



# ISMETA

Somatic Movement Lesson Plans

# International Somatic Movement Education and Therapy Association

## Somatic Movement Education Lesson Plans

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Enclosed Please find some sample lesson plans you can try with your students. Please visit [www.ISMETA.org](http://www.ISMETA.org) for more lesson plan ideas.

# Following an Impulse - Somatic Movement Activity

by Beth Pettengill Riley, MA, RSME

*Appropriate for grades 6 and up.*

See if you can find the impulse of your:

- Muscles to contract or stretch.
- Joints to move like water

See if you can find the impulse: (in mouth/lips/tongue) (in arms)

- To flow (come alive in your fluid system)
- To Reach
- To Push
- To Pull/Suck
- To Yield
- To Rest

Any Impulses in specific locations?

- What are the impulses in your feet?
- Hands -legs - shoulder - belly - heart - breath - voice - eyes.

Do you have any Impulse or desire for rhythm anywhere inside you?

Explore your sense of support / gravity / sense of reach / sense of hanging / of being suspended

Any impulses to take or make a shape?

Follow inner impulse:

- Impulse of tissue to elongate or stretch – reach
- Impulse of tissue to compress – push
- Impulse of tissue to pulse – wiggle – wave – move.

Find an impulse in a location – like impulse of toes or fingers.

Find impulse of rhythm – range of quick to slow.

Find impulse of rhythm – size or intensity.

Spine – lying on side:

- Vectors – longitudinal – up – down.
- Sagittal – back and forth.
- Lateral – side to side.

Sections of Spine:

- Explore on each side - on all fours, on back and vertically – sitting and standing.
- Dance like skeleton while standing.
- Feet and legs – rotate foot like sundial, finding micromovements in each shape or orientation of foot.

# Permeable Bubble-Ball

by Anna Rider CMA, MFA, RSME, RSMT

## Kinesphere

The space that surrounds you as far as you can reach while staying in one place. The image of a bubble-ball is to give the kinesphere boundaries.

## YOU

- Take note of your body and how you feel right now, not changing anything just becoming aware like waking up in the morning.
- Become aware of your breathing and noting the difference between the inhale and the exhale
- Breathing allowing your bubble-ball (kinesphere) to breathe as well getting bigger as you inhale and smaller as you exhale
- While standing still play with reaching inside of your bubble-ball
  - reaching to the edge
  - reaching to the middle
  - changing levels
- Has your breathing changed? Have you been aware of your breathing?
- Repeat reaching within your kinesphere while letting your breath reflect your movement.

## OTHERS

- Start moving through space taking the image of your bubble-ball with you.
- When someone enters the space of your bubble-ball allow him or her in, be neutral and mindful see if it changes the way that you are moving or breathing.
- The next time that you encounter someone, make a choice whether or not to allow him or her into your bubble-ball. Do this without speaking or changing your movement. How do you accomplish this task?

## SPACE

- Walk around the space, walking with others and leaving. Be aware of the space, others and your own breathing.
- Cut the space in half. Repeat the exercise.
- Continue to cut the space in half until there is barely any room to move.

## COMMUNITY

- Form a group
  - all facing the same direction
  - a single person takes a leadership role and moves in a manner that the group can follow
  - when the person changes direction, the person most forward in that direction takes over the leadership role
  - continue for a specific length of time or until the group finds an ending

## DISCUSSION

- How did your image of bubble-ball change in the group?
- How can we be part of a group and maintain our individuality?

# Somatic Modeling Clay

By Elisa Cotroneo, RSME, RSMT

Begin by asking students to find a space in the room where they have their own space and will not touch any other student as they move.

Standing on two feet in a neutral position, feet a fist width apart (demonstrate this by placing your fist between the two knuckles of the big toes to align the second toe, with center of kneecap and center of hip joint) arms hanging at your sides. Notice your relationship to the earth beneath you and the sky above. Explore your weight shifting to one side and then the other, then come to center notice equal weight on both feet. Shift your weight more to your balls of your feet then to your heels then come to rest at center.

Warm up: Jiggle Joints ~ to warm up the joints, increase production of synovial fluid in the joints and develop awareness of all the joints in the body. Can use music to support this activity.

Hands ~ Explore how the individual joints in your hands move, use your other hand to help mobilize, each of the 3 joints of each finger. The base of the finger knuckle joint circumambulates, meaning it makes circles, other parts of the fingers are hinge joints, they extend and flex. Now trace the long bones from the knuckles up to wrist, 5 bones at the base of hands that connect to two bones of arm at the wrist. Notice how as they move they change the shape of the base of the hand. Jiggle those joints by hanging your arm and shaking it, allow gravity to pull on the weight of your hands as you jiggle the joints. Bring awareness to your wrists as your hands jiggle.

Focus on Elbow ~ Bring your attention to one elbow, explore how it folds and extend. Feel the movement of the other elbow. Jiggle the joint as your arm hangs at your sides. One then the other...notice the sensation as your elbow jiggles.

