

BE A TREE!: Movement & Mindfulness



The picture book **Be a Tree!** invites the reader to embody a tree. Yoga often uses the symbolism of trees and being rooted to the earth as the basis for movement and practice.

Yoga instructor and middle grade novelist Lori Snyder offers movement and mindfulness prompts to accompany each page. Bring movement to your read aloud or carry the book into physical education classes.

Each section leads with a [quote](#) from the book followed by *talking points*.

"Be a tree! Stand tall..." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Wherever you are right now, freeze like you're a tree planted in the ground. Stretch your arms as high as you can. Don't move your feet! You're a tree! Then let your arms relax.

"Let your roots curl, coil in the soil to ground you." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Curl your toes a few times, like roots growing into the ground. Feel your feet connect with the floor.

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"Your spine is a trunk, giving you shape..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1

Without moving your feet, twist side to side. Feel how your spine lets you move!

Then bend forward. Can you touch your knees? Your toes?

Stand up and bend backward. Can you feel your spine bend?

GRADES 2-3

Without moving your feet, twist side to side. Feel how your spine lets you move!

Then bend forward. Can you touch your knees? Your toes?

Stand up and bend backward. Can you feel your spine bend?

Grow yourself and your spine as tall as you can. Then have a friend balance a paperback book on your head. Can you hold it there?

GRADES 4-5

Without moving your feet, twist side to side. Feel how your spine lets you move!

Then bend forward. Can you touch your knees? Your toes?

Stand up and bend backward. Can you feel your spine bend?

Close your eyes. Imagine you can feel your spine/trunk holding up your crown/head. Grow taller. Then grow shorter. Take a few different shapes, seeing if you can feel your spine moving each time.

"Your skin is bark...protecting what's within." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Put one hand on your belly. Breathe in. Can you feel the skin of your belly expand? Do this a few times.

GRADES 4-5

Grow really still. Close your eyes if you like. Then, breathe in deeply. Can you feel the skin of your ribcage or belly expand when you breathe? Now exhale. Can you feel the skin of your ribcage or belly move back in?

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"Beneath your bark are layers..." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Crouch down and pretend you can scoop up nutrients from the ground. Breathe in. Then, with a big WHOOSH of breath, stand up like you are lifting those nutrients up!

Imagine you are getting stronger. Stand like a strong, tall tree.

Put your hands on your hips and take one big breath in and out.

"In your heart's center is your pith..." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Put your hand on your heart. Can you feel it beating? Count ten of your own heartbeats.

Now, move around the room or jump up and down ten times. Then try this again. What happens to your heartbeat?

Imagine you could see your heart pumping nutrients through your body. Feel yourself get stronger.

"High above, your crown may be round..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Breathe in and lift your arms overhead. Let them make a shape, any shape you want.

This position/action is continued on the next page.

GRADES 4-5

Plant your feet wide like the reaching roots of a tree. Then breathe in and lift your arms overhead. Make a shape with your arms and hold it for three counts.

Make a different shape and hold it again for three counts. Do this one more time. Notice how the different shapes feel on your shoulders and arms. Which do you like best?

This position/action is continued on the next page.

"Wave your leaves in the wind, breathe in air..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Now wave your arms in the air like they are tree branches in the wind. Wiggle your fingers like leaves drinking in sun.

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GRADES 4-5

Take your favorite of the last three shapes you made and then open your hands like you are drinking in sun. Imagine your whole self getting warm. How does it feel?

"See yourself, branches and leaves above..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Let's stand in tree pose! Put your hands on your hips, and then lift one foot up and balance on your other foot. You're a tree! Now try the other side.

GRADES 4-5

Let's stand in tree pose! Plant one foot firmly on the ground and lift the other foot up, so you're balancing on one foot. Bend the knee of the lifted leg and put the bottom of your foot against your standing leg, either above or below the knee (but not on the kneecap!) Lift your arms high like branches.

Can you balance? Maybe you sway like a tree in the wind. Now try the other side.

"And now, look around you—you are not alone..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Look around at the other people (trees) in the room with you. Use your body to say hello without speaking--can you wave? Smile? How else can you say hello?

GRADES 4-5

Look around at the other people (trees) in the room with you. Use your body to say hello without speaking--can you wave? Smile? How else can you say hello?

Now, sitting or standing, with your eyes open or closed, imagine that there is a web connecting you to everyone else you know. Now imagine that each of those people is also connected to everyone they know...and so on and so on. Imagine yourself as one point in this vast network of connection.

Now, move around the room slowly, and notice in your mind's eye how the web moves with you, how it's always there to help support you no matter where you go. And then, see if you can notice that every single point in this web is important, and every single point is needed.

Notice that YOU are an important part of this web, and that all you have to do to hold up your spot is just be who you are.

Notice how that is true for everyone.

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"Our roots twine with fungi, joining all trees..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Turn to look at one of the other trees in your forest with you (one of the other people in the room).

This position/action is continued on the next page.

