

Millersville University

Mindful Maisy: A Story of Mindfulness and Calming Practices for All Kids

A Children's Book Manuscript and Review of Literature

A Senior Creative Project/Thesis Submitted to the Department of Early, Middle, and Exceptional

Education & The University Honors College Program

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Baccalaureate

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Abstract

The purpose of this creative project was to create a tool for students in educational and domestic settings to have for themselves to help them understand their emotions. Through writing my book I tried to keep in mind the vast differences between all children and their experiences. *Mindful Maisy* is a book created for all children from any background, whether that be socioeconomic status, racial background, region, gender, and so on. The age range for this book is intended for age four through age eight; the main character, Maisy, is intended to be about five to six years old. *Mindful Maisy* can be done as a read-aloud or read independently based on a child's individual reading level/ability as this book is slightly longer and more literacy-focused than other books for the same age range.

When writing this, I asked: What ways do children express themselves? How can educators and adults in children's lives better support them in the exploration of emotional regulation? How can I give the children in my life and in my future classroom a tool that has changed my life? What does the literature look like for mindfulness right now? How does or can mindfulness extend the classroom environment? In order for me to explore these questions and topics, I conducted research of twenty-five children's books on this topic. I researched the authors and illustrators who created these materials and explored many aspects of the books. I utilized peer-reviewed mindfulness research, available children's literature, and my personal experiences as an early childhood educator to create *Mindful Maisy*. I researched mindfulness practices, read, and analyzed picture books, and then wrote and edited multiple drafts of *Mindful Maisy* over the course of nine months, June 2023 to March 2024. My research uncovered different trends in writing and helped guide the writing and re-writing process for *Mindful Maisy*. The trends I discovered and analyzed included: overall, the picture books were focused on a

single topic under the larger umbrella of mindfulness; depictions of animals vs. children; the calming illustration style and color palette; the use of back matter (peritext) with resources the presence of other social-emotional themes; and finally the impactful/powerful quotes included throughout the books.

Acknowledgments

I would like to express my immense thanks to my thesis advisor Dr. Sarah Jackson, as well as my committee members Dr. Amber Nicole Pfannenstiel and Dr. Kaitlin Mondello. I could not have accomplished this project without their help, guidance, and support. Each of these women have been such an important part of my college career and my professional development. I could not have asked for a more supportive and guiding force of people to be in my corner through the creation of this book and the curation of the literature review. All three of these professors have fostered a love of students and literature in me throughout my time at Millersville and I could not be more grateful. Dr. Jackson has been a sounding board for me to bounce ideas off of, give my stresses too, and help me work through all the tiny challenges that went into creating this project. This project would not have gotten done, let alone be nearly as meaningful without Dr. Jackson's expertise in children's literature and developmental education.

I also want to thank Jane Lambert. I threw her into the huge task of creating illustrations for a children's book and she stepped up to help me as an artist, teacher colleague, and friend. The artwork she did and is still creating is so beautiful and evokes exactly what I wanted for this book. I could not have visualized this work or kept going with next steps of hoping to self-publish without her. This creative process has brought us so much closer as professionals, educators, and as friends.

I want to especially thank my biggest support systems, my fiancé Andrew, my best friend Hannah, and my family. Andrew has been with me since the beginning with this project and has seen the good, the bad, and the ugly of this process. Andrew was also a large part of the editing process and helped me put my thoughts into order. He was my emotional support when I was down on myself and feared I couldn't accomplish this. My best friend has proof-read *Mindful Maisy* so many times and I am forever grateful for her input in the writing process. Finally, my family. My family are always my biggest supporters, especially my stepfather Stu. He is always in my corner cheering me on and making a big deal out of things I find to be small accomplishments. He makes me believe in myself; he shows up for me no matter what. Stu once read a poem I wrote, looked at me, and said it was the most amazing thing he had read and that I should write a book. He didn't know at the time that I thought that poem was my worst writing, and I was planning on getting rid of all my journals full of ideas/poems that day. He saw me and gave me a light to shine on myself I didn't have before—he saved my words. The same goes for my mom, Laurie. She is the reason I have such a strong work ethic and can turn a mess into something beautiful without blinking. She is also the reason I got to stay in school, had enough time to finish this project, and attain my dream of being a teacher. I could not be anywhere close to the human being and educator I am without them by my side supporting me. My parents have supported my goals and dreams even when I didn't make it easy. They are the truest form of heroes I can think of.

Finally, I want to acknowledge my students. All the children I have ever babysat, met in placement, had the honor of teaching and cultivating their learning. Thank you from the bottom of my heart—you are what this is for, and you are what gives me purpose.

I could not have asked for better professors, a better team, better family, or better people in general to have supported me and stood by my side through the creation of Maisy. You all are incredible, and I am where I am because of you—you will never know what that gift feels like.

MINDFUL MAISY
A STORY OF MINDFULNESS AND CALMING PRACTICES FOR ALL KIDS

WRITTEN BY: MADELINE ENGLEMAN
ILLUSTRATIONS BY: JANE LAMBERT

DEDICATIONS & ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To Mom & Stu – Thank you for being my biggest cheerleaders and always supporting my writing/creativity. You gave me the strength to write this and keep going even when it was really hard or frustrating. You are my heroes and always *truly* believed in me. P.S This is part of what I was doing during that extra year of college ☺

My Brother, Jack, & Cousins – You are the first kids I ever watched grow, think, feel, and learn. It has been my genuine honor and I love you more than you will ever really know. Being the oldest sibling/cousin in the family used to annoy me but writing this and thinking of you all, I understand it all now. This book is for all you crazy kids...who aren't all kids anymore.

My Past, Current, & Future Students – I wrote this book to give you a tool but also to give you a little piece of my heart since you're all so infinitely important to my life. You matter, your emotions and thoughts matter, and you are so incredibly brilliant in your own individual ways—never forget that.

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All of my friends, family, & kids/students who read these drafts – you guys made this book so much better with your suggestions, comments, and reactions! I needed you all and this book needed you.

- M.E

Pg. 1

The sun snuck through the curtains and into Maisy's room, shining a warm glow onto her face.

"Ugh" groaned Maisy. "Go away sun, I am NOT getting up today!" she said from under her covers.

Pg. 2

Maisy's mom walked into her bedroom. "Good morning, my darling girl" she said brightly. Maisy huffed, and pulled the covers further over her head.

"Maisy...my Maisy girl, come on, honey, it is a beautiful day outside" she said.

Maisy huffed again, "I can't get out of bed, Mommy. I am just mad Maisy today" she said.

Pg. 3

"Okay, well I guess mad Maisy won't want to go to the park..." her mom said. "...the park...?" Maisy asked. "Yes, all your friends will be there today, it's a warm, sunny Saturday," her mom said happily.

"Well...maybe the park could help me," Maisy said, "I'll get out of bed and try." "That's my girl," her mom replied.

Pg. 4

Maisy and her mom headed across the street toward the park. Maisy's mom sat with the other parents nearby. Maisy said goodbye to her mom and ventured to find her friends.

Maisy still didn't feel like her usual self, but she was excited to see her friends and be outside.

Pg. 5

At the front of the park, Maisy saw her friend Aaron.

Aaron was sitting at a picnic table making something strange. Maisy walked over to see what it was.

Pg. 6

“Hi Aaron,” chirped Maisy. “Good morning, Maisy!” said Aaron. “What are you making?” Maisy asked. “This is my Mindfulness Jar” replied Aaron. “My teacher has one in our classroom to help us calm down,” he added.

Maisy looked at the jars on the table and was not convinced.

Pg. 7

“Here Maisy, take a jar” said Aaron as he pushed one toward her. “Just try it out and see for yourself,” said Aaron with a smile. The jar was filled with blank strips of paper and had a small pen inside. Maisy did like the blue lid on top though, so she took it.

Maisy gave a weak smile, said goodbye to Aaron, and went on her way.

Pg. 8

Maisy saw her friend Ariel sitting under a big tree. “Ariel, what are you doing down on the ground?” Maisy asked. “Hey Maisy, I am practicing my meditation,” Ariel said.

Pg. 9

“What is meditation?” asked Maisy. She had never heard of that word before. “Well, meditation calms me down and makes me feel happier,” Ariel replied.

“I am doing breathing meditation today,” Ariel said. “Do you want to try it?”

Pg. 10

Maisy didn’t really understand. We breathe all the time...Maisy thought to herself. She sat down next to Ariel anyway, closed her eyes, and listened.

“Okay Maisy, we are going to take 3 deep breaths, in through our nose and out through our mouth,” she said.

Pg. 11

Once the breaths were done, Maisy opened her eyes. She felt so calm. Ariel smiled at her. “Great job Maisy! Now you can add breathing meditation to that jar you have” Ariel said pointing to her jar. “Yeah!” Maisy said, “Thank you.”

Pg. 12

Maisy walked to the middle of the park. She saw Zara and Emir on squishy-looking mats. “What are you doing on those mats?” Maisy asked confused.

