

# ILLINOIS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ASSOCIATION

A NOTE TO COACHES AND JUDGES REGARDING IMPROVISATION.....



## **A note regarding improvisation...**

Many of you have expressed how Improv is difficult to judge. At judges' meetings, it's not unusual to hear someone say, "I hope I don't have any Improv today." To that, we would answer with something that Improv coaches often tell their young actors: "Don't over-think it." The IESA added improvised duet acting many years ago and more recently added Team Improv among the contest offerings. Although the two events differ in specifics, the same Improv guidelines hold true for both events.

## **As a judge you are looking for two qualities: acting skill and creativity.**

Perhaps it would help you in coaching and judging to list some basic tenets that we teach our Improv actors:

- 1) Don't deny. Don't shut down your partner's ideas.
- 2) Don't ask too many open-ended questions in a row. For example one person asking, "Who are you;" and then for their next line, "What do you want?" puts the burden upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> actor and doesn't help him a bit.
- 3) You don't have to be funny to be funny. The best humor comes from reality when an audience can see themselves in the scene.
- 4) You can look good if you make your partner look good.
- 5) Play a story. The real magic of Improv comes when actors take a totally random suggestion and somehow "make it work."

Of course it's the rare Improv scene that can manage to work all of these traits into the production, but if you keep these things in mind while coaching and judging, you will have covered the basic tenets of Improv. Again, "Don't overthink it."

**A final note:** Since the event is improvised, the coach doesn't have the chance to approve what words come out of the contestants' mouths. Coaches should warn all Improv students about using inappropriate words and subject matter at contest. We urge the judges to use the tear-off section at the bottom of your rating sheet to indicate if the students may have stretched the bounds of good taste.