

# LEVEL I IMPROV GAMES

## *Promoting ...*

- Improved listening and observation skills
- Enhanced creative-thinking abilities
- Improved decision-making skills
- Team development skills
- Heightened sense of focus
- Exposure to new ideas and perspectives
- Increased comfort taking risks
- Creative solutions to constantly changing circumstances
- Fun!!

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## GET TO KNOW YOU/NAME GAMES ~~~~~

### **Cross the Room**

Players are divided, ½ on one side of the room/stage ½ on the other. The teacher calls “Cross the room if you \_\_\_\_\_” (have any brothers/sisters, have seen the latest Harry Potter Movie, play sports, etc.) Players cross the room without discussion.

### **Name Game**

Players stand in a circle (spread out). Going around the circle, each player states their name and does a movement with their name. Once everyone has gone, a player states their own name while doing the movement they chose for their name and then passes the focus to another player by saying that player’s name while doing the movement for that player’s name. Each player chosen continues with the pattern.

### **I am a Person Who**

Players sit in chairs in a circle. There are enough chairs for everyone but one. The person without a chair is in the middle. They say “my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am a person who . . . .” (loves to fish, loves sports, likes pepperoni pizza, etc). If you are sitting in a chair and the statement that the person in the middle made is true for you, you must get up from your chair and try to switch spots with someone else who got up. You can move to any seat but the one that was directly next to you or the seat that you came from. The person in the middle also tries to find a seat. Whoever ends up without a chair is now in the middle.

## WARM-UP /TEAM BUILDING ~~~~~

### Alphabet Letters

Players in groups of 4 or 5. When a letter is called, each group forms that letter with their bodies. (Without talking to each other about who goes where).

### Assassin

Everyone picks someone to be their bodyguard, and somebody to be their assassin. Don't say out loud who picked who for what. Game starts, and everyone tries to protect themselves from their assassin, by trying to keep their bodyguard between themselves and their assassin. After several minutes of chaos everyone reveals who was picked for what.

#### *Variation:*

Have the players switch their bodyguard to their assassin, and their assassin to their bodyguard without saying who it was and try the game again.

### Big Booty:

Students stand in a horseshoe formation, with the student at the right hand end of the horseshoe dubbed "Big Booty". Other students number off from 1, going clockwise starting with the player next to Big Booty.

Students stomp rhythmically, one foot at a time (1,2,1,2) while energetically singing the Big Booty song: "Big Booty. Big Booty, aw yeah.

Big Booty, Big Booty, Big Booty."

Big Booty starts from there, calling his/her own name, followed by "Number" and the number of a player in the horseshoe. For example, the first turn is as follows:

All: "Big Booty. Big Booty, aw yeah.

Big Booty, Big Booty, Big Booty."

Big Booty: "Big Booty Number 5"

Number 5 would then pass to another player as follows, immediately: "Number 5, Number 7." Number 7 then follows, "Number 7, Number 4," and so on.

The call can be passed back to Big Booty, but there are no callbacks.

When there is a hesitation or an error, all players (continuing to keep rhythm by stomping) loudly and energetically call "Aw, shoot!"

The player who made the error then joyfully goes to the end of the horseshoe and becomes the last number. All other players move into vacant places left, adopting the number of the place in which they stand. For example, if Number 4 made an error, he/she moves to the end, becoming the last number (say Number 8). Number 5 moves into Number 4's spot, becoming 4. Six becomes 5, Seven becomes 6, etc. Play continues.

### Bibbity, Bippity Bop:

One person stands in the middle, and tries to get someone else to take his/her place in the following manner:

--say "bippity bippity bop" to someone, who will try to cut you off with "bop" BEFORE you get to say "bop." If they succeed, keep trying. If they fail (center completes the phrase before outside person says bop) they switch places.

--Say simply "bop" to someone on the outside, to which they must not answer anything (the same consequences apply)

--say "elephant" and count to 10 (quickly). The person you spoke to does the nose & an elephant sound, and the people on either side of him/her form "ears" with their arms

--say "viking 1,2,3,4 ... 10" and the person puts finger "viking horns" on his/her head and makes a "viking sound" (make one up!) and the people on either side have to row

--say "kamikaze 1,2,3,4 ... 10" and the person makes finger goggles & an airplane sound, and the people

on either side make airplane wings with their arms.