“Hello Maisy, we are doing our yoga stretches,” said Zara. “Yeah, we do it once a day together,” Emir added.

Pg. 13

“Would you like to try, Maisy?” asked the twins. “Okay, but I’m not very stretchy,” Maisy replied shyly.

Maisy got onto one of the yoga mats. Zara did a pose called Tree while Emir chose a pose called Warrior. Maisy watched intently and tried the poses with them. It was tricky at first but then she found her balance!

Pg. 14

“How do you feel now?” asked Zara. “My arms and legs feel strong, and I have lots of new energy!” Maisy cheered.

“Good” they both replied, “You can add yoga stretches to that cool jar,” they said. Maisy did, then walked on toward the berry bushes.

Pg. 15

Maisy saw another one of her friends, Freya, near the berry bushes. “Hi Freya!” Maisy called. “Hey Maisy, isn’t it such a nice day!” sung Freya. “Mhm-huhm,” mumbled Maisy quietly.

“You don’t seem yourself, Maisy. Here, come do a feelings check-in with me,” offered Freya.

Pg. 16

“A feelings check-in?” questioned Maisy. “Yes! My older sister does this with me almost every day after school,” Freya replied. “Okay, I’ll try” Maisy said.

“It’s easy. All you do is get comfortable, close your eyes, and say how you are feeling right now out loud,” whispered Freya.

Pg. 17

Maisy did what Freya said. “I am feeling down today. I’m not sure why. But it is getting better. I think,” Maisy said honestly.

Maisy opened her eyes and smiled. “Thank you for showing me that, Freya,” said Maisy. “Of course! Sometimes it’s all you need. Hey, you can add it to your jar now!” Freya said. Maisy did and went on her way.

Pg. 18

Maisy saw a bench and sat down to take a break. She saw her friend Colin walking toward her with his fluffy dog named Milo.

“Hi Colin, Hello Milo!” exclaimed Maisy. “Hi Maisy! Wow, that is an interesting jar you have there. I like the blue lid,” said Colin.

Pg. 19

“Thanks! Aaron gave it to me. I have been collecting different mindfulness exercises all day to fill the jar up,” Maisy said.

“I could give you another one to add. I do a gratitude list at the end of each week,” he told her. “Okay, I think I would like to try that,” Maisy said.

Pg. 20

Colin went over next to Maisy. “So, I get a piece of paper and write down all the things and people I can think of that I am grateful for,” said Colin.

“Sometimes I don’t know how to spell the words, but my Grandma helps me” he said proudly. Milo barked happily.

Pg. 21

“I like that idea, thank you for telling me about this Colin,” Maisy said. “No problem! I’ll see you at school, Maisy!” Colin yelled as he left. Milo barked his goodbye.

Maisy added the gratitude idea to her jar and started back into the park.

Pg. 22

Maisy saw her friend Leah laying in the grass near the swing sets. She walked over to see what Leah was up to.

“Leah why are you laying on the ground?” inquired Maisy. “I am enjoying nature and coloring, Maisy!” exclaimed Leah.

Pg. 23

Maisy saw she was coloring a picture of a family of ducks swimming on a pond. “I am going to write a story about them once I am done coloring,” said Leah happily.

“Wow, that’s really pretty,” Maisy said in awe. “Thanks! You can come color with me too. My Aunt Sarah says it helps you focus more on the details around you,” said Leah.

Pg. 24

“I think I will have to color with you another time—it’s getting late,” Maisy said quietly.

“Thank you for sharing with me though, Leah” Maisy said. “Of course! We will have to do this another time!” Leah said excitedly. “Definitely,” Maisy said proudly. Maisy added coloring to her jar for later.

Pg. 25

As she neared the pond, she saw Adrian. He sits next to her on the bus. She decided to say hello to him before returning to her mom.

“Hi Adrian, what are you doing? I don’t usually see you here,” Maisy said. “Oh, hello, Maisy. Nice to see you! I needed a new place for my sensory exploration,” he replied.

Pg. 26

“What does that mean? It sounds kind of fancy,” Maisy asked. “I just go around the park using my 5 senses: sight, touch, smell, hearing, and taste to explore what is around me,” Adrian said happily. “Here, let me show you,” Maisy agreed and joined him.

Pg. 27

“Okay to start, taste one of my apple slices. It’s yummy and safe to eat,” he said joyfully. Maisy took a bite and gleamed. “It’s sweet and crisp!” Maisy said. “Perfect! Let’s keep going,” Adrian offered. They set off to explore with their other 4 senses.

Pg. 28

Maisy and Adrian saw a turtle, heard dogs barking, smelled the sweetness of a honeysuckle bush, and felt the bumpy sharpness of a pinecone. She LOVED it!

Maisy added this new experience to her jar and went on her way back towards her mom. She was worn out. “Thank you so much Adrian. I’ll see you on the bus Monday!” said Maisy.

Pg. 29

Maisy walked through the park with her jar, remembering each new activity she did. Maisy was feeling much better now.

She could not wait to show her mom everything she learned today!

Pg. 30

“Hi darling, how was your visit in the park? You look much brighter now” Maisy’s mom said from the parent table. Maisy saw her friends joining up with their parents, getting ready to leave too.

“I had a GREAT time mom; I saw all my friends and they taught me all these things! Here, look at my Mindfulness Jar!” Maisy said smiling from ear to ear.

Pg. 31

Maisy showed her mom her Mindfulness jar and all the ideas she collected. Maisy’s mom smiled and watched her daughter with joy as she told her about each one.

Maisy put her slips back in the jar and her mom put it in her bag for safe keeping. When they got home, she set it on the bookshelf where Maisy could always reach it.

Pg. 32

“I’m so proud of you, my Maisy girl!” her mom said with pride. “No mom, now I’m your *mindful* Maisy girl!” she said, hugging her mom.

“I can’t wait for tomorrow,” Maisy said. “Why is that?” her mom asked. “Because I know I can make it a good day no matter how it starts!” she replied. Maisy and her mom smiled together. This was a very good day after all.

Pg. 33

YAY! You reached the end of my story, that’s amazing!

What did you think about it? Have you ever had a morning that started out like mine? Or maybe you have had an emotional or bad day?

I hope my friends and I gave YOU some good ideas about how to be calmer, happier, and live in the moment. I know it helped me so much more than I thought!

I brought you a little gift, your very own Mindfulness Jar to keep safe here on this page! You can label it with your name or if you are at school, this can be for the whole class! Use the little strips of paper to write down ways you like to calm down and be mindful – use some of the activities in my story or add your own new ones! Remember there will always be a brighter day coming and you are SO very important to be there when it comes.

- Love, Maisy

Back Index

Mindfulness Index for Families & Teachers:

Try Maisy’s mindfulness exercises at home or at school with the kids in your life!

Mindfulness Jar:

A mindfulness jar is a great tool for children to store all of their calming activities in one, individualized, and easily accessible place. This is a visual storage tool that can be in your home or your school!

Keep the jar in a place that is easily accessed or can be easily seen by children so they can have agency over their calming tool

Materials to make your own jar –

- Some form of container/jar, lids are optional
- Paint, fabric, glitter, stickers, etc. to decorate the jar if desired
- A small rectangle of paper for the front of the jar to label: ex. “Maisy’s Mindfulness Jar!”
- Blank strips of paper to write down your mindfulness activities: *Tip:* use colored paper to make it bright & fun!

Breath Meditation:

Breathing is one of the simplest and fastest ways to calm our bodies and minds. Breathing meditation is a great resource for children and adults to use in times of stress, anger, sadness, or when they are not in control. Breathing is something we do all the time, but meditative breathing allows purposeful oxygen into the brain and decompresses the body slowly and in the moment.

Step-by-Step:

1. Get into a comfortable position
2. Close your eyes
3. Take 3-5 long, deep breaths. In through the nose [2 sec.], hold [2 sec.], and out through the mouth [3 sec.].
4. Repeat steps as needed

Tip: Guided breathing can be beneficial for children who have trouble sitting still in silence or need more stimulation while doing their deep breaths

For more resources on breathing exercises, check out Yoga Guppy! She has a whole library of breathing exercises catered to children within her website and YouTube channel.

Website: <https://www.yogaguppy.com/>

YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/@YogaGuppy/videos>

Simple Yoga Stretches:

Yoga is an activity that helps refresh, energize, and stretch out your body. Yoga is a wonderful practice to calm our systems while also giving us a boost of energy to keep us going throughout our day. Yoga is a helpful practice for kids because it helps improve motor skills, balance, focus, and it gets them moving. Many times, yoga is in direct relationship with breathing—it’s a two-for-one!

Tip: You can do these yoga poses indoors and outdoors and with or without a yoga mat!

Some of Maisy's favorite yoga poses are:

1. Tree
2. Downward Dog
3. Cow
4. Warrior
5. Boat

For more resources on yoga poses check out Namaste Kids. This is a huge library of free, fun, and kid-friendly yoga poses!

