



JAMES THOMAS BAILEY is the Artistic Director of the National Comedy Theatre® in Hollywood and producer/director of *ComedySportz*®, the longest running show in Los Angeles, now in its 20th year. Mr. Bailey is in demand as a corporate trainer and consultant, having been engaged by such powerhouses as Universal Studios, ABC Television, Coca-Cola, eBay, PepsiCo and many divisions of the Walt Disney Company. ComedySportz has entertained and educated 63 of this year's Fortune 500 companies. In addition to his extensive corporate work, Mr. Bailey created the largest improvisational training program for youth in the United States. More than seventy schools in southern California participate and many thousands of students have benefited from

the life skill training the High School League® provides. For his work in education, he was recently given the Professional Artist Award from the California Educational Theatre Association and was inducted into the California Thespian Hall of Fame. As an artist, Mr. Bailey has produced many American and world premieres in Los Angeles, and has appeared in more than fifty stage productions. He also appears frequently on television, most recently as a regular cast member of *World Cup Comedy* on the PAX Television cable network. He is currently president of the World Comedy League and president of the California Educational Theatre Association.

ADDITIONAL IMPROV RESOURCES

Boal, Augusto: **Games for Actors and Non-Actors**

Routledge, 1992

Book, Stephen: **Book on Acting: Improvisation Technique for the Professional Actor in Film, Theater and Television**

Silman-James Press, 2002

Coleman, Janet: **The Compass** (re The Compass/Second City)

Knopf, 1990

Goldberg, Andy: **Improv Comedy**

Samuel French, 1991

Halpern, Charna & Close, Del & Johnson, Kim: **Truth In Comedy: The Manual of Improvisation**

Meriwether, 1994

Johnstone, Keith: **Don't Be Prepared**

Loose Moose, 1995

Impro: Improvisation and the Theatre

Theatre Arts Books, 1979

Koppett, Kat: **Training to Imagine: Practical Improvisational Theatre Techniques to Enhance Creativity, Teamwork, Leadership, and Learning**

Stylus Publishing, 2001

Sills, Paul: **Story Theatre**

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More Story Theatre

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Spolin, Viola: **Improvisation for the Theatre**

Northwestern University Press, 1963

Theatre Games for Rehearsal: A Director's Handbook

Northwestern University Press, 1985

Theatre Games for the Classroom: A Teacher's Handbook

Northwestern University Press, 1986

Sweet, Jeffrey: **Something Wonderful Right Away** (re The Compass/Second City)

Limelight Editions, 1986

Wirth, Jeff: **Interactive Acting**

Fall Creek Press, 1994

The Skills of Improvisation (This is What You Tell the Administrator and the Parents)

If you think of improv as funny theatre games, think again. Here's what improv teaches:

Focus
Concentration
Teamwork
Using creativity to overcome obstacles
Listening
Sharing
Saying "yes" instead of "no"
Confidence
Trust
Communication
Body Language
Awareness of self
Awareness of space
Spontaneity
Commitment
Risk
Creative problem-solving
Understanding of conflict
Understanding of dramatic arc
Character development
Stage presence
Appreciation of diversity

The secret is in the application of the skills, and that's where most teachers fall apart. Many theatre teachers will find a great book of theatre games and get an enthusiastic response from the kids.

"Thank God! They're involved! *They like me!*"

It feels so good to know the kids are enjoying themselves. But if you don't ever make the application of the skills the game teaches to their work as actors, then the value of the exercise is diminished. If you help students make the application, you will see the result in all of their work on stage. It will complement and enhance your program.

The Value of Play

Viola Spolin, the grand dame of improvisation, hit the nail on the head when she realized the value of children's play. When we are at play, we let our guard down and allow ourselves to explore areas that we normally wouldn't. We make choices with abandon without critiquing their sensibility. We act on instinct. This is invaluable to the actor.

There is nothing wrong with having a sense of play in your classroom. Your class should be the fun class. That doesn't diminish its worth. I *insist* that my class be fun, otherwise I don't want to be there. And moreover, I want to have fun with my students. Yikes, that's scary! I might let my guard down and let my students see that I, too, stumble occasionally.

As children, we don't have to be coached into playing or making believe. We make up characters, stories and games. We build things out of nothing. We sing songs that we're writing as we go. Somewhere around age twelve or thirteen, when our hormones decide that they are the most important thing in our world, we stop playing. What used to be fun becomes foolish. The sensible adults in our world, our role models, tell us to grow up and act our age. And thus the great decline of childhood begins. Someone once told me that adulthood, which we can't wait to attain, is really the death of childhood. As we march into our responsible lives and corporate cubicles, we forget how to play. By the time most of us our adults, we have trouble modeling play for our own children.

Using Improv in the Real World of the Actor

I already touched on a couple ways that improv will be useful for the actor who is trying to have a career. Let me elaborate.

Theatre

The joy of the live theatre is that it is ephemeral. A colleague of mine once likened a live performance to an angel in the snow. Remember how to make a snow angel? You lie down in fresh snow and wave your arms and legs and then stand to witness the beautiful likeness of an angel and its wings. But the angel is momentary; as soon as the wind blows, it is gone.

Everything about a live performance crackles with energy. Actors are making choices and feeding on the connection with the audience. Because of that immediacy and spontaneity, each live performance is unique.

In rehearsal, the skills of improvisation are most useful, allowing the actor to explore and make choices. As a director, nothing bugs me more than a young actor who stands on stage with script in hand, looking at me blankly, waiting for me to tell them what to do.

"Should I cross?" says the actor.

"I don't know. *Should* you?" says the director.

"What do you want me to do?" says the actor.

"Make a choice," says the director.

That's usually how the conversation goes. I love actors who make a big, bold choice. It doesn't matter if it's not spot-on. If it doesn't work, make a new choice, but make a choice! I don't enjoy having to act through the actor; I want to guide (or direct) the actor through the maze of choices to help them find their own unique take on the role. Improvisation teaches actors to make strong choices and to support others in making strong choices.

I was once fortunate to play Mozart in a production of *Amadeus*, a great part in a great play. But what made the production a wonderful experience for me was not the role itself, but the two other actors with leading roles in the play. *They were both improvisers*, and rehearsal was like a playground. We could try anything and the choices were supported. So much fun, and acting never felt so free.

In performance, the skills of improvisation provide the performance with immediacy. How else could Yul Brynner have done 8,000 performances of *The King and I*? Each night had to be the first time that the character said those words. Acting is about recreating human behavior on stage, and improvisation allows actors to become keen observers of the world around them.

Improvisation also allows flexibility for the exciting challenges of live theatre! Such as:

the missed entrance
the forgotten prop
the backdrop that flies in for the wrong scene
the gun that won't fire
the phone that doesn't ring
the zipper that gets stuck
the bird that flies on stage
the microphone that falls off
the actor who leaves stage to vomit in the wings

All of those things have happened in plays I've worked on. Believe me, the improv skills of a quick-thinking, unflappable actor has saved many a moment and many a play.

