

Class One

Introduction Exercise: Get to Know You Bingo

First Day Discussion Exercise

1. Ask Group, “What is drama?” Give them time to think and elect at least one response from each participant.
2. Record all the answers.
3. Circle the word acting as it has surely appeared on the list. Announce that the main reason for these sessions is to develop their acting skills.

Pantomime

Performance: Working in groups of 5-7 actors pantomime a single general activity, supplied on a card. In order to communicate the idea of a general activity, each actor in the group must pantomime a related specific activity. The audience then guesses the general activity and each specific activity. As soon as an actor’s specific activity is guessed, he or she may stop and stand still until the audience guesses all activities. The actors need not interact with each other stage.

Example: Six actors pantomime the general activity of “basic training” by pantomiming the following specific activities: shooting a rifle, doing jumping jacks, climbing a rope, saluting, polishing boots. The audience will usually first recognize the general activity and then point out the specific ones.

Preparation time: five minutes

Performance time: (per group) one to two minutes

Stage materials: chairs

Suggestions for conducting the activity: Quickly assign participants into groups each group a card with a general activity written on it. Make sure that all actors know they are to pantomime and activity, and not to speak. As participants plan their performances, circulate around the room, making sure that each group member plans to do a different specific activity. Be prepared to prod: “What are some things you do when you....(whatever the general activity is) ?” Keep the planning time short-five minutes should suffice. This activity makes an excellent beginning event. The participants are usually excited to be on stage the very first day.

Suggestions:

- Orchestra or Band
- Housework
- Broadway show
- Coffee Shop
- First Aid Training
- Hospital Work
- Parade or Festival
- Sports
- Gardening
- Time at the Beach
- Office Work
- Building a House
- Circus
- Camping

- Army

Second Day Discussion Exercise

4. Ask Group, “What are qualities of a good pantomime?” Give them time to think and elect at least one response from each participant.
2. Explain why Consistency, Exaggerated Resistance, and Exaggerated Expression and Gestures are key qualities.
3. Explain that it is important to keep it simple and to always try to tell a story.

Pantomimes

Performance: Within only a few minutes to plan, an actor pantomimes a simple activity and the audience guesses what it is. The audience waits until the performance is completed before guessing. The audience then recounts details of the performance. The actor can also simply announce the activity in advance in which case the audience does not guess the scene, but evaluates how skillfully the actor communicated. Actors can think up their activities, or you can give them suggestions.

Suggested Activities:

- playing a baseball position
- searching for water in the desert
- walking the dog
- washing a dog
- sleepwalking
- wading in a cold stream
- writing a letter, putting it in an envelope, stamping it
- playing golf
- carrying several pieces of luggage
- shooting a gun
- changing a flat tire
- serving a meal
- brushing teeth
- playing tennis
- painting a room
- washing dishes
- skiing
- learning to swim
- planting a garden
- paddling a canoe
- surfing
- putting in contact lenses
- wrapping a gift

Performance: In these short, unrehearsed sketches, actors convey a specific emotional state. Although emotions can be communicated abstractly, actors fare better if they imagine and pantomime situation in which a particular emotion might be dominant.

Example: Instead of thinking about “sad” in a general way, actors imagine situations where sadness occurs – saying goodbye to friends, receiving a letter with bad news, attending a funeral. The group can prepare for the activity by brainstorming together out loud.

- Sulky * Suspicious
- Bored * Excited
- Energetic * Indecisive
- Angry * Sly
- Annoyed * Terrified
- Amused * Loving
- Impatient * Disgusted
- Cold * Nervous
- Hyper * Friendly
- Exhausted * Sweet
- Arrogant * Hesitant
- Strange * Lonely
- Triumphant * Stubborn
- Tense * Sad
- Goofy * Bossy
- Mischievous * Cheerful

Performance: Divide the actors into groups of four or five members. Give each group a situation, preferably written on an index card, where people are “walking through” a particular setting. Each group has a few minutes to plan the action. The group members can announce the situation with a title beforehand, or the audience can guess after the actors have completed their scene.

Suggested situations: Pretend you’re walking....

