

Arts Assessment For Learning



THEATRE - 6th Grade

IMPROV EXERCISES

In general we refer to these exercises as games and the actors as players. This can help participants be more relaxed--anyone can play a game if they know the rules. Additionally framing things as game play moves the workshop process away from judgement (i.e that was good/that was bad) and towards engagement with the act of playing. Confidence, focus, collaboration, and innovative thinking can all occur in a state of play.

Point of Concentration (POC) = focal point ("the ball with which the game is played"); it provides concentration of attention that disciplines the work and allows the player to attach themselves to the moment and the action. When a player focuses their intellect on the POC, their intuitive/imaginative side naturally opens up. Points of concentration also allow the teacher/session leader points of observation to make sure that the players are engaging with the POC (rather than avoiding it).

WARM-UPS

Warm-ups get the body moving and the mind thinking quickly, collaboratively, and intuitively.

Physical Warm Up--walking around the space

Players move freely around the space following various movement directives.

Mirror

POC: Observe your partner and reflect what you see.

Partners choose an initiator and a reflector. The reflector follows the initiator's movements. Director/Coach calls out "switch initiators" periodically. The goal is for the partners to be working together with such concentration that an outside observer is unable to tell who is initiating and who is following.

More advanced players drop the initiator entirely and focus only on reflecting, this is called Follow the Follower.

Zip Zap Zop

Players throw the impulse of " Zip," " Zap," " Zop" around the circle. Players are eliminated if they fail to respond quickly, if they say the words in the wrong order, or if they are unclear about who they are sending the impulse to.

Donkey, Elephant, 1776

Same as Zip Zap Zop, with gestures added to up difficulty. Donkey is said while making donkey ears, elephant is said while making an elephant trunk, and 1776 is said while pretending to play the flute. Players are eliminated for all the same reasons as Zip, Zap, Zop and also for using the wrong word and gesture together. For example making donkey ears while saying elephant will get you eliminated.

Point and Nod

A collaborative circle game. Players trade spots in the circle, using only non verbal communication. Player one points at Player Two (meaning "may I have your spot?"), Player Two nods at Player One (meaning "yes you may have my spot") and then finds a new spot to go to by pointing at someone new, and so on. Players must all pay attention to how quickly they are moving, if a player moves too quickly and winds up at the new spot before the other person has found a place to go, the whole thing falls apart.

Bippity Bippity Bop

The group forms a circle and one person is "it" in the center. "It" can make somebody else "It" in several ways. If "It" comes up to a person and says , "bippity bippity bop" then the person who is not "It" must say , "Bop" before "It" says bop. (The person on the outside does not need to say the "bippity bippity..." part, just the "Bop".) If Bop is not said in time then the person on the outside is now "It" in the center. If "It" says,"Bop" only and nothing else then the other person needs to be absolutely quiet. If they speak at all then they become "It".

Text/Action Collage

This is an exercise to use when using a specific text (example: *Notes From A Midnight Driver*) as source material. Teacher/director pulls various bits of dialogue and action from the source material, prints them up and cuts them into slips of paper. Dialogue can be written in plain text and actions in italics (just as lines in a script are written in plain text and stage directions in italics). Players move freely around the space picking up the pieces of paper and doing/saying whatever is on them. Players may chose to explore the action or dialogue for an extended period of time or may do it once, drop it and move on to something new. This is a way to get the ideas in the text into the players bodies and imaginations. Once those ideas are percolating, they naturally influence the rest of the work in the session. (Note that when a large group is doing it, it will look and sound chaotic--that's ok it still gets the ideas moving)

GROUP SCENES

Larger group scenes are especially beneficial for introductory classes, because being part of larger group means no one has to feel "put on the spot". For the teacher/director group scenes will illuminate both the players who are more unsure (and may need time to gain confidence) and the bolder players (who may need to work on their listening skills).

Ad Game

Point of Concentration (POC): to teach the improv concept "Yes and," meaning improvisors listen to, use, and build on to each other's ideas.

Players imagine they are part of an advertising agency, and are coming up with an ad campaign for a new product. Players must begin every sentence with the words "Yes and..."

To begin play, send half of the class up on stage (or into the designated playing area) and solicit suggestions for the product from the audience half of the class. It's fun to first ask for a simple product and then ask for an unusual twist.

During play, players can be coached to first develop a slogan, then a jingle, and possibly a commercial concept. Side coaching should hold them accountable for saying "yes and" every single time they speak, and be sure that every player gets a chance to talk.

What Sport am I Watching (non-verbal)

POC: to show the audience what sport the group is watching.

A group of players agree on what sport they will watch (it must be a live event, not on TV), go on stage and show us the sport. Some players may try to mime (for example dribbling a basketball to indicate that they are watching basketball). This can either be discussed ahead of time (when you watch baseball, do you pretend to swing a bat when you are sitting in the ballpark?), or can be dealt with in the moment with side coaching: Show us don't tell us. If you see it, we will see it.