Commercials

If you're an actor, you might be saying to yourself, "I would never do commercials. I'm classically trained!" Well, yippee for you. So am I and a lot of my very talented friends. The truth is, when you're an actor, you act. You try to get every job you can because you get rejected so often. And most of all, you need the health insurance and the money those commercials can put in your pocket. That's the *real* world of the actor, and if you can't improvise, you're not going to get jobs doing commercials.

No one tells you this, but about 90% of all commercial auditions involve improvisation. That's because there's nothing for the actor to do. Have you ever watched a commercial where a guy is biting into a cheeseburger and thought to yourself, "Wow. He is really talented. I could never bite a cheeseburger like that." Of course not, because any idiot can bite into a cheeseburger. So why did he get the job? Because he did something interesting or clever during the audition process that made the director think it might be fun to spend half a day with the guy. And that half day of work could translate into \$25,000 or more plus insurance, depending on how they use the spot. That's why we classically trained actors audition for commercials.

Most of the time, commercials have very little script. There's very little for you to do, so the casting folks need you to improvise so they can try to assess who is best for the job. (Forget for a second that sometimes the best one for the job is coincidentally the nephew of the director.) They won't ever actually ask you to improvise. They can't, because then they are asking you to write for them, and there are union rules against it. I am about to tell you the secret code that a casting assistant will say to you when they want you improvise: "Have fun with it." In other words, please do something better than what we've given you.

I have partnered with people who can't improvise at all, and are in fact, terrified of it. I actually had a woman ask me as we walked out of an audition together if I knew where she could get a good improv class because she was impressed with my ability to take direction and come up with six different ways to talk about toilet paper. What's of note here, is that she was in her sixties, which means she waited sixty years to take an improv class. Think of all those cheeseburgers she could have bitten.

I didn't get the toilet paper job, by the way. Somebody else must have thought of a seventh way.

Television and Film

Every actor wants to get into television and film. It somehow makes our careers more valid to the general public. I hate when I tell someone I'm an actor and their first response is "What movies have you been in?" If you respond that your primary work is the legitimate stage, they don't seem to care.

It's also where the money is. Those jobs can pay a lot of money, and better yet, they pay residuals, which means you get little surprise checks in the mail when they re-run the show or sell it to a foreign market. You can make money for years if a show plays enough.

There are two main reasons that improvisation is useful in these arenas. The first is that in the audition process, actors most often read across the desk from a casting director or assistant. Often, the casting folks are casting folks because they're not very good actors. I once had a casting director tell me he used to run the sandwich cart in the lobby of the building and worked his way up—this is the man who was about to act with me. Improv allows you to make immediate choices and create the world around you, even without the help of the other actor. It allows you to adjust quickly and find ways around staging in the script that can't be accomplished in the the six-foot square casting office.

The second reason is that time is money. For those of us who love the theatre, one of the aspects we love the most is rehearsal. In television and film, you're lucky if you get a rehearsal. Usually the rehearsal is for the cameras, not for the actors. You're might be asked to kiss someone you just met or you might be handed two new pages of dialogue minutes before you shoot. The skills of improv allow you to quickly make strong choices and adjustments that are normally guided by a director, when the director is busy dealing with lighting and cameras. Time is money, and there isn't time for lengthy rehearsals, and there isn't time for you to 'try it again.' Improv will be your saving grace.

The legendary Spencer Tracy never wanted to do more than one take, and the older and more famous he got, the more directors indulged him. Imagine working with Mr. Tracy and how sharp your skills and how strong your choices would have to be.

Improv Groups

Yes, you might be in a group that improvises in performance some day. That's another reason to have these skills, but in reality, the least important. And that comes from a guy who runs an improv company.

If you already have an improv performance group and plan to use this book for your performers, you will pick and choose exercises more carefully, perhaps when a skill area needs a brush-up. One thing I know is that once improvisers start performing, they slowly transition to the idea that they know everything about improv and have nothing else to learn. If you can keep your performers rooted in their basic skills, you will have much more success in performance. There isn't an exercise in this book that I haven't done with my professional improvisers, some of whom have been improvising for over 25 years. Keep this kind of work as part of your regular rehearsal regimen, and you will see dramatic differences.

Post-Workshop Recap

In the course of our workshop together, we will have covered many tools from the improviser's toolbox. Here's a super-quick rundown of several touch points. Please feel free to email with any thoughts, questions or if you'd like to discuss anything further. We love talking about it and there's plenty more where these came from. Here's how they apply to life-skills:

1. We are all improvisers. Your entire life is improvised. The skills that we use on stage to make people laugh are the same skills that you use every day to communicate with the world. These basic skills of listening, trust, awareness, sharing, focus and teamwork can aid any student on and off-stage.
2. "Yes, and..." This is the improviser's secret handshake, the mantra upon which everything is based. It's hearing what someone says, accepting it, and adding to it. (Two evil stepsisters: "yes, but" and "yes, or.")
3. Making and taking "offers" In improv, when someone enters a scene they say or do something which informs the story. This is called an "offer" and may be verbal or physical. It may be different than the idea another improviser has already formed in their head. A good improviser will take that offer, "yes, and" it, even if it means being willing to drop their own agenda. It's the foundation of what we do.
4. Be so wrong everyone else thinks you're right. This is about confidence and not shying away. Often there is not a single right answer to a challenge. There are many choices and pros and cons to each. Often the solution to a challenge is the result of several ideas that don't work. If those initial ideas had not been made, the solutions would never have transpired. Don't be afraid to make an "offer." Strong *commitment* to choices!
5. Being "in the moment." A good improviser is present and focused on the exact moment that things are happening. It's so easy to get caught up in the stressors of life, distracted by thinking ahead, making suppositions, or wallowing in things that have already happen. There's a place for planning and reflection, but it can take you out of the present moment and limit *awareness*.
6. Listening to the ends of sentences. Being a power listener is about focusing on your partner and hearing everything that they have to say. Often we hear the beginning of what someone says and then tune out, simply waiting for our next opportunity to speak. This is often transparent and it breaks trust. It makes the partner self-conscious, more inclined to close off and not keep contributing at the current level.
7. Making each other look good. A good improviser makes their partner look good on stage. They do it by focusing on them, accepting their offers, listening all the way to the end of their sentences and then adding to what they've said. This is vital to making anyone feel confident and worthy and valued. In improv, *we take care of each other!*

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Hello Theatre Teachers of Cyprus!

These are some of the exercises we did in our workshops. We did not do all of the same exercises in every city, so perhaps you'll find something new.

These pages are excerpts from my book, which is not yet published. The red type indicates what you should say to the children. The black type are "stage directions" for you. Good luck and best wishes.

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The Circus Bow

Skills/Topics: Worrying about judgement, failing vs. failure, risk.

There's a difference between **failing and failure**. Failing is taking chances, trying new paths, being creative and experimenting. If after "failing," you dust yourself off and try again, then you haven't failed, have you?

