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Lesson Plans Sorted by Type

These lesson plans are divided into the following categories (Since many of these lessons do several things at once, they may appear in several lists.) See above for descriptions.

- **Narrative Pantomime Stories:** These are lessons that involve Narrative Pantomime--a technique in which the teacher or leader tells a story and each student, usually working independently, "acts out" the story.
- **Physical and Pantomime Activities:** These activities all teach physical control and pantomime communication.
- **Improvisation Activities:** Virtually all Creative Drama involves improvisation, but these plans focus in part on building improvisation skills.
- **Role Drama Activities:** These lessons use the technique known as Role Drama, in which students are in role and must make choices and relate to each other in role.
- **Writing Activities:** These lessons focus on the writing process.
- **Lesson Collections:** Though listed normally on other lists, these are actually collections of related lessons, rather than individual lessons.

Narrative Pantomime

A TREE GROWS
PAINTING THE BOX
PAINTING THE MUSIC
THANKSGIVING FEAST
NO, YOU CAN'T TAKE ME!
ST. GEORGE & THE DRAGON
SEASONS AND WEATHER
COMING TOGETHER
3 LESSONS ABOUT ENERGY
GUIDED IMAGERY
STORY STORY
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Physical & Pantomime

NURSERY RHYME CHARADES
HAND ANIMALS
PAINTING THE BOX
RHYME CHARADES
COMING TOGETHER
ST. GEORGE & THE DRAGON
B. FRANKLIN'S INVENTIONS
SCULPTURE GALLERY
MIRROR MIRROR
EMOTION WALK
THE JEFFREY GAME
MUSICAL FREEZE IMPROVS
SOCIAL ROLES
GIBBERISH SENTENCES
THE DISCOVERY OF FIRE
RITUALS
THREE WORDS
3 LESSONS ABOUT ENERGY
INSTANT JOURNEYS
IMPROVS AND WARMUPS
PAPER MASKS
STORY STORY
I AM WALKING
HANGMAN CHARADES
CONCEPT CHARADES

Improvisation

HAND ANIMALS
NO, YOU CAN'T TAKE ME!
RAINFOREST LESSONS
AROUND WORLD IN 30 MIN.
THE JEFFREY GAME
MIRROR MIRROR
MUSICAL FREEZE IMPROVS
OREGON TRAIL
PROPAGANDA
NEWS PLAYS
SOCIAL ROLES
GIBBERISH SENTENCES
THE DISCOVERY OF FIRE
RITUALS
THREE WORDS
INSTANT JOURNEYS
IMPROVS AND WARMUPS
EDWENA'S GAMES
PUPPETS IN CLASSROOM
PAPER MASKS
STORY STORY
I AM WALKING
JOB INTERVIEW
CIRCLE OF CHARACTERS
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Role Drama Activities
NO, YOU CAN'T TAKE ME!
THE LION KING'S COURT
RAINFOREST LESSONS
AROUND WORLD IN 30 MIN.
GIBBERISH SENTENCES
OREGON TRAIL
PROPAGANDA
NEWS PLAYS
JOB INTERVIEW
CIRCLE OF CHARACTERS
WHAT WOULD YOU DO?

Writing Activites
GROUP STORY
GROUP PLAYWRITING
GUIDED IMAGERY
FOURTH-GRADE PLAY
MAKE YOUR OWN GREEK PLAY
SLOW MOTION WALK

Lesson Collections
FROM PICTURE BOOKS
RAINFOREST LESSONS
MIRROR MIRROR
EDWENA'S GAMES
IMPROVS AND WARMUPS
PUPPETS IN CLASSROOM

Lesson Plans Sorted by Cross-Curricular Content

In addition to the Drama and Creativity skills taught in my lessons, most also teach concepts or skills from other disciplines--or general life skills. In fact, many of them have been specifically designed to support my students' curriculum in other areas. Below is a list of extra-dramatic skills and concepts, with those lessons that touch on them. (Sometimes you'll have to look at the "Variations" section at the end of a lesson to find the connection.)

Social Studies/History

General/Current Events
NEWS PLAYS

Cultural Development
COMING TOGETHER

World Cultures
AROUND WORLD IN 30 MIN.
SOCIAL ROLES
THE DISCOVERY OF FIRE
RITUALS
PUPPETS IN CLASSROOM
PAPER MASKS
MAKE YOUR OWN GREEK PLAY

Geography
AROUND WORLD IN 30 MIN.

Science

Zoology
LION KING'S COURT
HAND ANIMALS
RAINFOREST LESSONS

Oceanography
AROUND WORLD IN 30 MIN.
LION KING'S COURT

Horticulture/Botany
A TREE GROWS
RAINFOREST LESSONS

Meteorology
SEASONS AND WEATHER

Language Arts

General
NURSERY RHYME CHARADES
RHYME CHARADES

Writing
GROUP STORY
GROUP PLAYWRITING
FOURTH-GRADE PLAY
MAKE YOUR OWN GREEK PLAY
SLOW MOTION WALK

Friendship & Community

THE LION KING'S COURT
COMING TOGETHER
EMOTION WALK
INSTANT JOURNEYS
I AM WALKING

Immigrants NO, YOU CAN'T TAKE ME! GIBBERISH SENTENCES THANKSGIVING FEAST	**Physics** 3 LESSONS ABOUT ENERGY	**Visual Arts**
Oregon Trail NEWS PLAYS OREGON TRAIL PROPAGANDA FOURTH-GRADE PLAY	**Anatomy** NO, YOU CAN'T TAKE ME!	PUPPETS IN CLASSROOM PAPER MASKS
Inventors B. FRANKLIN'S INVENTIONS		

Narrative Pantomime

A Tree Grows

(Narrative Pantomime)

I use this lesson with my Kindergarten and Jr. Kindergarten classes, often as the first lesson in which we use our whole bodies to create drama. (I usually start out using hands and face alone.) It is a narrative pantomime--a story which is told by the leader and enacted by the students individually. I start with this activity partly because it allows a very full range of movement and physical sensation while keeping the students anchored to their respective spots on the floor--it takes us a while to build the kind of safe environment in which it is wise to have them moving all at once--and partly because the Jr. Kindergarten's thematic approach focuses on Apples in September, when I begin with new students. The main focus here is on creating real sensory experience from the imagination. My students really enjoy it, and it seems to connect for them on a very visceral level. Here it is:

The Story

- (Be sure to narrate this story slowly enough, and with appropriate pauses, so that the students are able to fully experience their own physical discoveries as they enact the story.)
- Everyone find your own personal space* on the floor and make yourself as small as possible.
- You are an apple seed, crammed tightly into your hard seed pod, and buried under the cold ground. It is winter, and you are barely awake. Above you, snow covers the ground. It is totally dark under the ground.
- Now it is spring. The earth around you is growing a little warmer, and you start to feel more awake. The snow above you melts and the water soaks into the earth around

you. It feels good. The earth feels warmer, and you seem to be able to pull energy out of the soil.

- It is time to come out of your seed pod. You feel strong and energetic. Using all your strength, you push up against your seed pod and break through, like a bird breaks out of the egg. You reach upwards into the warm earth with your tendrills. The earth around you is moist, and you soak in the life-giving moisture. You don't know why, but you know you want to push upwards.
- Finally, with one great push, you emerge from the soil and see, for the first time, the SUN!
- The sun's energy flows into you and you feel stronger and stronger. You stretch upwards and outwards until you are a healthy seedling. The gentle spring rains nourish and refresh you. Just take a moment to enjoy it.
- (Take a longer pause here.)
- Now let's move ahead a few years. You have grown into a strong young sapling--a tree about the size of a young person. You have beautiful green leaves that soak up the sun and make you strong. But you want to grow taller. You want to be a tree. So you summon all your energy and you push out and up. As the years go by you become a strong, handsome apple tree. You stand proud in the sun and enjoy your own strength and beauty.
- Now it is fall. You have grown succulent, nourishing apples all over your strong branches. The apples contain seeds which might someday become new apple trees. The apples are heavy. Your branches are strong, but there are so many apples. You feel weighed down. You feel as if your branches might break.
- Here come some children. You can't talk to them, but you know they are coming for the apples. They have bushel baskets. They are laughing and singing. The children pick your apples, and your branches feel light. You know they will take them away and eat them. You know they will throw away the seeds, and that some of those seeds might grow to be new apple trees.
- Almost all of your apples are gone. But you know you will grow more next year. You feel grateful to those children. You hope they will enjoy the apples.
- (Take a longer pause here.)
- Now it is winter. All of your leaves have fallen. But you know you will grow more next spring. Now it is time to rest. You rest.
- **The end.**

* Personal space is a concept all of our students learn in gym, so I use it. It just means find a space in which you can turn around with outstretched arms and not touch anyone.

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Discussion

After the story is done, I ask my students questions about the experience. I focus on "how did it feel" questions, and when, as invariably happens, the students have clear answers to these questions, I use this to demonstrate how powerful is the imagination. Below are some sample questions. (Note: In each case, the first question is the important one. I ask that question and get as many original responses as I can. Only if necessary do I then coach by asking the follow-up questions.)

- How did you feel when you first broke through the seed pod? Who felt a sense of accomplishment? Did anyone feel a little afraid?
- What was it like when you first saw the sun? How many were happy? How many were proud?
- How did it feel to become a big strong tree?
- How did you feel when the children picked your apples?
- Most of you felt a very strong emotion when you first saw the sun. How is that possible, since we were all right here in the classroom and the sun doesn't even shine in here?
- What part of your mind did you use to see the sun?
- Did you know your imagination was so powerful?

Painting the Box / Sharing the Boxes

Paint ng the Box

I use this exercise with my Kindergarten classes. It is a way to get them started thinking about using their imagination in a physical way, and about really *seeing* what they imagine in real space. It starts out as a simple narrative pantomime, so I've written that part out in the form of a story, just as I would say it in class.

I usually play music during this exercise. Debussy works well. Avoid lyrics, as they are too specific. You want music that can mean something different to each student.

Painting the Box

Everyone find your own personal space in the room. Be sure you have room to turn all the way around with arms outstretched and not touch anyone else. Once you have found your personal space, sit down comfortably.

Imagine you are inside a small box. The box is big enough for you to be comfortable, but not quite big enough to stand up in. In your hand is a paintbrush, and at your feet is a large can of paint.

Pick up the paint and feel how heavy it is. This is magic color-changing paint. Each time you dip your brush in the paint, it comes out whatever color you want. The paint won't get on your clothes, and it dries instantly. Some paint, huh?

Paint the inside of your box with the magic paint. You may paint it any color or colors you want. Don't forget to paint the ceiling and the floor. Remember that since the paint dries instantly, you won't end up painting yourself into a corner. Be as creative as you want. It's your box.

When you're finished, put down the paint can, but keep the brush. You'll need it, because now there's another can of paint in your hand. This is magic door paint. If you paint a door on one wall of you box with the magic door paint, it will become a real door that opens. Don't forget to paint a doorknob!

Once you have painted on your door, use it to step outside your box. You may want to stretch a little--it was kind of cramped in there, wasn't it? Walk all around your box. The inside is very nice, but the outside needs something. Paint!

Reach inside and retrieve the can of color-changing paint. Use it to paint the outside of your box any way you like. Maybe you'll even paint a peaked roof or castle turrets onto your box. They all look wonderful. If you want windows or more doors you can use the door paint. It's your own little house, so make it the way you want it.

All these boxes look fantastic!

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Sharing the Boxes

After we've finished "painting our boxes," I have my students share their work with one another. I go around the room from student to student, asking each one to "show" us his box, and to describe it in detail. I coach the students to be as descriptive as possible, and especially to help us "see" the colors. As necessary, I coach the rest of the class to "see" each box, and compliment each creator on his work. Usually the descriptions become gradually more elaborate as the students try to "top" each other, but right from the start I get clear, specific descriptions, and the class is able to buy into the conceit and "see" their classmates' work. This is generally a very successful lesson, and one I've used for many years. I often follow it with "Painting the Music."

Painting the Music / Sharing the Paintings

Painting the Music

I use this activity with my Kindergarten classes, usually right after "Painting the Box." It differs from that activity mostly in that there is an outside "inspiration" guiding their painting, and in that they are more likely to "paint" images, whereas in "Painting the Box" they mostly paint decoration. "Painting the Music" can only work with music, whereas music is helpful but not necessary for "Painting the Box." Also, this is a somewhat less physical activity, which makes a change.

Choose a piece of music with a fair amount of emotional range. Debussy is maybe a little too static for this exercise--Prokoffiev works better, or Wagner, or Mozart in his less mannerly moods. Everyone responds to music differently, but the chances are if the music stirs a "story" in you, it will in your students as well.

Painting the Music

Everyone find a comfortable spot and sit. Imagine you have a big easel in front of you, with a new blank canvas on it. In your hand is a palette with every color of paint you can think of.

(Start the music.) Listen to the music. Listen especially to the feelings in the music. How does this music make you feel? What do you think it is about?

As you listen to the music, begin to paint what you hear. Some of you will paint pictures, but some of you will probably just paint colors and shapes. Whatever you hear is what you should paint. *Really listen!* Listen to the changes in the music. Listen for characters and listen for events. Whatever you hear, that's what you paint.

These paintings are really starting to look good.

(When the music comes to an end--or you make it come to one.) Let's all finish up our paintings now. They really look fantastic. Everyone take your painting over to a wall and hang it carefully. Then return to your seat.

(With Kindergarten and younger, I find that I can only play about five minutes of music before the paintings are done. Older or more deliberate children can take much longer. Use your best judgment.)

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Sharing the Paintings

As in "Painting the Box," I give each student a turn to go to the wall, show us where his painting is hung, and share it with the group. I coach the artists to be specific and descriptive, and I coach the "audience" to really "see."

When we're done I ask the students if they would like to leave their paintings to decorate my classroom. Some do, but those who don't may "take them down," and "take them with them."

In some ways this activity is simpler than "Painting the Box," but I usually do it second because I use it to segue into other activities that use music for story inspiration.

Discussion / Preparation / The Feast

Thanksgiving Day Feast

I invented this game on the spur of the moment last Thanksgiving when a scheduling change obliged me to teach a Kindergarten class for which I was not prepared. It combines thinking and learning about the way the Pilgrims might have lived with exploring the senses. Obviously it works best around Thanksgiving.

Discussion

When was the first Thanksgiving? Who celebrated it?

What sorts of things do you eat at Thanksgiving?

What sorts of things do you suppose the Pilgrims ate at their feast? (Corn, Venison, Fish, Bread, Turkey, Squash, etc.)

Where did they get it? Did they go to the store and buy a turkey? (No, they shot it.)

Did they go to the bakery and get some bread? (No, they baked it from flour they ground themselves.)

Did they get corn out of a can? (No, they grew it.)

Did they get fish from the freezer? (No, they caught them.)

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Preparation

In a few minutes we are going to pretend we're Pilgrims. We're going to make, and then eat, the first Thanksgiving Feast. But first, let's practice pretending in a new way. We're going to have to pretend to **feel** things, and even to **taste** things. That's not so easy.
Let's start with a lemon. Everyone pretend you have a lemon in your hand. Feel its shape. Feel its weight. Toss it up and down a few times. Take your finger and gently feel the bumpy surface. Feel the pointy end. Okay, here goes. Take a big bite. Wow! Look at how your classmates' faces are all squeezed up! You all really can taste that lemon!

How about ice cream? Let's take a bowl of your favorite flavor. Feel how cold the bowl feels in your hands. Take a spoon and take a big bite. Taste the sweetness. Feel it as it melts. Don't take too big a bite or you'll get a brain freeze! Don't you hate that?

Now let's try something hot--say, hot cocoa. Feel the heat of the mug as it warms your hands. Feel the steam in your face. Carefully take a small sip--be sure it's not too hot!

What about lifting something heavy? Let's pretend there's a suitcase here, and it is full of lead. See if you can lift it. Try hard! Wow, are you strong!

Okay, I think we're ready to start our game. Be sure to listen closely and do just what I say, so that we can all stay together and have a great feast.

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The Feast

This is just a simple narrative pantomime. I've written it out in the form of a monologue, but there is no reason to slavishly adhere to it. This is just an example of what I say when I teach this lesson. I've divided it into specific events, but you might choose other events, and use some, all, or none or these. I only have a few here because my lessons with the Kindergarten are only half an hour long. This is just an example of what you could do.

Spring Planting / Fall Hunt / Time to Eat

Spring Planting

Let's pretend it is springtime. We need to start now if we're going to have anything to eat in the fall!

Let's plant some corn. The Indians showed us how, remember? First we dig a lot of small holes. Hey! Be careful where you're throwing that dirt! Make sure the holes are nice and deep. Can you feel how firm the soil is?
Who's got the corn? Take your bag of dried corn kernels and drop a small handful into each hole. Be sure not to miss any! Feel what the corn kernels feel like in your hand. What does it feel like to put your hand in the bag and feel them all?

Oops! Now we need some fish! Fish? Of course. Let's pretend we have some right over here. We caught them yesterday. Pick one up. Feel how slippery and scaly it is. Bring a bunch of them over to the holes. Don't drop them! It's hard to carry a lot of slippery fish! We should have used a bucket. Dump them down by the holes.

Use your shovel to cut each one in half. Oooh, gross! Let's not touch them with our hands again!

Now drop half a fish in each hole. That will help to fertilize the corn. Wow, I'm glad that's over.

Now let's fill the holes in with dirt. Gently! Tap it down with your toe to make it firm.

We need some water. Let's pretend the well is over here. Get a bucket. Now we turn the crank and up comes the pail full of water. Pour it into your bucket. Wait until everyone has some! Now let's carry it back to the cornfield. Ugh! It's heavy! Can you feel how heavy it is?

Now let's carefully pour the water over the freshly planted corn. We'll have to tend our cornfield all summer.

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Fall Hunt

Of course, we'll have to plant some squash and pumpkins, and some wheat as well, but let's pretend we already did that. In fact, let's pretend it's fall already, and it's time to get ready for the feast.

Let's go hunting. We have some guns--muskets and blunderbusses--but let's take bows and arrows instead. We're hunting wild turkeys, and the Indians have shown us that their bows are more accurate than our noisy guns. Make sure to bring plenty of arrows!

We're walking into the woods now. Can you feel the underbrush as it touches your legs? Can you hear the sounds of the forest? Can you smell the rich, piney air?

Shhh! I think there's some turkeys up ahead! Get your bow ready! Feel the tension on the string. Set the arrow carefully. We have to be ready when they fly up into the air. Pull the string back. It's surprisingly hard to pull, isn't it?

There they go! Aim carefully and let the arrow go! Did you hear the sound it made as it left the bow?

You got one! Good shot! Let's go pick it up and carry it home.

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Time to Eat

Now let's pretend it's time to eat. We must have hunted other things too, like deer, and we must have caught some fish. We must have cooked all day. But I think it would be more fun to EAT!

Take your plate and fill it up with all the good stuff there is here. Then bring it with you to your seat. Would someone say grace? (If you teach in a school where grace is a bad idea, just skip it, but I defend it on the basis of historical accuracy.) Okay--let's eat!

Be sure you really taste your food! Some of the things the Pilgrims ate might be new to you. What are they like? Do you like them? Be sure and try lots of different things!

For a spur-of-the-moment invention, this activity worked great the first time, and I now use it every Thanksgiving.

Seasons and Weather

I use this lesson with my first-graders when they are studying Weather. It is a way to physicalize some of the ideas they are learning about. But it also makes a strong improvisation game for older students, so I use it-with, naturally, some changes in sophistication-with my adolescent acting students.

This lesson plan is written in the form of a narrative-a description of what happens in class when I teach the lesson.

First Step: Thinking about it.

I begin by asking the students to think about the four seasons.

What are some of the activities you do most in each season? (Going to school, playing football, raking leaves, etc. in the Fall; swimming, going to camp, watching television, etc., in Summer; playing Little League, planting a garden, etc., in Spring; shoveling, skiing, playing hockey, etc., in Winter.)

What kinds of weather do we tend to have in each season? (Sunshine, thunderstorms, heat in Summer, fog, hurricanes, cool in Fall, snow, sleet, icy winds in Winter, friendly rain, warm in Spring.)

Second Step: Acting it out.

Next I ask the students to imagine if is Fall (for instance). Think of an essentially Fall activity and begin to act it out. When I call out, "weather!" some kind of typical Fall weather will take place. Each student chooses for herself or himself which kind of weather it happens. When I call out, "weather!" everyone must react appropriately to whatever weather they are imagining.

We repeat this with each season. Sometimes I'll call out "weather!" several times for each season.

In my side-coaching I put a lot of stress on the senses. What does the weather sound like? Feel like? Does it have a smell? A taste? What do you see?

As a variation, particularly when I'm working with older students and my primary goal is improvisation training, rather than learning about the weather, I will call out a particular kind of weather, to which the students must instantly react. This ensures that the weather is unexpected, and the response to it unplanned.

Both my first graders and my Middle Schoolers enjoy this game immensely.

Story / Discussion

Coming Together

This exercise is about space and the visualization of three-dimensional space. It is also metaphorically about developing communities. I use this exercise with my third-grade classes, but I have used a similar story with much younger and somewhat older students as well. I use it as a jumping-off point for what is often a very inspiring conversation about community and connections between people.

This exercise is a Narrative Pantomime. Narrative Pantomime is a Creative Drama technique in which a teacher or leader narrates a story and the students improvisationally "act out" the story, each in their own space, the actions of the main character. In this exercise, the students eventually come together to improvise as teams and then as a whole class, but it begins with solo improvisation. What follows is the narration as I would read it during the lesson. Naturally the exact words are not important--it is the developing story that makes the lesson. Following the narration is a description of the kind of processing conversation I have with my students after the story is through.

Story

Everyone find your own personal space in the room. Be sure you have enough room around you to turn all the way around with your arms outstretched and not touch your neighbor.

We'll begin our story now. Everyone crouch down and make your self as small as you can in your space.

Imagine you are inside a hard, transparent, spherical shell. The shell is only just big enough for you to fit, so you can barely move.

The shell is hard, but you discover that by pushing against the wall of the shell you can make a "dent." You can push one small part of the wall out away from you, and when you let it go, it doesn't spring back. Keep making more "dents" until you have actually made the whole shell bigger.

Keep pushing the walls out around you, smoothing out the dents as you go so you keep your shell smooth and round. It is hard work pushing the walls out.

Keep enlarging your shell until it is just big enough to stand up in. Remember that your shell is a sphere--it is as wide as it is tall.

Have you ever seen a hamster in one of those clear plastic balls? It can roll the ball all around the room by "walking" inside it. You discover that you can do this in your own clear sphere. But remember how big your sphere is! You can't walk right up to a wall or other obstacle, because of the roundness of you sphere. Even more important--you can't possibly get near another person, because long before you can touch them, your invisible sphere will bump into his sphere. If you stretch out your arm, you should just be able to touch the place where your sphere touches another person's--that is all.

Explore the room inside your sphere, taking care to remember where and how big it is, and to visualize your sphere.

Now you see someone--one of your classmates--and roll your sphere towards theirs. (Each person must pick a partner and do this. If there is an odd number you the instructor can either make your own bubble to partner with one student or make one threesome.)

When your spheres touch, you notice that they join, leaving a tiny opening between them that you can just get your hands through. Reach through and shake the hand of your partner.

Now, working together, start making the hole between your spheres bigger by pushing its walls out. Keep going until you have make a single, smooth sphere big enough for two.

Explore the room a little in your new, larger sphere. You'll have to work together to control the way it rolls.

Now you see another pair of your classmates and roll towards them. When you spheres touch, once again there is a tiny hole. Reach through and shake hands. Then once again gradually enlarge the hole until you have made one four-person sphere.

(I repeat this as many times as necessary until the whole class has made one huge sphere.)

Now, working together, shove the walls of your sphere out until it fills every inch of the room.