- Through tall underbrush
- Through a dark alley
- Across a wide street on a rainy, windy night
- In the burning desert looking for water
- Through a forest of man eating plants
- In outer space, weightless
- Down a road of sticky asphalt and tar
- Across a log over a ravine of crocodiles
- Across a street of broken glass
- Through a huge bowl of whipped cream
- From the cold out-of-doors into a warm room
- Through a snowstorm

- Through a swamp
- Down a cold mountain stream
- Through a bowl of chewed-up bubble gum
- Across a room of bouncy springs
- In a bowl of feathers
- Underwater

After exercise: Perform a relaxation exercise on the floor by laying down. Have them breathe deeply and ask them to close their eyes. Ask them to imagine that their entire body is sinking into the floor. Slowly mention different parts of the body, all of which are getting heavier. Imagine you are lying on the beach on soft, warm sand. They feel the sun and it's a soft warm light. Imagine your favorite color. They are surrounded by the sounds of the sea – waves crashing against the shore, seagulls crying in the distance. Then the actors slowly rise, as they feel ready to do so, and open their eyes, remaining silent at all times. They can now go on an imaginative journey.

IMAGINATIVE JOURNEY #1

Have the students stand up and act out the following: They walk away from the beach, over some sand dunes and through some tall grass. They enter a dark forest, which stretches in all directions. After the warmth of the beach, the forest is cool and dark. The walkers realize that they no longer know their way, and they begin to hear strange noises, frightening noises that come from all directions. They search, more and more frantically, for recognizable landmarks. Then, through the increasing gloom, they spot another person (another actor) in the forest. They feel relieved to find each other, and tell each other, in pantomime, how they've become lost. They continue on together. Meanwhile, the noises come closer and sound more dangerous; the night grows colder and more foreboding. Pairs of actors find other pairs; they exchange stories, in pantomime, and go on together as a foursome. They discover a huge rock cliff that rises high above them and to each side as far as they can see. One group member finds an opening under the cliff, large enough for one person to squeeze through. The group members help each other through the opening, and they find themselves back in warmth and sunlight.

Third Day

Pantomime games

The Selling Game

Performance: One person goes in front of audience. Those in the audience pretend that they are all Bulgarians, or some other nationality that no one would know the language for, and they cannot speak English. The actor pretends he/she is traveling in the country chosen and must buy a particular item, which must be described through pantomime to the “Bulgarians” until they can guess what it is. You can give the actors items to pantomime, or they can think up their own. If they choose the latter course, they write their items down on a slip of paper and turn it in before they go on stage.

Advance Preparation: Put the suggested items on cards.

Suggested items:

- Car jack
- Can of motor oil
- Can of bug spray/room deodorizer
- Ballet toe shoes
- Candy bar

- Lipstick
- Tape recorder
- Bookends
- Sunglasses
- Chain saw
- Bird cage
- Watering can
- Stapler
- Curtains
- Spaghetti
- Roller skates
- Overcoat
- Clipboard
- Clock
- Squirt gun

Who Began

Performance: Actors stand or sit in a circle. One person leaves the room. A student is selected to start leading movements in the circle. All other students are to mirror the leader w/o looking directly at them. The other student returns to the room and has three guesses to see who the leader is.

Mirrors: In a mirror game, one actor or group takes the role of a person looking into an imaginary mirror; another actor or group plays the role of the reflection. In these exercises encourage silence as much as possible. First, do a demonstration of mirroring with a student and show three important factors: move slowly, actors should maintain eye contact and rely on peripheral vision, and not try to watch the movements directly, and the left hand of the reflection imitates the right hand of the other. No one can touch their mirror image either.

Fantastic Duet Pantomime

Final Pantomime Performance:

The final in our first unit shall be a planned “Fantastic Duo Pantomime”. Before they perform the pantomime they will get an activity worksheet and come up with all their ideas, and then plan out their movements based upon what they have written out. Explain to the students that the story must have a fantastic twist, rather than a logical one. Tell students to list all sorts of fantastic things that can happen. For example, what fantastic things might occur during babysitting or washing clothes. Take a normal situation and create an impossible twist within it. They should have several minutes to plan and about 3 minutes to perform. This will end our pantomime unit.