Failing is innovation. Failing is creativity. *Failure* is stopping.

Edison failed more than a thousand times when inventing the lightbulb. If he had accepted failure, we'd all be sitting around in the dark.

However, if at some point during class, you feel you have just crashed and burned...do the **Circus Bow**. I'll demonstrate and then you clap madly. Ready?

Throw your hands in the air like a ringmaster, say, "I failed! Thank you!" and take a grand bow with your arms sweeping in front of you. The class should then burst into applause.

If at any time you feel like you took such a nose dive that there's no graceful way out, do the Circus Bow and we will all applaud your creativity and risk-taking. Everybody ready? 1-2-3!

Everyone takes their bow and applauds madly for each other.

Pussy (Kitty) Wants a Corner

Skills: Ensemble building, Connection, Risk, Communication, Trust.

This is an old game with an old-fashioned name. It was taught to me by Paul Sills, famous for founding the Compass Players, which became Second City. Oh, and his mom was Viola Spolin. I know what you're thinking. *I can't teach this game to my students. They're not mature enough and I will get phone calls.* Not true. You can change it to "Kitty Wants a Corner" if you like, but I have never once changed the name of this game, not for middle school kids, not for lumberjacks. Yes, I taught this to lumberjacks. There is great value in learning to "get over it" and move on. Sometimes we allow our students and ourselves too much room to spin out of control or to take ourselves out of experiences that make us uncomfortable. Sometimes, it's time to get over it and do the work.

Divide the class into circles of no more than fifteen.

Let's make a circle. One person will be in the center, and for now, that will be me. I'm going to teach you the name of this game. It's a very old game, perhaps 75 to 100 years old, and it has an old-fashioned name. I'm going to tell you the name of the game and then we're all going to get over it and move on. The name of the game is "Pussy Wants a Corner." Are we all over it? (Don't wait for an answer) Good. Did you see how easy it was to **get over it** when we allowed ourselves to? We just saved a lot of time. Thank you.

Now, I'm the pussycat and each of you are in a "corner." I will come up to one of you and say, "Pussy wants a corner!" to which you reply, "Go ask my neighbor."

Demonstrate this with a few students, moving randomly to the next person or across the circle as you see fit.

Get it? Now while my back is turned asking my question, you try to make eye-contact with someone across the circle and attempt to exchange places while my back is turned. If I see you and jump into your "corner" before you get there, you become the pussycat. Let's do a slow motion example.

Pick some students to help you demonstrate in slow motion. You will probably find that they will speed up rather than lose.

Did you see what just happened? Why did they go fast? Because it's part of our nature to not want to lose, to not give. That's something we can all keep in the back of our minds.

Once they get the idea of the game, give them instruction that they should play safely. You'd be surprised how many people run directly into each other. I suppose it's not funny, but it's *really* funny. Tell them to play with care and then let them play. After a couple of minutes stop the game and give an adjustment.

You probably noticed by now that it's possible to play this game and never actually move! All you have to do is watch the pussycat and you never actually have to receive communication from anyone. In improv and in theatre, it's important to be aware at all times. It takes two to communicate. If the message goes out, but it's

never received, communication has failed. Let's try it again. Take your blinders off. What's the worst thing that can happen? You become the pussycat. Go!

After about five minutes, stop and debrief. They will play this for hours if you let them. Don't let them; they need to go to math.

Helpful Hint: This is the way the game is normally played. When played in the first few days of class, I often use it as a way to learn names. Instead of saying, "Go ask my neighbor!" and moving randomly to new person, have the class use names, such as "Go ask Jessica!" and then the pussycat has to go to Jessica, etc.

Side coaching suggestions:

Have you moved?
Take some chances!
Who's trying to communicate with you?
What's holding you back?

Debrief/Application

Okay. Let's talk about it! What happened for you? How can we apply this to our work as actors?

Skills/topics that may be discussed:

Risk
Communication
Trust
Failing
Playfulness
Get over it!

Attacker/Defender

Skills: Dealing with Change, Not panicking, Stepping Back, Adjustment.

Some folks know this game as Enemy/Defender.

Ask everyone to get into one big circle.

I want you all to look around the circle, and silently, in your head, choose someone. 1-2-3! Got them? They are your defender. Remember who they are and hang onto it. Now look around the circle and choose someone else. 1-2-3! Got them? They are you attacker. You now have an attacker and a defender.

Before I move on, I want to point out how quickly we made those decisions. Think about all the times you stand in front of the menu board at McDonald's, trying to make a decision, as if the menu has drastically changed. We made good strong decisions quickly. We can do it if we want to.

Now here's what we're going to do: when I say go, you will move and attempt to position yourself such that your defender is always stationed between you and your attacker. Your attacker and defender will be moving too, so you will have to constantly adjust. Ready? Go!

You may find that you need to demonstrate before they start. Once you say go, it will turn into a swirling mess and get more and more frantic as they try to make it work. Soon people will be laughing, yelling and chasing each other. After a minute or so, ask them to freeze. Ask them for observations. You will get answers like:

"He wouldn't stop moving!"

"She was my defender, but I was her attacker."

"I lost my defender."

Let's try it again. Everyone back in the circle. Choose a new defender, 1-2-3! And a new attacker, 1-2-3! I'm going to give you an adjustment. This time—don't panic. Realize that the situation you expect is not what you're going to get. It's going to be different, so calmly step back and adjust. You can't control it, so try to calmly adjust. Ready—no panicking!—go.

They will play again and it will start calmly and some will still have trouble not panicking. After a while it will begin to take order, perhaps a long line on one side and a circle on the other. Ask them to freeze one more time. Ask for observations.

Did you see how this time it was much more ordered? Could you feel those moments of panic rising up inside you? The only thing you can count on is change. In your head, you may have a clear idea of where you're going, but there's nothing you can do to control other people's choices. In fact, did you realize that your attacker wasn't even attacking you? Nor did they know they were an attacker. We create our own problems, our own attackers and then allow ourselves to not be in control. How could we apply this to being on stage?

Debrief/Application Topics

Panic

What happens when our choices conflict with other people's
Stepping back
Making strong choices
Dealing with change
Adjustment

Exposure

Skills/Topics: Focus, Stage Fright, Inner Life.

This is my translation of an exercise from Viola Spolin. You may want to consult her book for her version. It is a wonderful exercise.

Divide the students into two groups, so there is a group that will participate and a group that will observe. Have the participants stand in a line facing the observers.

Here's what we're going to do:

Group One—I want you to watch each and every person up here. Your job is to make mental notes of what you see. Really take the time to look at each person.

Group Two—Here's what I would like you to do: for one minute I want you to do nothing--absolutely nothing--and we're going to watch you do it.

Ready? Go.

Time them and gently side-coach along the way:

Do nothing!
Do absolutely nothing!

Also side-coach the observers:

Observers, really look at each person!
Make mental notes about what you observe!

