

CONFLICT/IMPROVISATION WORKSHOP

LAWRENCE ARTS CENTER

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PRIMARY GOAL:

To develop improvisation through conflict exercises,
learning basic dramatic form for improvised scenes.

OBJECTIVES:

To encourage all students to "work on their feet."
To encourage all students to become aware of the importance
of conflict to dialogue and dramatic action.
To encourage all students to become aware of linear
dramatic form -- story with beginning middle and end.
To develop a complete story into dramatic form including
scenes, characters, conflict and resolution.
To discuss and illustrate cross curricular uses of story
playing.

OUTCOME:

To provide students and teachers with a simple method to
include improvisation in the curriculum by creating
conflict scenes from daily life, literature, social
studies, math and science.

LESSON PLAN

1. Discussion of basics of drama.
2. Fundamental Exercises/Warm ups.
3. Add ons.
4. Please/no.
5. The it exercise.
6. "It" in a scene.
7. Repeat scenes several times, with evaluation.
END OF DAY ONE
8. More Fundamental Exercises/Warm ups.
9. Developing resolutions.
10. Small Group Scenes.
11. Develop scenes, share work.

1. BRIEF DISCUSSION OF BASICS:

DRAMA/CREATIVE DRAMA/IMPROVISATION GOALS & OBJECTIVES

PRIMARY GOAL OF CREATIVE DRAMA: To open up imaginative and creative avenues for thinking and planning for improvisation based productions. To enable visualization of simple ways to use transformational theatre to illustrate ideas and create innovative performances.

Basic Criteria for exposure to Creative Drama/Improvisation:

TOOLS USED:

Voice, Body, Imagination

SKILLS DEVELOPED:

Concentration, Observation,
Use of Senses and Sense Memory.

METHODS:

Pantomime, Improvisation.

BASICS OF IMPROVISATION:

Characters, Characterization, Characters in Conflict,
Dialogue, Beginning-Middle-End, Irony, Poetic Justice.

BASIC CREATIVE DRAMA EXERCISES

I. Voice

A. Who am I in the family?

Simply make up any sentence of dialogue that one family member might say to another, such as "Pass the potatoes, please," but have students say it as though they were Grandpa, Grandma, Baby Sister, Teenage Brother, etc. Point out the way students show character through voice, even using a simple sentence.

B. How do I feel?

Start with the example of saying you're sorry when you're really not, "I'm SOR--RY!" Then say it as though you are, then you're not. Pick another every day sentence and give it different meanings through expression. "I really love broccoli," first as though sincere, then sarcastic, then angry. "There goes my balloon!" as a victory, as a loss, as jealousy. Explore emotions through verbal work.

II. Body

A. How old am I?

Put a chair "on stage" in front of other students. Ask a student to come forward and show how old they are by how they "eat" a meal. (This exercise clearly involves pantomime as well.) Remind them that general age is enough, not to try for exactly 16 years, 5 months, 3 days, 8 hours, and 47 minutes.

B. How am I feeling?

Have students sit either in desks or on floor in a circle. Choose one student to leave the room and come back in clearly expressing how they feel non-verbally. Discuss body language, the way we stand when we feel different ways.

III. Imagination

A. Steal the Bacon/What Else can it be?

Actors form two facing lines and then number off, starting at opposite ends. An object (such as a set of keys) is set midway between them. When the leader calls out a number, both actors run to grab the object and turn to their team (those on the same line they came from) and use the object as though it were something else, i.e. a hairbrush or earrings. When the team guesses, they score a point. If the actor uses something that's been done before, no point is scored. If the actor gets there and can't think of anything else the object can be, the team loses a point.

B. What ya doin'?

Two actors (one from each team if you're playing teams) stand next to each other. Actor One pantomimes an activity such as "combing my hair." Actor Two says, "What ya doin'?" Actor One must name any common activity other than "Combing my hair." So Actor One might respond "Mowing the lawn" at which time Actor Two must immediately begin that activity. Actor One then asks Two, "What ya doin'" and while still mowing the lawn, Actor Two responds with another activity, like "Washing the Dishes" and so on. Thinking of one thing while doing another. Rubbing your tummy while patting your head.

IV. All three -- (Theatre Sports/characterization/conflict)

A. The Hot Seat

This is a simple relationship exercise. One actor sits in "the Hot Seat," (just a chair) and the other enters the scene. The standing actor sets up a relationship by what he says without actually naming the relationship. For example, the entering actor might say, "If you don't do your chores, you won't get your allowance" but cannot say, "Son, if you don't do your chores, you won't get your allowance." The seated actor gets a chance to respond; "But I already did my chores -- last week!" Then the audience names the relationship, the seated actor joins the audience and the standing actor takes "the Hot Seat." This is an easy exercise to take an entire group through and gives the leader some feel for the actors.

B. Unlikely Sports

Divide into groups of four (five will work as well). Each group is given five minutes to think of an "Unlikely Sport."

These competitive sports must be something that could never really be done competitively! Examples are: World Championship Shoe Tying Contest, World Championship Chicken Throwing Contest, World Championship Lawn Mowing, etc. The team divides into two sportscasters and two or three contestants. The sportscasters share directly with the audience what is going on while the contestants act it out. During the improv, both sportscasters and contestants should listen to each other to get cues as to what to do, such as, "Look how fast she ties that knot -- oh, no, she got her finger caught in it. There, she's free, but that will cost her five points."

