

Title: Improv Your Life: Beginning Improv

Grade: High School

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Lesson Outcomes

After this unit, students will know the basic rules of improv. From doing multiple exercises, they will have a solid foundation for building scenes and partner work. They should feel confident to step onstage, accept that they don't know what will happen, and embrace the uncertainty. By making themselves vulnerable onstage during class, students will have strengthened their trust in their peers and have the ability to collaborate with each other on other projects. Because they have proven to themselves that they and their partners are enough all on their own (without a plan), the students will be able to trust their instincts and take this with them into scripted acting. Students will understand that many of the rules in improvisation can apply to their everyday lives, such as "Always Say Yes", "Trust Your Partner", "Do Something", and "Have Fun".

Objectives for Unit:

After this unit, students will be able to name and explain the nine rules of improv that we have worked on in class. They will be able to explain why the rules are important for performing good improv scenes. Students should also understand that the rules we have learned in class also apply to other kinds of theatre as well as their own personal lives. From doing improv, students should gain confidence in themselves and their performance skills. When they are forced to perform without a safety net, they learn that they are capable individuals who have the skills and tools to handle whatever issues they may face either on stage or in other areas of their lives. Students will also strengthen their relationships with their classmates. Since teamwork is such a big part of doing improv, the students will learn to rely on and trust each other. This will hopefully carry on into other shows and events in the theatre program.

National Theatre Standards:

TH:Cr3.1.1.b. Explore physical, vocal and physiological choices to develop a performance that is believable, authentic and relevant to a drama/theatre work.

TH:Pr4.1.1.b. Shape character choices using given circumstances in a drama/theatre work.

TH:PR5.1.1.a. Practice various acting techniques to expand skill in a rehearsal or drama/theatre performance.

Lesson 1 – Intro to Improv

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will discuss how improv is relevant to the entertainment industry
- Students will learn about the nine rules of improv
- Students will begin to consider how the rules of improv can affect their own lives

Essential Questions/Global:

How can one benefit from improv in other areas of his or her life?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

What are the rules for creating a good improv scene? What types of improv are there/where do people go to learn about improv?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand that there are rules to improvisation and that many of these rules can also apply to other areas of theatre/their lives.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to name and employ the rules of improv and will be able to name a few key facts about the culture of improv.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will discuss why they think having rules in improv is important and how these rules can help them in their day to day lives.

Summative Assessment

At the end of the unit, students will perform in multiple improv scenes demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the rules. Students will also take a short quiz.

Reflection

What are the benefits to knowing the rules of improv?

Learning Plan

Hook

YouTube Video: Have a YouTube video of a short improv clip done at the Groundlings theatre ready to go when the students walk into the classroom.

“Good morning, students! How are we all doing today?”

“Good! Okay, so I’m really excited for this next unit. Can anyone guess what we’ll be studying the next couple of weeks?”

“Improv! I actually really love improv. I know that some of you may be a little apprehensive about it, but I’m hoping that this unit will take some of the fear away and be really fun for you guys! Have any of you ever had any experience with improv before?”

“To start today off, I thought we would watch a short clip of some improv. This was filmed at the Groundlings Theatre in Los Angeles. I wanted to pick a clip not from TV so that you guys could see it and know that it hasn’t been edited to make the performers look better. Basically, the exercise is that the improvisers are given a fake movie title of a film they are acting in. When the director calls out to a character, that character has to perform an Oscar-worthy monologue in the middle of the scene. I want you to pay attention to the clip, because it will be used in our discussion today.” *Play video.*

“Do you guys kind of see how that works?”

Activity

“Before we jump into our main discussion on improv, I would like to go over the standards of this unit.”

Call on a volunteer to read each standard and ask them to describe what this standard means in their own words. What do they think they would need to know or be able to do? Continue this process for all of the standards, helping where needed to be sure students understand.

“Great! Okay, enough with all these standards. I have a little pre-test for you guys to take. Don’t worry; it’s not for a grade. I just want to see how much you all know. At the end of the unit, you will be taking a similar test for a grade.”

Hand out test and give students 10-15 minutes to complete it. (See Handouts and Supporting Materials Section at the end of the unit).

Direct Instruction

"I know I said that we would be on our feet a lot these next couple of weeks, but improv isn't all just fun and games (well, it is... but there are also rules). Today we will be laying the foundation for the rest of the unit. It will be the only day where there is more discussion than activity, so please stay with me, guys. I would like everyone to take notes during this portion of class."

