

Lesson Plan: The Sand Mandala
Learning that Feelings Come and Go

Grade band: 2nd – 4th Grade

Subject: SEL/ELA

Duration: 45 minutes

Montana ELA Content Standard

During the lesson, students will:

- **SL.2-4.1.** Participate and engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grade 2-4 topics and texts*, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly

Montana Whole Child Development Competencies

- **MTSEL.3-5.1.a** Label and describe emotions using a growing vocabulary (e.g., happy, excited, mad, furious, worried, scared)
- **MTSEL.K-2.2.a** Identify physical responses to strong emotions and apply simple coping strategies (e.g., simple breathing techniques) to defuse the emotional stressor

Learning Objectives:

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify and name a feeling
- Understand that feelings are temporary
- Practice noticing, naming, accepting, and letting go of feelings through a mindfulness activity

Materials:

- Pictures of Tibetan sand mandalas
- Blank mandala coloring sheet (one per student)
- Crayons or colored pencils
- Music (optional)

Lesson Outline:

1. Initial Engagement: (10 minutes)

Project several images of Tibetan sand mandalas and invite students to observe the photographs. Some guiding questions:

- What do you notice?
- What do you wonder?
- What words would you use to describe these works of art?

Explain that the designs are created by Tibetan Buddhist monks using millions of grains of colored sand and that they spend days or weeks creating their mandalas. When they are finished, everyone gathers, and the monks sweep it all away.

Ask, “Why would someone spend so much time creating something so beautiful only to wipe it away?”

Provide students with *think time* and then ask them to **turn and talk** with a partner before sharing ideas with the class. After discussing student ideas, explain that the sand mandala reminds us that nothing is permanent: everything changes, including our thoughts and feelings.

2. Explicit Instruction: (5 minutes)

Introduce the word *impermanence*: things don’t stay the same forever.

Ask students if they can think of any examples of things that don’t stay the same forever (e.g. weather, trees, etc.)

Explain that feelings also change. They aren’t facts and they aren’t permanent.

“Today we are going to work on noticing a feeling, naming the feeling, letting ourselves feel it, and then choosing to let it go. When we do this, we can move through feelings, rather than getting stuck in them. We will practice this using our own mandalas.”

3. Guided Practice: (15-20 minutes)

- Distribute mandala coloring pages.
- Invite students to color freely while thinking about a happy memory or a time they felt joyful.
 - Optional: Play calming or uplifting music.
- After a few minutes, ask students to turn and talk with their partner.
 - Possible prompts:
 - Why did those colors match your happy memory?
 - How did your artwork represent your feelings?
- Repeat the process with a sad memory.
 - After students have spent a few minutes with that memory, ask them to stop coloring.
 - Invite them to notice the feeling they were thinking about and name it.
 - Take one slow breath and feel the emotion.
 - Remind themselves that feelings come, and we get to choose what we do with them.
 - To symbolize letting the feeling go, students will pass their mandala to the person on their right. Acknowledge that it might be hard or disappointing to pass their work to the person next to them.
 - Note: some students have a hard time letting go of their work. Frontload the students that might struggle with this skill.

- Remind students that whatever they are feeling is okay and that we are practicing noticing those feelings instead of trying to make them go away.
- Repeat the process and have students think of a time they felt disappointed or frustrated.
 - Repeat this process as many times as you would like to.

4. Independent Application: (5 minutes)

Ask students to return the mandalas to their original owners. Students quietly examine the mandala they now have.

Ask them to reflect independently. They can do this in their head or by writing in their journals.

- How has the mandala changed?
- How is this like our emotions?

5. Closing: (5 minutes)

Bring students together for a final discussion and ask:

- How did it feel when someone else colored your mandala?
- Was it easy or difficult to let go?
- What happened after you sat with a difficult feeling for a moment?
- Why do you think the monks choose to wipe away their sand mandalas?

Reinforce the key idea that feelings aren't permanent. Noticing, naming, and honoring them help us move through and past them.

Ask students to complete the following sentence stem as an exit ticket:

- The next time I have a difficult feeling, I can...