIVITY NOT JUST ALL FINGERS AND THUMBS!

### Six verses for fingers, hands, and feet to help build sensory motor integration and fine motor control skills

#### LEADING THE WAY

In an age when we see more and more keyboard and screen use at younger and younger ages it is incredibly important to offer playful games that keep the fingers and hands breathing and versatile. If the hands are stiff and restricted with limited ranges of movement we actually limit the full potential of our breath to reach through us and into the world. Hands are for receiving and giving, for waving and flowing, not just for shaping and making. Explore the receptive capacities of each child by holding hands and sensing the quality of how he receives a handshake or responds to having his hands held. The hands can tell you a great deal about levels of trust or tension.

These exercises are very good for calming and containing a group, for changing the pace and releasing tension, and for shifting fatigue and opening up towards the next step. In fact I have often done finger games and face tapping with much older children although the success of the activity is very dependant on being introduced appropriately for the age. These activities offer a brief refreshing break in the middle of a class, and no one has yet protested!

With these verses, some of which are traditional, you can really play with the variety and pace to see how children open up. When we devote ourselves to the imaginative picture the young child will follow with rapt attention. This enables us in turn to guide the tempo and pace so as to create the most apt breathing rhythm.

The following verse moves through the fingers starting with the thumbs to two thin ladies – the index fingers; two tall policemen – middle fingers; two little schoolgirls – ring fingers; and two little babies – little fingers.

---

### **Two Fat Gentlemen**

Two fat gentlemen met in a lane,  
 Bowed most politely,  
 Bowed once again.  
 'How do you do?'  
 'How do you do?'  
 'How do you do again?'

---

*Two Fat Gentlemen* verse offers:

- dexterity and flexibility as tensions release and the range of movement grows
- a more even and flowing breath rhythm
- playfulness

In the next verse the fingers mesh together as you let one pair of ring fingers pop out, then work your way through a sequence. You can also try this with the toes and, as with the hands, pop both feet gloriously free at the end.

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### **Five Little Peas**

Five little peas in a peapod pressed  
 One grew, two grew,  
 So did all the rest!  
 They grew and they grew and they could not stop  
 Until one day, the pod went POP!

---

*Five Little Peas* verse offers:

- greater tactile awareness
- enlivening stimulation
- connecting feet and hands, fingers and toes

The  
Benefits  
of  
Smaller and  
Larger  
Movements

**Smaller and larger movements**

Finger and hand verses which are accompanied by movements enhance the fine motor control capacities and neurological development and integration.

The larger movements that build what are called gross motor skills, help develop body awareness and boundary as more of the legs, arms and back become involved. This can support spatial organisation and, most important of all, the lively movement of a joyfully free-swinging and vital breath!

You can explore the subtlety of the small movements every day as a teacher or a parent. Most of us overwork specific parts of our body and overlook or override the areas of strength. Great support for the rest of the body can be found in the back, legs and feet. These can offer vast reservoirs of vitality and breath to do necessary tasks.

We do our children a tremendous service, and ourselves too, if use our hands with sensitivity, and with an attitude of playful discovery. Many children tire very quickly when asked to write at school. If we lay the foundations now, at an early age, it will strengthen the range and possibilities of the hands enormously for later life.

In the next verse, count off on each finger and let the hands shake free at the end. This can also be done with the feet.

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**Toe Verse**

*Once I caught a fish alive!  
Six, seven, eight, nine, ten,  
Then I let him go again!  
Why did you let him go?  
Because he hurt my finger so!*

---

---

*Toe Verse offers:*

- vitality and a playful sense of sequencing
- engagement of the feet and hands
- lively expression

For *Ten Bright Candles* verse, continue until ten fingers are all extended. The finger extends upwards on 'lighting up,' and flexes downwards on 'drips down'. This is a wonderful way of gently extending the breath flow as the fingers are themselves extended. The opening and closing of the fingers and hands, and the flow of inhale and exhale, are naturally very connected in a natural, free-flowing breath rhythm.

---

### **Ten Bright Candles**

One bright candle lighting up the town,  
The flame goes up but the wax drips down.  
Two bright candles lighting up the town,  
The flames go up but the wax drips down.  
Three bright candles lighting up the town,  
The flame goes up but the wax drips down.  
Four bright candles lighting up the town,  
The flame goes up but the wax drips down.  
Five bright candles lighting up the town,  
The flame goes up but the wax drips down.



*Ten Bright Candles* verse offers:

- dexterity and strength
- a smoother breathing rhythm
- number sequencing

---

### **Rocks to Stones**

<i>Rocks to stones,</i>	(large circle with both arms in front)
<i>Stones to pebbles,</i>	(fists)
<i>Pebbles to sand,</i>	(finger pads touching each other)
<i>Soft, silky sand,</i>	
<i>That glides through my hand,</i>	(simulate sand gathered and cascading through fingers)

---

*Rocks to Stones* verse offers:

- a natural sequencing of large to small
- the rhythm of a natural process
- varied types of movement and touch with hands and fingers
- playful stimulation for the breath

The *Sweet Rosy Round Apples* verse is a very good one for busy hand and finger activity while keeping the children in the restful flow of their breath rhythm. This way of working means we never tire, but experience rhythmic joy and satisfaction in each activity!

### ***Sweet Rosy Round Apples***

<i>Sweet rosy round apples,</i>	(circle on stomach)
<i>Sweet rosy round apples</i>	
<i>We chop them and cook them,</i>	(use hands to mimic chopping with a knife)
<i>We chop them and cook them</i>	
<i>To make an apple pie, Oh my!</i>	(circle hands on stomach)
<i>To make an apple pie, Oh my!</i>	
<i>Buttery, buttery pastry,</i>	(roll hands in front of body on floor)
<i>Smooth, buttery pastry,</i>	
<i>We roll it and roll it,</i>	(you can mimic flipping pastry to vary rolling movement)
<i>We roll it and roll it</i>	
<i>To make us an apple pie, Oh my!</i>	(circle hands on stomach)
<i>To make us an apple pie, Oh my!</i>	

*Sweet Rosy Round Apples* verse offers:

- warmth and engagement of sense of touch
- taste, sight, and sound
- rounder and more flowing breathing rhythm
- varied and playful movements of hands

## The Benefits of Grounding Verses

### Grounding verses

All of these verses offer a dynamic relationship to the legs, the feet, and the sense of how the lower, more instinctual part of our body can offer us a source of vitality and strength.

Untempered, we may have more wild energy than is good for us. Providing contrast can also create balance and support integration. So when we allow the warming movements of the legs and feet which help us come more deeply into the body, to be balanced in turn, by freer movements that come from the upper body, as in the wings of birds, we offer wonderful balance and contrast for both the breath and the body. The *Gorilla Stomps* verse offers this contrast very strongly.

Whether rolling, as in the *Rolling Seals* verse or flying like birds and roaring like lions, as in *Gorilla Stomps*, the entire diaphragm and rib cage can also open wonderfully and be freed.

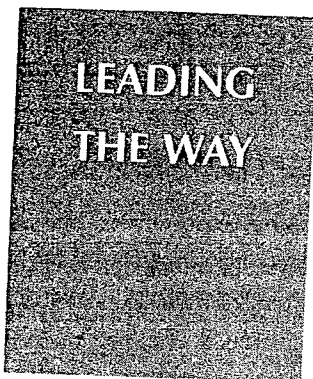
With this freedom comes a tremendous outpouring of healthy, revitalising breath for all the organs, the blood, and developing tissue. The association with joyous movement may even persist, for the young child, whenever he sees gulls or puts on rain boots!

As the breath flows and the blood moves, a stronger sense of body boundary and connection to the earth's supporting ground becomes very evident. The legs become more fully engaged, and an overall sense can prevail of strength, presence, and engagement.

## ACTIVITY

### ENJOYING THE GROUND: VERSES TO FILL THE BODY AND RELISH THE EARTH!

#### Six verses and movements to support deepening breath movement



The young child can explore different qualities of breath as he becomes the gorilla. Stomping, with spine slightly curved in a wonderful forward hang, offers a great stretch for all the vertebrae and can stimulate the sense of balance as the child comes back up. The lion offers a magnificent roar from the feet, legs, and diaphragm area to really open up the back and middle space of the body, while the Bird extends its wings and enjoys the airy realms of freedom granted to the upper space of the body – the chest, the



arms, the neck and head. Good language and varied, healthy movement are a medium the child swims in, imitates, and absorbs into the deepest parts of his being.

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### **Gorilla Stomps**

*Gorilla stomps on the jungle floor!*  
*Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!*

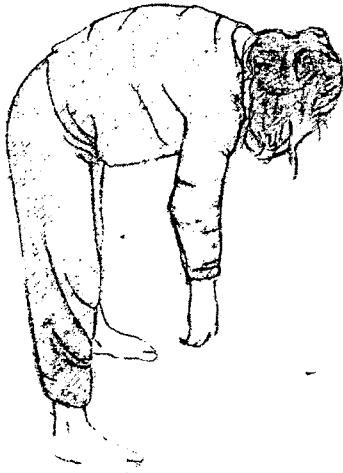
(legs and feet stomp, as spine is curled downwards)

*Lion roars on savanna plain!*  
*Roar! Roar! Roar!*

(roar like lions, hands on sides)

*Birdie flits from tree to tree!*  
*Flit! Flit! Flit!*

(let the arms fly outwards;  
flit and move about the room)



Gorilla stomps



Lion roars

---

---

*Gorilla Stomps* verse offers:

- a grounding breath for the feet and legs
- a sense of freedom and strength in the breath as the diaphragm area finds support from the ground and the feet and legs
- a sense of lightness and freedom in the breath as the chest opens and the face smiles

The next verse moves from sitting to standing, stamping, twirling and stamping, and jumping. It offers a wonderfully energetic way of differentiating and sensing the toes, the ankle joints, and the heels, as well as the glorious sensations of splashing without getting wet!

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***Pull on My Rain Boots!***

*Pull on my rain boots! Pull them on tight!  
 One goes on the left and one goes on the right!  
 Big toe in the corner! Little toe is shorter  
 Stand right up! Push my heels right down!  
 Now we turn around and around!  
 And a Splish! And a Splash! And a Stomp! Stomp! Stomp!  
 Are we ready for the rain boot romp?*

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*Pull on My Rain Boots!* verse offers:

- a vital and energetic breath
- a grounding of the feet and a differentiation of the parts of the feet
- spatial orientation and balance

In the following verse you are on all fours moving slowly and deliberately with the rhythm and sway of the elephant. It is really good to let yourself enter into the quality of each animal's movement and how their characteristic rhythm and movement can communicate something about breathing and pace. Contrast the heavy solemn and deliberate sway of the elephant therefore with the light and more mercurial movement of the stalking cat.

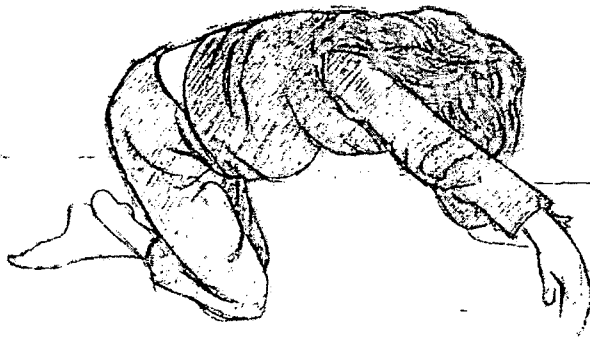
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***Rumble, Rumble, Deep in the Wood***

(on all fours)

*Rumble, rumble, deep in the wood,  
Herds of elephants looking for food!  
Rolling logs,  
Reaching for leaves!  
Rumble, rumble all through the trees!  
Tiptoe, tiptoe, creeps on all fours,  
The little black cat with snowy white paws!  
Sniffing for mice,  
Birds she can tease,  
Tiptoe, tiptoe all through the trees.*



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*Rumble, Rumble, Deep in the Woods* verse offers:

- a deeper breath throughout the body
- calming, and grounding as all four limbs move across the floor
- a wonderful stretch and flex for the spine
- playful contrasting movement

The next verse starts in standing and progresses towards the floor as you curl downwards and eventually softly tumble. It is a wonderful way to release all kinds of tension in the face and in the joints and have children learn to yield to and trust the ground. Very young children naturally do tend to trust the ground, but tensions accrue and the natural relationship to the earth can get very unfamiliar as bodies get stiffer and spend less and less time connecting to the earth.

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### *Crumbly, Mumbly, Fumbly Down!*

*Crumbly, crumbly,*

(fingers on mouth)

*Mumbly, mumbly,*

(let the head roll down to the chest)

*Fumbly, fumble me,*

(let the spine curl down as the knees soften and bend)

*Tumble me down!*

(give into the floor, and if you want roll back)

*Rumble me, rumble me, rumble me round!*

*Jumble me, jumble me, jumble me over*

(curl up, limbs swinging)

*Tumble me, tumble me, rumble me, rumble me up!*

(return to upright position)

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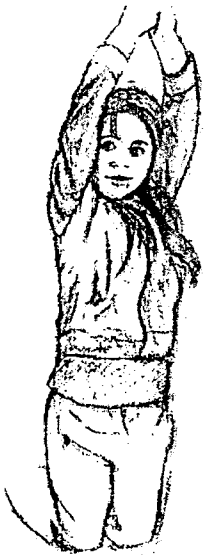
*Crumbly, Mumbly, Fumbly* verse offers:

- a playful way of letting the breath release tension and heighten awareness and flexibility through touch, rolling, and stretching
- increased sensory awareness of fingers and face
- opening up the back as we roll down the spine: increased strength of the legs and the sense of support of the ground
- re-alignment of the vertebrae along the spine and increased flexibility

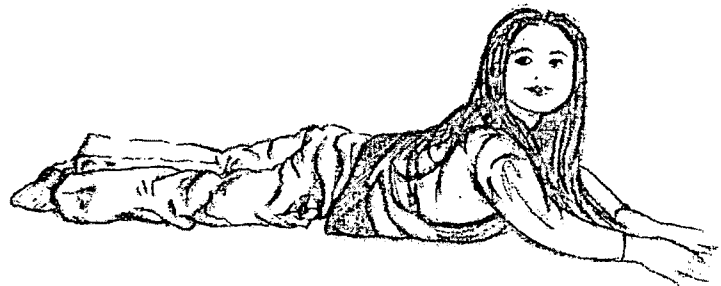
*Swooping Gulls* is a lively verse that can start from kneeling, and then do a diving from that position onto the floor on bellies! I always like to start it with a cue of squawking like gulls to signal the transition. On the second verse the return to kneeling position is good, as you simulate wing movements with extended arms. In this way the breath is given wonderfully expanding stimulation: the gusting wind and gusting movement all serve to evoke and unleash a vital breath in the lower, middle, and upper parts of the body.

### **Swooping Gulls**

*Steep! Steep! Gulls soar and dive  
One, two, three, four, five!  
Cruising, gusting, gliding free  
Hurtling down for fishy tea!  
Rising up in the wind's great rush  
Squawking loudly, never hush!*



Soar



Dive

*Swooping Gulls* verse offers:

- exhilarating and large movements with lots of contrast and expansion which open up the breath in the upper body
- releasing the breath
- moving the breath into the back and front of the body, and into the legs and middle
- a playful relation to the ground
- lots of expression
- lots of laughter

Any time we bring children into sensing and enjoying the floor, we are supporting the love of giving in and resting, a snuggling which, when done in connection with vibrant and vitalising activity, can cultivate wonderful muscle tone throughout the body.

The following verse is done entirely on the ground. It can be all done with rolling, or some of it coming up a little off the floor and half crawling, with the belly on the ground and the legs helping the movement forward; but everything should be as close to the floor as possible. The sounds help connect children in the right way to the serious business of being seals and so avoid any monkey business that might make it difficult to have a room full of children doing this. Having the child sense and enjoy the floor, and experience his body boundaries as he rolls around, is a fantastically affirming experience that offers sensation and boundary, bringing the child deeper into the body. The child will be more in himself and the breath will flow more deeply and fully while subtle levels of integration can take place between right and left sides.

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### **Rolling Seals**

*Flibber, flabber, flibber, flabber*

*Arp! Arp! Arp!*

*Barks the little seal as he rolls along*

*Flibber, flabber, flibber, flabber*

*Arp! Arp! Arp!*

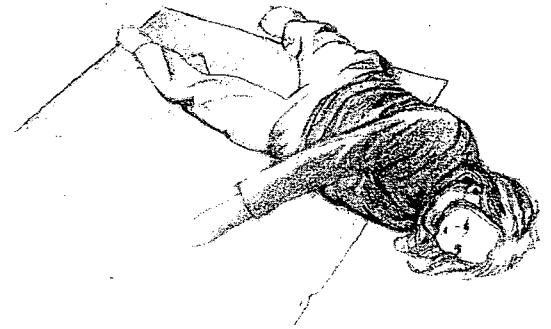
*Barks the little seal as s/he sings her song!*

*Flibbery, flabbery, flibbery, flabbery*

*Catch a fresh fish!*

*Flibbery, flabbery, flibbery, flabbery,*

*Splish, splash, splish!*




---

*Rolling Seals* verse offers:

- a gentle stimulation to the natural breath flow
- increased sensory awareness over entire body as children roll over the floor
- strengthening the sense of body boundary
- opening up the diaphragm area, especially on the barking sounds

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**Bear Has a Snout**

Bear has a snout

(hunkered down on knees with head suddenly appearing)

It pokes OUT!

Four paws

(hands suddenly appear)

They have CLAWS!

Burrowing deep

(circling round and round on the floor)

Bear goes to sleep

(curl up as small as possible)

(repeat 3 times)

---

---

*Bear Has a Snout* verse offers:

- a playful breath which allows an impulsive and vital quality to come through
- a contrasting snuggling movement which supports the full breath all the way into a deep exhalation and resting, a sense of coming home
- spinal flexibility

**Whirling and twirling**

These kinds of movement offer wonderfully freeing movement for the breath, as the body allows itself to be propelled with joyous freedom.

When we let the rhythm of the verse guide and contain us, both child and teacher benefit from a much freer, much livelier and deeper breathing.

The horizontal exploration of space which twirling and whirling offers as the arms become engaged, strengthens and integrates the legs and back, the middle diaphragm area, and the upper area of the chest, along with the arms and the head.

When we ground and balance ourselves through this kind of movement, greater clarity and presence can permeate all of our other senses, as the breath moves and the blood flows.

Whirling around asks for the feet to naturally seek out the earth and become familiar with the grounding and balancing support the earth offers us.

The

benefits

f

Whirling and

twirling

Gentle whirling and twirling movements, much like the rocking movements, can offer great benefits to the vestibular system that supports our sense of balance and spatial orientation.

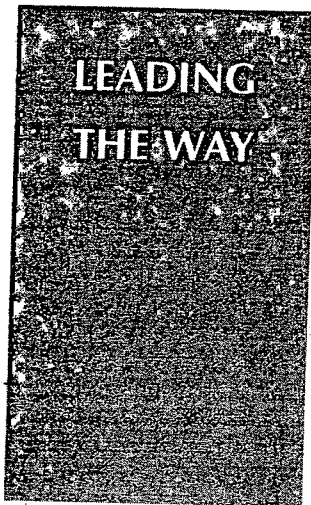
Stimulation for the physical body and for the vestibular system will support vision and hearing as well as the sense of balance.

Rotational movements support orientation and are very effective for freeing the spine, but this kind of movement needs to be built with gradual momentum for best results.

## ACTIVITY

### WHIRLING, TWIRLING, UPSIDE-DOWN

#### Circling breath goes round and round



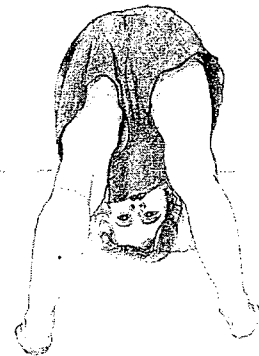
Whirling and twirling bring strong effects which help to support deeper levels of inner freedom and integration. Many children are immensely attracted to these kinds of movements, sometimes to excess! Always observe closely the effects of any movement you do. Is the child relaxed or stressed? For example, the ears reddening suddenly is a clear indicator of stress. So it is always better to start small and do less, and in that way refine your powers of observation and learning. If you push for an overly aerobic workout the breath may start to become controlled or stuck in too much effort rather than flowing freely. In that case you may well undo the good of the movement.

Two movements to support the integration of the vestibular system  
In the first verse the movement is performed looking down through the legs and waving at different people.