<https://namastekid.com/tool-type/kids-yoga-poses/>

Feelings Check-in:

Checking in with what we are feeling is important for socio-emotional learning development. It helps children regulate their emotions, express them, deal with them, and it allows them to be heard. Here are 2 options for a feelings/emotions check-in to try!

Option 1 Step-by-Step: Home or School

1. Find a comfortable position to sit, stand, or lay down in
2. Close your eyes
3. Take 3 deep breaths
4. Say out loud how you are feeling and why
5. Say out loud how you could make it better (*optional*)

Option 2 Step-by-Step: Home

1. Find a comfortable position to sit, stand, or lay down in
2. Close your eyes (*optional*)
3. Take 1-3 deep breaths
4. Say out loud the emotion you are feeling and give it a color. Ex. I am feeling sad, I feel blue.
5. Use color words to more easily indicate emotions being felt around the house as needed

Gratitude List:

Being grateful and looking at things to be grateful for during your week not only boosts happiness and kindness but also teaches thankfulness that is genuine! Making a gratitude list is a simple way to explore what is important to your child or student(s) while spending quality time together. *Note – the list can be as long or short as wanted, it can be specific for that day/week or can be broader**

Step-by-Step:

- 1.) Explain the activity so children know what to expect
- 2.) Give out materials: pencils, papers, etc.
- 3.) Take time with the child in your life to make a list of things and or people they are grateful for!

Coloring [with or without a writing component]:

Coloring is a natural activity for most children, and it is likely already something they often do and like. Coloring as a mindfulness practice should be intentional coloring for calming our

bodies and helps promote focus, fine motor skills, and detail-oriented play. All you need is coloring utensils, blank papers, and or a coloring book/printout pages.

If you want to add some literacy practice, challenge your child to write about their drawing or form it into a story to share!

Tip: if desired play some meditation-specific, instrumental, or soothing music while coloring to add an extra layer of calm to the coloring space!

Sensory Exploration:

A sensory exploration is a great way to be present in the moment and deepen the connection between the child and the world around them. Using the 5 senses or strengthening the senses is beneficial for your mind and your body. Children are already exploratory and ready to learn more about their surroundings. Therefore, by focusing on their senses they deepen their understanding, their connection to their environment, and sharpen their awareness while having fun!

Directions:

Use the 5 senses *[for the senses that make sense for your individual body and abilities]* to explore your environment.

This can be done indoors or outdoors in any space that is safe and offers multiple points of experience.

This activity could be done informally as just an exploration of objects that pique the senses, or this can be done formally with writing down or drawing the objects found!

Personal Kindness to Your Mind: for children & adults

At the end of each week take try to take a moment for self-love. Take a piece of paper and write down 3-5 [or more] things you like about yourself, that you are proud of, or that you accomplished this week! Anything, whether it is big or small, is important! Share these out loud to someone if you are comfortable or try saying them out loud to yourself in a quiet, safe space.

Author's Note

The initial idea for this book stems from my love for mindfulness and meditation. I had a therapist when I was a teenager named Debbie. She was the person to introduce me to mindfulness meditation and truly saved me in a simple sort of way. It has helped me grow and be happier in my daily life. It has also brought me such joy in showing it/sharing it with the children in my life. I wanted this book to be important and helpful but also real. The characters are based off of the beautiful diversity of the world we live in, but I wanted it to be presented in a way that didn't have to be explicitly cited in the writing of the book. I hope that when children read this or it is read to them, and they see these characters, that they see themselves or their family members, neighbors, friends, and future friends. I based the main character of this story, Maisy, off of my (currently) 5-year-old cousin Emmy. This is for her. When I share this book with her, I want her to see herself in Maisy, her beautiful skin and curly hair and girly style. I hope she sees just how very much I love her and love watching her grow up. This book is also my small way of

showing thanks and appreciation for all the educators in my family before me who have fostered a love of teaching, learning, and growing – my Grandmom & Grandpop Gilly, my Aunt Lizzy, my Uncle Nick, and especially my amazing and beautiful mom, Laurie.

Although this book started out as a creative project for my Honors College Thesis, it bloomed into something so much more for me – it became something I wanted to share with my family, my teacher colleagues, other families, and classrooms alike. I wanted to make sure the story was realistic, relevant, and had meaning. I wanted to convey real emotions and experience that are present to a child and some of the complicated process that go into figuring those out. To do this, I took all my own personal knowledge about mindfulness, meditation, and calming practices and mixed it with research conducted on other children's books on these topics. Throughout my research, I explored the different ways this topic can be presented when it comes to formatting/style. Some are illustrated, some are resource books with real images, some were more realistic looking while others were more abstract. Some of the books focused on just one practice while others focused on many. Many books have animals as the characters, and some had diversity in the representation of characters. My hope is that I took the best inspirational pieces of the books out there, disregarded the trends that didn't lend to the children I see all the time, and add that all to my personal story, passion, and intentions for *Mindful Maisy*. I could not have achieved this without my amazing thesis advisor and trusted professor, Dr. Sarah Jackson, nor would this book be nearly as beautiful if it wasn't for the illustrations done by my classmate, teacher college, and cherished friend, Jane Lambert.

To the children who hopefully enjoyed this book:

Thank you for being here. You are so important, kind, intelligent, and full of life. I wrote this for you and for all the amazing things you are and that you will be. Remember, you matter. You are brilliant. Believe in yourself and in who you are! Your emotions and thoughts matter, please share them. Try these activities out, explore more that aren't in here, and help your mind and body.

I hope *Mindful Maisy* helps you in some way because you all are the people who help me and drive my passion as an educator and human being.

I. Review of Literature

Introduction

When first beginning this project, I knew I wanted it to be centered around mindfulness and calming practices. I knew I wanted it to be a children's book that would be a jumping off point for families and classrooms. However, when thinking about the "why" of these decisions and intense feelings, I realized that it was the connection between the classroom, the home, the social atmosphere, and the emotional connection to these things that was important. Mindfulness has helped me so much in my personal life throughout my teenage years and into adulthood. When I began using mindfulness practices with the children and students in my life, I realized how instrumental it can be. Throughout my education program in college, we learn about best practices and dive deeply into strategies to help our students. I realized that mindfulness and meditation is something I rarely see implemented in my placements or talked about as a specific strategy. However, when I have seen it, it works for the students in such a profound way. I connected something that helps me personally every single day to something that could help my students regulate their emotions and deal with their day-to-day lives. Mindfulness is an unmined gem for the educational world in my opinion and when I had an opportunity to introduce it in a way that speaks to me it was just a perfect fit.

When thinking about the modality of my thesis/creative project on mindfulness, there were options. I could have gone the traditional thesis route but that didn't speak to me as a creative writer. I have always enjoyed writing short stories and poetry; my minor while in college is English and I have a skillset for teaching ELA to my students. Therefore, when completing this creative project I knew the traditional thesis was not for me. I wanted to write something from

my soul that reflected what I want for my future students and my children in the future to use. My goal was to create a tool within the pages of a children's book that is accessible to others and able to enhance the classroom or household the book is being enjoyed in. I also felt as if a children's book was a much better way to share this concept with people in my life and in my future educational career rather than having a long paper that wouldn't be seen by a range of individuals. Picture books are such a large point of contact between children, adults, families, schools, and the world. In reviewing all the literature that will be within this review, I have gotten to see mindfulness in so many different forms through different formats and mediums, but all delivered within a book you can grasp in your hands. I wanted a similar outcome for *Mindful Maisy*. As demonstrated below, picture books also have so much power in the way that the images and illustrations reflect the writing and the mood of the book. Children get to experience the concept of mindfulness in multiple mediums through a picture book and can have access to the concepts through the physical book itself. I wanted this to be for children, used by, and experienced by children. For me, the best way to achieve all of these things was through a children's picture book.

This literature review's goal is to outline the importance of mindfulness practices for children at home and in school. This paper will consist of said research, themes and trends found within twenty-five different mindfulness/meditation-based children's literature, an exploration into how *Mindful Maisy* is relevant as well as differentiated from those works, an insight into the overall writing process of *Mindful Maisy* and I will conclude with my hopes for the children's book.

Peer-Reviewed Research Studies on Mindfulness for Children

There have been substantial amounts of academic research on the importance and benefits of mindfulness practices and teachings in both domestic and academic settings. “Mindfulness is broadly defined as a non-judgmental, curious and compassionate awareness, noticing the forever unfolding present moment experiences” (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 1174). Children can connect to mindfulness practices as it is individualistic and does not look to the same for everyone. “Mindfulness is popular world-wide. In the United States (US) alone, it is estimated that over 225,000 psychologists, social workers and mental health professionals are using the practice with their clients. Programs have multiplied exponentially and filtered through to our education system. There is a myriad of ways that mindful qualities are now imparted to children, teachers, counsellors, principals and children in schools and out-of-school settings” (Albrecht, 2019, p. 491). This is important because the connection between the school system interventions as well as what is being done at home is essential for the support of young kids.