Congratulations! We did it!

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Discussion

Was it easy to imagine your shell/sphere as a real, three-dimensional thing?

How does your shell/sphere relate to the idea of personal space?

I think this is a great way to learn how to visualize space, but I also think it is a metaphor.

What is a metaphor?

A metaphor is a word or a story that can represent or stand for something else--like when you say your Mom blew her top, you don't mean she actually lost the top of her skull.

I think this story can be a metaphor for the way we move from being totally involved with ourselves to joining with friends and becoming part of the larger society. You start out life as a tiny baby, not knowing or caring about anyone but you. You live inside your own shell. But pretty soon you meet a few other people, and your world gets bigger. These people are your family, and they can help you to make your world even bigger by meeting other families or other people. Eventually you form communities. Even then, your world is pretty small. But today communities can come together to form larger communities. States form countries, countries form even larger alliances. Maybe someday even the earth will be just part of a larger community.

Think about the border between your sphere and your neighbor's. At first it is easy to see where one sphere ends and the other begins. But you kept pushing out and smoothing until you had one big sphere. What happened to the border? Could you even remember where it was? At first you were totally separate, but you came together so completely that you couldn't even remember what kept you apart. What does that say to you? Can you relate that to your everyday life? To your friendships? To your communities?

Be a Water Molecule--Three States of Matter / Why Do We Need Electricity? / Ring That Doorbell!

Three Lessons About Energy

I designed these three little lessons a long time ago to support a third-grade science curriculum (the particular textbook is now lost to us--or in other words I can't remember the name of it), but they could be used with any elementary students who are studying energy in science class.

Liquid State / Solid State / Gaseous State / Discussion

Be a Water Molecule--Three States of Matter

This is basically a narrative pantomime activity in which students act the roles of water molecules as they move from a liquid to a solid state, back to a liquid and then to a gaseous state. However, I do not tell the students at the beginning that they are water molecules, or that we are doing a lesson about states of matter. I do tell them the game will have something to do with science, but I save the specifics for after the activity.

Liquid State

I define a specific playing space on the floor, roughly circular, by arranging desks or chairs, or using an area rug. The space must be considerably bigger than the group can fill when closely spaced. Then I ask all of the students to come into the middle of the space, and get as close together as they can.

I tell the students to move around freely amongst one another, but to stay in the middle of the space. Depending on the group, I may have to be proactive in keeping them from pushing and shoving. I comment on the fluidity of the group, and the way that it seems to stay in the middle of the room and maintain its size, but change its shape continuously.

Solid State

After they are moving comfortably, I tell them that I am going to begin to take away energy from the group. As their energy decreases, they will begin to feel tired, and not move as much or as fast.

As the children continue to slow down, I "remove" even more energy. Finally I tell them to grab hold of one another and stop moving altogether. The group congeals into a solid mass, and I move around it, prodding it gently and commenting on how solid it is, and on the way it holds its shape.

Gaseous State

After the children are finished absorbing this part, I tell them I will now begin adding energy. They let go of each other and begin to move around more freely again. I comment on the fact that the group is once more changing its shape.

Then I tell them I am adding even more energy. As they start moving faster, I tell them that there is now so much energy that they can't stay in the center. I tell them they are free to move anywhere in the defined space, and that if they "bump into" anything (I stress that they should not really crash) they will bounce off in a new direction.

Presently the group is moving pretty freely all over the defined space. I comment on the fact that the group has expanded to fill all of the available space. I point out that once again its shape is constant, but now it is the "container" that defines the shape. I make a small change in the shape of the container and comment on the way that changes the shape of the group.

Discussion

After a minute or two of "high energy," I bring the energy back to the starting point, and we end the activity. We sit in a circle for a discussion. I ask the group if they can think of anything in their Science classes that is sort of like what we've just done. With very little prodding from me, they realize they have been enacting changing states of matter. This discovery generally delights them, and leads to a lively discussion of the ways the two processes--ours in the classroom and the physics process--are similar and different. Then we repeat the activity, very briefly.

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Why Do We Need Electricity?

This is a variation of "No, You Can't Take Me!" It teaches critical thinking skills while hammering home the idea of just how much we rely on electricity in modern life.

Each student chooses (but keeps secret) a particular electrical device. It could be anything from an electric hair dryer or toaster to an electric cable car or a photocopier.

Each student arranges her or his body to resemble the chosen device.

I survey the room and say, "My, look at all this junk. I don't need all this junk. I think I'll get rid of some of it." I then choose a particular student and say, "I think I'll take THIS thing away."

The student (we've discussed the rules of the game ahead of time) says, "No, you can't take me!" I reply, "Why not?" The student says, "Because without me. . ." (Here the student must come up with something bad that would happen if that particular device were not there. For example, a toaster might say, "Because without me you'd have to eat squishy soggy bread all the time." A photocopier might say, "Without me you'd get writer's cramp copying all those papers by hand." The idea here is that the students must come up with several real purposes for their objects. I often don't let them off the hook with only one answer. "Well, I like soggy squishy bread. I'm still taking you."

I repeat the process with each student.

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Preparation / Ringing the Bell / Discussion

Ring that Doorbell!

This is a fun little game in which students think a bit about how electricity works. It is based on a pretty simplistic concept of the physics involved, but you ought to be able to adjust it if it doesn't square with the way you teach the concepts.

Preparation

I begin this exercise with a short discussion about electricity and how it travels through wires. Then we choose one student to be the "Doorbell." (We audition the best "ringer.") Another student is chosen to be the "Avon Lady" (brush salesman, or anyone who could be expected to ring the doorbell, would work just as well) and another to be the "button." Everyone else is part of the "wire."

The "Doorbell" positions herself at one end of the room, and the "Button" positions himself at the other, near our imaginary door. The rest of the class joins hands and forms a "wire" leading from the "Button" to the "Doorbell."

Ringing the Bell

The "Avon Lady" walks up to the "door" and pushes the "Button." (She presses on his head.)

The "Button" squeezes the hand of the next child in the circuit, who in turn squeezes the next, etc., until at last someone squeezes the hand of the "Doorbell," who calls out, "Ding Dong!"

We do this several times, in different ways. We try to see how fast we can make it work, and we discuss the fact that real electricity would go much faster than we can, but that it does take time, even if it doesn't seem like it. We try it with our eyes closed, and we experiment to see what will happen if the wire is broken.

Discussion

Afterwards, we discuss how this is and is not like real electricity. (The textbook I was using when I wrote this lesson didn't get into positive and negative, and this game ignores the fact that we really should have a second wire going back to the button and probably a power source as well. But with a group sophisticated enough to need these, you could easily add them, or perhaps even better, *don't* add them and see if their absence comes up in the discussion.)

The Trip / Spring

Guided Imagery

This is a technique similar to narrative pantomime, but simultaneously simpler and more sophisticated. It has a lot in common with some kinds of meditation and relaxation techniques. Guided Imagery exercises help young actors explore the imaginative use of the five senses in creating the environment of a role. Students learn to relax and concentrate fully. They learn to focus their sensory and emotional selves in role. In addition, Guided Imagery exercises can help students to create stories that can then be developed in other ways. In Guided Imagery, the students usually do not move. They sit quietly, usually with their eyes closed (darkening the room can help), and experience the "story" of the exercise on a deep sensory level, not trying to "act it out" in any way. This is often difficult for students to grasp at first, and depending on the individual characteristics of a group it may be necessary to modify the requirements. However, once a group can be induced to buy into the concept, they nearly always respond enthusiastically.

The simplest way to explain how Guided Imagery works is to write down exactly what I might say to a class in performing the exercise. I should point out that while I include a few specific storylines here, you can create your own on virtually any topic, from the general to the very specific, provided only that your storylines include lots of opportunities for use of the senses and sufficient room for the imaginative contributions of the participants.

(As I narrate the exercise, I pause whenever necessary to allow the thinking and feeling called for to happen.)

The Trip

For this exercise everyone must find your own comfortable space. I will be telling a story, in which the main character is you. As you listen to the story, you must imagine that it is actually happening to you. You should concentrate especially on your five senses--your sense of touch, your sense of smell, your sense of taste, your sense of sight and your sense of hearing. You will not be actually moving around or "acting out" the story--this isn't that kind of exercise. Instead, you will be using your senses in your imagination to EXPERIENCE the story.

It will be extremely important as our story unfolds that you DO NOT MAKE ANY SOUNDS. Your classmates will be trying very hard to listen to the sounds in their imaginations, and real sounds will make that very difficult. Similarly, of course, you must not move around or touch anyone else in the room. Concentrate on your senses in your imagination.

To begin our story, I want you to think of a place that is just yours. It might be your room, or if you share a room, your special part of the room. It might be a fort or a special place outside that you like. You will decide what the place is, but it should be a place that is private and special to you.

Imagine that you are in your special place now. Look around. Look CAREFULLY. Use your sense of sight to take in all of the details you can--even the ones you may never have noticed before. Maybe there are little cracks in the ceiling, if there is a ceiling. Maybe there are colors or textures you've never noticed before. It's amazing how many things we see every day but never really SEE. Now listen. Listen to all the special sounds in your special place. Even a very quiet place has lots of sounds if you really listen. Maybe there is the sound of your house shifting. Maybe there is traffic away in the distance. I don't know. You must listen for the special sounds of YOUR place. And smells. Nearly everything in the world has its own smell. Maybe you've never noticed the smells of your special place, but I'll bet they feel comfortable and safe. See if you can identify several smells. Wood has a smell. Earth has a smell. Your place probably smells like you, too. Really breathe in the smells of your special place. The air may even have a taste--see if it does. Now take your hand and touch various things in your space. Feel the textures and temperatures of your space. Are the surfaces rough or smooth? Warm or cool? Damp or dry? Really explore your space with your sense of touch.

Now, as you sit in your special place, I want you to think of a trip you would like to take. Think of someplace else you might like to go. It might be someplace very close by or someplace halfway around the world. You must choose for yourself. As you sit in your space, go over in your mind how you would have to travel to get to this other place. For some of you, the whole trip could be made on foot. Some of you will realize you'd have to take a car, and some probably even a plane or a boat. For all I know, some of you might need a spaceship. But I want you to carefully think of all the steps your travel would take. For instance, if you would have to take a plane, you would first have to get in a car or a taxi, then drive to the airport, etc. Think of ALL the steps.

We've decided to take the trip. It is time to pack our bags. Since only you know where you're going and how long you'll be gone, only you know what you will need to pack. So get out a suitcase or bag--whatever seems appropriate--and begin to pack. As you place each item in

the suitcase or bag, examine it carefully with your five senses. What color is it? Does it have a smell? Is it heavy or light? If you shake it, does it make a sound? Does it have a texture? We're going to take the time to really pack carefully.

Now that we're going to begin our actual trip, you may find you have to speed up or slow down time in order to keep up with the story. If your trip is very short, you may have to slow down time, but most of us will probably have to speed up time.

Imagine you are now on the first leg of your journey. I don't know what that is--it will be different for each of you. But as you travel along, use your five senses. What are the sights you see? The sounds you hear? The smells you smell? What physical sensations are there? Are there any taste sensations? Really EXPERIENCE this part of the journey.

Okay, now here's where some of you may need to speed up or slow down time. Imaging your are exactly half way to your destination. Many of you are probably in a different kind of transport now, though some of you may be in the same one. Once again, use your five senses. What do you see? Hear? Taste? Smell? Feel?

Now let's imagine we have arrived just outside our destination. That may mean different things for each of you. If your destination has a gate or is indoors behind a door, imagine you are just outside the door or gate. If your destination is just a general place--say, the desert--imagine you are in some sort of transport, about to step out, and "into" the place. In any case, before we enter our destination, we're going to stop and use our senses again. From outside, what does the place look like? Sound like? Smell like? What do you think it will feel like inside?

Okay, it's finally time to enter. Once inside, I don't know what you're going to do--I don't even know where you are. But as we take some time just to experience this new place, remember to carefully consider what your five senses are telling you. There will probably be lots of new sights, sounds, sensations, smells, and tastes to experience.

As you do whatever it is you came here to do, I want you to think for a minute. Who is the VERY LAST person you would ever expect to meet in this place? The MOST UNLIKELY person to ever be here? In your mind's eye, recall what this person looks like, sounds like, etc.

Suddenly you look up, and there they are! You are certainly surprised to see them, but I don't know whether it's a good surprise of a bad surprise. I don't know who they are or how you feel about them. You may be glad to see them, or you may wish they would go away. As you look at them, and try to see as many details as you can, they speak. Listen to their voice. What does it sound like? What are they saying?

I don't know if you speak back, or if you do, what you say. I don't know what, if anything, the two of you do. This part of the story is up to you.

Finally the person leaves. I don't know why, but you do. I don't know whether you caused them to leave, but you do. I don't know whether you're glad or sad to see them go. But at any rate, now that they're gone you realize it's time for you to go, too. As you leave the place, take one last look. Try to remember all of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch sensations you can for your trip home.

We're going to compress time again, and imagine we're half way home. What sights do you see? What smells do you smell? What sounds do you hear? What tastes do you taste? What sensations do you feel?

Something has gone wrong. I don't know what it is--that's up to you, but something pretty serious. I don't know if the problem is something you can see or not. Maybe the problem has a sound associated with it. Maybe there is a smell. You can probably feel something as well. Whatever the problem is, no one seems to know what to do about it.

Finally you are able to solve the problem. I don't know how you did it. Does your solution have any sounds or smells associated with it? What do you see and feel? At any rate, you certainly feel relief, as we once again speed up or slow down time to arrive just outside our special place--home.

Before you go inside, see how many details of your special place you can recall. Then when you go in you will see how many of them you remembered correctly. It's been a long day, and a long trip, and you are tired. So you go into your special place and sleep.

Once the story is finished--I almost always end with the main character in repose--I have the students do some brief stretching exercises to get the blood flowing again, and then we have a discussion. Usually I have some or all of the students describe their adventure in detail. We talk about the fact that even though I told the same story to everyone, no two students came up with the same, or even very similar, stories. I point out to them that the creative force responsible for making the stories they have experienced was not mine, but came from them. So the stories now belong to them, and they can use them in any way they want. They can write them down as short stories, plays, or poems. They can make pictures of them, or write songs about them. They can make videos or improvise skits. I tell them (which is the truth) that this kind of quiet imagery is often the way I come up with the stories and details I use in my own writing. But most importantly, we discuss how effectively we were able to use our five senses in our imaginations. Usually the students are surprised they were able to remember and experience so many details of the familiar parts of their stories--such as the "special place"--and equally surprised at the vividness of the sensations in the original parts of the story. (The exception to this is that if the group has had trouble keeping quiet, no one will have been able to really hear the sounds in their stories clearly, and the stories will be more similar than otherwise, since their sounds will have influenced each other. If this is the case, we discuss it.) This exercise is much more effective if time is left for discussion at the end.

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Below is another storyline I use with my students in Guided Imagery exercises. Again, remember that you can always create your own. The introduction and discussion afterwards are just the same. (This storyline might work as a narrative pantomime as well.)

Spring

You are a small, burrowing animal. In fact, you are a newly born baby animal, and have so far lived your entire life inside your burrow. Your mother went down into the burrow last fall, and when spring began to make itself felt, you and your brothers and sisters were born. Since it is completely dark in the burrow, you have never seen anything--in fact, you don't even really know what it would mean to see. But you have four other senses, and you use them.

Listen to the sounds in the burrow. You can probably hear your mother's heart beat, and possibly also your own and your brothers' and sisters'. Maybe you all make some sounds as you move around in the burrow. Smell the cool earth of the walls and floor, and smell that special smell that means "Mom." Feel the hard-packed, cool walls of the burrow, and feel your mother and your brothers and sisters in this small space.

Just in the last day or so something has been changing. The walls of the burrow are getting damper and warmer. You don't know why, but Mom seems to sense a change. It is time for her to open up the burrow. It is spring. Listen as she moves to the entrance of the burrow. Feel the dirt hit you in the face as she digs away at the blocked entrance to the hole. Taste the dirt that gets in your mouth. She opens a small hole to the outside world.

For the first time in your life, you can see! Look around you at the dimly lighted interior of the burrow. For the first time, look at the others--your mother and brothers and sisters--with whom you have spent your entire short life. Look up at the bright circle of light that Mom is making bigger and bigger.

Suddenly Mom disappears out the hole. You don't know what to do. But then you hear a strange sound. You've never heard such a sound before, but somehow you know exactly what it is. It's Mom saying, "come on out!"

As you climb out of the burrow, feel the new earth under your feet. Smell the outdoor air. Suddenly the sun is so bright you're temporarily blinded. As you grow used to the brightness, you see that the hole is in the center of a large expanse of grass, like a meadow of a field. You start to explore the area around the hole. As you explore, you use ALL of your senses. You investigate things with your eyes. You smell them. You touch them. You listen to them. You even taste them. You discover that clover is very tasty. You discover that your brothers and sisters are not.

So far, you have been staying pretty close to the burrow, but now you notice something at the other end of the grassy area. I don't know what it is, and neither do you, but it's pretty big. You are overcome with curiosity. You start to cross the grass, to take a closer look.

As you go, feel the grass moving under your feet. Smell the sweet spring air. Taste any new plants you come across on your journey. Listen to the sounds of the much bigger world you have discovered. But keep your eyes on the big thing.

You arrive, and carefully investigate the big thing. Smell it. If it seems safe, taste it. Look it over carefully, listen to the sounds it makes, and touch it carefully. Try to learn as much as possible about the thing.

Suddenly you hear a sound from across the grass. You've never heard that sound before, but you instinctively know what it is. It's Mom saying, "Everybody in the hole! Now!" You run

across the grass and dive down the hole just as Mom starts filling in the top with grass and dirt to hide it.

You spent almost your whole life in this hole, and it always felt warm and cozy and safe. But now it feels cramped and dark. One of your brothers or sisters is standing on your head, and there's hardly any room to move around. But for now, you'll have to stay down here, so you make the best of it and take a nap.

How to Play / Variations

Story Story

This game is based on a similar one called "Story Story Die" that one of my students brought in. It sounded like fun, but it struck me that it wasn't really a drama game, so I made some changes and accidentally invented a really fun new game. It is pretty simple, but the results are often anything but, and it can get as zany or as serious as you choose to let it.

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How to Play

Group sits in a semi-circle around the acting area. (Any space will do--it needn't be very big.) Establish an order of play, as in a board game, so everyone will know whose "turn" it is.

The first player takes her place in the acting area. The second player begins to tell a story. The first player must act out the story as fully as possible, in whatever seems the best way. This can involve playing more than one character, using props--whatever she thinks will work best and with whatever limits the leader may choose to impose.

When this has gone on for a minute or so, the leader rings a bell. (Actually, I usually just yell "ding!") The first person sits down. The second person enters the acting space. The third person continues the story exactly where the second person left off, and the second person must now act it out.

After a minute or so, another bell, and another rotation. Continue until the story concludes or seems to peter out, or until everyone has had several turns as storyteller and as actor.

The beauty of the order of play is that each person must be the "actor" immediately after being the "narrator." This tends to prevent people from deliberately inserting difficult or embarrassing details to trip up the actor, since they know they will soon be on the receiving end.

My Middle School students love this game, and frequently request it.

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Variations

You can put any sort of limits or guidelines on any part of the game. For example, I sometimes insist that the story "make sense" or that it be "serious." (Other times I let it get as silly as it wants to.) Sometimes I allow the use of a set store of props and costumes, while other times I require that everything be pantomimed. You can really go wherever you want with it.

With my playwriting students I play a version of this game in which they write instead of speaking. Each person begins a play, and when the bell rings (usually after three or four minutes) everyone passes her paper to the right, reads the new play and continues where it leaves off. After about three or four passes, I tell them to find a way to bring the play to a close. Then we share the results. Lots of fun, and it helps reinforce the idea that sometimes it is helpful and fun to write even if you are not "inspired."

What Would You Do?

Introduction:

This is a fun game to play all by itself, but it can also be very useful for helping young actors learn to more fully inhabit their characters. It's incredibly simple on the surface, but it's not easy to do well.

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Play the Game:

One actor plays at a time. The others can take turns "narrating."

The player chooses a character. This can be the character he is playing in a current production, or a character from literature or life. (Be careful though--don't let students choose characters they will be tempted to lampoon.)

The "narrator" (it should be the instructor at least at first) begins to narrate in second person simple events in a person's daily life. Start simple. "You get up in the morning, and it's a beautiful day. You make breakfast."

The player simply follows the instructions, but he reacts in character.

The "narrator" may begin to add some surprises. "You're walking down the street when a man bumps into you."

The player must react to whatever happens IN CHARACTER. In most situations Hamlet would react very differently than, say, Benjamin Franklin.

Narrator continues the story, adding more and more extreme details. "You come upon a dead body. It's your mother." "It's floating in midair."

Play stops when the instructor feels it has gone as far as it can or should.

Discussion:

I find this game a great jumping-off point for a discussion of the difference between acting and "indicating." I am frequently asked, when explaining the game, "So, I'm supposed to figure out what my character would do in each situation, and then do it?" I reply, "Not exactly. I don't want you to HAVE to figure anything out. If you are truly inhabiting your character, you will simply react."

It's also a good way of looking at the concept of "playwriting" while acting or improvising. I'm sorry the term "playwriting" is used here, because as a playwright I object to the word's use in a pejorative sense, but in this case "playwriting" is a bad thing. It occurs when an actor consciously tries to push a story in a particular direction that is unnatural, rather than reacting naturally in character. Obviously in many improvisation settings, such as improv comedy, this can be a good thing, but for an actor in role it is dishonest. Because improv games are fun, I often have to remind people not to "try" to be funny when the point is to learn about character.

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Variations:

Obviously when this game is played as a way of helping actors inhabit characters as whom they have been cast, this won't work, but when the game is played "for fun" you can make it into a guessing game. The player who is performing doesn't tell the others what character he has chosen. (You could even have them pull the characters out of a hat.) Then the "narrators" use their narrating as a way of evaluating the character, sort of like the game "20 Questions." They can put the character into specific situations to see how he'll react, and use the answers to gradually zoom in on the character, until they can guess. I like to have them phrase their guess as just another piece of narration, but one that makes it absolutely clear that they now know who the person is. (For example, if the "narrator" is pretty sure the player is Hamlet, she could say, "And then your girlfriend comes in, and she's throwing flowers all over the place.")

Physical & Pantomime

Nursery Rhyme Charades

I use this activity with my really little ones--Pre-Kindergarten--when they are learning about nursery rhymes and Mother Goose. It is very simple, and a lot of fun for my students.

We begin by discussing nursery rhymes in general, and by naming as many of them as we can. Then we play the game.

Each student in turn goes to the center of the circle and pantomimes an element from a nursery rhyme. (For instance, he might pantomime someone sleeping for "Little Boy Blue.")

The rest of the class tries to guess what nursery rhyme is meant.

When dealing with very young students--although I suppose this activity would work with older kids as well--it is very important for the teacher to carefully guide the acting and guessing, and to make positive comments about the performances ("Wow! that's a really interesting way to act out Bo Peep!") and about the guesses ("Well, no, that isn't what he's doing, but I can see what you mean. He does sort of look like he's jumping over a candlestick, doesn't he!") so that everyone feels a part of the learning.

My Pre-Kindergarten class is my most difficult, and this activity works extremely well with them.

Hand Animals

This is an activity I do with all of my young students who are new to Drama. (Since I teach every student in our school, my new students are generally Kindergartners, but the activity works with somewhat older children as well. It serves as an introduction to the structured use of the imagination and to the idea or character. It's also great fun and gives all of the students a chance to "perform" on the first class.

Look at your hands.

We begin by examining our hands. I coach in the following vein: "Hold your two hands up and look at them. Use one finger to trace the lines and the shape of your other hand. Wiggle your fingers. Open and close your fists. Except your face, your hands are the most expressive part of your body. Look at all the different things they can do! Try to find as many different ways to move your hands as you can."

