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TEACHER'S GUIDE

The Yoga Game

By Kathy Beliveau

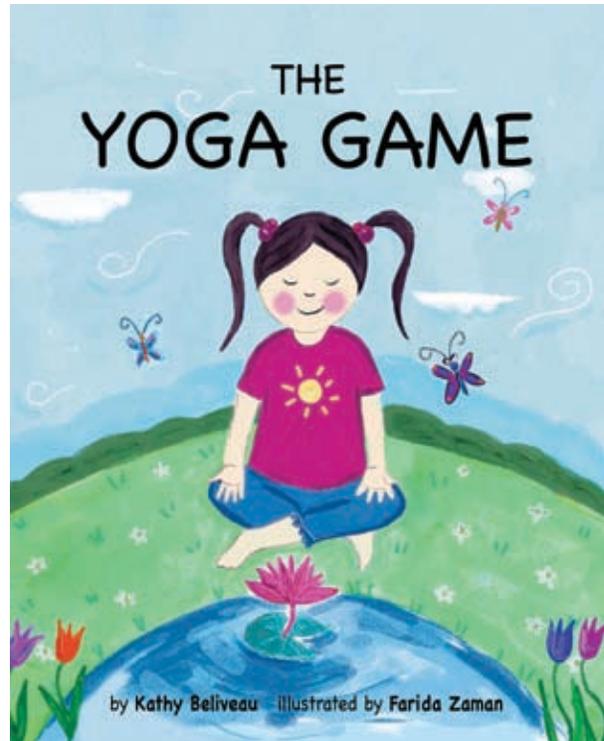
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"I recommend this book for every yoga teacher, and to school teachers and parents as well. It's easy to follow and simple to teach."

- Padma, Host of Padma™ Yoga Television Series



The story

The Yoga Game book offers a user-friendly approach to introducing yoga while playing with language (rhymes), incorporating problem solving (riddles) and supporting the new reader with repetition and visual clues. This fun-filled practice works with breath, body movement and guided visualization to foster focus, flexibility and relaxation in the body and mind.

About this guide

Play-based learning and self-regulation are both current topics in education today. The joy of learning and the ability to recognize and care for our own needs and the needs of others are powerful tools at any age. This guide builds on *The Yoga Game*, inspiring mindfulness, providing details of how to do each pose and presenting numerous variations to use while playing/learning yoga. The guide illustrates how one yoga pose can create calm while another can stimulate. One encourages inner reflection, while another allows self-expression. Yoga can be used to introduce topics and lessons, to support smooth transitions and to create meaningful closure. Incorporating the suggestions and activities into a number of subjects, this guide demonstrates how yoga can be integrated into different curriculums.

What is Yoga?



Yoga is an ancient practice believed to have originated in India over 5000 years ago. The word yoga comes from Sanskrit and means to unite or bring together. The practice of yoga helps to bring together body, mind and spirit.

While there are many different types of yoga, The Yoga Game centers around Hatha Yoga, a form of yoga that includes asana (that's yogi for poses or postures) along with breathing practices and meditation.

Yoga is much more than an exercise. Yoga is a way of life that includes exercise, proper breathing and diet, relaxation and positive thought. It is a journey of self discovery.

How to do the postures in *The Yoga Game*

Yoga is normally practiced in comfortable clothes and barefoot, to prevent slipping. A sticky mat is useful, but not essential. Yoga is not a competition! Remember, in yoga, the body is relaxed: the breath slow and steady. A chime is a peaceful and effective way to focus attention and transition between postures.

Belly Breathing

Begin by noticing your breath. Follow the natural in breath and out breath. Can you feel yourself breathe? How does it feel? Next, lie down on your back. Gently rest your hands on your belly and feel the breath. As you inhale deeply, the belly expands, the hands slowly rise. As you exhale, the belly drops, the hands slowly lower. Allow the breath to become even and steady and notice the body relaxing more and more as the hands rise and fall with each inhalation and each exhalation. Imagine a butterfly, or a tree frog, or a lady bug sitting on your belly. Try to gently raise and lower this little creature with your breath!

