

Beginning Theatre Activities & Games - The First Week Sets the Stage for the Semester

I developed this group of games and activities over the years and from a variety of sources.

My objective is to have students begin to form a supportive community in a safe environment where everyone is required to participate and expected to grow and succeed. Therefore, I do not use any games that involve elimination. We begin with very simple movement and sharing activities and build into simple improvisation.

All games begin in with the group standing or sitting in a circle.

| | Game | Procedure | Objectives |
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| 1 | Fruit Basket Turn-Over | Standing. Teacher goes around the circle quickly naming students fruits, 1 per 4-6 students: (Ex.: apple, orange, peach, banana, kiwi, pear.) Choose the last student named to go to the center. He may say any fruit name, not only his own. All people of that fruit name must leave their places and try to get into a place vacated. The one who doesn't get a place, moves to the center and calls out a fruit. | Students work off excess energy, get used to each other's physical presence, and end up not positioned beside the friends they choose to stand by. |
| 2 | Alpha Order | Standing. Determine the physical place that will be the "A" point and have students place themselves in alphabetical order by last names. (This can take a while. Some groups will allow a leader to emerge, and others will find other ways to achieve this. Don't help, but you can tell them they will get a grade if they get it totally right.) | Functioning as a group. It also lets the teacher accomplish roll call easily afterwards. |
| 3 | This Is Me (I do 1 or 2 of these each day for at least 4 days.) | Seated. Going in order, each student tells his or her first name and some very short piece of info determined by the teacher: a. Why he or she is in the class b. One thing done during summer or winter break c. Favorite musical group d. A hobby e. Place of birth f. One thing we should know about him or her g. Color of current mood h. Number and type of pets j. Favorite book ever read k. Dream place to visit | Teacher and students learn each other's names and begin to know something about each other. It is critically important that the students say their first names every single time. "I'm Shelby, and I've like to visit Spain." |
| 4 | Me to You | One student begins by saying "[Her name] to [another student's name]." This continues until everyone has been called a couple of times. (The goal is to get it moving very fast: Carol to Sally, Sally to Ben, Ben to Frank, Frank to Molly, etc.) After a few minutes, ask students who have not been called to raise their hands and say their names, and then continue the game. | Learning and saying each other's first names. |
| 5 | Stage Direction Run Around | I explain how the stage is divided into areas using the words Up, Down, Right, Left, and Center. As I describe each direction, I have the entire class move to that place. Then I have them all stand as close to center as they can get, and I start calling out commands: a. Everyone with blue eyes move to DR. b. Everyone with green eyes move to DL c. Everyone with brown eyes move to UL d. Everyone with hazel eyes move to DR I call out various things, such as colors they are wearing, number of pets, number of siblings, grade level, etc., until they are all moving confidently from one location to another. | This teaches stage directions to everyone at the same time using movement. They also learn more about each other. |

