

# Improvisation Tools for Building Classroom Confidence

## THE PRINCIPLES OF IMPROVISATION CONSIST OF THE FOLLOWING.

**Trust.** In order for a group to be successful and productive, the members of the group, referred to as “players,” must be able to trust one another.

**Acceptance.** This is the Golden Rule of improvisation. Players must be willing to accept a new idea in order to explore its possibilities; not just saying “yes,” but having an attitude of “yes, and...,” meaning I accept the offer (i.e., idea, words, or movement) and must build on it. Each team member is responsible for contributing to and supporting the group’s activity. The brainstorming that occurs can lead to innovative solutions.

**Attentive listening.** Players must be aware of the partners with whom they are co-creating in order to increase their understanding of each other and to be able to communicate effectively.

**Spontaneity.** Players co-create in the moment, without the opportunity to revise. Each player is motivated by a positive purpose and desire to delight. Spontaneity allows players to initiate words and actions, building trust with the other players. Players must suspend any critical judgment or spirit about what others say.

**Storytelling.** Players develop the ability to create a collaborative narrative that connects their dialogue through a story. This process often results in memorable content.

**Nonverbal communication.** Players use facial expressions and body language to help communicate attitude, character, and trustworthiness.

**Warm ups.** Warm ups are structures that provide an opportunity to develop trust and safe environments, where the players can feel free to explore through “contentless” games and structures. It is similar to bantering with students to develop rapport. Warm-up activities focus on transitioning individuals into an improvisational mode to allow them to:

- improvise verbally and physically
- be spontaneous
- “listen” carefully to one another
- use a sense of humor

\*adapted from *Training to Imagine: Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques to Enhance Creativity, Teamwork, Leadership and Learning* (Koppett, 2001) Improvisation as a Teaching Tool:

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238623530)

[238623530](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/238623530) Whose Classroom Is It Anyway Improvisation as a Teaching Tool

## IMPROVISATION ACTIVITIES FOR THE CLASSROOM

### What Happens Next?

One player is in the middle, the others sit aside. Any person can give the middle player a task, which she performs, and then she asks, “What happens next?” Any player may suggest what needs to happen next, but the idea is for the group to construct a coherent story. The player in

the middle should only and strictly be doing what they're told; it is up to the players at the side to construct the story. This game is also known as "And Then."

### **Energy 1-10**

Everyone is positioned in a big circle, squatting down. All participants count 1 to 10. This is done in unison, moving up slowly with increasing energy level. 1 is barely audible, 10 is as loud as possible—with everyone standing straight, hands reaching up. It's important to watch each other, to ensure all are at the same energy level. Also make sure that the increase in energy is very gradual.

### **Imitation**

This first game is simple and fun for any group, kids or adults. The game starts with everyone forming a circle. Someone will start by performing some kind of action, small or big, such as snapping or a dance move. The player can also opt to make a sound of some sort like a dog barking or whistling a short tune. The goofier the better. The next person in the circle will then do their best to imitate that sound or action and the next person will imitate that person and so on and so forth. The game is similar to telephone. You might think it should be simple to imitate a sound or action, but as more people attempt it, the more distorted and amusing it becomes.

### **What Are You Doing?**

Group stands in a circle. One person goes into the center of the circle and starts an action (such as brushing her teeth).

A person goes into the center, and asks, "What are you doing?"

The person brushing her teeth answers by saying something other than what she is doing. "I'm dribbling a basketball."

The first person then leaves, and the new person starts "dribbling a basketball." Then a new person goes in and asks, "What are you doing?"

And so on...

Encourage students to make new choices each time (no repeats).

\*Consider enforcing a 'no disgusting things' rule. For whatever reason, this particular game compels students to be gross.

### **Catch and Clap**

Players in a circle. Toss a beanbag or easy-to-catch ball back and forth around the circle. Let players know that it is the thrower's responsibility to allow the catcher to catch it! Once a rhythm is established, introduce a "clap" every time the ball is in the air. All other players must clap in unison while the ball is in the air. Play until there is a nice rhythm and flow! For more advanced drama groups, introduce another ball into play.

### **Zip, Zap, Zop**

This is one of the most famous theater warm-up games.

Stand in a circle. Have kids practice saying "Zip, Zap, Zop." One person starts by clapping and pointing to someone as she says, "zip." The person she pointed to claps, and points to someone else saying "zap." The person she pointed to then claps, and points to someone saying "zop." Then it starts all over again with the next player clapping and pointing to someone saying "zip!" The game continues until someone gets out.

If a player says a word out of order, he's out. If a player hesitates too long, she's out. When players is out, they can stay in the game, but turn into "land mines" by crossing their arms over their chest. If a player still in the game points to one of the "mines," he is out too.

### **Group Stop**

Have everyone quietly mill about the room. Tell group members that at any moment, a player may stop. As soon as that happens, the other group members should also stop. Basically, one person “freezing” should cause all of the others to freeze. Anyone in the group may start moving again, causing the entire group to move. This game reminds actors that what they do onstage is dependent on what other actors do. A play is a series of actions/reactions, not merely memorizing one’s part and saying lines on cue.

### **Name and Action Game**

This is a classic theater game used for name memorization! Have students stand in a circle. One at a time, each student states his name and makes an action that reflects his personality. In unison, the rest of the class repeats the student’s name and action. For a more challenging version, have one person say his name and do an accompanying action. The person to his right then repeats it, and says her name and makes her action. The third person repeats the first two and then adds her own. This continues around the circle. The last person will have to remember all of the names and actions of the entire group!

### **Change Three Things**

In pairs, actors observe one another. Say, “Notice everything you can about your partner. Look at her clothes, her hair, her eyes, really observe the other person.” Next, ask all players to turn away from each other, back to back. Tell players that each person must change three things about him/herself. Players can remove jewelry, change their hair, take off shoes, etc. Next, have the players turn back toward each other and take turns noticing what has changed

### **Pass the Clap**

Have students form a standing circle. Tell students that they will be passing a clap around the circle, but that it will go around the circle two students at a time. Choose a starting point and have one person turn to the next person and have them both clap at the same time. The second student then turns to the next person and they clap at the same time. Key to success is eye contact, and watching each other’s hands in the beginning. If the game gets sloppy, ask students to slow down. Once the game is going smoothly, tell students that they may reverse the clap by remaining focused on the player who passed the clap, and clapping again. Another clap may also be introduced at another point in the circle so that there are two claps traveling around the circle.

### **Categories**

In a sitting circle, lead all players in slapping their thighs to a rhythm. Next, name a category such as: colors; fruit; types of cars; words that start with ‘b’; etc. One at a time, going around the circle, each person must come up with something that fits the category and say it in rhythm. If a person stumbles or duplicates another player’s answer, he must offer a new category and start again.

### **Yes, Let’s!**

This is a very simple, yet effective drama warm up that sets a positive tone for the day’s activities. Have all players scatter about in the playing space. One student calls out an activity for everyone to start miming, the rest of the group members shout out “Yes, let’s!” and then they start doing the activity. For instance, if someone calls out, “Let’s start jogging in place!” the group responds with, “Yes, let’s!” and everyone starts jogging in place until someone calls out a

new activity. Encourage players to only offer one suggestion until they sense that everyone else has had a chance to play. As an alternative, play in a circle, allowing each student a turn.