

ATTENTIVENESS

Australian Supplement to the Character First Education Curriculum

I Will:

- Look at people when they speak to me
- Ask questions when I don't understand
- Sit or stand up straight
- Not draw attention to myself
- Keep eyes, ears, hands, feet and mouth from distractions



Definition

Showing the worth of a person by giving my full concentration to his or her work.

Illustration

It is very rare to see the ears of an Eastern Grey Kangaroo “flat” against its head. Dingos, or wild dogs, prey easily upon a kangaroo that fails to demonstrate attentiveness. Similar to the kangaroo’s ear, our own human ear is nothing short of phenomenal. The nine major parts are “illustrated” as children play the roles of the outer ear, ear canal, eardrum, hammer, anvil, stirrup, cochlea, auditory nerve and brain. Each part is an indispensable piece of the whole and illustrates a unique dimension of attentiveness.

One of Australia’s early and most famous explorers, Matthew Flinders’ attentiveness to the land lay proved invaluable. In fact, while in a French prison after accused of being a British spy, Matthew was able to sketch out maps from his own memory of the places he’d explored. Read the history story to find out how Matthew’s attentiveness and quick-thinking saved him and his crew from a fierce storm.

Attentiveness in Nature

The Eastern Grey Kangaroo

Early one morning, just as the sun was beginning to rise over the hills, a mother kangaroo with her little joey in her pouch hopped into a clearing. The kangaroo nibbled on a few blades of sweet, juicy clover, which were wet with the morning dew, while the little joey stretched out to grab a mouthful of grass. As the mother kangaroo grazed, its long ears swivelled like radar antennae, and its head bobbed up every few minutes to check for danger. Its nose twitched as it sniffed the breeze and, although everything seemed peaceful, the kangaroo remained alert and didn't venture too far from the safety of the trees.

Suddenly, the sound of a twig breaking caught the attention of the mother kangaroo. Instantly she raised her head, ears rotating in unison, her eyes following. As she sniffed the air, her ears stretched forward, listening intently for any further sound. Then, without hesitation, the mother kangaroo and her joey bounded off into the bush, her strong back legs pounding the ground, and her big, thick tail bounced gracefully behind. Fleeting, she looked behind, just in time to see the bushy tail of a dingo disappear into the tall grass. The dingo had been waiting for a chance to spring on the kangaroo, but the attentive ears of the mother kangaroo had

alerted her to the danger long before the dingo could attack.

The eastern grey kangaroo is known for its excellent hearing, and its ability to "tune in" to a particular sound. For her, attentiveness is a matter of life or death. Attentiveness is extremely important for you and me, too. We have to be attentive to those around us in order to learn. Let me show you how a kangaroo's ear works so that you can be as attentive as a kangaroo! Let's make an ear out of people to demonstrate how everything works!

The Outer Ear

First of all, a kangaroo's outer ear collects sounds. It's shaped like a "V" in order to capture and concentrate sound waves. By swivelling its ears back and forth and around in a circle like a radar antennae, a kangaroo can focus its attention in any direction, even right behind itself.

Hold your arms out straight above you like a "V." Can you imagine having an ear that big? That's about as big as a kangaroo's ear in comparison with the rest of its body. Swivel your arms back and forth and around to get a feel for how a kangaroo's ear works. While a kangaroo's ears work independently, our own ears



remain fixed on the side of our heads. We have to move our whole head to turn our ears in a different direction. That's why it's so important to *look at someone* when he or she speaks to you. To be attentive, our eyes and ears work together.

The Ear Canal

Once the ear collects sound, it guards that sound from distractions. A kangaroo's ear narrows at its base to a small passage, less than two centimetres in diameter, called the *ear canal*. This narrowing concentrates the sound and guides it toward the ear drum. Our ears also narrow to a small canal about the size of the little finger.

Let's attach an ear canal to the outer ear we made with outstretched arms. When we listen, we must *guard ourselves from distractions* so we don't lose what our ears hear.

The Eardrum

A thin flap of skin blocks the end of the ear canal. The skin is drawn so tightly that it acts like a drum. When sound hits the "drum," it vibrates. This changes mechanical sound energy, carried

by the air, into mechanical vibrations within the ear.

Let's add the eardrum to the ear by holding a shirt or jacket at the end of the ear canal. As sound enters the ear and travels down the ear canal toward the centre of the head, it hits the eardrum and makes it shake. When we listen, unless what we hear "SHAKES US UP," it won't have much effect on us.

The Inner Ear – Hammer/Anvil/Stirrup

Three tiny bones lie behind the eardrum, which filter and amplify the vibrations of the eardrum. These bones refine what we hear by removing extraneous noises, high and low pitches, and sound which might otherwise harm the ear. In the human ear they resemble a *hammer*, an *anvil*, and a *stirrup*.

Let's add them to the ear. One person will be the hammer. A second person will be the anvil and a third will kneel and lock fingers together to form a stirrup. When the eardrum (jacket) vibrates, the hammer pounds on the anvil. When the anvil gets hit by the hammer, its foot jerks in the stirrup and the stirrup begins to shake. When we listen, we must clarify what we hear by *asking questions* to make sure we understand.

