Tai Chi and Qigong (a basic explanation)

**Q - What is Tai Chi?**

**A -** Tai Chi is a 2,000-year-old Chinese Martial Art that is practiced for health, and at the highest levels, self-defense. Benefits that a student can expect to gain from studying Tai Chi are improved balance, strength, confidence, increased energy, stamina, vitality, concentration and the development of advanced coping skills for reducing stress. Tai Chi form movements are performed in a slow, rhythmic, circular manner that helps to develop focus and concentration. The most advanced Tai Chi students can move into studying martial applications. However, this takes an average of 5 years of twice-a-week classes, and 45 minutes a day of practice. Most Tai Chi students prefer to use Tai Chi as an exclusive health modality.

**Q - What is Qigong?**

**A -** Qigong, is a powerful system for improving health. From China, it is the art and science of using breathing techniques, gentle movement, and meditation to cleanse, strengthen and stimulate acupuncture and acupressure (trigger points) and circulate the life energy (qi).

**Q - How do I say it?**

**A -** *Qi* (pronounced “Chee”)  *Gong* (pronounced “Gung”, as in lung)

**Q - What are the benefits of doing Qigong:**

**A -** Qigong practice leads to better health and vitality and a tranquil state of mind. There are dozens of different Qigong systems. These exercises can be used to treat very specific medical challenges as well as improve general health, energy, flexibility, stress reduction and relaxation.

**The ATCQA:** While there are many sources of information about Tai Chi, among the most legitimate is the American Tai Chi and Qigong Association(ATCQA). Formerly the American Tai Chi Association (ATCA), it is a national non-profit organization. Its ultimate goal is “To promote Tai Chi and Qigong (Chi Kung) - in any style, lineage, or application - in the United States for American people’s health, fitness and wellness.” For more information, visit [http://www.americantaichi.org/](http://www.americantaichi.org/)
Basic Purposes of Regulating the Breath

Our breathing serves a multitude of purposes, but on a basic level it enables us to carry out the following tasks (among others):

- Bring oxygen into the body
- Expel carbon dioxide from the body which would otherwise be harmful
- Helps us regulate our emotions to a certain extent
- Increases our acquired Qi intake
- Regulates the internal pressure of the torso

Introducing Tai Chi to your students

Kids will not only grow to like Tai Chi, but it's also something that can help bring balance to their very busy lives, both in and out of the classroom.

I like to keep the following principles in mind when introducing Tai Chi to new students:

1. *Keep it simple.* Giving very few movements in order that they can create a connection is important. Begin with just preparation and commencement, repeatedly. Fifteen classes later, you may incorporate the “Wave Hands Like Clouds” movement (refer to the last page of this handout).

2. *Keep it fun.* When I teach kids drills, a tea cup drill for example, I will use popcorn inside little plastic cups. Whatever they can keep in the cup they get to eat. Bribery goes a long way! 😊

3. *Bring in a little philosophy.* Particularly with kids, I like to use the concept of Yin and Yang to have them understand duality, as it is connected to this important Taoist concept (culturally speaking, of course). I will start with semantic themes, like the four seasons. I have them write the seasons around the outside of the Yin Yang symbol (which they like to draw), beforehand.

Later, I will circle back with the same concept while we are completing a drill, such as the “Wave Hands Like Clouds” exercise. I will ask them to figure out which is the Yang leg and which is the Yin one, for example.

Glenn Rodriguez is a full-time Spanish teacher at the New Canaan Country School in New Canaan, CT. He is certified by the ATCQA (American Tai Chi Qigong Association), and began using Tai Chi in the academic environment when teaching in the NYC Public School System in 1995. He currently runs classes for students and faculty at the New Canaan Country School, and is the former assistant Tai Chi instructor of the Ross School, East Hampton, NY.
What is Yin and Yang?

In Chinese philosophy, yin yang describes how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary, interconnected, and interdependent in the natural world, and how they may give rise to each other as they interrelate to one another. ([Wikipedia](https://www.wikipedia.org))

This video explains the concept of Yin and Yang:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ezmR9Attpyc

Connection to the World Language Classroom

**Yin Yang Activity.** This is an exercise which uses the concept of Yin and Yang in order to help solidify the understanding of opposites within the same semantic theme.

**Instructions:** Draw each of the four seasons in the spaces around the Yin Yang symbol below.

![Yin Yang Symbol](image)

After introducing vocabulary, use may use this as a follow-up. With younger students, you can begin by simply writing opposites (positions 2 and 4 on the above image). Older students may be successful at labelling within the correct subcategory (all four spaces). There are other themes which would fit well into this exercise. Here are two more:

*Weather (Hot, Cold, Warm, Cool)       *Frequency (Always, Never, Sometimes, Rarely)
**Tai Chi with a breathing pattern (Moving Meditation)**

1 - **Preparation:**
   1. Starting position. Feet, a fist’s width apart.
   2. Soft turn to the right and step out to the left with left foot. Whole foot on ground with no weight (empty foot).
   3. Turn back to the front and balance yourself equally on both feet (50/50).

2 - **Commencement:**
   1. From the end of the Preparation, raise your hands up from the ground to heart height as if pulling up on springs connected to the floor. Your hands should be taut but not tense.
   2. Lower your hands to the end of the Preparation position. Your fingers should be extended to the ground. Fingers are always slightly open.

3 - **Wave Hands like Clouds - Right, Left and Right:**
   1. From the end of the Commencement, raise your hands to heart height.
   2. Turn right from your center and shift right while keeping hips to front and form a ball on your right side. Right hand on top, Left hand below. Hands are APPX chin and belly button height. Shoulders are down and relaxed.
   3. Turn to the left from your center, keep hips to front and form a ball on your left side. Left hand on top, Right hand below.
   4. Repeat back to right side with Right hand finishing on top.
   5. **NOTE:** the ball is rotating all through the shift. Top hand down & away tracing front of ball and bottom hand in and up, tracing ball up with back of hand.

4 - **Conclusion**
   1. From the end of Wave Hands Right, turn your upper body to the front, keeping your weight on RIGHT, bring your LEFT foot next to your Right and bring your hands back to the starting position. The goal is to do this at the pace of YOUR breath.

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INHALE | EXHALE

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INHALE | EXHALE

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INHALE | EXHALE

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INHALE | EXHALE