

Comedy Club Starter Kit

1

This document is designed to be an easy to understand “How To” kit for starting your own Comedy Club.

Contents

1. A short history of Comedy Club
2. Structures for a successful Comedy Club
3. Other Reasons To Start A Comedy Club At Your School
4. Your commitment if you choose to start a Comedy Club.
5. What a Typical Comedy Club Session looks like.
6. A 10 week Comedy Club Program

A Short history of Comedy Club

I started Comedy Club at Umina Beach Public School in 2008. It took time to evolve and has been refined and modified over the years. I am telling you this because what I present in this document has a proven track record of being highly successful and engaging with the children over a number of years.

In that time it has become a significant aspect of each year the Comedy Club teachers and the students, as well as becoming an important component in the overall well being of the students.

When I started Comedy Club I actually didn't have much of an idea what it exactly would be.

The initial concept stemmed from the ideas that I love comedy and that students love to laugh and will go to great lengths to get a laugh. These ideas were then crystalized by watching some comedy skits performed by students at the school talent quest.

In the early years I only had about 15-20 students involved and I focused on skits and adaptations of Roald Dahl poems- basically because I couldn't find anything “out there” really suited to primary aged students.

A few years later I started having 40-50 students attending regularly. This meant I had to ask the staff if someone would help so that the number ratio would stay manageable. I then started adapting old school musical scripts and linking skits together to make a show script.

About 5 years after starting Comedy Club, the interest had grown to the point where I had between 70-100 students each session, 3 other teachers and a community volunteer helping me each week. These numbers meant that the creation of a scripted show would be difficult if not impossible. So I took a step into the unknown- the Comedy Club evolved into being completely based on Drama and Improvisation games and activities. The number attending Comedy Club has remained at between 50-80 students over the last 6-7 years and this format has been successful with catering for and being popular with, these large numbers.

Structures for a successful Comedy Club

I would highly recommend you adopt these structures as they have proved to be part of the bedrock of why Comedy Club is so loved by the children.

- **Fun**

It should be fun for you and the children every week. It is the main purpose for Comedy Club to exist. I have included a lot of games and activities in this pack, so the children should never get bored of any activity. Also please note that there is a plethora on the internet, however word of warning. I have checked and trialled all the activities in this pack, but most of what you will find is for adults and not suitable for children. Many of the activities I have included were made for adults but I have modified or altered them to make them suitable, so I do encourage you to search for new activities, but check before you do them with the children.

- **The Years 3-6 mix.**

Comedy Club has always been open to all the primary students. Initially this rationale was because I had no idea how many children would be interested and so I thought to cast as wide a net as possible (and ensure I had enough children attending to make it viable). Once it reached the 50-80 students attending (out of a primary population of between 400-450), on a pure numbers attending rationale, I could quite easily have dropped the younger students. However, I have found that the year 3-6 mix is wonderful on many levels. For the activities the children do tend to stay in their grade or stage level, but when they do mix it can be very rewarding in a number of ways. It also fosters the relationships outside of Comedy Club, so that it is almost like the Year 3's and 4's have about 20-30 stage 3 buddies they can turn to if they need them.

By having the children being able to start in year 3, they get to witness and then imitate the skills shown by the Year 5 and 6's. This means that a lot of the basic stage craft skills are demonstrated and thus absorbed without the need for specific instruction.

Also being able to establish a positive working relationship with a student that can go over a 4 year period is extremely rewarding. The pride that my fellow teachers and I feel when we witness a child who started as a shy, timid Year 3, grow and mature into to a Year 6 leader of Comedy Club with stage craft, voice projection and killer comic timing, is a joyful experience that never gets old.

- **Voluntary participation or (If you don't want to be here, there's the door).**

This is such a powerful thing: I have never had to deal with a behavior issue in all the years of Comedy Club. Whilst I do admit that the vast majority of children who have attended over the years have been well behaved, happy and cooperative, we have had some children whose behavior record outside of Comedy Club would almost make the paper curl that it was written on.

However, because the students can always leave, their behaviour has never caused an issue.