---

#### *Looking through the Garden Gate*

*Looking through the garden gate,  
What do I see?  
A whole world that's upside down,  
Waving at me!*





*Looking Through the Garden Gate* verse offers:

- social activity for shy children
- playful stimulation that promotes deeper breathing
- benefits for vestibular function

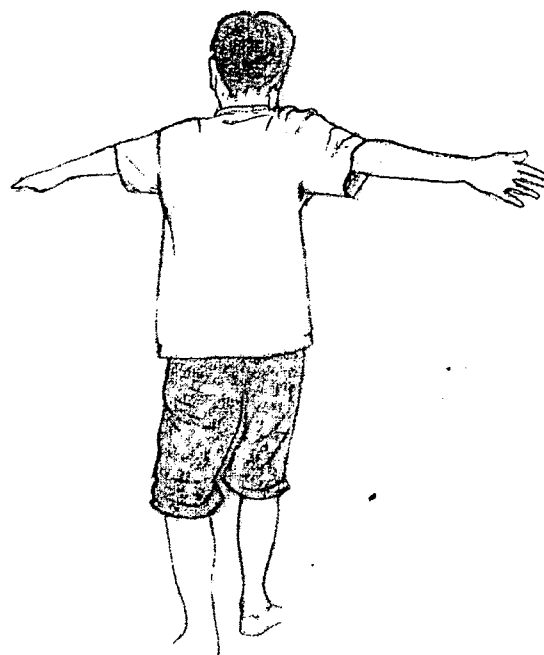
The whirling movement of the next verse is performed in pairs: if possible, the adult can lift the child off the ground! This kind of movement is wonderful, especially when accompanied by laughter, for releasing the diaphragm and opening up a joyous and free-flowing breath. The appeal of a verse can easily transform a chore into a playful and nourishing activity.

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### **Whirling, Twirling**

*Whirling, twirling, whirling round,  
Feet go flying off the ground!  
Whirling, twirling, whirling pair,  
Boys and girls twirl in the air!  
Twirling high! Twirling low!  
Hoping that no one will ever let go!  
Whirling and twirling to the heavens above!  
Whirling and twirling is what we most love!*



---

---

*Whirling, Twirling* verse offers:

- stimulation and release to enable a freer flow of breath
- a great way to create a social and expansive mood

**A verse to support sensory awareness of the body boundaries, preposition usage, and hygiene!**

---

*Scrub my nails, scrub my nails,*

*Sideways and back,*

*Up and down, roundabout,*

*Forwards and back!*

(Wash my face, wash my ears, wash my hair, brush my teeth, brush my hair, dry my hair, etc.)

*Scrub me and suds me,*

*Untangle my hair,*

*Sponge me and towel me most everywhere!*

*All squeaky clean and ready for sleep,*

*Rock me and roll me to dreams oh so deep!*

---

Rhythmic repetition is soul food for young children. A melodic and rhythmic verse invites the child into dialogue, encouraging an activity he may otherwise resist.

*Experiencing the resting place*

---

*'Ah, but the step of time;*

*think of it as a dream in what forever remains'*

Rainer Maria Rilke

---

Sensing the resting moments in a verse, or at the end of a verse, allows the child to experience more deeply the interval or pause that is necessary in the digestion of experience. Some teachers worry that if they offer movements to their children that are very dynamic

and revitalising, they will never get the children to calm down again. But if we build into our songs and speech the sense of natural rhythm that includes a resting place, the children will naturally come towards that and sense how they need it.

Within the breath cycle itself we have an inhalation, an exhalation, and a pause. In a healthy and balanced life we take the step towards what stimulates and interests us, which is also the character of the inhalation. This is followed by the experience of sensing, which the exhale offers us as the walls of the body, composed of muscle and skin tissue, swing back. These walls mediate the internal parts of our body with the external world and can be especially sensed along our flanks. In a full, healthy breath rhythm we find the resting place or pause which supports the digestion of the experience before we go towards the next experience and our next breath cycle. It is not hard to see how a full, healthy breath, penetrating the blood stream, the nervous system, and through to each cell, might make it easier for a child to bring a joyful and vital quality of attention, and how constricted breath leads to under-nourishment and more exertion than is necessary.

In the busy world of the early twenty-first century, what we often see are children and adults who are in fact very over-stimulated, and so are not digesting or resonating sufficiently deeply with what they have just experienced. This shows up very clearly in the breath rhythm, where we might see a tightness or controlling emphasis on the inhalation. This in turn can affect the full potential of the exhale, which may be cut off and flattened so that the benefits of the body walls swinging back to bring penetration of the breath does not occur as fully as it could. When a child's behaviour shows that his attention is fatigued or distracted, these are signs that his natural breath-flow may be shallow or impeded. Therefore something is required to help recover it, whether a break or a short movement activity. The goal is to help the child focus on the 'metabolism' of the social group and to support him in his needs. When we feel we are not getting enough, not enjoying a true sense of fullness or of contentment, anxiety often grows – and anxiety breeds restlessness.

Allowing a natural flow and rhythm to develop supports the child in his own natural rhythm and in its potential fullness. But we have to allow our own natural breath rhythm to flow for this to

really happen in the classroom or with our child. Then a deep patience and a simple joy in being present can grow. Rudolf Steiner, the founder of Waldorf education, talks of the natural breath-flow supporting both the digestion and the 'nerve-sense' processes, those parts of our being that help us to assimilate, integrate and understand experience. When we support the digestive process at its deepest level, we support the capacity for deep learning in both its dynamic and in its sleeping, resting, or fallow phases. We have to allow the world to penetrate our own bodies deeply to be able, in turn, to penetrate and understand the world in which we live.

That is why, after any dynamic and enlivening verse, the child must be given the contrast of a soothing and quiet interlude. In this way the different but complementary qualities of activity and deep rest can become deeply familiar to him. Excellent classroom management occurs when the teacher and the children ride on the waves of a rhythm that nourishes everybody in the room.

## CHAPTER SIX

# *Story Verses and Circle Verses*

### *The garden*

### *where the imagination roots and grows*

The circle is the fundamental social form, and is an excellent way to affirm the group as a whole. This acknowledgment is particularly good for ending classes where hands are held and a group rhythm sustained through a closing verse. The circle can reinforce the importance of how we meet and greet one another and how we say goodbye. If this is playful and delightful, so much the better!

Story and circle verses can also be very helpful as transitions from one place to another in your lesson, because they invite sharing of a group focus and tempo.

Young children learn deeply through imitation and so may join a circle, but will not really grasp its form and how it connects us socially until they are around three years old.

Whatever the age, I always offer the circle as the meeting place. However, the verses given here specifically invite the child into a much more explicit relation to this as we hold hands and move in and out of the circle – as in the verse, *The Tide Comes In and the Tide Goes Out*. Story verses invite children who want to join in with others, so gauge when your group is ready! Sequencing in the story verses, especially the *Hunting for a Beehive* verse is excellent for building memory and retention with its narrative that progresses forwards and then backwards.

The following verse has been adapted from the traditional bear-hunt verse *We're Going on a Bear Hunt*.

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***Hunting for a Beehive, Looking for some Honey***

We're hunting for a beehive  
We're looking for some honey  
It's a beautiful day  
We're not scared  
Here's a green meadow  
We can't go over it  
We can't go under it  
Oh well! We have to go through it  
Swishy, swashy, swishy swashy, swishy swashy!

We're hunting for a beehive  
We're looking for some honey  
It's a beautiful day  
We're not scared.  
Here's a deep river  
We can't go under it  
We can't go over it  
Oh well! We'll have to go through it!  
Sploshy, splashy, sploshy splashy, sploshy splashy!

We're hunting for a beehive  
We're looking for some honey  
It's a beautiful day  
We're not scared  
Here's a muddy bank  
We can't go over it  
We can't go under it  
Oh well! We'll have to go through it!  
Squelchy squerchy, squelchy squerchy, squelchy squerchy!

*We're looking for a beehive  
We're looking for some honey  
It's a beautiful day  
We're not scared  
Here is the beehive  
Deep in the forest, deep in the trees!  
We want some honey, good, golden honey, sweet to eat!  
So let's just help ourselves to this wonderful treat!  
BUZZZZZZZZZZZZ! BUZZZZZZZZZZ!*

*Ouch a bee sting! Buzz, buzz, a bee sting!  
Quick let's run back the way we came!  
Back through the mud squelch squerch, squelch squerch!  
Back through the river splish, splash, splish splash!  
Back through the meadow swishy swashy, swishy swashy  
Into our cave and under the covers  
Please bees please please GO AWAY!  
What did we forget when we took honey from the bees?  
We forgot one simple word.... We didn't ask PLEASE!*

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*Hunting for a Beehive, We're Looking for some Honey* is an acted story verse which offers:

- building an imaginative sense of place and mood
- sensory awareness of different environments
- a forwards and backwards movement of narrative to strengthen the memory

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**One Little Duck**

*One little duck went JUMP in the mud!*

*She splished and she splashed!*

*She splashed and she quacked.*

*She dived to the bottom*

*And when she came up,*

*She was STUCK!*

*Oh No!*

*Two little ducks went JUMP in the mud!*

*They splished and they splashed,*

*They splashed and they quacked.*

*They dived to the bottom*

*And when they came up they were STUCK!*

*Oh No!*

(Three little ducks, four little ducks, until a large number are in the middle of the circle)

*Then the sun came out*

*And smiled at the ducks*

*Poor little ducks all stuck in the muck*

*You're in luck!*

*The sun's warm rays dried the mud all up*

*And the ducks waddled free going quack, quack, quack!*

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*One little Duck* is an acted-story verse which offers:

- soothing to build sensory awareness
- counting sequence
- spatial awareness and expressive use of the voice



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### *The Mermaid's Purse*

*We found a little mermaid's purse lying in the sand,  
I picked it up and looked at it lying in my hand  
Its smell was of the briny, salty, great green sea,  
Its touch felt just about as soft as a sea anemone  
All stitched about with seaweed and white pearly shell,  
It was fastened very, very tight with a little silvery bell  
Inside was lined with fish scales of silver, green and blue  
And deep within its lining was a shell to share with you.  
Curled up inside the shell was a distant haunting song,  
That called to strange deep places where the mermaids throng.*

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*The Mermaid's Purse* verse can be used:

- to build awareness of the primary senses: sight, touch, smell, and sound
- to encourage imagination in evoking smells, textures and sounds of 'the mermaid's purse'

### *Building the social and connecting the group*

Circle verses, besides strengthening the social sense, which can connect the group as more of a whole, are also very useful for redirecting potential distractions and collecting a focus for the group as a whole to move together.

In the next verse one can start with all the children waving their hands above their heads for leaves, opening their hands in the air for flowers, and twirling around on the spot for the last line of buzzing bees.

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### ***We are Little Lemon Trees***

*We are little lemon trees, waving all our leaves,  
Buzz! Buzz! Buzz! Come the busy little bees!  
They sip and they sup from all of our flowers,  
Buzzing all around us for hours and hours!*

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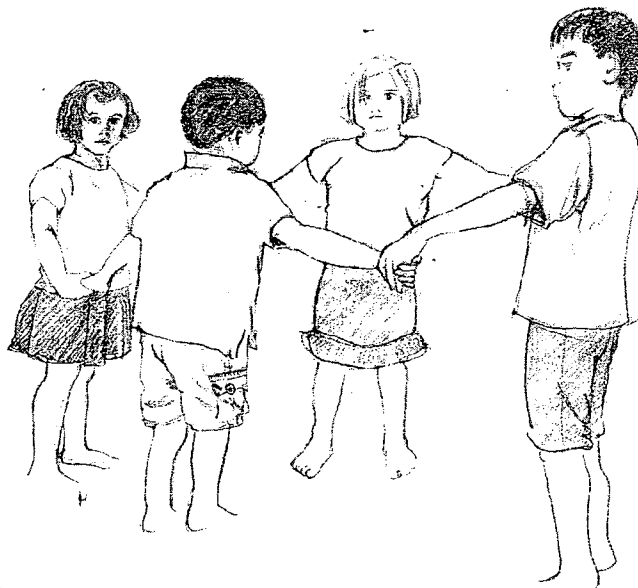
In the verse below everyone holds hands as the circle contracts towards the centre, and then expands all together outwards. When the big wave comes, the children may turn around and run away from the circle, but are called back in with the repetition of this verse at least two or three times. It is very effective to scene-set first of all, and then to draw the children into the vivid sensations of being at a beach through sounds and textures. Create the sensory awareness of sand and cool water, as the toes curl up and as the feet extend and flex feeling the sand.

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### ***The Tide Comes In and the Tide Goes Out***

*The tide comes in and the tide goes out,  
The tide comes in and the tide goes out,  
The tide comes in and the tide goes out,  
But when the big wave comes we run right out!*



*The Blackberry Patch* is a circle verse best done while standing. The group treads carefully and cautiously around an imagined blackberry patch. As stated before, children's readiness to participate in a circle depends on where they are in their development. Children under three years offer wonderful examples of the social desire to be with the group tempo, as they explore their own individual impulses and show us how imitation feeds learning.

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***The Blackberry Patch***

*Watch out! Watch out in the blackberry patch!*  
*Watch out! Watch out in the blackberry patch!*  
*And mind that you don't get a scratch!*

*Watch out! Watch out in the blackberry patch!*  
*Watch out! Watch out in the blackberry patch!*  
*And mind your clothes don't get a snatch!*

*Watch out! Watch out in the blackberry patch!*  
*Watch out! Watch out in the blackberry patch!*  
*How much fruit are you going to catch?*

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## *Cleaning up!*

A cleaning up verse to support easy transitions.

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### *The Dust Faeries are Sleeping*

*The dust faeries are sleeping, the dust faeries are sleeping*

*All over the house!*

(ears to the ground)

*The dust faeries are sweeping, the dust faeries are sweeping*

*All over the house!*

(pick child up and swing side to side)

*The dust faeries are flying, the dust faeries are flying*

*All over the house!\**

(whirl child around in the air)

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## *Closing*

Typically, I have used variations on the *The Tide Comes in and the Tide Goes Out* in order to bring a closing. You can substitute breeze and wind for tide and waves. The expanding and contracting movement creates liveliness but also brings us all together. This can segue very easily into a goodbye song which is very necessary for children who may never want to stop and who need a clear indication of another transition.

# Section Three

## CHAPTER SEVEN *Simple Storytelling*

Stories bring delight and nourishment for any age. Stories that are rooted in rhythms and pictures shape the child profoundly, affecting and strengthening the inner life and connecting directly to the breath. The quality of the stories we tell is important. Children's own storytelling and symbolic play will clearly reveal how this inner world is evolving. Stories rooted in the natural world are potent because their language and imagery offer immersion in earthly currents and rhythms of creation and regeneration. As we allow the contents and rhythms of traditional tales to influence our own storytelling, we open to the weave that has sustained storytellers since men and women first shared a fireside. Attunement to our own breath shows us how our voice and pace can work to support both listener and teller.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

# *Simple Storytelling*

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*Your breath will propel you along, wherever you are in your story. If you think you can't begin, that is an especially precious moment. You feel the greatest resistance when you are on the verge of the greatest discovery. Breathe! Begin, go on, and keep going to the end!*

Nancy Mellon, *The Art of Storytelling* (Element: Boston 1998)

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All of these stories evolved while working with very young children aged between one-and-a-half and five years old. They belong to a tradition, found all over the world and derive from strong oral traditions which, like the parables, indirectly introduce a message or teaching theme, often through vivid pictures. These stories also developed out of the need to capture the attention of the very young child, and are tuned for melody, rhythm, and sound, as doorways into language. Hands-on activity, participation, and the use of sounds and songs, immediately bring most children to a very different quality of attentiveness. By using the development of the senses as story inspiration, a very wide range of ages and learning needs can be involved at the same time. The approach of using sensory elements in the telling of a story sustains children's interest, and also offers a more embodied and immediate way of being in the story and absorbing a wide range of language, whatever the age of the listener. In my experience, music, song, and sound effects such as animal sounds and the patting of fingers to simulate rain, never fail to bring everyone into the pulse of the story.

## *Setting the mood for a story*

Rhythm, ritual and repetition are some of the fundamentals in telling stories to young children. Establishing the space is one of the ways to invite children to be receptive. This can be done by establishing rituals: lighting a candle, singing a simple song, perhaps invoking fire fairies who can be invited to help light the flame, or as unseen magical presences. Setting a small story stage with simple coloured cloths also gives a visual focus for the story. The rhythm you create invites the children to be profoundly attentive as they absorb the story. For young children, repeating a story three times, over three days or three weeks, builds a deep sense of security and a strong connection to the story that can emerge again in their free play.

## *Staging a story*

Very simple staging of stories is a wonderful way to show the child how any object can be used symbolically, thus strengthening the child's own imaginative symbolic play. For example, one week you might use a sock to represent a bird, the next week, a piece of coloured wool, and the third week, a feather. The more minimalist you get – using rocks and stones, twigs and leaves, such simple things from nature along with simple wooden toys – the more you ask of the child's own imagination, and the more fluid and available becomes your own immediate capacity to tell a story.

## *Stories as healers and stories as teachers*

The following stories came out of different needs and themes relevant to the young child. Many of the stories are designed to captivate and hold children, while meeting their unfolding senses. Very young children mediate their entire world through sense

experience. The stories cover a range of themes such as the wisdom of knowing when and where to use loud voices as in *The Tale of the Squawky Young Birds*, appreciating one's own gifts as in *The Muddy Farmyard* and *The Little Wooden Mixing Bowl*, dealing with impatience as in *The Little Lemon Who Couldn't Wait*, and meeting fear of the dark, as in *The Fire Faery*.

Stories are very often the most effective way to allow something that you want a child to learn to go deep. Children will often shut off from a reasoning approach, but when you capture the imagination and dare them into a different world, they are right beside you, holding your hand and ready to jump. I often recommend to parents that they select a theme that addresses an area of difficulty or imbalance in the relationship with the child or in the child's relationship to the world; for example, potential confrontation with their child, or a dark fear that the child is carrying. By letting yourself enter fully into a story you can nourish and heal both the teller and the listener. This can happen when you let the story have a momentum that can carry you, trusting your own, inner story-weaver. Your child could not be a more appreciative audience, and at the same time you feed his own imaginative ability and capacity to, in turn, tell stories. Stories are an essential current in the river of our humanity, and the way we pass on much ancient wisdom.

Many of us experience a sense of fragmentation that comes with the pressures of modern daily life. The lives we lead create all kinds of tensions which can easily detach us from our metabolic rhythms, impeding our sense of flow and satisfaction. To immerse ourselves in stories and in particular, to start to allow our own stories to come through, begins a process of creating wholeness that can mitigate the sense of things being incomplete or not quite fulfilled. Moving into present time in a story calls upon a universal time-sense that is both here and somewhere else. It is therefore in some way magical. For the adult and the child to find time together in this way can become an everyday magic that surprises and delights as the meanings that stories offer weave coloured threads between my child, myself, and the worlds of the past and the present.



## *Working with archetypes: finding a muse*

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*Nature is never spent; there lives the dearest freshness  
deep down things*

Gerard Manley Hopkins *God's Grandeur*

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Finding the keys to unlock the flow of your own stories need not be daunting. Working with archetypes that connect with our unconscious can delight us, as layers of meaning that have a life of their own reveal themselves. Because trees or stars, for example, have a compelling role in human consciousness we may find we can connect to a universal thread within our story, which we could never have planned. At the same time, we may uncover personal meanings. When we allow our attention to weave and dream within it, a story with an archetype as its guiding focus may begin to show us essential things that we have not previously connected. Then we start to penetrate some truth about the life and rhythm of say, the oak tree, the sunflower seed, or the phases of the moon, and discover something of the 'dearest freshness deep down things'.

Archetypes are potent starting places, and there are many. More generally, symbols collect and simplify our focus. They enable the teller to let go of notions of control and allow a deeper guiding spirit to weave the story. I have found that working with the idea of the four elements, as well as the different kingdoms of Creation, is a wonderful way to begin rich discoveries.

### **Sun, moon, stars and clouds**

Working with a group of parents and teachers over time, we explored stories that can build a sense of protection and healthy rhythm. We turned to the moon as our muse in our first explorations of stories for healing and teaching. To hook our imagination into a part of creation that is so connected with rhythm can, in turn, feed the rhythm of our own stories. We realised that the moon's profound role in our subtle rhythms can

manifest in a story beyond any rationally planned outcomes. By opening up to the moon as a vital element in our different stories we were inviting the moon's quality to penetrate them. A significant number of wonderful stories also include the moon in a key role: to borrow her silver light is to weave some of her wisdom into our stories.

