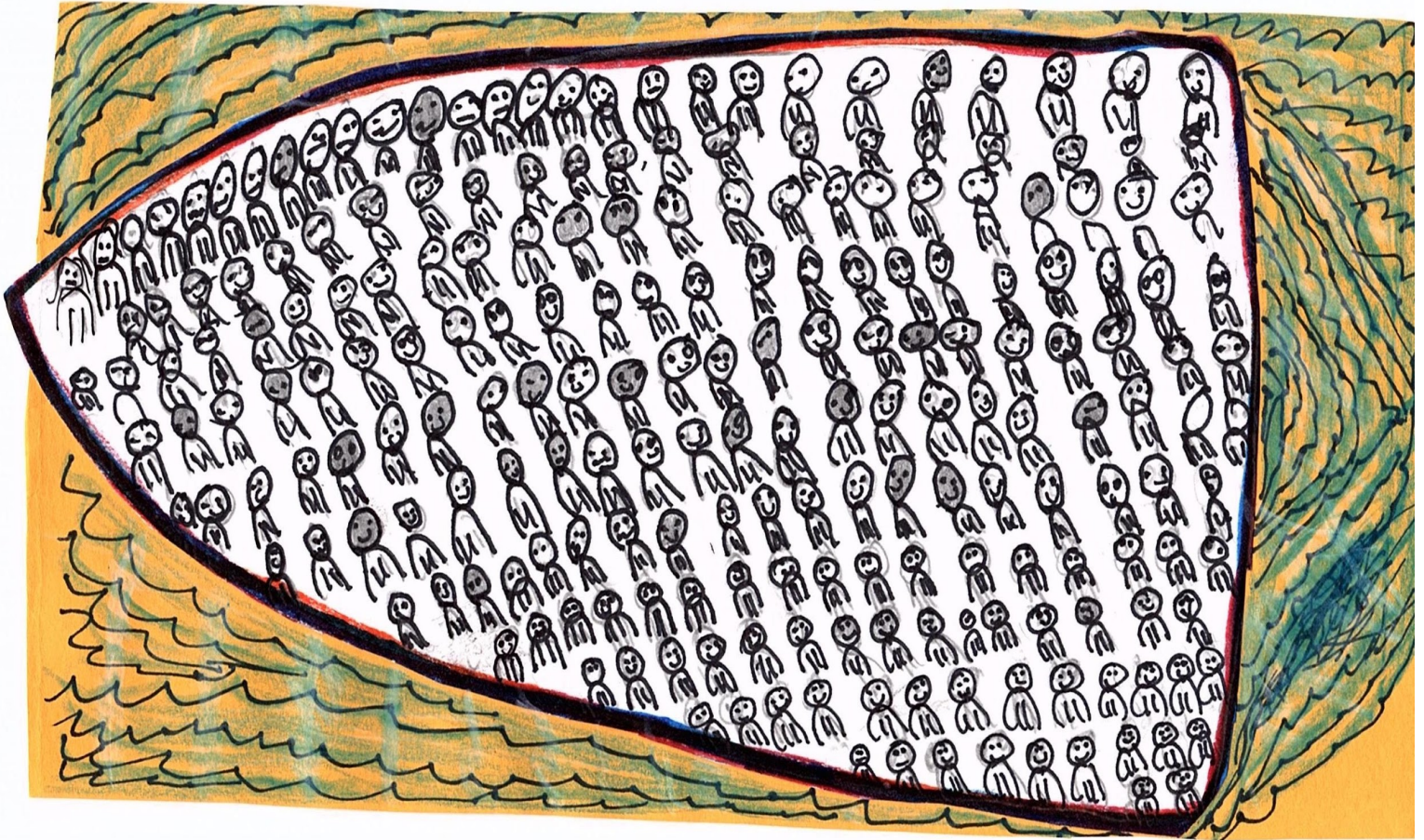


same boat

poems and stories of love, loss and resilience



SAMPLE COPY

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INTRODUCTION

How do we let students know that they matter, that their life experiences are important, and that we truly want to know them? By being curious and asking extra questions. This inquiry builds safety and a strong sense of community. It also makes for good writing.

