

Improv Exercises

The Stare Big circle. One person walks to center, suddenly stares at another and takes his place as the second actor enters and does the same. Nobody talks!

Sound Circle Seated in a circle. Announce our "location.".. Ex: maternity ward, the kitchen at Hardees, the school cafeteria, a zoo, a swamp late at night, inside somebody's head. All eyes closed. When teacher taps student on head, he or she begins making a sound that would be appropriate in that place.. Sounds build upon each other. Shout "Stop1" and begin another..

Terror Ninja Oh geesh...too hard to describe. I'll show you. The kids love it. It appeals to their violent nature.

3-Some One person steps to center and announces, "I'm a piece of cheese!" Immediately someone should step in and announce "I'm a ____" (something that would go with the cheese), then another person does the same. This third person then becomes the starting point for the next round.

I'm Falling Group meanders about the room... suddenly one person shouts, "I'm falling!" and they do a free-fall backwards. Others must catch him before he hits the ground. If it's a problem student, let him drop.

Groupings Simple beginning warm up. "Quick! Get in groups according to the month you were born!" (they do) Then.. Favorite sport, favorite ice cream, favorite pizza topping, etc.

Yes, Let's! First person jumps onto stage and says, "Hey! Let's paint the floor!" All respond, "Yes! Let's paint the floor!" and all begin miming the action of floor painting until someone shouts, "Hey! Let's brush each other's teeth!" etc.

Motion Start A classic... one person in center, close eyes. Point to a student in the circle and that student begins a motion which we all follow. Person in center opens eyes and must guess who's starting the action (as the "instigator" changes motions frequently).

Endowments Put a good actor in the center of the circle. Other actors walk in and begin talking to him, "endowing" him with a personality! "Grandma! I haven't seen you in years!"...improv continues until the next circle person walks in to change the endowment. "Here, Rover! Here boy!"

1,2,3 Look up! Simple, loud, and a great warmup. Make a circle. All stare at floor. "When I could three, look up right into the eyes of someone else. If that ONE person is looking directly back at you, both of you scream, shout, wet your pants and get out of the circle." Continue until only two are left.

Cow, Rabbit... Another one you've got to see to understand. One in center of circle. Points to another in circle and shouts the name of something.

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give you

People on each side of actor must help complete the picture. Ideas: cow, rabbit, jello, cowboy, Elvis, Elvis in a blender, 1776, tickle tree, etc.

Three noses Group mills about. You shout.. “Quick! Put three noses together!” Then “Four right feet!” “Six butts!” etc.

Michelangelo Your sculptor is Michelangelo. You whisper a scene into his ear and he takes his “clay” (other class members) and “sculpts” them into scenes that you whisper to him. “Washington crossing the Delaware,” “A shoe store,” “a football game,” etc.

Walk on, Sit, Walk Off ... a simple a direct exercise in emotion. Place chair at center. Whisper an emotion into the ear of an actor. He must (without talking) walk on, sit as long as likes, then walk off. The class then guesses the emotion he was portraying.

I Remember It Well Two old people ...a couple.. reminiscing about their “old days.” They describe their adventures. Every time one of them says, “Ah yes, I remember it well!” two other actors must act out that scene.

Cliché..Whisper a cliché to a group. They must silently act it out then the rest of the class attempts to guess the cliché. “It’s raining cats and dogs, “ “Don’t worry, be happy.” “Don’t cry over spilt milk.”

Vacation Slides One person is the narrator. He or she says, “Here are slides from our vacation to (get a place from the group). Here we are loading up the car. One, two, three, four, click! On “click” the group assumes a pose to show that scene. A great variation. YOU count “one, two, three, four, click,” then have the actors form a scene, THEN the narrator turns around and describes this “slide.”

Word Tennis ... cool warmup. Two teams, facing each other.. First person on each team goes head-t0-head with the first person on the other. Give them a category.. “Things that are blue!” and they must bat words back and forth in that category. If they stumble or hesitate or repeat, blow your whistle and that person goes to the back of his line. “Things you can’t stick in your nose, Things you can’t buy at WalMart, girls’ names, rock groups, NFL teams, etc.

Commercial Wars . One person from each team is given a product to sell.. actual and physical or imaginary.. They each have one minute to grab the attention away from the other contestant. Judged purely on attention grabbed.

Concentr-8 Single members from each team stand or sit facing their opponent. Neither can look away, neither can stop talking, neither can crack up. Give each a different topic to talk about.

Move me, Baby! . Two members needed from each team. One member of each team goes onstage and faces the other. Give them a situation to play. They may

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not move their own bodies. The only movement allowed is when another team member behind them moves one of the two actors. The actors should take their cues from those moving them.

Dating Game. Like the TV show. All four members of one team sit on stools or chairs. Give an imaginary persona to each of three contestants... Madonna, Eve, Brittany S, .. the fourth person does not know who they are. The fourth person asks questions of each to determine their identity. They may not ask pointed questions such as "Who are you?" Duh.

Work It In! Two members from one team come forward. Give them an improv situation and set them off. After they get going, throw in objects from the classroom one at a time. They must catch these and *smoothly* work them into the dialogue.