Bring your attention to your shoulder, Upper arm bone, collarbone and outer edge of your scapula/shoulder blade. With a hanging arm bring a jiggle right into the space between these 3 bones, one arm then the other. Now both. The other end of the collar bone is connected to the breast bone/ sternum as you lift your shoulder the joint between the collar bone and sternum moves...bring a jiggle there if you can...small quick indirect movement.

Come down to your foot and ankle. Shaking your leg while hanging your foot, allows you to bring a jiggle into your ankle and foot. Feet are a mirror image of your hands there are 26 bones with 33 joints. Release into gravity while shaking your foot and ankle.

Bring your focus up to your knee another hinge joint, allow your leg to swing and relax while bringing a shaking movement into this joint.

Now your hip (demonstrate the ball and socket joint with a fist and a cupped hand around it) This joint is a ball and socket. The ball rotates in a glistening socket, bring a

twisting rotating jiggle deep into the hip socket. The ball of your foot can rest on the floor as you jiggle and twist this joint.

Your spine is made up of XX joints from your tail to the base of your skull. Softening your knees and letting them jiggle will shift your pelvis which will allow a jiggle to move up your spine ~~~~~allow the jiggle to be lateral...then front to back then all through the spine multi directionally.

Now jiggle all your joints....jiggle up high arms over head...jiggle down low close to the ground...jiggle all around...

### Activity: Somatic Modeling Clay

#### Find a Partner

To begin one person will be the clay, the other the sculptor.

The clay does not have eyes. (If comfortable with blind folds you can use them otherwise work with eyes closed).

- #1 clay begins in a neutral position like we began today's lesson
- #1 sculptor creates a shape out of the clay, begin with a simple direction of only shaping the arms.
- clay feels the shape in their body
- sculptor brings the clay back to the neutral position
- #1 clay now becomes the #2 sculptor and the #1 sculptor becomes the #2 clay
- #2 sculptor **recreates the same** sculpture it was placed in with the #2 clay
- partners discuss whether they believe the shapes to have been the same, where they noticed a difference in the shape,

It is important to encourage gentle slow shaping of the clay, not forcing any shape but feeling the possibility in the joint.

Repeat back and forth creating more and more complicated sculptures. Encourage shapes that are angular and curved, high and low, ones with lots of negative space and those with hardly any.

#### Variations:

- Work with 2 people or more as clay to create a group sculptor. Using same number of sculptors and when they switch they sculpt the person who sculpted them.
- Moving sculpture where clay is guided in a simple movement phrase and then guides their partner

These activities develop proprioceptive, and kinesthetic awareness.

# Relationship of Habit to Dance Training

By Nancy Romita, MFA, MAmSAT, RSME

*This is the activity is an excerpt from Functional Awareness: Anatomy in Action for Dancers by Nancy Romita and Allegra Romita*

## The Story: How Your Suit Fits

A woman has taken her pantsuit to be fixed and altered by a tailor. She tries on the outfit to be sure the alterations are correct. As she tries on the pants, she notices the leg lengths appear different.

The tailor is not interested in doing more work so he just adjusts her hip a bit and now the legs look even. The woman adjusts and decides she can live with this. The woman now tries on the jacket and discovers one sleeve is too long and also the darts make the jacket hard to button in the front. The tailor just says, "Look if you just make this little adjustment in your shoulders, it will fit perfectly."

The woman actually buys into this sales pitch, makes the adjustment, and walks out of the store. As she is walking out of the store and down the street two people are coming at her from the opposite direction. One says, "Look at that poor woman." "Yes," the other one says, "doesn't her suit fit perfectly!"

People make subtle or larger adjustments in life and these adjustments become habits that are unconscious. Over time they begin to take a physical toll on our system. This toll is exhibited in tension, pain, stiffness, or rigidity of movement. The good news: It is possible to shift posture and movement habits and discover more ease and less tension in the body.

Here are three simple approaches:

1. Become more aware of your personal movement habits.
2. Learn a basic understanding about how the musculoskeletal system functions, and how this affects body action.
3. Practice new skills to improve movement function and dynamic alignment.

## Exploration: Becoming More Aware of Our Movement Habits

Try this experiment:

1. Clasp your hands together with all the fingers crossed.
2. Notice which thumb is on top. Is it your writing hand or your non-dominant hand?
3. Open your hands and close them quickly and unconsciously. Does the same arrangement in your thumbs and hand arise?
4. Now release your hands and reweave your fingers to place the other thumb on top.

How comfortable or uncomfortable is this? Does it take a little more time for your brain to tell your body how to place your hands in this way?

Try the same activity with your arms crossed.

1. Fold your arms.
2. Notice which arm is on the top. Is this the same arm as the thumb earlier?
3. Drop your arms by your side and now raise your arms to fold the arms with the opposite forearm on top.

How does this feel? Often, we have a preferred manner in which we fold our arms and the other way feels a bit peculiar.

Try the same activity with legs crossed.

