

Seed Mandala Ritual

Begin with a circle of fabric. Red, maroon or purple crushed 'velvet' is most suitable, made to the full width of the fabric and hemmed for easy repeat use. Spread the circle out on the floor (a carpeted floor is best for this exercise if possible) with small bowls of dried pulses and grains (brown lentils, red lentils, lima beans, kidney beans, split green beans, split yellow beans, navy beans, rice etc) and a bowl placed around the edge of the cloth. Between ten and thirteen bowls is ideal.

Start by taking a handful of rice and sprinkling a line with it through the centre of the cloth, and then another perpendicular to that, so that there are 4 fairly equal quarters delineated by rice. You may ask a girl with a steady hand to help with this first step, or you could do it yourself while explaining what is going to happen.

You can ask the girls what they understand a Mandala to be. Some may have seen or heard about the sand mandalas of the Tibetan Monks, or the chalk mandalas called *rangoli* that are commonly made in India to honour special times and places. Generally speaking a Mandala is made to symbolically represent an aspect of the natural and/or spiritual world. For instance the Kalachakra Sand Mandala of the Tibetan Buddhists is a symbolic representation of their cosmology, or understanding of the cosmic order.

The Mandala you are making is to represent the seasons and cycles of life as well as the cycles of female fertility.

Now the first two girls can choose a type of pulse each and start making a simple pattern or design in part of one of the quarters, each making their own pattern. They then repeat this in all the quarters in the same area of each quarter. As one girl finishes the next girl in the circle gets up and begins her pattern. She can create something quite separate, repeated in each quarter, or can add to the designs already represented in the Mandala. Two girls working on the Mandala at any one time is enough, as they need room to move and need to see where in the quarter the other girl is working so that each quarter remains

relatively consistent. Of course the alignment and repeated patterns will not be *perfectly* the same and this is as it should be and as it is in nature.

To progress smoothly you may like to instruct the girls to hop up and begin when the previous girl sits down without waiting to be told. Depending on the class size and the time you have it can be really nice for girls to have a couple of turns each, nonetheless one go is fine too.

While the Mandala is taking shape you can discuss aspects of the theme of the Mandala. This will depend on the needs of your class and what you have covered already. For instance you could talk about: the abundance of nature generally, and specifically human fertility, cycles of nature generally – day/night, seasons, life cycles (which like the quarters of the Seed Mandala are similar but different also, never quite the same). You can talk about their stage of the life cycle, the coming of fertility that is puberty, which along with physical size, is the primary physical difference between children and adults. You may like to discuss examples of abundance in nature, how this results in all the food we eat and materials we use for housing and clothing etc.

You could discuss in more detail female cycles and what is going on during the cycle. (If they've heard this once don't assume much has sunk in. It can always be useful to add more detail and consider questions such as: why do we menstruate? what happens at ovulation?) I find it very useful to discuss the menstrual cycle separately from fertilisation/conception as, except for maybe a few of times in their life, the cycle is about their own bodily processes and not about conception and pregnancy. For more fascinating details about the cycle see *A Blessing Not a Curse*.

You could discuss, for instance, the ovary, the fallopian tube, the uterus, the cervix, the vagina, and vulva. The changes in these during the menstrual cycle. The hormonal changes. Changes that we can become aware of that signal where we are in the cycle, for instance: symptoms of PMT (if any), changes in cervical mucus as seen, felt at the mouth of the vagina, changes in the lymph nodes on the same side of the ovary which is

releasing an egg at ovulation (swells and can be felt in the crease at between the top of the leg and lower abdomen).

Girls may have questions about their experiences of the cycle. Don't feel you have to know everything – if you can't answer a question, or not fully, model curiosity and willingness to find out. Similarly girls may have questions about difficult symptoms they're having like pain, moodiness etc. If you have skills and expertise around general self help for menstrual problems you can share those and ask the group what they know/use at home. You may like to include discussion or practice of safe exercises and therapies like yoga, shiatsu, herb teas, heat packs, aromatherapy, flower essences, diet and lifestyle for healthy menstruation. Discuss seeing a qualified, experienced health practitioner for more difficult problems.

You may also include different cultural/historical understanding of fertility and menstruation. Weave your discussion in and around the Mandala making. Use props if you need to, like an anatomy poster or vulva puppet. The latter are available from www.yoni.com.

When the Mandala is finished and everyone has had one or two turns, put the bowls and remaining seeds away.

At the end of A Celebration Day for Girls

Everyone can come in close sitting around the Mandala. Each girl takes hold of the cloth on the ground, with one or two hands depending on the size of your group.

You can say something like, 'In a moment you will be, sending the Mandala back to where it came from –to the formless source of all creativity and all life, to the creation and dissolution, birth and death cycle. We can offer a blessing or a wish to be send with the Mandala. (Like the Tibetan Monks) There may be a very obvious one relating to someone you all know, who may be ill or has suffered some trauma or, there may be a particular event your group wishes to bless. Otherwise I suggest something like: "As we

dissolve this Mandala back to where it came from let us send our blessing to girls throughout the world that they may have abundant support and celebration as they transition from child to woman”.

Then, with your (silent) blessing, prayer or wish in mind, begin to raise the cloth and tip the seeds back into the centre of the cloth. This is LOTS of fun and usually accompanied by high but contained energy with ohhs and ahhs. You will notice an interesting pattern of seeds in the centre of the cloth.

When the cloth is lowered and you have a pile of seeds in the middle I give the girls a paper bag or square of grease proof paper, to gather a scoop of seeds to take home. They can:

- use these in meals to add a special blessing
- keep them in a jar in their bedroom
- make their own patterns with them.

In my experience, and used in whatever way, I hear that girls treasure these seeds.