

TEACHING YOGA TO CHILDREN

By Femmy Brug

A Yoga class for children should have it all! Dynamic postures, movement and lots of variety, but also composure, focus and attention. Children should not hold the postures. Movement suits their nature and their growing bodies. This doesn't mean that there cannot be stillness in a children's class. Relaxation at the end can be a quiet time and it is also important for children to practise some simple breathing techniques. Conveying the message of Yoga through a story is something I am interested in. I have found that children love to illustrate stories with the Yoga asanas. Often I use myths or legends, and sometimes I ask the group to make up their own story. The warrior story I wrote for children aged 8- 12.

The Warrior and the Riverbank

The children are asked to lie down in relaxation pose, eyes closed, as they listen to the teacher introducing the story:

"Once upon a time there was a young warrior who wanted to learn as much as there is to learn. He had studied a lot of books, and so he had gained a lot of knowledge. He had done a lot of physical training, a lot of running, swimming, he excelled at all sports and so he was very strong and tough. But he knew that there was something missing, something that books and sports cannot teach you. The warrior decides to spend time on his own near a beautiful river in the mountains.

So imagine you are that warrior, strong, determined and unafraid. Lay down with your knees bent. The warrior is camping at the riverbank. You have brought a tent with you, but you have slept outside it, as the weather is so beautiful. You are lying on the soft grass and the day is just beginning. It is dawn. (Let the children imagine the surroundings! the softness of the grass, the freshness of the air, the sounds of birds and the river, bring the whole experience to life with their imagination).

You are now just waking up. Put your hands gently on your tummy, Feel how your breath is waking you up, feel how the breath starts under your hands and then fills you and gives you energy. Now give yourself a really good stretch, as you are ready for action. Then stand up.

All around are mountains so the warrior decides to stand as tall as a mountain and then stretch up towards the heavens, (Heavenly stretch pose).



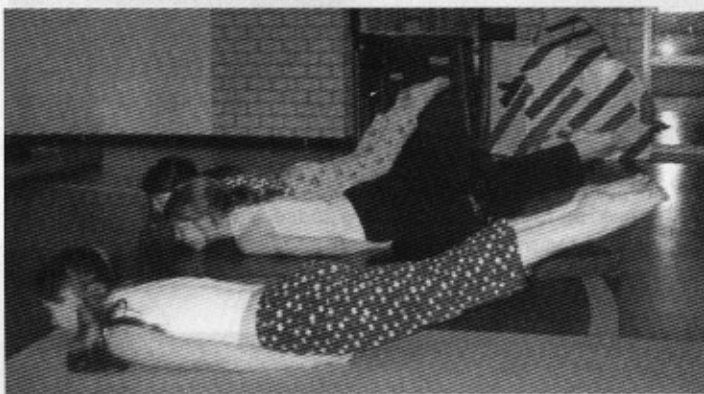
Neils? in Warrior



Marleen in heavenly stretch pose

The warrior next turns to face the sun and performs 2 rounds of the Salute to the Sun before laying down again on the soft grass again to relax the breathing.

Roll over and notice a lizard, how easily it moves. Adopt Lizard pose. (Repeat 3 times).



Zoe, Nanda and Nienke, Lizard pose

There are lots of frogs around the riverbank. The warrior observes their jumps, realising how strong and agile they will make his legs if he performs them. (Frog jumps around the room, anywhere you like). Then come back to your mat. Stand in warrior pose, bringing to mind again those qualities: strong, determined, unafraid. After this once again stand in mountain pose, still and tall, watch the breath.