The Mindful Literacy curriculum combines mindfulness and poetry in lessons designed to cultivate attention and acknowledge the negative thoughts, disturbing emotions, and habitual tendencies that prevent all of us from reaching our full potential. The goal of the curriculum is to establish a more compassionate, engaging classroom culture in which students feel safe to find their own voices while developing a resilient, academic growth mindset. Students explore themes of loss, of overcoming challenges, of habits they'd like to change, and of gratitude for the good in their lives. Through writing, reflecting, and sharing with their peers, they grow their academic skills as well as their self-awareness, self-compassion, and care and concern for those around them.

The young storytellers in this collection are twelve and thirteen years old. Aside from being English learners, they are also family interpreters, after school child care providers, future doctors and professional soccer players. Their poems and stories tell tales of separation, hardship, and violence and also the deep love and commitment to family inherent in Latino culture.

Background: The beginning of mindfulness is embodiment--coming home, coming back to the body, which supports self-regulation. Valerie reported that mindfulness helped her to calm down when she was angry and focus more in class. She found inspiration for her poem in an excerpt from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself." In this masterpiece, Whitman celebrates the beauty of connection to self and others--"My respiration and inspiration, the beating of my heart, the passing of blood and air through my lungs,...a few light kisses, a few embraces, a reaching around of arms..." Valerie's work demonstrates her growing appreciation for the good in her life and her strength as a writer.

The Sniff of My Friends' Perfume By Valerie

The smoke of my breath
Breathing in, breathing out
Chest rising, calming.
Myself, a blue sky, an ocean
A bird in a beautiful day
The sniff of my friends' perfume when we hug each other
The sound of our kisses

Have you reckon'd how lucky you are to have people around you who love you?
Have you practised so long to learn to love the people who love you?
Have you felt so proud to have beautiful people around you?

Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess a happy life.
You shall no longer fight in school.
You shall be nice to other people.



Background: Jaime seemed unsure of his place in school. Practicing mindfulness and self-compassion helped him to be aware of his negative self-talk and to befriend himself. In "Hoops," he recalled the determination and perseverance he had demonstrated in the past to master something. It gave him a renewed sense of purpose in learning English and helped him succeed in his ELD class as well.

Hoops

By Jaime

Being good takes time. Once my sister took me to a park and I saw people playing basketball. I noticed how good they were and decided I wanted to be like them. I told my sister that basketball looked hard and that I thought I couldn't do it. She said, "You could do it if I you tried. You'll get the hang of it." My dad bought me a backboard and hoop to play with and this made me happy. But the ball wasn't making it in.

Every time I got home from school, I would go straight to the backyard to play. I did that almost every day until, little by little, I began to get the hang of it. I also played after lunch with my friends. We would meet at the basketball court to play a game. They gave me tips on how to throw the ball and control it. They told me to bend my knees and use my left hand to protect the ball from my opponent.

I learned that you need to be patient and practice a lot to get the hang of things. With a little bit of practice, patience and hard work, anything is possible.

Background: In mindfulness practice, we train to be able to sit with an open heart and simply observe the shifting internal and external weather patterns. Naomi Shihab Nye's poem "So Much Happiness" reinforces the awareness of impermanence and the cultivation of this non-judgmental awareness--"Happiness lands on the roof of the next house, singing/ and disappears when it wants to./ You are happy either way." Enya's version of the poem hinted at some of the challenges I had suspected in her home life and showed her growing awareness of the need for self-care as she continued to support her family and others around her.

It is difficult to know what to do with so much happiness.
Even the fact that you once heard your family laughing
and now hear them yelling at each other
cannot make you unhappy.