Margaret Wise Brown's tale *Wait till the Moon is Full*, is a beautiful example of subtle teaching. A little raccoon keeps asking his mother when he can go outside to play at night. Wise Brown evokes simply and beautifully the impatience and anticipation of the little raccoon and the gentle response of his mother as they wait, through the different phases of the moon, for the *right* time to go outside. In our age which encourages instant gratification and overstimulation, showing a child a picture of different phases and qualities of time, and of fullness as something we wait for, is a profound and beautiful truth.

The sun offers very different qualities from the moon. Golden light and warmth contrasts with cool, silvery moonlight. The sun wakes us, warms us, and gives life, while the moon works through our more hidden, watery nature, in quiet and subtle ways. Evoking these resonant contrasts between the sun and moon, has ancient and universal meaning. Clouds and stars can equally be called upon as muses, and we might find unexpected resonance from our own childhood: from stories we have forgotten, or images we once experienced differently. Storytelling keeps alive the seam of connection between present and past.

### Trees, roots, branches, leaves and seeds

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O chestnut tree, great-rooted blossomer,  
Are you the leaf, the blossom or the bole?  
O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,  
How can we know the dancer from the dance?

William Butler Yeats *Among School Children*

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In the workshops described above, we also explored the role of trees as protective and grounding images, and what these offer a story. Nature is replete with symbols that lure us back into natural cycles and teach us about the wisdom of time unfolding, of gestation, of growth, of fruition, and of death and regeneration. Different trees offer different qualities: shade, strength, protection, rootedness, and the sense of home. Similarly, a forest can touch many qualities: a place of sanctuary, a place of rich life, a place to get lost and overwhelmed, a place of fear and darkness; or a place of change and transformation. When we evoke symbols from nature in the course of storytelling, our own body can inhale and sense the very life of what we evoke. The smell of pine needles, the crunching sound of twigs under foot, the soft green moss, the warm brown earth, the thick texture of the trunk, the gnarled roots and leafy branches can all be brought alive through our imagination and so nourish a child who naturally inhales the world through his or her senses.

### **The creature world: fins and wings, messengers and protectors**

Stories offer us an experience of freedom. Sensing your own rhythm brings you into the present moment and a more spacious and open sense of receptivity, supporting the story you want to tell. In workshops, working with parents and teachers, we always prepare ourselves by coming to our own breath and body. The awareness of our physical body and our breath as a resource and medium for expression means that we are able to tell the story from a fuller and deeper place. Over time we grow in flexibility and confidence. This means that on the spur of the moment, in the car or at the end of a busy day, we can ground ourselves, prepare, and make space for the inspiration of a story to descend and nourish both teller and listener, effortlessly and easily.

The creature world offers rich diversity, a cornucopia of inspiration for good and nourishing stories. The distinctive characteristics of beaver, nightingale, squirrel, owl, lion, dog, ant, bee, and bat, are just a few of the creatures that we can call on to enrich our stories.

A friend once told me the most marvellous healing story in

response to a tale of a hurt that had happened in my early schooling. Impromptu, she described the setting of a dark and ominous school. I had told her I that I tried to physically resist entering the school at the tender age of five. My memory was of a tug of war between the teacher and myself on the school's front steps. My storytelling friend transformed the sense of impending doom that pervaded the memory with a simple light touch. A small bird flew in with me as I was dragged through the doorway, and continued to sit on my shoulder. Her story made tears run down my cheeks. I am quite sure I would not have been so touched had we only talked about this experience as rational adults. Not only had a friend met and penetrated a place of formative struggle from my past, but she had imaginatively and lyrically offered a symbol that was a wonderful clear focus to guide me. The little bird, like all great symbols, could be interpreted in many ways: helpmate, silent witness, even the psyche which with wings, and a song, remains free while the physical body appears trapped. Her story also called in some way on the childlike aspect of my own being as I listened. Through stories we can offer each other symbols that resonate with truth and meaning long after the story is finished. When we receive a story in trust, we revisit as adults that place in children which offers essential transparency and trust to the world.

### *Trusting inspiration as your guide*

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*Wild air, world-mothering air,  
nestling me everywhere*

Gerard Manley Hopkins  
*The Blessed Virgin compared to the Air we Breathe*

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The inspiration that enables one to touch the creative source of a story is a glorious mystery. Undoubtedly, letting go and jumping in with a clear intention, while not knowing exactly the direction, and being as present as possible, allows inspiration to enter! If you do

this you will give yourself and your child a chance to open to a story that delights and nourishes. Most stories work like a question. The inner rhythm and resolution of a story can offer an apt and resonant answer to the way that the story's theme sustains the tension of its question and keeps us enthralled and held by the story to the end.

When we tap into the rhythm of our breath cycle we immediately strengthen and support possibilities for both impulse and inspiration, key elements in storytelling. At the very beginning of our inhalation there is in fact a little impulse, like the spark of creativity, a spark that utters 'Yes!' as we step forward into life. The more you work with this physical way of building trust and familiarity with your own breath, the more you can delight both yourself and the children in how stories arrive and unfold, revealing inner patterns and archetypal wisdom that connects us all to the web of story making.

### *Stories as antidotes*

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*An aged man is but a paltry thing,  
A tattered coat upon a stick, unless  
Soul clap its hands and sing, and louder sing.*

William Butler Yeats *Sailing to Byzantium*

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Stories weave for us the ancient rhythms from which humans have made meaning since they first sat around to chant and to tell tales of creation. When the rhythms are drawn from nature herself we root ourselves in the great teacher and healer that sustains all life.

We live in a time when we can no longer take for granted that sense of connection to the earth, the rhythms of seasons, or the rhythms of the tribe and community. We must build it anew. Many children – and adults too – suffer terribly from the breathless and increasing busyness that entrap us. Do we even have time at the end of the day to resonate with what we have experienced and its

meaning for us from day to day? Difficulties with breathing and eating, allergies, sleeping disorders, and integration and attention issues proliferate. These surely indicate an increasing challenge to stay in touch and connected with renewing and natural rhythms?

Stories are a wonderful way to heal and counter influences that distance us from ourselves. In the genuine meaning of the phrase 'in touch', stories connect us to what sustains our appreciation of each other and the meaning of being human. Stories are a powerful way to repair and restore a sense of wholeness when there have been disturbances of equanimity, and can even address more severe traumas. We can find inspiration from many realms for working indirectly with emotional upset. The animal world offers images that can parallel human experience. Children easily identify with the feeling life of creatures and can be drawn away from the inflamed, disturbed or irritated place of their own feelings to empathise with an imagined situation. A simple story can show what can be learnt from the difficulties a child has experienced.

Older children today, I have found, often receive so much of a certain kind of verbal input that they can grow immune to *telling* and *being told* even by the time they reach ten or eleven years old. I believe that this resistance reflects an overexposure to directions, injunctions, warnings, and other varieties of extremely literal language. The converse of this is the openness derived from a direct and vivid experience of language received and developed through the body, and the potent and playful world of imaginative pictures.

Bombardment with the wrong kind of telling spawns untold numbers of bad seeds for many future interactions as the children become older. Engaging children in excessive amounts of reasoning too young, in agenda-filled language that is deprived of a range of meanings and possibilities, combines with the pervasive idioms of consumerism to make children feel that something is demanded of them for which they still lack capacity. When something is wanted from a child before he is ready there is a pressure to show what may still be germinating as latent potential, not yet ready for the clear light of day. To avoid this push we need an attunement to our children that supports learning's growth and momentum in a rich and effective way, avoiding over-stimulation or insisting on adult and abstract meanings.

The more we can work strongly and indirectly with the young

child, through the playful melodies of song and story, the richer the prospects for nuanced meaning and playfulness of language in later life. Nothing compares with the surprise and delight in store as the child begins to show his own capacities for humour and surprise, and love of the renewing reservoir of image and dream. By encouraging childhood experience of melody, song, rhythm, and story, and by endeavouring to support children in experiencing the world through their bodies and imaginations, we can steer clear of pressures to become too rational too soon, and to adopt too early the 'head-based' language of adults. Our goal is to keep our children richly alive and awake, sensitive, interested, and grateful for all that life brings. These are the capacities that properly belong to childhood as the best foundation for becoming a healthy and learning adult.

The body's immunities, endurance, and strength are built through years of good nourishment. Similarly, a regular diet of good stories will lay the foundation for a rich and healthy inner life, and a facility with language that will connect the child to his outer world in ways that are satisfying and clarifying. When we fill children with good stories and with melody and songs, we build their 'immune system' to help them discern, as they become older, what feels good and what feels right. This can extend to all kinds of influences and behaviours. It is the job that culture has always striven to do: to help us know and discern wisely, through our bodies, souls and blood, which people, habits, food, books, media and choices can feed and help us grow.

### *Working with pauses*

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*All things already rest:  
darkness and morning light,  
flower and book*

Rainer Maria Rilke *Sonnets to Orpheus*, XXII, trans. Stephen Mitchell

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Always allow your story to have intervals of quiet as you collect momentum for the next step. This will help your children sense an inner flow in harmony with the innate rhythm of the story. You will also be supporting the natural breath rhythm of each child, in which each full breath cycle has a short rest after the exhalation. Good story rhythms always derive from healthy human rhythms anyway! You will also be cradling the children in a sense that stimulation and activity must be followed by digestion on a microcosmic, as well as a macrocosmic, scale. This means we create resonance between the rhythmic cycles that occur within the body and the larger cycles of nature, the seasons and the movements of sun and stars. All of these natural cycles work to bring a sense of wholeness and order: the word cosmos in fact derives from the Greek word for order.

### *Telling stories and reading stories*

When we tell stories to children we let them form their own pictures, directly absorbing the melodies and richness, heart to heart. When we read children stories, the book between the child and the adult signals a world that awaits in a different way. A book offers a pathway into literacy and a source of narrative beyond the reader, whereas in telling a story we can be, as it were, the eye of the needle through which the story flows, changes and develops in direct response to the child. Both are wonderful, but if the adult can develop a trust in her capacity to tell a story, adult and child can share surprise, delight and a deeply personal and nourishing connection. The vivid memories of my father's storytelling are stitched into me differently than what came from books. The books I most remember were the ones I read alone. Telling a story creates a different, deeper kind of companionship, and more immediate connection – even more so if the teller is inventing the story with a particular child in mind.



## *Stories for different seasons and different needs in the young child*

### **The Tale of the Squawky Young Birds**

A tale for the very young showing how loud squawky voices, when used too much, can lead to trouble. The more sound effects and variation you bring to the story, the more you enable the young child to go further in absorbing its language and meaning. This story is suitable for 2-year-olds and up.

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Once upon a time in a jungle thick with trees, in a far away land, lived a family of birds.

'Cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep, cheep!'

One day, Mama Bird said to her baby birds:

'Today, Mama Bird is going to fly out of the nest and over the treetops to find us more food. Take care of each other for you won't always be in my sight, but this Mama Bird will be back before night.'

'Cheep, cheep, cheep' nodded each little bird, thinking of the tasty bugs and juicy worms that

Mama Bird promised to bring back home.

Mama Bird spread her wings and soared out of the nest, her tail feathers catching the light of the hot, jungle sun. After she had gone, the two little baby birds played and played but the most fun they had was singing – singing their squawking song.

*Squawk, squawk, all day long.*

*Here we sing our squawking song*

*We squawk so loud, we squawk so long*

*The whole jungle loves our squawking song.*

Python was curled up asleep around a branch below. He opened one eye and hissed up at the baby birds in the nest above his head,

'Hiss! Hush! Or I'll eat you right up! Python is sleeping his afternoon nap, if his belly was empty he'd shut you right up!'

But the baby birds in the nest above his head, just laughed and squawked the louder,

*Squawk, squawk all day long,*

*Here we sing our squawking song.*

*We squawk so loud, we squawk so long*

*The whole jungle loves our squawking song!*

Python hissed again and then lazily slid down the tree to find a quieter spot, while he muttered to himself about badly behaved and inconsiderate baby birds who squawked instead of sang. But the baby birds were so pleased with themselves that they had driven the big python away from the tree, they swelled up with pride and squawked all the louder.

*Squawk, squawk, all day long,  
Here we sing our squawking song.  
We squawk so loud, we squawk so long  
The jungle wakes to our squawking song!*

So loud was the squawking and so relentless, that Lion woke from his afternoon nap on the edge of the jungle. He stretched and he yawned and he looked at his lionesses.

'What a cacophony, what kind of din! What on earth's making that horrible squawking!'

Lion got up and lazily loped off towards the tree where the baby birds were so full of themselves. He roared up at the treetop.

'Stop all your squawking, you're ruining the peace. All of us creatures want to rest in ease!'

But the baby birds were so carried away by their squawking it was as if they couldn't stop, even when asked to do so by the King of the Jungle, himself.

*Squawk, squawk, all day long,  
Here we sing our squawking song.  
We squawk so loud, we squawk so long.  
Lion wakes up with our squawking song!*

Lion was so irritated by the little birds' disrespect that he started to growl up at the tree. His great claws took hold of the bark and he scratched harder and harder, growling as he rolled his head. When the little birds realised that lion was scratching the tree to make them be quiet, they squawked even louder and fluttered into the air!

*'Squawk, squawk, squawk!'*

What would Mama Bird say? Her babies flew up into the air over lion's head, singing their song all the while. Then they flew off, up into the hot afternoon sky, higher and higher and further and further as gusts of wind carried them off.

'Let's squawk at the wind!' squawked one baby bird.

'Let's squawk at the ground!' said the other.

After a while they came to rest in a tall, tall tree and as they sat on the branches they squawked some more.

*Squawk, squawk, all day long.  
Here we'll squawk our squawking song!  
Wake the jungle, scare them all!  
We're so brave we'll never fall!*

As the baby birds looked around they realised that they had never been to this part of the jungle before. The colours of the sky were changing too, deep reds and oranges, even purple and blue, as the great jungle sun slid down over the distant savannah and got ready for bed. The birds' squawking became softer but not so soft. Owl heard the sounds and waking up, blinked around. 'Who woke me up? Is it night-time yet? Little baby birds! You should be in bed!' With that advice, Owl flew off, looking for a quieter tree where he could catch a few more winks before his night-time hunting began.

When Owl had gone everything started to feel darker and lonelier. The little birds had stopped squawking some time ago and now they began to feel hungry and afraid. 'Where's Mama Bird?' they whispered. 'Let's call her and see where she is!' But when they came to open their beaks no sound came out! The little baby birds had squawked so long and squawked so loud that their voices had quite gone away! They huddled on the branch together, feeling very small and very hungry. With no voices to call her would Mama Bird ever find her lost babies? They had flown so far away and made so many creatures in the jungle upset with them. Would anyone help them?

'Cheep, cheep, we lost our voices. We've lost Mama Bird. We're lost in the jungle and we can't get back home. Cheep, cheep, cheep.'

They thought of the warm cosy nest, the quiet peace of huddling up together and sleeping under the stars. Would they ever see home again?

Just at that moment, coming over the jungle wind, they heard a voice, soft and familiar, calling to them.

'My baby birds, my baby birds, where on earth are you? Your Mama Bird is looking for my babies, one and two!' But could they call to her? No, not at all!

Oh why had they squawked so carelessly all day long? Not thinking for one moment that they might need to sing a different kind of song. Suddenly there was a whirring of wings and a fluttering above their heads. There was Mama Bird! Her wings opened over her babies and she embraced them both! The babies snuggled as close to Mama Bird as they possibly could and she swept them up under wings and onto her back, carrying them up into the night sky and over the jungle to home.

When the little birds eventually got their voices back, they never did squawk as much, *ever, ever* again. And if ever they felt that they just must squawk, well they took themselves off to the edge of the jungle where no one's ears could be hurt and they squawked as much as they wanted to, which was not so very much after all!

*Squawk, squawk, squawking song*  
*We loved to squawk all day long!*

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### Staging ideas

For this story a simple basket with one large and two small feathers is enough to evoke a nest with birds. Snake can be a long green sock, lion can be a large ball of yellow wool fleece, and owl could be just a round pebble. Each story is best told at least three times in a sequence, over three days or three weeks. You may find that with birds you need to move arms high and low in the telling; but remember you are encouraging an inner movement and do not need to be too animated with this age. One time I used some stairs with railings to create the sense of height and distance of the far side of the jungle. As the story builds, using the space creatively to deepen the attention can be really fun, and at the same time can teach the children – and you as storyteller – about the possibilities of space.

### Potential activities

The preceding story could lead into colouring large, cut-out bird shapes, or making beeswax birds with soft beeswax used for decorating candles; or simple finger painting using yellow, red, and blue.

## The Little Wooden Mixing Bowl

A story to encourage inclusiveness of everyone and everything.

This story is very hands-on and sense based, to support different ways of touching and using the fingers and hands. You can bring in a bowl and spoons to act out and involve the children in the story as you tell it. This story is suitable for children aged 2 years and over.

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Once upon a time there was a kitchen; a big warm kitchen, full of pots and pans, bowls and plates, and spoons. On the very top shelf there was a little bowl, a little wooden bowl.

That little bowl was a sad little bowl because no one ever seemed to use her. All around her was the clatter and clutter of cooking in the kitchen. Chopping and slicing, cutting and peeling, pounding and stirring, and the warm, warm smells of baking in the oven. But not once did she ever get invited down to join everyone else in the kitchen.

'What's a little wooden bowl supposed to do? No one wants to use me. All forgotten, dusty, and useless while everyone else is busy and happy.'

One day, two firm, warm hands wrapped themselves around the little bowl, taking her quite by surprise. She was lifted up and carried over to the big sink where great bubbles of soapy water filled her and coated her as she bobbed up and down, sponged inside and outside and everywhere all over.

'Oh my, oh my, bubbles! Inside and outside and everywhere all over!' the little bowl spluttered.

Then, the newly cleaned little bowl was wrapped in a great big cloth and rubbed and stroked and dried all over. She started to hum with happiness and wondered if she was going to be asked to help. Two warm hands picked up the little bowl and carried her over to the table. Suddenly, she felt large, golden lumps of butter land with soft thuds and great dollops of thick honey go *gloop, gloop* inside the bowl. The big wooden spoon came stirring and beating the mix all around the sides of the bowl, *galoop, galoop, galoop*. Next, the little bowl felt three cracks on the rim, *crackety crack, crackety crack, crack, crack, crack*. Three eggs, one, two, three, with big yellow yolks and thick whites dropped into the mix and sloshed and slapped, mixed and muddled, folded over and folded under and all around the cake that was hoping to happen.

'Thank you little bowl!' cried the eggs and the honey and the butter. 'The sides of your bowl are quite lovely and warm. We think that the cake will be smooth, light and good and all because of your lovely soft wood!'

The little bowl laughed for joy. Suddenly great showers of flour fell from above, cascading like snow into the cake mix below. The little wooden bowl felt the spoon slowing down and stirring more slowly and deeply as the cake mix became thicker and heavier. 'Phew! Warm work this is!' called out the spoon. 'It's a pleasure to help you!' the little bowl sang.

After a while, the warm hands wrapped around the little bowl and carried her over to a large, greased cake tin sitting on top of the oven. 'Looks like a good one!' called out the cake tin.

The bowl, held now by one hand, felt the other hand dollop the mix into the tin. The spoon went around and around, scraping and cleaning every last piece of cake mix from the bowl.

'Good Work!' called a voice from just by the oven door. 'Now who wants to scrape the bowl?' Suddenly warm little fingers, one, two, three, four, five, and then the bowl lost count, circled around and around the sides.

'Mmmn delicious! Is it all gone? Can we just lick the bowl? Just one more time?' Every last bit of the cake mix was licked clean and the little bowl sighed with joy and contentment. Next, she was plunged into bubbly warm water, rinsed and left on the counter to dry with the spoon as the good smells of baking cake filled the kitchen.

Never again was she to feel useless and unloved, for in the kitchen everything has a place and a task to do, and every bowl from time to time will be filled.

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### Staging ideas

Always establish the story space very clearly.. This story space is where you begin and end as you bring your story and the children into a resting place. Bring in a wooden bowl and lots of wooden spoons, one for each child. Have the children stroke the bowl inside and outside as you pass it around. Let the spoons beat away during the mixing part of the story and let the children wipe the bowl with their fingers as they imagine scraping the bowl clean.

### Potential activities

After the story, kneading dough for bread, baking bread, making cakes, stirring the mix and pouring into small moulds. Kneading and squeezing activities, and beating and stirring with a spoon are all good for fine motor skills. They bring the breathing into a more rhythmic flow and create sensory awareness. Pouring the mix into tins or cases is excellent for eye-hand coordination.

## The Muddy Farmyard

A sensory based story to teach the joy of being oneself, regardless of others judgements. The children can be invited to make the pitter-patter sounds with their fingers on the floor. This is a good story for 3-year-olds and up.