At the end of one minute, call "stop" and ask everyone to remember what he or she felt or observed. Then switch the groups and have the observers become the participants.

When that minute is finished, switch the groups again, but this time give them an adjustment. Give them a task to count something, such as the number of ceiling tiles that are whole, that don't have a fixture springing from them. Or perhaps the number of different rectangles that you make from the window panes—something that's perhaps not too easy to do just by simple math.

Once again, time them for a minute and then switch.

Debrief/Application

During the first minute you were a participant, what did you feel?
Was it hard for you?

If you were an observer, what did you notice? Be specific.
How about the second time as a participant?
How was that different from the first time?
What did you observe the second time?
How can we apply this to our work as actors?

During the debrief, they will reveal the second time was much more comfortable because they had a **focus**. The observers too will notice a difference marked by less fidgeting, less giggling, less zombie-like stares. Even if they were able to “do nothing” the first time, the zombies probably developed an **inner life** which made them seem much more comfortable and watchable the second time.

This is your opportunity to talk about **stage fright** and how giving yourself a focus, usually the other actor, will take that away. Focus can also be on the task at hand (the **objective** of the character).

Giant Wizard Elf

Skills/Topics: Teamwork, Making Decisions, Yes!, Commitment.

This requires a large space. If you can play it on a large stage or outside, it is best.

Divide the class into two large teams. They should stand facing each other about 20 feet apart.

For this game, you will need to learn three secret signs: the sign of the Giant, the sign of the Wizard and the sign of the Elf. I'll demonstrate and you repeat.

Giant—throw your arms high over your head and yell “Raaahhh!”

Wizard—throw your arms in front of you, wiggle your fingers as if casting a spell and say, “Bzzzzzzzz!”

Elf—put your hands over your mouth, and in your highest-pitched voice, giggle, “Hee hee hee hee hee!” while jumping up and down.

Good! Now let's do all three in a row. There are some rules you need to remember:

Giants kill Wizards.
Wizards kill Elves.
Elves kill Giants.

This becomes a giant game of Rock-Paper-Scissors.

Your teams will huddle and you will decide on one sign for your whole team. After you've decided, you will return to the line and face the other team. When I say go, you will put your arms in front of you like sleepwalkers and take three giant steps toward the other team, grunting or growling on each step. After the third step, you do your sign. So it might look like this:

(demonstrating)

"rrruh, rrruh, rrrruh....Bzzzzzz!"

As you do your sign, quickly look at the person across from you to size up what they're doing. Remember the rules! If I'm a Wizard and he's a Giant, I have to remember that Giants kill Wizards! I'm going to turn around and run toward the start line. If the Giant tags me before I get to the safe line, I have to join the other team. Understand?

Now if you should meet your opponent and you're both doing the same sign at the same time, shake hands and tell the other person how attractive they are.

This always gets laughs, especially when they have to do it. Soon, they enjoy the process of complimenting and receiving compliments!

The game goes until one team wipes out the other team, although this rarely happens. Sometimes the little team comes back to defeat Goliath.

Let them play it for a while. You'll notice they immediately develop camaraderie, putting their arms around each other in a huddle. They will also begin to develop strategies.

After a while, I then begin narrowing their decision making time, first to ten seconds while I count down. Then I change it to five seconds.

Debrief/Application

How did you decide what sign to be?

Did the leadership change?

What happened if the choice didn't work?

How did it feel to be complimented?

Did you ever run the wrong way? Why?

How did you make decisions when I shortened the time?

Skills/topics that may be discussed:

The power of rallying behind a choice

Shrugging off a choice that didn't work

Teamwork

Not worrying if you lose

Amoeba Tag

Skills/Topics: Warm-up, Risk, Awareness.

Have the group form a large circle. If there is an odd number of students, you should play; if not, simply side-coach and observe. Two people will be in the center of the circle. If you are playing, let this be you and the lone student.

Join arms with one person next to you so that you are in pairs with some space on either side of you. You are now amoebas. I'm "it" and I'm going to be chasing Danny. Danny is going to try to avoid being tagged. In order for Danny to be "safe," he must join one of the amoebas by linking arms with one of you. When he joins

arms with one side, the other side of the amoeba must "divide" and let go. The person who just let go is now my target. If however, I should tag Danny before he becomes safe, then he is "it" and it's my turn to run. Understand? The only rule is that when you divide, you can't run to the person immediately next to you. Be aware for safety! Be aware to see if the person being chased really hooks on to your amoeba.

You will need to demonstrate this. You will also need to caution them not to panic and run. They need to be sure their amoeba is dividing before they let go. Students love this game and it's a great way to wake up a sleepy class.

Sidecoaching:

Run to someone who hasn't divided from their amoeba yet!
Take some chances!

Debrief/Application

Skills/topics that may be discussed:

Risk
Caring whether or not you lose
Being aware

Give and Take Motion

Skills/Topics: Awareness, Willingness to Give, Making strong choices.

This is another translated exercise from Viola Spolin. Have the students form a circle.

This is a silent game. In this game, one person is going to move and for now that will be me. I might move my arms or legs or bend or take a step or two. I am going to keep moving until I sense someone else start to move. At this point I will "give" and let someone else take over the motion. I will then freeze. The person in motion will continue until a new person takes and so on. Understand? The movement can be anything. Be sure to give when you sense someone else taking the motion. If two people take the motion at the same time, they should both give, rather than one person bullying their way through until the other person stops. Let's try it!

Students will be tentative at first. When they "take," they will probably do it by sliding into the movement gently, rather than doing it strongly.

After you do it once, stop and talk about it and then give some adjustments and try it again.

Sidecoaching

Are you giving when someone else takes?
If two people take at the same time, you both should give!
Use the eyes in the back of your head!
Make strong choices! Let people know you're taking!

Give!

Take more often! You can take whenever you want!

Stop the instant you sense someone else take!

Debrief/Application

Okay. Let's talk about it! What happened for you? How can we apply this to our work as actors?

Skills/topics that may be discussed:

Giving

Awareness

Strong offers

Stage Picture

Skills/Topics: Awareness, Creating good pictures on stage.

Again, a translation of a great exercise from Spolin.

Divide the class in half and ask one half to stand on stage and the others to be the observers.

I'm going to select one of you to be the "star." When I call that person's name, I want the star to move all around the stage and everyone else to try to keep up with the star because you're dying to be near her. When I say "stage picture," I want you to freeze where ever you are and then adjust your body position so that we in the audience can see everyone. Observers—it will be your task to let us know if you can see everyone. Ready? Jenny is the star!

Repeat this over and over, changing the name of the star after each stage picture. Sometimes the students will have to adjust their height, sometimes they will need to make more drastic changes to ensure there is a good stage picture. Once everyone has had a chance to be the star, have the students switch places so that the observers have a chance to try creating stage pictures.