The students spend several minutes (or until they're done) closely examining the infinite possibilities of hand movement.

Animal Characters

Next I show them that I can make my hand or hands into an animal. Usually I show them a spider. One hand becomes the spider, and it "crawls" up my arm, across my chest, and finally over my head, as I make comic-terrified faces and generally react as I would were a real spider crawling on me. The children love this, but they also get the point. I am able to make my "hand-spider" real for them.

I then coach the children to invent their own hand animals. By raising their hands (an absolute must in my school), children volunteer to show their new creations to the class. After we have seen and admired each character, the whole class tries to make it. (This reinforces for each child the worth of his or her creation, and gives the whole class practice in observation and mirroring.)

If the group is sophisticated enough I will coach discussion in some of the following ways:

"Look at this particular bird (or dog or wildebeest). For this performer, what do you think is the most important characteristic of a bird?" (I'm looking for the primary feature-a bird can be mostly wings and flight, but it can also be mostly beak and pecking motions. I've even seen birds whose principal characteristic was their distinctive hopping walk.)

"What do you think this character would do if he saw that character?"

"Is one character "better" than another?" (NO-just different.)

"What is a puppet? In some ways can we call these hand animals puppets?"

Once we have all made many different hand animals, I use this activity as a springboard into using more of our bodies to create characters.

Rhyme Charades

I learned this game from Sharon Grady at the University of Texas. It teaches the concept of rhyme in a fun and active way. I use it with my Kindergarten, First Grade, and Second Grade classes, and sometimes as a reward or time-filler with other students. (They love it, and request it.) It's very simple, but because it deals with rhymes, which can be very complicated indeed if the players are creative enough, it works with just about any age.

Everyone sits in a circle. The teacher says, "I am thinking of a word that rhymes with 'Cat.'" (For instance.)

Anyone who thinks they know the word raises their hand. When called on, they do NOT say the word they think is right. Instead, they go into the center of the circle and pantomime their guess. (In other words, to stick with our example, a child might get into the circle and pantomime "bat" by flapping his arms and swooping.)

The others in the circle try to guess what the child in the center is miming.

The teacher must be careful to explain that even if someone in the circle says the actual word, if that is NOT what the child in the center is miming, it doesn't count as a correct guess. Once the mime has been guessed, the teacher reveals whether it is the right word. If it is, the round is over and a new word is picked. (With older kids, I let the correct pantomimer pick the new word.) If it is not the right word, another volunteer comes into the circle to act out her guess. Continue until the word has been correctly mimed and the mime correctly guessed.

(In my experience two rhyme sounds presenting especially wide scope for this game are "oat"--boat, coat, goat, float, note, wrote, gloat, moat, tote, etc.--and "air"--bear, wear, stare, stair, chair, where, aware, mare, dare, care, fair, fare, glare, hair, lair, pair, pear, rare, square, tear, etc.)

Variations

Alphabet Charades

I'll sometimes substitute this version with very young students who have difficulty with the concept of rhyme. "I'm thinking of a word that begins with 'A.'"

Association Charades

With older or more sophisticated students I'll sometimes play a version of this game in which some theme or connecting idea takes the place of rhyme. For example, "I'm thinking of a person in Revolutionary America." "I'm thinking of something to eat." "I'm thinking of an

animal." The connecting concept can be as simple or as subtle as the sophistication of the students allows.

Preparation / Playing the Game

Ben Franklin's Inventions

I wrote this lesson to support my second-graders' social studies unit about Colonial America. It uses the figure of Ben Franklin, but any famous inventor would do--pick one who is appropriate to your geographical area or the cultural background of your students, or who fits in with what they are studying.

- **Preparation:**

Benjamin Franklin is famous for his inventions. What is an invention. Why do people invent things? (To make life easier or safer.) What are some of the things Ben Franklin invented? (Bifocals, Fire Department, Franklin Stove, etc.)

What if you were an inventor? What might you invent?

- **Playing the Game:**

The class sits in a circle. One student volunteers to "invent something."

The student may "use" as many other students as necessary to construct her/his invention. This will be a human sculpture-remember the "machines" we all made in improv class? It may or may not move, depending on the sophistication of the students and individual taste.

(Optional) The rest of the class tries to guess what the invention is for, or what it does.

Obviously this is nothing more than a context for a basic machine exercise. However, my younger students don't understand the machine game in the abstract. This lesson particularizes the concept and ties it to other learning.

Sculpture Gallery

I learned this activity, with modifications, from Sharon Grady at the University of Texas. I use it with first, second and third grade classes and my Summer mixed groups. It helps students become comfortable with their bodies, learn to express ideas and emotions kinesthetically, and learn to trust each other. It gives every child a chance to shine and be the star in two very different ways. My students also really enjoy it.

First Part: Creating the Sculptures

Divide the class into pairs. In each pair, one student is the "sculptor" and one the "clay."

The sculptor "sculpts" his or her partner's body into a statue of his or her choosing. The sculptor may do this by physically moving the partner's body

into position, or by showing the "clay" how to stand. The sculptor pays close attention to even small details like facial expression or the position of a finger. When the "sculpture" is finished, she or he freezes. (It the position is difficult or impossible to hold, the "sculpture" may memorized it and then relax until her or his turn in the "tour" arrives.

Second Part: Gallery Tour

Once all of the artists have finished their masterpieces, I call them together in the center of the room. The "sculptures" remain in place around the room. In role as a museum guide, I conduct a tour of the "gallery." When we reach each work, the artist who made it steps forward and explains his or her work to the group. In this way we make a complete tour, giving each artist a chance to show off and describe his or her work. (Once a "sculpture" has been viewed, she or he may relax and join the group on the rest of the tour.

Once the "tour" is finished, the partners switch roles and the process is repeated.

In our discussions afterwards I always ask the students, "How many artists created each statue?" At first they usually answer, "one," but I coach them to see that the "clay" is an artist too, since each one is different, and no matter how carefully he tried, an artist could not make exactly the same statue with a different partner. Being human and not clay, the "sculpture" makes real contribution to the work of art. This is a good introduction to the relationship between playwright, director, and actor-the actor makes a real contribution even if she does exactly what the director says every time, just as even the most slavishly literal director makes a contribution in addition to that of the playwright.

Basic Mirrors / Mirrors! / Circle Mirror / Who Began? / Mirror Canon / Movement Telephone / Fun House Mirrors / Emotion Mirrors

Mirror Mirror

This is not really one lesson, but several activities all stemming from the idea of mirroring. I introduce mirrors with my very youngest students, as a control device--see "Mirrors!" below--and by the second grade we are doing fairly elaborate activities and games with mirrors--see "Who Began?" or "Mirror Canon" below. Yet I continue to use even the "Basic Mirrors" exercise with older children and even adults. Mirroring is a way of developing concentration skills, and of honing those skills. It can be used to help cast members bond, and develop that instant communication so necessary for really fine theatre. It teaches careful observation skills, which serve students well not only in the Theatre, where it helps them to develop accurate and believable characterizations, but in all aspects of their increasingly complex life. Plus, it is a lot of fun! Try the ideas below, or make up your own. Good luck!

Basic Mirrors

You are probably familiar with this activity. I certainly didn't invent it. Everyone takes a partner. (If there is an odd number, the teacher pairs with someone.) Partners stand facing each other, about three feet apart. One is the leader, the other, the "mirror." Moving only from the waist up, the leader begins to make simple gestures or movements. The "mirror" duplicates the leader's movments exactly--just as a mirror would. (Some students have trouble with the right-left shift. If the leader raises his right hand, the "mirror" should raise

his left, just as the figure in a real mirror would. When they fail to do this, I tell students they are being a "video" instead of a mirror.)

Most students will want to make this harder than they should. The goal is to mirror the partner perfectly. I tell my students that if they are doing a good job, I will not be able to tell who is the leader and who is the "mirror." I coach them to use smooth, continuous movements, because abrupt movements almost always catch the "mirror" lagging. I coach them to look into each others' eyes, rather than at their hands, because this facitates more precise communication. I try to keep them from using their lower bodies until they have really mastered the arms-and-face mirroring.

I challenge my students to really focus on the process. I point out that it is the leader's job, as much as the "mirror's" to see that the exercise works. The leader does not try to trick his partner--on the contrary, he works very hard *not* to trick him. It is the leader's responsibilty to perform movements that the "mirror" can follow precisely. I remind the leaders that they should be looking right at their partners, because their partners *must* look at them, and therefore the only way the mirror illusion can be perfect is if the leader also looks at the partner. (If the leader looks away, and the "mirror" duplicates this movement, the "mirror" can no longer see the leader to mirror him.)

Once you've got all the students concentrating on mirroring, have them switch leaders a few times. At first, every time they switch leaders they'll have to start over, but they should reach the point where they can switch leaders in mid-stream, without interrupting the smooth folow of movement. If the group is older and advanced enough, see if they can switch leaders without communicating ahead of time. (When the "mirror" feels it is time to take over, he simply takes over, and the original leader is sensitive enough to perceive it and become the "mirror.")

Eventually this exercise can grow to involve the whole body, and even movement in space (locomotion), but be wary of beginning this too soon. I usually don't do it at all except with my older students. It is too difficult. I use the metaphor of model building. Some people buy the biggest, most elaborate model kit they can find, and take pleasure in building something really complicated. But others take their pleasure out of making a simpler model absolutely perfect in every detail. The second attitude is the one it is necessary to apply to mirrors if their full value is to be had.

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Mirrors!

This is my principle control device with my younger students. An instructor of mine had a tambourine he carried with him. The sound of the tamborine was a signal for everyone to freeze and be silent. Others use a hand signal, a whistle (ugh) or switching off the lights. In Drama class you really need some such device, because you are frequently setting the students loose to process all at once, and you need a way to bring everyone back to earth. I use mirrors. All of my students, from pre-kindergarten up, learn that whenever the teacher calls out, "Mirrors!" they are to drop what they're doing and become mirrors of the teacher. We discuss the fact that mirrors do not talk, but move just like the person looking in the mirror. This is an extremely effective control device because it takes real concentration to mirror accurately, so the students not only stop, but stay stopped. We practice this in the first few

classes every year ("Okay, let's all get a little crazy. . .Mirrors!"). It works. And since I nearly always begin my movements with a characteristic gesture, it works even when the noise in the room has grown too loud for me to be heard.

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Circle Mirror

This is really only a way of practicing for the game, "Who Began?" The class stands in a circle, about arms' length apart. (The easiest way to make such a circle is to join hands, extend the circle out as far as it will stretch, then drop arms.) The leader performs simple arm movements, and everyone in the circle "mirrors." Immediately the problem of left/right rears its head. Those opposite the leader in the circle will instinctively reverse them, like a mirror, but those next to or nearly next to the leader in the circle will want to do same-side movments. Those half way in between will be torn. Usually I tell my students that for this exercise, left and right don't matter. Plus I usually do movments with both arms together. This is a good way of working with a class whose members are having difficulty focusing in pairs. Since the teacher's eye is on everyone--circles are nice that way--sometimes such students are better able to concentrate.

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Who Began?

This is a game I have seen under a number of different names. It is a natural outgrowth of the "Circle Mirror," and can be used as a motivational tool for getting students to take mirrors more seriously. (My students live in an extremely sports-centered world, and any kind of competition is instantly attractive to them.)

Begin with a circle just like in "Circle Mirror." Practice making very smooth, rhythmic movements. The best kind of movements for this game are ones that repeat in rhythm, and gradually change. (A true pattern won't work--it is essential that changes happen.) Once the group is good at this kind of movement, someone is chosen to be "it." That person then leaves the room or turns his back, and the teacher chooses someone in the circle to be the leader. The leader begins to move, and the rest of the class to mirror. "It" is invited back into the circle, and must try to guess who the leader is. The more perfect the mirroring, the more difficult this will be, until, theoretically, it becomes impossible. I usually give "it" three guesses before I declare the thing a draw. A new "it" is chosen and the game is repeated. As the game is played, I coach the leader as necessary to vary the movement, or to make it more smooth, or whatever, but always addressing him as "leader," and never looking at him.

I usually don't introduce stratetgy until we have played a few times. I like the students to come up with the strategies, rather than having them handed to them. But there are some basic strategies that make the game harder for "it" to win:

Don't all look at the leader. At first this seems like a contradiction, but the students eventually realize that as long as *some* people--probably the ones opposite the leader in the circle--are looking at the leader, the rest can look at those people. usually the best thing is for everyone to "mirror" someone opposite them in the circle. This means "it" cannot pick the

leader by following everyone's eyes.
Leader look at someone. The leader is the only person in the circle who is not compelled to look at someone else. If he allows his eyes to wander, "it" can easily pick him out this way.
Don't make noise. Any movement--such as clapping, snapping or slapping--that makes a sound will give the leader away, since he will probably be slightly ahead of everyone else. Again, rather than telling my students these "rules" I coach them to figure them out for themselves.
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Mirror Canon

This can be very beautiful when it works. It can also be used as a tie-in with a music curriculum, because the canon form is very important in music.

Everyone stands in a circle. Everyone turns to the left (or right, as long as everyone turns the same way) so that they are looking at the back of the next person. One person is chosen to be the leader, and begins to make simple movements. (The leader must be careful not to bring his arms fully in front of him.) The person behind the leader mirrors him, but with a "delay" of about a second. The third person mirrors the second, again with a one-second delay, and so on around the circle. Eventually the leader will see his own movements recreated in the person in front of him--but delayed by many seconds. The effect for someone standing in the middle of the circle is of a "wave" of movement making its way around the circle. For the leader, the reward is seeing that movement come back to him.

I recommend that the teacher not participate in this exercise, but rather watch closely to make sure it is working. All it takes is one student not paying attention to put a stop to the "wave," and you need to be there to light a fire under any such students. You also might like to pull a few students out of the group at a time and let them watch from inside the circle, because it is so cool.

Variation 1: Once the canon is working in the circle, you can spread the people about the room randomly. Each person must remember who he is mirroring, and make sure he can see that person, but other than that they can be anywhere in the room. This is much more difficult, because there is usually at least one person closer than the one we're supposed to be mirroring, and we have to concentrate on the person we're supposed to mirror while ignoring the others. But when it works the students feel a great sense of acomplishment.

Variation 2: **For advanced students.** Find an actual musical canon--something simple!--and listen to it a few times. Two-part is probably best. Work in pairs. The leader imporvises movements in time with the music (the first part of the canon). The partner mirrors the movements in time with the second voice of the canon, so that music and movement work together.

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Movement Telephone

I learned this from a member of the National Theatre of the Deaf. Basically it is movement version of the child's game we used to call "Telephone" when I was a kid. The kids in PA call it "Whisper Down the Lane." I'm talking about the game in which children sit in a circle and

whisper a message from person to person. By the time the message gets back to its original source, it has invariably changed, usually with humorous results. I usually play "Telephone" with my students before introducing "Movement Telephone."

Students stand in a straight line, facing the back of the room. The teacher stands at the back of the line and taps the last person on the shoulder. That person turns around to face the teacher. The teacher performs a very simple series of hand movements. Only the last person in line can see this, because the rest of the class are facing the other way. Then that person taps the next person in line, and passes the movement on. Eventually the movement series makes its way all the way to the front of the line. Then the teacher shows the whole class what the original movement looked like, and everyone marvels at how much it has changed.

Often when I teach this activity, I use it as a jumping-off point to talk about the way that rumors and innuendo can get started. If even in a class in which everyone is doing his best to get things exactly right, an idea can change so much in transit, is it any wonder that half-truths and even utter falsehoods can arise from honest if catty gossip? The resulting discussions are often illuminating.

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Fun House Mirrors

Everyone has seen those mirrors in fun houses that make you look taller or shorter, etc. They are the metaphor behind the following mirroring variations.

Magnifying Mirrors

Work in pairs. The leader tries to keep his movements "small," but the "mirror" makes all the movements "bigger." This is lots of fun, and calls for imagination, because it is not always obvious how to make a movement "bigger."

Shrinking Mirrors

Like "Magnifying Mirrors," but in reverse.

Opposite, or Video Mirrors

The "mirror" does not reverse left and right. This allows for some very interesting effects, because unlike regular mirrors, it allows the partners to enter each other's space. In regular mirrors the partners can touch, but can go no further because the point of contact becomes the imaginary glass of the mirror. But in "Opposite Mirrors" the partners can even move around each other and change places.

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Emotion Mirrors

You can do this in pairs, or with the whole class mirroring the teacher. In unison, the leader and the "mirror"(s) speak some familiar speech. (This could be something like the Pledge of Allegiance or the lyrics to a familiar song, or it could even be reciting the alphabet or counting.) The leader tries to change his emotional affect frequently during the speech, and the "mirror"(s) try to duplicate the leader's emotions exactly. No attempt is made to mirror the leader's physicality--the point is to mirror his emotions. This is a great acting exercise for experienced and beginning actors.

Try out these variations, too!

Enlarging or Shrinking Emotion Mirrors
Mirror the emotions of the leader, but make them "bigger" (If the leader is mildly put out, the "mirror" is furious.) or "smaller."

Opposite Emotion Mirrors
You figure it out.

Use Emotion Mirrors in a Scene
This is an interesting exercise to try with a cast who is having trouble connecting to a script. Run through a scene, but with all the actors "mirroring" one actor's emotions. Then try it again, "mirroring" a different actor. Interesting discoveries here!

Emotion Walk

This is probably the least self-contained lesson on this site. Sometimes I do this whole lesson at once with a group--particularly an older group--but often I salt the various elements of it into a few different lessons, changing the pace and doing different games in between. It can be difficult to grasp, but it is important, and my students embrace the challenge. Basically this exercise is designed to get the students thinking about moving their bodies, and about clearly understanding the ways their bodies can move, and the ways they do move in various situations. Usually I introduce movement of the whole body gradually, starting with something like "Sculpture Gallery" or with narrative pantomime activities. With younger children especially, I am constantly monitoring the level of understanding, and tailoring the lesson to it.

Getting Started: Ways to Move in Space

Everyone finds their own personal space in the room. I have a defined "acting space" in my classroom--a large open area--and I tell the students they must remain inside this area all the time. Students begin to move their bodies through space. I coach them to find every conceivable way to move their bodies through space. This can get noisy, and you have to watch to be sure they are not discovering ways like throwing their classmates, etc., but my students love it. When we have explored different ways to move through space for five or ten minutes, we sit and discuss. On the board, I make a list of all the ways we have discovered to move our bodies though space. These often include:
Walking
Running (We discuss this one ahead of time. Running is a legitimate way to move, but not in the classroom.)
Crawling
Rolling
Hopping
Skipping

Jumping
Leaping
Tip-toeing
Tumbling
Walking backwards
Walking on hands
Galloping
Dragging lower body with arms
Spinning
Etc.
Once we have the list "finished" we get up again, and I coach the whole group through each item on the list.

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Ways to Walk

For this second part of the lesson we confine ourselves only to walking. There are many different ways to walk. I introduce the idea that any movement (in this case, the walk) can be changed in a number of different specific ways. I list them below, but in the lesson I generally introduce them one at a time, with time for discussion, etc. in between. Some of the categories below come from Rudolf Laban's movement technique. As the students walk--Don't stop! Keep walking!--through the space, I coach them through each of these changes. ("Okay, everyone, now let's walk as HIGH, as tall, as we can! Now let's see how LOW to the ground we can be and still walk--don't cheat and crawl! Now everyone walk as WIDE as you can!" etc.)
Change the *size* of the movement. A movement can be made wider or narrower, higher or lower, deeper or shallower. One can make the walk wider or narrower by widening or narrowing the stance and swinging the arms further away or closer to the body. Once can make the walk higer or lower by walking on tiptoe or slouching. One can make the walk deeper by taking larger steps or swinging the arms further forward and back.

Change the *time* of the movement. A movement can be made slower or faster. (When my students are sophisticated enough to grasp it, I include time in the size category--as the "fourth" dimension.)

Change the *weight* of the movement. This is pure Laban. I demonstrate by walking how a movement can be light or heavy. (An angry schoolteacher may walk heavily; a ballet dancer may move lightly.)

Change the *direction* of the movement. Also from Laban. A movement can be direct--moving to a specific point without veering off the path--or indirect--wandering aimlessly.

Change the *tension* of the movement. The muscles can be loose and relaxed or tense and constricted.

Change the *focus* of the movement. I made up this category, but it is easy for my students to understand and really helps with emotional work. Focus is basically the direction of the gaze, with usually a corresponding curve of the body. (Think of the difference between a downcast person walking about staring at the floor and a proud, happy person striding about with his chin up.)

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What Does it Mean?

Once we have tried out all the different ways to change our walk, I have the students sit around the edge of the space and work with one volunteer moving at a time. This part of the lesson is about body language, and how the way we move expresses our personality and our mood. A volunteer is chosen, and instructed to walk back and forth through the space as everyone watches. To begin with, I say, "Be as HAPPY as you can! Show us in your walk!" As the class watches the volunteer walking "happy," I coach them with questions to look at how the walk is dealing with each of the categories above. "Is he walking high or low?" "Wide or narrow?" "Are his muscles tense or loose?" "Is he walking fast or slow?" Gradually we build up a sense of what "happy" looks like--at least for that person. (With older students, if the volunteer is not actually looking very happy, I may coach him, using the categories, to look happier. "Can you move your focus up? Can you relax your muscles a bit? Look, class, at how much happier he looks now!")

Sometimes I write a brief description of "happy" on the board. (Fairly high, wide and deep walk, medium-fast, light, relaxed, direct movement, high or straight ahead focus.) It is important not to cheat, though. If my volunteer's version of "happy" doesn't conform to my expectations, and if when I coach him to match them the group feels he no longer looks happy, then I describe what he did, not what I think he should have done.

We repeat this with other volunteers and other emotions--angry, proud, sad, afraid, etc. With sophisticated groups, we talk about why certain emotions might have certain similarities or differences. (For example, in certain ways "proud" and "angry" tend in most groups to look a lot alike. Both tend to be tense, fairly deliberate movements that take up a lot of space, both in width and in depth. It can be fascinating to discuss theories as to why.)

This is really a broad outline of the general approach I take when introducing the idea of movement with my classes. I vary the approach nearly every time I do it, carefully listening and watching so that I can respond to what the students are and are not connecting to. I would be glad to discuss further the kinds of things we talk about in this unit with anyone who is interested. You can e-mail me at any time.

Preparation / Play the Game / Variation

The Jeffrey Game

I wrote this lesson after a third-grade student, Jeffrey, suggested the idea to me. It is basically a mirroring game. If carefully taught and supervised it can help students learn to isolate movements and to really look. Jeffrey's class enjoyed it, and I hope yours will too. Although the game was originally designed for Third Grade, I think it would work well with older, or even adult actors as an improvisation game.

Preparation

Some work is necessary before the game can be played. I do most of this work anyway with my Drama classes, but if you don't you will need to prepare your students for the game. Students must practice moving in a very self-aware way. They need to be able to analyze their movement so that they know precisely what they are doing. The work of Rudolf Laban

is helpful here, but not necessary. A basic concept I use is that a movement--any movement--can be *changed* in a number of specific ways. Among them:
Change the *size* of the movement. A movement can be made wider or narrower, higher or lower, deeper or shallower. (I demonstrate these three concepts by walking--and having the students walk. One can make the walk wider or narrower by widening or narrowing the stance and swinging the arms further away or closer to the body. Once can make the walk higher or lower by walking on tiptoe or slouching. One can make the walk deeper by taking larger steps or swinging the arms further forward and back.)

Change the *time* of the movement. A movement can be made slower or faster. (When my students are sophisticated enough to grasp it, I include time in the size category--as the "fourth" dimension.)

Change the *weight* of the movement. This is pure Laban. I demonstrate by walking how a movement can be light or heavy. (An angry schoolteacher may walk heavily; a ballet dancer may move lightly.)