The Cochlea

Attached to the stirrup is a coiled structure filled with water called the *cochlea*. When the stirrup shakes the cochlea, the water inside transfers the vibrations to

tiny hairs which line its inside surface. As the hairs move, they stimulate nerve cells at the base of each hair. These nerve cells in turn convert vibrations into electrical pulses.

Let's add a cochlea to the stirrup. One person can hold a glass of water. A second person, perhaps a young lady with a long braid or ponytail, can dip her hair into the glass of water to represent the hairs in the cochlea.

The outer ear collects the sound, while the ear canal protects and directs it. The eardrum converts the sound. The hammer, anvil and stirrup filter and amplify the vibrations. The cochlea transforms the vibrations into electrical impulses. When we listen we also transform words into *thoughts and ideas* so we understand what others say.

Auditory Nerve

Special fibres form the auditory nerve, which connects the cochlea to the brain. It transfers the electrical impulses generated in the cochlea to the cerebral cortex, so the brain can interpret what we hear.

Let's add an auditory nerve to connect the brain to the ear. A rope will do. When we listen, we must connect one idea to another to understand how it all fits together.

The Brain

The brain serves as a "command centre" to process information, make decisions and send orders to the members of the body.

Let's add the brain to the ear. A person "plugs" the rope from the cochlea into his or her head and shouts orders to the rest of the members. Our brains have to make many decisions, too. We have to be attentive in order to make good and wise decisions.

Now suppose we put this "ear" to work. The sound of the twig went "snap!" The sounds went in through the outer ear as it pointed in the right direction. The ear canal protected the sound so it wouldn't get distracted. When the vibration hit the eardrum, the tight flap of skin vibrated. The sound was sorted out as the hammer hit the anvil, and the anvil shook the stirrup, and the stirrup caused the water in the cochlea to ripple. Hairs in the cochlea picked up the ripples and converted them to electrical impulses, which travelled along the auditory nerve to the brain. The brain interpreted the sound (DANGER) and emitted the command to HOP!

Let's try it and when the brain yells "Hop!" everyone run back to your seats. Ready? Here it comes.

SNAP!....."RUN!"

*Adapted from the Character First!
Education, Series 1, Attentiveness
Nature Story*

Attentiveness in Australian History

The Deadly Storm

The ever-darkening sky worried twenty-one year old Matthew Flinders, as he sat at the oar of the little 2.7 metre row boat *Tom Thumb II*. The sea was surging, a storm was imminent! "We're in for one beauty of a squall," Matthew thought, as he straightened his shoulders and stroked firmly through the churning ocean water.

Did you spot the "I will"? Matthew didn't slouch in the seat of his boat; he sat up straight and started rowing.

His explorer/sailor companion George Bass was also rowing with all his might. The trio – Matthew, George and junior seaman William Martin – had been exploring the coastline south of Botany Bay and were journeying hard to return to base camp.

"We're four leagues from home!" George shouted, his words

A replica of the *Tom Thumb*



abrupt and quick as he pulled the oars in opposition to the rough sea.

"William, pull on that oar!" Matthew cried, just as the sky momentarily ignited with the startling glare of lightning.

"We need shelter, Captain!" William replied, as thunder boomed across the sky. "This storm could overturn our boat any minute!"

Matthew's eyes frantically swept the coastline. The fading light made it hard to define the rocks and inlets. Surely there had to be protected cove somewhere!

Suddenly, a wall of cold seawater broke over the side of the boat, soaking the three sailors. The *Tom Thumb* lurched and bounced violently. Matthew coughed and spluttered as he struggled to keep control of the craft. William and George shook their dripping hair away from their face.

"What are we going to do, Captain?" George almost toppled to his knees as the boat shuddered in the wake of a wave. "Can't we outride the storm?"

Did you catch the "I will"? George Bass asked questions when he didn't understand.

Matthew shook his head. "We can't stay here any longer, or we'll be drowned! You take the



sail, I'll take the oars!" Now fully aware of his position, his freezing fingers groped for the wet oar. "There's a sharp south gale!" he exclaimed. "William, grab that sail rope!"

The junior did as he was told as another fork of lightning flashed overhead. The sailors let the boat turn into the blustery wind. Matthew's oars beat at the churning water. The entire ocean resisted the small boat as it tossed the *Tom Thumb*, as though it were a cork bobbing along. Shivers went up and down his spine as the black dimness of the cliffs made the situation more uncertain. His knuckles clenched white, as he battled against the waves. He heard George shouting to William to bail out the water.

Matthew shut his ears and eyes to the commotion. Being an experienced sailor, he knew that one moment's inattention could result in an overturned boat and a drowned crew.

Did you spot the “I will”?
Matthew kept himself free from
the distraction of the storm.



“Matthew!” George cried out
urgently. Something was wrong,
and Matthew looked intently at
his friend.

Did you spot the “I will”?
Matthew looked at George when
he spoke to him.