Did you remember to breathe last week . . . or yesterday? While breathing is automatic, we can choose to breathe mindfully and by doing so, we can consciously control our energy in order to be calm.

Wiggle your toes and touch your nose

This posture helps to open hips. Sitting on the floor, lift one foot, wiggle your toes and touch your nose. . . or . . . holding one foot with both hands, see if you can tickle your nose with your toes! Keep the spine very straight and tall! Then try the same thing with the other foot!



Butterfly

Sitting on the floor, bring the soles of feet together and holding feet with hands, draw feet in close to body so that knees and legs form the shape of wings. Sitting tall, holding feet, flutter bent legs gently up and down like a butterfly's wings. Imagine you are a butterfly, flitting here and there, accepting change with grace. The metamorphosis of a butterfly is symbolic of faith. It symbolizes trust in life. What can we learn from the butterfly?



Bumblebee

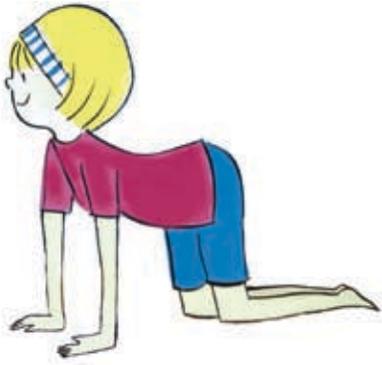
Sit with a straight back. Imagine a string at the top of your head, pulling you up, so that you sit a little taller. Place hands on knees and close the eyes. Inhale deeply through the nose. Drop head slightly, bringing the chin towards the chest. The mouth is softly closed. The teeth do not touch and the lips are just slightly touching. Next, exhale through the nose, while humming a strong, deep humming sound, like a bumblebee! Play with the sound. Hum low. Hum high. Cup your hands over your ears and hum as long as you can, before taking another breath and humming again. Feel the sound vibrations fill your head and body. When you are feeling scattered or anxious, the Bumblebee and its sound vibration will help you slow down, relax and feel more peaceful.



Tree

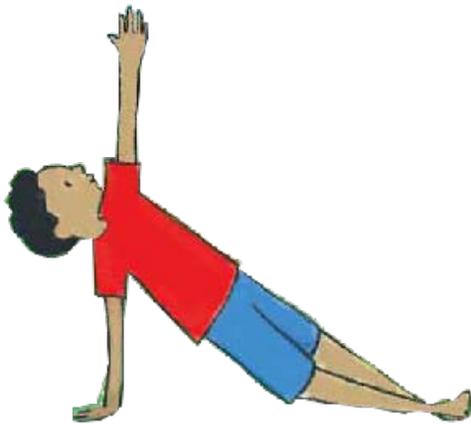
Stand tall, with feet pointing forward, slightly apart. Breathe out and imagine sending your energy down your body, down your legs through your feet and deep into the earth, like roots! As you breathe in, draw the earth energy up into your feet, through your legs and into your body. Feel balanced and centered! Now shift all your weight onto your right foot and bring the left foot to the inner thigh of the right leg, (or to just below the knee, or to the ankle, or even touching the floor). Balancing on the right foot, bring your hands palms together at heart centre and as you breathe in, raise your hands and arms up and then opening out, like branches on a tree. Hold, breathe, balance. Repeat on other side.

Why do you think it is important to have strong roots?



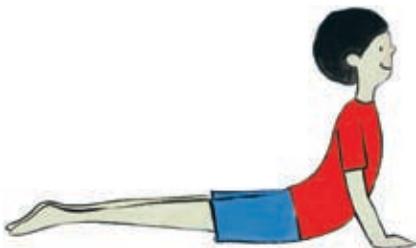
Cat

Begin on hands and knees, with hands directly below shoulders and knees, hip-width apart. Spread fingers wide like claws on paws! Inhale and allow the belly to dip down as the head rises up. Exhale, drop head, (chin to chest) and arch your back high and round like a spooked cat. Repeat the arch and stretch three to five times, remembering the breath with the movement. You can meow like a cat and even purrrr to show how good it feels! Consider this. Are cats happy because they are so flexible . . . or are they flexible, because they are so happy? How can we become more flexible in our bodies? How can we become more flexible in our lives?