Change the *direction* of the movement. Also from Laban. A movement can be direct--moving to a specific point without veering off the path--or indirect--wandering aimlessly.

Change the *tension* of the movement. The muscles can be loose and relaxed or tense and constricted.

Change the *focus* of the movement. I made up this category, but it is easy for my students to understand and really helps with emotional work. Focus is basically the direction of the gaze, with usually a corresponding curve of the body. (Think of the difference between a downcast person walking about staring at the floor and a proud, happy person striding about with his chin up.)

Change the *shape* of the movement (or change the kind of movement). This is the most basic and the most grand kind of change. It consists of actually changing to a different movement--a walk become a run or a crawl; reaching out a hand becomes reaching out a foot--or completely changing a component part of the movement--stop swinging arms while walking; reach out with a closed fist rather than with an open hand. This is really pretty easy for children to understand, despite its complexity. It is important to remember, however, to focus on *one* movement at a time.

(The above is taken from another lesson, "Emotion Walk." Check it out for more into.)

Once I have explained and demonstrated, with volunteers, these ways of changing a movement, I have the students walk about in the space, while I take them through each element in turn. "Keep everything else the same, but change the tension of your muscles." "Keep everything else the same, but change the speed of the movement." I continue this work until I believe the students have grasped the idea of isolating and changing elements one at a time.

Usually I do a whole period of work on this, ending with a discussion of the way that changing one element can change the whole feeling or emotion of the movement. For a more detailed description of this work, see "Emotion Walk." If the goal is just to play the Jeffrey Game, it need not take a whole period.

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Play the Game

To begin with, one student (or the teacher, if this will eliminate conflict) invents a short movement sequence. For example, he might walk four steps, bend and tie his shoe. The whole class practices this movement sequence until they can imitate it pretty accurately.

Once the movement is familiar, someone volunteers to change it. That student must repeat the movement exactly, but making one change. He may only change one element of one movement. (In our example, he might walk faster, or he might bend deeper, or he might massage his ankle instead of tying his shoe.)

This continues, with each new volunteer making exactly one change. (In our example, eventually someone will change the bend. If that happens before the shoe-tying has been changed, clearly he will not be able to tie his shoe if he hasn't bent. But he can still *pretend* to tie it, thus not actually changing the movement of tying.)

The movement sequence will grow less and less like the original. The teacher must side-coach to keep the sequence clearly defined, and to keep each student to one change. This is not a guessing game--it is fine (and usually a good idea) for the teacher to say out loud what each change is. As the game progresses, particularly if the group is pretty sophisticated, the sequence will evolve into something else with a clear meaning. (For example, after ten or fifteen changes the example sequence might have become crawling four steps, picking up a toy, and putting it in the mouth.)

Finally, the hard part. (For advanced groups only.)

See how few people it takes to change the movement back to the original sequence. Side coach carefully to avoid "cheating" by changing more than one element at a time. This is a real exercise in teamwork, because the each person's change depends on the previous change. With older groups, try it with the whole group consulting on each change, so that the transformation can be accomplished in the fewest steps.

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Variation

Try it with more than one person moving at a time. This can be part of a contact improv exercise, for example.

Preparation / Pre-Game Discussion / Playing the Game / Post-Game Discussion

Social Roles Game

I created this game for use with my Fifth Graders, who use a world history survey in their Social Studies classes. We play the game several times during the year, but with greater sophistication each time, and with different social roles at its center, reflecting the students' growing sense of the complexity of social politics.

Preparation

Before class, prepare a set of index cards, each with a different "social role" written on it.

These should be mostly social roles that exist cross culturally--such as priest or farmer--but may also include a few that are specific to a culture--pharaoh, for example. My cards include the following roles: Farmer, Gatherer, Hunter, Caregiver, Shaman, Priest, King, Slave, Laborer, Child, Teacher, Student, Parent, Scribe, Artist, Thinker. Many others are possible. Note that in most societies a person might occupy several roles--for instance, parent, teacher and caregiver, or child, student and laborer. If the lesson is intended to support a specific Social Studies curriculum, I make sure the prominent social roles of that society are represented, and that I am aware of those roles which will be especially difficult to conceptualize. (For example, ancient Egypt had slaves, kings, teachers, priests, farmers, scribes, etc., and these are roles that are easy to think about in relation to ancient Egypt, but roles like Shaman are less likely to make sense to students in terms of ancient Egypt, and roles like caregivers, parents, children and students will be challenging because most textbooks, including the one my students use, seem mostly unaware of the obvious fact that such people must have existed in Egypt. I don't necessarily take those cards out of the deck, but I try to be aware of the extra challenges they present.

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Pre-Game Discussion

I begin the lesson by discussing the concept of social roles with my students. We talk about the ways that cultures have evolved a division of labor, and about the increasing specialization of roles as cultures mature. Just in the three or four centuries since Europeans first began to settle in what is now the United States, our culture has moved from on in which most everyone personally did most of the work related to individual survival--hunted, farmed, built homes, educated their children, etc.--to one in which most people have an extremely specific task in the larger fabric of society, and wouldn't have the first idea how to perform someone else's role. In addition to specialization, societies also tend to develop classes and disparities in wealth and position. We discuss the phenomenon generally and as it relates specifically to the cultures the students are currently studying. Then I lead the discussion toward the commonalties between social roles in different cultures. Many very different cultures have had Shamans, whether they were called by that name or not, and even though on the surface these holy men and women may have been quite different, it is easy to see that all occupied or occupy a similar place in their respective worlds. The same can be said about kings, whether called King, Emperor, Pharaoh, whatever. Do we not have a subgroup in our own culture that can be compared to the serfs in Medieval Europe? Or to the folks who built the Pyramids? Since I usually do this lesson with Fifth Graders, the discussion can get pretty involved, and I try not to rush it.

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Playing the Game

The rules of the game are pretty simple once the prep work has been done. The group sits in a circle. One volunteer goes to the center of the circle and glances at the top card in the deck. (The honest truth is that I often manipulate the deck so that I control who gets what card--that way I can keep everyone challenged without frustrating anyone unduly.) Once the student has seen which "social role" he is to occupy, he begins to pantomime an activity that we might expect such a person to engage in. (For example, if the card said "Teacher" the student might pantomime writing on a blackboard, or lecturing an unruly child.) The rest of the group is trying to guess the social role, but they do not call out their guesses. Rather, as they think they know the social role, other students join the first one in the circle, to pantomime a

different activity that illustrates the same social role. (If one student pantomimes writing on the board, the next might pantomime reading aloud to the class.) More students join the circle, until most of the class is on its feet. Then the leader stops the play and asks someone (not the one who started it all) what he thinks the social role is. Often this student will have been doing the wrong role, but usually by going around the room you can find some who had it right. I am always careful not to make it seem like the first student's failure if no one got it, but I also have to guard against the tendency in some students to try to make it difficult. The goal, I tell my students, is for everyone to get it right. But it's a team effort. We repeat the game with new social roles as time allows.

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Post-Game Processing

This game leads naturally into quite a bit of discussion. We talk about what made certain social roles easier to guess than others. If there were any rounds of the game that went spectacularly badly--no one guessed the right answer, or almost everyone guessed the same wrong answer--we discuss what happened. I often find that this is a great opportunity to talk about rumor and stereotyping. What frequently happens is that one of the first people to join the initiator in the circle guesses wrong, and begins to pantomime an activity appropriate to a different social role. Subsequent participants are influenced by this guess, and so more and more people start off on this wrong tack. I try to get the students to see the parallel between this and what happens in their own school society (for example) when a rumor is started. The person who starts the rumor may not mean any harm--he may just be incorrect, but pretty soon the rumor takes on a life of its own and even if the original person realizes his mistake, it is too late. I try to let the discussion go where it wants to go.

Preparation / Play the Game / Discussion / Sentences

Gibberish Sentences

I invented this game when my Fourth Graders were studying immigrants. It is designed to get the students thinking about what it must be like for someone who is suddenly thrust into a world in which he or she doesn't speak the language or understand the culture. It's extremely simple, but it shows how even simple drama activities can be constructed to directly support other curriculum.

Preparation

Before class, prepare some index cards--at least twice as many as there are students in your group--each with one simple sentence written on it. These should be sentences that are fairly elementary and important--basic communications. A complete list of the sentences in one of my decks of cards is at the bottom of this lesson.

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Play the Game

Students sit in a semi-circle. One student volunteers to go to the front, and glances at the top card in the pile. (Sometimes I manipulate the deck so that the most advanced students get the hardest sentences.) The student's job is to communicate the precise meaning of the sentence

as efficiently as possible without the use of spoken language. (Sometimes I say without making any sound, but usually I allow sounds as long as they are not words. The title of the game comes from the fact that I sometimes allow the students to speak "gibberish" as they gesture.) The student must imagine that he or she is a stranger in a new country and does not speak a word of the language.

Students raise their hands and try to guess the meaning of the sentence. I do not, of course, insist on exact words, but I am fairly picky about precise shades of meaning. (For example, if the card says, "I like your new haircut," I do not allow "Is that a new haircut?" but I do allow "Nice haircut!") Depending on the success of the class and the sophistication of the particular sentence, I may coach and hint--"you're close!" etc. After a minute or two if no one has guessed the student tells the class what his sentence was. If this happens I always ask the class for suggestions for how the student could have made the meaning clear.
I play the game until everyone has had a turn, or until time up.

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Discussion

I don't ordinarily set aside time at the end of class for discussion, but I am constantly alert for the opportunity for analysis, discussion and critical thinking **during** the game. If a student is successful only after a long time, or with a lot of elaborate pantomiming, I open up a discussion about what might have been a more efficient way to convey the meaning. When someone comes up with a gesture that is a cliche--like the "check mark" in the air for "check, please!"--I applaud its efficiency but then discuss the way that gestures become universal clichés. This game allows for lots of connections and thought.

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Sentences

Below are all the sentences from my deck of sentence cards (in no particular order):

I have a toothache.
I like your new haircut.
Where is the exit?
That is a very beautiful hat.
I've missed my bus.
Please don't shout.
Are you my mother?
Is this your hat?
Who's in charge here?
May I take your order?
My feet hurt.
I can't find my shoes.
Does the train stop here?
Stop, in the name of the law.
I'm thirsty.
It looks like rain.
What a beautiful day!
We're going to be late.
This food is spoiled.

Get off my lawn!
My head hurts.
Where is the telephone?
Do you have a pen?
Leave me alone!
I'm cold.
I'm hungry.
My leg is broken.
Have you seen my dog?
You mustn't smoke in here!

(Naturally you will come up with more of your own.)

Discussion / Rehearsal / Performance

The Discovery of Fire

I wrote this lesson to support the beginning chapter in my fifth-graders' Social Studies text. They do a world history survey that begins with the dawn of prehistoric culture. It is essentially a simple improvised scene activity, but the problem-solving aspect of any improvisation exercise is heightened because the students work to create a scene that answers a particular question. One could adapt this exercise to approach a different question.

Discussion

I begin the discussion with the question, "What were some of the most important technological or cultural innovations of the earliest humans?" Usually I hear Language, Agriculture, Fire, and several others. I tell the students that today we will be working on a project that deals with the discovery of fire. I ask, "What were some of the main uses to which early humans put fire?" (These include cooking, which made meat easier to digest and prevented some diseases; protection against predators; heat in cold climates, which allowed humans to migrate over a much larger percentage of the Earth's surface; frightening prey animals into traps; and light, which allowed the working day to be extended and may have led to the "leisure-time" creation of art and other cultural hallmarks.) "Which of these uses do you think occurred first to early Man?" (I have no idea what the "right" answer to this one is and I doubt anyone really knows. Generally the class is split pretty evenly among all the possibilities.) Finally I ask, "How do you think early humans first discovered that they could use fire?" We discuss this question briefly, and generally many plausible solutions are posed. Then it is time to move into the active part of the project.

Rehearsal

I divide the class into small groups--four or five in a group. Each group must come up with a solution the the question, "How did early humans first discover that they could harness and use fire?" They must then prepare a short skit or play which dramatizes that discovery. (In order to keep the sketches physical I usually add the rule that students may not speak--or may not speak in a real language--grunts or gibberish is allowed. This forces them to use their physical skills and expressiveness to convey the plot of their scenes.) The groups, working independently, are given five or ten minutes to "rehearse" their scenes. I move from group to

group, side-coaching as necessary. I try to keep them focused on the problem, and I work to help them cooperate. I try to head off potential personality clashes--most of which involve one or more people who insist on being "the leader." I remind my students that working in a group is an important skill, and not so easy. Sometimes the best thing you can do is to let someone else lead for a while. This is also a leadership skill. I continue the rehearsal process (and pray that an administrator does not walk by--four or five small groups all brainstorming scenes at once can look a lot like chaos) until each group has rehearsed a more-or-less "finished" scene at least once.

Performance

Each group, in turn, "performs" their scene, with the rest of the class functioning as audience. We discuss each scene. What worked? What didn't? Did they find a plausible answer to the question? Did they convey their answer clearly? (In all of my lessons with older students I spend time working on critique skills.) If it seems warranted, I have the group perform all or part of a scene again, in response to the feedback of the class.

In teaching this lesson, great care must be taken to head the students off deliberately silly or humorous solutions. There is nothing wrong with humor in Drama class, but in order for this project to be as effective as it can be, the students must seriously examine the central question. The solution they choose to dramas should be chosen because the consensus is that it is the most likely solution because it will be the funniest one to act out. (Which is not to say that the acting out cannot be funny.)

Discussion / Rehearsal / Performance

Rituals

I wrote this lesson to support a Fifth-grade Social Studies unit on early man. But I now use it at various other times during their world history survey as well. It is based on an activity I learned from Sharon Grady at the University of Texas.

Discussion

We begin by discussing the concept of ritual. What is it? What is it for? How do ritual and magic inter-relate? Can we list some things that early humans might have feared, and that they might have created rituals to ward off? Can we list some things that early humans might have needed or desired, and that they might have created rituals to attract? Why was the Shaman or magic person so often a figure of great respect in early tribal cultures? What are some rituals we use today? Using these and other questions I coach my students to consider the way ritual functions in their own lives and the way it might have functioned in the lives of ancient man. Today's rituals (in most familiar religions and cultures) tend to be somewhat nebulous in purpose--becoming a man, or becoming a Christian, for example, are not really cut-and-dried events. But some rituals have very specific purposes. A Native American rain dance, for example, was intended to cause the specific result of rain. Early people may have had rituals intended to ward off evil spirits or to placate the dead, but they probably also had rituals intended to achieve quite specific physical goals--success in a particular hunt or battle, for example.

Rehearsal

In this project each student works independently. After the discussion, each student comes up with his or her own original ritual. This may be a ritual that applies to the life of early humans, or one that applies to the life of a contemporary student. It may be intended to cause a specific event--success in the buffalo hunt; an "A" on the math test--or to achieve a more nebulous goal such as "becoming a man." However, **there must be a clear, easily expressed purpose** for the ritual. Each student rehearses his or her ritual until it is clear and consistent.

Performance

With the rest of the class serving as audience, each person in turn "performs" his or her ritual. The class must try to figure out what the specific purpose of the ritual is. In my classroom this means they raise their hand and I--not the person performing--call on people one at a time to guess. Probably in some groups, especially older ones, this would not be necessary. I usually only take four or five guesses. If it takes more than that, the chances are that no one will ever come up with the answer except by chance--a wild guess. In that case I have the performer explain the ritual. If someone gets the answer, I coach them to explain *how* they knew. If no one guesses, we discuss what was unclear. I am careful, however, to stress that not all rituals bear their intended functions clearly. When everyone has had a chance to "perform," the lesson is over. (Often it takes me more than one class period to finish.)

Part One / Part Two

Three Words

This game teaches improvisation, pantomime, and clear communication. It also works as an introduction to the skill of giving constructive criticism. Plus it's fun.

I invented this game on the spur of the moment, after I was prevented by circumstances from teaching the lesson I had planned for my seventh-graders. It worked so well that it is now part of my regular lesson sequence. It comes in two parts, and the first part would work perfectly well without the second.

Part One

Break the class into groups of two or three.

Each group is given the same three words. (I use "why," "sorry" and "oh." Any three words would work.)

Each group, working independently, comes up with two different short scenes, in each of which the only spoken words are the three given. The scenes can include other pantomimed communication-implying that other words are spoken, but the only audible words are those three. These are very short scenes. The two scenes should use the three words in different ways.

Here are three scenes I've seen in my class--just for example:

A man walked down the street, until he bumped into another man. "Oh, sorry," he said. The second man beat up the first man, who then looked up to heaven and cried, "Why?"

A boy was painting graffiti on a wall. A girl (It was really a boy, but he made it clear) bumped into him, saying, "Sorry." The boy looked the beautiful girl up and down and said, "Why?"--implying that he was glad she bumped into him and she needn't apologize. She understood his meaning, and said suggestively, "Oh."

One man borrowed another's watch, then accidentally dropped it. "Sorry," he said. The other man, who hadn't seen the watch drop, said, "Why?" Then when his broken watch was shown to him, he said, "Oh."

After the groups have planned their scenes, they share them with the group.

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Part Two

The purpose of this part of the exercise it to give each group completely objective feedback as to how well they have communicated their scene.

Each group selects one of another group's scenes.

Each group, working independently, practices enacting their new scene, but this time they are allowed to speak as much as necessary, rather than pantomiming.

When the groups have finished rehearsing, they share their borrowed scenes.

Each group is enabled to see exactly how much of their scene was understood.

Usually I get a lot of, "No, stupid, that's not what it was about!" but I coach the students to understand that if their scene was not understood, the responsibility lies with the performers, not the audience. I use this as an introduction to talking about feedback, and the importance of communication in the theatre.

If there is time, I have the students re-create their original scenes, trying to clarify where they have learned that the scenes are not clear.

I think you could use this second part to evaluate almost any pantomime exercise.

Be a Water Molecule--Three States of Matter / Why Do We Need Electricity? / Ring That Doorbell!

Three Lessons About Energy

I designed these three little lessons a long time ago to support a third-grade science curriculum (the particular textbook is now lost to us--or in other words I can't remember the name of it), but they could be used with any elementary students who are studying energy in science class.

Be a Water Molecule--Three States of Matter

This is basically a narrative pantomime activity in which students act the roles of water molecules as they move from a liquid to a solid state, back to a liquid and then to a gaseous state. However, I do not tell the students at the beginning that they are water molecules, or that we are doing a lesson about states of matter. I do tell them the game will have something to do with science, but I save the specifics for after the activity.

Liquid State

I define a specific playing space on the floor, roughly circular, by arranging desks or chairs, or using an area rug. The space must be considerably bigger than the group can fill when closely spaced. Then I ask all of the students to come into the middle of the space, and get as close together as they can.

I tell the students to move around freely amongst one another, but to stay in the middle of the space. Depending on the group, I may have to be proactive in keeping them from pushing and shoving. I comment on the fluidity of the group, and the way that it seems to stay in the middle of the room and maintain its size, but change its shape continuously.

Solid State

After they are moving comfortably, I tell them that I am going to begin to take away energy from the group. As their energy decreases, they will begin to feel tired, and not move as much or as fast.

As the children continue to slow down, I "remove" even more energy. Finally I tell them to grab hold of one another and stop moving altogether. The group congeals into a solid mass, and I move around it, prodding it gently and commenting on how solid it is, and on the way it holds its shape.

Gaseous State

After the children are finished absorbing this part, I tell them I will now begin adding energy. They let go of each other and begin to move around more freely again. I comment on the fact that the group is once more changing its shape.

Then I tell them I am adding even more energy. As they start moving faster, I tell them that there is now so much energy that they can't stay in the center. I tell them they are free to move anywhere in the defined space, and that if they "bump into" anything (I stress that they should not really crash) they will bounce off in a new direction.

Presently the group is moving pretty freely all over the defined space. I comment on the fact that the group has expanded to fill all of the available space. I point out that once again its shape is constant, but now it is the "container" that defines the shape. I make a small change in the shape of the container and comment on the way that changes the shape of the group.

Discussion

After a minute or two of "high energy," I bring the energy back to the starting point, and we end the activity. We sit in a circle for a discussion. I ask the group if they can think of anything in their Science classes that is sort of like what we've just done. With very little prodding from me, they realize they have been enacting changing states of matter. This discovery generally delights them, and leads to a lively discussion of the ways the two processes--ours in the classroom and the physics process--are similar and different. Then we repeat the activity, very briefly.

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Why Do We Need Electricity?

This is a variation of "No, You Can't Take Me!" It teaches critical thinking skills while hammering home the idea of just how much we rely on electricity in modern life.

Each student chooses (but keeps secret) a particular electrical device. It could be anything from an electric hair dryer or toaster to an electric cable car or a photocopier.

Each student arranges her or his body to resemble the chosen device.

I survey the room and say, "My, look at all this junk. I don't need all this junk. I think I'll get rid of some of it." I then choose a particular student and say, "I think I'll take THIS thing away."

The student (we've discussed the rules of the game ahead of time) says, "No, you can't take me!" I reply, "Why not?" The student says, "Because without me. . ." (Here the student must come up with something bad that would happen if that particular device were not there. For example, a toaster might say, "Because without me you'd have to eat squishy soggy bread all the time." A photocopier might say, "Without me you'd get writer's cramp copying all those papers by hand." The idea here is that the students must come up with several real purposes for their objects. I often don't let them off the hook with only one answer. "Well, I like soggy squishy bread. I'm still taking you."

I repeat the process with each student.

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Preparation / Ringing the Bell / Discussion

Ring that Doorbell!

This is a fun little game in which students think a bit about how electricity works. It is based on a pretty simplistic concept of the physics involved, but you ought to be able to adjust it if it doesn't square with the way you teach the concepts.

Preparation

I begin this exercise with a short discussion about electricity and how it travels through wires. Then we choose one student to be the "Doorbell." (We audition the best "ringer.") Another student is chosen to be the "Avon Lady" (brush salesman, or anyone who could be expected to ring the doorbell, would work just as well) and another to be the "button." Everyone else is part of the "wire."

The "Doorbell" positions herself at one end of the room, and the "Button" positions himself at the other, near our imaginary door. The rest of the class joins hands and forms a "wire" leading from the "Button" to the "Doorbell."

Ringing the Bell

The "Avon Lady" walks up to the "door" and pushes the "Button." (She presses on his head.)

The "Button" squeezes the hand of the next child in the circuit, who in turn squeezes the next, etc., until at last someone squeezes the hand of the "Doorbell," who calls out, "Ding Dong!"

We do this several times, in different ways. We try to see how fast we can make it work, and we discuss the fact that real electricity would go much faster than we can, but that it does take time, even if it doesn't seem like it. We try it with our eyes closed, and we experiment to see what will happen if the wire is broken.

Discussion

Afterwards, we discuss how this is and is not like real electricity. (The textbook I was using when I wrote this lesson didn't get into positive and negative, and this game ignores the fact that we really should have a second wire going back to the button and probably a power source as well. But with a group sophisticated enough to need these, you could easily add them, or perhaps even better, *don't* add them and see if their absence comes up in the discussion.)

How to Play / Variations

I Am Walking--Instant Version

I learned the original version of this game from a colleague on the internet, and that version works great. This version, which is my own creation, while very similar in structure, teaches a very different set of skills. This version is sort of a cross between the original form of "I am Walking," and "The Martha Game." It works great for building ensemble, and especially for developing the kind of unselfish ensemble awareness young actors find so difficult to learn.

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How to Play

Before play, prepare a set of cards, each containing the second half of a sentence. Below are a few examples, but you will think of more.

". . . through a blinding snowstorm, looking for a lost child."

". . . across the Great Plains on the way to Oregon."

". . . to school on a cool late fall morning."

". . . down a dark alley, looking for an escaped prisoner."

". . . through the Amazon rainforest, in search of rare species of animals."