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Pitter, patter, pitter, patter, the rain fell all night long. Pitter, patter, pitter, patter, the rain fell hard and strong. By morning the farmyard was thick with wet mud.

When the hens looked out of the hen house they squawked 'Squawk, squawk! Who wants to go out today! It's too muddy!'

So, all the hens huddled close in the hen house, squawking and clucking to themselves about how wet the yard was, how much rain they had heard last night, and how many eggs they would not be laying that day. 'Cluck! Cluck! Cluck!'

When the cow peered out of the barn she went 'Moo! Oh No! What a wet and muddy yard! My hooves will get wet and my coat will get spattered, and how much better to stay inside the barn and chew and chew on my hay all day'

So the cow turned her back on the yard 'Moo! Moo! Moo!'

All of the animals agreed that today was a day to stay in. Except, that was, for the little baby-pig. When he heard all the hullabalooing he went to the door of the barn.

'Mama! Mama! Mama!' he called, hopping up and down, 'Look at all that mud!'

His mother came at once 'Snort! Snort! Snort!' she said with glee. 'Come little piglet let's cavort you and me! In the mud! Oh what fun! Rolling over and over! Then we'll dry in the sun! If we've ever felt itchy, just a titchy bit itchy, well now is the time to enjoy a scritch, scratchy, squelchy, splashy, splashy day of fun!'

And off they went, the mama pig and her baby piglet as they rolled and splashed and rolled all over the farmyard, grunting and chuckling and snorting and cavorting for pleasure.

'Good Heavens!' said the cow. 'Did you ever see such a spectacle?'

'My word!' whinnied the horse. 'What a performance!'

'Quite unbecoming!' clucked the hens as they ruffled their feathers.

'Don't worry dear,' murmured Mama Pig to her little piglet whose little ears were wagging 'Some folk don't know how to enjoy the gifts of the rain.'

'Rbkk! Rbkk!' said a little green fellow who had hopped over the fence. 'Good morning pigs, how pleasant to see other creatures enjoying the rain just like me!'  
'Good morning Mister Frog in your wet suit shiny green. It's lovely to share such a muddy moist scene.'

And the frog and the pigs cavorted all morning long: the frog splashing from puddle to puddle and the pigs rolling and chuckling for all they were worth. And that night, the rain again fell hard and strong, as the little baby piglet dreamed glorious muddy dreams all night long.

(Song: cup alternate ears for each line)

*If you hear the rain fall all night long,  
listen closely, for you may hear the little piggy's song!  
If you hear the rain fall hard and strong,  
listen closely, for you may hear his friend the little froggy's song!*

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### Staging ideas

Cloths may be laid out simply in a circle. In the middle is the muddy yard. In the circle we have the cow, the horse, the chickens, the frog, and the mama pig and her baby. The first time you tell the story you can use puppets or wooden animals, but over time you can substitute other objects for the animals to encourage a flexible relation to symbolic play. Use the pitter, patter of fingers for the rain, and vary the intensity. Enjoy all the animals' voices and let the characters grow through their voices.

### Potential activities

Baking is a wonderful activity after this story as you roll and knead dough together. Chubby fingers rolling and chubby balls of dough can all pretend to be pigs rolling in the mud, and you can even use cinnamon sugar as a reminder of brown mud. Wet painting which involves painting on paper that is already wet to increase the sense of flow, is also wonderful because the children roll pale red and yellow and even blue around the page, while the paint brush creates a guided story of rolling in water or rolling in mud.



## The Little Lemon Who Couldn't Wait

A sensory based story teaching patience. It is suitable for 3-year-olds and up.

---

*We are little lemons, we grow on trees,  
We are yellow lemons who love to be squeezed!*

Once upon a time, in a garden not so very far away, there was a little lemon tree. On that tree there were many lemons, but all of them were green, not ready to be picked, and not ready to drop.

One of the little lemons was very impatient.

'When will we drop? When will we drop? When will we drop from the tree?' he called out to the others and anyone who would listen.

'Not till the sun has ripened us yellow,' called out the large lemon next to him.

But the lemon was eager to leave the tree and he shook this way and that, huffing and puffing and blowing like the wind as all the branches rustled and swayed.

'When will we drop? When will we drop? When will we drop from this tree?'

The little lemon jumped up and down so hard on its branch that the lemon next to him who was also still not ripe, dropped right off with a big thud and landed on the ground below. That was a sour lemon! He wailed and lamented:

'Not yet ready! Not yet ready! Not yet ready to leave! What have you done you foolish lemon? All alone on the ground!'

The poor little lemon who was still very green and only a little bit yellow, rolled over and lay on the ground feeling very sour. The other little lemon was sorry that he had made his neighbour fall, and turned away, to hide his face. As he did so, he was struck by the tree next door, all covered in golden round fruit like the sun itself.

'Oh what kind of tree and what kind of fruit are you?' called out the lemon, who had never seen this fruit before and found it quite dazzling.

'Why we are oranges! Round and orange like the sun itself!' the oranges sang back.

'Oh you are so beautiful!' said the little lemon wistfully.

'But you are a lemon and a lemon is beautiful too!' beamed the big round orange happily.

'But a lemon isn't orange!' said the little lemon shaking on his branch.

'Well no, a lemon isn't orange because an orange is orange! A lemon is yellow!' chortled the orange back.

The little lemon sighed. Night was falling like a big blue blanket. Time to rest.

As night grew deeper, grey clouds gathered and a gentle rain fell all over the garden, watering the leaves and soaking the earth. When morning came and the birds began to sing, the lemon opened its eyes to the bright morning sun which grew hotter and hotter as the day went on, ripening everything under its gaze. All the little lemons on the tree in the garden grew fatter and juicier, soaking up water from roots in the ground and soaking up warmth from the big golden sun.

That evening, as the air was filled with the smell of evening flowers, someone came into the garden. Two firm hands wrapped around the little lemon and picked it off the tree, saying 'My, how the lemons have ripened!'

Even the sour lemon sulking on the ground was scooped up and taken indoors in a great big basket. Very soon those ripe lemons were in the sweetest of moods, for they heard they were to be cut up and made into lemonade! What fun it is to be chopped into chunks, squeezed and squished, swished and swirled, in all their lemony yellowness, while great chunks of ice and honey from the bees made it feel like a party in their pitcher. So happy was the little lemon that he sang and sang as the ice tinkled in the pitcher; and the golden honey swirled and danced, wrapping its sweetness all-around and about the sharp, sour tastes of lemon.

*We are little lemons, we grow on trees.*

*We are yellow lemons who love to be squeezed!*

---

### Staging ideas

You can bring in two greenish lemons or something to signify the lemons. Place the two lemons on a simple cotton gauze cloth; I use purple to really bring out the colour of yellow. A yellow cloth beside this can be folded around the lemons when the sun ripens them. At the end pass the lemons around for the children to squeeze and smell them.

### Potential activities

Have the children finger-paint yellow onto a lemon shaped cut-out. Have them tear paper and stick onto textured paper the colours of the story: yellow, green and orange. These activities bring sensory awareness and tremendous enjoyment that immediately affects the breath. A big bowl of bubbly water to wipe hands off afterwards can continue the same benefits. Of course you can also make lemonade, since squeezing movements are also very good!

## Barnaby the Gnome's Big Adventure

A story to teach the importance of curiosity and how easily we take our boundaries for granted. Suitable for 3-year-olds and up.

---

Once upon a time and far away, in a great forest full of trees, there lived a little gnome, and his name was Barnaby. One morning, he awoke to feel the warm, warm rays of the sun filtering through the leaves of the trees and warming the rich, piney floor of the forest. He crawled out of his house under the little toadstool where he lived. He stretched, and he stretched, and he stretched again. He felt so good as he felt the warm sun on his back and the smells of the forest filling his nose, that he looked right up towards the sun and said,  
'Why, Good Morning Sun!'

The sun smiled right back at him, and it was then that Barnaby noticed the tree. In the trunk of the great tree which had always sheltered his little house there was a door! A door that he had never seen before! Now you probably know that whenever gnomes see a door they want to know what is behind it, and Barnaby was no exception. So he climbed and he clambered, he clambered and he climbed right up the side of that old tree until, panting and gasping, gasping and panting, he came to the door.

Barnaby pushed against the door to see if it would open. *Push! Push! PUSH!* It would not open, so he pushed a little harder. *Push! Push! PUSH!* And still the door did not open. Sometimes, push must indeed come to shove and so Barnaby pushed as hard as he had ever done in his life. *Push! Push! Push! Push! SHOVE!* But instead of the door opening, Barnaby tumbled backwards, rolling and rollicking, rollicking and rolling, from branch to branch until he landed, thud, bump, thud, on the lowest branch of the tree.

'Ouch! Ouch! That could have been dangerous!' said Barnaby rubbing his elbows and knees. Undeterred however, he started to climb right back up the tree, branch by branch.

'Huffy! Puffy! Huffy! Puffy! Hup we go!' Barnaby soon found himself back in front of the door.

This time he started to pull on the door to see if it might open. *Pull! Pull! Pull!* The door didn't open, so he pulled a little harder. *Pull! Pull! PULL!* And still the door did not open. So, Barnaby heaved and pulled even harder. *Pull and heave ho! Pull and heave ho! Pull and HEAVE HO!* And with one big heave and ho, Barnaby tumbled backwards, rollicking and rolling all the way down the tree, from branch to branch all way down to the bottom of the tree and still the door wasn't open!

'Ouch! Ouch! OUCH! That really hurt!' said Barnaby rubbing his nose, his toes, and even his elbows.

Lying on the ground looking up at the treetops he felt something hard under his back. He groped around in the pine needle earth of the forest floor and gripped his hands around a hard object. It was a key!

Barnaby started to climb up the tree with the key in his hand, for where there's a key there **may be** a door that's waiting to be opened. When he got back up the tree, *Huffy! Puffy! Huffy! Puffy! Huffy! Puffy! Phew!* He got his breath back and then started to try the key in the lock of the door. **It didn't** fit. The little gnome turned the key around and tried it the other way round. It didn't fit. **Then** he turned the key upside down and put it into the lock of the door. It went click because it **did fit!** And the door swung open!

Barnaby looked around the door. On the other side was a magical place he had never seen before. Butterflies danced against the dappled sunlight, birds cheeped and chirped and hopped around, pecking at the ground for worms, little white flowers grew on soft mossy logs, and great ferny plants sprung out of the ground inviting Barnaby to come and rest. Barnaby hopped down, somersaulted and rolled through this magical world. He picked flowers and put them in his hair and felt the warmth of the sun on his back as the sounds of birds singing filled his ears. As he wandered, he saw in the distance a sweet little house. Who could live in such an enchanting little place? He came closer and looked at the house where no one seemed at home. As he peered around the sides and he peered through the windows, he suddenly realised that it was his house! Why he had never looked at his own house from quite this place before and it was such an inviting little home! He had never known just how beautiful his little home was until he had gone through that door!

---

### Staging ideas

A felt or knitted gnome is good to use here as well as something to depict the toadstool and his house. For the tree, as for Barnaby's house, you can use large pieces of bark and stack them in different ways. The key could be another piece of wood. The green world can be cloth.

### Potential activities

This story links to the verse *The Door's Shut Tight!* (page 71) in Chapter Five Verses for Movement. The activity is excellent for the lower back, the limb system, and the diaphragm area, and is usually very popular with adults and children alike because it greatly vitalises the breathing. Based on the story you can make pictures of the magical world Barnaby found, by sticking coloured wool fleeces onto cardboard; or you can use decorative beeswax on a candle to evoke the tree that Barnaby climbs up, with all the twining branches and leaves.

## The Fire Faery

A story to help meet fear of the dark, and very resonant if the fire faery is always the one who comes to light candles when the children have a candle. Suitable for 3 years and up.

---

Once upon a time in a place not so very far away, there lived a little girl called Lucy. Lucy loved to be outside all day long, skipping, hopping, jumping, somersaulting and swinging, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards on the rope swing that hung from the tree outside her bedroom window.

Lucy never wanted to come inside. When her momma and her poppa called her to come inside for her supper, deep down inside she always felt a big NO like a giant wave.

'NO! Lucy wants to stay outside!'

'But Lucy!' explained her parents, 'the sun is going down and soon it will be dark.'

It was true. Lucy could feel that evening was coming and the sun was gradually slipping over the hill towards bed. Lucy came inside feeling sad. She had her supper and cleaned her teeth, washed her hands and face, brushed her hair and got ready for bed. Tucked up tight in her snug little bed, her momma and her poppa had blessed her from the tip of her head to her tippy-tip toes. She rolled right over and said

'Good Night.'

'Sleep Tight.'

But deep in her heart something wasn't right. As the room grew quiet, Lucy could hear something tapping. A tap, tap, tap was tapping at her bedroom window. She pecked over the edge of her covers and tip, tip-toed, quick, quick, quickly. Pressing her nose flat against the window she saw the big tree. Tap, tap, tap went the leaves of her tree against the window. It was only the leaves of the big tree, outside her window, swaying in the wind!

Lucy popped back into bed. After a while she was sure she could feel a heaving and a humping, a thumping and a creaking, right under her bed! She hauled the covers over her head but it was too hot. Nothing for it but to look! She leaned over and looked one side. Nothing there! She leaned over the other side. Nothing was there!

'Momma' Lucy wailed, 'It's too hard to get to sleep!'

So, her momma sent in the cat.

'Miaaow, miaaow' said the cat as she jumped up on Lucy's bed, kneaded the bed clothes and curled herself up into a purring ball. Soon the cat was fast asleep.

'Poppa! Poppa!' wailed Lucy, 'The kitty is asleep but Lucy is still awake!' So, her father sent in the dog.

'Grrruff, grrwuff!' said the dog as he jumped right up and licked Lucy's face. Then he curled right up, next to the cat, and fell fast asleep.

Soon the house was full of the sounds of dreaming dogs and dreaming cats, but Lucy was still awake. When she heard the sound of her parents' feet coming to bed, she wailed again.

'Oh no! Lucy will soon be the only one awake in the whole house!'

At that moment, when she was almost cold with fright, she felt a warm, soft touch against her cheek and heard a light clear voice singing right beside her ear.

*Fire faery, fire faery brings you light  
In the very darkest time of night  
Fire faery, fire faery is right here  
Little Lucy, little Lucy do not fear!*

'Who are you?' whispered Lucy.

'The Fire Faery, my dear. Come to bring you light.'

Lucy watched dazzled, as sparks of yellow, gold, and red danced about her head and sent warm shivers down her back and into her legs. She felt very peaceful and serene.

'Lucy my dear. It is normal to be afraid of the dark but remember there is always light. There is a light inside you, a light all around you and even in the darkest, deepest places you can always find light.'

Lucy felt the warm glow all the way through to her toes, and her pillow felt softer and sweeter than ever before. Her eyelids were becoming heavier and heavier and she felt herself tumbling towards deep sleep.

'Remember...!' The last thing Lucy heard as she finally toppled into sleep was the soft voice of the Fire Faery.

Lucy was woken by the warming light of the bright sun. In the dappled light of the morning sun, last night seemed very far away indeed. Suddenly, she remembered the Fire Faery and how deeply and sweetly she had slept after her visit. 'The Fire Faery!' she exclaimed. Then just as she was beginning to think that she might never see the Faery again she looked down to see three feathers of yellow, gold, and red lying beside her on her pillow! The Fire Faery had left the feathers behind for Lucy, to remind her to look for the light. For when it is dark, it is easiest to see what is light. Lucy put the feathers under her pillow and never again was she afraid of the dark.

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### Staging ideas

In this story you can make a circle of different coloured cloths and make a little bed in the middle, also out of cloths. I use a pine cone to suggest the tree that she swings from, and some leaves for the branches against her window scattered on the circle of cloths. Lucy can swing back and forth from the tree, hop, skip, somersault, and run around the circle to show her energetic love of the outdoors. I use simple stones for the cat and dog, but a small girl puppet about 6 inches high for Lucy. I use a fleece faery of red and yellow for the Fire Faery.

### Potential activities

You can use strands of coloured fleece and, making a cross, fashion the body, head and wings of a faery, mixing the colours of the fleece across the spectrum of yellows, reds, and golds and tying it around the waist with red embroidery thread. Decorating a candle with coloured, candle-warmed decorating beeswax is another activity that goes well with a story about overcoming fear of the dark and appreciating the light. Designs can include simple faery forms, candles, suns and stars.

## The Story of Two Stones

This story was originally told to a very mixed age group. Some children sitting on a lap will have extraordinary powers of attention. The story is most suitable for three years, also bearing in mind that the staging and way in which you tell the story can invite in the younger ones and hold much older children as well.

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Once upon a time that was, there was a big, big, high, high mountain that reached all the way to the stars. So high, so high its peak seemed to brush the sky. Deep, deep, deep down inside that mountain there were rocks and tunnels, rocks and tunnels that went on forever, that went deep, deep into the earth.

Deep inside the mountain in the darkness and the cold there was a stone; all alone, a cold stone, quite alone in the darkness:

*One stone, all alone stone, a quite alone stone in the dark*

The little stone pulled himself in close and small and shivered in the dark, in the deep dark blackness of the mountain. He felt so alone.

*One stone, an all alone stone shivering in the dark*

But at that moment he heard a sound, a hard sound, a stony sound quite close by. At that moment he felt something, a stony something, cold and round, quite close by. It was another stone, not a rock but a stone, small and round.

*There are two stones, now there are two stones,  
yes there are two stones in the dark!  
Not just one stone, an all alone stone,  
but there are two stones in the dark!*

The little stone felt cold, not warm, as he felt the other stone close by. And as they met in the dark, those two stones, a spark flew into the air! For two stones can make a spark where one stone cannot. The little stone who had felt himself all alone saw sparks flying and he felt the warmth and saw the light that the two stones made as they came closer and rubbed against each other and his heart sang!

*Where there are two stones and not just one stone,  
All alone in the dark,  
When there are two stones and not just one stone,  
You'll see a spark,  
Making light in the dark* (repeat softly)

And so, if you remember, when you go climbing mountains, this story of the stones, put your ear to the earth and listen, for deep, deep, deep down in the dark, dark belly of the mountain you may hear this song of the stones.

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## A Winter Solstice Story

A story to evoke the wonder of the darkest part of the year...  
...to be told in the dark by candlelight – suitable for age 3 and over.

---

Once upon a time, there was a dark, tall mountain. That mountain reached all the way up to the sky and often found the clouds brushing around its snow-capped peak. It was the night before the beginning of winter and the mountain was cold, cold, cold, all the way through, from its deepest and darkest places, crevices, cracks, caves, and plateaux to its snow capped, icy pinnacles. The North Wind blew about the mountain.

'This is the longest night of the year! This is the darkest, longest night! The shortest day! The darkest, darkest part of the year!'

The mountain felt colder and colder and darker and darker. Shivering, shivering, shivering, the mountain tried to reach towards the light of the wintry moon that had just appeared from behind the clouds.

'Oh moon!' called the mountain, 'lend me your silvery light on this the longest night of the year. Give me light and give me warmth!'

Mother Moon smiled down on the mountain. 'Mountain, mountain here is moonlight and distant starlight, a beautiful silvery light to see by! As for warmth, I am too far away to warm you, even if I could, which I cannot!'

The light of the moon was beautiful but now the mountain felt colder and more alone than ever. How beautiful but how far away were the moon and stars! Yet, thought the mountain sombrely, it would be a long, long night before it saw the sun again.

'Look inside you mountain! called out a small voice. 'Look inside you!'  
Suddenly the mountain felt a gentle warmth coming from deep within the rocky base of his foothills. 'Who are you?' he called out.

'Diamonds! Locked up inside the rocks! Did you know you had diamonds, brilliant diamonds buried inside your mountain with deep seams of gold running all the way through, deep so deep into the earth?'

'No', said the mountain.

'We are treasure for great pleasure. We glint and we glow in the light of day!'

'That is all very well and all very good but there is no light of day, for here we are on the darkest night of the year as well as one of the coldest,' the mountain cried.

'Well, we are all in here together!' called out the diamonds and the seams of gold that ran deep, deep in the foothills of the mountain, but which were hidden from the light of day. The mountain was cheered to have companionship, but still he felt cold.

Suddenly he heard a strong, clear voice calling out 'What about us? Don't forget us! We are the ones who brought fire. The fire grew higher, the heat grew stronger and the world has had fire since long, long ago.' The mountain listened hard with his whole being. From far, far down in the very core of his rocky heart he heard whispered the ancient story of fire. How two rocks, carved from a mountain were rubbed together! A spark flew forth! From that spark came more sparks until a fire grew up and gave the world warmth!