Everything has a life of its own,
it too could wake up filled with possibilities
of tamales and horchata
and love even scrubbing the floor, washing dishes, and cleaning your
room.

Since there is no place large enough
to contain so much happiness, help people in need, help your family, and
take care of yourself.

—Enya

Background: This story was written by a young boy who arrived mid-year certain he didn't belong in our ELD class. He spent his time writing sexually explicit raps, making inappropriate comments to female classmates, and spending a lot of time in the office. Through mindfulness practice, he learned to control his impulses and develop compassion for himself and others. His growing maturity is demonstrated in "The Crash." Writing and sharing about this tragic loss improved our relationship and helped me to be more patient and empathetic with him.

The Crash

By Felipe

One day in the summer of 2016 my step-dad and I were driving on the freeway and all of a sudden the car behind us crashed into us. My dad got out of the car to talk to the guy behind us. From our car I could see that the man was drunk because he was bobbing his head back and forth. My step dad came back to the car and called the police.

A police officer arrived and also a policewoman who asked, "ID please." My step-dad said, "I don't have one." They took my dad and me to the police department. I decided to call my mom. Thirty minutes later she came to pick me up. She didn't know what was going on. My step-dad was speaking to the officer and I heard the officer say, "The border patrol is on its way." I shed some tears.

They took my step dad to Tijuana. Two years have passed so my mom decided to move to Mexico. She asked me to decide whether to



stay here with my dad or leave with her. I decided to stay here in Richmond with my dad.

It's been three months since I've seen my mom. It's been hard but I learned that I was never going to be with her my whole life. I realized that I

would just have to deal with the situation. I miss my step-dad and my mom, but my dad said I'm going to be able to see them every summer and every time there is a break.

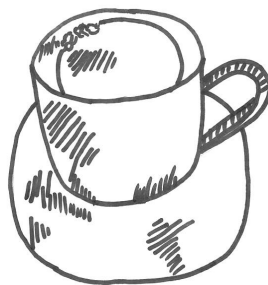
I keep in touch with my mom by texting or Facetiming her to see what's up with her and my step dad and to know if they are okay. In the future my mom and I hope we can get my stepdad papers so he'll be able to come back to California legally.

Background: Mindfulness is intimately tied with self-compassion--bringing kindness and curiosity to the exploration of all our thoughts, feelings, sensations, many of which can be repetitive and painful. This befriending of ourselves is what the speaker points to at the end of "Kindness" by Naomi Shihab Nye--"Only kindness that raises its head/...to say/ it is I you have been looking for/, and then goes with you everywhere/ like a shadow or a friend." Sharing this poem and then inviting students to write about loss helped to create safety and a sense of commonality. Marbella's version is a beautiful illustration of loss' heart-opening power.

What Kindness Is

By Marbella

Before you know what kindness really is, you must lose things,
Feel the future dissolve in a moment like sugar in strong coffee.
If you lose a family member like me, you will know.
One day the persons you love and have in your hands
Will never come back. That is very sad
And you start knowing what kindness is.



Background: Marisa often arrived at the classroom door in tears or angry and couldn't seem to focus on schoolwork. The seeds of mindfulness and self-compassion planted throughout the year finally bore fruit when I suggested in late spring that students write about a time they had experienced discrimination. Being able to recognize and accept her pain and anger surrounding her social life demonstrated her growing emotional intelligence and resilience. Learning about her encounter with racism at such a tender age opened my heart wider to the lived experiences of students of color and reminded me of the importance of talking about these matters in school.

Broken Heart

By Marisa

There is this boy who I was going out with and the first two months we were doing good. We were best friends and, at the same time, a couple. We hung out almost every day after school.

After a while, he started changing. I tried to talk to him to see what was going on, but when I asked him, he said, "Nothing." I told him that he was not the same and he was like, "What are you talking about? I'm still the same." I asked him again and finally he admitted it. He said, "Yeah, I'm not the same because my friends made me change. I said, "Okay. Cool. But I just want to let you know that I love you with all my heart and never forget that."

