

IMPROVOLOGY!

2014

Who We Are:

Improvology is a Gluck Fellows Program of the Arts funded and UC Riverside Theatre Department supported improvisational comedy troupe. It was created by a small group of talented undergraduate and graduate students dedicated to bringing the theatrical arts to students in the local community. We believe that teaching younger students about the value of having healthy bodies and healthy minds is vital to their future success in education and can most effectively be done through the gift of laughter.

What We Do:

Over the course of approximately 45-50 minutes, we perform an improv comedy show built around the actors taking different “classes” from a “professor” who is teaching them the art of improvisational comedy. Each improv segment falls within a different course subject that supports the subject matter of the game.

In English class, we put verbal play and language and story-telling skills at the fore. In History class, we explore a long-form, choose-your-own-adventure improv game that makes different periods come alive in fun and interesting ways as we follow students looking for lost objects in time. In Physical Education class, we have created a Slow-Motion Olympics that uses physical comedy to show that even the most mundane of household chores can be fun.

Each class within the larger performance is also separated by short breaks in which each of the actors directly addresses the audience of children about their own personal experiences in school and what they’ve learned about eating right, getting enough sleep, balancing schoolwork with having fun with friends, and how theatre itself can be both personally and socially fun and rewarding, and be an intense physical workout all by itself.

The show is followed by a ten minute question and answer session with the kids, encouraging them to further personally connect with the actors they see on stage, and help show them that they too can pursue an interest in the arts!

Descriptions of Our Games For Teachers:

We believe that giving kids the time and space to express themselves in the classroom through improvisational comedy can be an exciting change of pace, an educational exercise that builds focus and creativity, and a useful tool for the expending of high physical or mental energy.

While quality improv may *seem* entirely made up on the spot, the trick is that these games all have highly structured limits and guidelines which inspire and challenge participants to come up with things that are indeed funny.

If you would like to explore using our games in your classroom, below you will find basic descriptions and rules for some of them. Of course, there is no wrong way to do them, and you may find that a little trial and error on your part to make them relevant to your class will enhance the experience for everyone.

“Late For School”: This is basically a structured game of charades. One person acts as the “teacher” who is making a late student give an excuse as to why they were late. A suggestion can be asked of the class as to what they were doing, but the “late student” can’t know what it is. Starting with one other student acting as the helper, the helper acts out with their body what that activity is. If the late student guesses, they can join the class and help out with acting out the next suggestion given by the class. If they are having trouble, the “teacher” can help out by giving verbal clues. This process can repeat as many times as desired. Or the suggestions can get more complicated, building from what they were doing, to what and where they were doing it, to what, where, and with whom. This is a great game for teaching the importance of our bodies as a tool for communication, what students are capable of doing with their bodies in general, and in the later stages, the power of students working as a non-verbal team to help their classmates guess.

“The Question Game”: This game can be useful for teaching students about the power of questions and how they can often communicate just as much as statements. Students line up and the first two students begin speaking to each other ONLY in questions. If one student can’t come up with a question, or mistakenly says a statement, they are “out” and go to the back of the line. Conceivably, one student could potentially stay up front asking questions and knocking out all the other students. The trick to this one is to keep the questions focused on one topic or situation, which the next student to hop up to the front is charged with starting.

“The Alphabet Game”: This game may seem simple, but even adults have trouble remembering their alphabet when in the heat of the moment. This game builds listening skills and creativity, while also reinforcing the alphabet itself. Starting with the suggestion of an activity and any letter of the alphabet, two students must create a “scene” where the first word of each line they speak (and only one line) begins with each consecutive letter of the alphabet. The fun is in the challenge of remembering the alphabet and dealing with more difficult letters like K, Q, and X, while still sticking to the story of the activity.

“Story Conductor”: This game is great for building group cohesion and building listening skills. Can be done with larger groups, but groups of 5 or 6 work best. The group stands in a line on stage, and one other student is selected to be the “conductor.” A suggestion for anything can be asked of the class, possibly an object, an activity, or something they are learning in class you want to review in a fun way. The conductor points to any person in the group who must begin telling a story around that suggestion, and whenever they feel like it, the conductor can point to another person who must continue the story exactly (to the word if possible) where the first person left off. The conductor can switch it up as often or as swiftly as they want. It ends when the group naturally gets to “the end” or the teacher stops it.