The center person can mix these up, repeat, repeat, rapid-fire, whatever works :)

-- Charlie's Angels (Charlie's Angel Pose)

--Truck Driver (Center person drives the truck, people on either side are the moving wheels.)

--Hula Dancer (Center person hula dances, people on either side are palm trees moving in the wind)

Once they have gotten the hang of the ones that you have already called, add new ones into the game.

Once they have played all of the pre-made calls at least a couple of times, you can call

-- "Free for all \_\_\_\_\_" (insert anything you want i.e. Gone with the Wind, Meatball Sandwich, Cactus ... etc.) (Without discussion, the three people create a stage picture/pose of whatever it is you called out before you get to 10. There is no judging what they did, the point is to make a choice and if they do it, not matter what they chose, they are safe.)

### **Free Association Circle**

Everyone gets in a circle and establish a rhythm. Once a rhythm is established, one player starts by tossing a word to his neighbor, who associates on the word and tosses another word to his neighbor.

Rhythm:

Each beat consists of 4 phases:

Slap both hands on your thighs

Clap your hands

Snap your left hand fingers

Snap your right hand fingers

With every right hand snap, a word should be thrown to your neighbor.

It's important to stay in the rhythm. Tell the players to just say anything if they feel they can't think of a word, as long as the rhythms does not get broken.

### *Variation*

#### **Last Letter**

This is an association game, where instead of naming the first word you think of upon hearing a previous word, you name the first word you think of starting with the last letter of the previously heard word.

#### **Guess Who's Leading**

Group sits or stands in a circle. One person leaves the room. One leader is chosen and guides the group in various pantomimed activities. The person comes back into the room and has to observe and guess who is leading.

#### **Here comes Uncle Jessie**

Song:

Here comes Uncle Jessie

Coming through the field

with his horse and buggy and

I know just how he feels

He's calling \_\_\_\_\_ (t-shirts, red hair, girls, shorts, campers . . . )

(clap your hands, stomp your feet, wiggle your body, touch your toes . . . ) ( t-shirts, red hair, girls . . . . )

Thank you (t-shirts, red hair, girls, shorts, campers . . . )

#### **Kitty Wants a Corner**

Before you start the game, one person must be dubbed the kitty. Once you have your kitty, everyone but him/her must stand in a circle. The kitty stands in the middle of the circle, and goes to each person saying "Kitty Wants a Corner". If the person asked wants to give up their spot, they give the kitty their space, which then makes them the kitty. If the person asked does not want to give up their space, they say "Next door neighbor", nodding to the kitty which direction to go next. If the kitty doesn't get a space, they must keep asking until they get one. Here's the tricky part: while the kitty is asking for a

corner, everyone behind him/her is switching places. One person has to switch with another, without being seen. Because if the kitty sees you trying to switch places, they can steal the corner before you get there, which makes you the new kitty. The people within the circle must make eye contact with someone else before switching places, so they can know who they're trading with and where they're going. No one can talk except for the kitty, everything is done with the eyes.

### **Machine**

A machine that does not exist is called for and the players create the machine by each adding an essential part. There is no discussion amongst the players before starting. The first player starts with a repetitive activity and an associated noise. The next player adds to the machine with some activity that fits into the previous player's activity. This continues until a machine is created. The machine is sped up and slowed down. Certain players can be asked to malfunction, and the whole machine must respond. There is no leader in the creation of the machine.

### **Music Symphony**

Players stand in a circle shoulder to shoulder facing in to the circle. Each person thinks of a sound to make. When the conductor (outside the circle) taps on your shoulder you begin repeating your sound (rhythmically) adding to the symphony. When the conductor taps on your shoulder again you stop your noise.

### **Honey I Love You**

Players stand in a circle. One person is in the middle of the circle. The object of the game is for the player in the middle to get someone in the circle to smile. They must go up to people in the group and say "Honey I love you, will you please give me a smile?" They can do anything silly while they are saying it trying to get the person to laugh. The player must respond "Honey I love you too but I just can't smile." without cracking a smile.