Rainbow

Begin on hands and knees. Keep right knee on floor while extending left leg, and pointing left toes away from body. For greater challenge, straighten both legs so they balance, one on top the other. Shift your weight to your right leg and right hand, and raise your left arm to the sky, opening the body to the left. Now make your body into a beautiful diagonal line with the left arm reaching high to the sky while the right arm supports you. Breathe and Balance. Imagine all the colours of the rainbow radiating out from your body! Come out of the pose when ready and repeat on other side. Like magic in the air, you reach high across the sky, and decorate the world with colours, bright and beautiful! How does it make you feel when you see a rainbow? What happens when you reach out and make someone's world a little more colourful, a little more radiant?



Cobra

Lie on the belly, legs together stretched out behind, toes pointing back while top of feet rest on floor. Place hands, palms down, directly below shoulders. Keep the elbows down, tucked close to the sides. As you breathe in, press into the hands, lifting chest away from floor. Curl the spine up like a snake being charmed by the music of a snake charmer. Relax shoulders down, away from ears. Steady the gaze. Inhale deeply and exhale a long, slow hisssssssssss!

The cobra represents the spine, which benefits from being moved from end to end, back and forth, side to side, twisting this way and that.



Mouse

Begin by kneeling, then gently sit back on shins and heels, (toes pointed back, legs can be together or apart). Fold body down onto thighs. Allow the forehead to rest on floor in front of the knees, or turn your head to one side, which ever feels most comfortable. Arms relax along the sides of the body, palms up. Close your eyes. Listen to your breath. Feel the whole body soften and sink into the pose. Become as quiet as a mouse. This is also known as child's pose as it resembles a baby or young child resting. This pose is about taking time to relax, renew, restore. Why is it important to take time to relax? Do you need time to rest? Do people in your life need time to rest? What happens when we don't take this time? Why is it important to be aware of how the body or the mind is feeling? What happens when we forget to listen to the body?



Mountain

Stand strong with feet parallel and slightly apart. Bring body into alignment. See if you can hold the head directly over the neck. Open shoulders and relax them down, away from ears. Notice the hips. Try not to sway or round the back. Keep the knees soft, (not locked), and try to stand balanced on both feet. Now breathe in and lengthen the whole body. Breathe out and try to feel more grounded. Imagine energy radiating out through the crown of your head and down through the soles of your feet! When we stand strong, we feel more confident and are not so easily pushed around. In Mountain Pose, we learn to stand our ground. Try standing in Mountain Pose and closing your eyes. Now shift your weight all the way to the front of your feet and the toes as you lean forward. Notice what happens.



Eagle

Begin in Mountain Pose -- the foundation of all standing poses. Shift weight onto right foot and either wrap left leg around the right leg or cross it over the right leg. Now, bend arms and wrap right arm over left, bringing palms of the hands together, or towards each other. (Variations include simply crossing right arm over the left or even just giving yourself a great, big hug!) Balancing on the right foot, inhale and lengthen spine, holding the head tall! For more of a challenge, see if you can sink deeper into the pose by bending the knees and raise the elbows up a little higher. Now hold the pose, breathe and balance. Repeat on the other side, again, beginning in Mountain Pose.

While balancing in Eagle Pose, find something to look at and use this focal point to keep your gaze steady and your focus strong. Now glance around the room. Notice what happens to our balance when we lose our focus.