The beauty of this exercise is that from this class on, all you will have to do is whisper "stage picture!" any time you need the actors to make a physical adjustment. They will become so used to this side-coaching that they will be able to make the correction without dropping character and stepping out of the scene.

Debrief/Application

Why is this important?

Could you sense when your stage picture wasn't working?

First Letter/Last Letter

Skills/Topics: Listening, Being in the moment, Focus.

Tell the students to get into new pairs, again with someone new.

This game is called First Letter/Last Letter. You're going to have a conversation, one sentence at a time back and forth. When it's your turn to speak, you must start your sentence with the last letter of the sentence you just heard from your partner. For example:

Partner One: "I'm really excited about the game tonight."

Partner Two: "Totally. It should be fun."

Partner One: "Naturally, I'm going to get there early."

And so on.

Demonstrate this with a volunteer.

This isn't meant to be a spelling exercise, so if you want to just grab the last sound of the sentence, that's okay too. For example:

Partner One: Here's my first sentence.

Partner Two: Say, I'm getting the hang of this.

Ready? Go!

They'll have a tough time with this. Let it go for about a minute and ask them how it went. After brief discussion, give them this adjustment:

We're going to try it again, but this time, I don't want you to think so hard. Just let that first sound fall out of your mouth and trust yourself to make sense of it. Also, I'm going to give you a topic to help you anchor it—talk about your favorite holiday. Go.

Debrief/Application

What happened for you?

Was it easy or hard?

How was it after I gave you the adjustment?

This exercise forces us to do something we don't do very often—listen to someone until the very end of your sentence. Often we interrupt each other with our response before they have even finished their sentence. Then we apologize and ask them to finish their thought, but in our minds, we have already tuned out. We know what our answer is going to be, and even though we've asked our friend to finish her thought, it's not going to affect our response. We've already decided.

We're not very good listeners. We're constantly distracted by all kinds of things like cell phones, instant messaging, email and more. This exercise makes us remain in the moment. We can't move on until the other person is finished. This is extremely important for improvisation. It's also what keeps an actor's performance real.

Hug Tag

Skills/Topics: Warm-up, Taking Care of Your Partner, Risk.

This is a tag game. One person will be it, and anyone can be tagged unless you are "safe." The way you become safe is by hugging someone else. It doesn't have to be a full-frontal hug (very important for middle school!); you can simply be grabbing on to someone else or have your arm around their shoulder or waist. You can "hug" in groups of two or three, but if you hug in more than that, you are no longer safe. Also, you can only hug for five seconds, so once you start your hug you have to count to five and then you're fair game for the tagger. Understand? Ready? Go!

This is an awesome game for teens because you get to touch each other! You may observe a tendency to go from one hug to the other, but try to encourage them to risk as much as possible. What's the worst that can happen? They become "it."

Side-coaching

Only hug for five seconds!
Only hug when you need to!
How long can you risk not being safe?

Debrief/Application

Observations? What did that feel like?
Were you able to only hug when you needed to?
Did you come to someone's aid, even when you were okay?

Two Eyes

Skills/Topics: Accepting Offers, Trust, Teamwork, Yes.

You will need crayons (no light colors), a stack of white paper and some painter's tape.

Ask the actors to find a new partner and to position themselves somewhere where there is a writing surface. Distribute a small stack of paper to each duo, and one crayon per person. Let them pick the color! You can't imagine how happy this makes people.

This is a nonverbal game. Take one piece of paper that the two of you will share. To get us started, one of you draw two circles on the paper, like eyes on a face. Here's what you're going to do: one at a time, you will add a line or an element to the drawing. Then the other partner will add something. You will continue drawing back and forth until one of you decides the drawing is complete. You will then be to title the drawing, one letter at a time, Dr. Know-It-All style. When you feel the title is complete, simply stop and hand me the paper. Then you can start on your next

drawing. Your next drawing does not have to be a face; it can be anything you want it to be. Remember, no talking. Questions? Go!

When they have finished their drawings, use the painter's tape to affix them to a wall like a gallery. Let them each draw three or four.

Side-coaching

Remember, no talking!
After your first drawing, draw anything you like.
Try drawing faster!

After ten minutes or so, stop them and have them take time to look at the gallery and make observations.

Debrief/Application

What do you think of these drawings?
Any of the drawings speak to you? Why?
How did you like drawing together?
How was this different than drawing by yourself?
Could you have done this alone?
Did you ever feel your partner was trying to control your decisions?
Did you ever feel you were trying to control your partner?

This exercise is the introduction to building scenes together. Like building blocks, we build on what someone else has offered until together we create something that neither of us could build on our own.

This also introduces the term "**offer**." When someone makes a contribution in a scene, or in this case a drawing, we call that their **offer**. Offers should be treated as great, big gifts and enthusiastically opened and received! In a scene, an offer could be information, a physical action or a suggestion from the audience.

This leads you into the next exercise, which is a fuller explanation of "Yes, and..."

"Yes, but/Yes, and ...Party"

Skills/Topics: Saying yes/Yes, and..,

Ask for five or six volunteers. Have them stand on stage in a semi-circle so that they can see each other, but so that we can see them too.

You are the prom committee and together, you're going to plan it. Here are the rules:

- be sure everyone gets a chance to contribute.
- you can only speak one sentence at a time.
- you can speak as often as you like, in any order.
- after the first person contributes their idea, all of your sentences must begin with the phrase, "Yes, but..." Understand? Go.

The actors will quickly realize this won't work. They will begin to contradict each other and they will get nothing accomplished. Take a moment to ask them how it went. Then offer this readjustment:

All right, now we're going to plan a surprise birthday party, but this time all of your offers must start with the phrase "Yes, and..." Go.

Debrief/Application

What happened the second time?
How was the second time different than the first?

You have just learned the secret handshake of all improvisers. Every improviser know the phrase, "Yes, and...". Yes, and is total agreement. It means I accept what you're contributing and now I'm adding to it. It's the way we build stories. We have to agree to accept each other's ideas, or "offers."

"Yes, but" and "Yes, or" sound like you're saying yes, but you're really saying no. For example:

First friend: "Hey, let's go to a movie tonight."
Second friend: "Yes! Or we could stay home."

It sounds like yes, but it's really no, and a complete rejection of the other person's idea. Your drawings are perfect examples of "Yes, and."

Remember this concept, because it's going to be part of everything we do.

Everybody Go

Skills/Topics: Worrying about judgement, risk, acceptance, support, yes, being "ready."

Tell the students to make a large circle.

Here's what we're going to do. One at a time starting with me, we're going to jump into the center of the circle. When I get to the center, I'm going to say "Everybody go..." and then I'm going to do an action with sound. For example I might flap my arms and yell "Quack, quack!" After I do that, everyone will yell "Yes!" and then repeat the action and sound I just did with lots of commitment and enthusiasm. Then I'll jump back and we'll move to the person on my left and we'll continue until we've gone all the way around.

