



Mindfulness in the garden

The garden can be an active place, but also a great place to relax and re-centre. This activity is designed to allow students to stop and disconnect from what has happened in the previous lesson or in the break, and restart in an outdoor setting with a calm and positive energy and attitude. Don't overthink it: the students might not respond at first, but if you include this as a regular part of your classes, the students will likely become more connected to the space and to this activity. It can be simplified to just focus on breathing deeply in and out, and clearing the mind.

MINDFULNESS SCRIPT

Choose a quiet place, ideally where students gather at the start of a garden lesson. Arrange for students to be seated with some space around them, and read the following script slowly.

- Welcome to the garden. Before we begin the lesson, we are going to spend a few minutes getting settled in these beautiful surrounds.
- Plant your feet firmly on the ground. Sit up straight and relax.
- Take a deep breath in through your nose. Count to three and breathe out through your mouth. One, two, three.
- Continue to breathe in and out, concentrating on the air filling your lungs and being released slowly through your mouth. In, two, three. Out, two, three.
- Notice any thoughts, sensations, or emotions you are feeling and push them aside. They can wait. These few minutes are for you to stop and be present.
- Continue to breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth.
- Now look around. What do you see? Take your time to look. You don't need to rush. Find a plant to focus on and stop. Notice the colours, the shape, the size, and how the light falls on it. How do the leaves look in this moment? Are they flat, curved or twisted? Are the edges smooth or jagged?
- As with any meditation, your mind may begin to wander. Let this happen, notice it, return to your breathing: in, two, three and out, two, three.
- Start noticing the sounds. What do you hear? As you breathe in and out, listen. Can you hear the wind in the leaves? the traffic? the birds singing? the buzz of a bee? Listen harder as you tune back into your breathing. In, two, three and out, two, three.
- Now notice the weather. What can you feel? Become aware of the temperature on your skin. Is it warm, hot, cool or refreshing? Can you feel the sun on your face or your back? Is there a breeze? Is it gentle, blustery or is the air still? Let your body register where you are. Continue to breathe in and out with purpose, and relax. You are in a beautiful place where things grow and thrive; a place of positive vibes.
- With every breath, become aware of any smells or aromas in the garden. Does this smell cause any memories to arise? Notice any sensations or reactions in your body in response to the smell. You may find your stomach growling or your mouth watering in preparation for food.
- Finally think about where you are and what this space means to you. What happens in this garden? What is its purpose? What does it need from you and how can you help?
- As you breathe in and out, look around and decide how you are going to make a difference. What needs doing and what are you going to do? How will you add to its beauty?
- As you collect your thoughts, inhale deeply through your nose, pause and exhale slowly.
- Take two more deep breaths in and out. (*Pause and model two breaths.*) When you are ready, turn to face me with your hands resting on your lap.



Other mindfulness activities

There are many simple ways to encourage mindfulness in the garden, to help students relax and connect with the growing plants and produce. The mindfulness script is one approach; here are some other simple ideas that you could incorporate in a garden lesson.

BREATHE

Ask students to focus on their breathing. By slowing breathing down and establishing a steady rhythm, students become centred, calm and are better able to focus on the lesson.

OBSERVE

Ask students to walk around the garden by themselves, in silence, and notice what has changed, what has grown, what has ripened, what needs watering, what has died, how much water is in the rain gauge, where the weeds have popped up and what needs attending to.

ENGAGE THE SENSES

Ask students to consider the following to help them engage their senses:

- *Listen*. Name one thing that you hear when you listen with your ears in the garden.
- *Look*. Name one thing that catches your attention when you look around in the garden.
- *Smell*. Name a scent that you notice when you take a sniff with your nose in the garden.
- *Touch*. Name an object that you enjoy feeling with your hands when you are in the garden.

MINDFULNESS WITH FOOD

Herbs and other garden produce can be used in a sensory mindfulness activity. Ask students to select something growing in the garden, and examine:

- the appearance (e.g. colour, shape, size, shiny or matte)
- the texture (e.g. smooth, rough, bumpy, spiky)
- any sounds they may hear as they touch it (e.g. rustling of the leaves, squeaking of the surface)
- any aroma or smell they may notice and any memories or reactions this may trigger (e.g. stomach growling, mouth watering, lips pursed, happy times with friends)

ADD GRATITUDE

Ask students to imagine everything that helped get this garden to how it is now. Think about the sunshine, water and soil that fuelled the plant's growth and the people who prepared the garden beds, and planted and cared for each plant: their knowledge, skills, time, energy and perseverance. Ask them to fill themselves with a sense of gratitude and decide to enjoy and make the most of being here.

