



“THE GUEST HOUSE” POEM AND BODY SCAN FOR TEENS

"We might begin by scanning our body ... and then asking, "What is happening?" We might also ask, "What wants my attention right now?" or, "What is asking for acceptance?"

—Tara Brach

OVERVIEW

Share a poem that focuses on mindful self-acceptance, and lead students to pay attention to their bodies, noticing the physical sensations and feelings they experience.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Daily, for at least one week or longer
- At the start of a school day, at the beginning or end of class in a health course or elective for students
- When you or your students are experiencing tension, anger, or anxiety

TIME REQUIRED

- 10-15 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- Bell or chime

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice observing physical sensations throughout their bodies
- Learn to begin linking bodily sensations to emotions

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a quiet moment at home or during a break in the school day to try a [body scan practice](#)--a mindfulness practice that asks you to systematically focus your attention on different parts of your body, from your feet to the muscles in your face. It is designed to help you develop a mindful awareness of your bodily sensations, and to relieve tension wherever it is found.
- How did this exercise make you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

GETTING STARTED

This poem by a poet named Rumi can be used as an example of how to treat our emotions as they come and go.

- Read the following poem aloud to students. You may also consider asking one or two students to read the poem aloud after you. [It can be helpful hear a poem read more than once--and with different voices and emphases used.]
- Before you begin reading, ask students to mentally note any words, images, or phrases that stand out for them as they think about how they experience their emotions.

THE POEM

"The Guest House"

*This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!*

*Even if they are a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still, treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice.
Meet them at the door laughing and invite them in.
Be grateful for whatever comes.
Because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.*

— Rumi

- Tell students:
 - *Any time you experience an emotion, you can notice what "guest" or emotion has come into your mind and where it goes in your body.*
- Ask:
 - *How do emotions show up (or manifest) in your body?*
- Invite them to share responses, if they are comfortable. If not, let them know where and how you experience emotions in your own body. (Perhaps you feel tightness in your chest when you experience anxiety or worry--or maybe you feel tension in your throat when you are frustrated or butterflies in your stomach when you are scared.)
- Tell students:
 - *Let's spend a few minutes trying a "body scan" practice where we will observe the physical sensations we feel in our bodies.*

THE PRACTICE

[Ring bell or chime; take three deep, mindful breaths together.]

[Read the following script slowly, pausing, as appropriate.]

Let your eyes close, and your body be still and quiet. Get comfortable in your chair. Now bring your attention to the top of your head. See if you can feel any little feelings or sensations. Maybe you feel prickly or vibrating sensations, or maybe your head feels tingly or soft. No need to talk about what you feel right now—just notice it; pay attention.

Now we are going to try scanning our whole body for sensations. A sensation is anything you can feel in your body. You may feel very strong sensations, or you may feel weak ones. Don't worry; anything you feel is fine. Also, you may not feel anything at all. Just be curious, no matter what you feel.

So from the top of your head, move to your face; pay attention to your forehead.

Pay attention to your eyes; relax your eyes.

Pay attention to your cheeks.

Your nose.

Your mouth—relax your jaw.

Pay attention to your chin.

The back of your head.

Notice your neck and throat.

Then, bring your attention to your left shoulder, resting your attention there.

Notice your upper left arm, your elbow, and now your lower arm and hand.

Then all five fingers.

Then move your attention to your right shoulder; feel your right upper arm, right elbow, lower arm, hand, and fingers.

Come back to your back, and feel your upper back for any sensations.

You may not feel anything, or maybe you feel some discomfort or some pressure or tingles or itches.

Scan your attention across your back and down your spine and to your lower back.

Now come up to your chest, and feel the sensations in your chest.

Feel your belly.

Take your time; we don't have to rush.

Notice where your body is touching the chair.

Now feel your left leg from the hip to the knee.

Feel the knee and the calf. Feel the ankle. Feel the foot and all five toes.

Place our attention on your right hip, and feel the right thigh, your knee, your calf, and feel your foot and all five toes.

Now notice your entire body, all at once. Keep your attention on your entire body, letting your attention notice everything at once.

Silently consider the following questions:

- *Could you feel anything in your face?*
- *What part of your face could you feel? Eyes, eyelids, nose, chin, lips, jaw?*
- *What did it feel like? Soft, tense, cool, warm?*
- *Could you relax your jaw or eyes? What did it feel like?*
- *What part of your body was the easiest to feel?*
- *What part was the hardest to feel?*
- *How do you feel now?*

CLOSURE (FOR JOURNALING AND/OR DISCUSSION)

- Is being able to focus your attention like this important? Why?
- When you are in the present moment, not the past or the future, how do you feel?
- What is the most difficult emotion for you to feel? How do you normally handle it? How could mindfulness help you when you experience that emotion?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did they appear calmer and more focused? How do you feel?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

The body scan is a foundational component of [Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction](#) for adults and many adapted mindfulness programs for youth. A [2014 meta-analysis](#) that focuses on 24 mindfulness studies with K-12 students demonstrated changes in students' attention and resilience to stress, including positive emotions, self-esteem and self-concept. Further, a [2019](#) targeted review of mindfulness interventions with young adolescents indicated multiple benefits to teens' well-being.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Teens face numerous daily stressors that can negatively affect their learning and development. Teaching students about a practice that directly addresses these stressors in their bodies may ultimately bolster their personal well-being—and even improve their [attention and executive functions](#) (e.g., self-control, planning, decision-making, etc.) as well as their [school functioning](#).

SOURCE

Adapted from Mindful Schools' High School Curriculum (Class #11).