### **Pass the Gesture**

Everybody stands in a big circle. One player starts the game by making a gesture and a sound to his right neighbor. The neighbor turns to his right and imitates the gesture and sound to his right neighbor. This continues around the circle, each player imitating how their neighbor did the sound and gesture, not how the original person did it. Continue for several rounds to see how much the sound and gesture changes just from the little nuances by each new person. Have a new person pick a sound and gesture and begin again.

### **Scream**

Everybody stands in a circle (even numbers) shoulder to shoulder. Before beginning, have everyone confirm who the person directly across from them is. Everybody starts looking down at the ground. They count together "1, 2, 3" On the 4<sup>th</sup> beat everyone looks up and chooses to either look straight ahead to the person directly in front of them, to their right or to their left. Whenever 2 people look each other in the eyes, they scream. If you look and did not make eye contact with the person to your right/left or across from you (because they are looking another direction) you remain silent. The object of the game is to try to have a round where no one made eye contact and the group ends up silent. If they do not reach the goal it is ok to stop when you think they have had enough.

### **Whoosh/Whoa**

A joyful exploration of scene rules and games, and a nice brain fry exercise to boot. There are no winners and no losers here!

Rules:

Students stand in a circle.

They are instructed to pass a "whoosh" around the circle, which travels through their fingertips and voices to the player to their left.

Once the whoosh has traveled around a few times, introduce the idea of “Whoa,” which is produced by holding up your hands to block a “Whoosh.” When someone says, “Whoa,” the “Whoosh” must switch directions and go the opposite way.

After the students adapt to this, further actions are as follows:

Ramp, which is sent over the head of the next player, skipping that player and landing on the next one;  
Tunnel, which causes the next three players to turn sideways (creating a tunnel through their legs) and landing the next Whoosh four players over;

Volcano, which causes all players to run to the middle and erupt outwards and back into the circle, continuing the Whoosh from the last position;

Banished!, in which a player points to another and “banishes” him or her from the circle. The banished student then finds a new place in the circle. (Banished can also be used when a student misses a pass or fumbles.)

For more, see the Adaptations section below.

Adaptations:

Once students have adapted to all the different types of rules, they can invent their own, which should be accepted by the rest of the circle and incorporated into regular game play. The student should “sell” the new rule, so that his/her fellow players can be sure to follow up.

Some previous rules which have been “sold” and added include:

Baby Pig, in which the player lets a “baby pig” loose to run beneath the feet of all players in the circle, and back into its owner’s arms;

Accent/Language/Character/Genre- based Whooshing/Whoa-ing (which is, of course, joyfully copied by the next player);

Dance Breaks, and etc.

The possibilities are essentially endless. Have fun with it!

## PERFORMANCE ~~~~~

### Arms

Four improvisers perform a scene. Two improvisers stand in front and two in back. The improviser in front wraps his arms around the improviser behind. The improviser behind then uses his own arms as the front improvisers arms while the front improvisers perform the scene. To start, ask for a location where two people could be sitting next to each other and a relationship.

### Build an Environment/Object

Someone gives a suggestion of an object or environment that the group will create. When the leader calls the object/environment, everyone must instantly be some part of that environment or object WITHOUT talking about it beforehand or conferring with the group. The point of this game is to make a decision and do it. As they are taking their space they call out what part of the environment/object they are creating.

E.g.

Park (I'm a swing set, I'm the grass, I'm a water fountain)

Car (I'm the steering wheel, I'm the breaks, I'm the tires, I'm the hubcap, I'm the garbage on the floor of the car)

### Dr. Know It All

Three people are on stage acting as one person "Dr. Know it All". Dr. Know it all knows the answer to any question. Someone from the audience asks Dr. Know it All a question and he answers (each actor saying one word at a time to make up the answer)

### Good, Bad Worse Advice

Explain the rules of the game to the audience. Tell them that a trio of "experts" will be offering advice to the audience. Set up three chairs for the actors. Have three actors take their places in the chairs. Let the actors establish their characters as vain know-it-alls.

Prompt the audience to ask your experts for advice about a problem. As the MC, designate one expert to answer with reasonably good advice and another with advice that is worse than that given by the first. Finally, let the last expert offer horrible advice that is clearly worse than any offered previously.

Rule: Tell the actors that their answers may not include violence.

### "Hey"

All players are in the space.

One player yells "Hey!"

All answer " Hey what?"

