

A COLLECTION OF THEATER GAMES AND EXERCISES

SPLAT

I like to start out a new class or cast with a couple of concentration name games. Not only does it help everyone learn each other's names, but it practices focus and concentration and they are fun!

Before You Start

- Group forms a circle with one player or the teacher in the middle.
- Make sure everyone understands the importance of safety and control.
- Go around the circle once and everyone introduces themselves by first name.

How to Play

- The player standing in the middle of the circle is the "splatter".
- The splatter randomly points to someone and shouts "SPLAT!"
- The player in the circle that is pointed to must duck down low as if the splat hits them in the gut, sending them to lean over. This reveals an open space in the circle where the two players on either side of the "ducker" can see each other clearly. Those two players race to say each other's first names. The loser of the race is eliminated and steps outside the circle.
- The player ducking stands back up and the game resumes with the leader "splatting" another person in the circle. This continues until there are two people remaining in the circle.
- The game is finished by having a "Splat Duel" Both students stand back to back and look straight ahead. Every word you say that is NOT splat, they take a small step forward away from each other. Eventually you will say, "splat" and they both spin around and say each other's name. The first to say it is the winner and becomes the "splatter" in the middle of the circle for the next game. Note: You can try and trick the pair by saying words like, "SPLEEN!" or "SPLOOSH!" If one of them turns early, they automatically lose.

FREEZE FRAME

This is a group activity that lets your class or cast explore creativity and group dynamic. They should all work together to form a strong still photograph.

Before You Start

- Group forms a very large circle and sits down.
- One person is chosen to stand, enter the circle and hit a still pose.
- A director or teacher should call on people slowly to add into the picture to ensure everyone's choice is seen.

How to Play

- A person is chosen to enter the circle and hit a creative pose and freeze. The rest of the circle studies the pose as if it is a picture caught in time. "What might be going on?" "Where might they be?"
- Students raise their hand and are called on one-at-a-time to add into the frozen picture. The first person to add in has a lot to do with the direction the photo takes. If they think the initial pose appears to be a soccer match and join in as a goalie, then everyone should adapt their ideas and go with the flow.
- The exercise ends when every single member of the class or cast has added into the "Freeze Frame" and forms a frozen group picture.
- For added fun, you can take an addition five pictures saying, "click, click, click, click click" and watch the picture slightly change.
- Everyone resets to sitting in the circle and you ask for a new volunteer to stand and begin with a pose in the middle.





THIS JUST IN!

This works on trusting your instincts, being creative and remaining in the moment. Always be actively listening to the other actors on stage and respond accordingly.

Before You Start

- Group forms a circle. This could be done sitting or standing.
- Find a microphone to pass that does not have to work.

How to Play

- The first time through the director can jump off the activity by holding the microphone like a reporter and creating a crazy news headline that is being announced to an imaginary camera. "THIS JUST IN, An elephant escaped from the zoo and bought a house in Los Angeles" This can be whatever you want. Explain that all headlines must start with "This Just In" but to try and be as creative as possible.
- The first person quickly passes the microphone to the next person in the circle. Their goal is to take ONE word from the previous headline and create a brand new one inspired by that one stolen word. Going back to the Elephant example. The next person could say, "THIS JUST IN, there was a blizzard in LOS ANGELES that dumped 8 feet of snow over the weekend." They stole the word Los Angeles. I recommend passing it around the circle in order so the hand off is quick and the participants do not have a lot of time to think. They have to trust their instincts and come up with the first thing that pops into their head based on the person before. It is good practice to listen to your scene partners and to always remain in the moment.
- Don't create your headline ahead of time as you wait. Be inspired by the actor before them.
- Continue until everyone has had at least one chance to create a headline.

THE CUP GAME

Not to be mistaken for the when you sing about getting a ticket for the long way 'round, this game is fairly simple and intended as a team building exercise!

What you'll need

- A sleeve of Dixie/small paper cups (these are not meant to be used for drinking, so can be recycled if not crushed in the process)

How to play

- Depending on the size of your cast, break them into groups of 5-7 and spread the groups out throughout the room.
- Hand each group a paper cup, informing them that the goal is to pass the cup to each other within the circle, trying to keep it from dropping to the floor.
- It is important to NOT instruct them on how to do so!
- After a while, groups can start counting their reps to beat their personal scores.
- This game/exercise can run for any period of time, but generally 15-30 minutes is enough.
- Once the cast is used to the activity, this game could be played every day for a few minutes before rehearsal.
- For a competitive aspect, feel free to see which group gets the highest rep count.

There really isn't much else to the game! As mentioned before, the purpose of the game is to foster team building, but without the students being made aware of that fact. By not giving them any instructions other than keeping the cup off the floor, each group will instinctively find their own process of doing so that is unique and most efficient to them. You'll be surprised by all the creativity! This all then can translate into how they interact and work with each other in rehearsal and then on stage. I used to LOVE playing this game as a high schooler and never thought much of it beyond it being a fun, competitive experience. Years later, however, when I got the chance to work alongside my high school director as a colleague, he informed me of this team-building secret as we watched our cast play the game, and my mind was slightly blown.



WHAT ARE YOU DOING?

A fun, “think on your feet” game that works improv skills, creativity and being in the moment.

How to Play

- Have two students stand up in front of the group.
- One of the students should start performing a clear action such as vacuuming, stirring a pot, talking on the phone, etc.
- The second student should ask student 1, “What are you doing?” Student 1 must reply with an action that is anything but the thing they are doing.
- Once shared, student 2 will then continue with the newly suggested action.
- This repeats until one of the student’s hesitates too long to create an action. Students tag in until everyone has had a chance to play or one student has been in for too long.

A game more focused on improv, but could easily be used as an ice breaker, or an activity tied in to create characters with your ensemble members since it promotes instinctive action rather than thinking too much about the choices they make. Plus, it can get pretty silly!

HITCHHIKER

Another game focusing on improv skills, but also responding to your surroundings and communicating both verbally and physically to the group you’re with.

How to Play

- Place four chairs on stage to represent four seats in a car. Four students start in the car and they are going somewhere.
- A “hitchhiker” stands up and puts their thumb out. The hitchhiker has a very strong characteristic, such as enormous sneezes, extremely old age, annoyed business person, etc.
- One of the passengers will say “look, hitchhiker” and they will pull over to pick the hitchhiker up.
- The hitchhiker enters the front passenger seat and the other students rotate around clockwise. The driver gets out of the car.
- As soon as the hitchhiker enters the car, all the passengers and driver take on the hitchhiker’s characteristics immediately and to the extreme.
- They continue dialogue until a new hitchhiker comes on.
- This round robin should move very quickly.