What am I Listening To (non-verbal)

POC: to show the audience what the group is listening to.

A group of players agrees on what they will listen to (it must be a live event like a concert, lecture, debate) go on stage and show us what they are hearing.

Side coaching: Really listen. Be specific. Do you like what you are hearing? Show us don't tell us.

What am I Eating (non-verbal)

POC: to show the audience what food the group is eating.

A group of players agrees on what they will eat, go on stage and show us what they are eating.

Side coaching: Show us the temperature, the texture, is it spicy, what kind of utensil do you use to eat it? Really taste it, if you taste it we'll see it.

Join In The Activity (non-verbal, the whole group can play)

POC: Showing the activity (activity is also sometimes referred to as the "what")

One person goes on stage and begins a simple activity like jumping rope. As soon as the other players know what the activity is they are to go on stage and do the same activity.

It is ok if some people get it "wrong". For example if the activity is mowing the lawn, but some of the players think they are pushing a baby carriage that is ok; it provides opportunities to discuss

how to clarify the specifics of the activity. It's also an opportunity to side coach players to commit to whatever they are doing.

Tug of War (non verbal)

POC: Making the rope real

Two teams engage in a tug of war game with an imaginary rope.

Side coaching: Make sure you are all holding the same rope. Use your muscles! Pull! Work together.

It's Heavier When It's Full (non-verbal)

POC: Showing that the weight of objects can change.

Players chose a simple object to fill with items and show, with their bodies, the difference between when the object is full versus when it is empty.

These games must be non-verbal so that players are engaging their bodies, senses, and imaginations to communicate. Beginning players will tend over rely on words and avoid using their bodies, which keeps them from actively engaging with the problem at hand. Also people tend to feel that talking is somehow less risky than communicating non-verbally. We want them to gain the confidence of knowing "Hey I can communicate this concept without words!"

Machine (aka Parts of a Whole)

One player goes on stage and starts a repetitive sound and movement. One by one players join in with their own sound and movement, so that the whole group is creating one giant living machine.

Start an Activity (verbal)

POC: Joining the activity

One player begins an activity. Once other players understand what the activity is they may enter the scene--they must know who they are and what their relationship to the first player is before they enter--and join in a related activity.

For example a player walks on stage puts a medical mask over her face and starts washing her hands. Another player walks in pushing a gurney and says "the patient is prepped doctor," other players then enter as other medical professionals all intent on the surgery in progress.

Dr. Know It All (variations: One Word Story and Conducted Story)

POC: Giving a coherent answer as a group.

Several players 4-8 go on stage and link arms. Director/teacher ask the audience if they have a question for Dr. Know It All. Players answer the question as Dr. Know It All, one word at a time.

2-4 PERSON SCENES

2-4 person scenes allow players to explore character, relationship, action and environment (who, what, where) in depth.

Group Involvement with an Object

POC: on showing the object

Player decide on an activity they can all do as a group. It must involve all players touching the same object. Like moving a broken down car, folding a blanket, moving a piano. Then show us the object by moving it as a group.

This can be done non-verbally or verbally.

Who, What & Where

POC: Can focus on showing the where, the what, or exploring the relationships.

Players chose who what and where and then do a scene. Or the audience can suggest the who/what/where. If working with a specific text, the text can suggest the who/what/where.

First Line, Last Line

Players go on stage improvise a scene knowing only the first and last line. The first and last line can be suggested by the audience or taken from the source material.

Give and Take Focus

POC: On giving and taking focus.

2 teams of 2 players each: Team A and Team B. Each team is to play concurrent scenes, giving focus to or taking focus from the other team. For beginning play the teacher/director can instruct when focus should shift: "Team A take focus. Team B take focus." More advanced players can work together to give and take focus at will. Discussion with the group can focus on what strategies are most effective for both giving and taking focus.

3 Through the Door

POC: Showing who. Having fun with playing a variety of characters. Yes and.

2 players. Person 1 is the Information Booth person, Person 2 will play 3 different characters in the course of the game.

Person 1 sits at the information booth (and has the answer to any question--no matter how bizarre--that Person 2 may ask). Person 2 walks through a revolving door entering as a specific character, looking for some kind of information. Once they have gotten the info they seek, Person 2 exits the scene and then re-enters, through the revolving door, as a new character. This is repeated, so that Person 2 has played 3 different characters by the end of the scene.

Freeze

POC: Yes and.

2 players begin a scene. At any point anyone else in the group can call out "Freeze" players on stage must freeze. The person who called freeze walks into the scene, tags one of the players out, takes over the body position of that player and initiates an entirely new scene. The new person entering the scene is always the initiator.

It should be noted that real props are not used in any of these games. Instead players use "space props" meaning they are imaginary/invisible. Players are expected to bring the props to life, by showing us with their bodies what it is they are holding/using.
