

CREATIVE RELAXATION FOR CHILDREN

Relaxation, or *shavasana*, can be one of the most important aspects of yoga for children — especially children today, bombarded as they are, day in and day out, by the sound and imagery of advertising.

Additionally, *shavasana* may be the only quiet relaxation time children get all day.

Have children lie on their backs, arms away from their sides a bit, palms facing up. Legs should be slightly apart. Eye bags help eliminate distractions. Also a blanket may cover them to keep them warm. Many children will be able to lie still, and others will wiggle. Over time most children are able to get into the routine of relaxation.



Have children start by focusing on their breathing. Use a soft, soothing, slow voice and emphasize the in and out of the breath. For older children, instruct them to explore the gaps in the breath: The silence, emptiness and peacefulness.

Explain that our bodies are like batteries. When we rest, we are recharging our bodies with energy so that we can go out into the world and do more wonderful things.

Instruct them that if the mind wanders, see if they can catch it and label it as “thinking” and bring it back to the breath. Tell them to begin again and that it’s OK if the mind wanders. Also have them try and look for the gap that is between the thoughts. Have them try and witness the space.

Most of all emphasize the breath moving in and out, and that at each exhalation the body sinks into the earth and relaxes. It lets go. There are no worries, nothing to do, nothing to achieve, nowhere to go. Use the breath of in and out, letting go and so forth throughout all these meditations. Always remind the children to come back to their bodies, back to their breath.

Children who are especially wiggly can be urged to put their hands on their stomach and/or heart and feel the breath. I remind kids that if they are wiggling around, their monkey is running wild. Kids also can be rewarded for being still by having the honor of ringing the bell when it’s time to get up.

The Floppy Test

After children have taken a position lying down, say you are going to do the “Floppy Test” to see who is really relaxed. Choose a child and pick up his arm and flop it around to see if he is really relaxed. If there is tension or muscular energy, tell him to “Get floppy! Let go!” If the child is relaxed say, “Now here’s a relaxed and floppy yogi!” Continue with a few other children.

For Preschool Children and Up

Peace and Joy Breath

- 1) While in *shavasana*, breathe in “yes,” to my life. Breathe out “love” or “peace.”
- 2) Breathe in “happy.” Exhale “joy.”

Relax

Have children clench fist of their right arm. Super tight! Then let go. Let it all relax. Have them clench their whole arm and fist, then let go.

Continue going through all the parts of the body, chest, to the legs, then the other leg, foot, other arm and hand, then the head, each time clenching each part super tight with all their might, then letting go. Finally have them clench the whole body, super tight! Then let go. Relax. Sink into the earth.

Feather

There is a beautiful bird sitting on a branch. The bird opens its colorful wings and flies upward, floating easy in the sky, free, happy. A feather comes loose. You are that feather. Be the feather, as it slowly, slowly, rocks back and forth in the air, floating downward toward the earth. Back and forth you go, floating, floating. Then you land on the earth, light, happy, relaxed.

Cloud

Imagine that you are resting on a cloud. The cloud is so fluffy and soft, so puffy and light. Feel that cloud under you. It’s like a little bed. The cloud is just floating in the sky, sailing along. There are no worries, nothing to do. It gently floats through the sky with you on it.

Big Sky

You are lying in a beautiful meadow with lovely flowers all around you. You look up into the

sky and see little birds singing and flying by. The sky is so big and beautiful blue. There are no clouds at all. But there is a little black dot up there in that big sky. Just look at that black dot in the big, blue sky.

Sand

Imagine that you are lying on the beach. The beautiful sky and sun are above you. Imagine that sand is filling up your toes and feet. Your toes and feet get so heavy, filled with this sand. They are so heavy they can't move. They are relaxed and sink into the earth. Then the sand moves up your calves and fills them up. They are heavy and sink into the earth. You feel so heavy and relaxed. You let go. Breathing in and out. Then the sand moves up to your knees, to your thighs and fills them up with sand. You are so heavy with sand that you can't move your legs. Then the sand moves up to your chest and all the way up to your neck. Sand is filling you up. You sink into the earth. Relaxed, peaceful. Then the sand moves into your arms, all the way down to your fingers. You are so relaxed and heavy. You let go and sink into the earth. The sand comes up to your face, relaxes your mouth, your eyes, your cheeks, your scalp. They all fill up with sand and sink into the earth. You relax and are so heavy. Your whole body sinks into the earth. You feel calm and peaceful. Breathing in and breathing out.