Lion



Begin by kneeling, then gently sit back on shins and heels with the toes pointing back. Place hands, palms down, on the knees. With pride, inhale as you lengthen spine. Next, leap forward, thrusting your hands/paws forward and let out a thundering roar. Open your mouth. Stick out your tongue! Open your eyes as wide as you can. Be fierce!
A lion can let out a ferocious roar, a powerful expression of strength and courage. Practicing this posture can help one discover the power within. The Lion symbolizes the importance of recognizing that aspect of courage within ourselves and others. Do you have a lion in you?

Dolphin



Bring yourself to the floor, on hands and knees (knees hip-width apart and hands directly below shoulders.) Move your hands forward and place your elbows on the floor, just below your shoulders. Clasp hands on the floor in front and make a little triangle with your upper arms. Inhale and push your chest and body away from clasped hands. From this position, do push-ups, pressing body down towards hands then pushing up and away from hands, pressing the sit bones up and back. (This can be done from the knees or, for a greater challenge, you can come up on your toes, keeping the legs straight.) As you work and tone the upper body, imagine you are a dolphin, diving down into the sea again and again!
(Dolphins are playful, happy and strong. What happens when we are around happy creatures like the dolphin? What happens when we are around happy people?)

Star



Begin by standing. Take a wide stance and sweep arms out to the sides at shoulder height. Stretch hands, palms down, relax the shoulders down, away from ears. Feet face forward. Now spread the toes, spread the fingers. Extend outwards through the five points (top of the head, fingertips of hands, and soles of the feet.) Bring a sense of freedom and openness from inside yourself and radiate out like a bright light!

Variations of this can include the Rise and Shine Star, where one begins crouched down and slowly draws the body up and out into a five pointed star.

Star Side to Side begins in star pose. Breathing in, stretch the spine, neck and head upwards, breathing out, drop the left arm down left leg reaching right arm high over head. Enjoy this beautiful side bend! Inhale back to centre and repeat on other side.

May we all shine bright! May we all share our light!

Like the star, we can stretch and reach beyond our bodies and touch others with our light! How can we shine like a star? What makes you a star?



Frog

Squat down on balls of feet, (heels up). Place arms to the inside of knees, with fingers touching the floor. Hold head high, straighten back, open shoulders. Be very still. Just for fun, see if you can catch a pretend fly by flicking the tongue out and in again with split-second timing! Sometimes frogs stay very still . . . and wait for a fly. Sometimes they hop about and jump very high!

For the frog, a balanced life includes many different activities. What can we learn from the frog?



Camel

Stand on your knees with legs hip-width apart. As you exhale, carefully reach behind and see if you can grasp the heels with the hands. Only allow the head to drop back if this feels comfortable for the neck, otherwise, keep head in line with spine. Feel a lovely opening in chest and front of body. To come out of pose, raise one hand off the heel, then the other. Rise up. Fold forward (i.e. Mouse pose or Tortoise pose) to compliment backbend with forward bend. A less challenging variation of this pose is to simply place palms of hands on the lower back with fingers facing down, supporting the lower back. Inhale as you lift and open the chest. Exhale, relaxing into a gentle backbend. Again, release and fold forward. *Note: The Camel Pose is not recommended for those with back or neck injuries. The Camel symbolizes stamina and moderation. It represents adaptation and the ability to reserve inner resources for what lies ahead. How can we reserve our own resources so that we can enjoy stamina and strength like the camel?



Tortoise

Sit on the floor and bring soles of feet together, away from your body. (Knees are bent.) Tuck hands and arms inside circle formed by legs, then reach under each leg bringing hands to rest on outside of feet. Fold body forward, rounding the back like the shell of a tortoise and allow the head to drop towards feet. Now, become aware of the breath.

(Slow and steady wins the race! What does this mean? Why is it important to practice patience? Tucking your head into your shell, draw your attention away from the outside world and focus on your inner world. Safe and quiet inside your shell, notice your breath, notice how your body is feeling, notice your thoughts. Take time to “check in!” Do you feel comfortable and at home in your shell? Do you feel comfortable and at home in your body? Becoming mindful of our breath, our body and our thoughts can be a powerful practice. Why is this?