"Okay! Onwards and upwards. First of all, can any of you name any famous improvisers?" *Let students throw out some names. Help if needed.*

"Lots of famous successful actors have a background in improv; comedians, especially. You know that video that we watched from the Groundlings? That's a really famous improv theatre. That's where a lot of actors get cast on SNL from. The Upright Citizen's Brigade and Second City are another two renowned improv theatres where a lot of famous actors got their start. Even movies use improv. Movies like *Bridesmaids* and *Anchorman* rely heavily on improv. In fact, those movie scripts basically start out as a shell, and then the actors add and add and add their own material and jokes. So, if you're wanting to be an actor, learning improv can be a really great tool."

"I feel like a common misconception about improv is that there are no rules. That is absolutely not the case. There's actually a lot of guidelines and nuances to doing improv. I have picked the nine most important rules based off of my research and personal experience. However, there's no fun in me just telling you guys what they are; I want you to try and guess. Does anyone have any ideas?"

Hints for rules 1-9:

1. **Always Say Yes:** What's the most important rule of improv? It's what you do when someone offers you a million dollars and a trip around the world. When you're in a scene, it's important to be a team player. If your partner offers up a suggestion that doesn't fit with what you were thinking, it is your job as a good improviser to go along with your partner and agree with their idea. Give example of what happens when someone says no.
2. **Who What Where:** This is important in theatre, as well. How do we know what the scene is about? Typically, you want to introduce the who/what/where within the first three lines or so of an improv scene. What are the characters' relationships to each other? What are they doing? Where are they? This will help everyone in the improv and watching figure out what it is about.
3. **Do SOMETHING:** This is a tactic for when you feel you are stuck in a scene and don't know what to do or say. Sometimes in an improv, the scene might get stuck or you might freeze up. It's okay. Just do SOMETHING. There are no wrong moves. It's not scripted, and this is your world that you created. Pull a sandwich out of your pocket and start eating. Sit on the floor and sob. It will give your partner/team something to react to and get the scene unstuck.
4. **Trust Your Partner:** This is something that is important for actors to have in each other, and not just in improv. You need to trust your scene partners. When you walk on that stage, remember that you are not alone. Even if you have no clue what you're doing, your partner is there to help. Improv is a group effort. This also plays into the Always Say Yes Rule. It takes trust to follow someone's lead.
5. **Don't Explain, Show:** Theatre is all about action, right? So what do you think this rule might be? A good general rule in improv is Don't Explain, Show. Why talk about robbing a bank when you could actually rob a bank? It's so much more interesting for an audience to watch action than to listen to action being talked about. If you're talking about doing something, just do it! (When we get to this rule, we will talk about how you can transition from one "location" to another.)

6. **Don't Plan:** This rule plays into the first rule. What happens if you have an idea in your head and then that idea is contradicted? The sixth rule is Don't Plan. This one ties into Always Say Yes. Don't try and plan your improv scenes ahead of time. If you are stuck on an idea in your head, it is so much harder to be flexible and go where your team and the scene take you. 90% of the time, your plan will get thrown out the window. Focus on listening and reacting.
7. **Don't Fight:** This is one of the easiest rules to break, because it's a good way to add conflict to a scene. One of the easiest traps to fall into while improvising is arguing in a scene. While it is an easy way to add drama or conflict, it usually takes a scene nowhere. Think about it. When you are arguing, what are you doing? You're saying no, which breaks the very first rule. I find that it is much easier to solve a problem together. Remember the improv we watched at the beginning of class? The actors did a god job of not fighting. There was conflict from the wolf being wild, but there was no argument.
8. **Make Statements:** This kind of goes along with the Do Something rule, but in reference to the dialogue. In improv, you never want to ask too many questions in a scene. When you do this, it puts a lot of pressure on your partner. When you say things like "What are you doing?" "Where are we?" etc. you're putting your partner on the spot to create the scene his or herself. One of the most fun parts about improv is figuring out the scene with your partners, not forcing one person to come up with the entire thing. Also, when a lot of questions are being asked, it's likely that there is not a whole lot of action being done.
9. **HAVE FUN:** This is the rule that people tend to forget. HAVE FUN!!! Improv is fun. It's silly. Yes, sometimes it can be high stress, but in the end it's all just play. It's not brain surgery. And if you're having fun, the audience is having fun. The audience is rooting for you to succeed. If you are miserable, the audience can tell, and that's not fun to watch even if you are technically doing "good" improv. Not every improv scene will be perfect; in fact, you will rarely have a perfect improv scene. It's fun for the audience to make discoveries with you, so don't feel like you have to have all of the answers.

