

# WILLIAM CRAMP

# FIT FLYER

VOLUME 8, NUMBER 3

SUMMER 2022

## Mindfulness helps understand feelings

*Fit Flyer* reporters recently had a chance to talk with Ms. Cheifetz, William Cramp's school counselor, about mindfulness. Scientists have found that mindfulness can help reduce stress and anxiety, according to *Greater Good Magazine* of the University of California, Berkeley. Researchers say it can also improve memory, attention, and sleep. It can even boost a person's ability to fight illness.

The interview with Ms. Cheifetz has been edited and shortened.

### Question: What is mindfulness?

Ms. Cheifetz : Mindfulness is looking into ourselves, introspectively. You try and reflect on yourself and what's going on in your body—whether it is calm or at peace, or a little anxious or nervous or scared. For me, the hardest part is you're supposed to feel your feelings. That can be hard because sometimes we

(Please see *Mindfulness* on Page 4)

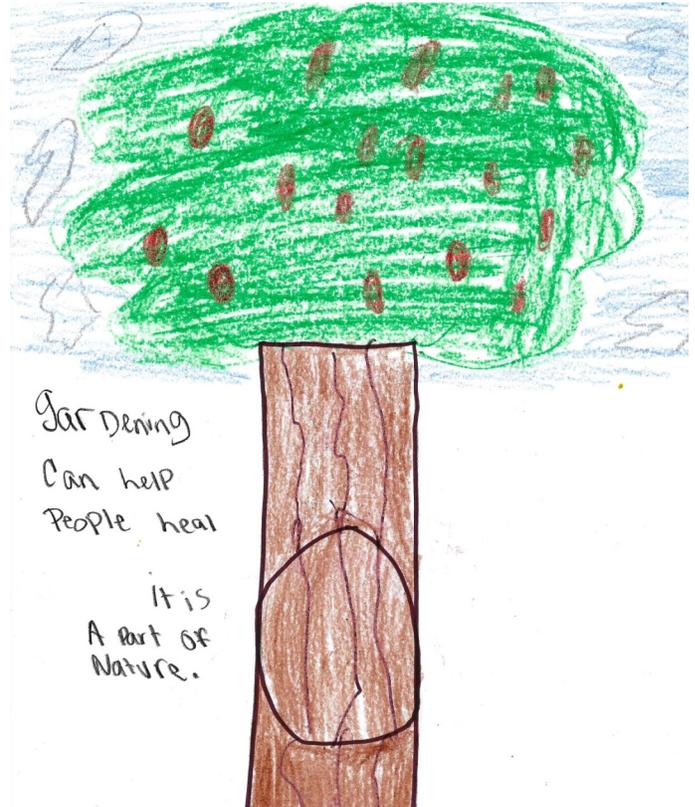


Illustration by Amiyrah Velez

## Mr. Fitzsimmons looks back on 2021-22

William Cramp teacher Mr. Fitzsimmons says he tries to help his fifth-grade students by being patient and a good listener. It's not always easy, he said, because "I'm not actually a patient person."

But he said he had tried extra-hard this year because of all the challenges the pandemic has created, such as lost school time and disrupted friendships.

"I feel that students don't get listened to enough," he told us. "How many times have I sat down with some of you and tried to work out a problem you're having? ... Everything that you're going through is going to affect what happens in the classroom."

Mr. Fitzsimmons has had to look after himself too. He tries not to let his feelings get the better of him. He works at doing what will keep him healthy. He cooks breakfast, he meditates, he listens to mu-

**This is one of three articles and student reflections that appear in the new book, "How We Heal." See Page 2 for details and learn about a new film.**

sic—all different kinds, depending on his mood. He exercises at 5 a.m. "I started boxing, which is incredibly stress-relieving. You can punch a punching bag and let all of your energy out."

Mr. Fitzsimmons thinks that kids who feel troubled should find someone they can talk to, an adult or a friend. "A lot of you like to keep all of that bottled up," he said, but "it will eventually all come out." He noted: "We've all been there." He also recommends that kids "find something that you like to do that helps you relax and put your energy into that."

—By *Fit Flyer* staff

# People can feel better in the garden

Mrs. Gavin, visual art teacher, said gardening makes her feel at peace with the world. She first started gardening when she was young and she got so good at it that she kept going.

Nowadays, Mrs. Gavin gardens on her farm in New Jersey. She grows vegetables, fruits like cherries, peaches, and berries, herbs like cilantro, and flowers.

Gardening helps her cope with anxiety and stress, she said. “A plant doesn't care how you look. It just wants a little love,” she said.