A key aspect of mindfulness that has impacted my life personally and guided me during research was the idea of mindfulness as a health activity. Mindfulness can be used as an outlet for both adults and children to feel happier and healthier. “Mindfulness is overwhelmingly considered in the academic literature to be wellness-orientated and a wellness intervention targeting a wide range of social, emotional, physical, spiritual and cognitive and creative outcomes...mindfulness is considered to be an active, lifelong and ever-lasting process of becoming aware of choices, making decisions and taking responsibility towards achieving a balanced and fulfilling life” (Albrecht, 2019, p. 491). The use of the word wellness spoke to me while reviewing this literature. Mindfulness is a holistic experience, and it is important to note

that while the practices vary, all are utilized in the pursuit of a child's wellbeing. I found that many studies have been done to show the positive impact that mindfulness-based practices have on the wellbeing of children and students. According to Albrecht (2019). "Mindbody wellness focuses on the interactions between the brain, mind, body, and behavior and the powerful ways in which emotional, mental, social, spiritual, and behavioral factors can directly affect wellness" (p. 490). This shows the deep interconnected nature of mindfulness into many other areas of the body that make up the whole child and their experiences.

Another key aspect of mindfulness practice studies is the emphasis on coping strategies that mindfulness provides for children. Thankfully, "mindfulness has taken a preeminent role in education" (Albrecht, 2019, p. 487). This shows up mainly in the use of regulation strategies in order for students to be successful in their educational journeys. In a research study conducted by Rozalski et al., (2021), it was said that "children may utilize unsuccessful coping strategies to handle stress and challenging situations, resulting in the increasing rates of stress and anxiety, most children will benefit from learning constructive tools to cope" (p. 6). This opens the door for a need of students to have better coping strategies and calming practices to be present "these strategies can empower students to regulate and monitor their moods and emotional states. Adopting mindfulness practices can strengthen the community of a classroom by improving students' inter- personal skills and how they connect with peers" (p.7). The use of mindfulness strategies in order to form closer relationships with peers creates a positive learning cycle where the social interaction is healthy as well as the educational experience is less stressful. Another study by Bockmann and Yu (2022) found similar results and noted the study was a comprehensive look into the benefits of self-regulation and the interrelationships between these strategies and the overall positive environment of the child. "Research shows that self-regulation

is linked to empathy and conscience development, social competence, overall social and emotional well-being, peer acceptance, and academic success.” (Bockmann and Yu, 2022, p. 693). Low levels of self-regulation can be the cause disruptive behaviors, high rates of rejection from peers, redirections from teachers, poor sense of self-worth, lower academic achievement, and difficulties managing stress (Bockmann and Yu, 2022,). Giving students a chance to not only explore healthy ways to express themselves but also encourage that exploration will help the child in a holistic way; it will cause positive change in many different aspects of the child’s life.

Mindfulness is also key for students in combatting stressors and understanding their emotions in a safe way. Students in younger and younger grades are experiencing stress and related issues in their homes and schools. Mindfulness gives students and children an outlet to work through those things and “a useful evidence-based strategy for managing stress in young people is the use of mindfulness practices” (Nguyen, et. al, 2021, p. 1174). It is important to create an environment where evidence-based practices are important. Giving children tools to help regulate their emotions and calm themselves is not as easily done as it is thought of. Creating an environment where the practices are curated intentionally is essential to meaningful connections to mindfulness, especially when students are feeling stress. Albrecht (2019) notes that “a key driver stimulating the expansion of mindfulness education is stress in the school system. High levels of stress are being experienced by students, in-service teachers, and pre-service teachers” (p. 488). Bockmann and Yu’s (2022) research goes further, to note the effects of the recent COVID-19 pandemic on students: “the pandemic has caused increases in financial, physical, and mental stress, experiences of depression, and adverse childhood experiences, which have been recorded both at home and in the early childhood education setting” (p. 693). Mindfulness creates an atmosphere where students have a point of contact for positive emotional

experiences. When students understand how to manage their stress and embrace their different emotional experiences, this directly correlates to better behavior, emotional regulation, and even academic experiences. “Children have articulated improvements in academic achievement; expanded range of knowledge in regard to emotions; the ability to regulate emotions; paying attention and focus; self-efficacy, which led to the ability to stand up to bullies; relaxation; empathy; and compassion” (Albrecht, 2019, p. 493). Nguyen et. al (2022) go on to say within their study that “mindfulness-based initiatives have been shown to improve psychological wellbeing and increase academic engagement in school settings” (p. 1172). Mindfulness practices give children a platform where they can dive deeply into their emotional sides and find new ways to express their needs to the adults around them. It is important for children to build confidence in the area of regulation as they learn and grow in society, therefore, mindfulness is essential for children as a building block of that experience.

In the research involving the use of mindfulness in literature and libraries, Rozalski et al., (2021) focused on the relationships between mindfulness, the school setting, and library connection. “The implementation of mindfulness practices can be an opportunity for teachers and librarians to form a collaborative relationship to transform the quality of the classroom or library experience” (p. 6). This research included what was not recommended as far as mindfulness-based practices and literature: “because of common misunderstandings, it is also beneficial to know what mindfulness is not—it is not turning off the brain, escaping from reality by avoiding difficult feelings, or practicing religion” (Rozalski et al., 2021, p. 8). There is importance in school systems when it comes to collaboration between libraries and mindfulness-based literature for students in order to promote healthy skills and strategies for them to acquire. This collaboration works because “teachers can also work with librarians to build a collection of

children’s literature that promotes mindful practices. Also, these situations allow the utilization of mindfulness literature and the activities within for individual or whole groups activities” (p.8). This research relates to Albrecht’s (2019) study in which “participants were also using mindfulness as a means to empower students—to give them the skills to manage their own emotions and wellbeing and in addition, encouraging them to lead other students in mindfulness activities...the teachers viewed mindfulness as a means to nourish the whole of a child’s wellbeing” (p.498). Within the research it seems that mindfulness findings are generally consistent in the way that they report positive outcomes and benefits for children as well as the adults in their lives who are completing these practices with them.

Peer-Reviewed Research on Mindfulness in Children’s Books

Mindfulness as a topic for children’s literature is impactful in many ways. Literature in general is a vehicle used in both academic and domestic settings to bring concept awareness to children. Mindfulness books are beneficial in the same way because according to Danilewitz (2021), “picture books depict and elicit feelings in children, and they offer a model for children in terms of managing their life situation in a meaningful way” (p. 31). Through the touchpoint of a book, children are able connect deeper and understand their own emotional responses better through a character. This point was further reflected in a dissertation out of San Francisco, Sarai (2019) powerfully stated, “by seeing what a character in a book is experiencing and can overcome, the child can feel less alone while having certain situations normalized” (pp. 5-6). This is important because children often learn meaningfully by following or mimicking others, which can translate into literacy character choices as well. This is further confirmed because

“when children empathize with believable story characters, they can understand themselves and others better” (Danilewitz, 2021, p. 3). It is an essential function of children’s literature that the children can connect with the book in a variety of ways in order to have a deep impact.

Children’s books surrounding the topic of mindfulness are also beneficial as a point of contact for children because these books make “mindfulness practices more available to children,” and they can act as a “vehicle to introduce the topic of mindfulness to young children” (Sarai, 2019, p. iv). This point was a large influence for me when thinking about how to bring mindfulness practices to children in a safe, familiar, and healthy way that fostered growth at the child’s own pace.

A large sample of research on mindfulness in children’s books focused on the topic of emotions and empathy. This was best represented by Danilewitz (2021) who stated “picture books can often facilitate children's ability to deal with their emotional concerns and prepare children for life events... Through stories, children can learn about empathic responses to situations and, over time, grow in their empathy” (p. ii). When children have access to materials that can help them work through their emotional responses and understand them better through literature, it creates a safe space to grow. This growth is not simply just at the surface level. Research conducted involving the wellness and health of children done by Murphy (2018) highlighted “engaging in a mindfulness approach led to systematic improvement” (p. 7) and “educators can use children’s literature to support students being introduced to healthy habits at a young age” (p. ii). In the school context this allows a bridge between healthy coping skills at both the home and the school environment.

The final aspect of children’s literature related to mindfulness books was the connection to bibliotherapy. “Bibliotherapy was defined as the use of books and stories to support social

emotional needs” (Murphy, 2018, p. 9). I feel that this is a key connection between the social emotional aspect of children’s lives as well as the regulation that they learn throughout their journeys of growth at home and at school. This concept of bibliotherapy is one I have been hearing about more often in the academic setting. However, when dealing with mindfulness, there are still some barriers of implementing it in school settings fully. One of the main reasons for this could be connected to the time it takes to engage in. Although mindfulness can be done anywhere for any amount of time, it does take consistency to implement as a go-to strategy during the school day. There could also be the challenge of students who do not identify with this coping strategy. Danilewitz (2021) notes that “mindfulness accesses the right brain more; we need more right brain access for ourselves and our culture. We need to express more empathy, kindness, and compassion in our world” (p. 5). Although this quote is beautiful and geared toward the betterment of our children and our world, there is a point to be made about the possibility that mindfulness practices in schools is difficult to implement if the teacher or students have a tendency to be more left-brained. This is not to say being more left-brained is a negative thing, but it could prove to be a barrier to consistent use of coping strategies if it is not understood or thought to be individually purposeful.