As the mountain dozed and dreamed to the music of the old rocks, they spun their tale made of flint, fire sparks, and gold dust. All of this was given to me, thought the mountain and from deep within myself I can dream and hold the fire that was given as a gift to the earth. From that night on, the mountain was never cold, lonely, or sad. Every time the cold wind blew or the darkest nights came, he remembered the treasures and stones that glistened and glowed deep within his rocky mass and all the stories they had to tell him.

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## The Snake Who Didn't Want to Change

A story for children who have a difficult time with transitions and letting go. Suitable for 2 years and up.

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*Snakes in snakes' skins slip along.*

*Snakes in snakes' skins sing their song*

*When it's time the old skin goes*

*Underneath a new skin grows!*

Once upon a time there was a mama snake who lived with her little baby snake close by a warm, warm stone. Hiss and writhe, hiss and writhe, Ssssssss:

*Snakes in snakes' skins slip along*

*Snakes in snakes' skins sing their song, etc.*

Soon it was going to be summer. Crickets chirped and birds sang as the sun grew hotter and hotter. Mama Snake called to Baby Snake in the heat of the midday sun to come slithering and sliding with her and meet everyone. Old Lizard was basking on his favourite stone down by the river, Little Green Frog was hopping and jumping from lily pad to lily pad, and Big Black Crow was sitting way, way up in the highest branches of the old oak tree.

---

Baby Snake was shy and could not look at even one of those friends in the eye as they called out to him.

'Isn't it hot?'

'What, lost your voice?'

'Did the cat get your tongue?'

'Frog in your throat?'

'Lost your voice but not your skin!' They joked and they called but Baby Snake was so shy he just slithered on by. Mama Snake laughed and said:

'Baby Snake, these folk are our friends! You'll need to learn to say hullo by the time you shed your skin.'

'My skin? Shed my skin? But Mama Snake I need my skin to keep me safe!'

Mama Snake just laughed and sang as she wriggled and writhed around her little baby explaining that she too would soon be shedding her skin!

*Snakes in snakes' skins slip along*

*Snakes in snakes' skins sing their song, etc.*

The little Baby Snake did not want to shed his skin, oh no he did not! So he curled himself tight around a small stone and he held oh so tight, he held that stone with all his might and he would not let go.

'Baby Snake, come slither with me!' called Mama Snake. But he would not.

'No, Mama Snake! No, Mama Snake! This little baby does not want to let go!'

Mama Snake laughed and said 'Baby Snake you can't stop Mother Nature you know! Look, my skin is shedding already! Don't be afraid!'

'No, Mama Snake! No, Mama Snake! This little baby does not want to let go!'

Then it grew cooler as the hot sun slipped lower in the sky and Mama Snake slithered up to Baby Snake curled up tight around his stone and said 'Baby Snake, it's time to eat.'

'No, Mama Snake! No, Mama Snake! said Baby Snake 'This little baby doesn't want to speak, doesn't want to eat, doesn't want to move and grow and doesn't want to shed his skin!'

Mama Snake laughed and sang 'You can't stop yourself from growing, Baby Snake, and you can't stop your skin from shedding! It's a snake thing and you're a snake!'

*Snakes in snakes' skins slip along*

*Snakes in snakes' skins sing their song, etc.*

As she sang, Mama snake's skin began to slip away. Underneath was a beautiful scaly skin that shone iridescent colours of the soft night: blues, greens, purples, and reds. Baby Snake peered out from his stone and saw his mama in the evening light. How beautiful she looked! How new and shiny her skin glistened in the evening shadows.

He called to her softly, holding on to his little stone: 'Mama Snake? Mama Snake? Don't want to move, don't want to grow, won't let go, won't let go, won't... won't... sing, ssssss... sing' As his voice grew softer and fainter his Mama started to sing.

*Snakes in snakes' skins slip along  
Snakes in snakes' skins sing their song, etc.*

At that moment Baby Snake felt a tickle of joy down his back and all through his body. He couldn't help but raise his voice in song and sing with his mother as he felt his own skin slither, slide and slip right down his back!

*Snakes in snakes' skins shed their skin  
When they feel that tickling thing,  
Underneath a new skin grows  
When we let the old skin go!*

Black Crow looking down from his branch, smiled and called out.  
'Evening, Mama Snake! Evening, Baby Snake! Mighty fine colours you have this season!'  
'Thank you Mister Crow', called out Baby Snake, as he continued to sing, slither and slip along, full of the joy of being a snake.

---

### Staging ideas

You can use a simple cloth and stones to set your story. Using soft snake toys can work wonderfully. There are many delightful, soft bean-filled lizards and snakes and frogs to be found. But for the crow, and any of the other creatures, soft coloured fleece fashioned into the shape of the animal, a feather for a bird, even a sock works very well, once you are sure that the child understands the concept of who the creature is. For the very young child the pacing and sound effects in your story will be crucial. Train yourself to observe as you retell how slowly you can go, and the quality of pauses you can take. I like to do a hissing lisp for the baby snake and to add lots of sss sounds along the way.

## *Simple stories for the very young*

It is quite possible to engage a very young child in storytelling. The following stories are best suited to children from eighteen months to two years, but even as young as twelve months, a child can be drawn to the warmth of sound, melody, and the human voice, listening alongside as older children attend to the story. When you invite attention through sound, touch, movement, and the natural rhythm of the breath, a child will naturally find a relationship to what you are offering, as long as you are also tuning to the span of the child's attention.

These stories come out of the experience of offering stories for such young children, guided by the compass of meeting the senses and the body creatively. Music and song typically always draw the child at some level into the world you are creating. With the very young I will bring in a song many times during the story as well as at its opening and closing. In some cases the entire story may be sung with just an occasional spoken interlude.

For all children it is good if the song for the story has resonance from the earlier movement part of the class, such as the fluttering leaves or the wriggling of caterpillars. In this way children experience in their bodies the rhythms, gestures and meanings of the theme of the story before being asked to sit and listen.

### **The Leaves on the Tree**

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Once upon a time in a place both near and far grew a big, big tree  
 With its roots deep in the ground  
 A big tree, such a big tree with branches on either hand  
 With birds in its branches who sang all through the day.  
 Who sang and sang as the autumn winds loved to play

*The breezes blow up and the breezes blow down  
 And the breezes blow all around and around*

(gentle blowing sounds)

The leaves blow up and the leaves blow down  
And the leaves blow all around and around  
Around and around and around, round, round!

(gentle blowing sounds and movements of wrists)

The warm sun shines down, the sun shines down  
The sun shines all around and around!  
Around and around and around, round, round!

(smiling all around)

The leaves curl brown, the leaves curl brown,  
The leaves curl up and down, the leaves all around  
The leaves curls all around, round round!

(sad expression)

The stems turn round, the stems turn round  
The stems turn all around and around  
Around and around and around, round, round!

The rain falls down, the rain falls down  
The rain falls down and all around  
Around, and around and around, round, round!

(pitter, patter of fingers on the floor)

The wind gusts up and the wind gusts down,  
The winds gust up and all-around  
Around, and around and around, round round

(loud gusting blowing)

The leaf falls down, down, the leaf falls down  
The leaf falls down, the leaf falls down,  
The leaf flies around and around, round, round!

(flutter one hand)

The leaves fall down, the leaves fall down,  
The leaves fall down, the leaves fall down,  
The leaves fall all around and around, the leaves fall around

(flutter two hands)

All around the leaves fall down, the leaves fall down  
 The leaves fall down all around onto the ground  
 Around, round round upon the ground!

And the big tree said: Listen little birdies now you've sung your song  
 Listen to the leaves because they won't sing for very long!  
 As they flutter and they rustle and they land upon the earth  
 Listen to the autumn winds whispering their mirth!

(finger to lips making soft sshh sounds)

### Staging ideas

For this story a simple silk scarf can set the stage. The wooden tree can be represented by a piece of wood or a carved wooden tree: either serves beautifully. A collection of curled autumnal leaves from nature marks this very obviously as a seasonal story. But look for a variety that show the different stages of colour, curling and turning brown if you can.

### Spoons' Song

Dark, dark, it was dark.

In a small, small drawer,

Quiet, quiet, it was very, very quiet.

In the dark of the night in the deep, deep drawers the little wooden spoons lay listening, listening  
 (gesture: finger to mouth and cup ear)

Soon the sounds of a mouse (squeak, squeak)

Filled the whole house (squeak, squeak)

(pause for listening)

Then one night the wind blew (whew, whew) right through (whew, whew) every room

Rattling and shaking, rattling and shaking, the windows and doors and the floors and the drawers where the spoons lay still. (listening gesture) listening

Then one little spoon said:

'Let us rattle with the wind!

Let's rock and rattle! Let's tip and topple! Let's tip and tap and rock and rap and roll right over!

And he did.

Yes he did, he rocked and rattled and tipped and toppled, tipped and tapped and rocked and rapped and rolled right over – into the arms of another spoon!  
And then there were two in a stack lying on their backs!

'Make room for us spoons!' cried the two little spoons.  
So they rocked and rattled and tipped and toppled and they tipped and tapped and rocked and rapped and they rolled right over – into the arms of another spoon!  
Yes they rocked and rattled, they tipped and toppled, they tipped and tapped and rocked and rapped and rolled right over into the arms of another spoon!  
And then there were three in a stack lying on their backs!

'Make way for us spoons!' cried the three little spoons.  
So they rocked and rattled and they tipped and toppled and they tipped and tapped and rocked and rapped and rolled right over – into the arms of another spoon!  
Yes, they rocked and rattled and they tipped and toppled, they tipped and tapped and rocked and rapped and they rolled right over into the arms of another spoon!  
And then there were four in a stack lying on their backs!!  
(at this point you can keep building the stack until you have about seven spoons )

'We're stuck!' said the stack.  
'We're stuck in a stack of spoons in a drawer! We can't move anymore!  
We can't tip, we can't tap, we can't rock, we can't rap! We're stuck!'  
And when two hands came to open that drawer, indeed it was stuck and wouldn't open any more.  
Those hands pushed and they pulled. Yes they pushed and they pulled. It was almost a fight pulling so hard with all of your might!

'We're stuck!' said the spoons.  
'So, let's rock!' said the spoon at the very, very top. 'Let's tip, let's tap and rock and rattle!'  
So they tried, softly at first. They rocked and rattled, tipped and tapped, forward and back until one little spoon rolled right off!

Then they tried again! They rocked and they rattled and they tipped and toppled and rocked and rapped until a second little spoon rolled right off!

Then they tried again. They rocked and rattled, tipped and tapped, rocked and rapped until a third spoon rolled right off!

And then they tried again. They rocked and rattled, tipped and tapped, rocked and topped until a fourth spoon rolled right off!



'We're no longer trapped!  
We rocked and rapped out of the stack!  
Now we're lying on our backs  
And there's room for every spoon!'  
When the two hands came to try the drawer again why it opened just like that and was no longer stuck. And the spoons were all inside. In a neat row side by side!

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### Staging

This story merely requires a simple cloth and lots of different kinds of spoons. You can cover them with a blue cloth at the start in order to signify night time. Young children can be very engaged by the sounds and the sequence of this story which is quite lively, with all the sounds that spoons can make. Sequences are always good and help to build memory when we go both forwards and backwards. I have found in groups which ranged from one to three-and-a-half years that there was great stamina for a sequence of at least seven spoons. This will be something you can best judge from your own experience with your group of children. Three is definitely too small to be a real stack however!

# Section Four

CHAPTER EIGHT *Preparing for Sleep*

CHAPTER NINE *Inviting the Breath and Creating More Flow*

This section has two chapters. The first, **Chapter Eight**, looks at how to support sleeping and resting patterns for both the child and the adult. Children need to have times of simply resting, free of excessive stimulation, for them to digest their experiences and grow. They also need to experience the consistency of being embedded in rhythms that support their sleeping and waking. Rhythm enhances how we embed ourselves in the world and helps us learn the differences between what is predictable and what is new. This chapter also offers a lullaby song for small children which closely follows the natural rhythm of the breath; inhaling, exhaling, and resting.

Chapter Eight also has three exercises specifically to support the adult in sleep and resting. These exercises all include slowing down

## How to use this section

and sensing the body, releasing tension, and letting the breath find its way to increase our sense of calm.

Chapter Nine offers a number of exercises, all specifically for the adult, which focus on key themes: checking in, focusing, stretching to open the body; and ways to build vitality and warmth. These are all excellent for the teacher to do before teaching in the morning. This section also offers some guidelines for sitting and standing, and includes a walking exercise which can be very helpful for releasing tensions at the end of the day. Both the little steps exercise and the spinal roll offer deep benefits for enhancing posture and alignment and for opening the body up to be freer, more breathful and alive.

Also in Chapter Nine is a section on developing touch. The importance of touch is fundamental. When we touch children with awareness in our hands we offer them sensitivity and a sense of self-knowledge that can be very reassuring and even healing for the young child.

Finally this section looks at building stamina and developing a sense of balance. A daily practice, even of fifteen minutes' duration, will make a big difference for keeping in touch with your rhythm, your boundaries, and the sense of a sustaining joy, no matter how turbulent the outer world.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

# *Preparing for Sleep*

Whether getting a child ready for a long sleep or a short nap, preparing the body and soul of the child will always lead to deeper, healthier sleep. To go towards rest in a joyful spirit is, of course, the most delightful way. 'Ah this lovely soft feather bed!' 'Oh that inviting, restful floor!' 'Oh I have worked and played so hard, my limbs are ready to rest!' Healthy children, like field workers of former times, are vigorously active, and if they are also supported by predictable rhythms and routines, children will meet sleep as a well-earned and delightful transition. Our work as adults is to help them learn this as they grow and change.

Children who do not greet resting and sleeping in this spirit will need much more help, and certainly in a group situation such as day care, preschool or a kindergarten, some children are too stimulated to want to rest. For the parent and teacher this means that we have to create a contrast with what is stimulating, to make resting and sleeping as inviting and soothing as we can.

The voice, the rhythm of our voice, the tempo and its timbre, has the potential to shape the mood of our homes and classrooms, if we are awake to its possibilities. When the adult inhabits her own body with awareness, the voice immediately drops and has more range and a richer quality. An example of how you can start to develop this is to become aware of your feet and how they make contact with the ground. Stay there in your awareness for a few seconds. Directing your awareness to a part of the body encourages

the breath to flow there more fully and gives a more comprehensive breath movement throughout the body. In this case – as we give attention to the feet – we become grounded: the breath moves more deeply and the diaphragm swings more freely.

Next you can extend awareness to your back and shoulders while also letting the movement of the breath swing through you. Fatigue and stress always flatten the breath, while tensions tend to force the breath into higher parts of the body, as they constrict and collect in the upper body. Here the sense of burden can easily congest the open, joyful freedom of the heart space, and the voice and face. The more fully you are able to penetrate and ground your body, the better you will feel.

Out of this calmer and fuller place, where your own breath moves more deliciously and fully, you can soothe, sing and call the child towards a dreamier state of being. Since stories are connected to the world of enchantment, we can let stories act like the boat in which we send our children off towards the Land of Sleep. The realm of deep, restorative sleep promises a wonderful oblivion to everyday cares and busyness. It can renew vitality, bring wondrous dreams and deeply comfort and support. From such sleep we arise each morning with limbs fresh, and an inner vigour and joyful enthusiasm, ready and rolling to greet the day! But how many of us have boats that sail easily and freely to this magic kingdom? Sleep disorders seem more and more common in our hectic, electric world.

Connection to the earth's natural rhythms profoundly supports the balance between healthy sleep and activity. Children must have a physically active day for health and integration to take place, but adults also need that balance of sensory physical activity and rest. If we are out of balance ourselves, then the young child, so involved in imitation as its path to development, and so connected metabolically to the mother's rhythms, will have a harder time coming into his own balanced rhythm.

**Lullaby: The Blanket of Night-Time is Falling**

The blanket of night-time is falling,  
The blanket of night-time is falling,  
The blanket of night-time is falling,  
Come home, come home, come home.

The far distant stars are calling,  
The far distant stars are calling,  
The far distant stars are calling,  
Come home, come home, come home.

The silvery moonlight is calling,  
The silvery moonlight is calling,  
The silvery moonlight is calling,  
Come home, come home, come home.

Your warm cosy bed is enfolding,  
Your warm cosy bed is enfolding,  
Your warm cosy bed is enfolding,  
Come home, come home, come home.



The blanket of night-time is fall - ing,



The blanket of night-time is fall - ing,



Come home, come home, come home.

## *Supporting the adult in finding healthy sleep*

As adults there are a number of ways we can help the breath lead us gently towards sleep. Of course, a physically active day, a certain rhythmic quality to our lives, and a capacity to release worries before turning to sleep, all give rise to a greater sense of rest, ease and renewal. Those who have suffered from lack of sleep, more than most, can appreciate the magic of the deep, satisfying pull of 'Lethe's cup' and the sense of refreshment that accompanies awakening from profoundly renewing sleep.

Ilse Middendorf talks often of the need to have devotion to our breath. Certainly, when we turn ourselves with a quality of devotion to whatever we do, including resting, we can somehow heal the fragmenting forces that often sunder our mind from our body in ways that create restlessness when we most need ease. Fundamental to our capacity to let sleep come is the ability to let ourselves be carried. As we lie down and prepare to turn towards sleep, we can sense the floor or the mattress and all the places where it fills and supports the body. As we do this we can become more aware of how the breath expands, deepens and releases, offering us a sense of settling down and a deeper resting.

### EXERCISE

#### PROMOTING SATISFYING SLEEP, TAKING TIME TO SMELL THE ROSES

Practise slowing down and smelling the roses whenever you can and bring that memory or even better the reality of a rose, into this practice.

- As you inhale, let yourself become more and more open, let the smell penetrate to the back of your nose, your pelvic floor and even your feet.
- The healing power of the rose is testified to in flower essences, aromatherapy, and poetry. Let its delightful fragrance support the breath opening and as you receive your fill, the exhalation will swing back naturally.
- When you fall asleep, allow the memory of this smell to come to recollection and feel how it affects your body and breath every time you smell a rose.

## EXERCISE    RELEASING TENSIONS BEFORE SLEEP

- Lying flat on the ground, the floor, or your mattress, become aware of your spine, your rib cage, the shoulder blades and the pelvis. Allow the legs and arms to give in more deeply to the floor or mattress as you sense the support the ground can offer you.
- Let the arms lie about ten inches away from the body with the palms flat on the ground.
- Let your breath come and go.
- Sense the way in which your rib cage widens and swings back as the breath moves the diaphragm.
- Allow the movement of your breath to become your focus as it comes and goes.
- Now gently bend the wrist of the left hand as you draw the back of the hand in the direction of the shoulder, the fingers pointing toward the ceiling and at a right angle to the floor. Keep the entire lower arm flat on the ground. You might want to bend and soften the finger tips slightly to ensure that there is not too much tension.
- Now rotate the hand towards the body, toward the flanks, keeping the fingers still vertical; and then away again, about five times slowly, letting the breath flow.
- Lay the wrist palms down on the ground and give it your focus. You may find that you are experiencing some pain, because our joints can hold a lot of tension, but this will subside.
- Repeat this sequence with the other wrist. It is important to work with each wrist separately to induce calm and harmonise the breath.
- The same kind of movement sequence can be repeated with the ankles, working one at a time, as you let the foot rotate inwards and then outwards.
- Rest after one or two movements in order to absorb the sensations and the changes, and then continue if you wish.

You may find that you need to practise this over the course of a month or so to gain all of its benefits. As you sense the release of accumulated tensions, you may find that large yawns presage a deeper letting go and a more oxygenated and rested state.



The last exercise helps to release accumulated tensions that can become congested and locked up in key places of the joints. Steady and attentive practice, repeated a few times, will soon reap tremendous benefits in supporting greater fluidity and a deeper sense of ease.

The more developed we become in sensing our readiness for resting and our readiness for awakening, the more adept we will be at living rhythmically and healthily. A sense of peace comes as our vital forces tell us we have slept not too much, not too little, but just the right amount.

In most of this breath work, the breath mediates, helping the unconscious to come to greater consciousness. In this next exercise we deliberately turn towards and invite unconsciousness.

Ilse Middendorf sometimes talks about 'Leaving our heads in the garden' when we begin on the pathway of growing in our breath awareness. We would do well to heed her advice. Frequently, the head dominates with controlling agendas, and overrides the body and breath. In the following exercise, we let the head move towards the space of the back. This is a very unusual movement in this work. However, it serves here to take us right away into the unconscious. This is exactly where we want to go in turning towards sleep.