Researchers learned that “participating in gardening activities has a significant positive impact on health,” according to a 2017 article that appeared in the journal *Preventive Medical Reports*.

Gardening takes time. Mrs. Gavin said she takes into consideration light, water, and space for the plants. She makes sure that the soil is healthy. She tills the soil, which involves breaking it up and loosening it so it is ready for planting. Then she puts lit-

tle plants in the ground that grew from seeds in her greenhouse.

Mrs. Gavin didn't always live on a farm. She lived in New York City in the “concrete jungle,” she said. Then, the only thing she could stick her fingers in and get dirty was a bucket of mint. Still, it connected her to nature.

The hardest part about gardening is experiencing loss, says Mrs. Gavin. “Always learning and failing—when you fail, you learn something, but every year is a new year, a new chance to try again.”

Her favorite thing about gardening is singing to her plants. She also likes to watch the dragonflies play tag.

Her advice to anyone who wants to garden is, “You can do something in your yard or in a tub. Flowers and plants grow pretty much everywhere. You might not get what you expect but you learn something.”  
—By Fit Flyer staff

## Reporters reflect on gardening

My experience with gardening is great because I love to get my hands dirty. When I'm bored, I ask my mom if I can go to the backyard. Then I get a tool I can garden with. I put my hands in the dirt, and I put a sunflower seed in the dirt. Then I go inside to wash my hands and eat dinner. As the days change, I see the flower grow and grow into a big sunflower.

—Lillie Boone

I have gardened in my classroom and backyard. I've planted tomato seeds, mint seeds, corn, zinnias, and more. Gardening makes me feel happy. I like getting my hands dirty sometimes. —Peyton Crawford

I have gardened, only in my classroom, never outside. I have planted some peppers and other things you can cook with. It makes me feel really calm and relaxed. I have never liked to get my hands dirty or even just play with dirt, but I was always taught to try something new and to never be afraid or scared. When I garden it does help me boost my mood and makes it better than it was. —Aidah Sanders

I have gardened before. It was fun getting my hands dirty. When I garden it makes me feel happy because I like flowers and plants. It is fun to do a lot of cool things. It makes me happy to see it grow bigger and bigger. —Lelanni Torres-Hernandez

I have been gardening since I was 5 years old. When you garden, it takes time and patience. Gardening makes me feel relaxed and at peace with nature. Gardening has helped me in many different ways and during difficult times. —Miguel Soto

### Check out book and film on healing

Congratulations, *Fit Flyer* staff, for contributing to “How We Heal: Leading Change In Our Communities 2022,” a new book by kids, for kids. The book includes articles about fifth-grade teacher Mr. Fitzsimmons (which appears in this issue) and therapists Tim Massaquoi and Michael Galaraga (articles appeared in the *Fit Flyer* spring edition). Reflections by Amiyrah Velez and Aidah Sanders also appear in the book.

**Teachers:** You can find the book, video clips, and classroom activities at [HealthyNewsWorks.org](http://HealthyNewsWorks.org).

You can also share with your students a 22-minute film based on the book. It is a kid-led newscast with experts and community leaders discussing healing. To set up a showing, contact Mia Blitstein: [mblitstein@healthynewsworks.org](mailto:mblitstein@healthynewsworks.org)



## Book's message: Show empathy

### I am Human

By Susan Verde

Illustrated by Peter H. Reynolds

Ms. Gallo's second-grade class read this book about kindness, empathy, and being human. Empathy is when you can imagine how someone else is feeling. When somebody is sad you can help them by showing empathy.

In this book, students learned that you can show empathy by giving flowers to someone, saying "sorry" when an accident happens, and showing kindness. Because the boy was human, he realized he could make choices, even brave choices.

Nine out of 14 students in Ms. Gallo's class said they enjoyed the book. One student said the book described someone who was nervous to climb a ladder, but overcame his fear. Here are some comments from the Cub Reporters:

- \* "I liked that it was about showing kindness."
- \* "It taught us about empathy."
- \* "It showed a boy making his own choices."

We recommend this book for children ages 5 to 11 (but really any age) because of the colorful illustrations and because everybody can learn something about empathy and kindness.

## Animals and kids need sleep

### Bedtime is Canceled

By CeCe Meng

Illustrated by Aurelie Neyret

This book is about a day when bedtime was canceled and a lot of silly things happened.