Be sure to emphasize the emphatic yelling of "yes!" as they do the exercise. You'll notice a lot of the kids just kind of screaming. You'll also notice disco dancing ala Travolta. You'll even notice kids saying things like "I'm an airplane!" because they will be nervous about their choice. That's all okay.

When they're done say:

That was great! Remember what you felt and saw. We're going to do it one more time, except this time you don't have to go in order. You can go whenever and as

often as you want. Also, this time there is a “hot spot” in the center of the circle. As long as someone is in it, the center will stay hot. As soon as it’s empty it will go cold. We always want to keep that spot hot, so jump right in as soon as someone leaves the center. Okay? Who’s first? Go!”

You will need to sidecoach during this round:

Go! Go! The spot is getting cold!
Someone get in there! Don’t leave it empty!
Be ready to go as soon as someone’s about to leave!

Debrief/Application

Okay. Let’s talk about it! What happened for you?
How did it feel the first time?
How did it feel to have everyone follow your lead?
How did it feel to say “yes?”
Did you feel foolish in the center?
Did you ever feel foolish on the side?
When you were on the side, did you care what anyone did?
How did it feel the second time?
How was it different from the first?
For those who didn’t jump in the second time, why not?

This exercise is about enthusiastic acceptance of another’s idea, the willingness to shout “yes!” and dive in.

The second time is really a case of timeliness versus readiness. The first time everyone was “ready” because they knew their turn was coming. The second time, they may have had to jump in because the spot was cold, even when they didn’t have an idea.

Sometimes you’re ready, and sometimes...it’s just time. You jump in because you’re needed. That’s an important concept to relay.

Silly Walks

Skills/Topics: Worrying about judgement, acceptance, yes.

This is an exercise I created based on the old Monty Python sketch wherein we see John Cleese strut and prance as a member of the Ministry of Silly Walks. It’s laugh out loud ridiculous. So is this.

Divide your class in two long lines with a good deal of space between them. The leaders of each line will be on opposite ends.

Here’s how it works. Adam, you’re going to be the first leader and Elizabeth will be the first follower. Adam, you’re going to do a silly walk—walking in a silly way that involves movement and sound. For example, you might swing your arms side to side as you take giant steps, saying “ Whee! Who!” Elizabeth will start walking from the other end, imitating Adam’s silly walk. You both must do the silly walk the length of

the room and then join the other line. The next time Elizabeth walks she will be in the leader line.

I think this sounds more confusing than it is. Try it once and you'll figure out how they should stand. It's a great exercise for letting go, and accepting offers, even when they're goofy. It also provides both physical and vocal warm-up.

Debrief/Application

Okay. Let's talk about it! What happened for you?

How did it feel to initiate a walk?

How did it feel to imitate it?

Was there a time when the leader was making it hard for the follower?

Did you plan your walk or just go?

Trust Walk

Ask them to find a partner, preferably someone they haven't worked with before. If there is an even number of students, you can just sidecoach. If there is an odd number of students, you will need to play, but end your participation a little early so you can sidecoach and watch for a minute. This will take a large open flat space.

One person in each pair raise your hand. Good. You will be the first leader. Here's how it works. You are going to lead your partner around the room simply by saying two words: his or her name and "stop." When your partner hears his name, he will walk toward you. When you say "stop," he will stop. The trick is that the follower will have their eyes closed. (Demonstrate for them.)

Leaders, remember to make your partner feel safe. Take them on a journey, but take good care of them. After a couple minutes, we'll switch and the other person will become the leader.

Followers, close your eyes. Without anyone moving yet, leaders—say your partner's name so he can hear your voice. Again. One more time. Okay, everybody ready? Go. Take your partner on a journey.

After a couple of minutes, switch roles, practice saying the names, and do it again.

Sidecoaching

Are you making your partner feel safe?

Are you taking care of your partner?

Say their name often enough for them to feel safe.

Leaders, be aware of everything around you!

Debrief/Application

What did you experience?

How did it feel to be led?

What did it feel like to be leader?

Did you trust your leader? Why or why not?

How did your partner take care of you?
Did you cheat and peek through your eyelashes? Why?

Diamond Dance

Skills/Topics: Taking care of your partner(s), Making your partner(s) look good, teamwork, Willingness to take the lead.

For this exercise, you will need a cd player and some dance music. Disco and Motown work especially well for this game. Some people know it as Dance Diamond; we've always called it Diamond Dance. In any case, this is an awesome game that everyone can't help but enjoy. I am unclear as to who created this game, but it's terrific.

Divide the class into groups of four. You may need to play if the numbers don't work out. It is possible to have one group with just three if necessary, but it really works better with groups of four.

Okay, everyone, I want you to face me and have your group form a diamond, with one person in the front, two on the sides and one in the back. This game is called Diamond Dance, and we're all going to dance together. Now don't worry, it doesn't have to be good dancing.

The person in the front will lead your diamond. When the music begins to play, he will start to move to the beat, and everyone else in the diamond will simply follow the movement, sort of like synchronized swimming. He will continue to lead as long as he likes. Whenever he wants to hand the lead to another dancer, he simply turns. When he turns, the whole diamond turns and the new person in front leads.

The goal is to have your diamond look like a well-synchronized boy band. Be aware of your partners. Keep the moves simple. If you're partners can't follow you, you're not doing the exercise. Keep everyone together. Ready? Here we go!

Sidecoaching

Are you taking care of your partners?
Make your partners look good!
Repeat the movement!
Keep it simple!
Be creative!
Use your whole body!
Use different levels!
Are you losing your partners?
Don't be afraid of it! Dance!
Heighten the movement!
Slow it down if you're losing your partners.
Don't be afraid to take the lead! Enjoy it!
Try handing off more often!
Can you make the transitions smooth so we can't tell you're handing off the lead?

After they've done it one time, they'll get it. Perhaps have the debrief first and then try it again. Also try varying the tempo. Watching the group dance to something lyrical like the Beatles' "Hey Jude" can be fun.

Debrief/Application

What did you get? What did you observe? What did you feel?
What did it feel like to dance?
Were you self-conscious?
What did it feel like to lead?
Were you willing to take the lead or did you hand it off quickly?
How did you make each other look good?
Was there a time when you weren't taking care of your partners?
Did you find a groove?
When did you stop worrying about dancing or leading?

Hitchhiker

Skills/Topics: Awareness, Yes and..., Commitment, Characters.

This game is always a favorite. It's fun to play, and it's fun to watch.

Place four chairs on the stage, as if they were the front and back seats of a car. Leave a little extra space between the front seats so that the audience can easily see the back seat as well.

This is a character game. This is a car and I'm the driver, so I'll sit in the driver's seat and use the steering wheel and especially the brake pedal, so let's all practice the sound of the brakes...

Make a cartoon-y screech and have them repeat it.

