Teaching With & Without Props

I love teaching with props. I think they’re an important and integral way for people to experience the freedom of poses in an accessible way.

But sometimes they’re not available, or sometimes only a couple are available, so here are some thoughts on teaching a safe and accessible class regardless of the props you have in the room on any given day.

Here’s a list of possible props that might be available (of course, some locations may have more or less, but we’ll consider this the list for ease of communication): wall, chair, block, strap, blanket, bolster, sandbag. Following is a list of uses – for Curvy classes because, of course, the use of props is not limited to what is written here. These are just some of my go-to ways to use these props, but I like to stay creative and use them any way I can!

- **Wall**
  - Sometimes a wall is all you need. If this is the only prop available, you can use it for Wall Salutations (see the Curvy Yoga Certification videos for an example), support for balancing poses, different ways to teach Warrior 1, Warrior 2, Side Angle & Triangle (with back to wall and/or back foot to wall – see videos for an example), back support for seated poses, and so much more.
  - If I don’t have a wall available, I am careful with things like balancing poses. I make sure all my students will be able to try them in an accessible way without wall support if I’m going to include them.

- **Chair**
  - It is nice to have at least a couple chairs available in case anyone comes to class who really needs to use it.
  - If you have enough chairs for everyone, I like to incorporate them into class from time-to-time. I find that this is a nice way to give people another experience of the pose. It’s also a nice way to teach people to use the chairs.
  - If you don’t have any chairs available and someone comes to class who needs one, you can adapt your sequence to make it as accessible as possible. If they are able to stand, working with front-facing (Warrior 1, Tree, etc.) and side-facing (Warrior 2, Triangle, Side Angle) poses is probably the best option. If you have a wall to work with, all the better. It will really depend on the student, though, and what issue is causing them to need a chair. For example, if someone can only do Uttanasana to a chair and you don’t have one available,
you could have everyone work with Uttanasana with their butt to the wall. Alternately, you could play with half-dog at the wall to find that spinal extension.

- Remember that you don't have to have a “yoga chair” to make things work. So long as the chair is stable (i.e. it doesn’t have wheels), you can use just about anything.

**Block**

- I like starting everyone with at least one block under the hands in Uttanasana (preferably one under each hand if you have enough). I start everyone at the highest height of the block, and then I offer them tips on how to know if they might like/be able to dial down to the medium or low height.

- A block under the sacrum for Bridge is one of my favorite inversions for Curvy students. I also like having two blocks under there so that people have a wider base of support; it feels more stable and gives them the ability to rock the knees a bit side-to-side without feeling like they're going to fall off.

- If you don’t have bolsters, blocks can provide a lovely, restorative forward bend at the end of class: just have students bring their foreheads to 2-3 (depending on what they need) stacked up blocks. It's Jenga for yoga students!

**Strap**

- Go-go-Gadget arm! Straps work beautifully to extend the arms in Supta Padangusthasana and Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana.

- Shoulder-openers: straps can work some magic for the shoulders in Gomukasana. I also like to play with them in Urdhva Hastasana: make a loop with the strap that is shoulder-width. You want to be able to press the arms out into the sides of the strap and not have it move. From there, come into Urdhva Hastasana – first without the strap – and instruct students to feel the shoulders – where they feel tight, free, etc. From there, lower the arms and add the strap around the forearms. Take the arms up again and notice the difference when the arms aren’t allowed to “cheat.” Use these two (with strap and without strap) as a barometer to check back in with the shoulders throughout class, noticing what’s opening as time passes.

- Preventing boob-smush suffocation: You can learn more about this in the doc entitled “Tips for Seated, Prone & Supine Poses.” You can also check it out in action in the certification video for Bridge. Suffice it to say it works well for other inversions, too.
• **Blankets**
  - These props can be a curvy student’s best friend. Here are (just a) few of the ways you might use them:
    - Under the butt to lift the hips in seated poses
    - Under the knees if you do any poses on the knees
    - Under the knees in Savasana if you don’t have a bolster
    - If it’s rolled up like a burrito: under the feet for a standing calf-stretch or under the shoulders for a supine heart opener
  - If you don’t have blankets, experiment with having students roll up part of their mat to get some extra support: under the knees in Savasana, under the butt for seated poses, etc. Also, if your yoga room has some extra mats, you can give these to students to use (especially for the rolled up blanket poses)

• **Bolsters**
  - Bolsters are this gal’s best friend – at least for my personal practice. I rarely have them available when I teach, but whether in class or with private students, I love them for restoratives.
  - They’re also great for an accessible quad stretch; check out this pic for what I mean: [http://instagram.com/p/I2gAmqyq9c/](http://instagram.com/p/I2gAmqyq9c/). In this position, the foot on the ground can step in to get more of a stretch (as needed). In addition, play with engaging the glute (or lifting the hip) of that same leg to find more/different stretch. Finally, the leg that’s up with the strap can stay like that, the knee can bend in to the chest or the leg can open out to the side. Play with different options and see what you want to teach.