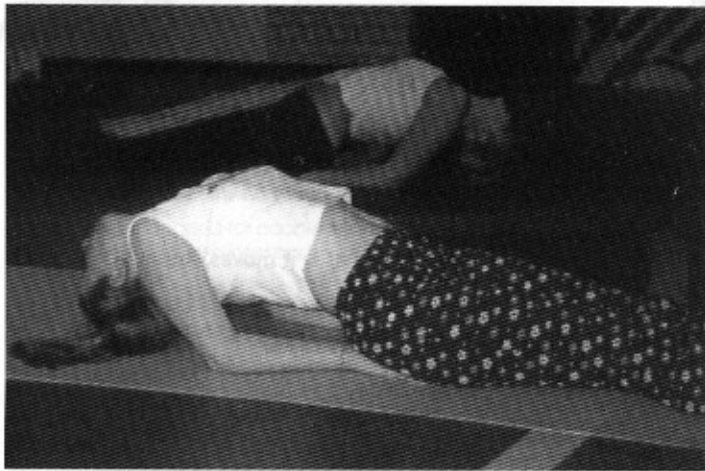


Simon and Maikel, Frogs



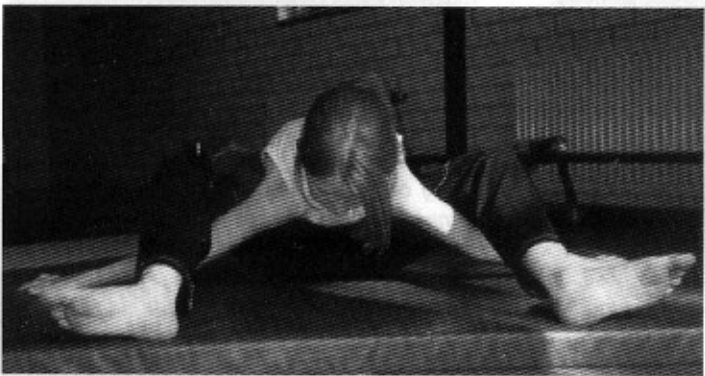
Boat posture, Niels

The warrior now decides to take his boat to row a little further up the river. (Boat pose) until he finds a place to stay beneath some tall, shady trees. When he is under the trees he decides to be like the fishes he saw in the water (Fish pose).



Zoe, Fish pose

Rolling over on to his side, he sees a snake slithering away. Again he admires how the snake moves its body and he rolls over on to his front and imitates the snake (snake posture). He also repeats the lizard pose.

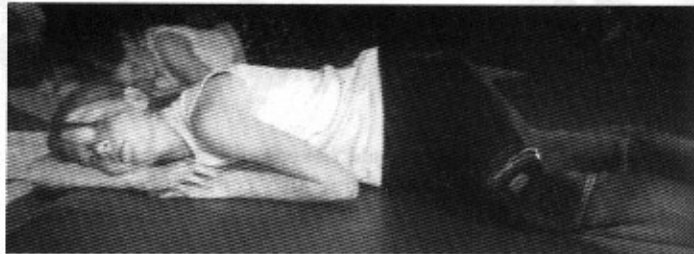


Nanda in Tortoise

Folding forwards as a tortoise, he remembers its strength and admires it for being so self-contained before moving into the half spinal twist posture.

The warrior now makes his way back in his boat, back to where his tent is pitched (Boat posture, repeated 3 times while tightening and releasing the muscles). Now he stands tall, next to his tent, with the fantastic scenery around him. The trees are tall, and strong, like he aims to be, yet they are not rigid (tree pose)

It is now almost dusk. The day is coming to an end, and so is our Yoga class. The warrior has learned from the animals and the beautiful day.



animal relaxation pose

He feels very peaceful and adopts animal relaxation pose. He then comes to sit up straight and comfortable, recalling the lovely sounds the bees made earlier on, with their humming. The class will then practise Humming bee breath, (Bhramari) without plugging the ears, so one hears this lovely hum go round. Invite the children to lay down for relaxation, imagining the soft grass, the earth, the gentle breeze, the pleasant air, which makes you want to breathe deeply, the calming sound of the water. The warrior will recall the qualities of the animals and absorb all these qualities inside himself to mix with his own special qualities. So the children will be asked to think of their specialness too. The class will then end.



Benefits:

I believe this is a balanced practice. Postures such as Mountain pose, Tree pose, and Frog develop strength, balance and concentration. Practices such as Cobra and Tortoise strengthen the spine and the internal organs. The Fish opens and strengthens the diaphragm. Bhramari is a beautiful breathing practice for children who enjoy it very much. The Salute to the Sun is an important sequence and works on different levels. It is a tonic for the whole system.

The postures are safe but it is important to tell the children not to work through pain. Please remember that although some children are very flexible, many of them are not (anymore). Treat the children you teach with love and respect, so that they will learn to treat themselves in that way too! Om Shanti.