Excellent! I'm going to keep driving until I see a hitchhiker standing by the side of the road. So one at a time, you will enter our scene by standing on the stage with your thumb out. When I see you, I will stop the car by making the brake sound. Then you will tell me where you want to go and why you want to go there. After you get in the car, we'll drive along and talk until a new hitchhiker appears. After this hitchhiker tells us where he wants to go, I'll get up and move to the back seat, the first passenger becomes the driver and the hitchhiker becomes the passenger. With the next hitchhiker, we'll all rotate again when he gets in. With the next hitchhiker, we'll rotate and I'll rotate out of the car, saying 'goodbye' as I go. Questions?

Now as I said, this is a character game, and this is where the fun begins. Every hitchhiker who enters the car is a different character. Maybe your hitchhiker is angry or a rock star or a French chef. When the hitchhiker enters the car, everyone else in the car will take on *the same character*. So, if someone angry gets in the car, everyone else will be angry too. Questions?

Here are some things to remember:

- Don't rotate until the hitchhiker has revealed their character and tells you where they want to go.

- Try to have a conversation. It's very easy for everyone to talk on top of each other.
- Make bold choices!
- If the person enters the car doing a John Wayne impression, and you don't know who John Wayne is, then do your impression of the hitchhiker doing John Wayne. In other words, do your best imitation even if you don't know what they're doing!

Here we go! Who wants to volunteer to be our first driver?

Students love this game. The more they play it, the more comfortable they will become with giving clear offers and accepting offers. They will also be better at sharing the conversation.

You will also find that this game may lead to some stereotyping, which should be discussed in a supportive way (see next Sidebar).

For Younger Students

For younger students, this game can be called **Bus Driver**. This will allow you to be the driver of the bus, which means you can decide when it's time to stop and pick up a new student. Also, the bus driver stays put; only the students rotate. This will allow you to anchor each "scene" and keep things moving.

Also, kids know what to do on a school bus. The last thing you want is for a little kid to go home and tell the parent, "My teacher taught us to *hitchhike!*" Ah, just think of the phone calls...

Sidecoaching

Let the hitchhiker explain what they want before you rotate.

Listen to each other.

Try not to talk on top of each other!

Really accept the character!

Make your characters bigger!

The person leaving should take on the character before they leave!

You may also have to nudge the next hitchhiker into action if the scene slows down.

Debrief/Application

What did you observe? How did you feel?

How did it feel to take on the characters?

Were there any characters that were hard for you? Why?

What did you do when the character was unclear?

Skills/topics that may be discussed

Saying yes to the character

Diving in even if you're unclear

"I can't think of anything!" –You're not supposed to! Just dive in and trust it will be okay.

How to know when to enter

Artist, Model, Clay

Skills/Topics: Awareness, Trust, Nonverbal communication.

Break the group into trios. If you have an odd number, you can have one group of four and one person will watch each "round."

This game is called Artist, Model, Clay. One of you will be the artist, one the model and one the clay. Let me show you.

Ask for two volunteers and have them stand in a line so they are directly behind each other facing you, with a few feet between them.

I will be the artist, Amanda (middle) will be the clay and Silvie (opposite end) will be the model. Silvie, as our model, will strike a pose she can hold for a few minutes and Amanda, our clay, will not turn to look at her. It's my job, as the artist, to mold the clay into the shape of the model, but I'm not allowed to talk to her, touch her or demonstrate for her.

At this point the players will look at you like it can't be done. The way you do it is by holding your hands a few inches on either side of the clay's arm or leg or head, and gently lift your hands, "massaging" the air. They will follow your lead and lift their leg or tilt their head as directed. You'll be surprised how well this can work. You will also notice that sometimes the clay gets confused, and that's part of the fun. After you demonstrate, allow the clay to turn around and see the model to prove that they have achieved the goal. After you demonstrate, say:

See? Now you're all going to give it a try. When you finish a round, rotate so that all of you get to try all three positions.

Sidecoaching

Remember, no talking!

Models, take care of your partner!

Try doing facial expressions.

Artists, if they're not understanding, try a different way.

Debrief/Application

What did you get? What did you observe?

Which position did you like best? Why?

Was it easier to do one position?

Did you ever get frustrated? Why?

Skills/Topics that may be discussed:

Teamwork

Yes, and...

Communicating without language

Taking care of your partner

Making Offers

Skills/Topics: Yes and..., Who What Where, Listening.

This lesson expands their knowledge of “yes and” beyond storytelling and gives them the basics of building a scene.

Today we’re going to talk more about “offers.” Remember an offer is some information, either verbal or physical. For example, let’s say I’m going to do a scene with Tom. I look right at Tom, throw my arms wide open and say, “Susan!”

And Tom, how might you respond?

Tom might say something like: “Harold!”

Perfect! Now we’ve only said two words and we already know a lot about these two people. What do we know, even if it’s obvious?

The class will say things like:

They know each other!

They’re friends!

They like each other!

One is a girl and one’s a guy!

They haven’t seen each other in a long time!

And all of these would be correct, assuming that Tom responded with the same enthusiasm.

Exactly! Do you see how much information was given to the audience? Do you see how the story has already begun? That’s because Tom accepted my offer with enthusiasm, like he was opening a great big gift. And did you notice that when I endowed Tom as a girl, nobody in the audience giggled or got all weird? That’s because Tom readily accepted it, and as the audience, we will too because we want to believe the story. We’ll believe anything you tell us—that you’re male, female, a pirate, a cockroach, a bottle of mustard—as long as you don’t violate the reality later. That’s why we allow ourselves to believe that in *The Wizard of Oz* Dorothy can be dropped to the ground by a tornado and just get up and walk out the door. *We want to experience the story.*

Now if Tom reacts in a different way, perhaps with some wariness, then that will give the audience different information. If Tom should deny the offer all together and say something like, “I’m not Susan, I’m Tom,” then there’s a lesson on how the story stopped dead in its tracks because the offer was refused.

Now let’s try a new offer. Remember, you’re keeping “yes and” in your head while you say your lines. Megan, what if I hold out my hands and say to you, “Here’s the pizza you ordered.” How would you respond?

Megan may say something like, “Thank you” or “Let me get my purse.”

Great! “Thank you” is the perfect example of “yes and.”

She might also say something like, "I ordered pepperoni. This is sausage." While not a complete denial of the offer and not necessarily bad, it does perhaps slow down the story.

Now try denying my offer. "Here's the pizza you ordered."

And Megan may say something like, "I didn't order a pizza."

Perfect denial! Now I have to go away because my character has no reason for being there. Can anyone else deny me in another way?

And they may say things like:

"Mom, why are you on my porch?"

"That's not a pizza, that's a cat."

"There's nothing in your hands. Are you crazy?"

All of which are examples of denial that stop the story dead in its tracks.

Remember offers can be physical too. If I open an imaginary door, and when you enter you walk right through it, you haven't accepted my offer. Or if I act as if it's so dark I can hardly see and you easily walk across the stage, you haven't accepted my offer. Understand?

Ask if there are any questions. You might try a few more examples just to make sure everybody gets it before you go to the next exercise.