In this work we typically let images arise out of a person's own experience rather than deliberately introducing them. But for the next exercise Ilse has sometimes invited her students, in sensing the skull, to picture it as if it were pure silver or gold as it sinks backwards under its own great weight. You can discover for yourself what works!

## EXERCISE FOR OPENING THE DOORWAY TO SLEEP

You can do this sitting on the edge of the bed, sitting up straight with your feet in direct contact with the ground.

- Let the skull slowly sink backwards as you sense its weight.
- Let the lips open and the breath flow freely.
- Once the head has reached its lowest position return it slowly to its original position.
- Try this three or four times, taking care not to let the forehead come forward or down.
- Soon you will experience the need to lie down and fall asleep!

## CHAPTER NINE

# *Inviting the Breath and Creating More Flow*

### Becoming Aware of the Breath Cycle

Until the age of seven or so, a young child inhales the world through his senses. Recall your own childhood memories. Perhaps you can remember a sense of smell so acute that different houses and people had distinctive smells that you knew as a child were not the smell of home.

As young children develop alongside us we likewise have an opportunity to further develop our own awareness of these innate faculties and subtleties. This heightening of our senses also brings us more directly into presence. When we are present it is much easier to avoid meeting a child from places of reaction: fear, anxiety, uncertainty, irritation or impatience. Children need us as adults to give a quality of attention as much as they need the air they breathe.

By giving attention to our breath movement we can become more serene and more present, and so live closer to the child's own kind of time. As we give attention to our own being, we expand our presence to sense that of the child's being. Through the quality of relationship we can offer the child participation in a sense of wholeness. A child quickly picks up on the quality of attention he is receiving, and responds accordingly.

The following movements offer a few simple ways to come to greater awareness of your own breath cycle, particularly when you are with children. I also give guidelines for simply checking whether

you can sense your own breath and developing the capacity to sense and focus with the breath, showing how you can open up and allow a more vibrant breath, and how to be connected to the earth and build stamina.

### *Some easy movements to support the adult*

## ACTIVITY CHECKING IN

### **Sitting down**

Sitting on a stool or on the edge of a firm bed is a great way to check in without going into too relaxed a state of letting go, and yet it is less demanding than standing. Always ensure that your feet are firmly planted and making contact with the ground, and that the spine can feel supported all the way through to the head. This way of sitting invites the upper body, ribs, shoulders, neck and head, to settle and connect with the lower body and the legs. As soon as we are connected to the lower space of the pelvis, legs and feet, we are more grounded and there is more support for the whole body.

### **Focusing and breathing**

Coming to one's centre, just below the bony part of the chest, the sternum, is a good place to start to sense the breath moving under your hand. You can ask yourself: Where am I right now? Do I have self-awareness in the midst of this hurly-burly? What is me, and how is my awareness shifting with the activity around and outside me? Can I acknowledge and let go whatever takes me away from being present to the movement of my breath? Can I experience the sensation that comes as I bring awareness to each moment again and again?

Place your hands in front, on your solar plexus. This is the area below your sternum, the front area of the chest just below the rib cage, and let your breath come and go. Sense beneath the touch of your hand whether you can actually feel movement. Stay there for a while and let yourself feel the breath moving. Can you sense any changes in the tempo and flow of the breath, or shifts and changes of physical sensations as you give attention in this way?

### **Stretching**

Stretching opens up the body and encourages a deeper and easier flow of breath. When we stretch we open pathways, and help stuck places to shift. If done everyday, stretching will keep us supple and freer of tension. When we tense repeatedly we easily create hardening habits, and frequent bracing and tightening lead to a kind of sclerosis.

You can start to stretch in sitting: extend your legs and feet and stretch alternately into each leg and arm. Next, come into standing and bend into the legs and feet, as you let the pelvis give in; explore squatting positions with the legs, soft and yielding at the knees. You can stretch into the sides and into the back by stretching the spine forwards and up and down. Be creative!

Try to let the stretch find your breath by not stretching for a longer duration than you inhale. The most important thing here is the quality of the stretch. Let it be enjoyable: easy, soft, dynamic, and animal-like rather than hard pushing, which would strain and distort the breath.

### *Sensing the breath and building awareness*

Overwork and stress can make us go numb and retreat from our own bodies. Waking up the body walls helps us to sense our breath flowing and penetrating more fully. The body walls are the muscles and tissue that mediate the internal parts of our body with the external world and can be especially sensed along our flanks.

Kneading, rubbing, stroking and tapping the outside of the body, immediately makes us more fully embodied. Let your palms stroke and knead the feet, the joints and legs, the belly, chest, shoulders, and face. The breath movement can then go more easily to the nerves and the periphery of the body – helping us to feel fuller and more alive. Observe the quality of your attention and sense if you feel different.

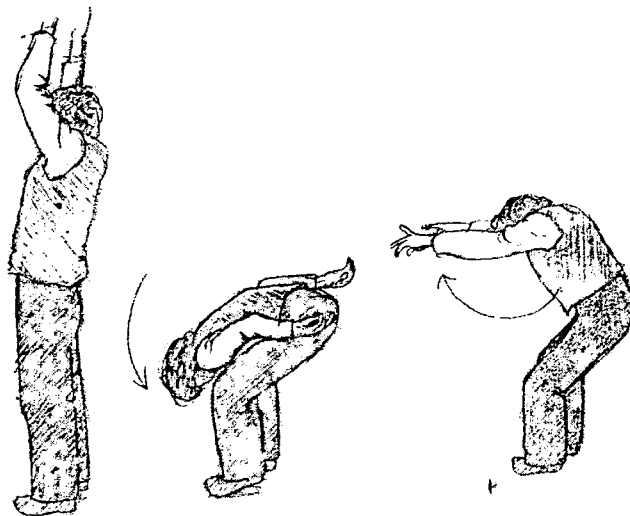
## *Creating vitality and warmth*

When we build vitality and warmth with swinging movements we are opening up the body and the breath, allowing a much stronger breath to penetrate.

### ACTIVITY BODY SWING

This is a wonderful movement for creating more vitality. The swinging movement can free and stimulate the breath as the diaphragm opens up, the legs give support, and the arms and head move more freely. The breath freed up in this way can be experienced as an uprising power. It is a breath that comes from the ground as feet and legs connect to the earth, and through to the upper body. The sensation of the movement of an uprising quality of breath creates a great sense of release and freedom as it continues up through the lower space into the other parts of the body.

Stand with feet apart at shoulder width. Sense the ground and your breath coming and going. Raise your arms above your head and then let them release, swinging downwards as head, arms and



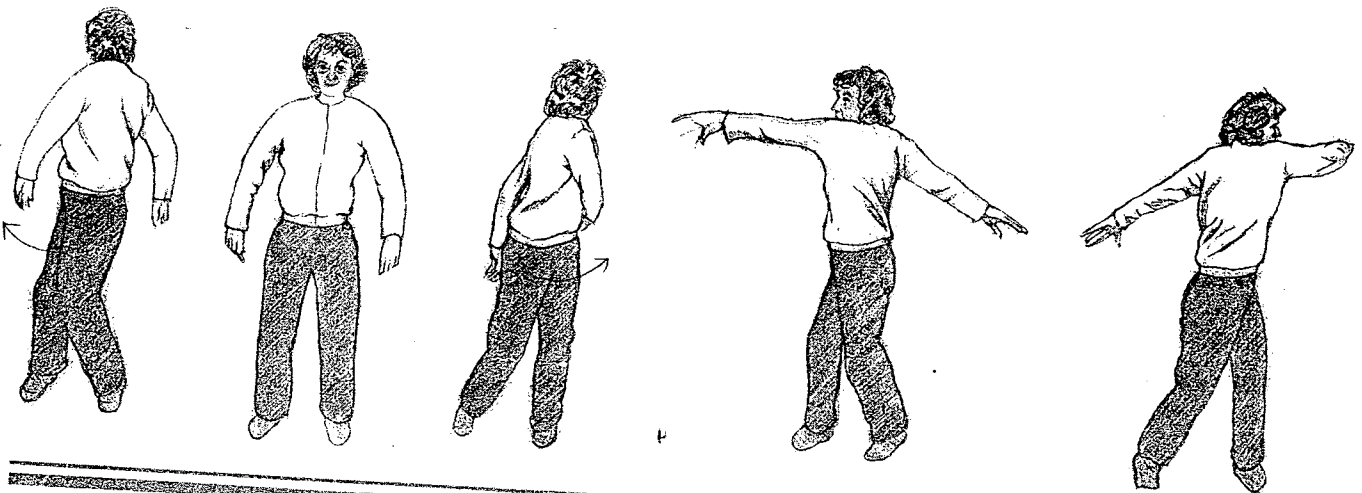
upper body swing down all the way to the ground. Then let the exhaling breath power carry you back up. Try this a few times and then sense the quality of your breath, as well as how you feel.

As you let go more and more to the breath you will find that its strength can carry you and take the place of externally imposed ideas of movement or muscular effort.

## ACTIVITY ROPES

Stand with your feet shoulder-width apart and let your arms hang slightly away from the body. Let your ankles and knees be soft and yielding. Start to swing from side to side as the arms hang from the shoulders. This movement gains impetus as you swing around the spinal column. Your feet keep you firmly planted to the earth. Let your head follow the direction of the arms as the whole upper torso movement builds momentum. As you do this the arms can become almost horizontal while the breath becomes stronger and more vital.

Enjoy the sense of opening and ease that this offers the whole body, and in particular the spine. But as with all the movements, take time to resonate and sense internally what it has brought you before repeating the sequence or going on to the next thing.



## *Connecting to the earth*

### ACTIVITY STANDING

Our feet are often a tremendously overlooked resource for grounding our breath and helping us to be sensorily aware and more fully present. Finding ways to become more aware in the feet builds a foundation for the whole body, and gives us a solid anchor out of which a deeper and freer breath can flow, making us more supple and more secure.

When we shift the weight from side to side in the movement of the rhythm of our own breath flow we invite remarkable releases and changes in our whole being. It is very good to practise awareness of the feet in situations where there is otherwise very little demand on attention. Standing waiting in queues at a shop, or at a bus stop, or looking out of a window at a view, allow yourself to go into a less active, more receptive mode. Sense how, as you give into the feet and allow yourself to be carried, your breath rhythm changes, allowing your vision to become both softer and more acute. These are the fruits of letting your breath come and go on its own, and letting go of strain.

Become aware of the balls of your feet and let the weight go more to the front of the foot in a way that is barely noticeable. Now allow the weight to go to the heel and the back of the foot. Can you sense the breath opening up the back of your body as you do so? When you go onto the balls of the feet do you sense that the front of the body can open and that you can breathe more easily?

Stress, discomfort, and pain all contribute to constricting and pushing the breath upwards to produce increased tension and shallow breathing.

In standing, you can give in to one side and let the breath just come and go, inhalation and exhalation, one full cycle. Then let the weight shift to the other foot, and again allow the inhale to come and the exhale to swing you back. Practise this for a while, alone, or standing in a line, or at the kitchen sink. It can bring great rewards as you let the ankles, knees, and feet soften and give in more. This is the toning power of your own breath. \*

It is always best for you be your own observer. How do you feel after doing one of these movements for a while? What is the quality

of attention you give while you are doing it? Can you give yourself that in other ways too? Are you becoming more attuned to the movement of your breath? Do you feel better? The more we build an experience of flow and ease throughout our day, the less we will feel that our life is filled with interruptions.

## ACTIVITY WALKING

Movement is life. Finding balance in our lives is no small task. Our hands, legs, feet, and minds are all involved in the busy everyday demands of the world in which we live. However, as soon as we become more conscious and more mindful, we can shape the quality of how we live amidst all the busyness and hurly-burly, and we can become more flowing and efficient. As we become increasingly in touch, sensing our own body and the movement of our breath, we begin to sense what is the right priority, how much is healthy to do in one day, and how we can experience real contentment.

Walking offers powerful ways to create a sense of wholeness as we move through space. With breathful walking it is possible to 'massage' all of our organs, as well as to strengthen the blood and lymph systems, the joints and spine, and of course the lungs. Tensions are released and we can be refreshed and strengthened just through being more aware of how our breath flows and offers support. If we let ourselves sense the earth and feel how it supports our stepping, giving buoyancy and life to how we walk, our posture and our attitude to life can change.

## ACTIVITY LITTLE STEPS

The 'little steps' are excellent, simple but strong movements to do at the beginning or the end of each day. They offer several different rewards: releasing and letting go, revitalising, and replenishing. They can bring significant change to the entire tone and posture of the body if they are done for fifteen minutes or more every day.

Stand with your feet close together and close your eyes. Keep the ankles and knees soft and open. Shift the weight very slowly from one foot to the other, letting the breath swing through, and allowing its rhythm to guide you. It is easier to sense the inhale as



you give in to it and exert light pressure into the floor, and to then sense the exhale as you let yourself come back into a more upright position, balanced between the two sides of left and right. The actual movement is typically very minimal but it has a strong effect. You will also find that it becomes easier to observe your own breath rhythm over time as it changes.

Feel the floor coming up towards you and the support which it offers. Move one foot forwards, sliding across the floor, and allow the weight to go to that side. Again sensing the support of the floor, allow the other side to move, letting the foot slide as minimally as possible and again, let the weight go to that side.

Alternate feet, moving very slowly with as small steps as you can, shifting from side to side and moving slowly across the floor. Allowing each step to be a complete shift of weight is a full accomplishment and will bring you into your natural rhythm.

This is a good movement to do, if you can, before children are awake. There are great benefits to sensing your children at a distance and feeling your home or classroom before it fills up with the day's activity. You can start to feel its peace as a renewed sense of the space: a certain clearing of the room takes place. We can talk about this as a way of hygienically cleaning inner and outer spaces each day.

## ACTIVITY THE SPINAL ROLL

This movement makes space for and re-integrates the entire back, as support emerges from the strength of the feet and legs.

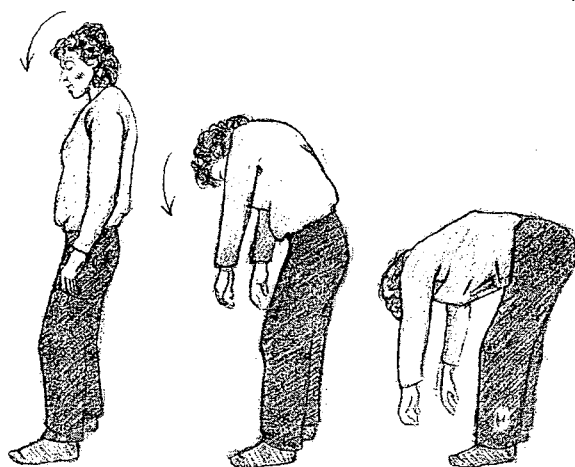
The back and the legs are often forgotten in a busy teacher or parent's life. Once we tune in and start to become more sensorily aware, we can realise how much we take for granted. A breathful back, one that is open and aware of the movement of breath, supports us in ways that are almost indefinable. We are then more conscious, more tuned in, more dimensional, freer, and more vital.

This movement, if done once a day, will make big changes by opening and realigning the back. Place your feet shoulder-width apart and let the ankles and knees be soft and open. Sense the ground and how you connect and find support from the ground. Become aware of how you are standing. Let your breath come and go freely. Let the chin roll down towards the chest very gradually, as vertebra by vertebra you

roll slowly downwards, giving into and receiving the earth. Generally this can be experienced through weight shifting more into your feet.

Only go as far as is comfortable. Any strenuous effort or discomfort will cut short your breath. But over time, the more you do this movement, the further your breath will allow you to move comfortably. Let yourself hang for a while, sensing your breath, your spine, and the legs and feet. In particular, sense the subtle shift through the whole foot, as it releases tension and develops a more substantial relationship to the earth, and so fills with increased awareness of the breath.

Sense your feet and allow yourself to experience resistance from the floor without tensing the feet, ankles or knees. Letting your breath flow, slowly start to come back up through the ankles, the knees, the upper legs and then the lower back, middle back and upper back. Let the roll up be very gentle and subtle through the neck and give the head time to find how and where it wants to sit. Allow plenty of time for this roll and let the inhale penetrate places that feel 'gluey' and stuck. Returning to the upright is a natural flow that happens very easily without effort. Trust the return and let it be slow if it needs to be, keeping present and sense-aware as much as you can. Let the head really find its place and come up last, allowing the movement through the cervical vertebrae of the neck to be very sensitive. All kinds of subtle shifts and changes are happening with this movement, and so it is important not to override them and fall back into old patterns where tension and awkward posture prevail.



Resonate with your eyes shut by sensing how you feel for a few seconds – a few breath cycles. What is different? How is my breath moving? Is it flowing more easily and fully? Am I more aware of my legs? Does my back and neck feel longer? How does my head want to sit? How do I feel?

Give yourself plenty of time to do this, and train yourself in resonating, as described in many of the earlier exercises. When we resonate we distil what the movement has given us and how it comes into greater clarity. We also allow the integrating changes to take effect before rushing back into old and habitual patterns.

The spinal roll is a very profound movement and can effect lots of positive changes to give you a breathing back. It is worth giving it time each day if you can create that space. Every time you do it you may experience the roll as subtly different, showing how richly layered is the usually unconscious world of the back!

### *Developing touch*

## ACTIVITY INCREASING SENSITIVITY AND WARMTH

As we reach into, work with, explore, and contact our world we use our hands in so many different ways! Developing dexterity can often lead us to take the hands even more for granted, and as we get older, we regard problems or stiffness of wrists or fingers as an obstruction rather than as a message. The eminent anthropologist Ashley Montagu in his book *Touching* (Harper and Row, 1971) has written marvellously about the fundamental importance of touching in child development and how we shape awareness, the senses, and profound neurological development, through touch.

Our language too is redolent with the language of touch: when we talk about 'tact' 'having a magic touch', 'being touched' and 'feeling touchy'. The skin, the largest organ of the body, the mediating membrane between inner and outer worlds, delights in, and is made for touch.

It is therefore very important that parents and teachers develop the potential for and delight in conscious touch. To be able to

soothe, guide, lull, reassure, stimulate, build trust and ground, with the sense of touch, is a gift of the hands.

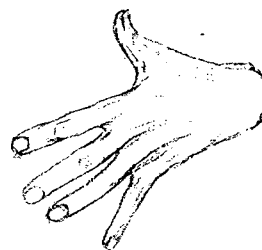
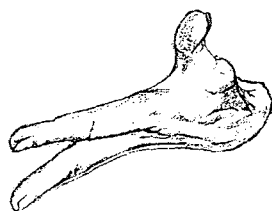
In this approach to the breath we work a lot with hands and wrists and their relationship to the whole body. Hands are for expression and exploration just as much as for doing and manipulating. There are many reasons why we have hands and not paws, just as there are for us having skin and not fur or hide! We are built for sensitivity and expression and the scope of our hands for what we can receive and give is vast. William Blake, the great poet and visionary, wrote of holding 'infinity in the palm of your hand'.

## ACTIVITY

### DEVELOPING SENSITIVITY: OPENING AND CLOSING OF THE HAND

Developing sensitivity and awareness in our hands can begin in the simplest of ways. Just by extending and opening your hand, palm upwards and gazing at your hand, your breath can change as you give attention. Now start gently to open the palm as you sense your breath coming and going. Can the movement of the hand and the breath find each other as you let the palm open and close?

How does your awareness grow as you let the movement extend through the fingers and thumb? When you let the centre of the palm serve as a starting point for opening and softening of the hand what do you sense?



Let yourself resonate after a few cycles of this, and then **do** it with the other hand. Over time, as you work, become aware of **how** the whole body participates in this single cycle of inhalation, exhalation, and a pause before the next breath cycle. Can you sense the arms, the shoulder blades, the back, the diaphragm, and the feet as you participate in this gentle opening and closing like the bud of a flower?

## ACTIVITY

### LETTING THE HAND FIND THE MOVEMENT OF THE BREATH

A simple way to let the hand become more sensitive, sensing, and receptive is to try the following exercise where the hand simply discovers, as if for the first time, the shape and nature of what it comes into contact with.

Let one of your hands rest on your thigh. How does it follow the contour of the leg? How do you sense the shape? Can you let the breath come and go as you follow this simple focusing of attention?

Now try resting one hand on the back of the other. Try it with both palms up and facing the ceiling in a receptive gesture, and facing down too. Let the breath come and go as you do. You can also try letting the hand be a resting place for the elbow. Ask yourself how it feels today and what is its shape today? Does it feel in any way different?

What is it like to experience a familiar part of yourself in an open way as if you had not known your elbow before?

Building receptivity with the hands will support your touch becoming nourishing to both you as a giver and others as receivers. The more awareness and sensitivity you allow here, the more you offer to others in bringing them – through touch – into a settling and more complete relation to themselves.