Floating Cloud (Savasana)

Lie on your back on the floor. Lay your arms at your sides, slightly away from your body, palms facing up and allow the feet to fall gently off to the sides. Close your eyes. Notice the belly rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Feel the body relaxing into the floor. Imagine you are drifting on a calm blue sea, or floating on a white fluffy cloud. Your body is weightless, light as a feather drifting in the breeze. You are happy, peaceful and relaxed.

Ways to use yoga with children

A Yoga Game mini practice:

For very young children or when time is restricted, one may choose to just do standing poses, (Tree, Mountain, Eagle, Star, Frog) or seated poses, (Wiggle your toes and touch your nose, Butterfly, Bumble Bee, Camel, Mouse, Lion, Tortoise) or floor poses, (Cat, Rainbow, Cobra, Dolphin, Cloud/Savasana.)

Yoga for Transitions:

With younger children, yoga becomes a wonderful tool and creative way to fill transition periods through the day in order to maintain flow (and control) as you move from one activity to the next. For example, the Tortoise pose allows children to take a moment, check in, (or “re-group” as adults sometimes call it) before moving on to the next activity. Mouse pose, Cloud pose, and simple Belly Breathing are also very calming. If, on the other hand, one needs to liven things up, the Dolphin, Frog and Lion poses can be very stimulating. In group situations, one might use the Tree pose, or Mountain pose, (mountains are silent!) or Eagle pose while waiting in line. Carpet time might begin with the Butterfly pose or Bumble Bee pose to bring the energy together. If a little down time (rest) is needed, try the Mouse pose or Tortoise pose or Floating Cloud pose.

Pick a Pose:

Highlight the “Pose of the Day! Feature one pose each day /week / session and take time to explore the pose in more depth, adding variations, etc.

Show and Tell Yoga:

Give children the opportunity to show their favourite pose and tell about it. (Which is their favourite? What do they like about it? How does it make them feel?)

Mix and Match: Once children are familiar with poses, you can vary the game, (i.e. Show me a tree. . . Show me a tree on a sunny day! A windy day! A cold day. Or Show me a Lion. . . Show me a shy lion. A ferocious lion. A bored lion. etc.) Bring in the elements, emotions, personality traits, encouraging them to act these out with their body language. Let them play with the poses.

Create a Yoga Skit! Either on their own, or in groups, encourage children to create and perform a story/skit, using various yoga postures. (i.e. Once upon a time there was a tiny Mouse, who lived under a Tree. etc.)

Using yoga in other subjects

Creative Writing: Allow children to tap into their own imagination and creative expression through Writing Practice using yoga poses, (i.e. If I was a Bumble Bee, or, If I was a Rainbow, etc.)

Or have them write a yoga riddle: Choose a different pose, (or invent a new one) and write a riddle for this pose. How to write a riddle: Work backwards. First pick your answer. Then, imagine your object/creature speaking to you; describing itself, telling what it does. Then make that into a little poem.

Art: An enjoyable and wonderful tool that invites us into contemplation and allows us to pause, reflect and engage more deeply. Art activities could include drawing and /or colouring/painting a yoga pose and including in the picture what we see and what we don't see. One might enjoy creating a model of their animal using the material of their choice. (i.e. clay, play dough, plasterscine, etc.) Another art activity might be asking children to draw a Star, shining bright and then a picture of someone, "sharing their light" i.e.: acts of kindness, etc. Playing with the essence of Savasana, or Floating Cloud Pose, can also stimulate interesting pictures/thoughts around favorite places in our minds. One might ask, where do you go in your imagination to feel completely relaxed and at peace?

Health and Well Being: Food for Thought. The practice of yoga includes embracing a healthy diet and positive thought. Incorporate these ideas into a lesson, bringing awareness to how we feed our body, (striving to replace fast food/ junk food with healthier food choices) and to how we feed our mind, becoming aware of negative, self-defeating thoughts. For example, replacing thoughts like "I'm not smart enough, I'm too small, I will never be good at this. . ." with more positive and empowering thoughts, such as, "I am strong. I will try. I am a star!"