"I really like these rules, because I feel like you can use a lot of them in your everyday life, too. Can any of you give me an example of a time when one of these rules would apply to school, scripted theatre, or even your personal life?"

"Okay, enough with the rules. Does anyone have any additional questions?" *Answer questions if any.*

"I feel like that was a lot of sitting for a theatre class. How about we end the day on our feet? Everybody get up and push your desks back. Let's make a circle in the middle of the room for some stretching."

Lead students in stretching.

"Alright. Are we all nice and limber? Are any of you guys familiar with **Zip Zap Zop?**"

Have students get into a standing circle. If a student is familiar, let him or her explain the exercise.

"Yes, exactly! The most important part of this exercise is eye contact with whoever you are sending you ZipZapZop to, so they know that they are the ones receiving it. This is also a perfect time to work on our projection. Alright, let's play!"

Let students play for a few minutes.

"Okay, now that our minds and bodies are warmed up, let's try an exercise that helps us practice the first rule. Who can tell me what that first rule was?" *Let students answer.*

“That’s right! This exercise is called **“Yes, And.”** I’m going to put you into pairs.”

Number students off and let them find their partner.

“Great! So what you guys will do is one person will start with a suggestion, and then the other person will reply with “Yes, and…” and build upon the first suggestion. You guys will continue to build and grow the statements until I stop you. Can I have a pair of volunteers to read this example for me, please?”

Let volunteers read.

“Any questions? Alright, perfect! Play with your partner until I stop you.”

Let students play for a few minutes.

“Awesome! How did that go for everybody? What challenges did you guys come across? As I was walking around the room, it looked like everybody had a pretty good understanding of the activity.”

“We’ll be doing lots of exercises in class, so if you have done improv before and have specific exercises you’d like to see about doing, please feel free to come and see me. Good job today, class! I will see all of you next class.”

Supplemental Materials

Rules of Improv Handout (See Handouts and Supporting Materials Section at the end of the unit)

“Yes, And” Exercise Example:

Person A: Let’s go to the zoo!

Person B: Yes, and then let’s go look at the monkeys!

Person A: Okay, and while we’re there, we should free the monkeys!

Person B: Yes, and then let’s film it!

Person A: Perfect, and then we should put it on YouTube!

Person B: Okay, and then we can get interviewed on Ellen!

Lesson 2 – Getting Into It

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will learn the first three improv rules in depth
- Students will demonstrate the first three rules in action
- Students will reflect on how the first three rules are important

Essential Questions/Global:

Why do we study improv?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

Why are the first three rules important to learn if one wants to be good at improvising?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand that learning the rules builds a solid foundation (and that to break the rules you have to first know the rules).

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to agree with their scene partner(s), establish the who/what/where of a scene, and be able to move the scene forward by performing an action.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will discuss why they think having rules in improv is important and how these rules can help them in their day to day lives.

Summative Assessment

At the end of the unit, students will perform in multiple improv scenes demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the rules. Students will also take a short quiz.

Reflection

In today's exercises, what came naturally and what did students struggle with? Why?

Learning Plan

Direct Instruction

"Good morning, class! How is everybody today?"

"Good! So today we are going to jump right into actually DOING some improv. I need you all to push your desks to the back and form a circle in the middle of the room for some stretching."

Lead students in a three to five minute stretch.

"Alright, are we all feeling good? We're going to play a little warm up exercise now. This one has a fair few variations, but are any of you familiar with the exercise **Samurai**?"

If there are students who know the exercise, let them explain. If their version is different, explain the differences. If no one is familiar with the exercise:

"Okay, this is going to help get our minds and bodies warmed up. Do you remember Zip Zap Zop from last week? This is kind of like that, but louder and more physical. We'll stay in our circle, and I'll start the exercise by making a loud sound and throwing my energy to someone else in the circle. It is important to make eye contact with this person so he or she knows that the energy is coming. That person will receive the energy by lifting their arms and making a sound, and the person on either side of the receiver will mime (there is no touching in this exercise) chopping the receiver's side (also while making a noise). The receiver will then throw the energy to a new person and the cycle continues. Any questions?"

