



# ~ IMPROV THEATER ~



**Theater Games to help quickly create interesting characters, dialogue and story with whatever items you have available**

**Fun for the whole family, all ages!**

## **WEEK 1**

**Reference:** On Stage, Theater Games and Activities for Kids, by. Lisa Bany-Winters

### **Introduction Warm-Up: Who, What, and Where**

Background: You may have heard of improvisation in jazz music. In jazz, musicians improvise from a tune's melody, and what they play is influenced by the other musicians. There are definite similarities between improv acting and jazz music. Both happen without much planning in advance. The musicians know the basic melody and improvise around it. "Who," "What," and "Where" form the basic melody in improv.



### Steps to acting out a scene using improvisation:

1. Choose WHO you are and what your relationship is to your scene partner(s), such as:
  - ❖ Parent and child
  - ❖ Salesperson and customer
  - ❖ Teacher and student
  - ❖ Boss and employee
  - ❖ Movie star and fan
  - ❖ Basketball player and coach
  
2. Choose WHAT action you will do initially to start the scene. It should be active, rather than just talking about something, such as:
  - ❖ Building a sand castle
  - ❖ Trying on clothes
  - ❖ Taking a test
  - ❖ Painting
  - ❖ Watching a parade
  - ❖ Learning to dribble a basketball
  
3. Choose WHERE your scene takes place, such as:
  - ❖ Beach
  - ❖ Mall
  - ❖ Classroom
  - ❖ Office
  - ❖ Street
  - ❖ Gymnasium

Practice by acting out a scene with your Who, What, and Where choices.



## The Question Game

Purpose: To discover how to NOT ask questions.

Procedure:

1. Each player chooses a scene partner and decides on a “who”, “what”, and “where.”
2. They begin improvising their scene, but as they’re acting with their partner, they may only ask questions. They may not answer questions or make any statements of any kind, including, “I don’t know.” The scene might go something like this:

**Player 1:** What do you want to do?

**Player 2:** Do you want to go outside?

**Player 1:** Is it raining?

**Player 2:** How should I know?

3. Act out the question scene for a few minutes so that each partner has a chance to ask a number of questions.
4. Now start the scene again, keeping the same “who,” “what,” and “where” – only this time, they may only say statements. Do not ask any questions.
5. Act out the statement scene for a few minutes. Then bring it to an end.

Reflection:

- After they’ve acted out a question scene and a statement scene, discuss which scene was better and more interesting. Chances are that their statement scene was more interesting and went further than their question scene.



## **Past, Present, and Future**

Purpose: To discover how to stay in the present.

### Procedure:

1. Each player should choose a scene partner and decide on a “who,” “what,” and “where.”
2. They begin improvising their scene, but as they’re acting with their partner, talk only about the past or the future. Talk about what they will do tomorrow or what they did yesterday, but do not talk about what they’re doing right now.
3. Act out this past-future scene for a few minutes.
4. Now start the scene again, keeping the same “who,” “what,” and “where” – only this time, stay in the present. Instead of talking about going to the mall, go there. Instead of talking about something they used to do, do something now.
5. Act out this present scene for a few minutes. Then bring it to an end.

### Reflection:

- Once they’ve acted out a past-future scene and a present scene, discuss which scene was better. Chances are their present scene had more action. Active scenes are more interesting than scenes where the characters only stand around and talk.

### Vocabulary:

**Characters** - people in a play



## Freeze

Purpose: How to go along with a new scene.

### Procedure:

1. Two players start by choosing a line of dialogue.
2. They begin to improv a scene that includes a lot of action. At any time, another player can say, "Freeze." Both actors immediately stop the scene right where it is and freeze.
3. The person who said "Freeze" taps one of the actors on his or her shoulder. They leave the scene, and the person who tapped them replaces them, taking their exact position. The new player starts a brand-new scene based on the position they are in. The other person in the scene goes along with the new scene, and the scene continues until someone outside the scene says "Freeze" again.

### Rules:

1. You must wait at least three lines before calling out "Freeze."
2. You must take the exact position of the person you are tapping out.
3. The person who called "Freeze" is the one who starts the new scene. The other actor must follow their lead.
4. The new scene should have nothing to do with the last scene.

### Acting Tip:

- This is an improv game, so don't plan anything in advance. When you see an interesting position, say "Freeze." Then immediately get into the same position and start a new scene.



Here's an example of how this scene might work:

Cristina and Victor begin a scene with, "I just love going to the circus," which is the first line of dialogue.

**Cristina** (*jumping up and down*): "I just love going to the circus."

**Victor**: Me too. (*Pointing*) "Look at that funny clown."

**Cristina** (*standing on tip toes*): "I can't see. I can't see."

**Rosa**: "Freeze!"

Christina freezes on her tip toes. Victor freezes pointing. Rosa taps Victor on the shoulder. Victor steps away from the scene, and Rosa takes his place. Rosa starts a new scene based on Victor's pointing pose and Cristina's tiptoed pose.