V. Concentration & Observation

A. Three Changes

Have students choose partners. One will be the first "observer" and the other the first "changer." The observer will look carefully at the changer, then turn around. The changer will alter three small things about their appearance; such as untucking a shirt tail, untying a shoe, parting hair differently. The changer then taps the observer on the shoulder and observer attempts to guess the three things. When this is finished, they switch.

B. Tug of War

Very simple pantomime exercise. Again with partners. Each tries to pull other over imaginary line with pantomime rope. Remind students of the reality of push and pull -- keep tension on the rope. One wins the first time, the other the second. Then do a third contest without determining the winner in advance. As the class gets good at this, it can become a group pantomime.

VI. Pantomime & Improvisation

A. Frozen Pictures - move, freeze, interpret

Set up a stage area with some furniture, chairs, wastebaskets, podium, table, etc. Have 2-4 students move about, in, under around and through furniture, even moving it, etc. When leader calls out "Freeze," the students freeze where they are. The audience students are then asked to make up a story that describes Who, Where and What they are doing. (Example: they are aliens on the moon and Roger is taking off, Whitney is blasting a hole to make a mine and Emily is admiring the diamonds Whitney has just found -- or, they are a marching band, Roger is playing trombone, Whitney just fell on top of her bass drum and Emily is trying to help her up.) Be sure all stories tell who they are, where they are and what they are doing.

B. Planned activity - add on pictures/pantomime

After students have done frozen pictures, they will begin to get ideas for stories themselves. Have one student start a story on the "stage" acting out a situation, i.e. a waitress at a restaurant. As soon as other students can tell what is going on, they join in, i.e. as customer, cook, etc. Each student must bring an independent action into the scene -- can't have two waitresses, etc.

C. Planned activity - add ons with words/improvisation

This is the same activity as C. above, except that students are allowed to talk. This begins the exploration of full character improvisation. Scenes begin to take shape.

Improvising scenes and story playing are the next two steps in Creative Drama/Acting Training and are the principal material for this workshop. The above exercises may be done in less than five minutes each and will vary with each teacher. Some will be done the first day, the others the second.

VII. Conflict Exercises:

A. Please/no -- Pantomime.

Room is divided into two lines facing each other. Silently, the first line begs the second for some object or thing. The second line pantomimes "No!" This is done three times then sides switch please and no.

B. Please/no -- Verbal

The same exercise, but this time students can use only the word please or the word no. Three times each side again, encourage variety -- "think of other ways to say yes or no, etc."

C. The "it" exercise

Students choose a partner and sit facing the partner. One of them has an imaginary object, which we won't name, called "it." The other one wants "it." Student who is asking tries many different methods as possible, i.e. begging, bribing, offering to buy, blackmail, asking nicely -- the other one says no in as many ways as possible, i.e. "it's mine," "I had it first," etc. Then they switch.

D. The "it" personified.

Students begin to role play. One becomes, for example, a parent and the other a teenager who wants to use the car -- "it" becomes the car keys. The role playing seeks to be realistic, but without resolution. Many situations are used, including:

1. Teacher/student -- student wants grade changed
2. Policeman/driver -- driver doesn't want ticket
3. Brother/sister -- little sister wants to borrow money.

E. Have students think up their own.

F. Conflict Improvs -- building a world.

Have students break into groups and work on building a world, including important questions:

1. Who -- are the characters?
2. Where -- are the characters?
3. What -- are they doing (conflict.)

G. Resolution

Discuss ways to end conflicts, including:

1. Poetic justice -- do they get what they deserve?
2. Irony -- O.Henry -- twist of fate?
3. Logic -- does it end how we expect?

H. Social Issue improves are then done

1. History based
2. Literature based
3. Contemporary

SOME VERY USEFUL CREATIVE DRAMA & IMPROVISATION BOOKS:

Bailey, Sally D. WINGS TO FLY: BRINGING THEATER ARTS TO
CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS, Woodbine House, Rockville,
Maryland, 1993.

Woodbine House
5615 Fishers Lane
Rockville, Maryland 20852 (800) 843-7323

Belt, Lynda & Stockley, Rebecca. IMPROVISATION THROUGH THEATRE
SPORTS, Thespi Productions, Puyallup, Washington, 1990.

Thespi Production
2010 12th Avenue S.E.
Puyallup, Washington 98372

Dinges, Susan & Thomas, Sue. CURTAIN I: A GUIDE TO CREATIVE
DRAMA FOR CHILDREN 5 - 8 YEARS OLD. N.Y.: Trillium Press.
1986.

Dinges, Susan & Thomas, Sue. CURTAIN II: A GUIDE TO CREATIVE
DRAMA FOR CHILDREN 9 - 12 YEARS OLD. N.Y.: Trillium Press
1986.

Trillium Press
First Avenue
Unionville, New York 10988

Peterson, Jill K. 64 DRAMA GAMES FOR THE CLASSROOM
University of Portland, 1981.

T & J Peterson
P.O. Box 7081
Missoula, MT 59807

Spolin, Viola, IMPROVISATION FOR THE THEATRE: A HANDBOOK OF
TEACHING AND DIRECTING TECHNIQUES, Evanston: Northwestern
University Press, 1963.