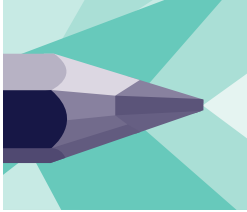


*Thank you*

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Please enjoy these complimentary exercises from *Mindful by Design* by Caitlin Krause. This book demystifies mindfulness and empowers each individual to embrace a personal mindfulness practice and inspire powerful learning environments. The following exercises on walking meditation and levity moments include step-by-step mindfulness lessons embedded into specific curriculum areas, ready to implement immediately.

[LEARN MORE](#) about this title, including Features, Table of Contents and Reviews.



## EXERCISE 2

# Kiss the Earth (Walking Meditation)

**As a long-distance runner,** cross country coach, and all-around athletic zealot, I was forced to stop my regular sports routine when I developed a complicated stress fracture in my foot. It coincided with (and certainly intensified) deeper discoveries about mindfulness and meditation. Each day, as I learned to walk again, I felt such appreciation for my feet. As Thich Nhat Hanh (2005) says, I was learning to “kiss the Earth” as I walked, practicing such gratitude for each step, and for my body’s improving health.

Even after recovering, I retained that sense of connection to Earth. Many mindfulness practices incorporate walking in some way; there are mindful retreats and expeditions that involve longer pilgrimages. As Valerie Brown (2015), co-author of *The Mindful School Leader*, says in a blog post about mindful pilgrimages, “The road teaches us what we need to know.” Brown leads pilgrimages along an ancient path in northern Spain and reflects about the feeling of presence: “In walking El Camino, I trained myself to be present each moment, not thinking ahead to the next hill or the next turn in the road.” In just the same way, on a smaller scale, this walking meditation offers a calm way to reconnect with what is local and immediate. We tune in to our own grounding force, processing the artful, sensual journey of walking itself.

### Mindfulness Skills Taught

- **AWARE:** builds awareness of sensations, surroundings, and presence
- **ADVANCING:** trains our bodies to process each step; to see the inner journey, too, and not the destination
- **AUTHENTIC:** connects us with our own inner nature, as we also appreciate the environment surrounding us

### Practice

- Choose a space for this walking meditation, outside or inside. The length of time and distance is up to you.
- Begin by taking a moment to stand in place, feeling the body and its connection to the ground or the floor.
- Take in your environment, noticing any sounds, sights, scents, tastes—anything that’s surrounding you. Also acknowledge how you are feeling emotionally in this moment, and just let that feeling be, as it is.

- ▶ While standing still, try shifting your weight, subtly, from your left foot to your right, and back again. Feel how that affects your stance and stature; feel from your head, down your spine, down your legs, to your feet, how even small changes in the placement of your weight make you feel.
- ▶ Now, try lifting one foot, moving it forward, and placing it down. Mindfully shift your weight, lifting the other foot, moving it forward, and placing it down. Continue to walk slowly, at this conscious pace, feeling the shifts and changes in your body while doing so.
- ▶ Walk with awareness and with focus, one step at a time.
- ▶ Each time, as your mind starts to wander, reconnect with your feet, your ground, and continue to focus on the sensations of slowly walking, “kissing the Earth.”
- ▶ Walk with this level of mindfulness, taking in your environment, focusing on the awareness of one step at a time.
- ▶ As soon as you finish this walking meditation exercise, which might be after five or fifteen minutes, depending on what you choose, I recommend taking time to write down any thoughts or feelings in a journal.

## Extensions and Additional Resources

The walking meditation is something you can literally take “on the road” wherever you go; it suits any time of day and every environment.

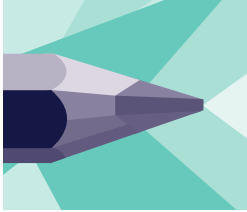
Informally, it can be practiced everywhere. You also don’t need to walk at a “snail’s pace” to feel a connection; I have tried my own variation of a “foot-strike meditation” while running, really feeling my connection with the trail. Of course, this became easier for me after I had some practice under my belt with slower walking meditations, as I had established a connection with all of the subtle feelings in my feet and body.

It’s hard to perform this “insight” sort of meditation while walking with someone else and having a conversation. The next exercise, “On Listening,” however, provides ideas for partner exercises, which can be wonderful forms of mindfulness and listening practice. I use them often!

Online, you can find recordings and information about movement meditations and walking meditations. Just as we know that some students are kinesthetic learners, if you find your body wanting to move itself, and seated/still meditation practices are especially challenging for you, this walking meditation offers a wonderful alternative.

I’ve also created my own variations for hiking, climbing, swimming, and other movements that tend to have their own natural rhythm and pace that connect with mindfulness. Later, I give more details about this in the exercise “Daring Greatly,” which challenges us to go beyond expectations and comfort zones, seeing what happens when we step into the unknown.

Enjoy the journey!



## EXERCISE 4

# Levity Moments

**We've all had an experience of levity**, at different times in our lives—there we were, weighed down by a heavy thought, and then we noticed something that entirely changed our perspective, lightening the mood. We were busy ruminating when the rainbow appeared—and, luckily, we were aware enough to notice. Sometimes, it helps to recall those small, wondrous moments that make us laugh or smile, or just the quirky things we like that remind us we are human, even while feeling anxious or under pressure. This activity can be started at the beginning of a class and shared at the end. It's especially useful when a class community feels burdened, experiencing stress of some sort.