**Rosa**: "You're a much better ballet dancer than that girl over there."

**Cristina** (*pretending to do a ballet dance*): "I know, but I must keep practicing."

The new scene continues until someone calls out, "Freeze."

Vocabulary:

**Dialogue** - conversation between two or more people



## Styles

Purpose: To explore many different kinds of acting and theater styles while improvising.

### Procedure:

1. Each player chooses a scene partner and decides on a “who”, “what”, and “where.”
2. They begin improvising a scene.
3. After a moment, another player, who is not in the scene, calls out a style of acting, such a musical comedy. Without stopping the scene, the two players in the scene begin acting as if they were in a musical.
4. After a few moments, the player outside the scene calls out a new style, such as drama. Now the players immediately begin to act like they’re in a drama.
5. Each time a new style is called, the players change their style of acting but keep the scene going. The players continue until the scene comes to an end.

### Notes:

- You can come up with a number of different styles of acting from thinking about your favorite books, plays, and TV shows.

### Suggestions for Styles:

Telenovela

Science Fiction (outer space)

Cartoon

Tragedy

Silent (pantomime)

Sitcom (family comedy)

Opera

Talk Show

Horror Show

Shakespearean Play

Documentary (educational)

Kung Fu movie

Spy Novel

Music Video

Courtroom Drama

Foreign Film

Police Drama

Farce (broad comedy)



## Who Am I?

Purpose: This guessing game puts kids in someone else's shoes. The trick is to figure out whose.

### Procedure:

1. One player leaves the room or goes somewhere where they can't hear the other players.
2. These players decide on one famous person for this exited player to be.
3. The exited player is called back into the room. When they enter the room, the scene begins with everyone treating them as if they are this famous person.
4. They continue acting until they can guess the name of the famous person they are supposed to be.
5. When they know who they're supposed to be, instead of saying it, they should become the character. They let everyone else know that they have figured out the identity of this famous person by doing things that this famous person would do. For example, instead of saying, "I'm Michael Jordan," they might start a game of basketball. Once it's clear that they have correctly identified the famous person, the scene can be brought to an end.
6. Continue playing until everyone has a chance to be a famous person.

### Vocabulary:

**Character** – a person in a play





## **Park Bench**

Purpose: To practice getting into character and guessing the identity of other characters based on body language and dialogue.

Props: Three chairs or a bench

### Procedure:

1. Set up the chairs next to each other so they make a bench facing the other players.
2. One at a time, three players enter the room.
3. Each acts like a famous person. They sit on the park bench and pretend to be in a park. They talk among themselves while each player tries to figure out who the other two famous people are.
4. When one player knows the identity of another player, they let them know while staying in character. For example, instead of saying, "You're Benjamin Franklin," they might say, "It's a good thing you discovered electricity."
5. As soon as someone has guessed who you are, make up an excuse, in character, to leave the park. Then you may reenter as a new character.

### Rules:

1. There can only be three people in a scene at one time.
2. Don't say who you are.
3. Remember the three rules of improv.

### Vocabulary:

**Body Language** - nonverbal communication in which physical behaviors, as opposed to words, are used to express or convey the information.

**Characters** - people in a play

**Dialogue** - conversation between two or more people



## Party Quirks

Purpose: To remember the rules of improv while trying to figure out what's wrong with the players around you.

### Procedure:

1. Choose one player to be the host of the party and send them out of the room where they can't hear you.
2. Three people play the guests at the party, and each comes up with a quirk (a peculiar or unusual trait). It can be as normal as having the chills or as crazy as having spaghetti for hair.
3. Call the host back into the room.
4. The scene begins with the host getting ready for the party. One at a time, the guests arrive, acting as party guests who have quirks-whatever quirk each guest came up with-added into their behavior.
5. The host must figure out what each guest's quirk is by acting out the party scene with them.
6. When the host thinks they know what a guest's quirk is, they say so in character. For example, the host might say, "Would you like me to turn up the heat? I see you have the chills," or "I just love pasta-do you mind if I try a piece of your hair?"
7. When the host has guessed a quirk correctly, the other guests applaud, and that particular guest makes up a logical reason, in character, to leave the party. For example, the guest with spaghetti hair might say, "I have to go to the store for some tomato sauce."
8. The game continues until all of the quirks have been guessed correctly.



Suggestions for Quirks:

- ❖ You think you're a king or queen.
- ❖ You sneeze jewelry.
- ❖ You speak in opposites.
- ❖ You have an imaginary friend.
- ❖ You think you're a car.
- ❖ You're magnetic.
- ❖ You haven't slept in days.
- ❖ Your clothes are way too small.
- ❖ You have X-ray vision.
- ❖ You're made of rubber.
- ❖ Every time you lie, your nose grows.
- ❖ You glow in the dark.
- ❖ Every time someone says the word "yes," you click like a chicken.

