

The Impro Show - Teachers' Notes

Introduction

The art of improvised theatre, popularized worldwide as 'TheatreSports', gives drama students of any age a solid grounding in many of the most important performance skills, whilst simultaneously allowing their imaginations to run wild.

Training is basically in two categories; **warm-up games**, (which deal with some of the most basic skills as well as mentally/physically preparing the student for the work), and **performance games** (sets of ground-rules from which to spontaneously group-devise performances).

The Impro Show

This performance introduces students to improvisation in three ways. Firstly, several performance games are demonstrated by the actors, using students' input, and thereby creating a short play.

Secondly, several of the most basic warm-up games are played to introduce students to some of the skills they will need in their own work.

Finally, a number of students are selected to spontaneously create their own short play, using some of the simpler performance games.

Warm-up Games

N.B. There are a limitless number of warm-up games and those given below may not always be the same ones used at your performance.

“Yes! Let's!”

The most basic aspect to improvised theatre is **making and accepting offers**. A scene always starts with an offer, which could be **verbal**,

(eg. “It’s time we got going”), or **physical**, (eg. an actor starts digging). Another actor must then accept or **yield** to the offer, by responding positively, for the scene to be able to **advance**.

In this game, students normally stand in a circle. Any student makes an enthusiastic verbal offer beginning with “Let’s....”, (eg. “*Let’s play tennis!*”). All students must then immediately and enthusiastically accept the offer by saying “Yes! Lets!” and physically performing the action suggested. Another student immediately makes a new offer and the warm-up continues.

“Thankyou”

Actors must be prepared to engage with each other physically as easily as they perform dialogue. To do this, they must accept physical offers with their own physical response. They must do so spontaneously and they must work as a team.

In this game, one actor from the circle moves to the centre and makes a physical offer by creating a frozen position, (*such positions may be recognizable, eg. a begging position, or entirely abstract*). Any other actor then rushes to the centre and, inspired by the offer, accepts it by creating a new position of their own, (*recognizable or abstract*). The first actor says “Thankyou” and returns to the circle. A third actor comes to the centre to accept the second actor’s offer, and so on.

N.B. Each new position should physically engage with the previous position, rather than stand separate from it. Also, avoid duplicate or mirrored responses, (*eg. If the first actor is throwing a spear, the second actor should not also throw a spear. They could be the victim of the spear, or have an abstract response*).

“Clap Game”

Actors must also have **focus**. They must stay **in the moment** and be ready to make/accept offers instantly and spontaneously.

In this game, the circle must be such that all players can see each other's eyes. One person begins by gaining eye-contact with any other player and clapping towards them. The other player immediately gains the eye-contact of a different player and claps to them, and so on. By playing the game as fast as possible, players are forced to remain ready to perform and fully focused. *(Try adapting this game by passing other actions or even sounds instead of a clap).*

Performance Games

N.B. There are a limitless number of performance games and those given below may not be the same ones used at your performance.

“One Word at a Time Story”

For as many players as you like in a line, circle, or arc. Establish a story title. The players tell a story, but each player only speaks one word at a time, before the next player has their turn. Encourage the story to move as quickly as possible – players should not think ahead, but simply say the first word that comes into their head within the context of the story title and the sentence in progress. **There are no right or wrong words. Next player must accept the last player's word without question.**

“Slow Motion Commentary”

For 2-4 players. One or two players perform a slow-motion mime. Other player/s commentate from off-stage. Choose a title suggestive of a story with a recognizable beginning, middle, & end, *(eg. The Melbourne Cup)*. When the scene starts, the physical players are preparing for their “event”, *(eg. brushing or mounting their horse)*. The event takes place, *(eg. the race is run with a definite end)*. Ideally, the commentators simply report to the audience what they see happening on stage. They may say something the physical performer hadn't intended to show, but the physical performer must accept the verbal offer and adjust their performance. The reverse may also happen, so at times the action is led by the commentators and at times it is led by the physical performers.

Emotional Replay

Up to 4 players. Establish a title as a place or action, (eg. “*At the Ice-cream Shop*” or “*Washing the Car*”). One player begins to create a short scene with other players progressively joining the action as required or as an idea comes to them. Once the scene has concluded, it is repeated as identically as is practical with an over-riding emotion given, (eg. “*At the Ice-cream Shop with Fear*” or “*Washing the Car with Love*”). The same scene can be repeated as often as you like with a different emotion given each time. **Not all players have to express the given emotion. Their performance may assist another actor to feel it.**

Conclusion

Improvisation games are constantly developing and increasing in number. They are easy to play on a basic level, but ongoing training which adheres to correct principles is necessary to derive the maximum benefits.

The benefits are, however, substantial; confidence, positivity, concentration, co-operation. For more training, contact TIE or the TheatreSports branch in your capital city.

Best References

(available from the “Performing Arts Bookshop”, Sydney)

“TheatreSports Down Under” by Lyn Pierse *(clear, very comprehensive)*
“Impro” by Keith Johnston *(The Canadian Guru of TheatreSports)*

We hope you enjoy “The Impro Show”