**Simply Peace**

**Peaceful Choices and Activities for Schools**

**by Mary Gavin**

**Introduction**

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| Always begin with a simple calming exercise. You can tell the children: ‘You have a safe and peaceful place within you. You are free to go there just for a moment, or longer, whenever you choose’.At this point a simple calming breathing exercise can be taught, such as breathing in through the nose to the count of five and out through the mouth to the count of seven. Then a simple example of a peaceful choice could be read out (like any of the ones below) and this could be linked to an activity (in italics below the peaceful choices).**Peaceful Choices****Because I feel peaceful, I can choose to be loving.****I can choose to use kind words.***At this point you could create, with the children's help, a list of kind words so they develop a vocabulary of kindness. Who knows, you may learn something too from this 'present' generation! They would love to connect with you I feel. You could also look at what could be ‘peace-friendly’ attitudes here. You could compile a list with the children's help.* **Because I am peaceful I can choose to be forgiving.****I can accept an apology and say 'sorry'** **if someone says I hurt them with my actions.***At this point you could offer age-appropriate training in things like conflict resolution, deep listening and empathy. You could have Peace Ambassadors and also develop a heavenly 'Peace Garden' with the children's help, which would be a place to 'Just BE'.* **Because I am a person of peace I can choose to be hopeful.****I can choose positive thoughts. I hope for a peaceful and happy world.****Because I am a person of peace I can choose to be a light in the darkness.****I can be a light by being a peacemaker in my school and community.***You could do work here with Amnesty International or other local groups that are actively doing good. You could hand out copies of Positive News - a magazine full of positivity - something the world needs so much to inspire it at the moment.* **Because I am a peaceful person I need to understand** **the power of positive thinking.***You could use Dr Masaru Emoto's photographs which show the effect of positive thinking on water crystals.* **Because I am a peaceful person I can choose to be joyful,****by being grateful for every simple thing in my day.***For example the children could begin writing a daily ‘gratitude’ journal. They could finish off this sentence each day: ‘Three things I am grateful for....’.* **By finding some stillness each day and some calm by listening to my breathing and thinking kind thoughts, I will send out ripples of peace. My ripples will be felt and will help others around me. Animals and nature also respond to kind thoughts, kind deeds and calmness. I can remember I have a calm centre of peace inside.***You could plant seeds of trees or flowers and you could feed the birds as that’s all so positive - simple acts of love and connection.* **Whenever I don't feel peaceful I can simply return to my own centre of peace** **Even JUST FOR A MOMENT.****I simply listen to my breathing…****Breathing in for a count of 5 and then breathing out for a count of 7.****If I get distracted I just accept this and remember it is natural to be distracted by our thoughts. I will just allow the thoughts to pass through me and then return to listening to my breath.** **I will be gentle with myself and other living creatures.** |

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**Message from Mary Gavin**

There is no pressure in this loving universe to be anything else other than who and what you are in this moment. Please accept and love who you are in this moment and what you have chosen to do. Accept and love who the children are in your care. They may have much to teach you so please be open to learning from them too.

During a recent visit to Japan the word 'omoiyari' stood out for me. Omoiyari means 'a heart of compassion'. This described Sadako Sasaki. She was the, now famous, little girl affected by the nuclear bomb that fell on Hiroshima in 1945.

Sadako hoped her paper cranes, carrying peace on their wings, would make her better. She wanted to fold one thousand origami cranes, since Japanese tradition said this would bring longevity of life. She believed in this with all her heart. Before she died she managed to fold six hundred and forty four, even though she was so ill and paper was not easily available. Her friends helped her to reach one thousand after her death. Sadako’s paper cranes now help to bring peace to the world. This tradition continues today. Beautiful compassionate understanding from Sadako's friends near and far reach out throughout time. As does the resilience and hope that showed itself in someone so young 'from her heart' in response to such devastation.

Omoiyari, 'a heart of compassion', seems to me to be the essence, the objective of peace education. Compassion for yourself too hopefully, in your difficult but meaningful work and for others and for the children in your care. What a privilege it is for you to touch so many lives, though realising too how heavy that responsibility can feel at times in this rapidly changing, uncertain world.

**About Mary Gavin**

Mary Gavin was a primary school teacher for 24 years. She was a PHSE and Global Citizenship coordinator, an Eco coordinator and she trained in Peace Education. Mary taught peace education and values education. She was interested initially in inclusion and visited Danish schools as part of her honours degree study. She undertook a postgraduate course in emotional literacy. She has experience of teaching Philosophy for Children too.

Mary looked at the Canadian education system and visited schools there regarding citizenship and eco issues in 2002 (TIPD study visit). Though now retired from teaching, she has continued her own research and has visited Japan twice to learn about the Eastern approach to peace. Mary now does voluntary work and is a writer of spiritual poetry mainly, though spiritual short stories for children are part of that too. The poetry has found a natural home in spiritual and interfaith settings in the past couple of years.

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