

## **Buddhist Education Services for Schools Inc. (BESS)**

**Promoting universal values for living together in peace and  
harmony for the happiness, health, and prosperity of all**

**JUNE 2023**



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### **BESS Newsletter June 2023**

Time for more news from BESS, and we are brimming with developments on several fronts. But first things first – a warm welcome to our new members, those who have shown an interest in our work and would like to follow us and our work in the schools with the children.

This year, the Lesson Development Team are excited to have introduced the first of our four-year cycle of lessons. However, integrating it into the schools has certainly been a challenge. All schools organise religious instruction (RI) differently, depending on the size of the school and the number of classes in each year group.

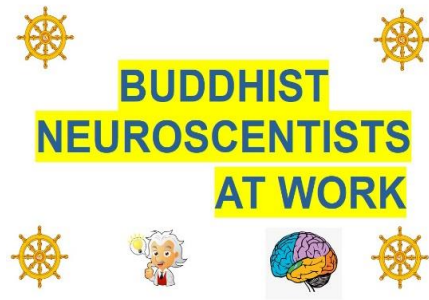
Some schools start RI in term two whilst some have RI for eight weeks instead of ten, all of which leads to everyone being at a different point in the lesson schedule. However, we have returned to Ironside State School this year, and this school has become the exemplar for the first cycle.

Other schools are following a different program which will possibly become cycle two. This presents a steep learning curve for us all and we are taking small steps, learning experientially what works and what doesn't.

This year, we have also taken a bold approach to showing the children what happens in their brain when they meditate -- more details of this follow later. Suffice to say that this has been a huge success with the students learning what their hippocampus and other parts of the brain are responsible for. In fact, the students have turned out to be enthusiastic learners and this has bolstered their interest in meditation this year.

There will be regular newsletters throughout 2023 and we invite everyone to contribute ideas and small articles of interest that could be included.

With metta,  
Venerable Tseten.


  
**BUDDHIST**
  
**NEUROSCIENTISTS**
  
**AT WORK**

**LESSON DEVELOPMENT**

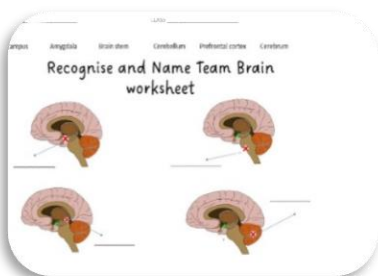
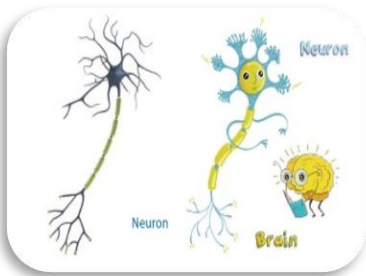
This term, we introduced a new suite of lessons to the students focusing on brain function and the parts of the brain responsible for consciousness and action. Our budding neuroscientists have impressed us greatly by their uptake of these concepts, and to our joy, are greatly enjoying these lessons.



These lessons continue our theme this year – SUPER. The students have looked at mindfulness, kindness and generosity as superpowers. They are now learning how their mindful brain reinforces their understanding of

meditation and the superpower it offers them. We identified parts of the brain and their functions, and explained how meditators are able to directly affect them with their practice and make them work far better. With this knowledge, the children see how they really can -- with lots of practice -- be better learners, make wiser decisions, and improve their mindfulness overall.

The lesson starts with a brief look at neurons and the network they form. Messages received from eyes, ears, nose, and taste, are relayed to all parts of the brain, as well as passing internal details, The amygdala also perceives danger and passes these signals to the prefrontal cortex which then advises flight, freeze or fight modes. The students therefore understand that the amygdala isn't always right, and they should allow their prefrontal cortex to assess the situation before acting on impulse! Their meditation practice teaches them to take a breath before acting or speaking, and we used the famous story of the snake or rope in the corner to illustrate this.



This worksheet tested their knowledge and understanding. We were impressed that most of the years 3-6 completed it. Can you?

**Author: Venerable Tseten. June 2023.**

## SCHOOL EVENTS

### Bathing the Baby Buddha

Each year, the children look forward to this event and it is a highlight in their lesson schedule. The teachers put a lot of effort into preparing gifts that go into their 'party bags' – laminated gold-sprayed bodhi leaves, bookmarks, fruits as food offerings. This year, the residents at Ven Tseten's retirement village helped pack 90 bags for West End State School and Mayfield. "We took only 30 minutes and everyone being able to help," Ven Tseten said.