Book Selection Process

When first beginning my research for this literature review, I was worried there would not be many books to choose from. However, I was overwhelmed by the amount of mindfulness and or meditation books for children that are out there. Primarily, I got my books from the local library in Lancaster City. It was important for me that the large majority of my pool of research books consisted of the same ones the children I teach/know have access to. I meant to use

mindfulness books that were local to the same area as the children who will have access to my book. This was done intentionally and with the upmost respect for the reality of the literature offered to children on this topic.

To begin this process, I explained my project to the children's library, and she provided me with everything she had. During the selection process however, I found there was an abundance of single-topic mindfulness books and I eliminated some of these from my overall pile as to vary the types of books I analyzed. I supplemented about four or five books with YouTube read alouds based on books I knew about, had read before, or was recommended but did not have access to during the time.

Author & Illustrator Background

During my research of twenty-five children's books based on different mindfulness practices, I also was interested in exploring the demographics of the authors and illustrators of these books. Some of the key points I investigated were their gender, race/ethnic background, geological location of origin, and other occupations. In total, through the twenty-five books, there were forty-six people, containing a mixture of authors, illustrators, and a few photographers. I compiled this data through the examination and analysis of author/illustrator biographies, about me-style sections on sites selling the book, as well as some social media research. The categories in these demographics that self-identified consisted of the Indian, African American, and Hispanic contributors, the contributors originating from South Korea, India, Canada, Russia, Australia, and Moldova. A small number of contributors self-identified their gender through the use of pronouns in online profiles or biographies, but the majority did

not specifically self-identify their gender. All other demographic categories listed were not self-reported.

I felt that the representation within the books as well as the authors and illustrators themselves was important. This merited some further investigation, but it proved to be difficult to compare demographic information not specifically cited/reported by the contributors. This fact showed me just how important it is to represent various groups, not only in books but in research as well. However, it does pose the question about why there are many books depicting diversity, but the majority are created by non-racially and ethnically diverse artists. I do feel it is important to note that this is a small data set collected from books of one topic collected from a local library and YouTube read-alouds, and therefore by no means reflects the entire culture of literature. Although I originally set out to collect a large amount of data on the gender identities as well as the racial/ethnic backgrounds of the contributors of these books, I could not obtain enough conclusive data to make a definitive claim about this aspect of background.

Another aspect of background I looked into was the geographical location from which the contributor originated; this data point proved to be the largest category where contributors self-reported. This category was still overwhelmingly skewed toward United States-based authors and illustrators but there were many more countries than I had expected. 74% (34/46) of the creators originate from the United States, 7% (3/46) originate from the United Kingdom, 4% (2/46) were from Russia, and there was a single contributor from each of these seven other countries of origin: these included Canada, Australia, Germany, Moldova, France, India, and South Korea. These global connections did bring me some joy in the way that these different countries and influences are coming into the books being created. An example of this was in *You Are a Lion!* By Taeun Yoo. Within this book, there are Asian children depicted for some of the

characters included in the book, the use of traditional Chinese meditation themes, and especially the illustrations being in the tradition Chinese style of artwork.

Not many of the authors and illustrators had completely different occupations than what they are being cited in this paper for. However, some honorable mentions include professional actress, teachers, and multiple medical professionals in the field of psychology. This showcased the range of those who write books or create art, but it also connects back to mindfulness having real, research-based positive effects. Also, books are something that parents and teachers actively engage with and utilize as a tool, therefore, having authors who also have expertise in the medical or education field is important.

Themes and Trends

Throughout the exploration of twenty-five children's books based on mindfulness, meditation, yoga, breathing, art, gratitude, and more, I felt like I gained a better understanding of this topic in literature. I used some of the common trends within my book but also have

differences. In the next section I will outline how my book relates and differs from the themes/trends explored throughout these picture books.

A main theme of the literature I reviewed was that the books are single-topic books. By single-topic book I mean the majority of the books are focused on a single aspect of mindfulness like yoga, breathing,

Figure 1

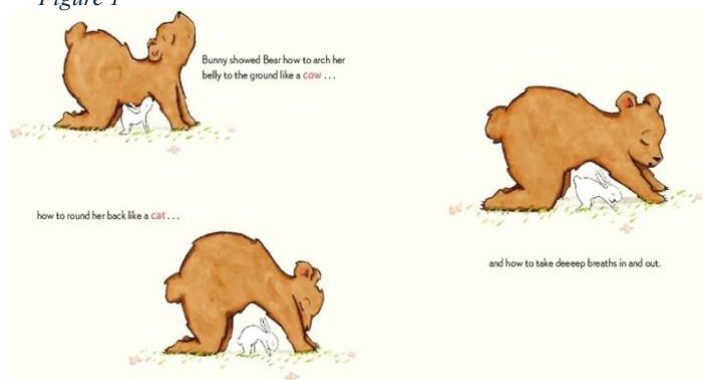


Figure 2



gratitude, feelings, etc. 64% (16/25) of the books I read and analyzed were focused on just one topic under the mindfulness umbrella. 36% (9/25) covered a larger range of activities and practices or used a combination of two topics in one book. Examples of single-topic mindfulness books included *A Friend for Yoga Bunny*, which consists of only yoga poses [see Figure 1], and *The Magic Breath*, which depicts characters breathing in and out using vivid colors [see Figure 2]. While reading, I did not find that one form of mindfulness (yoga, breath, feelings) alone was more impactful in providing meaningful mindfulness practice than in books with multiple practices. In other words, both kinds of books gave children a tool to understand their emotions and thoughts. Some examples of multi-topic mindfulness books for children included *Crafting Calm*, which was a large resources book broken into chaptered activities and practices for children to do [see Figure 3]. Another

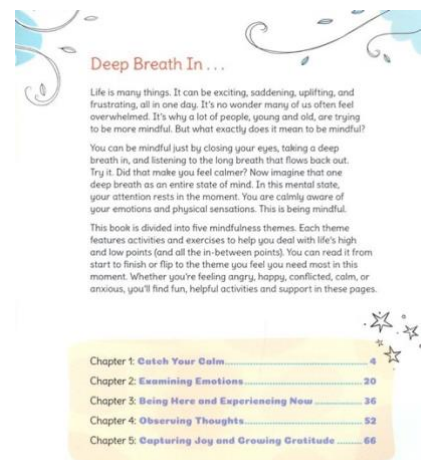


Figure 3

example of this can be found in *Calm*:



Figure 4

Mindfulness for Kids, throughout this reading different mindfulness practices are used together to create a larger meditative experience [see Figure 4]. I think that there are benefits to both a specific focus as well as a broader focus. When a book is focused simply on yoga or focused on

breathing, then the child reading that book gets a deeper understanding of that practice. Through the analysis of single topic books such as those on gratitude, being present, or emotions, I found

that the same topic was not done in the same way throughout every book.

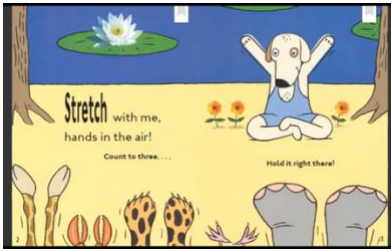


Figure 6

A trend that I saw with the single topic books was a focus on interactive stopping points.

Some examples that highlight this trend were

illustrated in *Meditations is an Open Sky: Mindfulness*

for Kids, Stretch, Listen Like an Elephant, and The Magic Breath [see

Figures 5,6,7, & 8]. In these books, there were points in which the reader can stop and do the

actual practices in the book more often than in the books with multiple practices. However, the

appeal of the books containing multiple practices within one vessel is that they provide more

opportunities for students and children to connect to the book. Not every child is going to

connect with sitting quietly with their eyes closed and

taking deep breaths. Not every child is going to understand

a book on being present or being grateful. Not every child

is going to have the physical ability to do certain yoga

poses. Through my

Figure 5

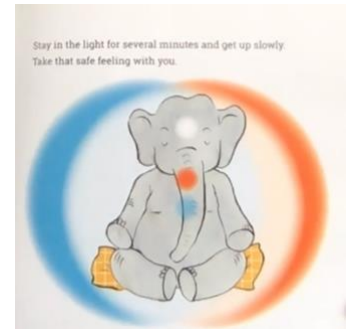


Figure 8

Figure 7



research of these books, I found that I gravitate towards

mindfulness as a broader topic that includes smaller practices

within. It is helpful to have multiple activities within the same

book so students and children can get exposure to those different practices. Nine of the books

excelled at weaving multiple mindfulness topics together.