Did you know?

A Yogi is a male who practices yoga.

A Yogini is a female who practices yoga.

Asana, (ah-san-ah) means comfortable pose or posture.

Pranayama, (pra-na-ya-ma) means breathing exercise or control of energy.
(Prana= energy yama= control of)

Savasana, (sha-va-sa-na) means Corpse Pose and for children, is sometimes referred to as Floating Cloud Pose or Relaxation Pose. It is done at the end of a session as an integration period and a time to relax and recharge the body.

Namaste, (nah-mah-stay) is a greeting meaning, “the light in me sees the light in you,” or “the spirit in me honours the spirit in you.” It is often used at the beginning and/or end of a yoga session. Everyone brings the palms of their hands together at the heart centre and greets each other with the word, Namaste

Om, is a simple chant with a complex meaning. It is often chanted three times at the start and finish of a yoga session. Om is considered the whole universe, (uni-verse, one-song) in a single sound and represents the union of mind, body and spirit. When chanted, the sound of Om consists of three syllables -- a, u, and m.

The practice of chanting Om is done by taking a deep breath and, on the exhalation, opening the mouth and singing out the sound, aaaaaaooooommmmm. For fun, you can place your hand on your chest and enjoy the vibration this sound makes in the body!

Meditation is a way to relax and become more mindful. Whenever we sit, or lie down and observe the mind, we are, in fact, meditating. The difference between meditation and napping, daydreaming or zoning out is that, in meditation, we are paying attention. By becoming still and following the breath, we discover a peaceful place inside.

Mediation calms the mind, brings a sense of clarity and soothes the nervous system.

Yoga in Schools: To “Om” or not to “Om” . . . that is the question! At least, that can be the question in some schools. Chanting Om, greeting one another with Namaste, or using other yogic traditions can represent different things to different people. Some consider yoga a science. Others consider it a spiritual practice. The debate appears to be endless. In keeping with the meaning of yoga, (to yoke – to unite – to bring together) it may be wise for those who teach yoga in schools, to honour people’s beliefs around this and adjust the practice accordingly.



Sanskrit Glossary

Many Sanskrit names can be broken down into two parts. For example, kurma means tortoise and asana means pose, so connecting the two together give us, Kurmasana, Tortoise Pose! Simha means lion and asana means pose, so Simhasana means Lion Pose!

Here are some more.

Bumble Bee Breath: Bhramari

Tree Pose: Vriksasana

Cat Pose: Marjaryasana

Cobra Pose: Bhujangasana

Mouse Pose: (Child's Pose) Balasana

Mountain Pose: Tadasana

Eagle Pose: Garudasana

Camel Pose: Ustrasana

Frog Pose: Mandukasana

Bhramari – Bumble Bee

Vriksha - Tree

Marjari - Cat

Bhujanga - Cobra

Bala - Child

Tada - Mountain

Garuda - Eagle

Ustra - Camel

Manduk - Frog

About the Author

As a parent, a yoga instructor and someone who has worked as both a preschool teacher and teacher's aid, Kathy has witnessed the effect of a society disconnected from itself and the Earth. Her purpose and passion is to help inspire little people (and big people) through her writing and yoga. In a light and playful style her stories and classes connect kids with nature, connect people to the planet and connect mind/body/spirit. www.kathybeliveau.ca

About the Illustrator

Farida Zaman has a passion for art and design. In her 20 years as a freelance illustrator, Farida has worked in many countries across the world, bringing style, colour, and joy to many. A graduate of the Chelsea College of Art and the Wimbledon School of Art, both in London, England, she has illustrated numerous children's books, and her work has been used in advertising, packaging, greeting cards, newspapers, and magazines throughout Britain, Canada, and the United States. Farida Zaman and her husband have two children and live in Toronto, Ontario. www.faridazaman.com

