

## BALANCING ACT

### Theme: Give It a Try

**Overview:** In this series of activities, students will explore the concept of balance. They will first try to balance groups of blocks using a scale and record their observations. Then they will create balance using their bodies.

### Vocabulary:

- Energy: What we need to move, work and play. Some activities require more energy than others.

### Activity 1: Don't Tip!

**Type of Activity:** Energy to Discover, Energy to Read

**Domain:** Cognitive, Language, Physical

### Students will:

- Weigh and balance various objects.
- Define balance in their own words.

### Materials:

- A balance scale or a homemade balance scale (Using a large plastic hanger, attach two plastic trays or sturdy plates to each side using string to create a balance).
- Several small objects that could be weighed (cotton balls, blocks, Legos, crayons, coins, bottles, bowls, feathers, etc.)

**Time Frame:** 20-30 minutes

### Directions:

1. Hold up two of the objects you have brought in and invite students to pass them around. Ask them to predict which one is heavier and which one is lighter. You may need to remind students what these words mean. Ask student volunteers to share reasons for their predictions.
2. Once each student has had a chance to predict, put the items on the balance scale to learn the correct answer. You may need to introduce what the scale is and what it is used for. Ask students to describe what they observe. They may notice that one side went down further than the other. What do they think this means? Which object do they think is heavier? How can the scale help them? Ask them to describe what they see using the words "heavier" or "lighter." Ex: The block is heavier than the crayon." "The feather is lighter than the bottle."

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3. Repeat this exercise using two more objects.
4. Then, invite students to pass around two of the exact same objects. Ex: Two crayons, two feathers, or two blocks. Ask them to predict which would be heavier and which would be lighter. Again, ask for reasons for their predictions.
5. Weigh two identical objects and ask students to describe what they see. They may notice that the scale is even. Ask students what they think it means when the two sides of the scale are even. Explain that when two objects weigh the same, the two sides of the scale are even. This shows balance. Show students how you can add something to one side and then the scale is not in balance again. That's because one side is heavier.
6. Invite students to experiment with different objects on the scale to try to show balance. For example, would a cotton ball be balanced with a feather? Would a block be balanced with a Lego? Note: If more than one scale is available, invite students to experiment in small groups.
7. When each student has had a chance to experiment, ask each student to share one thing that they learned about weight or balance. Write their names and answer on the flip chart paper and hang it in the room.
8. **Optional enrichment:** The concept of balance can also be introduced with the read-aloud story, "Balancing Act" by Ellen Stoll Walsh. If this book is part of your classroom library or available in the public library, you may want to read it to students during this activity.

## **Activity 2: Balancing Animals**

**Type of Activity:** Energy to Move, Energy to Perform

**Domain:** Physical

**Students will:**

- Explore movement and practice balance.

**Materials:**

- Beanbags (optional)

**Time Frame:** 20-30 minutes

**Directions:**

1. Tell students that they are going to learn how balancing their bodies can be similar to balancing objects on a scale.
2. Invite all students to stand up and give themselves plenty of room. You may want to ask them to make sure they are not touching anyone when they have their arms outstretched.
3. Ask students if they know what animal stands on one foot. Explain that a flamingo, a big bird, stands this way. Today they are going to act like flamingos! [Note: You may want to

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show your students a picture of a flamingo if you don't think they'll recognize the name.]

4. Ask students to lift one leg up behind them by having their heels touch the back of their thighs. After all students have tried lifting one leg, show students how to balance themselves by holding their arms straight out to their sides. Ask: *Is it easier or harder to stay balanced by using your arms?*
5. Then, ask students to lift one leg up by bending one knee in the air in front of them. Again, give students time to experiment with having their arms help them stay balanced.
6. Once students have had time to practice, tell them you are going to play the flamingo game. When you say the words, "go flamingo," they must lift one leg in the air until you say "stop flamingo." At first, try this for just one second. Slowly increase time to see if students can lift their leg in the air for five seconds.
7. Then, ask students if they know what animal crawls in water with its claws and eight legs. Explain that a crab walks this way! [Note: You may want to show your students a picture of a crab if you don't think they'll recognize the name.] Demonstrate for students how to get into a crab-walking position by sitting upright on their hands and knees while both are bent. Ask them to sit this way for a few seconds. Then, challenge them to balance their crab-selves by lifting one arm into the air. Give students time to practice.
8. Then, ask them to balance their crab by lifting one leg into the air. Give students time to practice this.
9. Finally, ask students to walk a few feet like a crab without falling down!  
**Optional enrichment:** You can make this more challenging for students by increasing the distance, asking them to crab-walk backwards or with a beanbag on their stomachs.

