

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 1*

Rating for each game

To help you, I have rated each activity/game according to the following scales.

Ease of play 1-5:

- 1 Inexperienced players can participate easily;
- 2 Inexperienced players can participate fairly with an example;
- 3 Some performance skills needed, possibly a challenge for younger or less experienced children;
- 4 For confident players. Will be a challenge for younger or less experienced children;
- 5 For experienced players. I would recommend that younger or less experienced children watch the first time(s) this is played.

Ease to explain 1-5:

- 1 Can be explained in less than a minute, children will pick it up very easily as they play;
- 2 Explanation is little longer or more complicated, but children will pick it up fairly easily as they play;
- 3 Needs a bit of explanation, but is then relatively clear how to play, children should pick it up fairly easily;
- 4 Explanation is a little complicated but example of how to play, should make things clear;
- 5 Needs a lot of explanation and an example of how to play, step by step examples needed, stop to make sure the children are following before going on.

Re-playability 1-5:

- 1 Can be played several times in a term;
- 2 Can be played a few times a term;
- 3 Can be played several times in a year;
- 4 Can be played few times a year;
- 5 Play only once a year.

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 2*

These activities need to be explained, the kids are given about 5 minutes to prepare then they take turns performing (voluntary of course). For most of these activities, groups of 3-4 work best.

Tip: I have found it best to pick a group to perform and also pick a group to go outside and prepare- this helps to keep the kids as a more focused audience because they know they will get a chance for last minute prep.

With all these activities also make sure the children understand two principles: keep it short and sweet and make sure the audience can hear what you are saying (this can be a tricky thing especially for the younger students. I have found that it is better to call out “louder” during their performance than to let it continue in whispers or mumbles). The performance should only continue whilst it is interesting to the audience. If it goes on too long, becomes boring, or still can’t be heard after several “louder” calls from the teacher, bring it to a close by asking the audience to give the performers a round of applause.

Adjective Scene

Children work out a short scene.

When ready to perform, ask the Comedy Club for an adjective (e.g. sad). The group plays the scene in which the players are as sad as possible.

Alternatively, give every player a different adjective.

- *Ease to play 3*
- *Ease to explain 3*
- *Re-playability 3*

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 3*

Boris

2 players play an improvised interrogation scene. One is the interrogator, the other is a suspect. The interrogator randomly throws unconnected elements to the suspect, who needs to incorporate these and get himself into (even more) trouble. And then we have Boris, who is a nasty, huge, but invisible thug assisting the interrogator. Every time the interrogator does not like the suspect's answers (and also when the suspect does not incriminate himself enough), the interrogator calls on Boris to torture the suspect, prodding him to confess or incriminate him even further.

Notes

- we do not establish the crime beforehand
- the suspect mimes being tortured by Boris
- the investigator can tell Boris what to do (break his leg), but it is more fun to leave the choice of torture up to the suspect
- if the torture does not go far enough to the investigator's taste, he can always call in Boris' evil twin brother, Igor (also invisible)
- as a gag, the suspect can also incriminate Boris (who can turn out to be a witness/accomplice to the crime).
 - *Ease to play 5*
 - *Ease to explain 4*
 - *Re-playability 2*

Bus Stop

Some chairs on stage. Player one starts, they enter and wait for the bus, but they need to try to make it obvious who they are by speaking and miming. The second player enters and through interaction, both should make it clear to the audience who they are. The third player enters, this is the cue for player one to come up with an excuse to exit (their bus arrives, they get a lift from a friend etc) once again interaction needs to make it clear who players 2 and 3 are. The final player enters and player two

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 4*

needs to make a reason to exit. Continue until last two on stage have established their characters. All re enter and the audience guesses who they were.

More experienced players might like to come up with their own characters.

- Dad with a child he hasn't seen for a while
- A crazy old lady who keeps muttering to herself
- A student trying to finish their homework last minute
- A nurse on the way to the local hospital
- A heavily pregnant lady going for a final check up
- A person from the past, who is in awe of what they see
- A person from the future, who is in awe of what they see
- A cyclist whose bike was hit by a car
- A girl on the way to a friend's birthday party
- A hot lifeguard on the way to the beach
- A clown dressed up for a kids party
- A nervous driving instructor who doesn't want to get back in the car
- An L plater who failed their driving test
- A chef on the way home from the long lunch shift
- A pro wrestler on his way to be in a match
- A farmer on his way to the Easter show
- A film director and actor making a commercial (play both parts!)
- A musician on his way to a gig
- A guy with flowers he is talking them home to his wife
- A politician out meeting and greeting the public
- A person in a wheel chair
- An escaped prisoner trying to look inconspicuous
- A huge beefy bloke on his way to a gym workout
- A mum with a naughty little toddler who doesn't want to leave
- Mum with a child, first day of school
- Teenager with loud iPod, gum and attitude
 - *Ease to play 3*
 - *Ease to explain 4*
 - *Re-playability 3*

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities
With Preparation Time **Page 5**

Crazy Olympics

Children in groups of 3-4. One child is a sports reporter, the others are the players of the sport. Reporter asks them questions about their sport and what training they do for it. Then get the players to demonstrate their sport. Below is a list of ideas, but for better players get the audience to come up with a suggestion, and depending on the students, have them improv the scene with no preparation time.

