**BARRY ORECK WORKSHOP**

**THEATER ACTIVITIES[[1]](#footnote--1)**

SLAP PASS

The participants stand in a circle. The person who starts makes eye contact with another person and claps his/her hands together, making a sound and directing the slap to another person on the circle by pointing. The receiving person then “passes” the slap on to another person on the circle.

SOUND BALL:

Again, the participants make a circle. The person who starts makes eye contact with another person and throws an imaginary ball to someone else on the circle, making a distinct sound as he/she throws it. The person receiving the ball catches it while making the same sound with which the ball was thrown. The receiver can then change the shape and weight of the imaginary ball and throws the ball to another person on the circle, making a new sound.

GIFT GIVING:

This activity is done in pairs and reinforces the basic rules for creating successful improvisations (always say “yes,” and always make your partner look good). One partner mimes giving the other a gift (referred to as “making an offer,” because the giver is providing the partner with a suggestion for further ideas). The giver does not tell the receiver what the gift is, but allows the receiver to infer what the gift is from movement (is the gift heavy, or is it so small that it can fit in the giver's pocket?). The second partner takes the gift, using physical cues and verbal expression, to clarify what the gift is and says, “Thank you.”

CHARACTER WALK AROUND:

This group activity explores the effect of physical attributes on the portrayal of a character.

Participants walk around the room in random patterns. They develop instant characters by

changing things about the way they walk, and letting those changes affect everything else,

including voice, attitude, etc. Simply changing the part of the body that leads, the length of stride, or the width of stance, for example, completely alters the way a character is perceived. Is the character confident or shy, aggressive or timid? This exercise can move on to impersonating types of people in the participants' lives, such as siblings or teachers, or impersonating themselves in the presence of others (such as parents, younger family members, someone smarter, or someone who irritates them).

CHARACTER INTERVIEW:

This activity creates characters through improvisation. The actor starts by miming a physical activity, suggested by the audience, with a particular attitude (timidly cleaning out a closet, for example). The audience asks the actor questions about physical characteristics, personality traits,family members, lifestyle choices, possessions, vocation, or hobbies and interests. The character is created by the actor’s answers.

CHARACTER INTERVIEW VARIATION:

The actor is given some characteristics before starting, such as: they are a particular type of person in a period in history (a rich manufacturer in *1929),* or a character from a work of fiction (Sam from *My Brother Sam Is Dead).* More discoveries are made about the character through the interview process.

SHAPE/FACE/WALK/TALK:

In a circle, one person makes a suggestion of a character, an adjective, weather condition or any other suitable thing one could represent with the body. In order the leader asks everyone to take on the physical shape of the thing, then to add the facial expression, to walk (or move) as the thing and the finally to talk or make sounds as this thing. The group then quickly reassembles in the circle for the next suggestion.

CONDUCTED STORY:

Have four students stand in front of the class to be the storytellers. The instructor will be the conductor. The conductor will point at individual storytellers who will make up part of the story for as long as the conductor is pointing at them. As soon as the conductor stops pointing at them, they will stop talking and the next person pointed at will pick up the story exactly where the other person left off. [Variation for ESL students: Have students do conducted story in their first language, then have another student who speaks their first language and can translate into English tell the class what the story was about.]

CONDUCTED STORY VARIATION:

Whenever one of the story tellers messes up in the handing off of the story, they must leave, perhaps performing a “death” before going.

COUNT TO 20:

The goal in this game is to count to 20: one person says one, another says 2, a third says 3 -- all the way to twenty. But there is no assigned order. If two people say a number together, the game begins again at 1.

EXPERTS:

One partner interviews the other on a made-up topic. Everything the “Expert” says is true and fascinating. Every question the “Interviewer” asks is perceptive and deserves an answer. Of course, every answer is some form of “Yes, and .

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NFORMATION BOOTH:

Scenario of a character asking for information in a department store. The purpose is to help an actor develop an instant character. The actor is given a word or image upon which to instantly base whatever character comes to mind. They walk on as the character and ask for directions for whatever department they need. The information giver’s sole job is to help the other actor develop their character as fully as possible. (The information giver should resist making attempts at being entertaining.)

ONCE UPON A TIME STORY...:

A group story-telling exercise in which members of a class take turns starting each of the following sentences in order (the instructor may write the sentence beginnings on the board): (1) Once upon a time. **. .;** (2) Every day… (3) But one day. **. .;** (4) and Because of that. **. .;** (4b) Because of that. . **.;** (5) Until finally. **. .;** (6) Ever since that day.. .The process helps students work on story structure: platform, event, consequences, climax, conclusion or resolution.

POP QUIZ:

The instructor asks ridiculous question, any answer is correct. Ask questions that require different kinds of answers. “How many...” “Who can explain why...” “Who can demonstrate...”

YES GAME:

In the Yes! Game everyone plays at once. Somebody shouts out a suggestion, everybody shouts, “Yes!” and then everyone does it. So if someone cries, “Let’s all act like chickens!” the rest of the class shouts, “Yes!” and everyone acts like a chicken. (Point at the person who is going to make the next suggestion.)

“YES, AND .. .“ STORY:

In a circle, each person adds anything he or she wants to a story as long as they begin their contribution with, “yes, and **. .**and adding to the story or making suggestions as to what happens next. [Variation for ESL students: Have a bi-lingual student translate what the typist is saying into the language the ESL students understand.]

FOR FURTHER READING (comments by Laura Livingston, of Freestyle Repertory Theater):

IMPRO by Keith Johnstone, Theatre Arts Books, 1979 (an improv classic that is out of print, well worth a trip to the library.)

DON’T BE PREPARED: Theatresports for Teachers by Keith Johnstone, 1995 IMPROVISATION THROUGH THEATRESPORTS by Lynda Belt and Rebecca Stockley, Thespis Productions

TRUTH IN COMEDY by Charna Halpern, Del Close, Kim “Howard” Johnson, Meriwether Publishing, Ltd., 1994

THEATRE GAMES FOR THE CLASSROOM by Viola Spolin, Northwestern University Press

IMPROVISING REAL LIFE by Jo Sales, Kendall/Hunt Publications

**Some good tips from Laura Livingston:**

1. **You’re trying to draw your students out,** to **ask** them to do something daring. So if you say something chastising, that should be intentional and very necessary; if you’re going to say, “Sit down and be quiet!” it must be absolutely necessary to say it that way. It will be much more productive to say, “I need you to be quiet so that I can hear what this other student is saying. I’ll ask you in a minute what that was you were saying.”
2. **Model risk-taking with energy;** encourage the students to invest the same kind of energy.
3. **Allow students to lead you further.** For example, if a student is reluctant to take on a character, give them an easy choice. If this allows them to go further --push them further. If a student starts at the more advanced stage, try giving them a harder, more abstract challenge **--** a metaphor, for example. Not every child gets exactly the same stimulus. The instructors have to alter the stimulus to both (1) RESPECT where the child is and (2) challenge them to their best.
4. In some situations, a student looking directly at another could be seen as an act of aggression. In games that require eye contact, the instructors should clearly state, “In our rehearsal place, the rule is that you are not threatening someone by looking in their eyes, you’re following the rules of a game.”

1. Collected and blatantly stolen (with permission) from Laura Livingston, Freestyle Repertory Theatre [↑](#footnote-ref--1)