## ACTIVITY DEVELOPING AWARENESS IN THE FINGER TIPS

Both ancient Indian and Chinese paths testify to ways of accessing the whole body through both hands and feet. In Middendorf work we also work with the finger tips to stimulate the breath to penetrate the deepest parts of our body.

Bring both hands with palms to face each other and bring the fleshy pads of the fingers into light contact, the hands almost coming together. Take it in turn to begin with the little finger, and then the ring finger pads, and apply light pressure and then release. Do this a few times to see if the breath finds its relation to the movement and then sense in which parts of the body this movement of the hands offers greater sensation and clarity.

Now apply the middle fingers together in the same way and again bring pressure over a few breath cycles, sensing what this brings you.

Lastly, take the index finger and thumb and in the same way apply pressure. Where do you experience greater awareness in the body when you bring these finger pads together in this way? Typically bringing such pressure to the different finger pads heightens the sensation and awareness in the lower, the middle and the upper parts of the body and helps us to appreciate how they can be sensed differently. At the very least, a greater sense of inner spaciousness and a deeper breath are some of the benefits of practising this simple exercise.

Everything we do to differentiate and sensitise the hands, and also how they move with the breath, can have effects within the body. It is part of the building up of the quality called 'substance,' a primary phenomenon in Middendorf work. This has analogies with what the Chinese call chi and the Indians call prana. Practise breath movement through touch in real life situations: stroking pets, children, and loved ones. How does it affect you when you gently stroke a child's head or back, and how do they change and come into deeper repose as their breathing shifts and fills?

## *Developing strength and stamina*

### **Finding Support and Strength**

Everything we have done so far develops stamina. The release of tension then opens us up to new potential. The breath as it moves more freely can fill, tone, and strengthen the substantial quality that recurs to penetrate and integrate our being.

As we go deeper into the work there are also ways to work with sound that can build tremendous strength and tone. This is one reason for the work's popularity with performing artists. Working with the breath with sound can also build coherence of substance. This coherence enables us to distinguish more clearly and subtly differentiations between contrasting parts of the body. Building a sense of contrast between lower, middle and upper areas of the body helps us to sense, over time, how the quality of the legs and pelvic floor have a particular kind of strength and can underpin a more vital and instinctive breath quality. This can be experienced as strongly distinguished from the quality experienced in the upper body, a region more delicately structured, where the breath quality can be experienced as refined and subtle, leading to other experiences and meanings. These experiences of increased differentiation, sustained at the same time by an increasing sense of wholeness, can become more and more frequently experienced and accessible as sources of sustaining power and renewal.

Fundamental to an enduring sense of stamina is the earth itself, and so the more we build our vitality through the legs and feet, allowing it to penetrate into the pelvic area and the belly and the areas of the diaphragm, upper chest, and shoulders, the more fluid and dynamic we will be.

## *Juggling*

These few simple themes and movements are just a beginning. They offer a brief introduction to ways in which your own breath can support you. For a teacher to 'ensoul' her classroom by doing some of these for ten to twenty minutes before class begins will offer incredible benefits and do a job that your classroom cleaners cannot do. Parents may find it hard to get up before their children are awake, but finding ways to bring these movements into interludes in the day and small portions of time before your child awakes or after he is asleep, will hugely replenish and fortify you. The more you can give attention to the breath effortlessly and with enjoyment the easier it will be to gain its benefits.

I need my own time and space for my own practice of being with my breath, and I love to be awake and up before anyone else so that I can sense the house and how I am in balance with inner and outer worlds, and so prepare for the day. It was not always like this. In the very early years of parenting I felt so sleep-deprived that getting up before my child seemed a Herculean task.

However, I have also worked with my daughter's desire to be connected and physically close when I wish to do some particular breath movements. This has evolved to become a wonderful extension of the breath. For breath is, by nature, expansive as well as interior. She loves to sit in the same space, doing some of the movements alongside me.

Parents and teachers usually juggle many points of focus during a day. This often creates a challenge, even sometimes conflicts. But there are simple ways to build places of tranquil grounding and integration alongside your child or children, allowing yourself a little space to observe your own breath and the sense of where you are. Movements that engage the child, and which we do together, are often delightful for both adult and child. Ways in which you help your child to be with you while you give attention, not just to your child, but to your own being, can build a foundation that supports both individuals coming into a deeper, more contented and more restful relationship to their own breath rhythm and fundamental nature.



## APPENDIX ONE

# *Breath Experience: Background and Context*

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*Breath experience requires an absence of formed ideas. ...An 'openness' to influences, a courage for what is new, and not yet experienced and a curiosity that gains context and content through a gradual layering. Experience is a turning of the Spirit, not an intellectual activity. Only if I experience, can I contemplate and differentiate aspects of 'Being'. Such capacity for experience can become a power if it attains integration. Breath experience is an inner knowledge when it combines with intuition, but it remains a reflex, as it functions physiologically in animals.*

*Ilse Middendorf The Perceptible Breath; a Breathing Science*

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### *Influences and background*

A number of great teachers have helped me in seeding this work. They have been guides and beacons of inspiration who have, in different ways, shown me great themes and truths that have offered inspiration, and fruition over time. One of the marks of great teaching is an inspired relation to the sense of time. Rudolf Steiner, Ilse Middendorf, and Dorothy Heathcote, in particular, exemplify lives lit by a vision that brought an irresistible urgency to prevail alongside an absolute respect and patience. They all knew that joyous learning and the fruition of insight need the ripening of time sustained by a loving quality of attention and the cradle of rhythm. It is a patient fire that tends the flame of larger truths, of wonders to be discovered and joys to be found.

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*For young children, love as they are learning, truthfulness as they are learning to speak, and clarity and firmness in their surroundings as they are learning to think become their physical constitution.*

Rudolf Steiner  
from the lecture 'Walking, Speaking, Thinking: Milestones in the Life of the Young Child'

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Rudolf Steiner, the great Austrian philosopher, visionary, and seeker, had extraordinary ideas about education and the developing human being, and inspired a school movement which is now international. The wisdom held in so much of this education is worth lifelong study, and endures as a source of awe and creativity for teachers and parents alike.

Often called Waldorf schools, the first was started in Stuttgart in the early 20s, after Emil Molt, a wealthy German industrialist and owner of the Waldorf cigarette factory, asked Steiner what he could do to enhance the lives of his workers. Steiner replied that he should educate his workers' children. From this initiative the first 'Waldorf' school was born. Steiner was acutely aware of the effect of industrialisation, and how the rhythms that governed typically agrarian societies – rhythms connected to the seasons and stable communities working together over many generations – were radically changing and fragmenting.

Steiner's vision of education was guided by inspired and developmentally appropriate themes and archetypes that could weave a child's experience into the ancient rhythms of stories, of discoveries and practices that have kept our humanity alive and evolving since ancient times. This was far-sighted in an era where fragmentation and isolation were just beginning to emerge as clear social trends. By educating the whole human being – head, heart, and hands – Steiner's vision is an antidote to the effects on individuals of social, technological, and economic changes. Practical skills, a wonder for the order and blessing of Creation, and a profoundly imaginative connection to the melody of language and to the lyrical elements of life itself are just some of the traits that are strongly rooted in this vibrant education.

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*Speech has to be developed on the basis of the right kind of walking and of the free movement of the arms. Otherwise the child's speech will not be anchored in his whole being. The relation between physical equilibrium (action of the legs) and soul equilibrium (action of the hands and arms) forms the foundation which enables the child to come into contact with the outer world through the medium of language.*

Rudolf Steiner

from the lecture 'Walking, Speaking, Thinking: Milestones in the Life of the Young Child'

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Dorothy Heathcote is an extraordinary teacher who worked her way from mill girl in the North of England to teaching drama to hundreds of different groups all over the world. Her extraordinary gift of attuning to and working out of group dynamics and her capacity to serve almost as a midwife to her students' creativity have been a fountain of inspiration to me. Helping others to discover worlds of imagination through group exploration, in playing and dramatising together, she provides a direct line to the seminal importance of imagination and play in early childhood education. Complete devotion to play and engagement of all the faculties are what this asks for. When it occurs, deep, therapeutically satisfying and formative experiences occur, consolidated through the thrill of involvement in something bigger than all the individuals in the room.

Rudolf Steiner also emphasised the absolute seriousness of imaginative play and appreciated that the subtle and diverse range of what is developed there lays the foundations for all important skills.

Dorothy Heathcote has also inspired much of my work with older children. Her principle that movement and language serve each other best when they happen together is a key for unchaining learning from lectures and desks, and facilitating dynamic discovery. In this way playing and imagination can develop and support what is already known, creating surprise and enhancing skills. The wonder and delight that can come when children play out the potentials of their creative imagination demonstrate that everyone benefits when expression, engagement, and movement are made the foundations of learning.

This book, however, owes most to Ilse Middendorf, who inspired the exploration of ways to bring this breathwork approach into early childhood education.

I first met Ilse Middendorf early on in my career as a Waldorf teacher. She seemed to me to embody in her teaching both clear principles and an artistry that enables a joyous journeying into, and acceptance of, the body. She provided a path that allows a flowering of what all too often remains implicit or elusive. Even in her nineties, Ilse retains a dynamic ease and the profound and radiant vitality that are the signature of her work.

### *Ilse Middendorf: a brief biographical picture*

Ilse was born in the small town of Frankenberg in Saxony, Germany in 1910, to a close-knit and loving family. Her early adult life was marked by the fragmentation and violence of the 20th century. She was to lose her much beloved and talented husband to the Second World War, becoming a widow while pregnant with their only child.

Ilse's life and her work are marked by the theme of a constant attention to deeper meanings, and the way to find balance in the midst of turbulence. When she teaches she sometimes refers to finding the 'red thread' of the breath and following it. The inspiration of this vivid image threading through Ilse's own life and her extraordinary radiance as a teacher, testify to a life forged through disciplined and inspired focus: finding joy in the midst of pain and equanimity in the face of turmoil.

Her search has always been for authentic movement that comes out of a freer breath that integrates feeling and thought. Movement finds its thread in the dance of the breath flowing into often joyous expression. And as the breath flows into expression, different parts of our being can orchestrate and find harmony together, as both levity/lightness and gravity meet in movements suffused with grace.

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*Dance is the perfect form of human movement. Dance is moved expression out of human wholeness. Dance includes the origin and the goal of human development. In dancing man senses the divine. In dancing he learns about reality.*

*Dance is as elemental as breath for both are rooted in rhythm and movement. When they pervade each other they are true, intrinsic life. The typical marks of such movement are ease and measure out of which comes gracefulness.*

Ilse Middendorf *The Perceptible Breath; a Breathing Science*

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Ilse was always attracted to dance and movement and from the age of five was enrolled in an unusual gymnastics class, based on the work of Dore Menzler, which focused on inner sensing. From an early age she remembers feeling attracted to sensing the essence of a movement. As a child in the family's garden she had an experience that recurred later, in a dream, at a very challenging time in her life. She describes her childhood experience as calling on her like an angelic visitation to know that the breath was like a 'guide rope', to be trusted and held on to. The guide rope of the breath would be very important in her life, giving direction and focus, enabling her to take risks, find courage, and learning.

#### **'Life, soul, mind and body form a whole'**

Ilse grew up in times of great challenge but there was also a tremendous richness and cross-fertilisation of culture and ideas. Germany from the late 19th Century and into the early 20th was a crucible for many innovative ideas relating to body movement, sensory awareness, and the evolving science of the body that today is often termed 'somatics'. Friedrich Ludwig Jahn (1778-1852), often referred to as the 'father of gymnastics' is generally credited with opening the first door on 'bodily unconsciousness,' and stimulating much further exploration. Ilse was at the centre of the creative explorations of her time and was to draw on many formative impulses. Elsa Gindler, Rudolf Bode and Alheidis von Bothmer, were among many of the gymnasts whose work she knew; and in the field of dance, she was familiar with the work of Isadora Duncan, Rudolf Laban, and Gret Palucca.

Even as a very young woman Ilse was drawn to key teachers and influences as she explored gymnastics and dance. Early on she articulated her rejection of a mechanical approach to the body, of viewing the body as an object, and saw very clearly that many different keys to corporeality were possible precisely because the body carries so much of the ground for meaning within itself. But it was the guide rope of the breath that was to lead Ilse to her most formative teachers.

The ancient Egyptians, Greeks, and Hindus had acknowledged the breath as the carrier of vitality and a path of contact with the divine. But it was not until the early 20th Century in western Europe that a resurgence of interest and exploration in the breath took place. Attempts were being made in many different arenas to understand principles by which the body and the psyche could access each other, and how inner meaning grows through movement and interaction with the outside world.

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*...the ancients used the breath as the umbilical cord to the godlike inside them. They obviously were embedded in it to such an extent that in earliest times no instructions were needed. By contrast, there is a new differentiation needed for the European of today: he has to learn to perceive his breathing, his breathing has to be revealed to him, for what he has understood and just acquired, what he is able to differentiate, will become his nature.*

Ilse Middendorf *The Perceptible Breath; a Breathing Science*

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Ilse's early exposure to the Menzler Method led her to an enthusiastic appreciation of internal sensing and movement. By the age of twenty she had deepened her study through many different teachers. However, she began to experience considerable conflict with movements she found were too restrictive and ran counter to the sense of flow found in the natural movement of breathing. By this time, she was engaged in teaching breathing and had trained further in Mastanang work, a system based on Tibetan movements where body and mind are interrelated. Her own work was clearly evolving and she began to differentiate her work from other paths. While other methods often worked with the breathing in a guided way using the will, Ilse was seeking to follow breathing's own 'laws'. Her aim was to be, as she puts it, 'neither above

or beside this law of breathing but within it.' The question 'What does breathing mean?' has been the guiding source of all Ilse's work.

Naturally, Ilse was drawn to those teachers who might support her questions. Her seeking brought her in time to a significant influence, Ewe Warren, a dancer, who taught Ilse the unifying aspects of breathing, movement and meditation. But it was Cornelius Veening whose own explorations with breathing and the psyche helped Ilse further on her path of understanding how the breath helps us to contact the essential.

Cornelius Veening was a Dutchman living in Berlin who had a small, select group of students. His connections and affinities to Carl Jung's 'depth psychology' were potent for her, and Ilse relates that it was under Veening's tutelage that something at a profound level opened for her, and her own work began to flower.

Ilse's quest also meant learning to penetrate, feel, and be able to teach how movements are achieved and created. She rejected many methods as too one-sided or too single-minded because of their focus on will power. As she perceived it, these left too little room for breathing and so for creating reality.

As Ilse gained greater clarity and independence in her own teaching, she resigned her professorship at the College for Higher Education for Music and the Performing Arts in Berlin and established her own institute, also in Berlin, in 1965.

With the birth of the institute, her work gained recognition and she devoted herself to leading seminars and professional training courses for those who wish to understand the breath and its compelling, transforming power. Currently, in the early 21st Century, Middendorf work is represented by several European institutes, and in America, where the talented Juerg Roffler is its foremost pioneer. In the early 1980s, advanced seminars, under the leadership of the far-sighted Feldenkrais trainer, Elizabeth Beringer, sponsored Middendorf breath work in the United States, enabling it to take root. As a result, there are increasing numbers of practitioners today on both sides of the Atlantic. Ilse's work has earned high regard in the performing arts, in clinical health applications, and in monastic practice. Its powerful support of authentic self-expression and healing, and its formidable capacity to enhance vitality, potential, and well-being, bridges all realms of endeavour. Breathing is integral to every area of life, and the quality of our breath will determine the quality of life experience.

## *The work in context*

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*When the breath comes of its own accord, we shall be able to become aware of its laws through focusing and perceiving, without interference. This is how the unconscious bears witness and how we are able to forge links between consciousness and unconsciousness.*

Ilse Middendorf *The Perceptible Breath; a Breathing Science*

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Ilse's work is often called the *Perceptible Breath* or the *Experience of Breath*. It includes as one of its fundamentals developing partnership models for living, working and understanding. Our own natural breath rhythm as a partner is the starting point. Paradigms that encourage overriding the breath, closing portals to deeper and more miraculous meaning are obsolete and obstruct our evolution as human beings. On the other hand, cooperating with the breath offers a pathway into the body that is both immanent, in the sense of being embodied, and cosmic. While Ilse's teachings bring much that is new, the principle that embracing the depths of experience – guided by real tools and coherent principles – leads to fuller understanding and a greater capacity for responsibility, has distinguished roots in the European tradition.

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*Every person has his own way of processing: through the experience of his breathing, he finds his way, his path. One person goes inside, senses his breath moving and his experience of breathing is based on that. Another one goes outside to experience the breath moving there, and comes back slowly... You have to find balance that is changing again and again all the time.*

*There is only one rule: it is focusing breathing. Whenever you sense that you are focused and breathing, there is also sensing of being centered. That's the whole thing. Out of that you make your own start and find your own process, but it is all based on Sensing, Focusing and Breathing.*

Ilse Middendorf *The Perceptible Breath; a Breathing Science*

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Ilse carefully differentiates three forms of breathing. The first is the unconscious mode of breathing, 'the kind gift of Mother Nature'. Embedded in the autonomic nervous system, this breath responds to myriad influences, and typically balances and supports other bodily functions.

The second form, voluntary breathing, is governed by the mind. This kind of breathing serves specific goals, deliberately increasing power or vitality or control. Breathing that is voluntary – in the sense of being led by the will – is often called upon in yoga, in some health practices, in the performing arts, and in sports. It can reach specific parts of the body structure but not the whole being since, led only by the conscious mind its route does not include the depths of the unconscious.

The third form of breathing is what Ilse calls the 'perceptible breath'. This is when we allow the breath to come of its own accord, then let it go and wait until it comes back naturally. Over time, the practice of being with the breath in this way builds perception and awareness of each phase of the breath cycle.

When we witness this natural functioning of the breath, we allow it to be, to grow and evolve, without disturbance. This is the kind of breath that can reach to the roots of our being. Such breath is changed by our awareness, by the fact of our turning towards it, of sensing it and where it moves. The flowing breath that comes with this quality of attention and focus guides us into appropriate movement and posture and feeds insights, intuitions and thinking, bringing with it a characteristic sense of vitality, dynamism and balance.

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*Both spiritual powers, devotion and awareness, are based on the appearance and power of the perceptible breath. It is an unerring light on the path to knowledge of oneself and self-development. Thus it brings about inner well-being, encouraging and reassuring. It streams and swells out of the inner and penetrates. It not only connects every cell, every organ, every space, with each other, but also opens up the outer space which surrounds us and joins it with the inner space where it originates.*

Ilse Middendorf *The Perceptible Breath; a Breathing Science*

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Approaching the breath in this way offers a conscious path of working which supports the natural flow to become fuller and more substantial in quality. Over time, a sense of a 'breath body' builds which offers strength, vitality, and integration. As the individual becomes aware of the breath moving between, and mediating inner and outer, upper and lower, and front and back, a sense of dimension and fullness grows and a profound capacity for presence emerges.

### *Modes for experiencing the breath*

#### **Breath and movement classes**

Two distinct branches of this work are available for individuals who want to learn more about their own breath. Attending breath and movement classes is one, where specific movements are taught in order to support the awareness of how we experience our own unencumbered and free-flowing breathing rhythm. Movements follow specific principles to build a sense of the quality of the breath. Sounds can also be part of the work to affect and change tonus in quite extraordinary ways. Sound also brings tremendous strength and balance within the body and breath, and offers ways to balance the breath rhythm.

#### **Breath dialogue: hands-on work**

The other approach to exploring breath in Middendorf work is hands-on. It is called 'breath dialogue'. The goal of the dialogue is to bring the individual into a deeper sense of her own *breath body*. Typically in conjunction with classes, the individual participates in this hands-on dialogue with a breath practitioner. One is invited to lie down on a table and sense the breath in order to discover where it flows freely as an integrating and subtly transforming force. The practitioner guides the session through hands that sense and support harmonising of the breath rhythm.

A Middendorf training rigorously trains its practitioners to differentiate the breath rhythm of the client from that of the practitioner. The matching of rhythms is interpreted as a muddying that can merge with and obscure the coherence and individuating

autonomy of the person who has placed trust in the practitioner. Autonomy is perceived as vital for self-empowerment and self-realisation and for finding a mature relation to oneself, the cosmos, and the meanings through which we meet the world.

### *Many approaches to the breath*

Among the different modes of approaching the breath, both ancient and modern, Middendorf breath work must be seen as a new member of the family that is particularly suited to a Western sensibility.