I do understand that voluntary participation can be a two edged sword in that you won't know how many children will turn up each week and might also be left with the unknown of if you'll have enough children to make your session viable. This feeling of "not having a safety net" is, funnily enough, very much akin to what makes improvisation both so confronting and also so much fun for the children. However, because of the nature of the drama games and improvisations, it can cope with students being away for various reasons (other commitments, sickness or slackness) so the session is never brought to a halt by the key actor being absent. I must state that it has been my experience that there is a solid core of about 60-70% of the children who do come every week because they love it. Once the children get a taste for what Comedy Club is, I'm sure you'll get a group of regular attendees, because they will learn to love it.

- **A safe environment.**

Comedy Club has always been a safe environment- students can be themselves, they can be silly, they can make mistakes. In my opinion this is an essential element of Comedy Club because the nature of the activities means that the children are putting themselves in situations where in the wrong sort of environment they maybe teased or belittled. The supportive environment that is now just such a norm at Comedy Club, that I don't have to address it more than once each year, which is a wonderful thing. When new teachers have attended Comedy Club for the first time, the friendly, cooperative attitude of the children toward each other, is one of the things on which is commented.

Other Reasons To Start A Comedy Club At Your School

Wider Participation

- The Drama and Improvisation games and activities format not only copes with huge variances in numbers attending, but it allows for greater participation by a greater number of students. Unlike traditional drama activities e.g. plays and musicals, after the initial casting period the opportunities for children to shine, stand out and surprise is pretty much dictated by the size and type of the role they have. With Comedy Club, any child on any day has the opportunity to surprise and have the audience howling with laughter at some gem. I'll be honest. It is pretty much "rocks and diamonds" as far as what comedy is produced by the students, but I cannot recall a session where I have not had a good belly laugh at what the children have produced. Even something that really fizzles, is a learning experience. A safe environment allows the chance for students to scale heights that they could not have imagined and especially with the year 5 and 6 students it allows for a friendly rivalry of who can be the funniest and get the biggest laughs.
- **Student Engagement**
It easily fits within the scope of meeting the needs of several areas of Student Engagement.

- **Cost**

It is free. The school's only financial commitment would be to pay some release time for you to visit a Comedy Club session at Umina and possibly for a half day release if you wanted me to visit your school.

- **Musicals**

Comedy Club is also the training ground for our school musicals. In 2018 grades 3-6 presented an original musical about Charles Kingsford-Smith, written by Jeff Bonner, one of our teachers. The overwhelming response from everyone who saw the musical was what an incredibly challenging task it was for primary students and what an amazing job the whole cast and in particular the main actors did. The confidence and impressive stage craft on show were in no small part, down to Comedy Club. All the main actors were drawn from Comedy Club and rather than auditions, the parts were allocated according to what skills the students had demonstrated, in some cases, over the last three years.

Your commitment if you choose to start a Comedy Club.

- **Preparation**

I have prepared a ten week sample Comedy Club program to get you started. You should familiarize yourself with the activities so you know what's what. This will hopefully take no more than half an hour of your time each week. There are also short videos that show each game or activity being played. They can either be just for your reference or they could be shown to your Comedy Club children to help with the game/activity explanation.

You will need to refer to the three booklets I have prepared:

- i) **Warm Up Games;**
- ii) **Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time**
- iii) **Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time**

- **Time Commitment**

For the last 8 years or so, Comedy Club has run every Friday morning in the school hall from 8.15-9.10 starting in Week 5 in Term 1 and running every week until about Week 8 in Term 4. Yes you read that right Comedy Club runs for about 33-34 weeks each year. However even though I run Comedy Club over an extended period of time, the children are always itching for it to start each year and are disappointed when we wrap up for the year. This is because the children love it so much.

Back in 2008, I started running Comedy Club at lunch times, but I have found that the morning time slot is great and Friday just perfect because a) I have done my prep for class for the week, b) there is no sporting team training to compete with, c) no one else wants the hall at that time and d) a good laugh in the morning is a great way to start the last day of the week. Now of course it is up to you when and for how long you run Comedy Club. It would most likely be that in its early years, you may run Comedy Club less frequently than I currently do. When I started out, I only ran Comedy Club for one or two terms. However I do want you to be warned, the children will really come to love it and you may feel compelled to extend how long Comedy Club runs.

What a Typical Comedy Club Session looks like.

OK so let's get down to the nuts and bolts of what you need to know to start and run a Comedy Club at your school.