Player who called "Hey" answers "Let's \_\_\_\_\_ (Go to the Beach) (Play tennis)" All answer "Yes, let's! (with enthusiasm)".

All players do that action (if it is go to the beach, they pantomime doing some activity you would do at a beach i.e. Build a sandcastle, swim, fly a kite, eat a picnic, tan ...)

Actions continue until someone else calls "Hey". Make sure each activity is given time to be played out before moving on to someone else's new idea.

### Hitch Hiker

Use 3 chairs to build the interior of the front seat of a truck. One player starts driving the car, and another player becomes a hitch hiker, hiking a ride. The hitch hiker character has a particular character tick or a particular emotion, which the driver takes on once the hitch hiker enters the car. Both characters explore and heighten the emotion/tick/characteristic until the next hitch hiker comes in to the scene. Other hitch hikers join in, each with their own characteristics or emotions, taken on by the driver and the passengers in the car as the hiker joins. As the new hitch hiker comes in the car, everyone

shifts seats and the driver leaves the car, making room for the hitch hiker. The driver must justify why they are leaving the car.

### **Magical Box**

Coat/Towel, etc. on the floor covering the “magical box”. Children take turns reaching under the coat/towel and in to the “magical box” and pulling out a gift that they really want for their birthday/the holidays. As they pantomime the gift they pulled out the other children try to guess what the gift is.

### **New York Lemonade**

Team 1 “Here we come”

Team 2 “Where from”

Team 1 “New York”

Team 2 “What’s your trade”

Team 1 “Lemonade”

Team 2 “Show us if you’re not afraid”

Two teams

Team 1 has 10 seconds to agree on a profession that they are going to act out (team 2 counts slowly to ten out loud, when they get to ten the team must have come to an agreement)

Team 1 walks towards the other team while they start the New York Lemonade chant with Team 2

Team 1 acts out the profession while team 2 makes guesses

When Team 2 guesses the profession team 1 runs back and tries to get across their line without being tagged by someone from team 2

If they get tagged they must join team 2.

Now it is the other team’s turn to come up with the profession. Game continues until you think they have had enough of playing the game.

### **Questions**

2 teams face off. 2 players begin and must speak only in questions. First one to get stumped goes to the back of their line. The next player on the team must step in place and continue the scene with the other player.

### **Samurai**

An opportunity for students to let loose vocally and physically, Samurai is a great way to break the students’ bond to the outside world and welcome them, ninja-style, to the improv world.

Rules:

Students stand in a circle.

Each creates a Samurai “sword” by putting their hands together, palm-to-palm.

Raising his/her “sword” above his/her head, an improviser lets out a classic ninja yell and brings his/her hands down, “stabbing” across the circle at another improviser.

When the first Samurai has their “sword” up, the other Samurais to his/her right and left have an opportunity to use their own “swords” to stab the first Samurai’s soft underbelly. They will let out a yell when they do so, bringing their arm-swords across the first Samurai’s belly in a lateral motion (they do not actually touch the person, just cut across).

Once the “stab” has been passed, the receiver will raise their sword and let out a yell while passing the stab to another player. The players on his/her left will attack the players belly while shouting, as with the first Samurai.

## **Zip, Zap, Zop**

Zip Zap Zop is a traditional theater warm-up game. It can be played with any number of people greater than two, and is generally used to get actors to pay attention to each other and pass the focus. Whether you're in charge of an improvisation troupe or a production of a Shakespeare play, you can gather your actors for a quick round of Zip Zap Zop before moving on to more complicated exercises.

1. Gather all actors in a big circle.
2. Start the game by sliding your hands and pointing at another actor in the circle and saying "Zip." That actor, with no hesitation, must immediately point to another player and say "Zap." That player must, in turn, immediately point to another person and say "Zop." And that person must immediately point to someone else and say "Zip."
3. Continue in this fashion until someone makes a mistake by either saying the wrong word or by hesitating too long. That player is eliminated, and the player to her left begins again from Step 3.
4. Keep playing until only two people are left.
5. Modify the game to suit your own needs. You can create variations on Zip Zap Zop to work on certain skills. For example, a great way to work on eye contact is to play that instead of pointing, you must simply make eye contact with another player when saying "Zip." This requires your actors to pay even closer attention to each other and make more eye contact.