He said, "Okay," and we ended the conversation, but I know that one of his friends was trying to get me and telling him that we should break up because we were different races. When I heard this, I just said in my mind, *What the hell! We all are human. We all come from the same god. Just because we are different races doesn't mean we are different.*

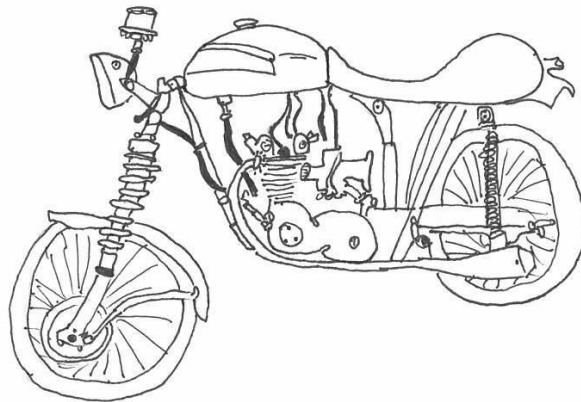
But we just decided to break up and each went their own way.

Background: In the spoken-word poem "Afro-Latina," Elizabeth Acevedo writes, "Afro-Latina, camina conmigo. Salsa swagger anywhere she go, como 'la negra tiene tumbao! Azucar! Dance to the rhythm. Beat the drums of my skin. Afro-descendent, the rhythms within." Her tough and honest account of returning to her roots with self-acceptance and self-love fueled Francisco's own celebration of his cultural heritage. And while mindfulness did not prove to be his cup of tea, he contributed many illustrations and the poem "Guatemalteco."

Guatemalteco

By Francisco

*I am proud to call myself guatemalteco
Tamales, salsa, and rainbow-colored dresses
Riding motorcycles around the park with my cousin
Practicing cock fights
I am proud to call myself guatemalteco*



Background: Luis seemed like a popular, friendly, outgoing guy. But like all of us, he could get swept away by his emotions. By sitting quietly and anchoring his attention on his breath, he was able to train his mind, so that he could respond rather than react in the heat of the moment. His story highlights the significance and power of a pause and reminds us all, once again, that we too need to take a breath when tensions rise.

Walk Away

By Luis

It was Friday, the 13th and I was on my way home when this kid called me the B word. My friends said, “Hey, he’s talking crap about you!” “Like what? I asked. “He’s talking about your mom.” I said to myself, *“You know, what the point of fighting if you can just talk it out?”*

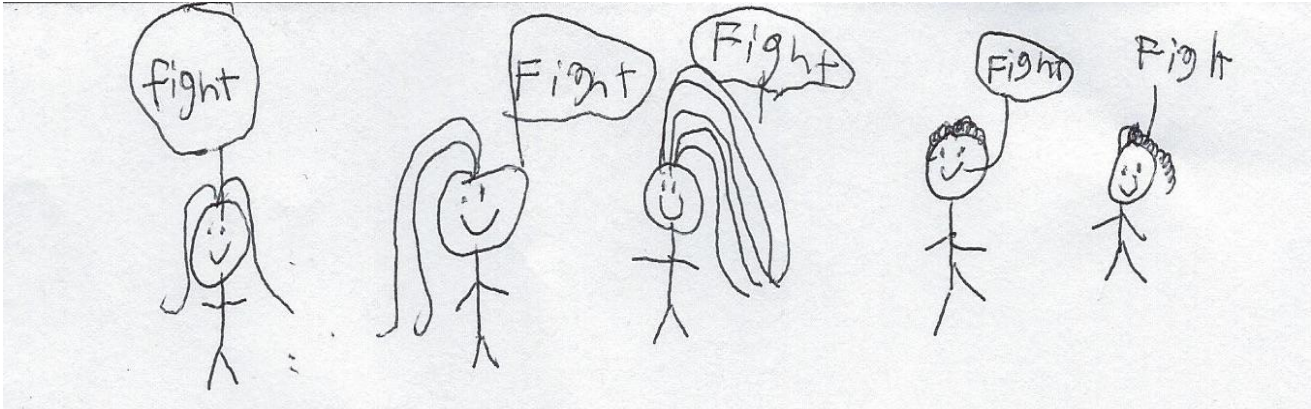
I went up to him and said, “Hey Alex, what’s your problem with me? “You keep talking smack about me.” “No, I wasn't!” “Yes you were!”

