

"Saying Yes, and..." other ideas for Teaching with Improv in the Language Classroom
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Teaching with Improv: Some Classroom Exercises

"Improvisation is invention—a way of making things up spontaneously, out of whatever comes to hand, or to mind." Tony Adler, *Encyclopedia of Chicago*

Zip, Zap, Zop- All students stand in a circle. One student begins by saying the word "Zip" and pointing to another student standing somewhere across the circle (not standing to the left or right). The second student responds by saying the word "Zap" and pointing to a third student, who then says "Zop" and points to a fourth student. The fourth student starts the exercise again by pointing to someone new in the circle and saying the word "Zip." Students point to each other in a clapping motion. This exercise requires students to pay close attention and listen to each other, and encourages focused concentration and communication.

Word Association- All students stand in a circle and one student starts by giving a one-word suggestion, which could be any word, or a word related to a given topic. The student standing to the left says the next word that comes to mind, which inspires the next student to say another word. The exercise continues until each student has offered a one-word response that is inspired by what was previously said. One-word answers keep the pace of the exercise moving, and motivate students to be spontaneous and to practice accepting their own ideas.

Playing Ball- Students work in pairs, standing across from each other with enough room to throw an imaginary ball. Students take turns "throwing" various balls to each other, including basketballs, baseballs, and beach balls. With each ball type, students must adjust their body movements to account for changes in ball size and weight. They must pay careful attention to their partners so that they throw and catch these imaginary balls in believable ways. The exercise draws students' attention to their bodies, and serves as a metaphor for how they communicate by sending and receiving different messages, or "balls."

Foreign Poet- This exercise requires three students. One student acts as a poet and recites a poem in gibberish one line at a time. A second student acts as a translator, interpreting each line of the poem and translating it into English. The third player interprets the poem through dance, using non-verbal communication to convey the emotion and meaning of each line of the poem. This exercise emphasizes kinesthetic, verbal, and non-verbal forms of communication. It can be done in gibberish or in a foreign language.

"Yes, and"- This exercise encourages students to accept and build upon the ideas and suggestions of others by responding with "Yes, and" in a given dialogue or scene. It can be adapted for teaching to help students generate ideas through collaboration.

Living Tableaux- This exercise is derived from the work of Brazilian theater director and activist Augusto Boal, and his application of tableaux to promote social change. Groups of actors create tableaux by positioning themselves in frozen poses to depict specific events, scenes, and ways of thinking. (Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*)

Additional Resources:

- Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors*, 1992
- Folger Shakespeare Library, *Shakespeare Set Free Series*, 1993
- Michael LoMonico's "Closing Reading on Your Feet: Performance in the English Language Arts Classroom," published in *English Journal* 95.1 (2005).
- Jeffrey D. Wilhelm, *You Gotta Be the Book*, and *Action Strategies for Deepening Comprehension*, 2002
- Jeffrey D. Wilhelm and Brian Edmiston, *Imagining to Learn: Inquiry, Ethics, and Integration through Drama*, 1998.
- Keith Sawyer, *Structure and Improvisation in Creative Teaching*, 2011.
- J. Lea Smith and J. Daniel Herring, *Dramatic Literacy: Using Drama and Literature to Teach Middle-Level Content*, 2001
- Viola Spolin, *Improvisation for the Theater*, 1963