

## Warm Ups, Games and Exercises



- The drama student must become aware of themselves, sensitive to others and flexible in their thinking.
- They must learn first to listen, to watch and then finally to speak.
- They need to become more spatially aware, confident in their bodies, increasing their strength and stamina.
- They need to learn how to use their breathing to control energy and to project their voice.
- They need to gain confidence in themselves and acceptance of others.
- They need to feel safe enough in their environment to take risks and meet new challenges.

Try to always start the class with an activity that helps students prepare their mind, spirit and body for the task at hand. Who knows what else may have happened to them that day? They need to be brought into this new environment for creative exploration - and warm ups, games and exercises help you achieve this goal. There are many wonderful resources available which provide warm ups, games and exercises. The examples on the following pages have been tried with great success over and over again.

You need to determine **your goals** for the group – do they need to work on group cooperation, impulses, control, trust? Select activities which will help advance the group in various stages of the process.

## **Sample Warm Ups and Exercises:**

### **“Stretching”** (*physical, mood setting*)

Use any variety of stretches you know; try to think of the body as a unit, connected at the neck, shoulders, rib cage, pelvis, elbows, wrists, knees, ankles, toes and fingers. Yoga exercises work well (“Sun Salutation”). Play some soft music to keep the stretches slow and meditative (this also helps quiet down rowdy kids).

### **“Hello Bob, Thank You”** (*get to know names, coordination, cooperation*)

You need at least 4 balls of varying sizes. Stand in a circle and be sure everyone has had a chance to learn each name. One person begins with one ball, she says “Hello Bob” and bounces the ball to Bob. Bob says “thank you Ms Burns .... Hello Sally” and bounces it to Sally. Sally says “thank you Bob .... Hello Jon”. Continue until everyone has had their name said AND THEN add in a second ball. Keep adding in more balls as you play.

### **“Mirrors”** (*group trust, physical awareness*)

Follow the Leader Play slow soft music. Students stand facing the teacher, follow, as in a mirror, the movements which are very slow and deliberate. The goal is to stay together in movements.

Partners – Who is the Leader? Find a partner, face each other, select one person to begin moving. Try to keep eye contact at all times (no laughing). You may need to help the group learn how to make eye contact and not laugh. Start with someone you know and then move to new partners. At some point the leader changes without a word or signal given – just let the leadership pass back and forth. The teacher then goes around and to see if it is evident who is leading. The goal is to make it invisible.

Small Group Form groups of 4, stand in a circle and try to repeat the exercise. The teacher should not be able to identify who is leading. When this has been mastered, move to larger and larger groups. Is it possible to do this with the entire class?

### **“Balancing Acts”** (*group trust, cooperation*)

Partners Face one another, keep eye contact, hold each other by grasping wrists, place feet about 6 inches apart, gradually lean back and balance your weight. At this point, close your eyes and lean your head back. It feels like you are floating. Weight and height are not important, it is finding the point of balance and trusting one another.

Small Group Move to a group of 4, hold wrist of person next to you, lean back and balance. Then close your eyes and float. Keep moving to a larger group.

**“Group Freeze”** (*attention to others, control*)

Walk in a random pattern around the room, do not make eye contact but try to remain aware of everyone else. At any point, any person can freeze – the goal is to also freeze the moment you notice. It is quickly apparent who is most aware of others – it is also a good skill to practice. Try it while skipping or jogging.

**“Go, Turn, Swizzle and Freeze”** (*listening, cooperation, control*)

There are 4 commands to follow: go means to move in a random pattern throughout the space (you can also add in jog, slide, slo mo as movement); turn means to make an abrupt 180 degree turn and to keep moving; swizzle means to stop, jump and turn 360 degrees and keep moving, freeze means to stop and hold. The goal is to move, respond to directions and to keep out of other people’s way.

