

Focusing Attention

Social Emotional Learning

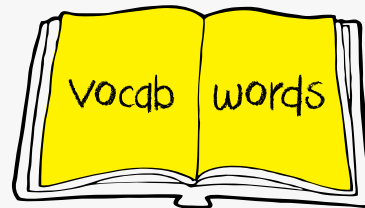
Project and Purpose: Students play the drama game “Mirror” and discuss how to focus their attention.

Essential Question:

Why is it important to focus your attention?
What does that look like?



- A stuffed animal/piece of unusual fruit/colorful piece of material
- Calm, slow music
- Story of **Tortoise and the Hare**



focus

attention

Room Set up: Chairs, tables and desks pushed back to create an open space to move and interact.

Introduction

1. Hold up an interesting item — a stuffed animal, an unusual fruit, a colorful piece of material — and tell students that you want them to follow the object with their eyes as you move it around. Move it slowly around the perimeter of the room, up and down, and even sometimes hide it behind your back or an object.
2. Ask what they had to do to follow the object. Discuss what they did with their eyes and their bodies. Describe this as focus: keeping your eyes on something.
3. Explain that in this session, they will combine ‘focus’ with ‘attention.’

Direct Instruction (I do)

1. Demonstrate standing at attention like a soldier. Point out to students how you stand very still and focus your eyes on one point in the room, never letting anything distract you.
2. Take a break and select a volunteer. That person’s job is to try to distract you from focusing on the point in the room. Give them parameters for their attempts, and make sure you keep your attention focused on the point.
3. Thank the volunteer, and ask students to describe what they noticed.
4. Discuss how focus uses your eyes and your body, and attention uses your mind and brain. When you focus attention, then you need to combine eyes, body, mind, and brain.

Guided Exploration (We do)

1. Explain that actors play different games about mirrors to practice focusing attention. Invite the whole class to practice a group mirror with you. Ask everyone to stand (as they are able) and face you. (Note: If you are short, you might want to stand on something sturdy so everyone can see.)
2. Explain that you will be the leader, and everyone will be your mirror. This means the students must focus their attention: use their eyes to watch very carefully and their bodies to do the same thing you do.
3. VERY SLOWLY, move parts of your body and encourage the class to do exactly what you do. Encourage the class to use focus: keep eyes on you and move slowly. Narrate the experience (e.g., “I see you keeping your eyes on me at all times so you catch every little move”).
4. After one minute, tell students to pause and describe how it felt to focus their attention on you very intensely. Challenge them to try it again for two minutes and debrief the experience.

NOTE: It often helps to play slow, calm instrumental music in the background to encourage focus AND to help you with timing the exercise.

Notes:

Independent Practice (You do)

1. Tell students they will now try something even more challenging — doing a mirror with a partner while other partners are doing their own mirrors. Discuss what they think their eyes, bodies, minds, and brains will have to do.
2. Break students into pairs and ask them to select person A and B in each pair (you can use any system of defining one from the other — book characters, colors, numbers, etc.)
3. Give each pair a space of their own, indicate which person will be the first leader, and ask them to stand in neutral position until you tell them to begin. **Reminder:** Neutral position means standing with hands at side, feet shoulder width apart, eyes straight ahead. Tell them when you call start, the first person will lead the mirror for one minute (or whatever time you select), and then they will stop and swap roles.
4. Quietly call “start” and move around the room encouraging them to use their focus skills. (**Note:** music can also be used here.)
5. Call stop and ask students to discuss how they focused attention with their partner.
6. Repeat the exercise with the new leader.

Notes:

Conclusion/Reflection

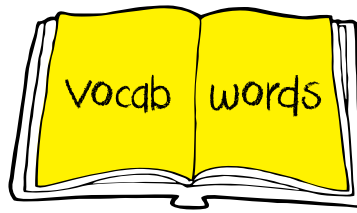
Debrief the game and discuss other times during the day when they need to focus their attention.

- How does focusing your attention help with learning?
- When is it important to focus attention?
- What are you doing when you are focusing your attention?

Extension

Read the story **The Tortoise and the Hare** and talk about how Tortoise focuses attention to win a race against Hare who doesn't focus attention.

Notes:



Vocabulary Definitions

focus (v)

- Definition: to concentrate; to direct one's attention or effort.
- Context: The Tortoise focused on being slow and steady during the race.

attention (n)

- Definition: a) the act or power of fixing one's mind on something; careful listening or watching b) a state of being aware.
- Context: If the Hare had focused his attention on the race, he could have won.

The Tortoise and the Hare

Once there was a Hare who lived in the forest. Hare was very proud of how fast he was and he bragged about it to all the animals of the forest. One day the Hare was talking to his friend, the Tortoise, who was the slowest animal of the forest. The Hare said, “You are so slow, I am sure I could beat you in a race!” The Tortoise surprised the Hare when he said, “OK, I’ll race you.” The Tortoise and the Hare decided to race from the beginning of the forest, up the hill down the hill, past the big tree and the pond and to the edge of the forest which would be the finish line. The race started and the Hare took off quickly up the hill, while the Tortoise went slow and steady. The Hare raced on and started to pass the tree, when he decided that he could take a nap and still beat the Tortoise. Meanwhile, the Tortoise was so focused on the race that he never stopped. The Hare woke up from his nap and saw that the Tortoise had passed him, so he quickly got back into the race and passed the Tortoise again. But soon, he was distracted by the pond and thought of how hot he was. So he jumped into the pond thinking that he could take a quick swim and still beat the Tortoise. But the Tortoise stayed focused and determined and never stopped. Just as the Hare jumped out of the pond, the Tortoise crossed the finish line as the animals of the forest cheered. The Hare sadly admitted that he had lost the race because he didn’t stay focused like the Tortoise.

Moral: Slow and steady wins the race.