Ms. Masich's first-grade Cub Reporters said they liked the book because getting enough sleep is important when you have to get up early and go to school or work. We learned that when people don't get enough rest they can make lots of mistakes. For instance, the parents were so tired they buttered the dog's tail. The dad fell asleep in his mashed potatoes.

We found the book silly and hilarious. We recommend it book for kids ages 6 and 7, just like us.



## Feelings matter

### But Perhaps, Just Maybe

By Tuvia Dikman Oro

Illustrated by Menachem Halberstadt

This book is about happiness, friendship, and empathy. Empathy is when you can understand what other people are feeling.

In the story, students saw lots of characters helping each other. The cat helped his sister. Mrs. Hoopoe fixed people's bikes. Mrs. Fox picked raspberries to make juice for all of the friends.

Ms. Quintana's second-grade reporters said they enjoyed the book because they liked the setting and the characters. They said the artwork is "so great" because the hedgehog looked like Sonic (from the videogame).

One student said, "I liked it because they had different thoughts until the end."

Another said, "I liked the cat because he was helping." Two other students loved the fox because she was a helper, making drinks for everyone.

Ms. Quintana's reporters recommend this book for all children in grades K to 5 because of the artwork and because it could make them think about why people do the things they do. We hope that the book will remind others about empathy.

## Think about others

### Hey Little Ant

By Phillip and Hannah Hoose

Illustrated by Debbie Tilley

Ms. Pegrem-Bredell's second-grade Cub Reporters recently learned about empathy. They read this book about an ant and a boy. The ant was asking the boy to let him go. The ant was telling him about his life and trying to get the boy to understand him. Empathy is being able to imagine yourself in someone else's place. In the book, students noticed that the ant was asking the boy to show empathy and imagine life as an ant.

Thirteen of 14 students said they enjoyed the book because it showed about putting yourself in someone else's place. One student said, "The story is about treating others nicely."

Another student said, "The story was good because it shows that you should always treat people the way you want to be treated."

We recommend this book for children of all ages because they should always be kind. This book will make you think twice before stepping on a bug.

## Handling stress

KidsHealth.org says "stress is when you are worried or uncomfortable about something." The feeling can cause you to feel unwell in your body. For instance, it can "give you a stomachache or headache," according to KidsHealth.

Ms. Ortiz-Horan's first-grade Cub Reporters learned about how to deal with stress. They learned about breathing in and breathing out. They also practiced deep breathing which is a good way to release stress.

One of their favorite activities was to blow out a pretend cupcake candle. They used their hands to create a "candle" and then blew on it. They also did "ball breaths," where they pretended to blow up a beach ball and then squeeze out the air.

Before this activity, some in the class were feeling sad, scared, mad, or happy. Afterward, they all said they felt relaxed and happy.

The students said they would use these activities with their families and friends and use them when they are stressed.

## Mindfulness can help people heal

*(Continued from Page 1)*

don't want to feel our feelings. Mindfulness is making ourselves aware of how we feel.

### **Question: How is mindfulness used in school?**

Ms. Cheifetz: I use it all the time when students come to my room. I have a healing YouTube station on in my room. It is the sound of gentle rain. I have the light dimmed down. I have mindfulness techniques that I use with students. Community meetings are all mindfulness activities such as breathing deeply and listening to music.

### **Question: How can the practice of mindfulness benefit student behavior?**

Ms. Cheifetz: It centers you. It helps you process your emotions and helps you take a step back and feel what you're feeling. Different things work for different people. If we are able to practice mindfulness skills in a peaceful state, there's more likelihood of using them when you're a little flustered. Doing the breathing techniques (breathing in through your

nose) helps you practice and get better and then you'll be ready when you really need it.

### **Question: What are some ways to practice mindfulness at home?**

Ms. Cheifetz: Practice deep breathing activities, color, blow bubbles which helps with breathing. I find meditation incredibly difficult but I do it for short amounts of time. Ask yourself or your family members questions about what they're feeling.

### **Question: Is mindfulness an important skill for students to learn?**

Ms. Cheifetz: Absolutely, yes, it's very important. It's a skill. You practice it and it gets easier.

### *William Cramp Fit Flyer*

A publication of William Cramp Elementary School in School District of Philadelphia. Student staff members are fifth graders and include Lillie Boone, Peyton Crawford, Josuel Laboy-Ferrer, Marilyn Maysonet, Imani Reese, Aidah Sanders, Miguel Soto, Lelanni Torres-Hernandez, Amiyrah Velez, and Mackenzie Velez.

The *Fit Flyer's* faculty advisor is Mr. Fitzsimmons. Ms. Logan is the school principal.

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