Sunshine

Imagine that you are lying on the beach. Breathe into your heart and imagine that inside your heart is a beautiful sun. The sun is so warm and it warms up your whole body. Then exhale and the sun comes up above you. The sun shines down on you and you feel its wonderful, golden warmth. The sun's rays touch your toes and feet, and they soak up the sun's light and feel so heavy and warm, they sink into the sand. Down, down, into the earth you go. Happy, safe, peaceful, relaxed.

The sun moves up your calves, your legs, and they soak up the golden sun, and they are heavy and sink into the earth. The sun moves up your hips, stomach, chest, and they just soak up the sun and feel so warm and heavy. They sink into the earth. The sun moves up to your neck, down your arms, into your elbows and fingers. They are heavy, filled with golden light, warmth and happiness. You sink into the earth. You let go. The sun goes all the way up to your head, relaxes your lips, jaw, cheeks, eyes, forehead, scalp. It feels so warm, golden, happy. You sink into the earth. Your whole body is filled with the beautiful, radiant, golden light of the sun. You breathe in the sun back into your heart. And you are relaxed, golden, heavy, happy.

Imagine somebody that you love. Somebody who makes you very happy. Smile at them. Then imagine somebody that you don't like, somebody who gives you trouble. Smile at them. Then see yourself. Smile at yourself. Then see something about yourself that you don't like, something you don't feel good about. Smile at this thing. Smile at yourself. Then take the hand of the person you love very much, and the person who gives you trouble and all three of you go to the place you want to go most in the world. Where is it? What do you do? What things are

happening? What sights, sounds and smells?

Still Pond

Imagine a pond of cool water. Throw a stone in it. See the stone sink to the bottom of the pond. Feel your body, heavy as the stone, sinking, down, down, down. Relaxed. Happy. Peaceful. See the ripples on the pond. Watch them go to the shore. Then see all the ripples disappear, one by one. Until there are no more ripples. Just see the clear, motionless pond. See it all in your mind's eyes.

Flower Heart

Imagine a flower in your heart. What kind of a flower is it? See its color, beauty and smell. Now see that it is in a tiny, beautiful bud. With every breath you take imagine that the flower is opening petal by petal. Every breath you take, you feel full, held and secure. Every exhalation let go and feel your body drop down into the earth as if the flower had roots that are reaching deep down into the earth. Drop like a stone thrown into a pond. Down, down it goes. Then breathe in again into the heart, open the petals a little bit more, and again, exhaling the roots down deeper into the earth. Repeat until the petals are all the way open and the flower is blooming. Look inside the flower. What do you see? What's there in the middle of the flower? Then see yourself in that flower. Happy, smiling, safe, secure.

Dreaming

Breathing in and out. Breathe in calm. Breathe out ease. Breathe in happy. Breathe out love.

Breathe in peace. Breathe out joy.

See yourself doing something that you've always wanted to do. Something that you're good at. Or something that you want to become when you are older. What is it? It could be something you are about to do in the future, or something that's going to happen. What dream of yourself are you bringing into the world? What is your passion? See yourself participating, doing it masterfully. Feel how happy you are doing that which you love to do and doing it beautifully.

Expanding

Close your eyes. Look down with your inner eye to the heart. Feel the breath move in and out. Then see yourself in your heart and say to yourself: "I love myself. I trust myself. I lovingly give, and I lovingly receive back." Then see somebody that you love. Send your love to them. Feel them sending love back to you. See somebody you don't like. Send them love. Feel them give you love back. Then breathe in feeling love, then breathe out, and send the love into the

room, beyond your body. To all the people around you. Breathe in and feel them giving you love back. That love you receive is just as big as the love that you sent out. On the out breath, expand outward to the whole school; on the in breath feel the love coming back to you, the love of the whole school coming into you. Say to yourself, “I am loved.” Exhale again and expand outward toward the whole city, the whole state, the country, the earth, and the whole universe into infinity. When you breathe in, you receive infinity back to yourself in love. You are infinity. Say to yourself: “I am loved. I am love. I am peace. I am peace.”