**“Jab, Slide, Swirl and Collapse”** (*physical awareness, spontaneity, cooperation, coordination, trust*)

This is very similar to the previous game. Use the movement descriptors of “jab, slide, swirl, collapse” as a way to keep them moving. This has many possibilities – use with a story line (“you are behind enemy lines, it’s night, you must make it to the hill ahead”) and call out words at random times. Remember to use levels (ex. If you call “collapse” and then “jab” they need to find a way to jab while on the ground, and must remain on the ground until you say to rise up).

Another idea is to use it with music as a warm up. Play the music, something with a good beat, have them move according to the movement called. Students can also call move changes. They could be encouraged to add in new words to describe movement.

They could also work with a partner to choreograph the 4 movements into a scene. The task is that each person must use the 4 moves, but in any order they choose. What is the motivation to move? Make the moves make sense by adding in dialogue.

**“Pass a Clap”** (*concentration, cooperation*)

Stand in a circle, hands up and ready to clap, eyes on the floor. The leader claps hands once, the clap is repeated around the circle. The goal is to keep it smooth

and even in sound. Another goal may be to speed it up or to slow down or to make a rhythm.

**“Counting, All Together Now!”** (*cooperation, concentration, awareness*)

Similar to the previous game, stand in a circle and as a group try to count up to 10. At any point, any person can say a number BUT only one at a time may speak. If two or more speak the group must start over at one again.

**“Jeepers Peepers”** (*silly noises, anyone can win, no risk*)

Stand in a circle, eyes on the floor, on the count of three look up at someone in the circle. If that person is looking elsewhere then you look back at the floor BUT if you make eye contact with someone you both must scream and jump out of the circle. You are both then out, and the circle closes in and continues until the final showdown.

**“Everybody is It!!”** (*physical, awareness, energy boost*)

This is a very active, but short game best played in a large open space. Every person is it and you try to tag people by touching them on the back. If you are tagged you lie down “dead”. Very quickly it will be down to only a few students until strategy wins out.

**“Gesture Pass” “Sound Pass” and “Face Pass”** (*impulses, trust*)

Stand in a circle, select a person to start, they turn to the right and make a physical gesture to the next person. That person repeats the same gesture back exactly. They then turn to the right and make a new, different gesture. It is repeated back and so on. The goal is to be spontaneous and follow an impulse, don't THINK, just DO. It might help to keep it fast by dividing into two even circles and have a race.

Sound Pass is the same except you pass a sound. You may suggest a theme sound such as cartoon noises. You can also put a sound to a gesture. Pass a Face is the same but you make faces at one another, try adding a sound as well.

**“Yes, Let's!”** (*accepting ideas, imagination*)

The goal is to help students get used to accepting suggestions in improv (to not block ideas). Walk in a random pattern about the room. At any point, any person can call out a suggestion, such as “Let's all bounce like bunnies” and

everyone calls out “Yes! Let’s!” They have to then bounce until a new suggestion is called out, such as “Let’s all pretend we’re Dracula” and the response is, “Yes! Let’s!”.

**“This is a ....”** (*impulse, creative*)

Stand in a circle and produce a simple object (a pencil, a ball glove, a ruler). Explain that the object is capable of turning into anything you can possibly imagine. Begin to use it in a new way (ex. To brush your teeth) as you say “This is a ....”. Anyone, or all, fill in the blank (ex. A toothbrush). The object is passed to the next person who begins to use it in a new way.

Another option is to stand in a circle with a chair in the centre. Any person can move to the centre to use the chair in a new way until it is identified by the group. The goal is to be spontaneous and inventive with the chair.

**“Atoms Everywhere”** (*new groups, impulses, cooperation*)

This game requires listening to directions, moving quickly and cooperatively with others. Begin by moving about the room – as atoms in a substance – call out different substances each time, such as honey, ice, gum, boiling water, jello. Once they have explored the movement for a time, call out “Atom 6” (or some such number as you wish) and they rush to form a group of that number. Tell those without a group to attach themselves anyway to an atom cluster. Then call out an object, such as a toaster, a tractor, a telephone – and they are to rearrange the atoms to make that object with their bodies. Count to ten and yell freeze (to give them the incentive to move quickly with little discussion). Then allow them to bring it to life and add a sound component. All will laugh and be silly. Then they are back to being atoms, moving about the room and so the game repeats.