Traditional Eastern yogic paths have typically taught breath as a path to follow for uniting with transcendent bliss. The breath can take us to places where distinctions in the world are no longer relevant and the pains and sorrows of physical suffering no longer matter. Counting in-breaths and out-breaths, for example, leads into a relation to our breath that supports peace, calm, perspective and possibly a sense of a more enduring reality. Because the classic yoga path orientates toward unity with the All – and reflects back an experience of self from that perspective – we can call it ‘excarnating’ in order to make a contrast with the ‘incarnating’ path of Middendorf breath work. The contrast in meaning between these two paths tells us something about differences between Eastern and Western spirituality and even parallels the two aspects of the breath rhythm itself.

Other more contemporary approaches to the breath have fostered direct and conscious access to therapeutic or psychological issues for the sake of encouraging cathartic release. These modes work very directly with the power of the breath, and tap its enormous potency to uncover emotions and locked-up memories and patterns that have shaped our posture and how we move and present ourselves in the world. Wilhelm Reich, Alexander Lowen, and Stanislaus Grof are some of the teachers who have explored this path.

T'ai Chi and the Chi Gong are ancient paths that have endured. They include the breath in how they work to enhance chi, a

condition of organised potential that embraces soma and psyche. These are forms for standing and moving that bear a closer relation to Middendorf work than any other I have found. They encourage awareness in standing and the building of substantial life force through movements that engage all of the limbs.° But in Middendorf work all forms are seen as means to observe and understand the principles of how the breath moves. Consequently, at the end of each class free expression of movement is encouraged in order to support individual integration and self-understanding.

In general, Middendorf breathwork can be distinguished from the other approaches I have described:

- Rather than guiding the breath through particular forms, it supports the breath by uncovering and strengthening its natural flow. This experience offers unique doorways to personal connection and meaning.
- Rather than directly changing the breath to achieve cathartic release, the therapeutic process Middendorf work offers is above all a positive process of integration. Cathartic and disorganising experience often occurs as part of this process but the primary focus is to let the breath show the way.
- Rather than effacing the personal as merely contingent in an approach to ultimate reality, Middendorf work unfolds, distils, and strengthens the sources that are drawn on in becoming a person.

## APPENDIX TWO

# *Notes on Methods and Materials*

### **Repetition**

Children love repetition, connecting as it usually does with a sense of rhythm. Learning to differentiate the predictable from the unknown and surprising is an important part of development. From a neurological point of view pathways are being formed and consolidated, while a predictable universe also builds the child's sense of emotional security and trust.

### **Beeswax for modelling and candle decorating**

Coloured beeswax is one of the modelling materials children use in Steiner schools. Using the fingers to model with such a warm and fragrant material stimulates their rhythmic system, as well as strengthening fine motor skills. It is also a lot of fun! For very young children, candle-decorating wax is easier to use for modelling, as well as for candle decorating, as it is much thinner. Stockmar is one of the most reputable makes, although others exist and can be obtained from Waldorf websites. See:

<http://www.stockmar.de>

<http://www.mercurius-usa.com/>

<http://www.waldorfresources.org/>

### Wet painting

Wet painting is a technique which enables a very fluid use of brush and colour. It involves soaking good quality painting paper in a tray and sponging off the excess water before applying the paint. Up to the age of 8 these painting experiences can be conveyed in 'colour stories' that try to bring out the essential gestures and 'personality' of different colours.

### The lyre

The pentatonic scale is one common in eastern, and also much folk music. Its important characteristic for young children is that is 'hovers' rather than being rooted in tonic and dominant – like young children themselves who only gradually descend to earth. Lyres are simple stringed instruments which young children can use themselves without acquiring a great deal of skill, as all the strings harmonise with each other.

### Wooden toys

Toys which have a fundamental simplicity encourage children to enjoy the beauty of natural materials and the sensory quality that typically comes with this. Simple toys encourage the child to use his imagination and to be flexible in symbolic play. They can 'become' many different things, whereas fixed, ready-made and mass-produced toys are usually only one thing alone. For instance a doll with only the slightest hint of facial features can assume many moods and characteristics in the child's imagination.

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## *About the Author*

The author's background includes many years working in theatre, writing, and teaching in schools, college, and community education. Nell is also an associate faculty member of the Middendorf Institute for Breath Experience in America and works as a consultant to schools and teacher trainer. She currently resides in Ireland and offers workshops to schools both in Europe and America to enhance healthy breathing rhythm, expression, and dynamic, and integrated learning in groups.

Influenced by many years of teaching in Rudolf Steiner schools – whose curriculum cultivates imagination, inspiration, and intuition in both teaching and learning – combined with many years working as a Middendorf breath practitioner, she sees the breath as supporting and shaping how both children and adults can be at home in the body and find inspiration and wholeness through the breath.



## *Author's Workshops*

Workshops for educators, assistants, and parents are available on a series of related themes.

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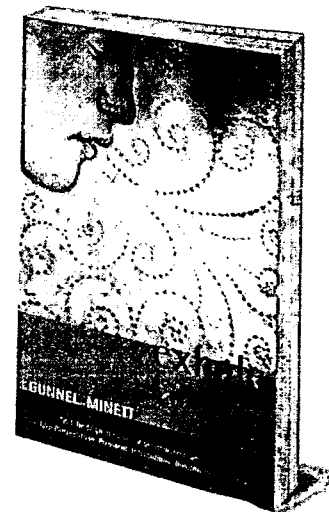
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Gunnel Minett was the General Secretary of the International Breathwork Foundation for five years.

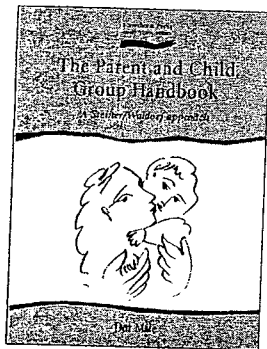
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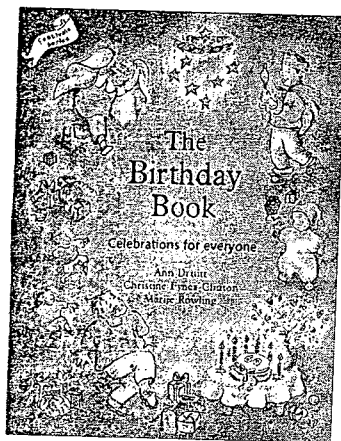
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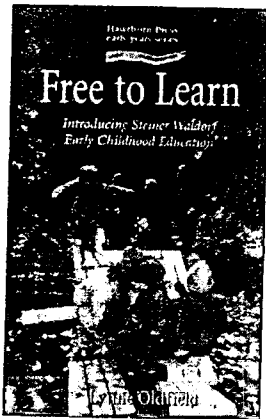
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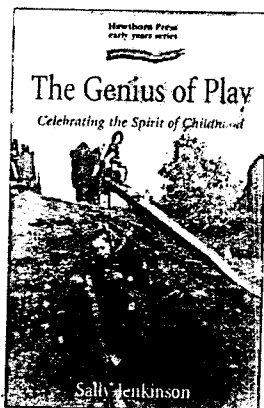
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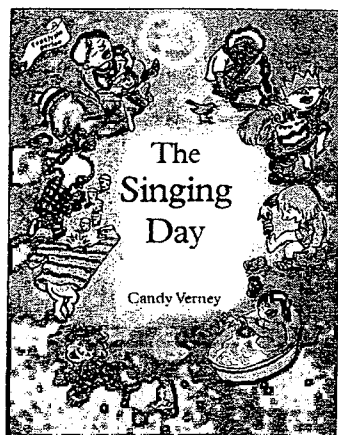
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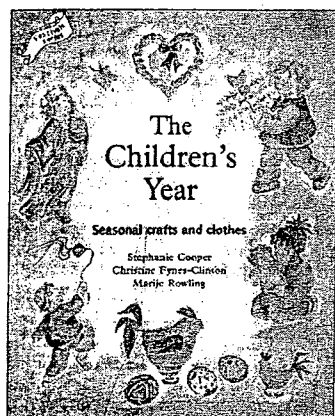
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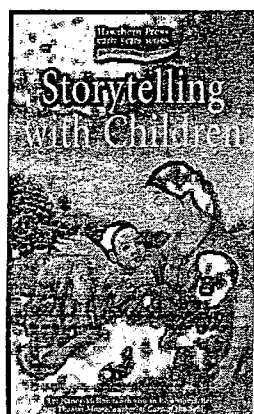
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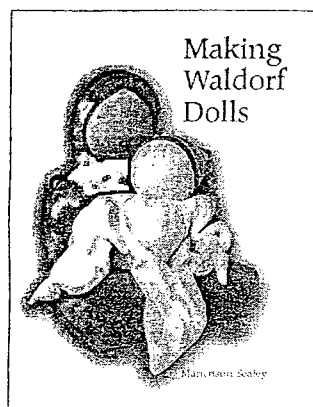


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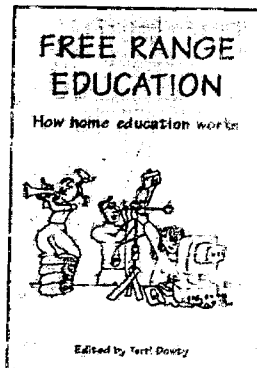
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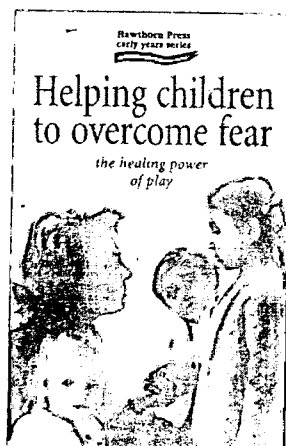
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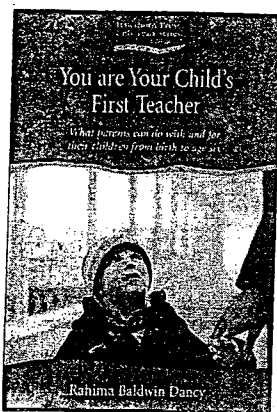
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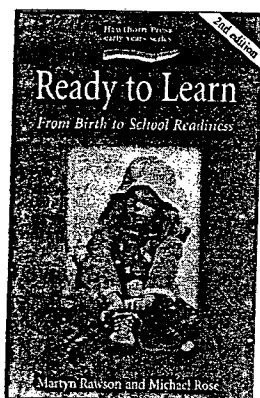
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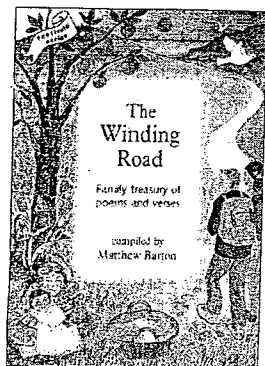
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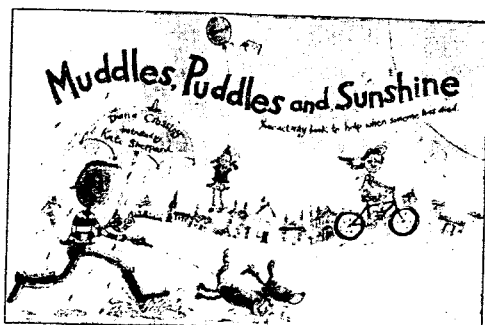
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Celebrate each age and stage of your child's life with this poetic travelling companion. *The Winding Road* offers over 200 poems on the theme of childhood and growing up by writers ancient and modern — from Gaelic blessings to Navajo prayers, from William Blake to Eleanor Farjeon and Billy Collins. This rich treasury of poems, verses, blessings and meditations reflects a child's journey from baby to teenager, from first milestones to leaving home.

224pp; 210 x 148mm; 1 903458 47 1; pb



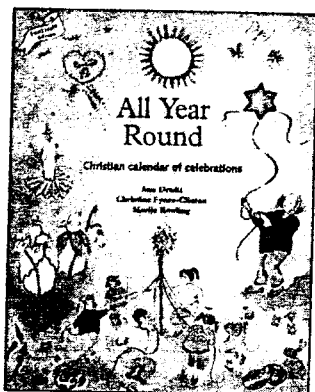
## Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine

Your activity book to help when someone has died.

WINSTON'S WISH

*Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine* offers practical and sensitive support for bereaved children. It suggests a helpful series of activities and exercises accompanied by the friendly characters of Bee and Bear.

32pp; 297 x 210mm landscape; illustrations; 1 869 890 58 2; pb



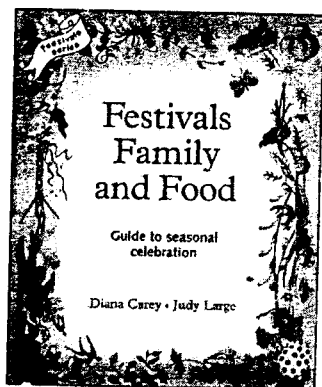
## All Year Round

Christian calendar of celebrations

ANN DRUITT, CHRISTINE FYNES-CLINTON, MARIJE ROWLING

*All Year Round* is brimming with things to make; activities, stories, poems and songs to share with your family. It is full of well-illustrated ideas for fun and celebration: from Candlemas to Christmas and Midsummer's day to the Winter solstice.

320pp; 250 x 200mm; 1 869 890 47 7; pb



## Festivals, Family and Food

Guide to seasonal celebration

DIANA CAREY AND JUDY LARGE

This family favourite is a unique, well-loved source of stories, recipes, things to make, activities, poems, songs and festivals. Each festival such as Christmas, Candlemas and Martinmas has its own, well-illustrated chapter.

224pp; 250 x 200mm; 0 950 706 23 X; pb



## Festivals Together

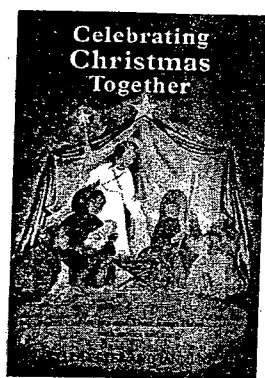
Guide to multicultural celebration

SUE FITZJOHN, MINDA WESTON, JUDY LARGE

Enrich your seasonal celebrations with *Festivals Together*. This resource guide offers stories, things to make, recipes, songs, customs and activities from a wide variety of faiths and cultures including Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh. Enjoy the adventures of Anancy the spider trickster, discover how Ganesh got his elephant head and learn how to make a Filipino Christmas star, Chinese lanterns and spring flower festival decorations!

224pp; 250 x 200mm; 1 869 890 46 9; pb





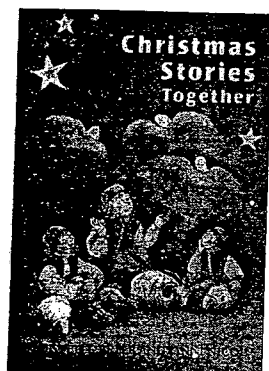
## Celebrating Christmas Together

Nativity and Three Kings Plays with Stories and Songs

ESTELLE BRYER AND JANNI NICOL

This book is an inspiration for anyone who wants to prepare hearts and homes for the wonder of Christmas. This treasury of stories, songs and activities includes instructions for making a nativity scene, and advent calendar.

96pp; 210 x 148mm; 1 903458 20 X; pb;

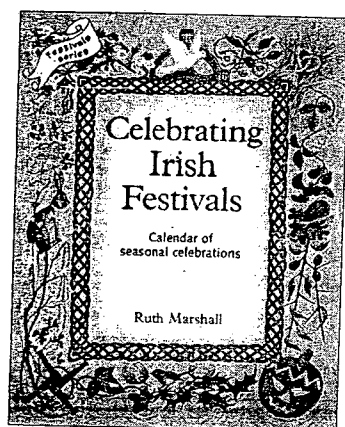


## Christmas Stories Together

ESTELLE BRYER AND JANNI NICOL

A treasure trove of 36 tales for children aged 3-9, with stories ranging from Advent and Christmas to the Holy Family's flight into Egypt. These delightful, gentle and touching stories make a wonderful companion to *Celebrating Christmas Together*.

128pp; 210 x 148mm; 1 903458 22 6; pb



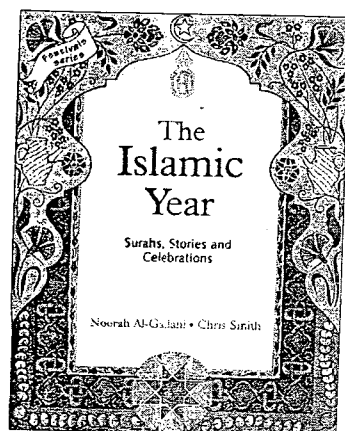
## Celebrating Irish Festivals

Calendar of seasonal celebrations.

RUTH MARSHALL

Here is a comprehensive resource book for anyone looking for festive inspiration for family or school. *Celebrating Irish Festivals* offers something to make, do, read, sing or eat for almost every week of the year. Reaching back to the ancient fire festivals of Imbolc, Bealtaine, Lughnasadh, Samhain, and to Celtic Christianity, Ruth Marshall offers new ways to engage children with meaningful seasonal rituals.

224pp; 250 x 200mm; 1 903458 23 4; pb



## The Islamic Year

Surahs, Stories and Celebrations

NOORAH AL-GAILANI AND CHRIS SMITH

Explore Muslim festivals with this inspiring treasury of stories, surahs, songs, games, recipes, and crafts. The core values of Islamic culture are celebrated through wise and funny folk tales, while activities such as making carrot halva or creating a Seven Heavens mobile offer a practical way of engaging with the themes of the festivals. *The Islamic Year* is beautifully illustrated with a colouring calendar, Arabic calligraphy, traditional patterns, maps and pictures.

240pp; 250 x 200mm; 1 903458 14 5; pb



## Bringing the Best out in Boys

Communication Strategies for Teachers

LUCINDA NEALL

These time tested communication strategies help get the best out of boys. The tips for tackling difficult behaviour will result in more classroom co-operation and learning – so that everyone benefits.

*'Strongly recommended.'*

Times Education Supplement

*'This book makes a notable contribution because it tries to tackle the issues in a positive way, without reducing opportunities for girls. It emphasises positive steps that teachers can take.'*

Ted Wragg, Professor of Education at Exeter University

*'A godsend to harassed classroom teachers.'*

Mike Shankland, Liverpool Hope University

288pp; 210 x 148mm; 1 903458 29 3; pb

## Bringing The Best Out In Boys (video)

Communication Strategies for Teachers

Using real-life classroom scenes and lively interviews, this video and facilitator's guide explores what boys think about school, what motivates and de-motivates them, and suggests communication strategies to engage them in learning. Topics featured include: channelling boys' energy; structure, boundaries and discipline; praise and admiration; and teaching styles. The video can be used by individual teachers, small groups or as the basis for an in-service training session for larger groups. The facilitator's guide gives a summary of the video, highlighting the key points and commenting on the examples of classroom practice.

50 minute PAL (UK) format video with 48pp facilitator's guide

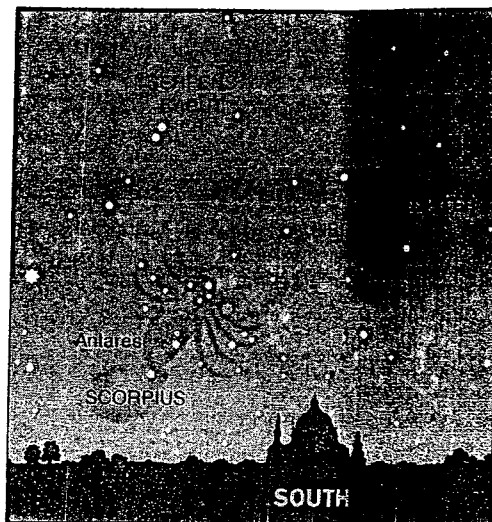
198 x 114mm; 1 903458 41 2

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Explore the wonders of the night skies with the *Stargazers' Almanac* – no telescope required! Track the planets, locate the Milky Way, discover the heavenly Giraffe, Orion's dogs and Draco the dragon, recognise the signs of the zodiac and watch meteor showers and other planetary phenomena. The beautiful, easy to use colour charts make this a great introduction to

astronomy, perfect for beginners, children and back-yard stargazers.



Each monthly chart features two views of the night sky looking north and south; a visual guide to the phases of the moon; and key planets and other objects. The observing notes include fascinating insights into the science, history, folklore and myths of the stars and planets.

*Stargazers' Almanac* also includes:

- Advice on how to navigate the night sky
- Overhead map of the sky
- Reference plan of constellations
- Guide to the signs of the zodiac and how they relate to the stars
- Glossary of constellations and Latin names; glossary of brightness of stars
- Information on the British Astronomical Association's Campaign for Dark Skies

Art and Science series; 32pp; 420 x 297mm landscape; pb

PUBLISHED ANNUALLY

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