Getting- ready- for- school triathlon
Spaghetti eating race
Washing up race
Balloon blowing
Face contortion competition
Sausage sandwich speed eating
Granny break-dancing
Moon walk races
Blackboard speed cleaning
Full page of writing race
Animal imitation competition
Nappy changing race
Pancake flipping
Sandwich making races: creative fillings
Setting the table race
Bedroom cleaning/ hiding the mess
Directing traffic dance
Angry Mum pose competition
Best excuses for not doing homework
Covering a fall/ trip competition
Doing many things at once competition
Temper tantrum competition
Squashing into a smallest space
Getting dressed race
Faking sick competition
Biscuit steal competition

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 6*

Sneaking out

Juggling: think of creative/ unusual things

Wash the car race

Not falling asleep competition

- *Ease to play 2*
- *Ease to explain 2*
- *Re-playability 3*

Create Obstacles

Two players chase each other about a space. The player that is being chased mimes obstacles for the other, who then has to overcome these obstacles.

Make sure that the children understand the object of the game is not for the chaser to catch the player, but it is to make the audience be able to imagine the obstacle.

E.g. The player might say, “Wow I’m really lucky I missed that quicksand!” the chaser is now in the quicksand and must mime trying to get through. It could get really whacky where the player might have to go back and rescue the chaser and after the rescue they stand recovering for a few seconds before they look at each other remember what they were doing and resume the chase.

- *Ease to play 3*
- *Ease to explain 3*
- *Re-playability 3*

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities
With Preparation Time **Page 7**

Custard

This game is based around the following skit. Give the children time to practice their roles.

Mother is cooking custard, centre stage. As she is stirring the custard, her son/daughter comes home from school. They greet each other, ask about their respective days, then the son notices the custard and comments on how good it looks, and smells.

Offered a taste from the mother, the son eats some and immediately feels ill, commenting that it tastes terrible. He collapses to the floor. The mother tries to rouse him, but can't so, concerned, she rings the doctor. The doctor is sitting to the side of the stage at a desk and answers the phone. The mother explains that her son has collapsed and is sick. The doctor agrees to make a house call and hangs up. Knocking on the imaginary house door, the mother lets the doctor in and shows him her son. The doctor examines the boy and discovers he is dead and breaks the news to the mother who reacts. He suggests she call the undertaker. (Teacher calls CUT) They are then told to replay in one of the following ways. The children should not be given anytime to prepare, they need to improv.

- Be really nervous
- Be arrogant
- Be scared
- Be evil and mean
- Be really happy
- Be embarrassed
- Be worried
- Be shy
- Act in slow motion
- Act like superheroes
- Act with mime only

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 8*

- Act like you are aliens
- Act in Italian
- Act in fast forward
- Be shocked and surprised
- Be confused
- Be jealous of each other
- Be excited and hyperactive
- Act as if every couple of seconds you feel a spider crawl down your back
- You think you stepped in something a dog did

Variations:

1. Each child is given a different way to act.
2. The children come up with a short three handed skit/ scene that can then be replayed in different ways.
 - *Ease to play 3*
 - *Ease to explain 3*
 - *Re-playability 2*

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 9*

Ding

A scene is played. To help I have cards with characters on them or the audience can give them characters. If they want they can also be given an objective for their characters or they can come up with their own. E.g. Wonder Woman and Superman are trying to stop a monster robot from destroying the city.

Whenever the teacher (or after playing this a few times I allow experienced children to take this role) says “ding” the player who is doing something/saying something needs to say/do something else.

Notes

Doing “something else” is quite often interpreted as doing/saying the opposite of what you did before. One can be more creative, e.g. repeat what was said in a different emotion. If you use this as an exercise on Spontaneity the teacher can “ding” quite often (very frustrating for the players, but they will come up with stuff they never would have thought of before). Disadvantage of this is that the story/characters tend to get lost. Use sparingly for performance.

Also if a child is the one saying “ding”, make sure you explain their job is not just to make it difficult for the performers, they are actually in a partnership, trying to look for humour.