**“Red, Green, Black, Tag”** (*impulse, group interaction*)

Students must understand the rules of improv – everyone is a character and the things said are not to be taken personally. The game requires listening to a colour and then doing a corresponding improvised dialogue. When red is called you must find a partner and begin to compliment them. When green is called you must move to a new partner and begin to insult them. When black is called you must do a melodramatic death scene. When tag is called you must try to tag as many people as possible by touching them on the back. The caller must try to keep people moving about to new partners.

### **“Slow Motion Samurai & Fast Forward Chef”** (*movement, creative*)

Try out various ways of moving through space. Ask for students to write down occupations on slips of paper and place in a hat. You will call out slow motion, fast forward, reverse or pause (just like a VCR) and then you will also draw out occupations. For ex. “Slow motion - Samurai” and they must move in this manner until a new direction is given, such as, “in reverse – Deep Sea Diver”.

### **“Baby I Love You”** (*control, creative*)

The goal of this game is to be able to control your laughter, take on a role and be believable. It is a good game for discussing personal space as well. Stand in a circle and one person is in the centre. The person can select anyone to address by saying, “Baby, I love you. Won’t you give me a smile?” They can say it any way they please, use any type of voice BUT they must not make physical contact. The other person must keep eye contact and with a completely straight face say, “Baby I love you but I just can’t smile.” If they crack a smile they must then go in the centre and try to get someone else to smile. This game really helps them learn to control emotions.

### **“Fortunately, Unfortunately”** (*advancing the story, imagination*)

Stand with a partner and tell a story together, but imagine you are only one person speaking – use “I”. Each phase of the story must begin with either “fortunately ...” or “unfortunately ...”. Each addition to the story must advance the story. You can also try this in a large group.

### **“First Lines”**

This is an improv exercise in which the first line is given and then the dialogue is driven from that starting point. Students interact with new partners for each starting line in order to get used to talking to everyone. The dialogues are all happening at the same time so that they are not put on the spot with others listening in on the scene. It is a good way to introduce improv dialogue and taking on characters.

Example: Call yourselves “A” and “B”. “A” is the mother/father and “B” is the teen. “B” has the first line “I told you I’d be late.” Let the dialogue go for about a minute or so. Then move to a new partner.

Example: “A” is room mate of “B”. “A” has the first line, “How did my stereo get broken?”

Example: “A” is a teacher and “B” is a student. “B” starts with “Please??!!”

## Using Improvisation

Many people use improv for fun – and it is fun! But they also underestimate the value improv has in creating drama students with the ability to think quickly, respond and to take risks. Use improv to build up group trust, but be aware that it can also just as easily erode group dynamics if some are using it to poke fun at certain people, to showboat, or to manipulate the group. The teacher must be watching and listening carefully to the scenes being played out. Laughter can be healing or hurtful. Be prepared to discuss problems honestly and do “perception checks” to clear the air.

Remember, improv requires:

- Listening skills
- Following impulses
- Taking risks
- Advance the story always
- Find the conflict
- Don't block ideas by always saying “no”
- Have fun, BUT don't always go for comedy, explore all kinds of emotions (going for the laugh is also a defense, it is easier than showing fear or anxiety and looking vulnerable)

### **“Somewhere on a Bench”** (*characters*)

Playing the Same Place a bench in the playing area, students are lined up and watching. Each are to play a character which complements, is the same without being a copy of the character on the bench. The first person enters for example as old man feeding the birds. The next in line must watch carefully to understand what the first is trying to portray. They then come in as another old person and perhaps ask to help with the feeding – or perhaps offers a new kind of seed. When they seem to have the scene the others clap to indicate it is done. The First person leaves the playing area and the second person now becomes a new character on a bench. For example they become a child playing with a toy. The next in line comes in aslo as a child and they begin to fight over a toy. And so it continues until all have had a chance.

