

Thornwood Yoga



BY DENÉ ERIN OGLESBY

CHAIR YOGA FOR THE CLASSROOM

Every body needs

BREATH • MOVEMENT • REST

throughout the day.

Observe your breath. “I am breathing in, I am breathing out.” or “Inhale 1, Exhale 1, Inhale 2, Exhale 2” and so on to your desired number. Don’t rush or change the breath. Just observe it.

Wake up the face. Tap with fingers or smooth with thumb from center of forehead, nose, and chin from the center outward to hairline, temples, and ears.

Stretch the neck. Keeping body still with a tall spine, look back and forth, up and down, side to side, make small circles with your nose in front of you.

Move the shoulders. Give yourself some heart hugs by inhaling deeply and exhaling loudly out the mouth. As you breathe this way, scrunch shoulders up to ears and release with an exhale, try to move shoulders together behind the back and release with an exhale, and finally, push shoulders together in front of chest and release with an exhale. Repeat as much as you like to relieve stress!

Warm the hands. Version 1 - Clasp one hand into the other firmly, like you are making a Play-Do pancake. Squeeze firmly. Open hands and switch so the bottom hand is now on top. Keep switching back and forth. Version 2 – Interlace fingers together and gently squeeze. Open hands and interlace the opposite way with the other thumb in front facing your chest. Keep switching back and forth.

Swing the joints. Standing, begin to swing arms together, forward and back. Notice how your body works to keep you upright. Now, as your arms swing up, bend the elbows, then swing them back forward, before going back. Next, shift your balance to one leg and swing your leg. Use a chair or wall for stability. Similar to the arms, as you swing the leg back, also bend at the knee. Swing for as long as you like, making sure to repeat on the other.

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Tap the body. Using gently formed fists, knock lightly on body parts to get circulation moving and stimulate the lymphatic system. This is a Qi Gong practice borrowed from Chinese traditional medicine. Arms – start on top of shoulder, moving down outermost part of arm, all the way to the back of the wrist. At the wrist, flip arm over and tap upward the innermost part of the arm. When you get to the elbow, lift your arm and tap under the arm. Don't skip the armpit! That's where a primary collection of lymph nodes are located. Repeat twice on both arms. Legs – start on the outermost part of the hips, tapping down the outermost part of the leg, down the thighs, and calf muscles. At the outer calf, just before the ankle bone, turn your feet open and tap upward the innermost parts of the legs. When you get to the upper leg/groin, try to tap across the crease of the lap where the leg meets the lower abdomen. Again, this is another big collection of lymph nodes not to be missed! Repeat tapping both legs simultaneously.

Stretch the sides. From seated, reach up one arm, hold the bottom of the chair with the other hand for stability, and lean to open up the side. Repeat on both sides. Variation – Interlace fingers and turn palms up to the sky, then stretch!

Twist the spine. From seated, look to the side, reach the same arm or hand to the back of the chair, and use the chair to leverage your twist. Stay for a few seconds and gently breathe, noticing the diaphragm as it stretches. Repeat on the other side.

Move the spine. From seated, put feet flat on floor, hands on knees. Scoot forward away from the back of the chair. Tilt chin to chest and slouch as far back as you can as you exhale. As you inhale, lift chin up to the sky, drop your belly and arch your back. With little ones, enjoy some animal noises! CAT for the arched back, COW for the big belly stretch. Variation – relax your face as you slouch back; lemon pucker, scowl, smile, or stick your tongue out and cross your eyes as far as you can when you look up.

Rotate the ankles. From seated, make your foot circle around to bring movement to the ankle joint. Go both directions ten times for each ankle or spell out your entire name as if you had a marker on your big toe. Now, spell it backward!

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Open the hips. From seated, place feet together, then separate the knees. The outside edge of your feet should be toward the ground. Circle your upper body like you are going on a tilt-a-whirl ride. Go both directions several times. Variation 1 – try putting some blocks under the edges of the feet or practice sitting on the floor. Wings are allowed to flap gently and gracefully, like a BUTTERFLY. Variation 2 – As you circle, incorporate the CAT/COW movements from above for a wonderful stretch. Slow it down and speed it up. See what feels best.

Stretch the low back and legs. From seated, pick up one leg and cross the ankle on top of the opposite knee. Lean forward gently into this PIGEON or figure four position. You can rock in and out of the pose following your breath, or gently breathe and focus on relaxing the body in the pose on the exhales. Repeat on other side. Variation – Try this standing to play with balance and for space for a deeper stretch.

Release the “sillies”. Stand up and make sure you have plenty of space around you. Step legs out wider than hip width. Begin to sway side to side picking up one heel from the ground at a time, keeping toes on the ground. Begin to let the arms swing away from the body. Try to let go of controlling and enjoy a release in the low back and twisting up the spine. Check out how funny everyone’s ELEPHANT ARMS look.

Waterfall Breath. Stand up and make you have plenty of space in front of you. Inhale deeply and exhale with the loudest moan, groan, or sigh you can make. Relax your knees and pretend you are a ragdoll or puppet. Now, fling your arms up and overhead with an inhale, down and in front of you toward the ground on an exhale, and repeat until you’ve gotten out everything you need to. Hang in a forward fold with your knees, neck and face soft for a moment or two before coming back up.

Breath of Joy. Play with your inhale to exhale ratio. Practice inhaling like you are a sniffing rabbit and exhale deeply. Now, practice 3:1 inhale:exhale purposefully. Add movement. Inhale 1 – Arms forward in front of the body like a zombie. Inhale 2 – Arms out to the sides in a T. Inhale 3 – Arms up overhead like an air traffic controller. EXHALE – ragdoll and let arms fall down and in front of you like in Waterfall Breath. Note: this is a breath practice meant to stimulate the body, pump extra oxygen into the system. Don’t do this with already rowdy kids! :D

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Rest and relax. Turn off the lights and set a timer. Either lying on the ground or putting feet up on another chair, interlace fingers to rest on the abdomen. Close your eyes. Watch the breath again or just notice the rising and falling of your hands on the abdomen. See how still and quite you can be. What is your mind doing? Is it fast? Is it slow? Whatever thoughts or feelings come into it, see if you can watch them as they come and eventually go. Rest and enjoy doing nothing, but being your awesome self, knowing you've earned a break.

A note to teachers:

These quick chair yoga exercises for the classroom are designed with practicality, from one classroom educator to another. I know curriculum time is precious so choose one for a transition, as a way to start, or end class. Feel free to rename them or have students draw their daily yoga break out of a box!

Our students need healthy ways to connect to their bodies and even a short moment of BREATH • MOVEMENT • REST can help immensely. I've highlighted a few specific practices (tapping face, swinging the joints, tapping the body, and Breath of Joy) that are very energizing and have the possibility of overstimulating certain students. Use them right away in the morning or for an afternoon pick me up.

Finally, these are written with detailed notes so you could pick one and read the script or have students read them. No nonsense, practical yoga for your classroom!

Please feel free to reach out with any further questions, requests for yoga workshops related to your curriculum, or additional ideas for ways to support the whole child in our classrooms. HAL teachers can request my services for free through the Nebraska Association for the Gifted.

Namasté!

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Wellness Presentations • Personal Yoga Programs • Retreats

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500 Hour Registered Yoga Teacher

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