A-B-A

Skills/Topics: Yes and, Listening, Awareness, Making Offers, Who What Where.

This exercise will teach the foundations for creating a scene using Who, What and Where.

There are three pieces of information we need to know when creating a scene:

Who: not just the characters names, like Susan and Harold, but their relationship like old friends or pizza delivery boy and customer or mother and daughter.

What: what's going on in the scene, like a family reunion or someone buying their first car or studying for final exams.

Where: where the scene is taking place, like home or school or the Laundromat or Disneyland or a pirate ship.

In this exercise we're going to create two-character scenes. One character is "A" and one character is "B." This is a three line scene; Character A says a line, Character B says a line and then Character A finishes it off with one more line—ABA.

During the course of the scene the two characters are going to try to get out those three pieces of information—Who, What and Where. Character A may get some of

the info out in the first line, then Character B will try to add some more info, and then Character A will try to fill in anything that's missing. Character A may get all the info out in the very first line, but if not, Character B will try to help. At the end of ABA, if they haven't provided all of the info, we'll have them start over and try again. This isn't a penalty; it's an exercise, so we'll just work on it until we get it.

One more "rule"—no questions. All questions do is force our partner to do the thinking, and we slow down the scene. We can just as easily tell them something rather than ask it.

For example, rather than saying, "Have you been wearing my sweater?" we can just as easily say, "Take off my sweater! You promised not to wear it!"

I know that if I asked one of you a question on stage you would be able to handle it. I also know that if we didn't get Who, What and Where out in three lines, the scene could go on, but we're trying to train ourselves to get the info out quickly because then the story is clear for both actor and audience.

Understand? Let's get two volunteers and begin.

Use chairs as needed. Trying to mime a chair is tough and distracting.

The scene might go something like this:

A: Young lady, you were supposed to have the car home by midnight.

B: But Dad, I lost track of time.

A: Go upstairs and explain that to your mother.

In this example, "A" has provided us with some of the information, primarily that the car wasn't home by midnight (What). As an audience, we will already be making assumptions about Who and Where, but they're not clear.

In the second line, "B" has sharpened the Who by letting us know they are father and daughter. They could have been mother and daughter or police officer and girl.

In the final line, "A" has clarified the Where by letting us know they are home. Notice too that home is implied by the fact that the mother is waiting upstairs. It would be awkward to say something like, "It's very late, here in our house."

In fact, offers don't have to be strictly verbal to communicate Who, What and Where. For example, two people holding hands tells us that it is a close relationship like sweethearts or parent and child. Strangers don't usually hold hands at the bus stop. Or if a person mimes eating popcorn and looks up at an imaginary screen, we've just learned the Where is a movie theatre without anyone talking about it.

Play this game "round robin" with each student getting a chance to play both A and B. Be sure to debrief after every round to make sure everyone knows the Who, What and Where.

Debrief/Application

What is the Who?

What is the What?

What is the Where?

How did they show the Who/What/Where without talking about it?

Was there a way they could have shown some of the info instead of talking about it?

Tiger Martian Salesman

Skills: nonverbal communication, being in the moment, commitment, connection, the value of laughter, not caring what other people think.

This is the first exercise in every workshop I teach, whether it's kids or lumberjacks.

I want you to divide yourselves into groups of three.

You will notice that they will immediately reach for their friends next to them, even grabbing them by the wrist. Stop the action and call on a group where this occurred.

What just happened here?

You'll get answers like "They're my friends" or "I know them."

I noticed many people doing the same thing. Why?

They will gradually talk about how it makes them feel safer.

There's nothing wrong with this; in fact, we all feel the same way. We're all the same—we're human. It makes us feel safe to be with those we know. Think about those times when you are invited to a party but don't know anyone when you arrive. Most of us will stand talking to the potato chips rather than actually walking up and introducing ourselves to strangers. So here's the first lesson: step out of your comfort zone and find two people they don't know or haven't worked with much. The exercise will last 5 minutes and by the end of the next week you will have worked with everyone as a partner. Go!

After about 20 seconds of scrambling, help those without groups get into a group. If there's an odd man out, make a group of four.

This is the dumbest thing I'm going to teach you, so if during the exercise you look at me and say "This is dumb!" I will say I told you so. This is silly. It's supposed to be.

We're going to learn three signs: the sign of the tiger, the sign of the martian and the sign of the salesman. Watch. I'm going to demonstrate the sign of the tiger.

Put both your hands in the air like claws and say in your best growl, "Ra-a-a-r!"

Now you try it. Good. Here's the martian.

Demonstrate: fingers on head like antennae, wiggling them up and down and in a high-pitched voice, "Beedle deedle deep!"

Great. If you feel dumb, you're doing it right. Now the salesman.

Extend your arm to offer a handshake and say, "Hi! How are you?"

Now you try it. (They do). Now all three in a row. Go!

Good. Now turn your backs on your partners so that you're backs are touching, but not leaning on each other. Realize that you may cross another comfort zone. Touch for many people makes them a little uncomfortable. If it does, that's okay, just recognize it. Now I want you to close your eyes. Realize too, that lack of sight is another comfort zone. That's okay, but really close your eyes. Now let your arms go. See how easy it is to go back to old habits?

I want you to try to be **here and now**. This is our first acting concept, the idea of being **in the moment**. Focus on what's happening right now, not the class you left behind or the homework or problem you have tonight. Concentrate on now. Hear the sound of my voice, the sound of the fans, etc. Try to be present. Being in the moment is what allows actors to make their performance seem like it's really happening before our eyes.

Here's what we're going to do: This is an exercise in **nonverbal communication**. I want you to concentrate on one of those three signs: tiger, martian or salesman. You're going to try to pick up on your partners thoughts. When I count to three, you're going to turn around, face your partners and do the sign. The goal is for all three of you to be doing the same sign at the same time. There's no prize for this so it does no good to lean over to your partners and whisper, "Do the tiger!" You get nothing for doing this right. Say 'yes' to the exercise and see if you get something from it. Ready? One, two, three!

Everyone will turn around and do their sign. Immediately laughter will ensue and they will begin to chatter about who did what. This is a great time to talk about the value of laughter and humor and how in that one moment, it brought us all together. Interesting statistic: the average child laughs four hundred times per day. How often do you laugh? How often do your parents or grandparents laugh? Makes you think, doesn't it?

You may observe that some of the students did their signs half-heartedly or waited to see what others would do. This is a great opportunity to talk about commitment and investment. Ask how many "succeeded." Repeat two more times. See if more succeeded with increased commitment.

Debrief/Application

This was fun wasn't it? But the game doesn't do us any good if we don't apply it to our work as actors. Can someone tell me, even if it's obvious, what we could take away from this exercise and apply to being on stage?

Also refer to the list of sample debrief questions.

Skills that may be discussed:

Concentration
Nonverbal communication
Going for it
Not being afraid to look silly
Daring to be wrong

Focus
Being in the moment
Being in tune with your partners