Party Quirks. Whole team at once. Put one person into his "living room," then (out of earshot of the host) give the other team members a quirk to display once they enter the party. They cannot name their quirk. Send them into the party one at a time. The host must guess each quirk. Sample quirks: a man with a duck on his back, a girl with snakes wrapped around her neck, a boy who cries every time someone asks him a question, a girl who laughs every time somebody says a verb.

Larry. . One is the interrogator and the other is a probably suspect to some crime.. like stealing basketball coaches panty hose. The third character is a Pooka, an invisible 8-foot tall being of enormous strength. Larry takes orders only from the interrogator.

Freeze Tag. The customary game. A direct challenge. One contestant from each team comes forward and begins to act out a prompt. At some point one of the other contestants shouts "Freeze!" The two actors freeze in position as one actor from each team enters to replace them. They tap them on their shoulders, assume the frozen position, then take off on an entirely different idea based on the frozen poses.

Hands Behind. Two actors act out a scene with their hands behind their backs. Two other actors stand behind them, sticking their arms through the arms of the foremost actors, thus becoming their hands.

Simul-Talk. All team members participate at once. Teams huddle very close together, head on with the other team. One member of the first team begins talking and all his teammates talk simultaneously with him. After a bit, he tags a single member of the other team and the second team does the same.. tagging back and forth.

Scene 3 Ways. Get a story line from the audience.. like “What’s the funniest thing that’s happened to you this week?” Then have one team act this out. (Keep it brief with a definite ending.) Then say, now play the same scene as a Soap Opera! (Play it three different ways.. Other ideas: a Western, a musical, a Situation Comedy, as the Tele-Tubbies, as Sesame Street or Mr. Rogers, as a Kung-Fu Movie, as a Bruce Willis action-adventure flick, as the Flintstones, as a game show, etc.)

Alpha-Bits. One team lines up and you give them a story to tell, one sentence at a time. Each new sentence must begin with the next letter of the alphabet. Ex: “A huge elephant showed up in my pajamas.” “But I didn’t ask him to stay.” “Cause he was big and hairy.” “Did you see him?”

3-Word Scene. Two actors from the same team improv a scene. Each line must contain three and only three words. Once a mistake is made, the MC goes “ERRRR!” or something clever and two from the other team jump out and try to keep it going.. back and forth.. etc. etc. .. ad infinitum.

Statue Statue! Entire team comes onstage. You give them a scene then five seconds to form a statue depicting this scene. EX: Washington Crossing the Delaware! One! Two! Three! Four! Freeze!” or “At the kitchen in McDonalds!” in “The school cafeteria!” Give each team about four of these.

The Brain. Three person. One sitting on floor facing the audience, one sitting on a chair behind him, and one standing behind the sitter.

Taxi! Taxi! Three people.. or two or four.. sit on a park bench. A final person enters and sits with them. This intruder has some small quirk or idiosyncrasy that is gradually and eventually “caught” by all the others. When all have contracted this affliction, the intruder yells Taxi! Taxi! and exits.. then another intruder enters and the game goes on. Same afflictions: an itch, a tendency to shout everything, a tendency to doze, unrealistic fear of everything, spazz-icity, etc.

Hitchhiker...four chairs set in “car” formation. Three family members taking a trip. Fourth participant stands up and thumbs a ride. They stop to pick him up and his small quirk slowly infects the rest of the car’s inhabitants. When someone offstage yells “Hitchhiker!” a family member is thrown out and former hitchhiker becomes a family member and the process is repeated.

BUS STOP...similar to *Taxi! Taxi!* or *Hitchhiker!* with participants waiting at bus stop and various characters coming up to wait on bus. In this version, someone shouts “Here Comes The Bus!” and leaves.

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Newscast. Entire team at once. Assign one person as the TV anchor. Another is the “reporter in the field,” one is the weather person and a fourth does the commercials. You act as director. As you point to each area of the stage, the anchor takes the action there. Give them situations. A storm front containing cats and dogs approaching from the Rockies, a sportscaster interviewing the captain the school’s new frog dissecting team, etc.

Hoe Down! This one’s tough and you need a piano. Kids love to try it, even if they aren’t great. (like the *Who’s Line* TV show). Give a basic type of music, have someone play, give the improvisers a subject. The contestants step forward one at a time and improvise a verse, then step back.

Only Questions. Two from one team. Give them a situation to improvise. They may only ask questions. If anyone “fouls,” you let forth with a vicious “ERRRR!”

Line Talk. All contestants from one team in a single line facing the audience. Give the first person a prompt. They repeat it and keep talking. When you shout “Switch!” that person goes to the end of the line and the next person takes over.

Sit Stand Lie. Three contestants. Give them a situation to improvise. At all times, one person must be lying on the ground, one sitting in a chair and one standing. Whenever one person changes positions, the old position must be filled by another. The trick is to make these changes logical and not haphazard.

Circle Tag: Play a scene in the center of a circle. Improvisors tag in, while maintaining the same initial characters and story throughout the scene.

