

IMPROVISATIONS & THEATRE GAMES

1. MIRROR

Have the students pair up (any one without a partner gets to go with the instructor!). Decide which one will be the leader and which one will be the "reflection" first. The reflection must duplicate all actions by the leader. No speaking is allowed. The leader should not try to trick or confuse the reflection. At a particular time (after a couple minutes or so) the instructor will clap hands or otherwise signal that the partners should reverse roles.

2. FREEZE

Have two students begin an improvised scene of some kind of action that requires teamwork (washing a car, making cookies, etc). After a minute or so, or as soon as they've gotten "into" the routine, the instructor will clap hands or otherwise signal them to come to a complete freeze. Either choose someone or ask for a volunteer to take the place of one of the two actors. When in place, the new actor will begin a completely new and different action that evolves from the frozen pose. [For instance, waxing a car could evolve into petting a dog] This repeats until imaginations run dry.

3. HISTORY LESSON

This is a solo exercise. Beforehand, ask the students for objects found at a department store or supermarket as the instructor writes their answers down. Announce one of the objects and have an actor get up and tell the history of that object--how and when it was invented, by whom, how its use has evolved throughout history, etc. Truth is not important here (actually, it is not as much fun as fiction), the important thing is that whatever the actor comes up with be imaginative--but somewhat logical. If and when the actor starts to run out of gas, stop him/her and either have someone else take their place and continue from where they left off or have them begin with a new object.

4. POINT OF VIEW

This takes 3 or 4 students. Have one of them be an interviewer of some kind--possibly a policeman interrogating witnesses--and the others the interviewees. One at a time, have the interviewer ask each of the students questions about an event (either one from history or well known fiction, or make one up). Each student will listen to what the previous students report and when it is their turn to relate their side of the story, they should tell as different a version as possible. Have the class decide who is "telling the truth".

5. ELEVATOR (Story Improv)

This takes 3-5 students. The scene is an elevator in a 5 story school building. The last class has just ended and everyone is leaving for the day. The students in the elevator are from the same class--so they know each other. Give each student a definite personality type: typical jock, male chauvinist, rich snob, school bully, class brain, etc. Halfway down, the elevator breaks down. Their objective is to get to the bottom floor so they can go wherever they were heading after school.

6. **FAMILY REUNION** (Story Improv)
This takes 3-5 students. All the students are cousins attending a yearly family reunion being held at the home of one of the actors. They are from all over the country (possibly out of the country as well)-- a surfer from Florida, a valley girl from California, a farmer from Kansas, a girlfriend of a gang member in New York, Donald Trumps rich nephew, etc. Have them get reacquainted with each other--it's been a year since they've seen each other.
7. **PROMPTER**
Have two (or more) students onstage. They begin a scene. The host begins them with a word they must work into the improv. As soon as the word is worked in--that is the cue to the audience that they are to suggest a word or phrase. The actor will then incorporate the suggested word or phrase into the conversation just as if it was what they were going to say all along. The more outlandish, the better. The actor must justify the suggestion. Continue on as long as possible.
8. **BODY JUSTIFICATION**
Have a student go onstage. The audience places him/her in a specific bodily position (the more specific the better). The actor must justify it by continuing an improv from that position.
9. **ACTION JUSTIFICATION**
Similar to **BODY JUSTIFICATION** (#8, above) but here the audience gives the actor two unrelated actions and the actor must justify them going together.
10. **EMOTIONAL JUSTIFICATION**
Similar to **ACTION JUSTIFICATION** (#9, above) but here the audience gives the actor two unrelated emotions and the actor must justify them going together.
11. **WORD JUSTIFICATION**
Similar to **EMOTIONAL JUSTIFICATION** (#10, above) but here the audience gives the actor two unrelated words and the actor must improvise a short scene that incorporates the two words together. A variation is to have two actors on stage, assign each one of them a word, and also give them a setting for the improv.
12. **FILIBUSTERING**
A student receives a word (real or fabricated) from the audience. The actor must tell how the word originated, give a definition, and use it in a sentence.
13. **PRIMITIVE SOCIETY** (Story Improv)
Have a group (maximum of 6) fabricate a primitive society. The actors will become the religious leader, political leader, society leader, poor people, rich people, workers, beggars, etc. The ensuing scene will show the interaction between the members of the society.
14. **SOUP KITCHEN** (Story Improv)
Have a group (maximum of 6) make up a scene at a soup kitchen (may or may not be during the depression). Have a couple workers and a few customers. Why are they all there? What jobs did the customers hold before their bad times? What is the attitudes of the workers?

15. **TRAIN ROBBERY** (Story Improv)
Have a group (maximum of 6) re-create a train robbery. Have a couple of robbers, a conductor, and passengers. The scene can be funny or serious. Where is the train heading? What do the passengers do for a living? Why are the robbers holding up this particular train? Keep physical violence to a minimum.
16. **ARCHEOLOGICAL DIG** (Story Improv)
Have the group (maximum of 6) become members of an archeological dig somewhere. Actors become archaeologists, government officials, local inspectors, student helpers, news media, thieves, etc. What are they digging for? What do they find? How does the find effect those present?
17. **TALK SHOW**
Have one of the actors play a host of a talk/interview show. Have another actor (or actors) play a guest. The audience should give the host and guest specific personality types--and give the guests occupations, hobbies, raison d'etre, etc.
18. **WHAT'S NEXT?**
Have a small group story improv (2-4 actors) begin as usual, having the audience suggest the characters, setting, and conflict. At various times during the scene, have the host stop the scene and ask for suggestions from the audience for plot twists which the actors will take.
19. **FOREIGN FILM**
Have 2-4 actors do the acting and 2-4 other actors do the voices. The audience gives the actors a scene--the actors doing the acting will supply the actions and the others will provide the over-dubbed voices.
20. **A-B-C**
Given a situation, the two actors improvise the scene. Alternating with each actor, the first letter of the first word of the first sentence must begin with A, then B, then C, and so on through Z.
21. **ANYTHING BUT**
(group) Pass an ordinary object around the room. The actors must use the object as something other than what it really is (for ex: open a stapler up and use it as a telephone).
22. **WHO DID IT?**
(4 or more) A charade-type game, similar to the gossip telephone game. As in the board game CLUE, a murder has taken place and we must find out who did it, with what weapon, and where the murder occurred. Send all but one actor out of room and have the audience decide who did it, with what weapon, and where the murder occurred. The first actor will use charades and sound effects (no words) to communicate the murder's identity to the second actor. When the second actor thinks they know, s/he says "I think I know" (note that they never say who it is) and they go on to the weapon, then on to the place. Then the Third actor comes back in. The first actor sits down and the second actor does the charades for the third actor, and so on until all the actors have come back. The last actor then tells who did it, with what weapon, and where the murder occurred and the audience sees how far off they are.

23. CUSTOMER SERVICE

(5 actors) Having someone be the clerk, Manager, customer, security guard and another customer, have them improvise a situation where the customer is returning something (a CD player?) to the store of purchase. The customer's objective is to get a refund so s/he can go to another store and get it for a cheaper price. The clerk's objective is to NOT refund any money (negative cash flow!). The Manager's objective is to look out for the interests of the store (which may or may not be what's best for the customer). The security guard's objective is to do what he's told within the law, and the other customer just wants to make his purchase and get out of the store--but s/he has to wait in line.