". . . to the platform to receive a gold medal."

". . . down an empty highway, running away from home."

". . . along the Boardwalk near the beach on a summer evening."

". . . across the deck of a sailing ship during a storm."

(The idea is that the first half or each and every sentence is "I am walkingŠ")

Divide the class into groups of three or more. The groups will "perform" one at a time.

The first group enters the performance space. A representative draws a card from the pile, and they share it around so everyone can see it, but there is NO DISCUSSION.

On the instructor's cue, the group must create an instant scene (using pantomime, and, if the instructor chooses, sounds, props, etc., but no words) that will convey the COMPLETE sense of their sentence. This can be done, obviously, in lots of different ways. One person might become the person who is "walking," while others become the environment, or "supporting" characters. The challenge comes in the fact that the group is not allowed to discuss or plan. If each individual in the group decides that he would be the best person to be the "lost child," for example, the group will almost certainly fail to communicate the snowstorm. Each member of the group must evaluate what the rest of the group is doing, and respond by contributing, not in the way that makes himself look best, or in the way that is most "fun," but in the way that best reinforces the effective communication of the group. The most effective groups will therefore be the ones in which everyone is able to sublimate their own individual stardom to the stardom of the group.

Once the group has performed, others in the class try to guess the sentence. The group who performed should try not to react positively or negatively to the guesses until everyone has guessed. In this way, no one changes or suppresses their guess once they know it is "wrong." This is important, because the "guesses" are the best kind of descriptive feedback on the effectiveness of the performance. I often use this as a jumping-off point for discussing the idea of communication, and of responsibility for the messages one sends, whether intentional or not. If the group intended to convey the sentence "I am walking on the deck of a sailing ship," but most of the class guesses "I am walking on top of a locomotive train, chasing a train robber," it is not because most of the class is "wrong" or "stupid." It is, in fact, because what

the group actually conveyed, intentions notwithstanding, was this second idea. By knowing what the audience saw, the group can judge how effectively they have communicated.

Obviously, this process is repeated until all groups have had a turn to perform.

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Variations

The original game I based this one on works the same way, except that the group is given time to discuss, plan, and rehearse their sentence before the "performances." This works very well, too, but it emphasizes different skills. Obviously it doesn't teach improvisation or thinking-on-your-feet as well as my version, and it makes it easier for some group members to sit back and let one or two "leader types" do all the work. However, it results in much more polished scenes, and provides excellent training in directing and pantomime. And you can make it still more effective by having the groups go "back to the drawing board" after the guessing sessions, and revise according to what they have learned from their classmates about which parts worked and which didn't. I use both versions of this game regularly.

Freeze and Justify / The Martha Game / What Are You Doing? / Everyone Who. . . / Pinocchio / Murder Mystery / Hitchhiker / Look Up (Dude!) / The Shakes / Mr. Hit / Whole Zoo Duck Duck Goose

Improvs and Warmups

This is a small collection of improvisation games and warmup games that can be used to sharpen up your cast if you're a director, or to add energy and originality to your students' acting if you are an acting teacher. All can be done with no materials in any reasonably sized space. As well as being great practice in themselves, they are great for refocusing a group that has become scattered, or for waking up one that has become jaded.

None of these games are my own inventions, although I've made some modifications on some of them. I've written very few improvisation or warmup games for actors, largely because a.) There are already lots of good ones out there, including the ones below, and b.) In my current job I mostly work in creative drama, not theatre, so I don't really use formal acting games much. When I started this site I didn't intend to include any lessons unless I'd written them myself or received them from someone who had sent them in specifically. But I get lots of e-mail from folks requesting improvisation games and warmups for actors, so I've tried to collect together all the ones I could think of. I use all of these games either in my classes or in my rehearsal process. In most cases I don't know who invented these games, nor have I made any particular effort to find out. If you think you are the inventor of one of these games, and you don't want it on my site, let me know. (Although I don't know why anyone would mind.)

I will be adding games as they occur to me or as I learn new ones. Check back periodically.

Also check out **Edwena's Games,** a page of improv and concentration games sent to me by a friend.

Freeze and Justify

The Granddaddy of 'em all. Just about everyone who has ever had an acting class knows this one, so I'll be brief.

The group sits or stands around the acting space.

Two people enter the space and begin to improvise a scene, with dialogue and as much physical action as possible.

At any moment, anyone else in the group may shout, "FREEZE!"

The actors freeze instantly and exactly.

The person who stopped the scene taps one of the actors on the shoulder. The actor sits down and the new person takes his or her position exactly.

The new person must now initiate a new and DIFFERENT scene. The scene must flow naturally from the positions of the two bodies, and it is the new person's responsibility to communicate to his or her partner and to the audience what the new scene is about.

At any moment another person may shout, "FREEZE!" and it begins again.

Pointers

With some groups it is necessary to make a rule that no one may freeze a scene until the situation has been clearly established and both actors have contributed.

With groups of kids I sometimes have them take turns saying, "Freeze!" In other words, as a scene goes on, only one person is allowed to freeze it. Then when he does, the next person is allowed to freeze it, and so on.

If you have a reticent student, you can shout "Freeze!" for him and then coach him as necessary.

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The Martha Game

I have no idea who Martha is or how this game got its name. Works best with a group of 8 - 12. With a larger group, divide them into two teams.

Group stands outside a designated performance space.

One person runs into the space, forms her body into a statue and announces what she is, as in "I'm a tree."

Instantly the next person runs on and forms something else in the same picture. "I'm a bench under the tree."

The next person further adds to the picture. "I'm a bum on the bench."

"I'm a dog peeing on the tree."

"I'm the newspaper the bum is sleeping under."

Etc., until the whole group is part of the picture.

Start again. And again. Etc.

Coach this to go very, very fast. There is no time to think--just go!

If there are two teams, they alternate.

Pointers

Fast, Fast, Fast!

Make sure a different person starts each picture.

Variations

After a while, you might say, "Okay. . .on a count of three this becomes a moving picture!"

Or even, "A moving, talking picture!"

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What Are You Doing?

Lots of zany fun.

Group gets in a line at the edge of the playing space. The first person enters the space and begins to pantomime a simple activity--for example, brushing his teeth.

The second person runs on and says, "What are you doing?"

The first person may answer anything EXCEPT what he is actually doing. In our example he might say, "I'm washing the car."

The moment the second person hears the answer, she must begin to pantomime the mentioned activity.

The first person goes to the end of the line and the third person runs on and says, "What are you doing?"

Etc.

Pointers

The person acting MUST NOT STOP until he or she has answered the question. Side coach to make sure.

The new person MUST START IMMEDIATELY when the answer is heard.

The answer MUST NOT be what the person is doing, but, for convenience, it should also NOT be something that LOOKS LIKE what the person is actually doing.

Variations

After a while, add to the original formula, "I'm _____." It can become, "I'm _____ with a _____." Eventually it can become, "I'm _____ with a _____ while _____." (For example, "I'm painting the barn with a codfish while snorkeling." It doesn't have to make sense.) The second person must begin to act as soon as she hears even PART of the answer. (In the example, we should see her painting the barn even before she hears that she's using a codfish. When she hears about the snorkeling she'll have to adjust.) Side coach to make sure they get all three details into their pantomiming.

You can play this as a tournament if you want. Two people bounce the question back and forth until one of them "fouls" by repeating himself, stopping the action before answering the question, not starting the acting in time, or answering the truth. A new challenger steps in, and so on until all but one person have been eliminated.

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Everyone Who. . .

More of a warmup game than an improvisation game. A little like musical chairs.

Everyone sits in a circle. There should be one fewer chairs than people.

The person who is left in the middle ("IT") says something like, "Everyone wearing red." or, "Everyone who has a brother," or "Everyone who is left-handed." Any description that is likely to describe **some** and unlikely to describe **all** will do.

Everyone who fits the description must move to a different chair.

"IT" is also trying for a seat.

Usually a different person will be left standing, and become "IT."

In addition to being fast-paced and very physical (especially when played with highly competitive, creative adults), this game helps a cast to get to know each other, and it calls for strategy that depends in part on how well "IT" knows the others. Great fun.

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Pinocchio

This is a really great way to start a rehearsal on a physical high. It is a physical warmup/stretching exercise with dramatic content to keep it focused. It is named after the wooden puppet. (Sometimes at Christmas I do this with my young students and call it The Nutcracker. I suppose Pygmalion would work too.) It consists basically of a narrative pantomime of the wooden puppet SLOWLY coming to life. What follows is approximately what I say. (This one I did create.)

Right now you're made completely of wood. Your arms and legs are carved from a single piece of wood. You can't move any part of yourself at all.

Now the magic spell has begun. It begins at the top of your head. The spell moves down slowly until your head down to your eyebrows is flesh and blood. Try and move your eyebrows.

The spell keeps moving down. Now you can move your eyes! All your life you've been staring straight ahead, and now you can look to the sides.

The spell gets to your ears and your nose. See if you can wiggle them.

The spell gets to your mouth. You can smile. It feels strange at first, and probably looks pretty strange too, but you grow more comfortable with it. Try some other facial expressions as well.

Slowly you discover that you can turn your head. Careful! You can look up and down carefully as well. Look! You have feet! This is the first time you were ever sure.

The spell reaches your shoulders. But remember, your arms and hands are still attached to your torso, since you are carved from a single piece of wood, so you can move ONLY your shoulders. Try some circles. Do you feel a tingle up and down your spine? That's the magic working.

The spell reaches your chest. You can puff it out like a soldier.

Your elbows can move now, but still not your hands. As the spell goes lower, see if you can pull your left hand away from your body. Ooofff! You did it.

Bring your hand up to your face and study it. See if you can move the fingers. Wow! You've never seen anything so beautiful!

See if you can get your right hand free as well. Does it move too?

The spell has reached your waist. Carefully bend forward, to the side. See if you bend backwards. See if you can make a circle.

The spell reaches your hips, but your knees are still locked together and your feet are still attached to your pedestal.

The spell gets to your knees. See if they bend!

Reach down and see if you can pull your left foot free. Ooofff! Point the toe. Flex the foot. Make little circles.

Now see if you can get your right foot free.

You're all real now! See how you can move. Careful at first--these are your first steps! Let's find all the ways our new bodies move!

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Murder Mystery

This one's complicated, but it can be really fun for an advanced group. I don't do this with my elementary students, but when I get a chance to play it with the folks in the performing troupe to which I belong, I just love it. It's a little like a cross between the board game "Clue," the kids' game "Whisper Down the Lane," and the parlor game "Charades." Central to the game is the idea that there has been a murder, and the task is to discover **Who** was murdered, **Where** they were murdered, and **How** they were killed. (Think, "A noun is a person, place, or thing.") The order is important, as you will see.

The group divides into two teams. Team A leaves the room, and Team B brainstorms a person, place and thing. (For example, Shirley Temple, in Burger King, with a butter churn.)

The first person from Team A enters, and Team B tells her the three things.

The second person from Team A enters.

The first person must communicate all three items without speaking. The twist is that the second person can't speak either, so there is no way for the first person to be sure she has communicated successfully. The second person may indicate through sounds, humming or gestures that he does or does not understand--he may even try to "restate" an item in a different way to be sure he has it, but no language of any kind is permitted.

When the second person thinks he has all three items, the next person enters, and the message is passed on in the same way.

When the last person in Group A thinks she has figured out the three items, she announces her conclusion--which is almost never identical to the original information.

The teams switch roles and the process is repeated.

Pointers

It is a good idea to establish at least a little bit of "Charades Code" to start with. For example, holding up one, two, or three fingers can indicate which of the items--person, place or thing--is being performed at a given time. Usually the three items are enacted one at a time. It is not necessary to act out the actual crime. (In the example, you might hum "The Good Ship Lollipop" and mime curly hair for Shirley Temple, eat a pretend hamburger after indicating a crown for Burger King, and then mime churning butter. It is not necessary to mime clubbing poor Shirley with the churn--and in fact it will probably confuse the issue by making the "churn" look less like a churn.)

Music (hummed but not, of course, sung) can be extremely useful here. I once saw a person act "Tinkerbell" by three bars of the opening music from The Wonderful World of Disney and tapping an imaginary wand. The person receiving understood instantly. Commercial themes, television show themes, pop music--all are easily recognized and convey much.

If a group is good at the game, they will start deliberately choosing combinations of items that will be hard to guess, but at first a leader might want to veto items that are too obscure. (Of course, half the fun of the game is that people get off on the wrong track, and since half of the group is always "audience" they are able to watch as the train comes derailed.)

It is very difficult for players familiar with charades to understand that not only the "giver" but the "receiver" as well must not speak. Be sure to stress this. You cannot, as in charades, verbalize your guesses so as to help the actor know how he's doing.

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Hitchhiker

This game combines improvisation with careful observation, and so makes a great rehearsal tool for serious improv performers who need to be able to see and imitate easily. Plus it's lots of fun.

Set up four chairs to resemble the front and back seats of a car.

The first three people get in the car, leaving the rear passenger-side seat empty.

The three people in the car invent a scenario to explain their traveling together, and mime driving along, improvising a conversation, etc.

The next person in line enters the scene as a hitchhiker. The hitchhiker must have a fairly clearly defined character.

The people in the car must stop to pick up the hitchhiker, but they improvise how politely they do it, etc., based on their characters.

Once the hitchhiker is in the car and a four-way conversation begun, everyone in the car begins to pick up the hitchhiker's personality and mannerisms. (For instance, if the hitchhiker is paranoid, soon everyone is paranoid. If the hitchhiker is drunk, soon everyone is drunk. If the hitchhiker is excessively cheerful, soon everyone is, etc.)

Once everyone has fully taken on the new personality, the driver leaves the scene and everyone moves over one seat, so that the front passenger becomes the driver, the driver's-side rear passenger becomes the front passenger, etc.

Repeat with a new hitchhiker, who has a different personality. (Until they have picked up the new person, the three in the car continue to play the first hitchhiker's personality.)

Pointers

If you feel the game has gone on long enough, just enter the scene yourself as a hitchhiker who is blind, or a small child, or something else guaranteed to cause a fatal accident once the driver catches it.

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Look Up (Dude!)

I call this game "Dude!" but most people call it "Look Up" or some other less exciting name. It is an excellent focusing exercise, and is useful both for getting a cast to function as a unit and for evaluating how well an ensemble is working.

Stand in a circle. Everyone look at the floor.

When the leader calls out, "Look up!" everyone must look directly into the face of someone else in the circle.

Most people will find they are looking at someone who is not looking back at them, but a few people will probably find that they are staring directly into someone else's eyes.

When this happens, these two people are "out," and must exclaim to each other, "Dude!" as they leave the circle.

Continue in this fashion until only one (or, if there's an even number in the group, two) are left.

At first this won't take very long, but after a while a group will get to the point where they can go for a long time without anyone being knocked out. It takes a real psychic bond--essential also for real ensemble work.

Variations

If this is being used as a warmup and you don't want an elimination game (as I often don't) you can play so that any two who find themselves facing each other must shout, "Dude!" and change places as fast as possible.

Obviously the "Dude!" part is not required. I just think it makes it more fun.

Pointers

With young performers, watch carefully so that they don't "cheat." They may fall into a pattern, which will of course prevent anyone from going out, but it defeats the purpose of the game. Stress that patterns are not allowed, and enforce it. More mature actors should not need this push.

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The Shakes

I learned this game from a colleague. I don't know where he learned it. It's lots of zany fun.

Everyone stands in a circle. One person begins to develop "the shakes" in one particular, localized part of his body. (For instance, his foot might begin to shake violently.) After the shakes are fully developed, that person "throws" the affliction across the circle to another person. Eye contact is important here, so that it is clear who is being "thrown" to. The new person "catches" the shakes in the same body part. Gradually the shakes move to a different body part. (For instance, the tremor might travel up the leg until it eventually comes to rest in a hand.) Once the affliction is firmly established in its new location, the victim "throws" it to another person, etc. Try not to repeat any body part exactly. (It may be necessary, of course, to repeat "foot," but maybe the shakes themselves are different, or it locates in a particular toe or something the second time.) Continue to play until everyone is running out of ideas.

Pointers

It is okay, and in fact encouraged, to get creative. I once had a whole group in hysterics when I "shook" my brain.

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Mr. Hit

I learned this lesson from a colleague in an improv troupe. It is supposed to be a way of learning the names of a group, and it works, but it is also great (and exceedingly difficult) with a group whose names are already familiar to each other.

Stand in a circle. One person announces, "I am Mr. Hit!" Mr. Hit begins walking directly (but slowly, at first) towards another person in the circle, with his hands out in front of him like a zombie. If he touches (hits) the person, they are "out" and must leave the circle. The only way the intended victim can stop Mr. Hit is to call out the name of another person in the circle before any contact is made. No fair running away.

Once a name is called out, that person instantly becomes Mr. Hit and begins advancing on a victim. (He doesn't have to announce that he is Mr. Hit after the first time.) Again, the only way the victim can save himself is by calling out a name.

Continue play until all but two people have been eliminated. It gets harder and harder, because as people are "out" the fund of names grows smaller. You can't say the name of a person who is out--it must be someone who is still in the circle. It sounds easy, but it isn't. It is very difficult to think with Mr. Hit bearing down on you.

This is great, if frustrating, fun, and although, as I've said, I think it is great for any group, it is also hands down the most effective "name game" I know. Something about the sheer panic you feel when Mr. Hit is coming at you and you can't think of a name to say really makes those names stick in your head. Doesn't work with little kids.

Pointers

Gradually move faster, but never really fast. It's quite scary enough without that.

Some groups find that they have to change the name of the game to "Mr. Tap" to avoid injury. You know your group best. There's really no reason to do more than lightly touch the victim.

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Whole Zoo Duck Duck Goose

This is a wacky game I made up one day when it was too hot to stay indoors and we'd finished the days lesson. It's silly and fun.
Everyone sits in a big circle. One person is "it" and begins to walk around the circle, tapping each person on the shoulder. But instead of saying "duck" each time, he or she must name a different animal each time.
Just as in regular "Duck Duck Goose," when "it" says "goose" the person tapped must chase him or her around the circle. If "it" can run around and sit where the "goose" was sitting, there is a new "it." If the "goose" catches "it," then he or she must stay "it." All this is just as in regular "Duck Duck Goose." The difference is that both runners must run as whatever animal was mentioned just before "goose." (For example, if "it" had said, "cow, pig, dinosaur, owl, slug, goose," you'd see two slugs slowly chasing each other around the circle.
Anyone hesitating while naming animals is out. Also, anyone not being the correct animal is out.

Variations

Sometimes I just play regular "Duck Duck Goose," but with different animals instead of just ducks. It really is harder than the regular way because hearing all the different animals can make you miss the goose.

Pointers

Even though it is fun when the teacher plays along, I usually stay out of the game so I can act as a judge. This avoids disputes about how much hesitation is too much and whether people adequately become their animals. (It's not fair if "it" is caught because she is really being a slug and the "goose" isn't.)
Often I have the new person be "it" each time, whether the old "it" is caught or not. That way everyone gets to play. My students understand that the real point is the animal pretending.

You Will Need / Making the Masks / Using the Masks / Scenarios

Paper Masks

I use this exercise with my fourth-graders when they study Ancient Greece in Social Studies. Naturally we discuss Greek Theatre, and one of the most interesting characteristics of this form is the fact that the actors were masked. For this reason it seems natural to introduce mask work at this time, and to relate it to the Greeks. However, mask work can be used at any time in a drama curriculum, and can be just as easily tied to any of several other historical forms, including Commedia. The masks used in this lesson plan are designed to be simple to

make. (They can be made in the drama classroom, ordinarily in a single period and without the help of the visual art teacher.) However, if you have more time or an art teacher who wants to get involved, there is no reason you shouldn't make more solid or elaborate masks.

You Will Need

- Heavy card stock, 8.5x11, enough for sheet per student.
- Thin (around 1/4 inch) sewing elastic, enough for about 14 inches per student. (Often you can buy this by the yard on a large spool.)
- Scissors.
- Hole-punch.
- Crayons or markers.

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Making the Masks

- First, determine the distance between the eyes. The easiest way to do this is to close your eyes and very gently place two fingers (thumb and second finger seem to work best) on your eyes. Open your eyes and transfer the distance to the paper and mark they eyes with dots. The eyes should be about a third of the way down the paper, and centered.
- Once you have marked the location of the eyes, draw the eyes around your dots. Make them about as big as, or a little bigger than, your own eyes.
- Draw the shape of a head around the eyes. The head should be as big as the paper, especially at the sides. (Otherwise, among other things, the elastic will not be long enough.) Depending on the character you have in mind, you can make the head basically oval or a more fanciful shape. Remember, though, that it should use most of the paper, or your own face will show through.
- Once you have drawn the basic shape of your mask, you can decorate it any way you like with crayons or markers. Try to make your mask a definite character.
- If you have the time and the inclination, you may provide students with construction paper and glue so they can add three-dimensional details.
- Once the mask has been decorated, cut it out. Teacher may have to help cut out the eyes.
- Punch holes on the sides, around one inch below the eyes. Be sure the holes are far enough in not to just tear out.
- Carefully tie one end of a 14" piece of elastic to each hole. If the elastic is too loose, re-tie one side.
- Your mask is ready to wear.

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Using the Masks

(Making the masks usually takes a whole period, and I save working with them for the following class.)

- With my students (who are all boys, and consequently especially rowdy) I have learned not to let them all loose in their masks at once. Moreover, the exercises work better with a few students working in front of an audience. I try, in the course of a class period, to give everyone a chance to perform.
- Two or three students stand in the performance space wearing their masks. The audience and I discuss the characters we see, and I devise a simple scenario for them to act, based in part on the particular personalities presented. At the end of this lesson plan is a list of some of these scenarios.
- As the students perform, I point out salient features of their performances. I remind the performers to "present the mask"--to face the audience so that the mask and its expression are visible. Frequently I freeze the action so as to better discuss a particular point.
- The students soon learn that they rely heavily on their faces for expression. When this means of expression is removed, communication is at first very difficult. However, the students gradually begin to use their whole bodies for expression. (Of course this is the real purpose of the exercise, from an acting standpoint, and greatly improves the performance of young actors, most of whom tend to act "from the neck up.")
- What tends to be most fascinating for the audience is the way the performers' movements and body language seem to change the masks. We know objectively that the masks stay the same, but when the performer has found his body control, we really SEE his facial expressions change with his story. We discuss how this could be. (For some reason, this phenomenon is much clearer for young people than ideas like, "seeing the emotion in a person's back," and can be used to teach composition.)
- We discuss what is most and least clear about the scenarios, and what is most and leas compelling.
- Usually I have the performers repeat their scenarios after criticizing them. The audience discusses what has changed and how it has improved.

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Scenarios

(Ordinarily I have the students do these without sound. These are only a few suggestions.)

- A loud argument. (The audience should be able to tell who is winning at any moment, and who finally wins.)
- A teacher trying to teach a lesson to a well-behaved but hopelessly confused student. (For closure, you can have the student finally "get it.")
- A tourist is given conflicting directions to his destination by two locals. (The audience should be able to tell which local is right, and which one the tourist believes.)
- Two, three, or more people arrive one at a time in a crowded movie theatre, in which there are only two (or three or whatever) seats empty. (We should see each one look for a seat, locate one, and go to it. We should be able to tell how each feels about taking a seat next to a stranger, and how each feels about the next person sitting by them. For fun, I sometimes tell older students we should be able to tell what kind of movie it is.)
- Several strangers (or, alternatively, not strangers) watch a sporting event, not all rooting for the same team. (We should be able to tell who the "opposing" fans are, and which team is winning.)
- Someone purchases something from a sidewalk vendor. (We should be able to tell what is purchased, and who the purchaser is.)
- A homeowner buys a vacuum cleaner (or a set of encyclopedias, or whatever) from a salesperson, despite the fact that he or she doesn't need it at all. (We should see the persuasion happen, and, for closure, we should see the realization, after the salesperson has left.)
- Several people pass an accident on the street, with various reactions. (Or a beautiful garden, or an unusual store, or anything out of the ordinary.)
- One person makes a mess almost faster than the other can clean it up.
- Make up your own!