Packing the party bags prior to the Bathing Buddha ceremony

Each year, we work to a theme with the students -- this year's was "Aspirations". Following a lesson on the importance of aspirations, the students were encouraged to write them onto the bodhi leaves and hung as offerings on the "bodhi tree". We were impressed and moved by some of what the children came up with, e.g. "I am going to be kind to my sister for a week", or "I will not use plastic". These reflect a high level of awareness in today's young children.

Jeff Brunne said his Year 3 students at West End State School who were doing it for the first time, were fascinated by the ceremony. "One child wanted to know if the Buddha only bathed once a year", he said. The children say the words of the metta mantra as they bathe the Baby Buddha, and they then gather to chant the mantra led by Ven Tseten.

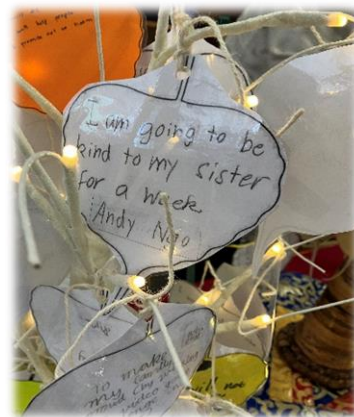
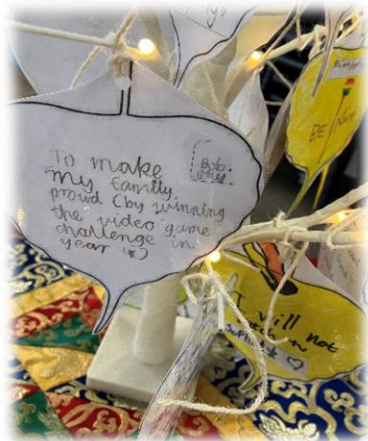


This year, the words

**"May I help them all be well, happy and safe."**  
reflect the theme of making an aspiration to help them.

Pauline Whiteman heard all the children enthusiastically chanting the metta mantra at Indooroopilly School. All the bodhi leaves with the aspirations will be kept by the children in their journals.

In the spirit of the festival, every year, BESS offers a book to the participating school for their library to celebrate this important festival. This year the book was called *Taste Your Words* by Bonnie Clark and illustrated by Todd Bright. The story teaches children about the power of words and the importance of kindness, and clearly illustrates why we should think before we speak.



## MOVIE NIGHT FUNDRAISER



BESS's movie night – *Lunana: Yak in the Classroom* – was a resounding success! The Oscar-nominated movie is the story of an aspiring young Bhutanese teacher who must serve out the final year of his contract in a remote community of nomadic yak herders high up in the mountains. It struck the right note with both our teachers and friends. They found the story both inspirational and instructive on so many levels.

In the movie, one of the villagers brings a yak into the classroom so that the new teacher would understand the importance of the animals to the community. Veneration of the teacher or guru is an important aspect of Buddhism and indeed, all Eastern cultures. In a powerful scene in the movie, one of the students in Lunana says he wants to be a teacher when he grows up because he wants to “touch the future”. That indeed is the *raison d'être* of BESS teachers who are all volunteers.

A total of 61 people attended. “This event was very important in raising awareness of BESS and what we do,” Venerable said. “We signed on new members that night who want to support our work.”

“We are certainly gratified by the support. We will investigate how to organise a regular fundraising event around a “Buddhist Film Festival”, instead of making it a BESS event.”

The film night was held at New Farm Cinema and ticketing was handled by Humanitix, a non-profit organisation whose profits support disadvantaged children with their health and education.



Venerable acknowledged the hard work of the organising committee for the successful event, in particular BESS supporters Norm Crisp, for organising the venue and ticketing, Karyn Smith for the artwork and setting up the poster, Treasurer Cheryl Grampe and Secretary Maria Thornton. Everyone else pitched in and the teamwork was very much evident on the night.

All in all, it was a very successful event, much enjoyed by everyone.

On that note, we would like to thank everyone for taking the time to read this newsletter, and BESS hopes that you have found it informative and interesting. You have received it as a supporter or member of BESS, and please share it with anyone who you may think is interested in our work.

We apologise if you have received it by mistake, and if you no longer wish to receive it, please let us know at [bess.info.qld@gmail.com](mailto:bess.info.qld@gmail.com).

With metta  
Tracey Chin  
*Editor*