

Improvology! Presents “The Lyin’ King” by Stu Krieger Director Krista Skorupski

Classroom Online Resource Document (CORD)

This packet will help in the understanding and executing of improvised storytelling techniques in the classroom.

Introduction

Improvised storytelling is a great way to exercise and expand one’s creative choices and problem-solving skills. On stage, the choices a performer makes can impact the entire production, and knowing how to navigate problems that may present themselves onstage is an irreplaceable skill. Much like in life, events are never guaranteed to unfold in a perfect and predictable way, and this is why actors utilize improvisation. Knowing how to navigate quickly changing environments and gracefully execute solutions will make a person an invaluable asset in any situation, on or off the stage.

*All warm-ups and games range in difficulty and physical exertion. Discretion is left to the supervising faculty which activities are appropriate and safe for each individual group of students.

Warm-ups

Like any trained athlete or musician, performers must warm up their muscles before performing, in the form of physical and vocal exercises. Being both physically and vocally prepared for a performance can mean the difference between having a great performance or a forgettable one. The following are a few simple exercises to get your students warmed up before getting into what can be a rigorous set of improv games.

Gentle Stretching

Being in command of your body first starts with knowing your body. If any of these stretches are too strenuous for your individual body, please adjust them to fit the needs of the group.

- **Head and neck rolls:** begin by allowing your head to drop forward. Then slowly roll your head to the right, and then back around to the left. Continue for three repetitions and then bring your head back to center.
- **Neck Stretches:** Slowly and gently, look completely to your right, then your left. Bring your head back to center, then look up to the sky, and down to the floor. Bring your head back to center and continue for three repetitions.
- **Arm Stretches:** Lift your arms to your sides until your body makes a big T. Gently continue to stretch out in both directions. Bring your arms back to your sides. Stretch your right arm across your body to reach for your left side, take your left and cross it in

front to your right arm to hold it in place, and hold this for five seconds, then switch arms. Continue for three repetitions.

- **Leg Stretches:** Slowly and gently, bring your right foot forward and left foot back until you're in a forward lunge position. Once in this position, lean your weight on your forward knee for ten seconds, then switch legs and repeat. Next, bring yourself back to center by with your arms at your sides and your feet square with your shoulders. Once at center, gently and slowly bring your right leg up behind yourself, holding it with your right hand. Hold this for five seconds, and bring yourself back to center. Then repeat on the left side, hold for five seconds, and come back to center.
- **Back Stretches:** Bring both your arms up to the sky, and slowly and gently allow your hands to fall forward until they reach your feet or shins, whichever is the most comfortable. Allow the top half of yourself to dangle freely for a five seconds. Next, slowly and gently bring yourself upright, allowing each part of yourself to stack on the other until you are back at center with your arms loosely at your sides and your feet square with your shoulders.

Now that your body is stretched out you are ready to play some warm-up games!

Warm-up Games

Warm-up games are shorter and simpler than the games played by the troupe during the story. These are brief exercises in active listening, eye contact, and quick-thinking.

- **Zip! Zap! Zop!:** This high energy game requires focus and concentration to play correctly. All participants form a circle where everyone can be seen by everyone else. It begins with the first person sending an electrifying Zip! To do this, that person places their hands palms together out in front of them creating an arrow pointing toward another member of the circle and saying "Zip!". The person who receives the Zip! must respond with a Zap! by sending their arms into a point above their head and saying "Zap!". Once they've received their "Zap!", they send it on by pointing to another person and sending a "Zop!" by placing their hands palms together in an arrow towards the next person in the circle. That person then sends out the next "Zip!" in the same manner until the cycle repeats itself through the whole circle.
- **Ball of energy:** To play all participants form a circle where each person can clearly see everyone else. The first person creates an invisible "ball" of energy, and begins the game by tossing the "ball" to another person. This next person must pretend to catch the ball, and then changes it in any way they see fit. They can make it bigger, smaller, heavy, square, or whatever the other person wants, before tossing it to another. That next person must catch the ball in whatever configuration the person before them made it into. If the previous holder made it a hot ball, then they must catch it as if it were hot, and so on and so forth, and then make their own changes. This continues until every person has had a chance to catch and manipulate the ball, and the last person throws it to the first person, who extinguishes the ball of energy.