Playing Opposites Once they understand the exercise they can play it again but this time come in as a character opposite (or in contrast) to the one on the bench. Very interesting scenes arise from this exercise.

Talk about characters, how do we recognize people? Observation is important.

### **“Switch”** (*impulses*)

This is a standard exercise used by many – the idea is to start an improv scene and at any point someone can yell “Switch”. The action must freeze and the newcomer takes the place and position of another and then changes the intent of the scene. It is important for people to try to make large gestures. It is also important to keep the switching fast so that scenes don’t get laborious and the energy is lost.

### **“Arms”** (*physicality, responding*)

Start with 4 people. Two people are in the scene, while the other two people provide their arms. It helps to give them a location in which action takes place. Provide a relationship for them to work with. Ex. A couple in a fancy restaurant trying to break up. Extras can play the waiter, other couples, the chef, etc.

### **“Objects = Emotions”** (*responding, listening, emotions*)

Identify 3 objects and an emotion to be played when in contact with that object. You give a scenario to three players. They must in contact with one of the objects and play the appropriate emotion. At any point they switch objects and thereby switch emotions. The scene must justify the change in emotion.

For example: In a police interrogation room. Table = angry; chair = sad; wall = apologetic. The characters are two police and a suspect.

### **“Fairytale in a Minute”** (*finding the essence of a story*)

Pull a fairy tale suggestion from a hat. Form a small group. You have 1 minute to discuss how to show the story in one minute. Assign someone to time it as it plays out.

### **“Inner Voices”** (*character, listening, responding*)

In groups of four, two people are to have a scene while two other people are to speak the inner thoughts. Remember you can only “hear” your own inner thoughts. Respond accordingly to the thoughts provided.

Give them a relationship and a location. For example: at the movies on a first date; or a doctor’s appointment for a pregnancy test; or a boss holding an interview for a job.



### **“Entrances and Exits”** (*listening, cooperation, building stories*)

This is an interesting way to use improv with the entire class. It is an ongoing story in which people may enter or exit at any time, they can also change characters at any entrance. The rule is to keep it continuous and for the story to make sense as it advances. Try to discourage bombs and robbers unless people react accordingly – all must accept the story and keep it going realistically.

Start by asking a few to volunteer and to create a set, ex: a living room and to become characters in the set. Establish their relationship and how exits and entrances may be made. For ex: if you enter from another room in the house we must assume you belong there or showed up previously. Respond accordingly and assume the relationship. If you say “who are you?” then it blocks the scene from advancing. If they enter all bent over with a cane you may choose to yell, “hey grandma, did you have a nice nap?” or whatever.

This exercise provides lots of room for discussion in how to make a story advance, playing character, listening to each other and attention to the playing area. Be careful, you don’t want 4 stories going on at once – the audience won’t know where to look, nor will the players hear the story.

### **“Hot Seat”** (*staying in character*)

This exercise is used to help a character fill out in more detail. Spend some time finding your character, how they move, think, dress, talk, occupation, age, etc. What do they really want? What is stopping them?

Work with a partner and take turns putting each other in the “Hot Seat”. This is done by staying in character and answering any questions given. You must remain in character, and give answers confidently and spontaneously. Who is asking the questions? Is it a police officer, a priest, a hairdresser, a shrink?

### **“On the Bus”** (*staying in role, react, listen*)

This can be played as a whole class episode. One person plays the bus driver and stops to pick up various characters at different stops. Let the scenario develop according to character actions. Work on finding conflict and stay in role. People can get off the bus at any time.

### **“Telephone”** (*working with monologue, character*)

Using only a chair and a telephone as props, ask each person to pull a character and a problem from a hat. Use this to create a scene with a phone. It will be a spontaneous monologue arising from the problem they are dealing with.