Another theme that I observed was depictions of animals versus depictions of children in the illustrations or in some cases actual photographs. At first, I thought that using animals in children's literature could be a way for authors to avoid writing characters of different races or religions or backgrounds.

Figure 9

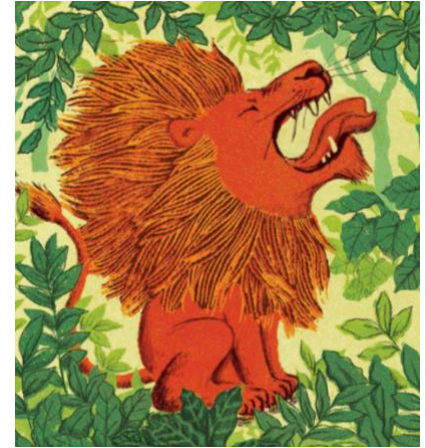


Figure 10

However, as I was exploring these books through the lens of mindfulness and meditation, I found that this trend lends well to the topic. As I was reading and listening to YouTube read-alouds of these books, I noted that the

animals created a fun tone

Figure 11



when they were doing yoga, and I could appreciate that animals are something that children gravitate towards. Examples of this could be found in *You Are a Lion!*, *Deep Breaths*, as well as *A Friend for Yoga Bunny* [see Figures 9, 10, & 11].

I was happy to discover that nine out of my twenty-five books contained racially diverse character depictions. Although there were many books containing little racial diversity or animal depictions, I found that there was more representation of race or gender or even some religious themes than I had originally anticipated. I had gone into this research with an assumption that there would not be a lot of diversity depicted in these books and that almost if not all of them would be very simple, very similar, and all illustrated animals.

One of the most creative trends I reviewed when reading these books involved the illustration choices. Twenty-three out of the twenty-five books are illustrated, whether that be through watercolor, pencil drawing, crayon, paint, oil pastel, and any other medium used to create the works of art. Four of the twenty-five books contained real photographs of children, of mindfulness activities, and of the real world. This is important to note because in the four books that had real photographs, two of those books had them as a supplement to illustrations, one of them was a resource manual almost functioning as a craft book, and the last was a mindfulness book where each photograph took up an entire page. It seems to be a trend that mindfulness books for children are illustrated and the ones I reviewed were all similar in the tone that the illustrations create. Specifically, the overall color palettes are soft and there are a lot of calming and cool tones throughout the illustrations. This is important to note because the tone of the

Figure 12



Figure 13



illustrations in the books

is a large aspect of the overall meaningfulness. The best examples of this within the children's books analyzed where the ones done in watercolor such as *I am Yoga* and *Outside In* [see Figures 12, 13, & 14]. The illustrations give way for a large range of techniques to be used but in the same calming style that mindfulness



needs to accompany the text. Many of the illustrations depicted the characters doing the mindfulness practices and created a

Figure 14

connection and flow between the illustrations and the

storylines or wording in the book. Some examples of the interplay between the illustrations and text are *The Breathing Book* by Christopher Willard and Olivia Weisser and *Outside In* by Deborah Underwood. In *The Breathing Book* there is a select and limited color palette of blues, greys, whites, and blacks as the reader reads the book the illustrations reflect the words, and the reader is encouraged to do the activities along with the character. There is a similar connection in *Outside In*, however, this book connects a watercolor palette to nature and feelings that come around the reader in their environment.

Another trend that I saw within some of these books that made me feel more confident in my creative decisions was the use of back matter. In eight out of the twenty-five books the author had put peritext that contained at least an author's note detailing attributes or characterizations about the mindfulness topic or mindfulness in general. However, most of the time, the peritext in the back of the books contained the practices themselves, future things to try, more resources, and descriptions of mindfulness activities that children can keep doing after the book has ended. I find this aspect of mindfulness books important because through my research, I have learned that all of the books are interactive in some way and when the book contains back matter, it gives another point of contact for that child or that family to lean on and utilize.

Another theme that I came across during my research was that all of the mindfulness books that I surveyed contained other themes besides mindfulness. Each one of the books also contained other important aspects of children's real lives such as friendship, compromise, understanding, struggle, conversation or communication, love, family, and so on. This fact connected me to a deeper realization that books that are meant to evoke emotion and curate an environment where other big themes in children's lives can also be explored. There are definitely trends of learning and exploring within each of these books that are distinct from the meditation or mindfulness practices being used. For example this type of learning can be found in the large and bolded print that gives younger kids a chance to explore literacy like in *Mindfulness is an Open Sky* by Whitney Stewart; throughout the book words like wobbly, pop, meditate, as well as color words are illustrated with colorful, bolded text. These words also have artistic flourishes that connect to the word such as pop being depicted in a curved shape of a bubble. Other books tackle tough concepts about feelings, grief, or boundaries that students need to learn - some of the books even cover topics such as friendship conflict or feeling not enough as a person like in *Broken Crayons Still Color*. These pieces of literature that I sought out for their connection to mindfulness, breathing, yoga, or meditation turned out to also be an exploration into humanity. Throughout these books there were multiple instances of real-life environments and situations. The calming practices were used as a tool to be utilized in scenarios that happen every day or that happen rarely but need to be addressed. The language used throughout the different books is meant to evoke natural speech and dialogue when reading, teach kids new vocabulary, and start meaningful conversations both at home and at school about large abstract concepts and feelings.

These impactful connections to the everyday lives and learning of children threaded through many of the books researched, some of the books containing the best visual examples included *Alphabreaths*, *Listen Like an Elephant*, and *Happy* [see Figures



Figure 15

15, 16, 17, & 18].

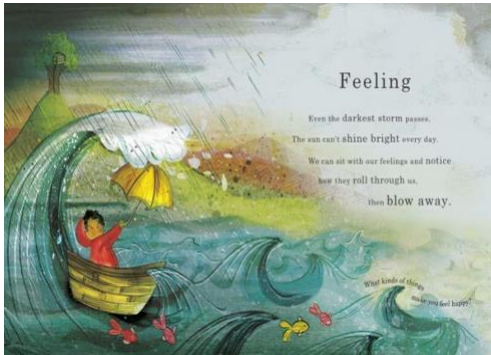


Figure 16

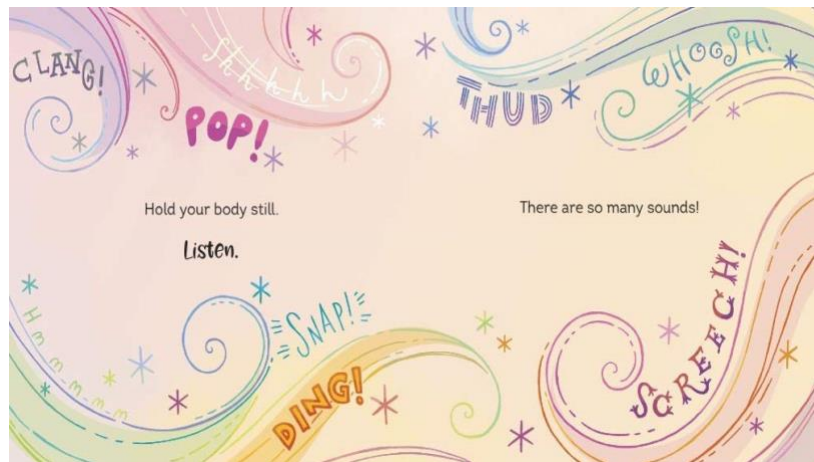


Figure 17

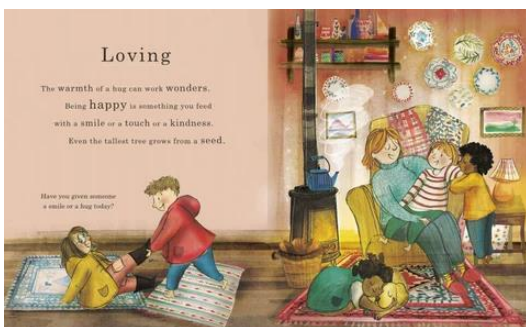


Figure 18

The last trend in many of the books I picked up on was possibly considered a small one, but it made a large impact

on me and my writing. There were so many little moments in the pages of the stories that made a huge impact. The literary themes and writing styles within these books were meant to be calming as well as empowering. For example, “He remembered that it’s important to let feelings come up during yoga, but it’s also important to let them go” (p. 23, *A Friend for Yoga Bunny*). This quote reminded me that children need to be able to work through emotions and feel okay to let them go as well as feel them. Some other quotes that read as an informative tool for children to go back to included, “Meditation won’t take away your problems, but it will help you deal with them” (p. 8, *Meditation Is an Open Sky*). Another quote

that spoke to me while reading was “even if you have a big worry, you can always draw a frame, put your worry in it, and then put it away somewhere” (p. 18, *The Breathing Book*). I found that these impactful literary moments gave the books power and were creatively used to help children deal with emotions in various situations. Specifically, these quotes were pithy; they each created a moment for the reader to connect to them as well as think deeper about their own personal experiences. For example, focusing more on feelings and creating a space where not being okay is actually okay sometimes where quotes that stated, “Feeling even the darkest storm passes. The sun can’t shine bright every day” (p. 6, *Happy*). and “Sometimes my mind is like a mixed-up swirling snowstorm. It isn’t right or wrong – it’s just how I feel” (p. 9, *A World of Mindfulness*). Both of these quotes detail the feelings that go on the inside of the body and mind which I found to be honest and empowering to read.

