

Introduction to Theatre Games

Theatre games are a great resource for helping students gain confidence *using* the language they are learning. By playing theatre games in the classroom, students are given the opportunity to practise in ways that are different from the practice they do sitting at their desks. All of these theatre games come from the tradition of theatre improvisation and are very common as warm-ups at the beginning of an improvisation class. Their focus is on helping students *to think on their feet*, thus preparing them for interacting with others outside of the classroom. The theatre games presented here work well as a warm-up for the slightly riskier *Stage to Page and Back* improvisation and writing exercises that follow. For many teachers, using theatre games in the classroom will be a new experience. It is possible that some students will be reluctant at first to try something new and challenging. They may be too self-conscious and afraid of making mistakes. It is important that these students realise that making mistakes is all right; it is an integral part of their learning process, a process that should be fun. Students should be encouraged to take risks and have fun and they should be congratulated for doing so, especially when they make mistakes. When students feel that they are in a safe environment where mistakes are allowed, they are often more open to receiving feedback and correction. The teacher should also feel confident in changing the lesson plan occasionally by introducing fun activities that are less focused on the reproduction of 'correct' language. Often it is these moments when students don't realise that they are learning that they actually learn the most. Partly this is because some students are primarily kinaesthetic learners and they simply need to get their bodies involved for new language items to stick. By moving, making gestures and using their other senses, some students will be better able to remember vocabulary items and grammar structures. It is this break from the normal routine of sitting at their desks that may just be the kind of practice they need to learn more successfully.

Preparing for a class using Theatre Games

Each classroom situation is different. When using these theatre games, the teacher will need to decide whether it is possible to do the games with the whole class or whether they have to divide the class into smaller groups that can work simultaneously. In an ideal situation, these games should be played in an open space with the involvement of the whole class. This is possible in classrooms where it is easy to move desks to one side to create an open area with enough space to move about. If this is not possible, then the teacher might request the use of a multi-purpose room, gymnasium or assembly hall to facilitate a special class. On the other hand, these

theatre games can be adapted to work with smaller groups using the limited space that is available in the classroom. In this case, it is a good idea to work with one group at the beginning by modelling the game so that the other groups have a clear idea of how it works. Finally, since some of these games will require students to use their bodies more than they normally do, it is helpful to lead them in a short physical warm-up before playing the games (stretching upward, bending over and touching toes, twisting, etc.). It might also be useful to do a vocal warm-up by leading the students in saying aloud some of the twenty vowel and diphthong sounds (see page 128 of the Student's Book for a list of the vowel sounds) or by taking some of the difficult-to-pronounce words from the unit they are studying and saying them aloud together.