

# Improvisation Theater Workshop

## Description

Improvisation is likely to be known as a performance form that allows for audience participation, is based in comedy and is only for the very quick-witted. Improvisation, however, is a truly adaptable art-form that is proven to be an effective tool onstage and off for many different ages groups and levels of experience. In other words, while it can be highly entertaining, improvisation is much more than "being funny." The tenets of improvisation--namely saying yes or accepting ideas without judgement, creating a safe atmosphere and listening--have made this form important to actors and non-actors alike. For actors, improvisation is crucial to being in the moment and learning to trust your instincts onstage, particularly in auditions. For non-actors, improvisation is an effective tool for creating a workplace that is focused on creative ideas, free communication and teamwork. The purpose of this arts learning program is to introduce students of all levels to improvisation and allow them to experience first-hand what it's like to make up scenes on their feet.

## Program Length

Much like the form itself, improvisation classes are very adaptable in terms of length of time. Typical improvisation classes that students would take at an improvisation theater would be anywhere from 60 to 90 minutes. For the purpose of this arts learning program, it would be most ideal to allow for 120 minutes, so that a group dynamic can be formed and exercises can be revisited. However, as stated, outside demands on time can be accommodated easily and classes can be formatted for time constraint without any loss of effectiveness.

## In Class

**Improvisation classes are comprised primarily of on-your-feet exercises (which are easily adaptable to all levels of physicality and mobility) that build on one another. These exercises are briefly described below. Typically, students begin with a series of warm-up exercises, but it is noted that when the students are performing these exercises, they are already improvising. The order and exercises adapt to the number of students as well as the level of students. All workshops--regardless of length--have simple warm-up exercises and end with the group learning a performance structure.**

- *Introduction:* principles of improvisation are shared with the class and guidelines for our play are established, namely: saying yes, participating as much as you are comfortable, listening and supporting one another.

- **Curriculum:**

Note: all exercises focus on saying yes and trusting the group to play along; more skills (*i.e.*, physical commitment) are layered in as the class progresses.

- *Name Game:* students get in a circle and move about the circle by saying another person's name and waiting for him or her to say "yes." Goals: say yes, work as a group, ice breaker.

- *Everybody Go:* students stand in a circle and each student, one at a time, performs a simple movement with sound. The other students say "yes" together and then repeat the movement and sound together as accurately as possible. Goals: say yes, commit to movement and sound, work as a group.

- *Zip-Zap-Zop:* students stand in a circle and pass the phrase "zip-zap-zop" around the circle to one another while clapping. Goals: focus, commitment to group, energy.

- *What's in the Box:* a way to give one another improvised gifts while reinforcing the "yes" principle and introducing space work, or miming objects. Students get in two lines and give one another gifts that the other must accept and then utilize in some way. Goals: accepting gifts, saying yes and adding the important "and" after it so that there is a scene, *i.e.*, building on ideas.

- *Word Ball:* students stand in a circle and throw an imaginary ball to one another. Space work and working together is emphasized. Goals: commit to scene group creates, listening, physical commitment.

- *Transformation:* students get in a circle and send a sound and action from one to the other as quickly as possible. Goals: to react rather than "think," say yes.

- *Rant:* students break from group one at a time and "rant" about a given topic. The key is to keep the rant going, so when one student is ranting, the others look for a place to pick up the rant and maintain the energy. Goals: connecting emotion to words, learning not to self-edit, work as a team.

- *Clams Are Great:* much like rant, students break from group and talk about why "clams" (object changes) are "great." Students are encouraged not

to worry about being literal. Goals: capturing stream-of-consciousness thought, saying yes, accepting all ideas.

- *Computer*: also a performance structure, students stand in a line and answers questions posed to them one word at a time. Goals: listen, work as a group.

- *One-Line Story*: students stand in a line and tell a story one word at a time. 2 person story can also compliment this structure: 2 students work together to tell a story as if they were trying to remember it together. Both of these structure are also performance structure. Goals: listen, work as a group.

- *3-Line Scene*: students perform a series of 3 line scenes one after another, using only words of inspiration to begin. Goals: say yes, listen, give gifts, work as a group, accept new ideas.

Improvisation is about creating a safe and non-judgemental atmosphere from which students can create. The low-risk exercises give students a great deal of confidence in their abilities--whether they consider themselves actors or not. Ultimately, students learn that there is no "scene" without commitment to saying yes to new ideas and listening to those around you.

This arts learning program is adaptable for middle-school through adult age students and is appropriate for students with disabilities as well. Possible venues for this program include middle-school, high school, junior college, university, or community education class. Ideally classes should be limited between 10-20 students. The only space requirement is a room large enough for 10-20 children or adults to move comfortably.