For Elementary

Diamond Cave

Imagine that you are barefoot walking through the woods. Feel the soft, green forest floor beneath your feet. Look up and see the tops of the trees and the sun streaming through them. You notice an animal. What kind of an animal is it? Watch it walk away and show you down a little path. You feel safe and happy, and follow the animal along the path. You go to a cave. The cave is lit with little diamonds along the way. Follow the animal into the cave, feeling safe and happy as you follow the diamonds lighting the way. The diamonds stop and you find yourself in the middle of the cave. Then a little window opens up from above and beautiful light pours down on you. It bathes you in love, safety and happiness. Make a wish. Anything that you want. Anything that you most want in the world or want to do. Say thank you, and then set it free, knowing that your wish has been heard. Then relax. Rest. Come out of the cave, go back down the path. Now lie down in a beautiful meadow and rest.

Sunshine and Sunflowers

Imagine planting a seed at the bottom of your spine. Water the seed with your breath. Each time you inhale the plant begins to grow. Now imagine the seed right below your stomach. It rests there for a moment and then begins to grow again upward. With every breath, it moves into your tummy, then into your heart, then up to your throat, then in the middle of your forehead. Now imagine a rolling field blooming with yellow sunflowers. You are the sunflower, gazing tall at the sky and earth. Now imagine taking a crown full of sunflowers and placing it on your head. In the crown imagine unfolding the sunflowers petal by petal and showering your body with golden light.

Sailing Away

Get in a little boat. Lie on your back. Feel the water rock you back and forth, back and forth, as if you were in your mother or father’s arms rocking. Feel so peaceful, safe, relaxed. Breathing in and out. The sailboat gently rocks in the lake, floating, happy. It comes to a little island. You get up and look around. What is your island? What do you see? Somebody is there to greet you. They take you somewhere. Where is it? A city, a castle? A garden, a jungle? What do you see and visit? Who is there? Be there for a while. Explore this place for a while. But then it’s

time to say good-bye. The greeter gives you a gift. What is it? What are you supposed to do with it? Thank them for the gift. Get in your boat, sail back home. Rocking back and forth. Slowly, slowly. Relax. Let go.

Body Points

Starting at the top of the head breathe in. Exhale down to the right leg. Inhale back to the head, exhale to the left leg. Inhale to the head, exhale to the tailbone. Inhale to the head, exhale to the stomach. Inhale to the head, exhale to the heart. Inhale to the head, exhale to the right hand. Inhale to the head, exhale to the left hand. Inhale to the head, exhale to the neck. Inhale to the head, exhale to the forehead. Inhale and exhale to the top of the head. Then release. Bring focus back to the heart.

Ending Shavasana

Give about 2–5 minutes for quiet time and then sing the breathing song quietly to them. Ring the bell and tell children to start wiggling their toes and hands and then to inhale and stretch arms over head. Bring knees to chin and give self a hug, then roll over on right side and rest. Then use arms to pull up to sitting.

After *shavasana* have children talk about their experiences and tell stories about what they did, where they went and how they felt. Encourage them to give details and bring out more parts of the story by asking, what happened next?

Encourage them to write stories, write down dreams, paint pictures, draw, sculpt, whatever they wish to express their experiences while in *shavasana*.

ENDINGS

Ending Class

Ask a few children to tell the main story back to you. One person can do the beginning, the others the middle and the end. Coach them along with details or story elements if you need to.

After each child tells his part, ask him to show the class a pose that he remembers from that part of the story. Encourage children to practice those poses at home.

Have a child who has behaved well and participated, or the most improved, have the honor of ringing the bell, or saying goodbye to the puppet or object. They can put it away in its special box if there is one.

Heaven and Earth

Children in cross legged position to begin. Thumbs and index fingers together to form a triangle. Beginning at the base of the spine — “I am.” Next, bringing hands into prayer position, *anjali mudra*, in front of heart — “I am love.” Then, hands reach over the head, with thumbs and index fingers together again, palms facing away — “I am light.” Bending at the elbow, right hand up, index finger and thumb together — “I am heaven.” Left hand, index finger and thumb together, pointing down — “I am earth.” Bring both hands up at sides, bending at the elbows. Make circles with hands and forearms — “I am creation.” Reverse circle directions — “I am destruction.” Reverse again — “I am creation.” Arms crossing in front of body — “I am a child of God (light, love, etc.)” Release arms and reach into the sky. Bring arms back in cross in front of body. Remain in silence for a few seconds.

End with Namaste

The ritual of yoga is over, as all students bring hands into prayer position, *anjali mudra*, and bow out in namaste.

This is a sample chapter of the book Storytime Yoga. To order a copy of the book please call 303-456-6311 or visit www.storytimeyoga.com.