- Shake it Out:** This simple energetic game allows performers to shake out any extra energy buzzing around their body, so they can focus on their performance. First, everyone participating gathers into a circle. It begins with each person shaking their right hand in the air and quickly counting down backwards from ten. Next, the group does the same with the left hand and then the right foot and left foot. This continues back to the right hand, this time counting down from nine, and then left hand, right foot, and left foot, which each round reducing the countdown until the group reaches ones on each appendage. After the final shake out, everyone shouts out all of their excess energy and then they are ready to begin.

Once you've warmed up, you are ready to perform your story! To do this you must first understand the fundamental parts of any story.

Improvised Storytelling Fundamentals

What is the story?

This is the most important part of the storytelling—if you don't understand the story you are trying to tell, then you have no way of how to tell it, and so it is imperative that you know what it is before you begin. A great way to create a story is start from a central conflict and expand from there. For example, let's assume your conflict is someone trying to find their missing ball.

Where do you go next? What do you need? Here are a few questions you should ask:

Where are we? - Are we in a jungle, a city, on a farm? This question establishes the setting, and is important because it allows your fellow performers to make more specific choices in terms of what they say, do, and see.

Who is there? – Who is this story about? Do they have anyone who helps them? These are your characters. The people your performers will play throughout the story, and who the action is directed toward.

What's happening? – We've established that we're trying to find a lost ball, so we have a main conflict, but what else is happening? It would have been very boring if all Dorothy had to do was just walk to castle with nothing in the way to stop her! This is where further questions and additional conflicts make for a more engaging and entertaining story.

*All of these elements are filtered through the audience in improvised storytelling and should be understood before trying to take on an improvised story.

Place/Setting

Knowing where you are, or where the action takes place, is a very important part a story. Establishing this by asking the audience for suggestions is easy, but taking and filtering through these random audience suggestions so that they make some kind of sense for your story is important and challenging.

It is imperative that performers make sensible and practical choices to ground your story. If you're looking for a ball in space, how does this change the way your walk, talk? Paying

attention and following along with the suggestions and fellow performers is necessary for this type of storytelling.

Characters

All good stories must contain a compelling cast of characters, whether it's ragtag team of kids trying to save their favorite school, or a King trying to change his devious ways.

Characters are how the audience can quickly identify who they're following throughout the story, so you must clearly establish who these people are and how they act. In improvised storytelling, the audience is generally given a short premise, and then are given options on who can be who in a story, or the cast is chosen by the director and the audience gives suggestions on the premise.

In order to have an audience chooses some of the characters, you must have a pre-chosen performer who is in charge, like a narrator, to guide the audience, ask the right questions, and move the story forward.

Once you have your characters established you must then have them start to navigate their story.

What's Happening

Any good story should have twists and turns of fate that create conflicts and resolutions for the performers to play out and for the audience to enjoy. These story changes and conflicts can be prompted by asking simple questions like "who did our character meet in the forest?". This can offer a challenge for the character, and where we insert games into the story. Let's say that our performer meets a character in the forest who needs the main character to complete a task. This task can be an improv game, or it can be solved through audience participation, such as, asking the audience "What did our character have to do?" and let's say someone responds with "jump" then the character would jump and the story would move forward.

*Improvised storytelling has different requirements than traditional theatrical performances. It requires active listening, proper communication, working as a group towards a common goal, and most importantly, a willingness to participate. SO the word "NO" should never be said. If a performer says no or refuses to participate, the story will stop or abruptly change course in a way that disrupts all other performers who must adapt.

Now you're ready learn the games you'll add to create a more interesting story.

Improv Games

Improv games are like mini stories within themselves. They are created and performed instantaneously as suggestions come in from the audience.

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 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.

Machine: This game is great way to incorporate physicality into your games. Machine uses physical gestures and sounds to mimic machinery. The group must work together to create their machine. Each person creates their own individual movements and sounds, and one by one they keep adding on to the machine until every person is incorporated. Then the machine runs for a few beats, and that’s the game.

The Alphabet Game: This game may seem simple, but even adults have trouble remembering their alphabet when in the heat of the moment. It 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 listening skills. It can be done with larger groups, but smaller groups of 5 or 6 work best. The participants stand 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.