Mindful Maisy in Context

When I was creating *Mindful Maisy*, I really wanted the book to celebrate so many different types of children so that whenever a child would pick up this book and read it, they would feel like it was for them. I wanted the children who read this book to be able to see themselves, as well as be able to step outside of themselves and see someone else’s view. I wanted to make sure that there was racial diversity, religious diversity, diversity in exceptionalities that children may have, and to show that there is so much beauty in friendship. *Mindful Maisy* has a mixed-race girl as the main character, I based her off of my five-year-old cousin who is mixed race. I took inspiration for the other characters from all my different teaching placements and from the amazing kids I’ve gotten to experience because of teaching.

Jane and I spoke extensively about these character choices while creating the book. I shared my vision of the characters and illustrative details with her and she has been able to bring them to life artistically. I wanted my book to have the same calming tone and flow of conversation as the picture book styles, I read but wanted it to be at a reading level that was more suited for older elementary students. By this is mean, I wanted to make sure that this book was created in a way that children could read it by themselves but also could read it as a part of a classroom, with their parent, or with any other person fostering healthy relationships in the child's life. It was very important to me that *Mindful Maisy* have multiple practices for mindfulness within it. I personally do not do just one type of mindfulness to calm myself down or to live my life and I don't believe that one practice works for everybody. Therefore, when writing and drafting my manuscript of *Mindful Maisy*, I wanted to make sure that there was something that anyone could relate to in some way. I also incorporated some of the activities I saw while researching such as the mindfulness jar.

I also felt it was important to show mindfulness practices in a normal everyday setting. I wanted Maisy to be going through the park and seeing her friends on a normal Saturday and see everyone doing a helpful practice that they share with each other. Mindfulness doesn't have to mean sitting in silence and breathing or doing a really hard yoga pose. I wanted this book to be approachable, fun, and interactive but in a way that suited the child's development. I am collaborating with Jane Lambert on the illustrations for this book and we focused on color palette and soothing images to accompany the words. The books I reviewed had relationships between the colors used, text, and font. I wanted to make sure my book was situated similarly, and it was important to me to evoke the same calmness throughout.

Mindful Maisy also incorporates peritext in the form of back matter at the end of the story. I wanted to include a mindfulness index in the back of the book in order to create a point of connection between children, their parents, and their school. Whether this book is being used at home or in a school classroom setting, it was important for me that it have resources. Not every child comes from the same place or same socioeconomic background. If this book is being read in a classroom and a child wants to engage in a mindfulness activity, it was important for me to give multiple options in order for every student to have access. Not every child has access to a yoga mat and can go to a park and do yoga for hours. Not every child has the ability to get mindfulness coloring books and crayons. It is imperative that children, especially those who need to be able to cope with their thoughts and feelings, feel they are able to do so with the least amount of resistance as possible. When I wrote *Mindful Maisy*, I had the intention of making sure many practices could be available to students, done with items around the house, or did not require much if any cost to participate. The peritext in the back of the book is also meant to help teachers and families feel comfortable in these practices and feel like they can support the children in their lives when something comes up. Some of the peritext is directed specifically at the child reading the book but much of it is also directed to the parents, teachers, or other adults interacting with this book alongside the child.

I tried my best to create a book worthy of my students and the children that I have met throughout my life. I tried to take what I learned through research of mindfulness and meditation and through the comprehensive understanding of works of literature and use the guidance from those things to make something meaningful. Creating *Mindful Maisy* in a way helped me practice mindfulness, allowing me to be present in the moment, just as I hope it will become so for others.

Writing Process

When I was first conceptualizing an idea for what I wanted this creative project to entail I knew I wanted to bridge my love of literature with my love of teaching and my love of mindfulness meditation. Meditation has helped me so much as a person in growing and in understanding my own thoughts and feelings as an adult. With the various students that I have had the honor of meeting and teaching, I started to use mindfulness and calming practices as an entry point for building our relationship and for helping children understand their own feelings in moments where those emotions seem too big. I've always had this strong belief that emotions do not always need to be hidden or quickly suppressed and sometimes I see an expectation of children to never feel any big feelings and if they do, then to not show them in a way that will make a scene. But when I was thinking about a book that I could write that would really reflect how I feel about those big moments, it came to my attention that meditation and mindfulness practices have helped me take some of the happiest times of my life or some of the most sad or dark times and feel them, but in a way that is helpful, constructive, and healthy. Even though children do not always understand what they're feeling or know how to remedy things that happen to them in their daily lives, I think it is very important that they know that feeling their emotions is okay and that they learn ways that they can cope with those things and be healthier, happier people.

My other inspiration for this book that is I am the oldest cousin, the oldest grandchild, the oldest great grandchild, and oldest sibling in my immediate family. This has changed a little bit as my family has become blended and has shifted over the years, but I feel that that has just given me more inspiration for this book as I now have a nephew and the hope that I have for him is unmatched. Being the oldest has given me the opportunity to watch every other child in my

family grow and learn which is where my love of teaching began. Watching the kids in my life explore their world and begin to make connections was meaningful for me. This directly affected how I see the world and my personality, therefore, I wanted to create something I would have wanted them to have as kids.

This book is also a reflection of how I feel the world should be in the normalization of differences. When I thought up the character of Maisy, I was picturing my five-year-old cousin Emmy. Emmy is a beautiful, mixed-race child who comes from my aunt who is White and my uncle who is Black and in our family. I felt like this diversity was something to be celebrated. I wanted my cousin Emmy to see this book and connect Maisy to herself naturally. I wanted my book to be a celebration of everyday normalcy. For example, I wanted child characters to feel like kids and I wanted the characters to interact in a way that felt tolerant and kind and caring. I think of it as I wanted the book to reflect people just being.

I wanted to also show that no matter where a person comes from, what they look like, or what special accommodations they may need, it's the little things that constantly connect us to the world around us. As Maisy goes throughout her journey through the park collecting all of these little bits of knowledge from her friends and finding all of these new ways to filter her emotions, I never wanted the book to stray from being, at its base, a little girl who woke up having a bad day and the one thing that made it better despite all of the calming practices she learns is the people in her life around her and the human connection that is able to create a whole different outcome for her day.

After I had the initial idea for *Mindful Maisy*, and I knew I wanted it to be focused on meditative practices and calming exercises, I just couldn't stop thinking about the ideas and scenarios. I started drafting by brainstorming the different mindfulness activities that I knew I

wanted to include in the book, so I started with a broader amount and then whittled it down to the main practices that I use and that I have used successfully with students. Breathing, yoga, a feelings check-in, a gratitude list, coloring, and sensory exploration were really important to me to include in the book because I feel that they are some of the most impactful and easy-to-understand practices to introduce to young kids. Also, they are able to be done for the most part with or without an adult. I wanted to make sure that the children who would be hopefully reading and enjoying this book and diving deeply into these practices did not feel that they could not do these things without an adult telling them to do them. Although Maisy and the other children's parents are in the park nearby, the parents are not facilitating any of these interactions and all of the children are doing their own thing. I thought it was best though that Maisy's was learning these practices along the way by herself. This for me, was to create a strong sense of community within the children but also show that while adults can and should be involved, children can also do these things on their own when they need to. Thinking about the parents, that is where my first main revision came in the first draft of this book.

When I first wrote this book, I created the entire manuscript in eight hours and the story was just flowing out of me onto my laptop. However, when I first wrote it, Maisy had left the house without her mom to go to the park and do all of these things with her friends. My fiancé was the first person that I read my draft to, and he had made a comment about how young kids especially in this generation, do not leave the house unsupervised and all of these kids should not be in a random park alone. I hadn't even thought about that because growing up, I was allowed to leave my house and go 8 houses up and run around my neighborhood and wait for my mom to scream it was time for dinner. I made the change to the story where her mother comes along to the park with her, and the other parents of the children are there, but they are sitting at the adult

table talking while the kids are nearby doing their own thing. This helped me give insight to my overall vision and fine-tune some of the little things that I didn't think about before. My best friend, Hannah, was the second person that I read this draft to, and she had a ton of literary insight as she is a 7th grade English teacher. She helped me a lot with the grammar and proper quotations and helping me with word choice when I was stumped about little places in the plot. She also helped me talk about how to consolidate bigger pieces of text into smaller portions that said the same thing I was trying to convey.

