

JOURNEY IN... YEAR THREE

THE DIVINE WITHIN

ART

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- 'Practice' implies having the discipline and commitment to do something over and over again until it becomes second nature. Artistic, musical, athletic and language skills are all things that demand practice, as kids know well.
- It takes practice to establish a strong connection to the divine presence within us and in our lives. We call this sort of effort 'spiritual practice'.
- Each person can find a spiritual practice that helps cultivate inner balance and depth. There are plenty of options to choose from, drawing from many traditions and schools of thought.

Lesson Materials

- Bamboo brushes
- Washable black ink
- Practice paper
- High quality paper
- Images of Chinese characters such as 'love', 'peace', etc.

TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in. And when you chew, chew only the carrot, not your projects or your ideas.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Do you have a body? Don't sit on the porch! Go out and walk in the rain!

– Kabir

At the end of his spiritual talks, Gurdjieff said "Amen." When asked to translate "Amen," one of Gurdjieff's closet pupils answered, "Give it a try!"

– Michel Legris

Any act that protects life is sacred. Technology that is dedicated to life-saving purposes acquires sanctity as well, and its use becomes a holy act.

– Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Every act done in the sunlight of awareness becomes sacred.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Every time you pick up a piece of trash along the road, say to yourself, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the house of the Lord."

– Edward Hays in *Psalms for Zero Gravity*

This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God.

– Walt Whitman

If you keep your practice steady, morning and night, summer and winter, there is nothing you cannot do and nothing that can harm you.

– from the *Upasakashila Sutra*

What is your preferred spiritual practice? How would you describe your commitment to it? What benefits do you reap? Are there any habits or acts in your life that are unrecognized spiritual practices?

Did you understand spiritual practice as a child? Imagine the gift you are giving your students, sharing this idea with them, offering them possible tools to find and keep their balance throughout their life!

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- You might find the word **discipline** a helpful tool, but be sure to clarify that in this sense, the word discipline doesn't mean that we punish ourselves. Discipline comes from an old word that means "teaching". When we commit to a new discipline, it means we're teaching ourselves something new.
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YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

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GATHERING AND FOCUSING

🕒 4-5 minutes

Check-in: What are some art skills and techniques that a person might have to practice to get good at?

Raise your hand if you've practiced: Folding origami? Drawing still lifes? Drawing animals? Drawing cartoons? Painting with watercolors? Calligraphy?

PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE CALLIGRAPHY: CHINESE CHARACTERS

🕒 40-45 minutes

Artists must practice their techniques to achieve the level of skill they need to transform their imagination into a work of art. Did you know that people have to practice being spiritually centered, too? Lots of people do t'ai chi, pray, meditate, sing, chant....and some people practice calligraphy.

Calligraphy is the art of beautiful writing. Calligraphers practice writing over and over again until they can do it fluidly and make each kind of letter from memory. In the Chinese language, each character has a different form and a different meaning. Skilled calligraphers practice the characters over and over again until each brushstroke is perfect. The perfected art is revered as a spiritual achievement.

We'll get a feeling for practice today by learning some Chinese calligraphy.

- Show the class the selection of characters that they can choose to learn. Have each child select one.
- Provide each child with a brush, ink pot, ink and several pieces of practice paper.
- Invite them to practice the character over and over again until it's a perfect replica of the original. Point out the position, angle and thickness of each stroke can affect the meaning of the character.
- When a child feels confident that he or she can create the character perfectly from memory, award him or her a piece of beautiful paper to create their final character on. See if they can write the character without looking at a reference. They can choose to write the English

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

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translation on the paper. You can mount it on a piece of card stock with mounting dots for a beautiful finished product.

Wondering Together

- I wonder why anyone would choose to practice writing beautifully? Why not just write any old way?
- I wonder why you chose the character you did?
- I wonder how long it would take someone to become an expert at writing all 3,500 commonly used Chinese characters....?
- I wonder what happened to your regular thoughts as you were practicing making the characters?
- I wonder how you felt if you didn't get it exactly right. Did you try again?
- I wonder how writing could help us connect with our spirit?
- I wonder what would happen if you did Chinese calligraphy every day?
- I wonder what you might choose to be your spiritual practice?

CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING

🕒 2 minutes

Gather in a circle, take each other's hands and speak these words:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you.
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.
 Deep peace of the shining stars to you.
 Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.