CLASS 11 | BE A (PEN) PAL

Highlights the value of connection and sense of purpose through a volunteer letter writing campaign.

TBH FOCUS  
SOCIALIZE

SKILLS WORKED  
P A C N VE VI M PS

SBBT  
PAIR UP

YOU WILL NEED  
• Whiteboard or flip chart and markers
• Stopwatch or timer
• Stationery and envelopes or postcards, pens, colored markers, stamps, enough for each student to write several letters or postcards. Remind distance learners to have these ready ahead of class
• Now Do It! worksheets and TBH Takeaway handouts, enough for each student. Distribute to distance learners ahead of class
• Video conferencing technology if modifying for virtual delivery

WELCOME TO CLASS!

• Welcome any new students using the Welcome to the TBH Course introduction.
• Introduce today’s class.

Today’s topic is “Be a (Pen) Pal.” Our TBH Blueprint focus is the “Socialize” action point. We will learn why staying social is something we can do in unexpected ways, even in ways that improve the well-being of others.

We will be working on the following thinking skills today:

P Perception  
A Attention  
C Coordination  
N Nimbleness

VE Verbal Skills  
VI Visual Skills  
M Memory  
PS Problem Solving

TBH LET’S GET IT STARTED!  

5 MINUTES

• Lead this upbeat, seated warm-up to build focus, energy, and get everyone ready to learn.
• Encourage class to count along and support one another.
• See the TBH Let’s Get It Started! playlist for suggested music to set the pace of your workout.
• See the course introduction for a fully scripted version of this workout.
• Mute distance learners to avoid noisy distractions.
We are going to begin with *TBH Let’s Get It Started!* Being physically active is great for our brains. This quick warmup is a great way to get focused, build energy and get us ready to learn. We’ll do this right at our seats at the beginning of every class. Just watch what I do and follow along!

**FEET GET STARTED!**
- Tap toes on both feet, up and down. 10 repetitions. Count together 1 to 10.
- Alternate toe taps. 10 repetitions. Count backward together 10 to 1.

**LEGS GET STARTED!**
- Stamp feet on the ground, alternating feet. Make “noise” with group.
- Gently kick legs out from the knee, alternating legs. 10 repetitions. Count together from A to J.
- March in place, alternating legs. 10 repetitions. If your class is physically able to march in place safely while standing, you may choose that option. Count backwards from 20 by 2’s (20, 18, 16...)

**ARMS GET STARTED!**
- Gently shake arms, open and close hands.
- Circle wrists a few times in clockwise and counterclockwise.
- Hold arms straight out in front, shoulder level, palms facing down. Slowly lower both hands to thighs and then raise them back to shoulder level. 5 repetitions. Count by 2’s (2, 4, 6, 8, 10).
- Shrug shoulders up and down, with hands on knees. 5 repetitions. Count backwards from 5 to 1.

**VOICES GET STARTED!**
- Say “OHHHHHHHHHH.” Have group say sound with you. Hold for a few seconds.
- Say “EHHHHHHHHHH.” Have group say sound with you. Hold for a few seconds.
- Say “AHHHHHHHHHHH.” Have group say sound with you. Hold for a few seconds.
- Say “OH – EH – AH.” Hold each sound for a few seconds. 3 repetitions.
- Say “The lips, the teeth, the tip of the tongue.” Repeat this famous acting voice exercise with the class, focusing on articulation and participation. 3 repetitions.

**BREATH GETS STARTED!**
- Slow focus to bring awareness to sitting still in chair.
- Take a deep breath in through the nose.
- Exhale out through the mouth.
- Give selves big hug, wrapping arms across waist and squeezing gently, as able.
- Thank selves and send some “TBH love” to our brains!

Great job, everyone! We are started up and ready to go!
BRAIN PLAY | LANGUAGES OF THE WORLD 5 MINUTES

- Lead this quick cognitive warm up to build attention, processing speed, nimbleness and other cognitive skills, as well as group connection.
- Have students name different languages, working as quickly as they can against the clock. Stop them at 3 minutes.
- Write down the languages they name on the white board or flip chart.
- Encourage distance learners to join in from home.

Now let’s move to our “Brain Play.” Research shows that working against the clock is a great way we can keep our thinking focused, fast and nimble. Today’s Brain Play is called Languages of the World. In a moment, we are going to start naming as many different languages as we can think of. But we only have 3 minutes! I’ll write them down as you call them out. Ready? Here we go!

That was magnifique! Or should I say wunderbar! Wish yourselves a big “felicidades” everyone!

LEARN THE TBH SCIENCE 5 MINUTES

- Present the science behind this class.
- Allow for brief discussion of the science with your students.

Did you know that staying social is perhaps one of the very best things we can do to stay sharp, preserve memory, and prevent dementia? Researchers have long touted the value of connecting with others to our brain health. A Harvard School of Public Health study found that people who reported lower levels of social interaction were twice as likely as their more social peers to have memory problems. And, a recent AARP survey found that folks who felt socially isolated were significantly more likely to complain about feeling more forgetful, more distracted and less able to think clearly.

