

from 'Mind Body Magic'

Martha Belknap

Weather Report

Release tension in the neck, shoulders, and upper back by using familiar images of weather.

PURPOSES

To teach simple massage skills.

To enhance a presentation on workplace self-care skills.

To provide a relaxation break.

TIME

10-12 minutes.

MATERIALS

None.

INTRODUCTION

Massage is an ancient healing art as well as a special form of communication between people. Appropriate human touch based on trust and caring can promote the flow of healing energy, enhance relaxation, and bring relief from muscular tension and pain. There are many ways that we can help each other come into balance mentally and physically through the use of simple massage techniques. The following activity is designed to be done in a classroom setting, at the workplace, at home, or anywhere that feels appropriate to you.

PROCESS

Introduce the topic and purpose of the exercise and give participants the following instructions:

Pair up with a partner and find a spot in the room where you have space to move.

One partner should sit cross-legged on the floor. The other person will kneel down and place their hands comfortably on their partner's shoulders from behind.

As I read aloud the following weather report, I will lead you through a tension-relieving massage. During the Weather Report, check to be sure that your partner is comfortable and enjoying the activity. Adjust the amount of pressure you are applying, if necessary. Let's get started:

Begin by tapping your fingers lightly along the top of your partner's shoulders.

Extend these gently falling snowflakes up the back of the neck to the top of the head.

Change the snowflakes into raindrops, tapping a little harder on the head, neck, and shoulders.

Let the raindrops become hailstones, flicking your wrists as you let your fingertips bounce a little harder. Check with your partner to find out what amount of pressure feels OK.

Now create some thunder. Cup your hands and clap them across the shoulders and down along the top of the arms.

Next comes the lightning. Use the sides of your hands with a chopping motion against the shoulders and upper back.

Use your thumbs like the eye of a tornado. Press into the muscles with small deep circles. Find out where your partner would like the tornado to land.

Now for the meteor shower. Make fists and pound up and down the back on either side of the spinal column.

We are about to have a blizzard. Move your fingertips vigorously around the upper back and shoulders. Imagine snow and wind being blown together up and down the mountainside. Prepare for the earthquake. Hold onto your partner's upper arms and gently shake the whole upper body.

Get ready for the tidal wave. place your palms on the upper back and move them vigorously from the shoulders down to the waist. Imagine waves sloshing up and down the coast.

Now the storm is over. Feel the calm as you place your hands gently on the shoulders and rest. Send warmth into the muscles as you imagine soothing energy flowing out of your hands into your partner's body. Visualize a beautiful rainbow spanning the sky. Feel the peace and serenity of this quiet scene. Very gradually, lift your hands several inches above your partner's shoulders. Hold them there for a few seconds. Then lower your hands to your sides and shake them gently.

After the massage is finished, instruct participants to change places with their partner and repeat the activity. Lead a closing discussion using the following questions:

- What was the most soothing part of the massage?
- Which area of your body seemed to hold the most tension?
- How can you relax that part of your body?

VARIATIONS

In small groups brainstorm your typical tension spots and create metaphors for a relaxing massage of those areas.

You may want to present the Weather Report like an ongoing travelog and introduce the weather conditions which are specific to various parts of the country. For example, a snowstorm in Colorado, a thunderstorm in Minnesota, a tornado in Kansas, an earthquake in California, a tidal wave in Hawaii.

NOTES

When working with active children we need to make sure that they are being considerate of one another. I often suggest that they are giving a gift to their partners. In a while the gift will be returned to them. Ask them how they can offer the gift in such a way that it will be enjoyed, appreciated, and then returned to them as they would like. I also suggest that they go home and offer to become "weathermen" for their parents and grandparents.

In one of my classes in a summer enrichment program for gifted children, I was teaching simple shoulder and back massage techniques to a group of twelve- to fifteen-year-old boys and girls. At first I was a little uneasy about how these adolescents would handle a potentially embarrassing situation. I started by presenting the information in a very straightforward manner with clear basic instructions. The children were mature enough to respond very appropriately. When I asked them to change places with their partners for the second round, I added, "You handled that so well I would like to enhance the mood a little. We'll turn the lights down and play some quiet music." One of the boys who had received a massage in the first group said, "Is that fair? They are going to get the gourmet treatment, and we only received the generic variety!"