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| 6 | <p>Ball Pattern Game</p> <p>(I buy fiber-filled soccer balls in the stationary area of Target. Dead tennis balls will do.)</p> | <p>Students sit in a circle and raise right hand. Teacher chooses one person to throw the ball to another student, who throws it to another, until every student has had the ball once. Each student puts down his or her hand after having received the ball. Once the ball has returned to the original student, they complete the pattern again, then attempt to add balls.</p> <p><i>Important:</i> when a student has to leave the circle to retrieve a ball, the person throwing to him must hold the next ball until the student has returned to the circle and thrown the ball. No one can have two balls at the same time. Eye contact is essential, as is knowing the receiver's name to get his/her attention before throwing the ball.</p> | <p>This game teaches that --</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Every single person is important in a group activity. When the objective is to get the ball into the other person's hands, you can find a way to throw the ball so the other person can catch it. Concentration and focus are essential in group activities. |
| 7 | Walking | <p>Sitting. Teacher makes a set of cards listing various situations in which one walks: in quick sand, in a rainstorm, in a city with tall buildings, on hot coals, etc. Two students at a time draw a card and then—without conferring—cross the circle miming walking in that situation. After they have crossed the circle, students can guess the situation.</p> | <p>Beginning mime and improvisation. Working in duos reduces the terror.</p> |
| 8 | I Like . . . | <p>Seated. A student lists two things, activities, etc., that he or she likes. ("I like ice cream and swimming.") Any other student in the group responds by retaining either one of those items and adding one of his or her own. ("I like ice cream and <i>Lord of the Rings</i>.") When two or more students speak out at once, they must allow the person who actually began speaking first to have the floor.</p> | <p>This teaches group behavior: waiting one's turn, deferring to a fellow student, being sensitive to others. It also teaches students more about each other. (After the game, I frequently give them 2 minutes to go talk to someone they don't know well about a shared interest.)</p> |
| 9 | Mirrors | <p>This is a fast-paced version of the theatre game that allows students to partner with one-half of the class in a short amount of time. Number students 1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2, etc. Have the 1's stand in a circle, and then have the 2's make an inner circle facing the 1's. (If there is an odd number, one 1 will be able to watch the others each pairing, which can be a very good thing.) Ask them to <i>maintain eye contact</i>, and move <i>slowly</i> enough for the other person to be able to mirror them. Use either hand claps (or a bell or whistle) to control the game. On one clap, the 1's move their hands and arms slowly, and 2's mirror them. On two claps, control shifts to the 2's. On three claps, the 2's move one partner to their right. Repeat until the 2's get back to their first partner. I only allow 20 to 30 seconds before I clap for the next control or partner change. After each person has had 2 or 3 partners, I usually stop and ask them what is weird about this, and what type of movement seems to be easiest to follow. Slow instrumental music works well to beat back the scary silence in the room.</p> | <p>Non-verbal communication. The students who are serious about drama will love this one. Everyone gets a chance to work with at least one or two people who are trying to do it properly, and they can all see the difference.</p> |
| 10 | Join Me | <p>Standing. A student picks a card from a stack of cards listing activities. He or she goes to the center of the center and begins miming the activity. As others realize what he is doing, they enter the circle and mime that activity or something else that could be done in that place.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Cooking a meal Working in a beauty salon or barbershop Playing in the snow Surfing in the ocean Lifting weights | <p>Beginning mime and improvisation.</p> |

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| | | Etc., etc., etc. | |
| 11 | Ensemble Mirrors | Divide the students into groups of 3 and have them form a triangle. (If the group is not divisible by 3, you might have a couple of groups of 4, in which case they stand in a square.) Ask all the students to look in one direction and tell them that the person who is at the front and can't see anyone else is the leader. Have them rotate together until they are looking at another leader in their group. One more rotation, and each person has been in the leader position. Now put instrumental music on and have the current leader begin movement that the others can mirror. Tell them that the leader should rotate to one direction or the other after a minute or so. When the leader can see another person in the group, that person becomes the new leader. When a person can no longer see another group member, s/he has become the leader. The music for this one can be slow, but fast music also works if its rhythm is predictable. | Non-verbal communication, taking and relinquishing control. |
| 12 | Hitchhiker | Seated in chairs. Place 4 chairs in the center, as if seats in a car. Leave the backseat passenger chair open for the 1 st hitchhiker, who goes to the front of the car and sticks out his thumb. Everyone in the car yells "Hitchhiker!" The hitchhiker brings to the car a situation and emotional state, which everyone in the car assumes immediately. (Ex: "I am so mad at my boyfriend." Everyone in the car is immediately mad at her or his boy or girlfriend.) Everyone can talk at once. As soon as everyone has assumed the state, a new hitchhiker jumps up. 1 st hitchhiker moves to other back seat, driver's side back seat moves to front passenger seat, front passenger moves to driver's seat, and driver moves to seat the hitchhiker vacated in the circle. No one gets a 2 nd turn until each student has been a hitchhiker. Especially with young classes, the noise level can get pretty intense. I sometimes stop the action to ask them to find situations that elicit a quieter emotional response. | Improvisation. Students must honor the new hitchhiker by jumping into the situation the hitchhiker brings with him or her. |
| 13 | What Are You Doing? | Standing. 1st student mimes any activity. The next student in the circle says, "What are you doing?" The 1st student names any activity <i>except</i> the one he was doing. The 2 nd student mimes the stated activity, and then the 3 rd student says, "What are you doing?" Repeat around circle. Remind students not to say anything they would not want to do themselves. Occasionally reverse the direction mid-game. | Beginning mime and improvisation. |
| 14 | ABC Game | Write the alphabet with alternating letters in different colors on a large sheet of paper, or use another method to project/display the alphabet. Have students choose a partner they do not know well. Student 1 starts a sentence beginning with A. Student 2 responds with a sentence beginning with B. Repeat through the alphabet. All student groups talk at the same time. Once they have finished the alphabet, tell them to switch the person who begins and try it again. After everyone has had a chance to go through the alphabet at least once, ask for a duo who wants to demonstrate for the whole group. | Improvised dialogue. The great thing about this is that everyone gets to participate simultaneously, which is good for large groups. |