

## 6th and 7th Grade Theater - for Beginners Theater Class

*For the purposes of this guide I am assuming that your students have little to no theater experience. This is not a curriculum or lesson plan; it is simply a guide into a beginners theater class, using Improvisation games tried and proven to result in a safe, creatively-stimulating environment. It is imperative that the students participating in such activities feel absolutely valued and safe-driven into a creative space. Therefore, building a community of trust and communication is key to the beginning of theater teaching/learning.*

- I would start with very simple non-verbal trust and awareness games.

You could start the class by saying how important it is to trust each other and respect each other; theater is really all about working with other people, just like any sport: theater is a TEAM sport. So if you don't know your teammates or don't trust them or don't communicate well with them, then you lose the game. Same with theater.

A play is all about communication, and that starts in rehearsals.

### 1. Community:

You could start them off by simply walking in the space (requires some open space for physical movement and exploration). Slowly, once they are all walking around the space freely, not really noticing each other, have them smile at each other as they pass each other. They should not be walking in a circle (its a habit that all students fall into). When they smile at each other it is important that they don't use verbals and simply trust that their smile is enough for the other person to feel noticed. it is also important that they keep their heads up and try to make eye-contact (one of the hardest things a student will ever have to do is learn to make eye-contact with their peers).

Once you have them all smiling at each other, have them stop and face each other and high-five using both hands up in the air. It'll make them giggle a little bit but its their first physical contact so its normal. This should eventually happen smoothly without them having to look for a partner. All this should happen while they're still walking around the space, not in a circle. This will also force them to look up. You could also make this an elimination game if you think they'll like it by making them find a **new** partner and high-five every time you clap! If they don't have a partner when you clap then they are out!

*I would play this every beginning of class to make them get use to the exposure and movement. it should take about 15 minutes the first time you introduce it and then 10 minutes each class you repeat it.*

### 2. Frozen:

The goal of this game is to have the entire group "frozen". Students walk around the room and someone will stop moving. Once other players notice the frozen player, they will stop moving. This will continue until everyone has stopped moving. You can tap the first student to signal that it's time for them to stop, point at them, wink at them, or some other relatively discreet way to alert them – or simply let one of the children stop on their own.

This will help with non-verbal communication and team work.

*I would play this maybe 10 minutes.*

### 3. Elimination Game:

(perhaps a little advanced for 7th graders, but definitely a fun game for students - could try if your students can handle a more patient and thought-provoking exercise)

Have the students stand in a circle with their eyes closed. Then you go around and choose one student to be the eliminator and one student to be the police. Once you've chosen those two students have them all open their eyes and walk in the space (not in a circle).

The eliminator's goal is to get everyone to die, by winking at them as they pass each other in their walking paths. The police student's goal is to catch the eliminator. So the eliminator should be very good at hiding their role. Obviously if the eliminator winks at the police in order to take them out, then the police should say I am the police and you are the eliminator and then the game ends. Up to that point though there should be no verbal communication! All this happens in silence. It also forces the students to keep their heads up. One last thing, when a student is eliminated, the only way they can die is with a very dramatic death! So if their death is not dramatic enough, you should make them do it again. This is to break everyone out of their shell and make them laugh with each other.

You can play this for multiple rounds, I usually do 2-3 rounds. It takes a while so allot at least 20 minutes.

#### 4. Mirror:

Pair your students up or let them find a partner, and they must mirror their partner in full body and face WITHOUT touching each other. Switch leaders at your discretion so every student is the leader and the follower at least 3 times throughout the exercise. They should not talk (they will probably laugh though). The movements should be full body and face movements. Suggest changing speed, tempo, levels, etc. to introduce these elements.

This should take 15 minutes.

- Once you get them to really listen to each other, you can add spoken improv games.

#### 5. Circle imitations:

Have students stand in a circle and one by one they will think of a full body gesture. Once they all have that gesture in mind, one by one they will do the full-body gesture/movement and going in one direction the whole circle will repeat everyone's gesture/movement until you've gone through the whole circle.

With repetitions of this exercise you can add sounds to the gestures and eventually you can repeat the circle and each time they must come up with a different sound and gesture without having to think about it. This might take a few weeks for them to think on their feet so quickly so you could repeat this warm-up game over 3-4 weeks.

It should only take 10 minutes each class.

#### 6. Word association:

Students stand in a circle and a student of your choosing will start with a word, then the student to their left/right must associate that word with another one and so on, until you go through the entire circle. For example if one says Cat the next one might say Dog or Whiskers or Pet, etc. The point is to get the students to play the game fast without stopping to think of a name. It will take a while.

I would play this for 10 minutes at first.

#### 7. Story telling:

In this game, students work together to tell a story. When playing in a group setting, children sit in a circle and in turn, they add a word to fit into the narrative after repeating the words that came before. When played quickly, this game is great for encouraging free-flow thinking. For example, Student 1 could say "Once...", Student 2 could say "Once upon...", Student 3 could say "Once upon a...", and so on.

I would play this for about 10-15 minutes, probably going around the circle a few times before they fully understand how it works and come up with something cohesive. The point of this is for them to truly listen to each other.

## 8. Alien, Tiger, Cow:

The goal of this game is to get every player to be the same character: alien, tiger, or cow. Alien: Hold index fingers upright against head while saying "Bleeb Bleeb"

Tiger: Hold one hand out like a claw and say "Roar!"

Cow: Bend over and hold one hand on stomach while saying "moo"

This game is similar to "Rock, Paper, Scissors", someone says "Alien, Tiger, Cow" and all players choose a character to imitate. With the end goal in mind, the game is played until everyone chooses the same character, rather than trying to eliminate one another like you would in Rock, Paper, Scissors. It takes a similar concept, but turns it into a team game.

I would have the students get into groups of 3 first and slowly make the groups bigger by joining them once each group of 3 meets the goal of the game (they're all the same character). That way you can make the whole class team up towards winning the same goal! They'll want to work together to beat you (the teacher) basically.

This game can take long but you could split it up over a few classes. I would play it for maybe 20 minutes at a time and repeat it over a few weeks, and hopefully you'll see non-verbal communication into play as well as team work.

*If you'd like to continue with Improv you can add Yes, And games but they are a little hard. You can look at Viola Spolin for more Improv games, she has a great book called Improvisation for the Theater. After Improv I would move into basic Theater terminology, like STAGE DIRECTIONS, TYPES OF THEATERS (proscenium, arena, etc.) and then maybe looking at what makes a character a villain or a hero based on children's books, etc.*