## Activity 3: Beanbag Balance

**Type of Activity:** Energy to Move, Energy to Perform

**Domain:** Physical

**Students will:**

- Use motor skills to try to balance their bodies using several movements.

**Materials**

- Beanbags
- Masking Tape
- Small colored squares

**Time Frame:** 20-30 minutes

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## Directions:

1. Stand in front of students and place a beanbag on top of your head.
2. Ask students to predict what will happen if you tilt your head or body too much to one side. Once all students have made predictions, tilt your body and see what happens. Then, place the beanbag back on your head and ask what they think will happen if you keep your body straight and even instead of tilting. Show students how the beanbag stays on your head. Explain that you are balancing the beanbag on your head.
3. Give each student an opportunity to balance the beanbag, at first standing still and then walking around. Ask: Do you think it is hard or easy to balance the beanbag on your head. If you feel it falling to one side, how can you try to balance it? Remind students that they used their arms in the last activity to help them balance. Explain that if the beanbag is going too much to one side, you can try to balance it by moving your head or body part to the other side. You may need to demonstrate this. Challenge students to walk in a variety of ways – fast, slow, backwards – while keeping the beanbag balanced on their heads.
4. Lay a piece of masking tape in a straight line on the floor. Ask students if they have ever seen the high wire act in a circus or on television. Invite volunteers to describe the act. Ask students to pretend that this line is like a high wire that they must safely walk across without stepping off. In order to walk across the line, they must balance their bodies. If they step off of the line, they are out.
5. Give each student a chance to walk across the high wire (tape line) without stepping off. You can modify this activity for younger students by placing two lines of masking tape about a foot apart from each other and asking them to walk between the two lines of tape. Ask: Was it hard or easy for you to stay on the line? What did you do to try to stay balanced?
6. Once each student has had a turn, explain that they are going to try to walk on the high wire with the beanbag on their heads! They must try to stay on the high wire and keep the beanbag balanced! You may need to demonstrate.

**Optional enrichment:** You can make this harder by making a curvy path with the masking tape, placing a bottle halfway the line down that students must bend and touch without letting the beanbag fall off their heads, or asking students to walk slower or faster.

## Modifications:

### Pump It Up for Older Students

- You can explain to older children that there are many different types of balance. One type of balance relates to what we eat and how we move. When we eat, we get energy. When we move, we use energy.

### Cool It Down for Younger Students

- Younger students may only be able to do the first set of movements within each activity.

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## NAEYC Standards Alignment

- **2.A.10** The curriculum guides teachers to incorporate content, concepts, and activities that foster social, emotional, physical, language, and cognitive development and integrate key areas of content including literacy, mathematics, science, technology, creative expression and the arts, health and safety, and social studies.
- **2.K.01** Children are provided varied opportunities and materials that encourage good health practices such as serving and feeding themselves, rest, good nutrition, exercise, hand washing, and tooth brushing.
- **2.C.04** Children have varied opportunities and are provided equipment to engage in large motor experiences that stimulate a variety of skills; enhance sensory-motor integration; develop controlled movement; enable children with varying abilities to have large-motor experiences similar to those of their peers; range from familiar to new and challenging; help them learn physical games with rules and structure.
- **2.F.04** Children are provided varied opportunities and materials that encourage them to integrate mathematical terms into everyday conversation.
- **2.G.06** Children are provided varied opportunities and materials that encourage them to think, question, and reason about observed and inferred phenomena.

## Be Smart from the Start at Home!

Preschool-aged children are not expected to understand calories or how their bodies use energy, but they can begin to learn foundational information to help them make healthy decisions around diet and exercise. The Smart from the Start lessons are a set of flexible activities designed to introduce and reinforce these concepts, and we encourage you to integrate the rest of the activities in Me and My Choices and Give it a Try! into your existing curriculum. Throughout these activities, children will learn about energy they need to work and play; to make healthy choices about what they eat and drink from a variety of food groups; and how to move throughout the day with fun activities that help keep their hearts strong and healthy.

As your students progress to elementary school, the Healthy Decisions, Healthy Habits Together Counts™ curriculum can help them focus on more rigorous concepts related to self-esteem, decision-making, healthy nutrition and regular physical activity.

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## Energy at Home

This week, your child practiced balance skills using objects *and* their own bodies! Balance is an important foundation skill for all movement activities including throwing, catching, kicking, and running. You can help your children practice balance by asking them to stand on one leg, asking them to lift an arm or leg in the crab position, or by walking with a soft, light object placed on their heads.

You can even have a balance contest in your family by seeing who can walk the furthest on a line of masking tape without falling off or who can walk the furthest with a soft, light object placed on their heads!