



Changing lives through the arts

Improv Comedy Lesson Plan – *Physical/Verbal Storytelling*

Instructor: James Miller

Grades 3-5 (could be easily adjusted for grades 6-8)

Standards Fulfilled by this Lesson:

- Grades K-4 National Standards for Theatre Education Content Standard 2.b
 - *Acting by assuming roles and interacting in improvisations*
 - Students use variations of locomotor and nonlocomotor movement and vocal pitch, tempo, and tone for different characters
- Grades 5-8 National Standards for Theatre Education Content Standard 2.a,c
 - *Acting by developing basic acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes*
 - (a) Students analyze descriptions, dialogue, and actions to discover, articulate, and justify character motivation and invent character behaviors based on the observation of interactions, ethical choices, and emotional responses of people
 - (c) Students in an ensemble, interact as the invented characters
- Grade 6 Virginia Public Schools Theatre Arts Standards of Learning:
 - 6.4 The student will improvise responses to creative prompts.
 - 6.5 The student will practice theatre etiquette and identify the role of the audience as integral to the performance experience.
 - 6.6 The student will explain how meaning is expressed both physically (through movement, gesture, and other forms of physical expression) and verbally.
 - 6.8 The student will portray invented characters.

Objectives:

The Learner will create and tell stories based on lesson prompts

TLW explore the difference between Physical and Verbal Storytelling

TLW Gain confidence working in both modes (physical and verbal) of storytelling

Set-Up

- Arrange the classroom, if possible. Remove distractions and clear a playing space, physically distinct from audience space (chairs, tape line on floor, mat, etc)
- Collect students. Assign a line leader and someone to bring up the rear. Establish “Quietest Hand Raised” (students with their hand raised quietly will be chosen for activities) while choosing volunteers.
- Remind everyone to go to the bathroom before class; otherwise they will not be excused unless it’s an emergency.

- Ask the line leader to stop at the door to the class. Explain clearly what they should do when they enter the space (come in quietly, sit in a circle, stand in a line, etc.).

Introduction/Warm-Up

- Go over the Five Rules—have them name them for you (Have Fun, Respect the Space, Respect Each Other, Respect the Teacher, and Have Fun)
- Those are the rules of the class, what is the number one Rule of Improv? (Always Say Yes!)
- **Warm-Up game: Presents!**
 - In a circle, feet planted. “I have a present for you./Really? What is it?/It’s a [anything]!/Thank you! I’m going to use it for [anything].”
 - Each student takes a turn giving a “present” to the student beside them – this game is a great imagination warm-up, so feet should remain planted while students work on listening to their partners and demonstrate good audience skills as taught in previous lessons.

Instruction

- **Introduction to Storytelling:**
 - “We can tell stories in a number of ways. We have excellent tools at our disposal. What might those be?” (List of tools can be long and ridiculous, but should include bodies and voices—that’s where we’re headed, physical and verbal storytelling).
 - Following list from students, take a minute or two to pull the focus to using bodies and voices (the tools all actors use) for storytelling in today’s class.
- **Fortunately/Unfortunately:** (students in a Big Sitting Circle)
 - “We’re going to create a story that has never been told before.”
 - Select a volunteer to act out the story silently (“only using your body”) in the center of the circle. Ask for definitions of “Fortunately” and “Unfortunately”, explain if necessary. The story is told around the circle, one event at a time, alternating between good and bad things (Starting with “Fortunately...” or “Unfortunately...”. Ask for a location suggestion and begin. Encourage large physical choices in the sentences, so that the center circle actor can use his or her whole body throughout the activity. Ends with: “Find a happy ending to our story.”
 - Variation: Instructor points to students around the circle and says either “Fortunately” or “Unfortunately”, not alternating. This can lead into “Unfortunately/Unfortunately” which can be quite funny. (It should be established in previous lessons that the character is not allowed to die – this breaks the improvisation rule of always saying yes!)

- **Gibberish Interpreter:** (Audience sitting in a line, two volunteers at a time)
 - This game is a combination of **Experts** and **Passing the Food**.
 - Begins with teacher saying: “We have a very special guest lecturer here to tell us all about [audience suggestion]. Unfortunately, our guest only speaks Gibberish, ‘The Language that Everyone Speaks and No One Understands’. Fortunately, we have an Interpreter to translate.”
 - An “expert” and an “interpreter” are chosen from the students.
 - The expert speaks one sentence at a time in Gibberish with large physical gestures, then looks at the Interpreter to signal that it is their turn to speak (Passing the Food) and they immediately translate the sentence into English and pass the food back. The lecture is usually four or five sentences long.
- **Experts TV:** (Audience in a line, two chairs)
 - Begins with Instructor as a TV host who calls an expert—“Doctor [Student First Name]”—out from the studio audience onto the show. “It’s a pleasure to have you back on the program Doctor, as the world’s leading expert on Whale Ballet.” Ask specific questions about their work. “I understand some of your Whale Ballerinas are in the audience today and are going to perform for us, could you call them up and conduct the performance please?”
 - Every guest appearance should end with some kind of wacky audience inclusion.
 - If possible, advanced students should be chosen to play the host after a few rounds so that the Instructor can observe.

Wrap-Up

- Sitting in a circle. “Raise your hand and tell me your favorite game from class today. What were your favorite moments from that game? Why were they so funny?”
- Revisit what activities used voices to tell stories, what activities used bodies, and what activities (Gibberish game, etc.) used both!
- Have students reset the classroom to how we found it.
- Return students using the same line instructions as the start of class.

Back Pocket Games: Taxi, Next, Problem/Object