The Fourth Day **The Voice**

Introduction

Begin by explaining to the class why the greatest weakness in beginning actors is poor voice control (not in an insulting way). We watch TV and movies where the voice is more subtle on TV than it has to be on the stage. On the stage, *how* you say something is as crucial as *what* is said. Tell the students a story that has a very anti-climactic ending but say it with suspense, increasing volume, and being very secretive. Then reiterate that it's not *what* is said, it's *how* it's said.

"It was a quiet, sunny day, perfect for what I had in mind. I swiftly drove the car to the large, spacious building at the corner of Main and Second Avenue. I parked my car and hurried in. I walked down the long crowded aisles until I found the section I was searching for. I glanced around. There it was! I moved silently towards it, and quickly put my hand around it... a head of lettuce."

Characteristics of a Good Stage Voice

1. **rate:** Almost 90% of beginning speakers are nervous and speak too fast. Actors need to speak slower than their normal rates.
2. **projection:** Most beginners speak too softly on stage, no matter how noisy they are offstage. This normally co-occurs with poor breathing. Speaking loudly incorrectly can hurt a student's vocal chords. Try to teach them how to breathe first. We'll get to that in a minute.
3. **clarity:** Garbled speech usually stems from two causes: poor sentence phrasing or poor enunciation. Poor sentence phrasing means that we need to mark our scripts for pauses. Poor enunciation is usually just the result of lazy daily speech habits. People tend to not speak clearly on a day-to-day basis. This includes not opening your mouth wide enough in most cases.

Test: When they say the beginning vowel sounds of words like *Iowa*, *all* and *over*. They should be able to stick two fingers, held vertically, in their mouths. For these problems, the best remedy is interruption and imitation of the correct sound. Performing an activity in which everyone over-enunciates every single word also helps clear up a mushmouth.

4. **expression:** Instruct beginners to overemphasize and exaggerate important words in their sentences as much as possible. At first, students may feel embarrassed but will gradually be comfortable with "being big".
5. **pitch:** Encourage young actors to speak in a higher tone than their normal speaking voice. Most people speak very low and raspy sometimes. Try to use a full range of voice in speaking.
6. **Stance:** Performers should stand with good posture while speaking. They should not shuffle their feet while saying lines.
7. **eye contact:** Like in pantomime a person should always cheat out towards the audience so that people can hear them. Make sure that you can see the audience in your vision while saying your lines.
8. **poise:** Actors must stay straight while speaking in a scene. Try to avoid grimacing, giggling, putting the script in front of your face, or rolling your eyes backwards if someone messes up.

Vocal Warm-ups

A. Breathing: Bring in some straws. One for each person. Use the straw to take a deep breath from below their belly button. Put their hands on their stomachs. Tell the students that they should feel like they are getting fat. As they exhale they should be feeling skinnier. Do this until everyone understands.

Variations and additions: Count aloud to 10 starting softly and building to loud, then start loud and get softer. Count like a drill sergeant, like you're in love, like a child; count happily, sadly, angrily, boredly, sulkily. Sing it like an opera singer, a rock singer, or an old record player that skips.

B. Actors pretend their mouths are like rubber bands that stretch in the following sequence: right, left, up, down, drawn in like an old person's mouth, pursed out like a fish's and then stretching in all directions.

Variations and additions: Actors make their faces very small, pushing every feature to a single point, and then make their faces very big pushing all features

out like an inflated balloon. Actors smile a big, dumb smile; frown a big, angry frown.

C. The actors repeat the vowel sounds ih, ae, I, oh, ooh, two to three times. Make sure that the more open vowels are open enough to put two fingers in your mouth. Put consonants in front of the vowels like S, F, or put them after like LP, RT, RP, NT, MT, LM, SH.

D. Tongue Twisters:

- Selfish shellfish
- Rubber baby buggy bumpers
- Red leather, yellow leather
- Knapsack straps
- Specific Pacific
- Unique New York
- Burgess's fish shop sauce
- Men munch much mush
- Black bugs blood
- Rush the washing, Russell
- Good blood, bad blood
- Toy boat
- Fruit float
- Fresh fried fish
- Pre-shrunk shirts