

Mindful Observing

Two brief descriptions of activities.

I. from Jody Zeigler

Shared at the Center for Contemplative Mind's 5th Annual Summer Session for Contemplative Curriculum Development, August 12, 2009

A contemplative component of the Visual Arts History 101 course at Holy Cross University.

Goal: for the students to learn to truly see. The first week of class Jody takes her students to the Worcester Art Museum and introduces them all to an abstract painting. She asks the students to visit this painting every week for the duration of the course and, after each visit, tell her in writing what they've seen. (Most of these students are unfamiliar with modern art and certainly not fond of it, and many go for weeks resenting the assignment.) Jody tells her students that it is okay to relate to the painting in any way and to have varying feelings as they view the painting. Their experience of relating is part of what they see. Feeling safe to have their relationship to the painting be whatever it is, students begin to see more in the painting, its surroundings, and what it evokes in them. Over time, students notice their relationship to the painting changing. They begin to make their own sense of it. (They are not allowed to obtain any outside information about the painting). By the end of the semester, many students see beauty in the painting and find that the painting has become "their painting."

II. from Irene McHenry

Shared at the Friends Council on Education's Mindfulness for Educators workshop January 2009

Invite participants to move in silence to a window (could be done outdoors in a defined space) for a new experience in observation – cultivating mindful seeing. Experiment with each way of seeing for one minute (sound a bell for each transition):

- Observe the big picture – all that you can see
- Choose one object or small area and observe for specific details of color, size, shape, patterns
- Look more deeply at these details
- Observe movement and changes, as well as stillness
- Look for the patterns of light and shadow, bright and dark
- Look at the larger context using "soft" eyes - a slightly unfocused fuzzy gaze
- Look again at the details with clarity.

Return to the circle in silence and sketch or write observations.

What did you notice? What stood out? What changed as you continued to see?

Paired sharing for a few minutes: Sharing in large group: what did your partners share that resonated with your experience? What stood out?