A typical Comedy Club session looks like this:

Warm up games usually 2-3 Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time and/or Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

The official start time of my Comedy Club is an hour before school starts. In practice I aim to be in our hall by 8.00 because often there are children who are keen and arrive before the official start time. I don't start any activities until there are at least 10 children present and then the activity will be a simple to play and one that the children have experienced before so that as others turn up they can either join in or watch. The best games for this time are Evolution, Person Place Object, Cross the Circle, or even just your traditional game of charades.

How many activities you need to prepare and how many you will get through depend on a few factors. Firstly, how many children are attending Comedy Club? With the reduced numbers of just Stage groups attending at the moment due to Covid restrictions (Roughly 20-30 children) I aim to fit in 2-3 warm up activities which take up about 15-20 minutes, and then one or two Improvisation activities. With my normal numbers (50-60 children), I might have just two warm ups and have just one "improv" activity. The second factor is, if there is a performance activity, you need to take in account the numbers in each group, e.g. with "Machines" there are usually 4-5 in each group, so you will get through all the groups a lot quicker than with paired activities like "Master Servant Disaster." Some weeks I just can't manage to get through all the performance groups- so I aim to have them perform the next week. Some tips running the preparation time improvisation. I outline what they need to prepare, then give the children about 5 minutes to work things out. The first few times you do this you may wonder how anything can come from the noise and chaos that ensues in those 5 minutes, but this has become one of my favourite parts of Comedy Club. I am constantly amazed at the variety of ideas that are born from the cacophony. When there is any performance, at the start of each term and then occasionally thereafter, I will remind the children of their duties of being a good audience. To help the children remain focused on what is being performed and not thinking or speaking about what they are going to do, I choose one group to be outside preparing while one group is performing.

The first time the children perform and again occasionally thereafter, I give a very brief (1-2 minute) talk on three points i) keeping 90% of the action downstage in the middle; ii) making sure their voice can be heard at all times and iii) keeping their bodies and especially their mouths pointed in the direction of the audience, *not* the other actors on stage. Don't be afraid to "side coach" by calling out for a child to speak up, or even physically moving them to the correct position on stage. As long as you don't make too much of it, I have found that my children over the years have been very open and accepting of the occasional interruptions. I also try to start the performances with an experienced group, who will (hopefully) exemplify the three points.

One last thing, which might upset some teachers, but I believe if you have reached this far into document, you will get what I am about to say. Comedy Club is about the children. It is not a “gab fest” for me. I will aim to speak no more than 2-3 minutes in the entire Comedy Club session. Given the complexity of some of the activities, an explanation might take a fair bit of time, but that is the exception not the rule. As I said at the start, every session should be fun. If you and the children are not having a ball each session then there is something wrong- please get in contact with me, I am more than willing to help.

10 Week Comedy Club Program.

I have chosen activities to suit a 50 minute session, which may seem long, but believe me it flies. If you are going to have a shorter session then feel free to adjust. If you just want to start with a few warm up games that would be fine as well. You know your children and what is going to suit them best.

Don't feel like you should know everything off by heart. You know how long I have been running my Comedy Club, but I still have all my information in a folder that I refer to, as I am introducing/ explaining a game or activity!

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 1

Warm up games

- Cross The Circle
- Primal Voice
- Person Place Object

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- Scenes from a Hat
- Make a Scene

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 2

Warm up games

- Person Place Object
- Primal Voice

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- Artists Model Clay (As an activity no performed)

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Machines

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 3

Warm up games

- Evolution
- Ducks and Cows

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- Make a Scene

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Crazy Olympics

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 4

Warm up games

- Evolution
- Mirror

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- Scenes from a hat

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Create Obstacles

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 5

Warm up games

- Person Place Object
- 54321 (Any variety)

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Bus Stop

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 6

Warm up games

- Evolution
- 54321 (Any variety)

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- What are you doing?

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Custard

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 7

Warm up games

- Cross the Circle
- Zombie Tag

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- World's Worst

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Flock Of Seagulls

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 8

Warm up games

- Pirate Ship
- Vampire

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- World's Worst

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Custard

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 9

Warm up games

- Vampire
- Person Place Object

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- Make a Scene

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Machines

Sample Comedy Club Session Week 10

Warm up games

- Evolution
- Zombie Tag

Improvisation Activities With No Preparation Time

- Scenes From a Hat

Improvisation Activities With Preparation Time

- Bus Stop