

Study Guide For Teachers

Freestyle Repertory Theatre In *TheatreSports*

presented by

Young Audiences
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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

“TheatreSports” is a series of ever-changing, improvised theater games created from student suggestions and played with student volunteers. *The New York Times* described our 1999 Artists of the Year as “constantly entertaining...kooks on the loose.”

LEARNING GOALS

Students will:

- Be exposed to the art of theatrical improvisation.
- Be encouraged to participate with peers as a team and be self-reliant through the principles of improvisation:
 - To look good, you must make others look good.
 - To be safe you must take risks.
 - To be self-reliant, you must trust others.
 - To be able to succeed, you must be willing to fail good-naturedly.
- Understand the difference between live theatre and film or television
- Understand the difference between a scripted and improvised performance

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Theatrical improvisation is an art form in which the performer acts as playwright, director, and actor in front of an audience. Actors use audience suggestions to guide their performance as they create dialogue, setting, and plot extemporaneously. It employs teamwork, spontaneity, creative risk-taking, and all the skills of traditional theatre.

In this creative and fun-filled program, two teams of actors challenge each other to come up with the better improvisation in a series of games such as “People as Objects”, “Cutting Room”, “Fugue” and “Conducted Story”. The audience decides which team is the winner of each match.

As the performers create scenes, stories, songs, or poems based on suggestions from the audience, the art of improvisation becomes accessible and fun.

Students and teachers will see games that can be readily explored in their classrooms by following the two simple rules of improvisation: “always make your partner look good” and “always say yes”. Exercises in improvisation help students think creatively, develop focus and attention, work together, and try new things.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

1. Ask students whether they have seen live theatre – and if so, discuss their reactions. Discuss the difference between live theatre and television or film (including proper audience behavior).

2. Introduce the class to the idea of improvisation. To improvise is to simultaneously compose and perform on the spur of the moment, without any preparation – the performer is “making it up as he/she goes along.”

3. Encourage your class to improvise! Try pantomime: Try “becoming” an object, or a person using one. You can “be” a spinning top, an airplane, clothes on the line, or a person spinning a top, playing baseball, or hammering a nail. Express feelings in pantomime. Move as if you are happy, fearful, angry, bored, excited, proud, unhappy, etc.

- For older students, try the famous Bobby Lewis exercise: “This is not a pencil.” With students in a circle, take turns thinking up new things that a regular pencil could “be”. No words are used; students must use clear body language to show what the pencil is while the other students guess the meaning of the gestures.

4. Improvise with spoken dialogue.

Paper Bag Drama: Place three objects (if they are unrelated objects, even better!) in a bag, and ask your students to improvise a situation using all three.

Ask-A-Word: Each student writes a word on three different slips of paper. The slips are shuffled and each student pulls out three words and improvises a situation around them. (This activity can also be used as a creative writing exercise.)

5. Let students know that their ideas will be used during the performance. They can prepare themselves by thinking of interesting or unusual suggestions. For instance, students can list some elements in a style of an author they have read for class. Urge them to give that author as a suggestion during the show.

RESOURCES

Coleman, Janet. *The Compass: The Improvisational Theatre that Revolutionized American Comedy*. New York: Knopf, 1990.

Johnstone, Keith. *Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre*. Grove Press, 1987.

Spolin, Viola. *Theatre Games for the Classroom*. Northwestern University Press, 1986.

Sweet, Jeffrey. *Something Wonderful Right Away*. Limelight Editions, 1987.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. Discuss with students which was their favorite improvisational scene or game, and why.

2. Have students write a poem, with each student contributing one line. You may choose to begin by choosing a type of poem (haiku, sonnet, etc.) or mapping out the rhyming pattern. Try to maintain the elements of poetry (rhyme, meter, simile, metaphor, etc?) as you write together.

3. Ask students to create a fictional character by making a list of that person's characteristics, (e.g., name, occupation, appearance, age, personality, etc.) Each student should contribute one characteristic. Then, have small groups or the entire class write a story about that character.

4. If applicable to the performance, ask the students if the improvisers successfully recreated the style of a given author. Why or why not? How might they reflect that author's style better?

5. Why do students think the performance is called “Theatre Sports”? How are improvisational games similar to, or different from sports?

VOCABULARY WORDS

IMPROVISATION
CREATIVITY
OBSTACLE
COOPERATION
DIRECTOR
PLAYWRIGHT
ACTOR
SPONTANEITY
ORIGINALITY

ARTIST INFORMATION

Young Audiences National Artists of the Year in 1999, Freestyle Repertory Theatre (FRT) is dedicated to the whimsy of the audience and the visceral thrill of actors flying without a script. Since 1982 FRT has produced annual seasons of improvisational theater throughout New York City. FRT fields a roster of about 30 TheatreSports team members and has a repertoire of more than 100 improvisational games. FRT performs TheatreSports before 50,000 schoolchildren a year in tri-state area schools.