How to Play / Variations

Story Story

This game is based on a similar one called "Story Story Die" that one of my students brought in. It sounded like fun, but it struck me that it wasn't really a drama game, so I made some changes and accidentally invented a really fun new game. It is pretty simple, but the results are often anything but, and it can get as zany or as serious as you choose to let it.

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How to Play

Group sits in a semi-circle around the acting area. (Any space will do--it needn't be very big.) Establish an order of play, as in a board game, so everyone will know whose "turn" it is.

The first player takes her place in the acting area. The second player begins to tell a story. The first player must act out the story as fully as possible, in whatever seems the best way. This can involve playing more than one character, using props--whatever she thinks will work best and with whatever limits the leader may choose to impose.

When this has gone on for a minute or so, the leader rings a bell. (Actually, I usually just yell "ding!") The first person sits down. The second person enters the acting space. The third person continues the story exactly where the second person left off, and the second person must now act it out.

After a minute or so, another bell, and another rotation. Continue until the story concludes or seems to peter out, or until everyone has had several turns as storyteller and as actor.

The beauty of the order of play is that each person must be the "actor" immediately after being the "narrator." This tends to prevent people from deliberately inserting difficult or embarrassing details to trip up the actor, since they know they will soon be on the receiving end.

My Middle School students love this game, and frequently request it.

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Variations

You can put any sort of limits or guidelines on any part of the game. For example, I sometimes insist that the story "make sense" or that it be "serious." (Other times I let it get as silly as it wants to.) Sometimes I allow the use of a set store of props and costumes, while other times I require that everything be pantomimed. You can really go wherever you want with it.

With my playwriting students I play a version of this game in which they write instead of speaking. Each person begins a play, and when the bell rings (usually after three or four minutes) everyone passes her paper to the right, reads the new play and continues where it leaves off. After about three or four passes, I tell them to find a way to bring the play to a close. Then we share the results. Lots of fun, and it helps reinforce the idea that sometimes it is helpful and fun to write even if you are not "inspired."

Hangman Charades

Introduction

This is just for fun. During a recent production I often found myself unable to begin class on time--I was always talking with an actor or a parent volunteer or something--so my students were left to entertain themselves for five minutes or so at the beginning of class. For some reason they hit upon "Hangman." You know

how you play. One person thinks of a word or phrase and writes the right number of spaces, one for each letter, on the board. He also draws a stylized gallows. One by one, the other players guess letters. If the letter they suggest is in the word, the "leader" writes it in its appropriate place. If not, the letter is written under the gallows and one part--say, the head--of the hanged man is drawn. If the other players are able to guess the whole word or phrase before the whole man appears, they have won. If the man hangs, the leader wins. Well, anyway, my students usually made SOME effort to make the game appropriate for Drama class. They generally restricted themselves to the names of plays or movies, for example. But I thought the game could be made more dramatic. We set our minds to the task, and this is what we came up with.

Play the Game

Someone--first time around it should be the teacher--thinks of a word or phrase and writes the appropriate number of little spaces on the board, leaving extra space between words, just as in "Hangman"--or "Wheel of Fortune." The way we play, the leader also writes the category, as in "Charades"--Movie Title, Book Title, Song Title, Play Title, or whatever. There is no gallows, but there is a box for "wrong" letters. (I have fun making up silly names for this box, such as "Letter Rubishery."

In turn, the other players try guessing letters, but here's the catch: They don't just call out a letter. Instead, they must ACT OUT the letter. (For example, if the letter the player wishes to guess is "B," she might pretend to be a bear, or a basketball player, or even--clever!--a bee.) The other players, including the leader, call out letter guesses as in "Charades," and the guessing player can encourage them on the right track also as in "Charades." When the correct letter--that is, the letter the player wishes to guess--has been called out, the leader either enters it in its appropriate place or places in the phrase, or, if it does not occur in the phrase, enters it in the "rubbishery."

If the letter IS in the phrase, then the person who guessed and acted out the letter is given the opportunity to guess the phrase. (Naturally during the beginning they will probably not have any idea, but as more letters are entered, they may. Part of the fun comes from the fact that a player may KNOW the word, but be unable to guess it because it is not his turn.) Again, if the player wishes to guess, she must now act out the whole phrase. (For example, if the phrase turned out to be "A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court"--which is a pretty hard one, by the way--the player might act out Babe Ruth's famous home run, and then act out a king and knights.)

If the letter guessed is not in the word, nothing bad happens to the person who guessed it, except that she is not given a chance to guess the phrase, and the next player gets a turn to guess a letter. This means that eventually SOMEONE will guess the phrase, if only because there are no more letters left to guess except the

last one missing from the phrase. (In this way the game is more like "Wheel of Fortune" than "Hangman."

If you want to play the game for a long time, rather than just as a time filler, you can keep score. A player gets one point for correctly guessing a phrase. (There is an element of chance here, because one can only guess when it is one's turn.) Players can take turns being the leader, or the teacher can remain in this role. (I have found that when I hand over the leader role to students I generally have to disqualify myself from play, because for some reason I always seem to know the phrase almost before any letters have been guessed. I think I just instinctively know the kinds of things each student is likely to come up with.)

A rule: If you play the game more than once--that is, with more than one phrase--players are not allowed to act out any letter the same way twice. In other words, if on the first phrase someone guessed "F" by becoming a frog, the next person who wants to guess "F" must find a different way--say, pretending to be in a thick fog.

Tip: The more completely you can divorce the guessing of the charades--of the individual letters being acted out, or of the whole phrase being acted out--from the guessing of the phrase itself, the better the game will work. Try not to jump to conclusions. If you're pretty sure the player is acting out a frog, for the letter "F," don't call out "P!" for prince just because you think or know that there IS a "P" in the word. And when it comes to the acting out of the whole phrase the same thing goes.

Concept Charades

Introduction:

This is a pretty complicated game. I created it with my advanced middle school group, who did well with it, but it worked less well with my less advanced students, even those who were older. Central to the game is the idea of "concept" or "category." These are large over-arching ideas such as "Love" or "Fate," as well as disciplines like "Mathematics" or "Science" and spheres of life such as "Politics" or "Religion." I've included a list below, but you will think of others to add. It is very important that the participants understand the kinds of ideas that will make the list. (Indeed, sometimes when I play I read the whole list out before we start.)

This game works best with a group of no more than five or six. If there are more, you may want to adjust the rules so that not every player participates in each round. You could create a rotation.

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Preparation:

Before playing the game, make a set of index cards, each with a different concept or idea. (See list below.) Depending on the sophistication of the participants, you may want to read out these cards before beginning, but if you do, be sure to shuffle them afterwards.

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Play the Game:

Players take turns, and it is important that everyone remembers where she or he appears in the order.

First player takes a card, looks at it, and returns it to the bottom of the pile.

First player must now act out, without words (you can decide whether to allow sound effects) the concept or idea on the card. Player should choose one basic approach or idea to pantomime, rather than trying to approach the problem from as many different ways as possible. (For example, if the card said, "Politics," the person might pretend to be giving a campaign speech. Alternatively, she might pretend to be using a voting booth, or to be watching political ads on television. But she would NOT do all three of these things. She would choose one approach.)

There is no guessing out loud at this point!

Once the first player feels she has finished, the second person (who has NOT seen the card) must try to act out the SAME CONCEPT, but in a different way. (To go back to the same example, if the first player had acted out giving a campaign speech, the second person might say to himself, "Aha! The word is 'Politics!'" and act out voting in a voting booth.)

Of course, the second person may not have successfully guessed the word, but that's part of the fun. It gets to be a little like the child's game, "Telephone," in which a message is transferred from person to person, deteriorating and changing as it goes.

As you have no doubt by this time guessed, when the second player is done, the third player must act out the concept in yet another way, and so on until everyone has acted. Then the word is revealed and everyone enjoys dissecting their mistakes and critiquing each others' acting and ingenuity.

Obviously, while guessing the concept may grow easier with each player's turn, coming up with something to act out becomes more and more difficult. Therefore, when a second round is played, the SECOND player begins, and so on, so that everyone has a chance to be first, and everyone has to deal with the dregs.

(Actually, it is the tail end of the round that I find the most fun. Trying to come up with a new way of enacting the concept after all of the obvious ideas have been taken really stirs up the creativity. One student in my class enacted "Politics" by sitting at a table holding imaginary ballots up to the light and looking for "dimpled chads.")

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Concepts:

Here are some, You'll think of others.

Love
Hate
War
Peace
Life
Death
Fate
Science
Mathematics
History
Politics
Romance
Cuisine
Civilization
Religion

Improvisation

Preparation / The Trip / Discussion / Time Travel Variation

Around the World in Thirty Minutes

This lesson was written to support a second-grade unit on the countries and continents of the world. I think it could be easily adapted to the study of the provinces or states of a country. I am also including a variation-appropriate for older kids-that addresses history over time. The lesson uses pantomime skills, research skills, and information sharing, as well as knowledge of the subject matter.

This is a basic teacher-in-role exercise. I have written this plan in the form of a narrative-a description of the class-rather than giving you step-by-step instructions, because it makes better sense. Every teacher has her or his own style-you can use whatever of mine works for you. (A note about pronouns: since I teach in a boys' school, all of my students are male, but obviously the lesson would work just as well in a coed or all-girl group.)

Preparation

I told my students the name of the lesson--"Around the World in Thirty Minutes." I explained that we would shortly be enacting a whirlwind tour of the world. I asked each student to choose his favorite country or continent in the world. I told them that they would be pretending to be someone or something in that country. I, and a friend, would be making the

tour of the world, and in each country we visited, the students in that country would pretend to be animals, people, or things that a visitor in that country would be likely to see.

Many of the boys chose countries about which they knew little. Some chose countries from which their ancestors emigrated. Some chose places that just sounded exciting. But the long and short of it was that most of them didn't know what a tourist would be likely to find in the country of their choice. That was exactly what I had hoped would happen. We had a class discussion about the problem. Each boy in turn told the group what country or continent he had chosen, and I asked if anyone knew what kinds of things might be found there. In many cases, the boy's classmates had great suggestions. But some of the boys had chosen countries nobody knew much about. So I brought out some reference books. (I have an excellent children's atlas, which includes maps with pictures of animals, landmarks, industries, etc that the boys loved looking at.) The group researched the countries enthusiastically, and after about ten or fifteen minutes, every boy had decided what or who he was going to pretend to be.

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The Trip

I arranged the boys around the classroom. Some countries were represented by more than one boy, but that was fine. Each country or continent had its own place in the room. I explained that it would be impossible to travel to all the countries in thirty minutes, if it were not for my Supersonic Transport. (I used a wheeled swivel chair.) I brought out a Muppet-style puppet which I use in other lessons, and which the boys love. I explained that "Oliver" and I would be making the trip together. (Obviously one could do this lesson without the puppet.)

I sat in my chair and wheeled myself and Oliver to the first country. The puppet and I Ooohed and Aaahed at the sights we saw there. Usually I was able to correctly guess what the boys were pretending to be, but when I wasn't, they were not offended, and were quick to give me hints until I did. After I had finished in the first country, I asked the boys which other country was the closest. They had to think about this one, but we always came to a decision. In this way they learned and used their knowledge of geography. Sometimes I had to help--as when I pointed out that it was quicker to go over the Arctic to get from Canada to Siberia--but that was more learning. Once we decided which country was closest, I moved on to that country and continued in this way until I had visited every boy. Then I "came home."

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Discussion

After the trip was over, we sat in a circle, and I asked each boy to mention one thing he learned that he hadn't known before. Every one was able to come up with something.

This lesson worked extremely well. The boys frequently ask me if we can do it again. I think that it could work with students much older-with a corresponding increase in the sophistication of the information we learned about the countries, and possibly also the level of interaction between the traveler and the natives of each country.

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Time-Travel Variation

I haven't tried this--mostly because my students are not ready--but I think it would work: Instead of travelling from country to country, we would travel from time period to time period. The people in each period could interact with the travelers--who could be students, rather than the instructor--as much or as little as time and the sophistication of the students allowed. (After I try this, I'll let you know how it worked.)

Discussion / Activity

Oregon Trail Propaganda

I created this simple project for my Fourth graders, who were studying the Oregon Trail. They seemed fascinated by the propaganda--posters and rumors--put about by the U.S. government to entice people to travel West. The fantastic claims--pigs running round ready-cooked, with knives and forks stuck in their backs, headless, already roasted chickens that just land on your table--really captured their fancy. I decided to combine this interest with some serious considerations about media literacy in today's world.

Discussion

* What is propaganda?

* What are some examples of Oregon Trail propaganda?

* Why do you think the government put out so much propaganda?

* Do you think propaganda is a lie?

This question sparked some very interesting debate. We talked about the concept of exaggeration, and decided that there was a line, past which an exaggerated statement became so obviously an exaggeration that it was no longer really a lie. (No one was really expected to believe the streets were paved with gold--it was a metaphor.) But we also decided that the propagandists had often ulterior motives and were not necessarily honest or honorable.
* Most propaganda took the form of posters, newspaper stories, and word of mouth. Why didn't they use television?

* If television had been invented, do you think the government would have used it to help get folks to move to Oregon? Why?

We had a lively and educational discussion about the merits and pitfalls of television advertising, about people who believe everything they see on television, and about why that's not a very good idea. We agreed that the propagandists would almost certainly have used television had it been available to them, and some of the students pointed out examples of television propaganda today.
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Activity

I divided the class into small groups (or three or four). Each group, working independently, came up with a short "television commercial" about the desirability of traveling to Oregon.

They were allowed to use objects in the room for props and set, etc. After a suitable time for rehearsal, each group in turn performed their "commercial" for the class, and we discussed them. What worked? What didn't? Would this commercial make you want to go to Oregon?

This activity was a lot of fun, and my students really seemed to take it seriously, and to learn from it.

News Plays

Discussion / Performance

I invented this lesson to help my Fourth-Grade students express what they were learning about the Oregon Trail. However, you could use this exercise to explore any historical period, or even to explore current events. In addition to being a fun way to learn, it can be a useful tool for assessment, because it helps the teacher see which concepts seem most important or most interesting to the students.

Note: Like many of my lesson plans, particularly those for older students, this lesson contains a great deal of discussion and analysis with the students. This is partly due to my firm conviction that this kind of critical analysis is good for kids, and partly due to personal style. If you find that your students won't tolerate so much talk, and just want to "get on with it," I see no particular reason not to do so. The discussion and analysis is interesting, and, I think, educational, but it's not as if the lesson won't work without it.

Discussion

I begin with a discussion of Television News. Why do networks run News? Why do people watch it? What can you tell about a community by watching the Local News? We discuss the ways that news editors, even when telling the absolute, unvarnished truth, can shape the opinions and perceptions of their audiences. We lament (well, most of us lament) the fact that so many people get all of their news from television. (This can be a whole class discussion in itself if you let it--which I will, if there's time.)

Then we think about what ways people might have had to get news in a similar format before television. Of course there were newspapers, but we usually conclude that there were probably almost as many people "back then" as now who don't read newspapers. I tell the students about the old "Newsreels" that used to accompany films before TV killed the Cinema. In a sense, these were like Television News in that they were both visual and aural, and in that, like the stories we see on the TV News, the stories shown on newsreels were chosen out of a much bigger pool or "news" as the most interesting or important--so that, again, someone else's opinion as to what is important takes precedence over the audience's own judgment.

And what about before the Cinema? Well, believe it or not, sometimes people would actually act out the news live. In the early part of the century in cities like New York, current events were acted on stage in news theatres. In Medieval times, traveling minstrels would enact the news in movement and music. In many times and cultures, people made plays to tell the news. We discuss the way truth can be shaped and bent by such a practice. How is a person acting out the news--which is visual and aural--different from television coverage of the same

event--which is also visual and aural? We talk about the difference in perception between seeing an interview with the actual person involved and seeing an actor portray that person. Even if every word of every utterance is repeated verbatim, an actor can always color a portrayal with his or her own opinion. So sometimes watching a "News Play" can tell you as much about the performers as about the news.

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Performance

Once we have talked about the idea of a "News Play," it only remains to make one. I divide the class into small groups--4 or 5 seems to work best--and each group retires to a different corner of the room. The groups are given time--use your judgment on how much time, but with 4th-Graders, ten or fifteen minutes is about their limit, unless someone gets inspired--to choose a news story and rehearse their performance of it. The news story should be about whatever historical period or culture the class is studying. (You could also have them do current events.) Generally the groups choose a narrator or "anchor," but I don't tell them they must, and indeed I try to give them as few structural limits as possible. Unless a group asks for help, or is clearly not able to work together effectively, I leave them alone and let them rehearse in private.

When everyone is more-or-less ready, the group comes together as audience and each group in turn performs their "News Play." After each performance we discuss the success or failure of the group, and also talk about what we know about the performers' personal opinions or prejudices from the way the story was presented.

Lots of fun. And it can be used again and again as students study different subjects.

Concentration Games / Situation and Acting Games

Edwena's Games

This is a collection of concentration and improvisation games, best suited for Middle School and older students. These games were sent to me by Edwena Jacobs, a fellow drama teacher and cybercolleague. This is exactly the sort of thing I started this website for. Drama teachers are few and far between, and we can't have the kind of collegial exchange of ideas face-to-face that, say, History teachers can. So I am thrilled to be taking part in a world-wide exchange of ideas over the Internet. Edwena lives thousands of miles from me, and we have never met, but we have been learning from each other, exchanging ideas, and improving both our crafts. It has always been my intent to eventually include lesson plans and games submitted by other drama teachers. This page is the first of what I hope will be many. I have tried most of these games, and they are great. Thanks, Edwena!

Concentration Games

Telling It

- The class divides into pairs.

- Each has to think of a story to tell the other--for example, the plot of a recent TV play or film they have seen.
- At a signal from the teacher, they both start telling each other the story at the same time.
- They must look at each other in the eye without looking away, and they must keep talking without a break and without laughing.
- If either breaks down, the other has "won."

Telling the Group

- One person tells the rest of the group a story, or gives them a talk on a set subject.
- The others interrupt him by asking totally unrelated questions.
- The speaker must answer the questions and then continue with the story or talk without hesitation, and from exactly the point where he left off.

Truth and Lies

- The class divides into pairs. In each pair, one is the questioner and the other the answerer.
- The questioner asks questions in rapid succession.
- The answerer must answer the questions, alternating between true answers and lies. He must not hesitate or laugh, and he must keep strictly to the alternation.
- If the answerer hesitates or laughs, or if he fails to alternate between truth and lies, he is "out" and the partners reverse roles.

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Situation and Acting Games

Making Enquiries

- This rather complicated game is particularly useful with a new class who do not know each other very well.
- The class divides into pairs and each pair decides who is 'A' and who is 'B'.
- To begin with, A has to find out as much as he can about B in 2 minutes.
- At the end of that time, the As stay where they are and the Bs change partners.
- The class are then told that B is a policeman who is suspicious of A and intends to question him.
- A has to pretend that he is the B he has just questioned. He has to remember all the details that he can from that conversation so that when the new B starts questioning him - about his name, address, and so on - he can answer with detailed information, in role as his former partner. (When he can't remember, he is at liberty to invent.)
- Repeat the game with new partners (and with As becoming Bs).

All Change - Conversations

- The class divides into pairs and decide on who is 'A' and who is 'B'.
- The teacher then gives the class a simple and straightforward topic for conversation, or a situation (e.g.: A is a local in the town and B is a stranger. B is asking the way to the station.)
- They converse for a minute or two and then the teacher interrupts with fresh instructions that alter the situation partially but not completely (e.g.: Now A is old and deaf; or, now B is a rich and famous person).
- Teacher continues to make changes, with increasing swiftness and strangeness, as the game progresses.

Join in

- The class sits in a circle and the teacher asks for a volunteer to start the game.
- The volunteer thinks of a mime--either a task or an activity--that involves a lot of people doing different things (e.g.: building a house; shopping at a supermarket).
- The volunteer begins the mime he has thought of.
- The teacher then indicates different members of the class who must join in, either assisting the first person or using the location he has chosen.
- The teacher's aim is to get as many people in the class involved as he can, and in as short as time as possible.

How to Play / Pointers

Job Interview

A colleague taught me this game. I don't know where he learned it. It's a lot of wacky fun for older (middle school and up) actors, and requires them to be both focused—so they don't break character—and creative—so they can think on their feet.

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How to Play

Three chairs are placed in the performance space. Three players sit in them. The one in the middle is the "boss," who turns and begins to "interview" one of the others for a job. The idea is that the two on the outside are rivals for one opening. The boss makes up the job, and the qualifications, and the "interviewee" improvises answers to the questions.

Meanwhile, the remaining candidate (who is now essentially behind the boss, who can't see him) tries to distract his rival (who CAN see him) any way possible. This can involve making faces, climbing on the chair, doing a little dance—anything that does not make a noise or otherwise attract the attention of the "boss." (This is a little like the "staring contests" Conan O'Brien used to have with his sidekick, in which, behind Conan's head where only Andy could see them, all sorts of surprising or disgusting things would happen to throw Andy off.)

The candidate being interviewed must try to keep a straight face. If she breaks, the boss can demand to know what's so funny. If the interviewee cannot answer convincingly (without ratting out her competitor) then the interview is over and that candidate is "fired"—she is "out." The remaining people move over one seat (so that the other "candidate" is now the "boss"), a new person takes the remaining seat, and the game continues with a new job and qualifications. However, if the interviewee CAN give a convincing answer on the spur of the moment when challenged, then the interview can continue, perhaps with the admonition, "well, try to stay focused." (For instance, someone being interviewed for a job in a medical office might say when asked to explain why she is laughing, "I'm sorry, but you mentioned that the job would require patience, and I thought you meant it as a pun for "patients"),

Another (and more frequent) way for someone to be "fired" is as follows. If in the course of the "interview the "distractor" makes a noise, or the boss catches a glimpse of him—or indeed every so often for no particular reason at all—the "boss" may suddenly turn and demand, "WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" The person is generally caught in an incriminating position, such as standing on one foot on the chair, or writhing on the floor. (I once saw a player caught in the act of pretending to "groom" the boss, and popping little bugs in his mouth as he extracted them.) As above, if the guilty candidate cannot give a convincing explanation for the position in which he is caught, or for a noise he made, he is "fired," and "out." But if he can explain himself ("I thought the light bulb was about to burn out, so I was going to change it for you." "Sorry—I sometimes have seizures.") then the play continues, with the "boss" now interviewing that person and the other one trying to distract him. It is up to the boss to decide whether an explanation passes muster.

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Pointers

There should be some kind of challenge at least every minute or two, so even if the "boss" does not actually detect any movement behind him, he should arrange to catch the "distractor" out every so often anyway. Similarly, no matter how noisy the "distractor" is, it is better not to challenge immediately. For the "audience"—which consists of all those not currently in play—the fun of the game is in the crazy antics of the "distractor" and the wacky job descriptions and qualifications invented by the boss and the interviewee, as much as in the creativity of the responses when someone is challenged. So it is best to let these things develop a bit before challenging. Most groups figure this out for themselves pretty quick.

With my Middle School students especially, I find it best to qualify the instructions a little. It is dangerous to say things like "Do whatever you can think of to distract the other person." I always add, "As long as it is appropriate for school (and you KNOW what I mean by that), as long as you use your common sense, and as long as you follow the general rules of the classroom."

Sometimes it is necessary for the leader to "cook" the results a little so that the same people don't end up in the game too long. (According to a strict interpretation of the rules, this can happen if the "boss" fires the person on the left, then the new "boss" fires the person on the right, so that the original "boss" is "boss" again, etc.) Usually I do this by just declaring that person a "retiring champion" and putting in someone new.