“When?” I asked. “During lunch.” “So, you’re mad because people say that I called you something? If I was going to say something to you, I would have said it to your face.”

When we finished talking he said, “So, are you going to fight or not?”

“No, I said.” But even though I said no, he still hit me. Everyone screamed, “Fight! Fight!” like six times. I asked myself, *“Should I fight him, yes or no?”*

I breathed in and out. I said, "You know what, I am not going to fight you?" I went home. Mindfulness.

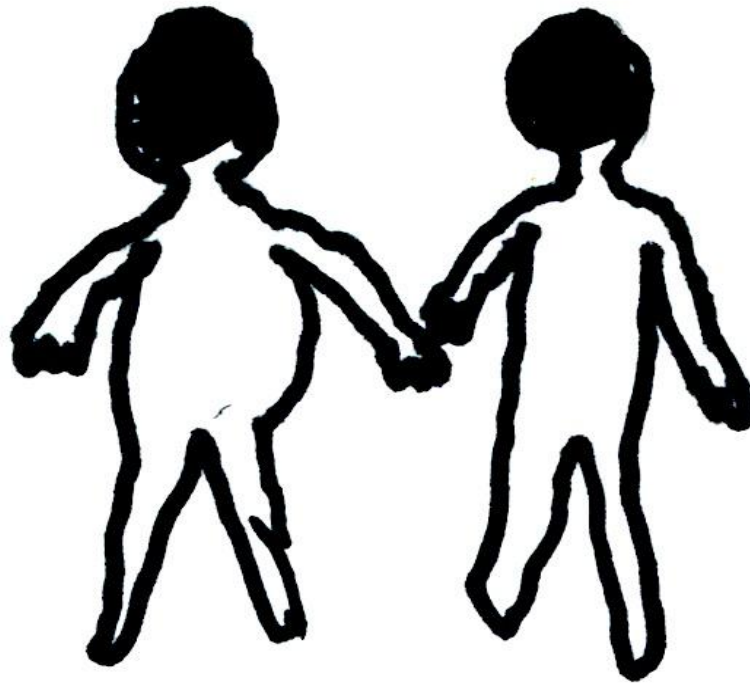


ABOUT THE EDITOR

Laura Bean is excited to combine two of her great loves, mindfulness and creative writing, to promote healthy, productive educational and work environments. She has practiced mindfulness for three decades and is passionate about sharing this extraordinary tool with others.

A published author with an MFA in Creative Writing, Laura has taught writing workshops in New York City public schools, as well as in Tucson, Arizona, and in Okinawa and Kyoto, Japan. She has an English teaching credential with a Bilingual Authorization Certificate in Spanish and twenty years of classroom experience.

Her work has been featured at a mindful youth conference sponsored by the Center for Mindfulness at UC San Diego and in UC Berkeley's *Greater Good Science Center Magazine*.



Mindful Writing Workshop

Explore what mindfulness is and its relevance to our lives in terms of increasing attention and executive function, reducing stress and anxiety and promoting emotional regulation. Practice working with various anchor points including sights, sounds, the body and breath. Explore a different mindfulness theme each week through the lens of poetry using Common-Core aligned lessons. Students write their own poems and stories. Option to extend sessions to create anthology at end of residency.

To bring the benefits of mindfulness and creative expression to your school, office or organization, please reach out to Laura Bean@MindfulLiteracy.com