- *Ease to play 5*
- *Ease to explain 3*
- *Re-playability 2*

Dubbed Movie

2 or more actors play a scene, but they don't speak, although they can move their mouths as if they are speaking. The audience should know what the scene is supposed to be. 2 or more players sit in front of the action, and provide the speech.

The effect is (or should be) like watching a dubbed movie.

Variation: You can play this with either the children providing the dubbing knows what the scene is, or for even greater fun, the children dubbing don't know what the scene is.

- *Ease to play 3*
- *Ease to explain 3*
- *Re-playability 2*

Flock of Seagulls

The group comes up with a simple scene (no shorter than about 30 seconds, no longer than a minute) You have a lead actor and 2-4 other actors who must copy everything the lead actor does. The problem is that each of the other actors has some sort of problem. E.g. One has their foot stuck to the floor, one can't put their arms down, one has their hands stuck to their head, one keeps falling asleep (kids come up with their own problems).

- *Ease to play 1 (Lead actor needs experience so 3)*
 - *Ease to explain 2*
 - *Re-playability 3*

Hitchhiker

This game combines improvisation with careful observation, and so makes a great rehearsal tool for more experienced improvisation performers who need to be able to see and imitate easily. Plus it's lots of fun.

Set up four chairs to resemble the front and back seats of a car. The first three people get in the car, leaving the rear passenger-side seat empty.

The three people in the car invent a scenario to explain their traveling together, and mime driving along, improvising a conversation, etc.

The next person in line enters the scene as a hitchhiker. The hitchhiker must have a fairly clearly defined character.

The people in the car must stop to pick up the hitchhiker, but they improvise how politely they do it, etc., based on their characters.

Once the hitchhiker is in the car and a four-way conversation has begun, everyone in the car begins to pick up the hitchhiker's personality and mannerisms. (For instance, if the hitchhiker is paranoid, soon everyone is paranoid. If the hitchhiker has a nervous tick, soon everyone has a nervous tick. If the hitchhiker is excessively cheerful, soon everyone is, etc.)

Pointers

Try to encourage the children to bring the scene to an ending, ideally with a punch line, but you may need to step in and ask the audience to give them a round of applause.

- *Ease to play 3-4*
- *Ease to explain 3*
- *Re-playability 3*

Human Props

Excellent exercise for building environments and object work. Ask one player to start doing an activity that somehow defines (broadly) a location. E.g. when someone starts typing she might be in a (home) office. The other players then become the other objects in the environment.

Notes

Tell the first player she can start using the props built by other players in the environment (if she recognizes them). Tell players to go for the obvious: in just about any room you could be a plant, a door or a table, after all. When done, ask the first player to name any `object` built in the environment.

Variations

You can use this as a handle for a performance. When a player is asked to sit down, and there are no chairs on the scene, another player can become the chair for the first player to sit on. Other examples are ticking clocks in haunted houses, cabinets and closets, you name it.

- *Ease to play 3*
- *Ease to explain 3*
- *Re-playability 3*

Lines from a pocket

Before hand get the all kids to write short sentences on strips of paper. For this game I created a bank that I could re use at other times.

The children get into pairs. They work out which characters they are playing and what they are trying to do in the scene. They explain this to the audience. Each player gets a line which they put in their pocket without looking at it. Then they play the scene. At any point in time, instead of saying whatever they think they might say, they take the paper, and read what's on the card. Whatever is said should be justified as fitting into the scene. The scene then continues, incorporating the sentence just read.

- *Ease to play 3*
- *Ease to explain 1*
- *Re-playability 2*

Machines

This is an excellent game to use early in the year with new kids as everyone can participate.

Groups of 4-5 come up with a (real or invented) machine. The players make the machine; every player becomes a part of the machine. We want to see/hear the machine work, so each child should have a sound and a movement. For the performance, the machine can work in one of three main ways:

It could work with one part at a time,

One part starting with others joining in or

All parts working at the same time.

Variations

Tell the players the machine goes into overdrive, until it explodes. Or tell the players the power's out, and the machine slowly grinds to a halt.