How to Play / Pointers / Variations

Circle of Characters

This is a complicated but really fun game I invented with my advanced 7th & 8th grade class. It works with older kids and adults as well, but I wouldn't try it with much younger. It probably also wouldn't work very well with groups of more than eight or ten, unless you split them up and had one group play while the other was "audience." What makes it difficult is that players must maintain a character in an improvisational setting while at the same time carefully observing others' characters.

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How to Play

Each person is given an index card (or any little slip of paper will do, as long as they are all pretty much the same) on which he or she writes the name of a famous person. (Alternatively, you could have them write the name of a literary figure, or the description of a made-up character--you can set any kind of limits or guidelines you like. I generally make them show me before passing each name--not because I think they'll write something "inappropriate," but because I think they'll name someone who won't be recognizable to the whole class. For instance, I have one student who seems to have spent all of his first ten years or so in front of the television, and is always naming obscure TV actors or MTV stars no one else knows.).

The leader collects the cards and redistributes them, so that no one receives his own. (Actually, to make the game work smoothly, it is necessary to do the distribution very carefully, but not to give away the method to the participants. I'll discuss that at the end.)

Each person reads the card given her and thinks about how to "become" that character.

The leader then names a scenario. For example: "A bunch of people are gathered together at a dinner party in honor of someone's birthday. They mingle for a while, and eventually all sit down to dine around this table here, which has precisely the right number of chairs." Or: The world is about to end, and these eight people are the only ones left alive. They have a spaceship which will carry them to another galaxy, but there is no guarantee that they will find a habitable planet there. They argue and go back and forth, but eventually decide to get in this rocket ship here, which has precisely the right number of seats, arranged in a circle, since it is a flying saucer." You can make up any scenario you want, but it must end with everyone sitting or standing in a circle. It works best if there is a prescribed physical place in the acting space for this circle, as in the examples above.

The object of the game is this: As the actors begin playing out the prescribed scenario improvisationally, each is also searching for the person who is playing the character he or she named. The idea is to end up sitting in a circle so that each person is sitting directly behind (or directly to the right of) the person who is doing that person's character. (This is why the cards must be distributed carefully.) The game is over once everyone is seated, and if the order is wrong at that point, then the team loses, so an actor who thinks someone else has made a mistake and is sitting in the wrong place must resist sitting herself until the problem has been resolved—but she must resist in character, and appropriately to the situation.

Once everyone is seated, everyone reveals their characters and it is clear whether the group has won or lost.

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Pointers

Distributing the cards: Clearly this must be done carefully, or you may end up with several small circles instead of one big one. I suppose you could create a scenario that would allow this, but as the circles might be as small as two people (what if Bob gets Betty's character and Betty gets Bob's?) it is probably easier just to cook the distribution so that you ensure one single circle. There are lots of ways to do this. Since I know everyone's handwriting, I can recognize whose card is whose, and I just make sure that whoever gets the first card, it is that person's card I hand out second, and whoever gets that card, I hand their card out third, etc. This works, but of course it won't work if I TELL the class I'm doing it, because then everyone will be able to figure out by watching me who gets their card--it's the person I come to right after them! Probably a better way would be to arrange the order ahead of time and make a list—something like "Bob get's Betty's, Betty gets Allen's, Allen gets Marigold's, Marigold gets Eunice's, Eunice gets Arvide's, Arvide gets Bob's." If you are working from such a list (and you should make a new one for each time you play the game) you can hand the cards out in random order and still be ensured of a circle. It doesn't really matter HOW you do it--the point is to make sure you don't get any closed loops inside the circle. I mention the above two methods of ensuring this for those who (like me) tend to be math-impaired.

Scenarios: Below are some suggested scenarios, in addition to the two above. You will think of others.

A group of people are at an amusement park, chatting while they wait for the carousel to stop. When it does, they each select an animal to ride and get on.

A group of people has just discovered a huge treasure chest filled with gold. They may quarrel over it. As it grows dark, they decide they must guard it against theft, and the only sure way is to sleep in a circle around the chest.

A group of people are on a jury together. They have just been sent into the jury room to deliberate. They discuss the case in a haphazard way until the foreman persuades them that they should all sit down at the table.

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Variations

As mentioned above, you can set any guidelines you like on the characters people may choose to write down. For example, in an English class you could have everyone write down a character from the current reading. In a History class you could have them choose historical figures you have been studying. An advanced acting class might be asked to write a single adjective or adverb--demented, loudly, frequently, etc.--which might generate some very interesting results, as well as pointing out how vague such words really are.

If you can trust your group not to be unnecessarily cruel, try this one: Have everyone write THEIR OWN NAME on their card. This way, you're looking for the person who is you! This can be extremely telling and fun for a group with the maturity to handle it!

Preparation / Playing the Game / Variations

The Lion King's Court

This lesson was written to accompany an Indian Folktale called The King's Choice, which my Kindergarten students had read, but it is really only peripherally connected to the story, and works perfectly well without it. (I assume the book is out of print, although of course it may be a familiar story in India.) I have since used it with first graders and preschoolers, who were studying Africa and Rainforests, respectively. Obviously it need not tie in with curriculum-that's just something I like to do when I can.

Preparation

I introduce the activity like this: "Everyone knows the Lion is King of the Jungle. But every good King needs a court. A King needs to have people around him who are his friends, whom he can trust and upon whom he can rely. These people are called courtiers. What qualities should courtiers possess?"

We discuss this question. Students usually come up with "strong," and "brave," and "helpful." With a little coaching they are usually able to add "kind," and "loyal," and "clever." After the group accepts each new adjective, I ask them to think about which animals exemplify each quality. (For example, elephants are strong and helpful, dogs are helpful and brave, cats are clever and brave, horses are loyal and helpful, etc.) We discuss the sort of animals who would make good courtiers until a fairly sizeable list has been generated.

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Playing the Game

Next, I tell my students that we will now act out the selection of the King's court. Each student chooses an animal to portray. (It need not necessarily be one that was mentioned earlier, although of course most will be.) The teacher, in role as the King, calls each "animal" forward. "You, animal. Come forward into the presence of the King." The animal moves forward. "What sort of animal are you?" The student announces what animal he or she is portraying. With older students I usually want them to use an appropriate animal voice. "Why should I have a (blank) in my court?"

The student then describes the qualities of her/his animal that make that animal good courtier material. The King responds, "Wonderful! You may join my court."

I usually have an area defined, around myself, for the "court," so that the students can physically enter my court.

Obviously everyone must be invited to join-even snakes.

I usually end this session by having a parade of the King's court, with each animal moving according to its way. Then the whole group (if the walls are sufficiently thick) "roars"-each according to species-to announce the presence of the greatest Royal court in the land.

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Variations

When my second-graders were studying the oceans, I did a version of this game called "The Sea King's Court." Each student became a sea animal. You could try it with older kids using real historical figures-from any era-and a mythical human King-or Queen.

Schreibwerkstatt

Period One / Period Two / Period Three / Period Four

Group Story Project

This project guides students in creating their own fairy-tale or story as a group. It takes four class periods to complete.

PERIOD ONE

Talking

We begin by talking about STORIES. What makes a good story? A good story has a PROBLEM. (Conflict)

What are some PROBLEMS in familiar stories?

The end of a story usually comes when the main character(s) solve the problem. How do the problems we've mentioned get solved?

New Solutions

Start with a story and a problem that are familiar to the group.

If necessary or desirable, add a few characters from other stories.

Have the class come up with alternate solutions to the problem in the story.

Do this as a verbal exercise with the whole class.

Small group stories

Break into small groups.

Each group takes the same (new) story/problem and comes up with an individual solution, which they act out.

Watch that each group does their own work rather than trying to eavesdrop on each other.

Talk

What is a character? What two main kinds of characters do you find in stories? (Protagonists and Antagonists-"Good Guys" and "Bad Guys.")

How do these two kinds of characters relate to the PROBLEM?

On board, come up with two lists-one of "Good Guys," and one of "Bad Guys."

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PERIOD TWO

Preparation

After the first day of the project, make up two sets of index cards-"Good Guy Cards," and "Bad Guy Cards." Put all of the characters generated in the last part of the lesson on these cards so that each card says either "Good Guy" of "Bad Guy" on the back, and has the name of one character on the front. You will use these cards in the next class.

Pair scenes

Warn students that not everyone will necessarily get a chance to be in front!

In front of class, two students at a time select cards-one from each stack-and act out a short scene between these two characters.

Whole class helps to determine what the PROBLEM will be, and also makes suggestions on how to construct the story.

Do this as many times as time allows.

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PERIOD THREE

Talk

Review last period's lesson. Can you remember any particular combinations of characters that were especially fun?

Have the class vote on one combination of "Good Guy/Bad Guy" they like best.

Stress that they are not voting for their favorite SCENE from last time, but only on the combination that seems to offer the most possibilities.

Write

Write the chosen combination at the top of the board as a title-"Superman vs. The Big Bad Wolf"

Brainstorm a PROBLEM for our story. (Keep stressing that it need not be the problem we saw last week.)

Write the PROBLEM on the board as a story synopsis. "The Big Bad Wolf kidnaps Lois Lane and locks her in a closet full of Kryptonite."

Begin adding details to the story by asking questions:
Do we need any other characters?
Where is our story set?
What is the very first thing that happens in the story?
How will Superman solve the problem? (Or will our story have an unhappy ending?)

What questions you ask will depend on the story that is developing. But by the end of this period, we should have a fairly detailed outline of the story.

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PERIOD FOUR

(This shouldn't take a whole period. It's really just the icing on the cake. Plan something fairly physical for the remainder of the period, to make up for the fairly sedentary last class.)

Preparation

After the last class, you should have carefully typed up the story, complete with a title page including the names of all of the members of the class, and made professional-looking copies for everyone in the class.

Story Party

Hand out the copies of the story to everyone.

Read the story in class, having students take turns reading.

There is an element of role-play here. We are authors celebrating the arrival of the first printing of our new book. Make it festive. THIS IS IMPORTANT! A lot of what makes this lesson work is the pride and ownership students take in their work and in the process of writing.

IMPORTANT NOTE:

I devised this lesson in part to generate a story that could then be made into a play, perhaps in the manner of my Group Playwriting Project. BUT

I think it works well on its own, and:

If you are going to go on and make a play, I strongly recommend putting the story away for at least a month and doing something very different for a while before coming back to it.

Step One--Analysis / Step Two--Improvising / Step Three--Dialogue / Stage Directions/Narrators

Group Playwriting Project

This plan assumes that the STORY of the play has been predetermined. The STORY can be a familiar or new folktale or fairy story (The Three Little Pigs) a simple true historical narrative with which students are conversant (the story of the Great Compromise), or a story taken from a picture or storybook. (Caution is advised when using books protected by copyright, however. While it is perfectly permissible to use such books for classroom exercises, PERFORMANCE of copyrighted material is a reserved right, and, contrary to popular belief, the legal definition of "performance" does not depend on whether admission is charged or profit is made. Any "public" exhibition of the story counts. In practice, as long as the audience is solely an INVITED one, no admission is charged and the performance is not advertised to the public, you are unlikely to have problems, particularly since performances of this type are exceedingly common in schools.) Sometimes I begin this project by leading the students to create their own original story, but that is another project dealt with elsewhere. This project is all about making a PLAY out of an existing story. It takes several weeks (I teach each class once a week.) to write the play, even before any "rehearsing" takes place, and I do not always follow the writing of a play with a performance, although this is often great fun. One thing I always do is to present the students at the end of the project (and sometimes several times during it) with a professional-looking script, properly formatted and typeset (using a computer, naturally), and bearing the names of all of the members of the class (NOT simply a legend like "Miss Clark's Class") on the first page in the author's space. (I think this is an important point. It gives all the students ownership in the work, and gives them a really impressive artifact to take home and display or save, and at the same time helps to educate them about proper formatting, the importance of editing, and the way a play works.) Inevitably a group will want to "put on" the play they have written, even if only in class, but I spend the bulk of my time on the writing because it is both more creative and more inclusive (since everyone can't play the lead) than the production of the play.

I use the blackboard (actually in my classroom it's a marker board) throughout this project, although I am trying to get my school to spring for the equipment that would allow me to use my laptop instead, projected onto a large screen. Either way works, but if you have the technology I think there are two advantages to using the computer-one for you and one for your students. For the students, the use of technology makes the project seem more important and more exciting. For the teacher, it saves time, particularly if you are teaching a number of different classes every day. Since I cannot just leave the material on the board from lesson to lesson, I must frantically type everything into my computer (of course writing it on paper would work too, but I type faster than I write) at the end of each class, to save it for next time. This is often a major pain because our school schedule does not include flex time in between periods, so I am generally faced with ushering one group in just as the last is leaving. Also, although I have no way to really test this theory, my students are always telling me (with appropriate sense of wonder) that I write "really, really fast" on the board. If it is true that I write measurably faster than most teachers, then I may have designed a lesson plan that works only for me, because I am constantly aware that the time it takes to write on the board is slowing me down. In any case, I think the project works perfectly well with a board, but if the technology is available to you, I heartily suggest you take advantage of it. In any case everything must eventually find its way into your computer if you are to print out the professional-looking script I like to end the project with.

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- **Step One-Analysis**

Having become familiar with the story, we start out by brainstorming several lists on the board:
Who are the CHARACTERS in the story? (Three Pigs, Wolf, Mother Pig)
What are the SETTINGS? (The woods.)
What are the EVENTS in the story. (The point here is to come up with a brief outline of the plot.)

The first two lists are easy, but the third needs some explanation. With first-graders, for example, you can't just ask, "What are the events in the story?" If you get anything at all, it will probably not be a narrative list of plot points. What I do is to start by saying, "What is the FIRST THING THAT HAPPENS in our story?"" And I write it down. (Mother Pig tells the Three Pigs they have to move out.) "Okay, good. Now, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?" At this point you will get a large variation of what I call "degrees of next." Some will say, "They don't want to go," (which I think is too specific-it's really part of the first event) while others will say, "They all build houses," (which I think is too general-it's really several events). I try to respect every response, while gently coaching the students to come up with responses of an appropriate order of magnitude. (There are an infinite number of "right" responses, naturally. One might be, "the first pig makes a house of straw.") I try not to have a specific idea of how the outline should go. In this example, for instance, it is up in the air whether the next event is the building of the second house or the destruction of the first. But a principle I hold is that just because there is no one "right" answer to a question does not mean that every answer is right. If we have agreed as a class that we're telling the story of The Three Little Pigs, I won't allow space aliens. (On the other hand, we could choose to do a story like that.) The point is that this project is about making a play from a story, not about making up the story. Throughout the project, once we have settled and agreed upon a detail as a class, I won't allow the group to change that detail. This may seem harsh, and some teachers might ignore it with great success, but I have found that, at least with my particular boys, it is important to keep

moving forward if the project is going to come to a successful conclusion. (This is especially important if we are writing a play to be performed at an already scheduled assembly.) If I don't sit on them, the boys are perfectly capable of becoming mired forever in re-thinking and re-doing in the previous steps of the process, rather than focusing on the current one. HOWEVER, and this is paramount, I never disparage or belittle that impulse. I try to value it by saying something like, "You could write another version of the story yourself, and try out your idea, because it's a good one. It's just not what we agreed upon for this version."

Step one usually takes up a whole class period, and results in a list of characters, a list of settings (this one's not always necessary) and a rough outline of the plot. More importantly, though, it results in a class full of kids who have really thought about the mechanics of the story, often in ways they never have before.

Go back to the top.

- **Step Two-Improvising**

We begin to deal with just one item from our outline at a time. Usually I start with the first one, but not necessarily.

I write on the board. Scene One: Mother Pig tells the Three Pigs they have to move out.

Then I choose the requisite number of students (in this case four) and ask them to act out the scene. I might do this several times with different groups, trying to involve as many students as possible.

Important note: the biggest problem I have at this stage is that students think that being asked to "play" a particular character in an improvisation somehow means they will "get" or "have" to play that character in the performance. I have to continually remind the class that what we are doing is WRITING A PLAY, and that it has nothing to do with the eventual performance of that play. I don't know if all groups will have that problem, but it's best to nip it in the bud.

As the groups perform, the whole class brainstorms ways to refine the plot. (At first you'll probably get a very short scene consisting of Mother Pig saying, "You have to move out," and the other three shuffling out in silence.) I coach the group with questions like, "Is she just going to come out with it like that?" "How do you think the pigs feel now?" "Do you think they should say anything?" When possible, I like to give students who are not currently "performing" first crack at questions like these. What is aimed for is a model in which the seated students are coaching the performers themselves.

It is important to note that while dialogue will surely result at this point, I don't write it down yet. This step in the process if for cataloging the fine points of the outline. What ends up on the board will be something like the following:

Scene One: Mother Pig tells the Three Pigs they have to move out
Mother Pig has the little pigs sit down.
She tells them that they're all grown up now, and they have to move out.
The first and second pig complain bitterly, but Mother Pig is firm.
The third pig is confident.
The three pigs leave to go make houses for themselves.

I repeat this process for each event in the outline. This can take several weeks if the story is long.

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- **Step Three-Dialogue**

Before this step I try to do a fair amount of preparation. If possible, I like to have a draft "script" printed up with copies for the students. This script looks exactly like a professional acting script, except that there is no dialogue and the stage directions are overwritten. Where I think dialogue should go, I write DIALOGUE. The stage directions are written by me, but I try to mirror the language used in our group outline. Part of the script from our example might look like this:

MRS. BAILEY'S CLASS PLAY
By Tommy Hilfiger, Mike Doonesbury, Freddie Kruger, etc.

Cast of Characters
Mother Pig
First Little Pig
Second Little Pig
Third Little Pig
Big Bad Wolf

Scene One

(The forest, inside Mother pig's house. Mother Pig has called her three children together. They sit listening to her. She means to tell them it's time they set out on their own.)

DIALOGUE

(Two of the Little Pigs really don't want to go.)

DIALOGUE

(The Three Little Pigs leave the house forever.)

Scene Two

(etc.)

There is no title yet, because I usually tell my students it is best to make up the title last, since that way you know exactly what it is naming. (In the same way a puppy's name is more likely to be appropriate if you wait until you actually see the puppy to name him.) The reason for the over-written stage directions will become apparent later.

I hand out the scripts and we read them together. I explain what is meant by "DIALOGUE"-a process that takes more or less effort depending on the sophistication of the students. (If

they're fifth-graders I don't really need to explain.) I also take the opportunity at this point to make sure there are no errors or deletions in the names of the playwrights. That way when we're all finished, I can present the students with a finished script that will not have such errors.

Once again we take the scenes one at a time.

Each time we come to DIALOGUE, the class brainstorms who speaks and what, exactly, they should say. I coach them as much as necessary and as little as possible. All the dialogue is written on the board, and changed or adjusted as we fine-tune it. If we encounter a scene that is hard to write, we might ask a few students to act it out, and try out different lines, to see if we like them.

Always once we're "finished" with a scene, I have a few students act it out (in the style of a staged reading, with me reading the stage directions out loud) to make sure the lines work in context and "flow" well. Often further fine-tuning results.

We do this with every scene. It can take several weeks. Then we make up a title.

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- **Stage Directions/Narrators**

One thing you have probably noticed is that there are only five roles in the example play. That's because there are only that many characters in the story, and it would be really pushing it to add enough characters for a whole class to play a role. This doesn't necessarily bother me, because the point of the exercise is really the creative work of writing the play. If the project is not leading to a public performance, I simply have the students perform for each other several times, until everyone has had a chance. The fact is that even those plays with "roles for everyone" tend to have one or two big roles and a dozen tiny ones. There is really no way to avoid the problem that some students get more stage time than others. What's great about this project is that even students who don't play a big acting role can feel justifiably proud of their contribution, because they wrote the play. When they hear another student performing a line they wrote, the thrill is just as big as if they were performing a line written by someone else.

HOWEVER, I am frequently placed in a position of needing to give everyone an individual line. In public performances, when the audience consists largely of the parents of the class, this is a political necessity. Often I solve this problem by creating large numbers of NARRATORS. I would be considerably less comfortable doing this if the play were not written by the class, but I have found that I almost never run into hurt feelings, because of the ownership everyone takes in the project. (Also, of course, I take every available opportunity in production to give the students non-speaking action and to involve them in set-making, etc., but that's for a discussion of production.) Now you know why the stage directions above are overwritten. It makes them easier to turn into narration lines. Usually all I have to do is change the tense from present to past. (Naturally I could just write them that way to begin with, but when they are stage directions, I want them to be correctly expressed as stage directions.)

ONE SMART PIG
By Tommy Hilfiger, Mike Doonesbury, Freddie Kruger, etc.

Cast of Characters
Mother Pig
First Little Pig
Second Little Pig
Third Little Pig
Big Bad Wolf

Scene One

(The forest, inside Mother Pig's house. Mother Pig has called her three children together. They sit listening to her.)

NARRATOR 1

One day, Mother Pig called her three children together.

NARRATOR 2

She wanted to tell them it was time they left home.

MOTHER PIG

Now, boys, you know you're grown up now. It's time you set out on your own. And you'll have to make your own houses.

(Two of the Little Pigs really don't want to go.)

NARRATOR 3

Two of the Little Pigs really didn't want to go.

FIRST LITTLE PIG

We don't wanna!

SECOND LITTLE PIG

Awe, Mom, do we have to?

NARRATOR 4

But the Third Little Pig understood.

THIRD LITTLE PIG

Mom's right, guys. Let's go.

(The Three Little Pigs leave the house forever.)

Scene Two

(etc.)

The Trip / Spring

Guided Imagery

This is a technique similar to narrative pantomime, but simultaneously simpler and more sophisticated. It has a lot in common with some kinds of meditation and relaxation techniques. Guided Imagery exercises help young actors explore the imaginative use of the five senses in creating the environment of a role. Students learn to relax and concentrate fully. They learn to focus their sensory and emotional selves in role. In addition, Guided Imagery exercises can help students to create stories that can then be developed in other ways. In Guided Imagery, the students usually do not move. They sit quietly, usually with their eyes closed (darkening the room can help), and experience the "story" of the exercise on a deep sensory level, not trying to "act it out" in any way. This is often difficult for students to grasp at first, and depending on the individual characteristics of a group it may be necessary to modify the requirements. However, once a group can be induced to buy into the concept, they nearly always respond enthusiastically.

The simplest way to explain how Guided Imagery works is to write down exactly what I might say to a class in performing the exercise. I should point out that while I include a few specific storylines here, you can create your own on virtually any topic, from the general to the very specific, provided only that your storylines include lots of opportunities for use of the senses and sufficient room for the imaginative contributions of the participants.

(As I narrate the exercise, I pause whenever necessary to allow the thinking and feeling called for to happen.)

The Trip

For this exercise everyone must find your own comfortable space. I will be telling a story, in which the main character is you. As you listen to the story, you must imagine that it is actually happening to you. You should concentrate especially on your five senses--your sense of touch, your sense of smell, your sense of taste, your sense of sight and your sense of hearing. You will not be actually moving around or "acting out" the story--this isn't that kind of exercise. Instead, you will be using your senses in your imagination to EXPERIENCE the story.

It will be extremely important as our story unfolds that you DO NOT MAKE ANY SOUNDS. Your classmates will be trying very hard to listen to the sounds in their imaginations, and real sounds will make that very difficult. Similarly, of course, you must not move around or touch anyone else in the room. Concentrate on your senses in your imagination.

To begin our story, I want you to think of a place that is just yours. It might be your room, or if you share a room, your special part of the room. It might be a fort or a special place outside that you like. You will decide what the place is, but it should be a place that is private and special to you.