INVENTION... A scene depicting how something was invented... The first Pepsi.. The Hula Hoop, the shoelace, the first underwear, the meatball, the pizza, the potato chip, the Kleenex.

INNER THOUGHTS... two characters doing a scene, two at side giving their real thoughts

ATTITUDE! ... get attitudes from audience..one is neutral

EMBARRASSED! Get an audience members most embarrassing experience.. play it twice..once like it happened then how you wished it would have happened.

BEYOND WORDS.. play a scene where the emotions are so profound, they can’t be expressed in words.

BLIND FREEZE... Same as freeze tag but team stands with backs to audience as two members face audience and act out scene given from audience. One member with back turned yells "Freeze!" then he and someone he tags enters the scene and tags off, resuming the same positions as those tagged. This sometimes actually works better than freeze tag.

SCORPION.. warm up exercise .. six in middle of circle..close eyes.. one is murderer.. kills by squeezing the arm of another.. when squeezed, the victim screams and joins outer circle.

CHANCE OF A LIFETIME... someone in audience tells about something they've always wanted to do.. they bring him/her onstage and act it out.

ANGELS AND DEVILS... two actors giving thoughts to person onstage (or two people.) One an angel, one a devil...like the old cartoon idea.

FLASH TAG... pair begins...MC says switch and another pair takes over..use the whole team.

HIDDEN WORD... three actors leave.. get environment from the audience..then three words that might be used in that environment... the actors come in and the audience responds wildly when they're getting close.

FOLEY ROOM.. one offstage making sound effects..or..two onstage with other team members in the Foley Room, making sound effects.

GIBBERISH COMEDIAN.. comedian and his audience..this one's great.

LAST LETTER.. each actor's first word must start with the last letter of the previous speech.

CHARACTER LINE... each has a given character..take turns telling a Fairy Tale

PHYSICAL CONTACT... actors can only speak when they have physical contact with someone else.

SLOW PUPPETS.. two actors moving in slo-mo.. They can only move when someone else taps a part of their body and that part must begin moving in slow motion.

SECRET WORD ... actors turn backs to audience, plug ears... get word for each from audience..write on paper and tape to actor's back.. other actors try to get them to say that word.

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REVERSE SEX.. boys play girls and girls play boys... give them a scene..kids love this one...something hormonal, I think.

The Speck.. (German version: "Das Spec"..) one actor holds a spec in his hand..offstage actor is spec's voice.

STUNT DOUBLE.. duet begins.. when a dangerous or distasteful act is called for, he yells "Stunt Double!".. then the double yells "First Team!" when finished.

TRUTH—LIE... three actors sent out, one shares a true event in her life.. they return and all tell the story as theirs with small variations. The audience can question them.

School Bus..tried and true..always a winner

What are you Doing?..... . Group activity. One person starts miming an activity. Another comes up and asks, "What are you doing?" The first lies and says something totally different...the second person must start doing that activity..a third comes up and asks the second, etc.

Goin' for a ride..Good for young elementary. Two participants are whispered something on which to be riding..the others try to guess. horse and buggy, rocket, bronc, roller coaster, hot air balloon, elevator, elephant, merry go round, dog sled, canoe, tobaggan, teacher's back, etc.

Mr. Mumble...Another good old warhorse. Two participants memorize this scene:

"Hello." "Hello." "Who are you?" "I'm Mr. Mumble!" "Huh?" "I'm Mr. Mumble!" "Oh!" Then they stand face to face and do the scene with lips covering teeth, trying to make the other person laugh.

Late For School...I like this one. Ideally, five kids are used. One plays the school principal, two play the kids who are late, two are the "mimers" in the background. The two tardy kids stand before the principal and the principal asks them why they're late for school. The mime duo stand behind the principal and through frantic gestures give the two late kids cues as to why they aren't on time.

Left-Handed Louie...a sort of extended form of Word Tennis. Line several kids up facing you and start naming categories ala Word Tennis. When a student comes up blank or otherwise makes a mistake, they put their left hand in the air. The second mistake causes their right hand to come up. Third time and they're out.

MAGIC WORD...Each actor is assigned a “magic word,” then given a setting in which to improvise a scene. Make sure that the words are the type that would naturally and frequently come up in such a setting. For example, if they’re in a restaurant, you might choose “Food” “table” “water” “order,” etc. If a character is onstage and his word is mentioned, he must find an excuse to quickly leave the stage. If he’s offstage when the word is mentioned he must find a reasonable reason to enter.

Murder Wink...A Warm-up. Stand in a circle...close all eyes. You tap someone and they become the “murderer.” Quietly, everyone searches the eyes of the other people in the circle. The murderer “kills” by quickly winking at someone. That someone screams, agonizes, and falls to the ground dead. The trick is for someone in the circle to catch this process going on. If they do, they make a guess as to whom the murderer might be. If they’re wrong, they’ve just killed themselves. The object...find the murderer before she wipes out the entire group. Encourage loud death.

Death By...a simple game for a group. They stand before you and you tell them they will have 30 seconds to die. Then you tell them how they will die...repeat this with several interesting types of death...Death by dryer lint, death by giggles, death by boredom, death by tight underwear, death by whipped cream, etc.