GRADES 4-5

Turn to look at either one of the other trees (people) in the forest with you, or make a circle with everyone else in the room or on the screen.

This position/action is continued on the next page.

"A wood wide web of information." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Inhale and hold out your arms toward the other tree like you're giving them food. Then exhale and drop your arms.

Turn to another tree in your forest. This time, inhale and hold your arms out like you're giving them water. Then exhale and drop your arms.

GRADES 4-5

In the circle, or while facing one other tree (person) either online or in person, inhale and lift your arms overhead. Imagine you are gathering information from the world around you. Exhale and bring your arms down.

Then inhale and open your arms wide to your sides. Imagine you are passing this information to the other trees around you.

Then, exhale and draw your arms into your body. Imagine you are receiving information from the other trees around you. Repeat 3-5 times.

"We purify the air. We anchor the soil..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Take a big, deep breath in. Imagine you are a tree that can purify that air inside your own body, and then breathe out pure, clean air. Do this two more times.

Now, imagine you have roots growing out of one of your feet, anchoring you into the ground so you can't fall. Lift up your other foot and see if your roots help you balance. Then try the same thing on your other foot.

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GRADES 4-5

Take a big, deep breath in. Imagine you are a tree that can purify that air inside your own body, and then breathe out pure, clean air. Do this two more times.

Now, imagine you have roots growing out of one of your feet, anchoring you into the ground so you can't fall. Lift up your other foot and see if your roots help you balance. Then try the same thing on your other foot.

There's a mindfulness practice where you breathe in any bad feelings around you, turn them into good feelings inside of you (like love or kindness) and then breathe out those good feelings. The next time you or someone you know feels angry or sad or frightened, you can try this. Or, try this for yourself or someone you know who doesn't feel happy right now. Just like trees purify the air inside of themselves, you can practice purifying feelings inside of you.

"Our dome of joined crowns, swings..." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Lie down on the floor and reach your legs into the air. Pretend your legs are the crown of your tree. Let your legs swing and straighten in the wind (but be careful not to hit anyone)!

This position/action is continued on the next page.

"Our bodies and branches and roots are homes..." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Flip over onto your stomach and come up onto your hands and knees. Pretend you're a squirrel that lives in a tree, eating an acorn. Can you sit up on your knees like a squirrel? Or swing your tail?

Now sit down on the ground and bring the soles of your feet together so your knees are out to the sides. Pretend you're a butterfly flitting between trees, and flap your knees like wings!

Be a snake in the tree! Come onto your stomach and bring your hands next to your ribcage. Press into your hands and lift your spine up like a snake!

"Immigrant trees away from native habitats..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Imagine how it would feel if there were no other trees around you. Curl up in a little ball. Then, imagine there are trees all around you who want to help you! Jump up with joy and stand tall and strong. Put your hands on your hips and plant your feet like the tallest tree of all!

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GRADES 4-5

Think of a time you felt alone, like an immigrant tree in a strange place. Stand or walk around the room like you feel all alone. Now, imagine you have come to a place filled with other trees who want to help you. See if you can feel their kindness being directed at you. See if you can feel how worthy and cared for you are.

Change your posture to reflect feeling strong and powerful. Then jump with joy that there are so many of you who all care for each other.

Put your hands on your hips and plant your feet like the tallest tree of all!

"Mother trees nurse young trees..." —BE A TREE!

GRADES K-1 & 2-3

Stretch out your arms like branches. Move them like you're giving shade to the new little trees around you that need help. Stand like a strong tree sheltering weaker trees.

GRADES 4-5

Stretch out your arms like branches. Move them like you're giving shade to the new little trees around you that need help. Stand like a strong tree sheltering weaker trees.

Now, think of someone you know who might need a little sheltering right now. Maybe this is a friend or a sibling, or someone you don't know but have heard about. Imagine you can protect them and give them whatever they need: strength, love, courage, or anything else.

How does it feel to send this to another person? Stand in the way it makes you feel.

"A family, a community, a country, a cosmos..." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Lie down on the floor again and make your body into the shape of a star, stretching out your arms and legs. Take up a lot of space, because there is enough for everyone!

So, be a tree.

Jump up to your feet again! Take up as much space as you can without moving! There is plenty for everyone!

Then, stand like a tree!

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"So, be a tree. For together, we are a forest." —BE A TREE!

ALL GRADES

Take a deep breath in, and at the same time, open your arms wide like you are hugging the whole forest.

Then exhale, and at the same time wrap your arms around yourself like a hug.

Do this two more times: inhale and open your arms to hug the whole forest; exhale and wrap your arms around yourself.

Then, sit down cross-legged.

Imagine there are trees who love you all around you. Take a deep breath in and out and see if you can feel how much they love you.

Then imagine you are sending your love out to those trees. Take a deep breath in and out and send your love out to all the other trees around you!

Imagine you are part of the most wonderful forest in the world, and in your imagination promise to protect and love all the other trees.

When you are done, stretch your arms slowly to the sun one more time.

Now, continue your day thinking about what trees give you and what you can give the trees.