Vocabulary:

**Character** – a person in a play



## **Hidden Intentions**

Purpose: How to set an “intention” and get what you want without saying it.

Procedure:

1. Two players decide on a “who,” “what,” and “where” for a scene that they’ll create.
2. Player 1 leaves the room (or goes where they can’t hear).
3. Player 2 is given an intention by Player 3 – something Player 2 wants from Player 1. It can be an object, such as a hat, or an action, such as wanting them to tie their shoe.
4. They switch places – Player 1 comes back into the room and Player 2 leaves – Player 3 gives Player 1 an intention.
5. After both Player 1 and Player 2 have intentions, they begin acting out their scene. Throughout the scene, each of them tries to figure out what the other player wants and gives it to them, but neither player can come right out and ask for what they want.
6. When Player 1, for example, figures out what Player 2 wants, they should make it part of the scene. Instead of saying, “Oh, you want my hat,” Player 1 might say, “My hat would look much better on you. Why don’t you try it on?”
7. After both intentions have been guessed, the players bring the scene to an end.

Vocabulary:

**Intention** – what you want



## Double Scenes

Purpose: To practice the concept of give-and-take in improvisation. It helps kids learn to know when to give focus to the other scene and when to take focus back.

### Procedure:

1. Divide into two groups.
2. Both groups choose a “who,” “what,” and “where” that are somehow related, such as a husband and wife picking out furniture at the furniture store and two painters who are painting the couple’s home.
3. Both groups set up their scenes next to each other. One group begins improvising. They continue for a few moments, until the other group takes focus by beginning their scene.
4. The first group gives them the focus by freezing in whatever position they are in.
5. The second group acts out their scene until the first group takes focus again, and the second group freezes.
6. This continues until both scenes come to an end.

### Note:

- This game can get very funny because you can use what you hear in the other scene. For example, hearing that the painters are painting the house light blue and yellow, the actors playing the husband and wife could pick out furniture that is bright green and purple.

### Suggestions for Related “Who,” “What,” and “Where” Scenes:

- A mom and dad eating dinner at a restaurant; a baby and babysitter finger painting at home
- Two wives shopping for their husbands at a mall; two husbands shopping for their wives at a mall
- A dentist giving a dental exam to a patient in his office; another patient and a nurse filling out forms in the waiting room
- Two friends decorating for a party at the birthday girl’s house; the birthday girl and another friend listening to music in a car parked outside the house



## **The Storytelling Game**

Purpose: To give kids a lot of ideas for stories and characters.

Prop: A chair

### Procedure:

1. Set up a chair on one side facing the other players.
2. Choose someone to sit in the chair. This person is the narrator or storyteller.
3. They begin telling a story that they are making up as they go along.
4. The other players act out the story as the narrator tells it. These players become whatever characters or objects the storyteller needs for her story and provide all the sound effects. Remember to give and take.
5. The narrator needs to pause from time to time while telling the story so that the other players can act out the scene they have just described. During their pauses, the other players take the focus and act out that part of the story.
6. Then they freeze and return the focus to the narrator to hear the next part of the story.

### Note:

- Try to play this game without planning anything in advance, including who will play each part. When a narrator mentions a character, a player immediately jumps in to become that character.



Here's an example of how this game might work:

**Narrator:** "Once upon a time there was a duck."

One actor immediately jumps in and becomes the duck.

**Duck:** "Quack!"

**Narrator:** "The duck lived in a pond."

The other players make the sounds of a pond.

**Narrator:** "One day the duck noticed his reflection in the water."

One player jumps in to become the reflection.

**Duck:** "Oh, look! My reflection."

**Narrator:** "He didn't like what he saw."

**Duck:** "I look terrible."

**Narrator:** "So he went to the duck beauty parlor."

Players who were the pond now create a beauty parlor.

**Narrator:** "A beautician gave the duck a feather cut."

One player becomes the beautician.

**Beautician (cutting Duck's feathers):** "Snip, snip. There you go."

**Narrator:** "The beautician told the duck to sit under the dryer for a while."

**Beautician:** "Go sit under that dryer."

One player becomes the dryer.

**Narrator:** "After a few minutes, the duck was ready to go."

**Duck:** "Thanks a lot! I'll see you later."

**Narrator:** "And when he looked in his reflection this time, he liked what he saw."

The same player that acted as the reflection becomes the reflection again.

**Duck:** "Much better."

**Narrator:** "The end."

Vocabulary:

**Character** - a person in a play

**To play** - to act out

**Narrator** - a person who says the events of a story

**Sound Effects** - a sound recorded and presented to make a specific storytelling or creative point without the use of dialogue or music

**Storyteller** - a person who tells stories