### Mindfulness Skills Taught

- ▶ **AWARE:** builds awareness of the five senses, and practices the art of close observation
- ▶ **ADVANCING:** allows students to practice sometimes subtle humor and the art of play; helps build listening skills; helps decrease stress
- ▶ **AUTHENTIC:** encourages students to check in with their own senses of pressure, to allow for a “lift” to take place, and to appreciate the smaller moments

### Challenge Tips

This exercise is an invitation for mindfulness to become part of the day in a way that's engaging, fun, and accessible for all. Some students might need to hear a few examples (see below) before they grasp what it's all about—after all, how often do we collect the “little moments” and lift them up? The challenge can grow from here; this is a perception-builder. I encourage students to keep practicing this art on their own; as their awareness of the details in the world around them builds, the experience of noticing becomes even more rewarding.

**Time Requirement:** Twenty minutes (ten minutes at the beginning of class; ten minutes at the end, to read the finished piece out loud)

## Resource Materials Needed

- ▶ **EXAMPLES** you create yourself to share as an introduction

## How to Teach It

Tell students that during the class time, they'll also create a collective, traveling list of "levity moments." You might wish to read the introductory blurb for this exercise ("Sometimes, it helps to recall . . .") as a warm-up. I usually also add a few of my own as examples, sharing my own quirky side, too. I'll reveal to students that I love it when the expiration date on the milk reads my birthday—for some reason, it gives me a lift, reminding me that my birthday is on its way, coming soon! I also enjoy lying in grass at night in summertime, listening to crickets chirping. I consider these small moments meaningful, even if they might seem quite ordinary.

### Setting the Context

You might wish also to tell them, for instance, that the poet John Keats was famous for his great attention to detail, writing odes to "ordinary" things like a bird (nightingale) and a vase (a Grecian urn, to be precise)! He also suffered from myopia, and his near-sightedness might have made him even more prone to seeing things up close, focusing on the beauty of the detail (Townsend, 2011).

In fact, many of the world's greatest minds have made amazing discoveries through their ability to focus on the finer points. This sort of attention to detail can be honed. Sometimes, it involves "levity moments" of recognizing something beautiful; at other times, it might involve simply noticing a detail that others consider unremarkable.

Science is filled with these mindful moments of awareness. In science and medicine, it's this level of "noticing" that is part of the discovery process. For example, in the 1920s, Dr. Alexander Fleming noticed that mold had grown on one of his experimental petri dishes, inhibiting a pathogen. Later, his student, Dr. Cecil Paine, would demonstrate that penicillin, a drug derived from the mold, could effectively combat bacterial disease (Gottfried, 2005).

In a similar sense, many mathematicians will notice their concepts evidenced in nature, or will find themselves "lifted out" of the rut of problem-solving through a moment of levity and release.

Designers operate with a similar sensibility. Graphic artist David Carson ([davidcarsondesign.com/](http://davidcarsondesign.com/)), for example, finds himself inspired by travels, local signposts, and graffiti art. The new details he encounters inform his art and perspective.

In mindfulness, this appreciation for the finer, smaller points is part of building awareness. Students can be encouraged to embrace their abilities, which we often have in a heightened state as young children. Finding levity, or lifting, in these moments, is part of the gift that's in our human nature. It's up to us to choose to use it.

## Mindfulness Writing Exercise Prompt

**Levity Moments:** For this exercise, we're passing around a piece of paper—a traveling poem of sorts. When the paper reaches you, add a line that briefly describes your “levity moment,” something you see as uplifting, making you laugh or smile. Some people call each moment like this “a moment of wonder” because it takes you out of yourself and reminds you to observe and celebrate the small, special qualities of life. Don't think too hard—these can be quirky and uplifting! Then fold the paper over so the next person can't see what was written before them.

Students can do this on their own, and a separate discussion/course of study can be happening simultaneously in the classroom, as the paper quietly travels. Encourage students not to share ideas or talk about the levity moments until the final product is shared out loud.

Here's a compilation of Levity Moments contributed by students in a ninth-grade class I taught:

### Levity Moments

- ▶ Popping bubble wrap
- ▶ The crunch of the apple when you take the first bite
- ▶ Looking for your sunglasses and they're on top of your head
- ▶ Silent ripples of waves on the ocean at night
- ▶ When a bag of peanuts or a jar of peanut butter says “may contain nuts”
- ▶ When you smile at someone frowning and then they smile back
- ▶ The smooth top of the peanut butter when you open a new jar
- ▶ When you open a fortune cookie and it's relevant to something you're going through
- ▶ Chewing to a beat
- ▶ Making awkward eye contact with people in other cars
- ▶ Watching someone in a passing car dancing and singing to a song on the radio
- ▶ The urge to laugh in quiet moments
- ▶ Opening a Snapple bottle and pressing the safety button up and down, up and down
- ▶ When my cat hears something but turns only one ear, not her whole head
- ▶ The white crayon

When class time has ten minutes left, collect the paper, unfold, and read aloud.

## The Takeaway

Students understand the need to slow down and notice positive experiences, even (and especially!) during stressful periods.

The exercise builds an appreciation for laughter, an attention to detail, and an honoring of community.

If you like, you can encourage students to snap their fingers a few times if this “levity moment” also reaches them. This serves as a reinforcement, showing students they have a lot in common. The “snap for solidarity” has been around since Roman times, I’ve heard, and is making its resurgence in recent years. It shows agreement without disrupting the flow of an audio reading or such performance.

I traditionally incorporate this exercise into every school year, and it’s a true crowd-pleaser. Not only do students love the writing parts, which feel as if they’re part of a secret society, the read-aloud portion becomes similar to a poetry slam experience.

**Tips:** I encourage you to be the reader/performer, though students might volunteer. My reasoning: you can skip anything that might not be suitable read aloud for the audience, it saves students from having to decipher each other’s writing, and it preserves anonymity. If you do feel as if you wish to have student readers, your alternative is to type up the sheets after class, saving the read-aloud part for the next class time together.

The activity builds mindfulness skills, and is a brain-boost as well as a mood-lifter for the whole group.