

MIRROR ACTIVITY

Everyone gets a partner. (If there is an odd number, someone can go twice.) Partners stand in two lines, facing each other, about a meter 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 movements exactly—just as a mirror would.

The goal is to mirror the partner perfectly, so the leader must move carefully so that the mirror won’t fall behind. If they are doing a good job, we cannot tell who is the leader and who is the mirror. Encourage them to maintain eye contact rather than look at their partner’s hands.

Challenge the players to focus on the process. Initially there will be giggles. Encourage the leader not to try to trick his/her partner—on the contrary, the leader works very hard not to trick the mirror. It is the leader’s responsibility to perform movements that the mirror can follow precisely.

Once all players are concentrating on mirroring, have them switch leaders a few times by calling out, “Change!” At first, every time they switch leaders they will start over, but they should reach the point where they can switch leaders in midstream, without interrupting the smooth flow of movement. After the leadership has been exchanged a few times, switch groups so that the audience can do the exercise and the first mirror group can observe.

Variations and building on:

- Let the leader use the whole body, not just from the waist up. Add levels and depth (e.g., a step closer, a step farther back).
- The leadership can shift back and forth between partners without the teacher calling out “Change.”
- The mirrors can move around the space still mirroring each other’s actions.

ECHO ACTIVITY

Students intently listen while focusing on the teacher and the task

Teacher/leader goes first. Students echo in unison.

- Use a variety of body rhythms (clap, snap, stomp, tongue clicks, vocalizations)
- Start simple but soon more challenging (but doable)
- Mix in some easy stuff

FREEZE ACTIVITY

Students learn a basic and exacting skill

Teacher explains the basics:

“When you freeze in physical theater you’re still and silent, BUT you can breathe (don’t die!) and blink (because it hurts if you don’t blink) BUT watch me, I’m going to show a person who is NOT frozen.”

Teacher strikes a great frozen pose complete with breathing and blinking. AND (10 or 15 seconds) adds eye movement, starting to look around while everything else is still. Asks: “What wasn’t frozen?” Students will have seen the eye movement. Confirm that they’re right and that everyone sees it. “If you want to look perfectly frozen, your eyes don’t look around. Your eyelids blink but your eyes stare. Let me see how many of you can do a perfect sitting down freeze.”

Students do perfect freezes.

Teacher walks around and confirms: "That's right. Your eyes don't follow me."

Students unfreeze and remain seated.

Teacher: "When I say 'WALK', you're going to walk around the room. Watch me." Teacher walks around and stops. "What am I touching?"

Students look and figure it out: "Floor, air, and clothes."

Teacher demonstrates getting very close to furniture and students. "You can get close to desks, books, and your friends but you're only going to touch... FLOOR (includes carpet), AIR, and CLOTHES. And we won't use underneath anything (desks, chairs, tables, etc.). Then when I say FREEZE I want to see how many of you can do an instant, perfectly balanced freeze." (Confirm that little kids like to fall, but they know that freeze doesn't mean fall, it means to instantly halt, breathe, and blink.)

Students move to the leader's voiced images within a clearly delineated space (touching only the floor, air, and their clothes). Move like you're hot and tired, walking in deep peanut butter, sneaking, crawling through a dark tunnel using a flashlight, floating like a cloud, silent sneaking lion, etc.

- Emphasis is on the skill required.
- Skill and excitement build as the commands call for more vigorous movement and difficult freezes.
- Students achieve maximum freedom of movement within clear limits.
- Shrink the space.

(MIME) ILLUSIONS ACTIVITY

In physical theater the challenge is to show a story, action, or idea without stuff—no furniture, special costumes, props, or scenery. You make everything using people so sometime illusions are handy.

Define an illusion as something that fools your eyes (e.g., mirages, optical illusions, magic tricks).

"We're doing a story that includes a tug of war, will we use a real rope? No. Let's do it with an illusionary 'rope'."

To work on illusions have students work privately but at the same time in an uncrowded spot. Some objects to try out: a wall, barbell, rope (with a partner), ladder, or any object that is needed for the performance.

Watch each other and look for the moment something looks "real." Notice where one's eyes should focus (on the wall, on the opposing tug of war partner).

Talk about what works. What looks real?

BUILDING STATUES WITH A PARTNER

Work in pairs as statue/artist. The artists work for 30 seconds to build an interesting shape. Then artists become perceivers; they gather on one side of the space in order to get a clear view of all of the statues in the collection. The students rejoin their partners and trade roles.

*The challenge is to make a unique statue and for the statue to remain frozen.

BUILDING STATUES IN A GROUP (TABLEAU)

Students take turns being the artist who builds large statues out of a group of people. The artists can create statues that meet formal challenges (varied levels, lots of negative space, diverse facings and connections, etc.), or fit titles (midnight, Saturday, under water, the nightmare, etc.). The statues can animate (come to life).

NOTES ON CREATING A PERFORMANCE

Students work in groups to solve sections of the piece.

Each group does more than one task.

Teacher is the narrator/storyteller (groups talk and make noise but the narrator runs the show)

Make an in-class stage and wings to practice on (then duplicate in a larger space if needed)

Mark stage and wings using painter's tape (blue or other bright color)

Wings are where groups wait to go onstage and return to between sections ("home base")

Often a whole wing is onstage at once.