1. Cross your legs or your ankles if that is more familiar to you.
2. Notice which leg is on the top. Is this the same leg as the arm earlier?
3. Uncross the legs and then try the other side. How does this feel?

In facilitating this activity for over 30 years to thousands of people, we realize that these habits are not systemic and have no pattern in regard to dominant hand or genetic proclivity. They are merely “how your suit fits” or how you have made a habitual accommodation over time.

Some habits are compulsory and very positive, such as brushing our teeth or automatically moving the foot to the break pad when a light turns yellow and then red. Some habits are unnecessary.

Unconscious habits with posture can compromise body balance, place unnecessary stress on the system, and lead to discomfort and pain. Improving your range of choices for movement develops a more resilient neuromuscular system.

## **Your Findings and Why They Matter**

My grandmother was born in 1900. Using life insurance statistics, the average life expectancy for a woman born in 1900 in America (married and nonsmoker) was age 50. Life expectancy for a woman born in 2000 who is married and does not smoke is now 90!

We only get one skeletal system for a lifetime. If my grandmother had a little arthritis or chronic discomfort as she started to grow older, she only had to deal with this until age 50 (on average). We now live almost twice as long on average! It behooves us to know more about how our unconscious habits affect our muscular skeletal system and how this unconsciously contributes to chronic discomfort or worse. More importantly, we can prevent and change patterns of movement to alleviate pressure on the system through some techniques and practices in awareness.

Chronic unconscious misuse of the body leads to chronic discomfort or pain. A subtle habit can have a profound impact over time. Folding your hands does not have a large impact on your neuromuscular system, but crossing your arms often leads to many other accommodations so the body becomes imbalanced.

Crossing one leg far more often than the other can lead to an imbalance in the hips. If your legs are crossed right now, notice if you have more weight on one hip. You may want to check this out while you are driving. Are you always leaning slightly into

one hip? This constant small imbalance creates instability in the low back and pelvis, and this can lead to pain or discomfort over time. How you move through daily action affects your whole health.

1. Discover how your "suit fits." What are your habits for head balance, arm cross, and leg cross? None of this is wrong or bad posture. It is merely an unconscious pattern that can contribute to imbalance in the system. We all have habits of asymmetry. It is awareness of these habits and choosing when they are necessary that enhances body/mind health and efficiency of movement.
2. Consider letting yourself move out of habit and into a state of curiosity about balancing the body differently. Play with letting your eyes gaze the horizon to rebalance the head or play with where your weight rests at the feet.
3. Keep a movement journal to record your findings. This journal can help you notice patterns over time.

# **Relax to Focus Movement Series© A Movement 'Calm-Down & Wake-Up' Somatic Dance Activity**

By Martha Eddy, CMA, RSME/T, EdD  
Director of the Center for Kinesthetic Education

This sequence is based on basic early childhood movements that are central to the development of our coordination and the functioning of different parts of our brains. This sequence stimulates different parts of the brain as well as using the proprioceptive and kinesthetic senses - the 5 interoceptors - muscle tension, body shape/joint position, inner ear gravity sensors for stop/start/speed, proprioception, vision and inner ear for stand tall, and labyrinths of inner ear for tilt - fall.

Seated Version (on the floor or in a chair): Relax to Focus Movement Series©

1. 3 deep breaths with hands on belly
2. Quick invigorating squeezes on own arms and legs
3. Expand and shrink with upper body (stretch arms wide, give self a hug)
4. Relax head down and let it pull the spine along too – rest head on knees
5. Place hands on floor or on stable chair behind hips and lift hips up – keep weight even
6. Shift balance from right to left (foot and hand), balancing on each side for as long as possible
7. Alternate between left knee and right elbow reaching together and right knee and left elbow reaching toward each other
8. Return to 3 deep breaths. Breathe in and out as slowly as possible.

Standing Version : Relax to Focus Movement Series©

1. Breath: 3 breaths (deep and slow with hands on belly)
2. Sensory Wake-Up: Squeeze squeeze squeeze each arm and then give a quick rub-down to each of your legs Repeat 3x's
3. Whole body coordination: Expand and shrink – grow as large as you can; create a tiny shape
4. Torso and Head organization: Spinal wiggle – loosen up the joints of the spine by shaking and wriggling or slow spinal roll down – end with the head relaxed on knees, hanging down or eyes closed. Slowly roll up.
5. Upper Bilateral Symmetry & Lower Bilateral Symmetry: Symmetrical and focused: brings the body to our midline to increase attention. Put both hands on the floor and do mini- pushups; keep the weight equal in both arms; consciously push up with the legs to come to standing
6. Right – left organizing (hand and foot dominance): Stand on one leg for 10 – 60 seconds – pick a focus point straight ahead. Repeat on other leg
7. Cross-lateral coordination (opposition): Crossing the midline – as if marching in place but have the elbow reach to the opposite knee; alternate rhythmically.
8. Return to 3 slower and deeper breaths. Visit us for more activity sheets, lesson plans, workshops & teaching tips.