NOW DO IT! 15 MINUTES

- Lead your class in the workout to personalize their learning of the science. Option to distribute class worksheets.
- Break your class into pairs of two, or three if needed.
- Read one to two selected letters from notable famous sources (see Resources).
- Introduce your letter writing campaign. You may choose a campaign from the suggested list below or one that you select for your community.
- Have students work in pairs, supporting and helping each other as they write their postcards or letters for the selected campaign.
- For virtual delivery, modify workout to do “All Together.” Adjust scripting accordingly.
Today we are going to do something that is both socially and intellectually engaging: write letters! How many of you still write letters (not emails or texts!) regularly? Writing letters remains a wonderful way to connect with others. Sharing our thoughts with someone else, even indirectly, can yield similar mental benefits. Composing a letter is also intellectually challenging, as it requires that we think, plan and express ourselves in written language.

Some letter correspondence makes history. Think, for example, of the letters of John and Abigail Adams, or Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Or Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning, who courted through their letters and then eloped. (Remember “how do I love thee? Let me count the ways ...”?)

Here are some wonderful examples of letter writing. I’m going to read these aloud. I’m curious to see what you think.

The letter writing we will do today also has another important element. All the letters we write will go to people who could really use a bit of cheer. Helping others can nourish our own sense of purpose, another key ingredient of staying well. I’ve selected a campaign I know will be meaningful to us all. We’re going to work in our pairs as we write to share ideas and help each other, as well as enjoy a bit of companionship as we work. Let’s get started!

Share details of your campaign with the class and have them begin letter writing. At the end, collect the letters for distribution.

**BE A (PEN) PAL SUGGESTED LETTER WRITING CAMPAIGNS**

**More Love Letters | The Letter Requests.** It all started with one crazy idea – that the world could use a few more love letters. What followed was a movement that has made thousands feel more loved. Visit the website to see the active requested campaigns, or to learn more how to hold a “More Love Letters” campaign in your community.

**Amnesty International.** Amnesty International fights on behalf of individuals worldwide facing political repression and torture. Their “Write for Rights” sponsors letter writing campaigns on behalf of persons throughout the world.

**A Million Thanks.** This organization sends letters to U.S. active, reserve and veteran military to demonstrate thanks and support for their service.

**Local Organizations.** There are a number of local organizations that will welcome cards for those they serve. Try partnering with organizations in your community such as homeless shelters, food banks, hospitals, hospice programs, or meal delivery programs.
Letter writing may seem old fashioned, but the benefits it brings to our brain are timeless. Connecting with others by mail, snail or otherwise, boosts our brain by connecting us socially, engaging us intellectually, and – when we take part in a letter writing campaign like this one – giving us the chance to feel better about our role in the community by helping others.

What is one thing you will always remember from today’s class?

Let’s wrap up with “TBH Take a Breath.” Being mindful of our breath and sharing some positive thoughts is a wonderful way to acknowledge what we’ve learned together before we go back to our day. Research also shows that these kinds of exercises help us focus better and even learn more effectively.

- Have students get comfortable, resting both feet flat on the floor, hands resting in their laps.
- Have students close their eyes and keep them gently closed.
- Ask students to focus their attention on their breathing, noticing the rate and rhythm of their breath. Allow them to focus on their natural breathing for a few moments.
- Instruct students to begin rhythmic breathing. Ask them to inhale slowly and deeply through their nostrils, breathing gently into their chest and belly. Then ask them to exhale slowly through their lips, slowing the rate and rhythm of their breath.
- Have students continue rhythmic breathing, instructing them to continue to focus on gently and slowly inhaling and exhaling, allowing their attention to simply “ride” the wave of their breath. Allow them to focus on rhythmic breathing for several moments.
- Offer the following positive affirmation statements below in a calm, slow voice. Invite students to simply listen, repeat the phrase silently to themselves, or to think about what each statement means to them.

  My mind is calm.
  I am grateful to feel useful.
  I am grateful to feel connected.
  I am grateful to be able to help others.
Pause for several moments.
End the exercise by inviting your students to bring their awareness back to the room, gently opening their eyes and becoming more aware of the room and of each other.
Invite them to end practice with gratitude for taking a moment for themselves, for the chance to learn together and to connect with each other.

COMING UP NEXT!

• Thank students for attending the class.
• Invite students to join you for the next TBH class.

I am so glad we had this time to learn together today. I enjoyed seeing everyone work together on our class letter writing project. I know what we did will now bring joy and comfort to others.

I look forward to seeing you for our next TBH Brain Workout class! Be sure to bring a friend!

CLASS RESOURCES

NOW DO IT! WORKSHEETS
Use these optional worksheets to run your class.

Be a (Pen) Pal Worksheet. Promotes letter writing as a social engagement tool.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Letters of Note. This website offers an extensive collection of notable and common letters of all lengths you can share with your class.
Letter from Birmingham Jail. Share excerpts of this historically important letter from Martin Luther King, Jr. with your class.
Correspondence of John and Abigail Adams. There are several letters to select from and share with your class. Available through the Massachusetts Historical Society website.
From Mark Twain to an “Idiot of 33rd Degree.” Some consider this letter to a “snake oil” salesman to be vintage Twain, biting and humorous. A great selection to share with your students.