Some suggestions:

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities *With Preparation Time* *Page 14*

Machine movements:

blowing, brushing, cutting, hammering, twirling, side to side, up/down, squashing, pulling, pushing, turning, cranking, lifting, setting, sliding, twisting

Machine sounds:

blip, clunkety clunk, pitter patter, twang, hhh, boing, pop pop, bring, buzz, plop, beep beep, rattle, thud, thrum thrum, whistle, gong

Real machine types:

car, motorbike, lawnmower, microwave, blender, sewing machine, fridge, photocopier, computer, treadmill, dryer, vending machine, coffee machine, hairdryer, toaster, washing machine, vacuum cleaner

Imaginary/ crazy machines:

Teacher machine (hands up, line up please, good morning class, quiet shhh!), School machine (what page miss, my pencil broke, I can't see the board), Food machine, Tv machine, Singer machine, Hairdresser machine, Doctor machine, Builder machine

- *Ease to play 1*
- *Ease to explain 2*
- *Re-playability 2*

Make More Interesting

Kids in groups of 3-4, work out a simple scene which needs to involve dialogue and actions from all of the players. The kids play the whole scene through. Then they repeat the scene, but part way through the teacher claps their hands. The player then needs to make whatever he was doing more interesting, without advancing the scene. E.g. If a player was opening a briefcase, at the clap, they need to make `opening a briefcase` more interesting; he is not allowed to take something out of the briefcase, as that would be advancing; player needs to stick to `opening the briefcase`.

Notes Simple to explain but not so easy to play. When done well you move into the clownesque. Think about Chaplin, Laurel & Hardy or Mr. Bean.

- *Ease to play 4*
- *Ease to explain 2*
- *Re-playability 3*

Master Servant Disaster

2 players, one is the master, the other is the servant. The master will ask the servant for something simple. The servant always blocks the question, and explains why this should not be possible. The master always accepts this, and asks for something else (which turns out to be impossible as well). Every time the servant has to explain why this should not be possible, the situation gets worse, until the whole thing turns into a disaster. An example:

Perkins, get me a glass of brandy.

Yes sir. Oh, sir, that won't be possible sir, we're out of brandy.

Well, get me a glass of whisky, then.

Yes sir. Ah, sir, um, we're out of whisky too, sir.

Oh? Well get my any kind of alcohol, then.

Ah sir, we're out of alcohol sir.

Perkins, have you been drinking again?

Well, the staff had a little party last night, sir.

I see. Well get me a glass of water from the kitchen then.

Yes sir. Ah, sir, the water pipes are bust sir, sorry.

Well, get me some water from the pond then.

Ah, yes, sir, uh, sorry sir, the pond is dry, sir.

And so on, until it turns out that the staff had a little party, accidentally set the kitchen on fire, used the water from the pond to fight the fire, and so on. Eventually, the only room still standing is the master's study, the rest of the castle has burnt down and all staff are dead. And all this for a perfectly logical explanation.

The idea is for the servant to connect all elements the master brings up, into one and the same disaster. In this respect this game resembles Boris.

- *Ease to play 5*
- *Ease to explain 5*
- *Re-playability 4*

Only Questions

A scene is improvised, in which any sentence used by the players must be a question. Players that use statements instead of questions are buzzed out by the audience and are replaced by other players. New players need to take over the character of the players they replace.

Variation. Players must use questions only and are out if they use a statement instead.

Suggested Scenes:

- At a job interview- Employer and person trying for the job
- Lost and asking for directions- Tourist and local person
- An interview with a famous person- Talk show host and famous star
- Parent teacher interview -Teacher and mum or dad
- Principals Office- Student and Principal
- Student struggling with math work- Teacher and student
- Cooking with Grandma- Curious child and Grandma
- Fishing with Grandpa- Squeamish child and Grandpa
- Research task- Helpful librarian and student
- Judging a meal on a TV cooking show- Judge and contestant
- Old man/woman getting a check up at the doctors- Old man/woman and Doctor
- Police interview about a bank robbery- Police officer and suspect
- Getting computer fixed- Computer technician and customer with problem
- The vets- A vet and owner of a sick pet
- Marriage proposal -Boyfriend and girlfriend
- Buying a new phone/ car/ house/ bike- Customer & salesman
 - ***Ease to play 1 (to try, but it is hard to master)***
 - ***Ease to explain 2***
 - ***Re-playability 2***

Stunt Doubles

2 Actors are acting a scene such as washing a car. When it comes time to do a "dangerous" step (such as turning on the hose) they call in their stunt doubles. This can be a hilarious game. Encourage the children during their planning time to come up with silly ideas for using the stunt double. The more implausible the better, e.g. getting ready for school, have the stunt double do the "dangerous stunt" of brushing their hair. I have even had kids do the "dangerous stunt" of their "mother" "kissing" them goodbye. Make sure that the actors and the stunt double stay in character, with both the actor and the stunt double showing that the silly activity is really dangerous

- *Ease to play 2*
- *Ease to explain 2*
- *Re-playability 2*

Comedy Club Improvisation Activities

With Preparation Time *Page 19*

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Other activities can be found in various places such as:

Top 50 Drama Games Unpacked By Celia Pennay

(Currently out of print)