Do you have a handkerchief?”
George said. He bent over
William’s leg and Matthew
noticed that a trickle of blood
was clouding the water in the
bottom of the boat. He pulled
out his damp handkerchief and
handed it to the surgeon, turning
his eyes back to his work.

An hour passed, but the storm
refused to abate. Rather, death
seemed to loom constantly in the
minds of the exhausted men. His
fatigued muscles ached from
gripping the oar. Matthew’s eyes
stung from the salty water, but
he refused to wipe away the

irritation, for he had to
concentrate on steering the boat.

Then George shouted excitedly.
“Breakers! No shadows ahead!”
Matthew turned his head and
faintly saw large waves. Yes,
there was no sign of cliff
shadows. His hopes lifted – if
only if it were a cove!

“Quick, let’s go!” George
shouted, as, instinctively, they
rowed towards the surf. Even as
the waves surged, a helpful wind
blew their way. George tore
down the sail and grasped an
oar. The two men steered hard in
the direction of the breakers.

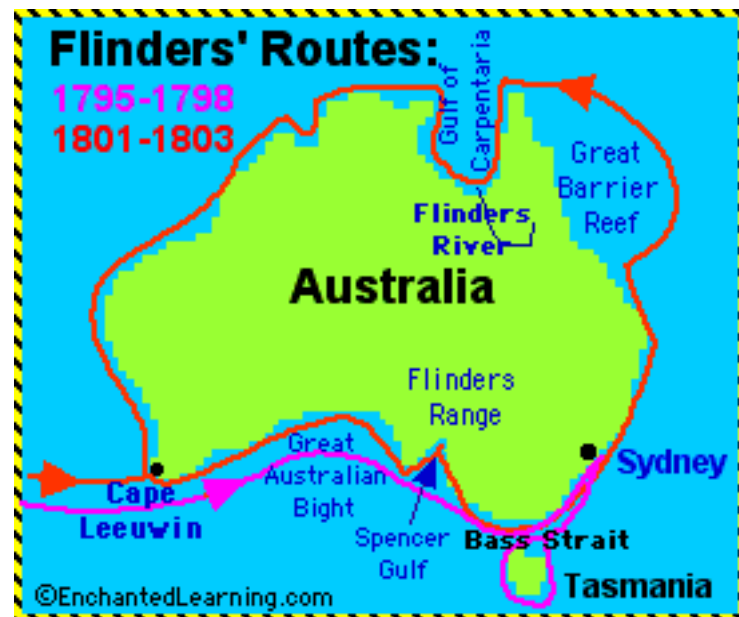
The sea eased
around them and
the boat’s
lurching slowed
as they neared
the point. There
was something
flat, glistening
white. What was
it? Cautiously,
they approached
the mysterious
whiteness.
Matthew kept his
eyes glued to the
front and,
gratefully, he realised they were
approaching a well-sheltered
beach.

He felt the urge to yell and shout
with relief, but he kept himself in
check, knowing that such a
display would disturb the others
from the labour at hand and
might even upturn the vessel.
Calmly, he set his oars to the
shore.

Did you spot the “I will”?
Matthew didn’t draw attention
to himself.

William joyfully bailed the
remaining water, while George
surfing the boat right up onto the
beach. Matthew put down his
oar and the three men slumped
to the sand, exhausted, but
thankful to be alive. He named
the beach ‘Providential Cove’,
expressing his relief at the
miracle of secluded relief during
such a fierce storm.

Attentiveness had saved them
and, later, Flinders wrote, “One
moment’s inattention could have



sent us to the bottom.”

Later in his life, Matthew Flinders
went on to determine Tasmania
as an island and he
circumnavigated and charted the
coastline of Australia, becoming a
great explorer.

*Story researched and written by Eunice
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Project Ideas

Language

Study a tray of objects for 1 minute, then cover all the objects on the tray.

Study a picture for a minute, then answer questions when the picture is taken away.

Have someone leave the room, change something and come back in.

Science and Technology

Study marsupials and how they care for their young.

Study kangaroo's, their life cycle, habitat, diet, etc.

Society and Environment

Do some mapping, being attentive to coordinates. Find your home street in a local street directory.

Study cartography and recognise the importance of attention to detail for those who make maps.

Study the life of Matthew Flinders – do a timeline of his life.



Health

Study the ear, how it works, and importance of cleanliness, and diseases of the ear.

Talk about posture, sitting up straight, standing straight, to enhance attentiveness.

The Arts

Clap or tap a rhythm for children to repeat.

Have children do a pattern for others to follow – e.g. pat your head, shoulders, clap twice, click.

Sketch a picture of a kangaroo.

Do some Aboriginal art of a kangaroo.



Matthew Flinders

The Attentive Explorer

- What were the names of the Matthew Flinders' two companions?

- What was the name of the boat they sailed in?

- What else did Matthew Flinders do as an explorer?

- How did Matthew Flinders demonstrate Attentiveness? List two things:

1. _____

2. _____

- How can you show Attentiveness...

Today? _____

This week? _____



ATTENTIVENESS

Showing the worth of a person by giving my full concentration to his or her work.