I also read the drafts as I was doing them to my students. At the time of drafting, I was a kindergarten and school age teacher for KinderCare Learning Center, and I had been with this group of kids for about two years, and I knew they would give me very honest feedback. When I first read *Mindful Maisy* to this group of children, who are about five and six years old, I was extremely nervous that they were not going to be able to sit through the book since it is a longer children's book and at the time I had absolutely no illustrations to go along with it. However, my students did such a wonderful job of listening to the story and then giving me very specific feedback afterwards. I believe that it helped that during the story I would stop and do some of the practices with them which is what I hope that parents and teachers who read this book naturally do as well. For example, during the breathing exercise, I had us stop and do 3 deep breaths or during the sensory exploration at the end of the book, I had us pause and I gave a smaller group of my students each something sensory to look for. Some of the specific feedback I got from my kids after reading the book to them was “Miss Maddie, we know how to color already. That part could be shorter. See, we have all those coloring books and markers, and we color every day, so I don't think you need that girl to explain all of it to Maisy.” – K.P, age 6; “Miss Maddie, don't you think that Maisy should not eat anything in the park without knowing what it is? That could be

really dangerous, and she could get really sick, and her mom would be sad.” – G.M, age 6; “I want my own mindfulness jar, wouldn’t it be so cool if Maisy gave us one like Aaron gave her!” – K.G, age 6. These suggestions were so thoughtful and really opened my eyes to just how brilliant my students were and some of the things that I could definitely rearrange or reword or pull back on. After this reading I revised the book so that the coloring portion was shorter and where Maisy didn't actually color during the time, but she collected it for later since she already knew how to do it. I also changed the ending with the sensory exploration to have Adrian give Maisy's apple slices that he had brought to the park as the taste sense and specified because they know these are safe to eat. That was very insightful for me to realize that I could present this book to a student and although sensory exploration is such a meaningful and engaging task, they could go out into their local park and eat berries off of a bush that are unsafe. The last comment by a little girl in my class was very sweet and her saying that she wanted a jar just like Maisy made a lot of sense and I was thinking about a craft children could do for that. However, in addition to that, I really took what she said about wanting Maisy to give it to her as Aaron gave it to Maisy, so I added an extra page at the end that sort of breaks the 4th wall and Maisy is giving a mindfulness jar to the children reading the book. This creates an interactive atmosphere within the back of the book and sets up classrooms or families to then engage deeper with the peritext in the back where they can find all of the information relating to the practices and how to engage deeper with the children in their lives. I re-read different drafts to different groups of students as the process went on and their reactions and little comments gave me so much hope for this book. It was also instrumental that my friend and colleague doing the illustrations and I sat down often and made artistic decisions based on the writing, as well as making revisions to the writing in order to compliment the artistic vision and characters better. Since we do want to get this book

self-published and try to give some hard copies to anyone who wants to enjoy *Mindful Maisy*, the editing process being a group effort between the students/children in my life and me was essential to the finished project.

Another aspect of this writing process was the research aspect of other books about mindfulness and meditation. When I first started this process of writing the book and researching other books, I was not keen on the research of other books because I didn't want my vision for my book to be changed just because someone else more accomplished than me wrote something. However, as I started to comb through the 25 books that are a part of this literature review, I realized that I didn't have to change *Mindful Maisy* in order to get ideas and benefit from these other books at all. I also realized all of these little details that I didn't think of at first that really gave me a good picture of what a whole finished book should include. This included the images as well; my close friend and teacher colleague Jane Lambert had agreed to do the illustrations for my book, and we really worked hard to create characters that reflected the vision in my head but also to create scenes in the book itself that reflected calm and meditative ambience and peace. The books overall gave me a good idea of the main themes of mindfulness literature that is for children and there are so many hundreds more books that I am planning to read and analyze for my own classroom in the future. The books that I researched tended to have a lot of singular themes and I enjoyed learning this because I wanted my book to have multiple mindfulness and calming practices throughout instead of focus on just yoga or just breathing or just sensory mindfulness. I also got to experience the different techniques in artwork that linked directly to wording which was helpful for me to understand what I wanted to do with the font or color scheme so then the words interact with the images better than if I hadn't done research. For example, in the process of creating the actual illustrations and layout for the book Jane and I

decided that bolding the mindfulness practices and giving them calming colors was impactful. We also looked at fonts and although we have not decided on a final one yet we did explore different fonts with soft edges to have a calming effect on the page. I also was surprised by my book research because I had not seen many children's books about mindfulness or meditation that had diversity or that weren't focused on animals and that made me really nervous, so that is another reason that I wanted all of this diversity in my book. However, as I searched and branched out into different genres of this category, I did find an abundance of diverse characters that I was not originally expecting which was very pleasant and made me feel so much better that my book was positioned in a similar way.

Conclusion & Hopes for the Book

Through this creative process and the research that has come with it, I have learned just how much goes into the creation of a meaningful product for young children. Mindfulness is a practice that can significantly support and help children while they are understanding their thoughts feelings and emotions. The literature that is written about mindfulness for kids was much vaster than I had initially anticipated and makes me feel hopeful for the support that is out there for children. This process has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever completed and although it was hard work, I feel that this topic is imperative for the mental health of my students. I hope that this book will serve as a helpful tool but also, I have come to realize it is such an important part of me as a person and an educator. I hope that I will be able to self-publish this book along with my teacher colleague as a finished product by the end of this year. I hope that I will be able to create some sort of physical copy of this book and distribute it to my school, the children in my life, and anyone who wants it. My biggest hope for this book is that

although it was created originally as a part of an Honors College research project and creative project, I hope that it becomes so much more than that. I hope that even just one kid gets to hold this book and use it and feels better because of it. I hope to continue to do research and better my education on these practices. Most of all, I hope that this book shows children that there is beauty in their differences, in their friendships, and that there is strength in feeling.

Appendix A – Analyzed Children’s Books

- Alladin, E. (2023). *World of Mindfulness*. PAJAMA PR.
- Borgert-Spaniol, M., Kukla, L., & Rangarajan, A. (2020). *Crafting Calm: Art and Activities for Mindful Kids*. Beaming Books.
- Collier, T. J., Bak, W., & Vasilica, N. (2023). *Broken Crayons Still Color*. Tommy Nelson, an imprint of Thomas Nelson.
- Cronin, D., & Menchin, S. (2009). *Stretch*. Atheneum Books for Young Readers.
- Denos, J., & Goodale, E. B. (2019). *Here and Now*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Edwards, N. (2020). *Happy*. Random House Children’s Books.
- Halperin, W. A. (2013). *Peace*. Atheneum Books for Young Children.
- Hudson, K. (2021). *Mindful Mr. Sloth*. Capstone.
- Jones, J. (2022). *The Calm Down Jar*. publisher unidentified.
- Kinder, W. (2019). *Calm: Mindfulness for Kids*. DK Publishing.
- Larson, L., & Sen, D. (2019). *Wild Mindfulness*. Ingram Spark.
- Magvayr, N. (2020). *My Body Sends a Signal: Helping Kids Recognize Emotions and Express Feelings*. Magvayr, Natalia.
- Ortner, N., Taylor, A., & Polizzi, M. (2018). *My Magic Breath: Finding Calm Through Mindful Breathing*. Harper, an imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers.
- Rotner, S., & Kelly, S. M. (2013). *Feeling Thankful*. Capstone Press.
- Russo, B. (2022). *A Friend for Yoga Bunny*. Harper, an imprint of HarperCollins Publishers.
- Shardlow, G., & Bowes, V. (2015). *Maria Explores the Ocean: A Kids Yoga Colors Book*. Kids Yoga Stories.
- Stewart, W., & Rippin, S. (2015). *Meditation is an Open Sky: Mindfulness for Kids*. Albert Whitman & Company.
- Thompson, C. (2019). *Deep Breaths*. Random House Children’s Books.
- Underwood, D., & Derby, C. (2021). *Outside In*. Houghton Mifflin.

- Verde, S., & Fleck, J. (2020). *The Three Little Yogis and the Wolf who Lost his Breath: A Calming Fairy Tale*. Abrams Books for Young Readers, an imprint of Abrams.
- Verde, S., & Reynolds, P. H. (2017). *I am Yoga*. Abrams Appleseed, an imprint of Abrams.
- Willard, C., Rechtschaffen, D. J., & Clifton-Brown, H. (2019). *Alphabreaths: The ABCs of Mindful Breathing*. Sounds True.
- Willard, C., Weisser, O., & Oliver, A. (2020). *The Breathing Book*. Sounds True, Inc.
- Willey, K. (2019). *Mindfulness Moments for Kids: Listen Like an Elephant*. Rodale Kids.
- Yoo, T. (2012). *You are a Lion! and Other Fun Yoga Poses*. Penguin.

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- Danilewitz, D. A. (2021). *Incorporating Children's Picture Books on Mindfulness in Bibliotherapy* (dissertation). *Incorporating Children's Picture Books on Mindfulness in Bibliotherapy*. York University, Toronto.
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- Sarai, C. (2019). *Development of a Mindfulness Meditation Book for Children with ADHD* (dissertation). Alliant International University, San Francisco.