Imagine that you are in your special place now. Look around. Look CAREFULLY. Use your sense of sight to take in all of the details you can--even the ones you may never have

noticed before. Maybe there are little cracks in the ceiling, if there is a ceiling. Maybe there are colors or textures you've never noticed before. It's amazing how many things we see every day but never really SEE. Now listen. Listen to all the special sounds in your special place. Even a very quiet place has lots of sounds if you really listen. Maybe there is the sound of your house shifting. Maybe there is traffic away in the distance. I don't know. You must listen for the special sounds of YOUR place. And smells. Nearly everything in the world has its own smell. Maybe you've never noticed the smells of your special place, but I'll bet they feel comfortable and safe. See if you can identify several smells. Wood has a smell. Earth has a smell. Your place probably smells like you, too. Really breathe in the smells of your special place. The air may even have a taste--see if it does. Now take your hand and touch various things in your space. Feel the textures and temperatures of your space. Are the surfaces rough or smooth? Warm or cool? Damp or dry? Really explore your space with your sense of touch.

Now, as you sit in your special place, I want you to think of a trip you would like to take. Think of someplace else you might like to go. It might be someplace very close by or someplace halfway around the world. You must choose for yourself. As you sit in your space, go over in your mind how you would have to travel to get to this other place. For some of you, the whole trip could be made on foot. Some of you will realize you'd have to take a car, and some probably even a plane or a boat. For all I know, some of you might need a spaceship. But I want you to carefully think of all the steps your travel would take. For instance, if you would have to take a plane, you would first have to get in a car or a taxi, then drive to the airport, etc. Think of ALL the steps.

We've decided to take the trip. It is time to pack our bags. Since only you know where you're going and how long you'll be gone, only you know what you will need to pack. So get out a suitcase or bag--whatever seems appropriate--and begin to pack. As you place each item in the suitcase or bag, examine it carefully with your five senses. What color is it? Does it have a smell? Is it heavy or light? If you shake it, does it make a sound? Does it have a texture? We're going to take the time to really pack carefully.

Now that we're going to begin our actual trip, you may find you have to speed up or slow down time in order to keep up with the story. If your trip is very short, you may have to slow down time, but most of us will probably have to speed up time.

Imagine you are now on the first leg of your journey. I don't know what that is--it will be different for each of you. But as you travel along, use your five senses. What are the sights you see? The sounds you hear? The smells you smell? What physical sensations are there? Are there any taste sensations? Really EXPERIENCE this part of the journey.

Okay, now here's where some of you may need to speed up or slow down time. Imaging your are exactly half way to your destination. Many of you are probably in a different kind of transport now, though some of you may be in the same one. Once again, use your five senses. What do you see? Hear? Taste? Smell? Feel?

Now let's imagine we have arrived just outside our destination. That may mean different things for each of you. If your destination has a gate or is indoors behind a door, imagine you are just outside the door or gate. If your destination is just a general place--say, the desert--imagine you are in some sort of transport, about to step out, and "into" the place. In any case, before we enter our destination, we're going to stop and use our senses again. From outside,

what does the place look like? Sound like? Smell like? What do you think it will feel like inside?

Okay, it's finally time to enter. Once inside, I don't know what you're going to do--I don't even know where you are. But as we take some time just to experience this new place, remember to carefully consider what your five senses are telling you. There will probably be lots of new sights, sounds, sensations, smells, and tastes to experience.

As you do whatever it is you came here to do, I want you to think for a minute. Who is the VERY LAST person you would ever expect to meet in this place? The MOST UNLIKELY person to ever be here? In your mind's eye, recall what this person looks like, sounds like, etc.

Suddenly you look up, and there they are! You are certainly surprised to see them, but I don't know whether it's a good surprise of a bad surprise. I don't know who they are or how you feel about them. You may be glad to see them, or you may wish they would go away. As you look at them, and try to see as many details as you can, they speak. Listen to their voice. What does it sound like? What are they saying?

I don't know if you speak back, or if you do, what you say. I don't know what, if anything, the two of you do. This part of the story is up to you.

Finally the person leaves. I don't know why, but you do. I don't know whether you caused them to leave, but you do. I don't know whether you're glad or sad to see them go. But at any rate, now that they're gone you realize it's time for you to go, too. As you leave the place, take one last look. Try to remember all of the sights, sounds, smells, tastes and touch sensations you can for your trip home.

We're going to compress time again, and imagine we're half way home. What sights do you see? What smells do you smell? What sounds do you hear? What tastes do you taste? What sensations do you feel?

Something has gone wrong. I don't know what it is--that's up to you, but something pretty serious. I don't know if the problem is something you can see or not. Maybe the problem has a sound associated with it. Maybe there is a smell. You can probably feel something as well. Whatever the problem is, no one seems to know what to do about it.

Finally you are able to solve the problem. I don't know how you did it. Does your solution have any sounds or smells associated with it? What do you see and feel? At any rate, you certainly feel relief, as we once again speed up or slow down time to arrive just outside our special place--home.

Before you go inside, see how many details of your special place you can recall. Then when you go in you will see how many of them you remembered correctly. It's been a long day, and a long trip, and you are tired. So you go into your special place and sleep.

Once the story is finished--I almost always end with the main character in repose--I have the students do some brief stretching exercises to get the blood flowing again, and then we have a discussion. Usually I have some or all of the students describe their adventure in detail. We talk about the fact that even though I told the same story to everyone, no two students came

up with the same, or even very similar, stories. I point out to them that the creative force responsible for making the stories they have experienced was not mine, but came from them. So the stories now belong to them, and they can use them in any way they want. They can write them down as short stories, plays, or poems. They can make pictures of them, or write songs about them. They can make videos or improvise skits. I tell them (which is the truth) that this kind of quiet imagery is often the way I come up with the stories and details I use in my own writing. But most importantly, we discuss how effectively we were able to use our five senses in our imaginations. Usually the students are surprised they were able to remember and experience so many details of the familiar parts of their stories--such as the "special place"--and equally surprised at the vividness of the sensations in the original parts of the story. (The exception to this is that if the group has had trouble keeping quiet, no one will have been able to really hear the sounds in their stories clearly, and the stories will be more similar than otherwise, since their sounds will have influenced each other. If this is the case, we discuss it.) This exercise is much more effective if time is left for discussion at the end.

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Below is another storyline I use with my students in Guided Imagery exercises. Again, remember that you can always create your own. The introduction and discussion afterwards are just the same. (This storyline might work as a narrative pantomime as well.)

Spring

You are a small, burrowing animal. In fact, you are a newly born baby animal, and have so far lived your entire life inside your burrow. Your mother went down into the burrow last fall, and when spring began to make itself felt, you and your brothers and sisters were born. Since it is completely dark in the burrow, you have never seen anything--in fact, you don't even really know what it would mean to see. But you have four other senses, and you use them.

Listen to the sounds in the burrow. You can probably hear your mother's heart beat, and possibly also your own and your brothers' and sisters'. Maybe you all make some sounds as you move around in the burrow. Smell the cool earth of the walls and floor, and smell that special smell that means "Mom." Feel the hard-packed, cool walls of the burrow, and feel your mother and your brothers and sisters in this small space.

Just in the last day or so something has been changing. The walls of the burrow are getting damper and warmer. You don't know why, but Mom seems to sense a change. It is time for her to open up the burrow. It is spring. Listen as she moves to the entrance of the burrow. Feel the dirt hit you in the face as she digs away at the blocked entrance to the hole. Taste the dirt that gets in your mouth. She opens a small hole to the outside world.

For the first time in your life, you can see! Look around you at the dimly lighted interior of the burrow. For the first time, look at the others--your mother and brothers and sisters--with whom you have spent your entire short life. Look up at the bright circle of light that Mom is making bigger and bigger.

Suddenly Mom disappears out the hole. You don't know what to do. But then you hear a strange sound. You've never heard such a sound before, but somehow you know exactly what it is. It's Mom saying, "come on out!"

As you climb out of the burrow, feel the new earth under your feet. Smell the outdoor air. Suddenly the sun is so bright you're temporarily blinded. As you grow used to the brightness, you see that the hole is in the center of a large expanse of grass, like a meadow of a field. You start to explore the area around the hole. As you explore, you use ALL of your senses. You investigate things with your eyes. You smell them. You touch them. You listen to them. You even taste them. You discover that clover is very tasty. You discover that your brothers and sisters are not.

So far, you have been staying pretty close to the burrow, but now you notice something at the other end of the grassy area. I don't know what it is, and neither do you, but it's pretty big. You are overcome with curiosity. You start to cross the grass, to take a closer look.

As you go, feel the grass moving under your feet. Smell the sweet spring air. Taste any new plants you come across on your journey. Listen to the sounds of the much bigger world you have discovered. But keep your eyes on the big thing.

You arrive, and carefully investigate the big thing. Smell it. If it seems safe, taste it. Look it over carefully, listen to the sounds it makes, and touch it carefully. Try to learn as much as possible about the thing.

Suddenly you hear a sound from across the grass. You've never heard that sound before, but you instinctively know what it is. It's Mom saying, "Everybody in the hole! Now!" You run across the grass and dive down the hole just as Mom starts filling in the top with grass and dirt to hide it.

You spent almost your whole life in this hole, and it always felt warm and cozy and safe. But now it feels cramped and dark. One of your brothers or sisters is standing on your head, and there's hardly any room to move around. But for now, you'll have to stay down here, so you make the best of it and take a nap.

1.) Introduction / 2.) Idea / 3.) Preparation / 4.) Playwriting / 5.) Rehearsal / 6.) Performance / 7.) Post Mortem / Appendix 1--Brainstorms / Appendix 2--The Play

How the Fourth Grade and I Wrote a Play

Matt Buchanan

Introduction

I recently had an experience with my students that I think is worth sharing with other teachers. If, like me, you often think elementary school "class plays" are of questionable value, our project may change your mind. What follows is a description of the process by which my drama students, their classroom teachers, and I created a play about the Oregon Trail that was both informative and entertaining for its audience and enriching and personal for its creators. This project was an experiment, and it often seemed likely to fail, but the result was ultimately so successful that I though it would be useful for other teachers to see

how we did it. I am not suggesting that you necessarily try to imitate our project exactly, but I think that there is much of value to be found in this account. Rather than setting forth a series of instructions for other teachers to follow, I will try to describe both the successes and the failures we encountered along the way. Every teacher has a personal style, and will adapt the project to suit that style. I'll narrate the process from idea through the preparation, writing, rehearsing, performance and "post mortem." I hope in this way to provide an understanding of the project from which other teachers can take what will work for them and leave what won't.

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I am a drama teacher in a private boys school. I teach primarily in our Lower School, which consists of pre-Kindergarten (Jr. K) through fifth grade. I teach one period per week of creative drama with each class in the school (20 in all). In addition, I assist with classroom projects that have elements of drama or theatre in them, coordinate the Lower School boys' participation in pep rallies and the like, and generally serve as a resource for anyone and everyone. (I also direct plays in Upper School.) The Lower School Drama program in place is my creation--the school had never had a drama teacher or any dramatic arts curriculum at the elementary level until I was hired to create it. It has not always been easy to win acceptance for drama in a school whose teachers, to a limited extent, and whose parents, to a much greater extent, tend towards the conservative and the "3 Rs." However, I now feel that drama is an accepted part of the school week, and it is clear that it is a favorite subject for many boys. Except in grade 5, the school day is divided between classroom teachers, who teach language arts, math, and social studies, along with related subjects to one homeroom, and "special teachers," who teach a single subject to multiple homerooms and grade levels, who come to them one or more times a week. The "special subjects" at our school are Science, Gym, Music, Art, and Drama. I am the only drama teacher, so I see every child in the school.

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Every year at my school, each grade level (pre-K through 5) is assigned an "assembly" date. This "assembly" is in essence a class play. This tradition dates from long before drama was introduced as a curricular subject at the Lower School level, and the "plays" have traditionally been put together by the three classroom teachers at each grade level. Those of you who are practicing drama teachers will understand that this tradition rather dismayed me when I arrived here. Such "class plays," as traditionally handled, exist almost entirely for the gratification of parents, and are of little educational value. Depending on the degree of polish the teachers demand, they can be unduly stressful, and can even, in extreme cases, instill an early fear or hatred of the theatre in children. I must insist that I saw no signs of such extremes at this school when I arrived, and concluded that the "assemblies" were at worst neutral in impact, and sometimes educational. Even the Jr. K plays seem to be a largely pleasant experience for the boys. Still, I have tried, as my position here has become more accepted, to influence these programs in a positive way--to make them more process-centered, to include the children in the creative process, and to generally provide an experience of positive value for the students' education. Although my first few such attempts were met with skepticism, I have found that the classroom teachers have been very supportive overall, and the results have been gratifying.

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For the most part the "assembly" dates for each grade are about the same every year. Since the subject matter for the plays is generally pulled from the social studies curriculum, which also stays pretty constant from year to year, each grade generally presents a play on the same topic each year. (Indeed, some of the grades present the same play every year!) Since I have been here, the first grade has done a Thanksgiving play, the second a "Native American Pow Wow" (I've tried to do something about that, but so far with no success), the third grade a play

about ancient Egypt, the fourth grade a play about ancient Greece or Rome, and the fifth grade a "Medieval Feast." (The pre-K and Kindergarten classes do something different each year, but at that level the "plays" are really just recited poems.) The first grade level to embrace the change in approach I began advocating the day I arrived here was the third. A few years ago the third-grade teachers handed their "assembly" over to me almost completely. (I don't want to imply that the teachers had no role in the process--only that the roles were reversed, and I became the one ultimately responsible for putting the project together, rather than just an expert who came and coached the children on diction and projection.) I hit upon the idea of having the students write their own plays, based on ancient Egyptian folktales, the results were very well received, and that's what we do every year now. For me, the main point is that the students (in group sessions with me) write the plays themselves, which gives them ownership in the project, and shifts the focus from rote repetition and product to creativity and process. For the teachers and parents it doesn't hurt that our final product is usually up at least as good as the pre-written scripts traditionally used. Still, these plays are very simple structurally--each of the three classes presents its own story--and they depend heavily on narration. (Convention dictates that each student must have at least one line, and in the third grade plays, most of them have lines of narration.) When, this year, the fourth-grade teachers indicated an interest in collaborating on their assembly play, I wanted to try something a little more difficult (and more theatrical).

Greek Play Project

I created this lesson as part of my 7th & 8th grade Theatre History cycle. I try in this course to take a "hands on" approach to the subject, and to deal more in trends and concepts than in dates and such. I am especially concerned with performance practice in each of the periods we explore, and with the way plays are structured and how their structure influences more recent periods. So, after reading some exerpts from Greek tragedies and discussing in depth such concepts as the use of the chorus, the late point of attack, the emphasis on motivations and psychology over action, the absence from the stage of scenes of violence, etc., we set about to create our own "Greek Tragedies." Throughout the project I stress that we are interested in getting at the concept and the sense of what the great Greeks were doing, but not to reproduce in a realistic way the theatre of Ancient Greece. Because we discuss the fact that the Greeks tended to select for their matierial stories with which the audience was already familiar, and the fact that this familiarity often allowed the great playwrights to get at an irony that would have been impossible if the audience had been approaching the material for the first time, I encourage my students to select stories that OUR audience will know. We talk a lot about how to find the late point of attack in the stories they select, and while we don't worry too much about the seriousness of the stories, we do examine them carefully to be sure that they will support, at any rate within the confines of our very short plays, the kind of psychological introspection of a true Greek play. Not all fairy tales--and it's those that leap to mind first--work very well. The big bad wolf isn't much of a tragic hero, but one of my groups managed to make him one by giving him pangs--not exactly of conscience, but of sensibility, that almost made him leave poor little Red alone, and his greed (hunger?) became his tragic flaw. It didn't make the most coherent play, but the fact that they were able to think it out showed me how well they understood what we were learning about. (I don't discourage humor, although I point out that it would not have been usual for the Greeks in a tragedy. I find that 8th-graders--oddly enough, more than the 7th-graders--grow bored if I don't allow them to take a pretty lighthearted approach to their projects. But if I were to try the exercise with older or more advanced students, I might insist on real tragedies.)

Below is the hand-out I give the students at the beginning of the project. Since it is often difficult to completely visualize a lesson just from such a document, I have added comments in red.

Project--Make Your Own "Greek Tragedy"

- Your group will write and perform a play according to the structure below. You must choose a familiar story from history or from fiction to dramatize. Remember that Greek Tragedy uses a "late point of attack." My students tend to choose either Greek Myths--Pandora is popular, and happens to work very well--or fairy tales. It is often difficult for them to understand why choosing their favorite TV sitcom doesn't work. (*Friends* is not a story.) The "late point of attack" is a stumbling block for some, but the fact that it is necessary for a project they have already decided will be fun usually gives them the impetus to make the necessary effort to grasp the concept--even if it doesn't always translate into a coherent play.
- Everyone in the group will be an actor. You may have as many characters as you want, as long as you never have more of them onstage at one time than you have members in your group. Unless the group shows themselves very able to work together, I usually discourage them from creating the sort of situation--common in later 5th-century plays--in which one character is played by different actors at different times. But the idea of one ACTOR playing more than one character is easy, and, indeed, usually indispensible.
- The "audience" will serve as chorus.
- You will make all necessary masks for your characters‹we won't worry about masks for the chorus, but be sure the text tells us who the chorus are supposed to represent. This is an important point, and one I sometimes fail to make clear. The chorus in a Greek play is never just a bunch of random people. They are the elders of Thebes, or the neighbors of Medea, or the people of a particular city, and thus have a stake of some kind in the story. I try to encourage my students to think hard about who the chorus should be. (For example, in one "Little Mermaid" play, they were Ariel's mermaid sisters.)
- You must be sure that the lines for the chorus are presented clearly so that the "audience" will be able to "perform" them without rehearsal. Stress this, and don't take their word for it without checking up on them. Middle Schoolers often think they have written clearly what to anyone else (including other Middle Schoolers) looks like gibberish. I make certain to stay on top of the written component of my students work, so that they don't get to the end and then find their project doesn't work for a trivial reason.
- We will go over proper format for scripts. I show them standard Samuel French acting edition format, but any would do. The point here is to make them pay attention to the format, and learn the discipline of sticking to a single one.
- You will not be required to memorize your lines. If I were working with older or more advanced students, I might make them memorize. In any case, I stress that although they will be allowed to carry their scripts, they must still ACT. They must be familiar enough with their lines not to spend the whole play with their noses in the scripts.
- You are not required to use props or scenery, but if you want to do so, you will need to make or find what is necessary. I do this only because I have a lot to cover in my course, and we do a lot of work with design during my unit on the Italian Renaissance. There is no reason you couldn't make costumes and sets a part of the project.

- At the completion of the project you will hand in your script, and your grade will be based both on the script and the performance.
- Note: Although of course real Tragedy always ends unhappily, it is not so easy to find familiar stories in this day and age that don't have happy endings, so you are not required to give your play a "tragic" ending. As I mention above, I might drop this provision with more advanced students.
- You must provide copies of all of the chorus's words to hand out to the "audience." You may make these copies yourself, or you may have me make them. However, if you want me to do it, you MUST get them to me by the end of school on the day before the performance. Obviously this requirement is just for my own convenience. With older students I'd probably just require them to make the copies themselves, but Middle-Schoolers can't drive themselves, and it's not always easy for them to make copies.

Your play will have the following structure:

Prologue

Characters speak, perhaps directly to the audience. Tell us what the play is going to be about, and what you think we will learn from it. I have to coach carefully to remind them that they must not just "come right out and say it," but that the necessary information must be revealed through natural-seeming comments by the characters. But I am more or less insistent on this point depending on the group's ability to grasp it.

Parados

Chorus, in unison, tells us what has happened before the beginning of the action of the play. They should also tell us who they are. If you want, you can have the chorus speak in verse. (In a real Greek play, the chorus would "enter" here, but since the "audience" is serving as chorus, we'll just assume that part. But if you want, you can have them say something about "entering.") It is often unnatural at first for the students to write in verse but once pushed, they usually become wonderfully creative. Here again, I encourage them to "show" rather than tell. (Although, when it comes to playwriting of any kind, I hate that expression, because of course virtually all of playwriting is in one sense "telling," since it is dialogue.)

Episode 1

Characters, in masks, of course, act out the beginning of the action of the play. If you want, you can have the chorus interrupt the action to ask questions or make comments. (If you are going to do this, make sure you have copies of the whole play, rather than just the chorus parts, to hand out to the "audience.") Remember that characters in Greek Tragedy tend to talk a lot about decision making and moral choices‹what should I do? Am I doing the right thing? Etc. Remember that anything violent should take place offstage, with a character or "messenger" entering to tell us what happened.

Choral Ode 1

Chorus speaks about something connected with the theme of the story, but not necessarily about the story itself. Or, if you prefer, you may use a popular song or poem here, that you think expresses the mood or theme at this point in the play. If you use a poem, the "audience" will read it in unison. If you use a popular song, you may simply play it on the stereo at this point. (In a real Greek Tragedy the chorus would probably also "dance" at this point. You can't expect the audience to do this, since they won't have rehearsed, but if you want, you can have the members of your group perform the movements of the chorus while the "audience" reads or the song plays. This is NOT, however, required.) Surprisingly, make less use of the freedom provided here than I expected the first time I did the project. I was afraid they's seize on the permission to use a popular song as a way of avoiding writing so much, but although nearly every group uses one or two, more is rare. This part of the assignment is pretty vague, but that's intentional. It is necessary for me to stay on top of what the groups are doing, and to

coach them when (and only when) necessary.

Episode 2

Characters act out the next part of the story, again with choral comment if you want.

Choral Ode 2

(See Choral Ode 1)

(If necessary, you may add more Episodes and Odes here.)

Final Episode

Characters act out the end of the story.

Exodus

As or after the characters leave, the chorus tells us what we have learned from the story. Once again, and more so, I must coach them not to be too explicit. "We hope you have learned. . ." doesn't cut it. But that's all to the good, in a way, because I have always been a firm believer in the value of rewriting.

Should you wish to do this project, and to use my handout, you can print the handout (without my comments) by clicking HERE and then selecting PRINT PAGE (or the equivalent) on your browser.

Slow-Motion Walk

Introduction

I learned this from playwright Suzan Zeder. It's a great way to stimulate creativity, get over writer's block, or whatever. It's amazing what even normally less facile students come up with during the writing part of the exercise.

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Walk

These are the instructions I give the class:

In a moment you will go outside for a walk. You will walk very, very slowly. (This works better if the place you send them to walk in is not too crowded, because they will attract attention.)

Don't concentrate on trying to memorize what you see, and do your best to ignore any stares you might get from others.

You will walk for about twenty minutes.

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Write

While the class is gone, I get the room ready for their return. I dim the lights, and, if possible, light some candles. I turn on soft music. (Debussy or the like seems to work best--something like "La Mer.") I put several sheets of paper and a pencil in front of each chair. I write a few Haiku on the board, to be used as examples of the form. (I've included a few examples of my own Haiku below. Technically Haiku are supposed to be about nature, but all I stress is the rhythmic form--three lines of five, seven and five syllables.)

When the class returns, I quietly instruct them to take their seats. I tell them they are now to write Haiku about anything they like. I point out the examples on the board for those who don't know what Haiku are. (I generally have to give these instructions over and over again, as the class straggles in one at a time. I try to give them exactly the same way each time.) I don't mention the lights, the candles, or the music. If anyone asks questions, I refer them to the instructions again. They are to sit and write Haiku.

I let them sit and write for about ten or fifteen minutes--or until they seem to run out of steam. Then we share the Haiku.

That's all there is to it. It works, though. Try it!

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Haiku

Swimming with the stream,
Rushing forward, clutching tight.
No one look at me!

Horizontal lives.
Space is an elevator,
Sunshine a window.

Many lovely rocks
Decorating the sidewalk.
(Some of them are gum.)

Watching from a tree,
Bushy tails contemplating
All the idiots.

Tumbling heavenward,
Clumsy, rushing tenements
Falling up to God.