Do exercise for about three minutes.

"Awesome! Now, do you guys remember playing "Yes, And" last week? Can I get two volunteers to step into the middle of the circle and demonstrate for the class? Remember, only use statements."

Let students play for a minute. Reflect with class on what happens.

"Great! Lets try a new exercise now. This one is called **Accepting Circle**, and it's basically a physicalized version of "Yes, And". It starts out with just one person making a movement. It can be anything (as long as it's appropriate). Everyone in the circle will repeat the movement. Then, the person to the right of the original person will repeat the first movement and then add their own. Everyone in the circle then repeats the two moves. We keep adding on moves in the same way until everyone in the circle has contributed. If you wish to add a sound to your movement, you may do that as well (the sound must be repeated along with the move every time). Any questions?"

Do the exercise until it comes back around full circle.

"Good job, guys! Can anyone explain to me how this relates to the "Yes, and" rule?" *Let students explain.*

“Totally! Okay. We have just one more exercise for the “Yes, and” rule today. We’re going to make up our own story as a group. The first person will start a story with “Once upon a time....” and begin to tell a story of whatever they want, no rules (except it has to be appropriate). Without warning, I’m going to call on a new person. Person A will have to stop talking, and Person B will have to pick up the story RIGHT where Person A left off (no pausing allowed). This will continue until everyone has had at least one turn to speak. The story does not end until I say, so it’s your job to keep it going.”

Let students play until everyone has had a turn and the story finds a conclusion.

“Nice! That went really well! Did you guys struggle with this at all? How does this exercise encourage us to say yes?”

Discuss.

“I really think you guys are understanding “Always Say Yes”, so we’re going to move on. The next rule we’re going to practice today is “Who, What, Where?”. Can somebody tell me what this rule means?” *Let student answer.*

“Exactly! Now, this first exercise is called **3 Lines**, and I need two volunteers. Great! Now, the goal of this exercise is to establish as much information as quickly as possible. The scene will only last for three lines total, and you need to establish the who/what/where. Lucky for our volunteers, I have already scripted out a couple example scenes for them to read so that you guys aren’t jumping in totally blind.”

Have volunteers read the examples.

“Do you guys see how that works? Great. You don’t need to be funny or anything. This is just practice for getting the information out quickly. Let’s practice. I want you guys to get into pairs and practice doing this with your partner for just a couple of minutes.”

Let students work with partners for a minute or two. Discuss what was easy/hard about the activity.

“Alright, because you guys are so awesome, I’m going to add a twist. Have any of you played the **Alphabet Game** before? Here’s how it works. You can start on any letter, but for the sake of easiness, we’ll go with A. Person A will start their sentence with a word that starts with A. Person B responds with a sentence that starts with the letter B. Person A will respond with a sentence that starts with the letter C and so on. This will continue until you reach the end of the alphabet. I want you guys to still try and establish the who/what/where within the first three lines, but it’s okay if it doesn’t quite happen. Just do your best.”

Let students play in partners until they reach the end of the alphabet. Go around as a class and ask each group when they were actually able to establish the who/what/where and discuss anything else that may come up.

“Okay, great. Now when I say go, you guys are going to form two lines. One partner will go to Line A and the other one will go to line B. Go! Alright. This next exercise is called **Doors**, and it really focuses on establishing the location of the scene. The first person in Line A will establish a scene by walking onstage through a “door.” When you walk through the door, you want to show through your physicality what you are walking into. Maybe you are going from inside where it’s warm to outside where it’s freezing cold. Maybe you are exiting out of a spaceship into outer-space. Try to keep the talking to a minimum, but you can use sound effects. Once the first person in Line B has an idea of where Person A is, they will walk through the door and deliver a line of dialogue that establishes the two character’s relationship. Player A responds to Player B accepting their offer, and the scene ends. Each player will go to the back of the OTHER line. We will play two rounds so that everybody has a chance to play both roles.”

Let students play.

“Good job, guys! Do we all see how that works? Can any of you tell me how the “Always Say Yes” rule also plays into this exercise? After doing the last three exercises, can you tell me why it’s important to establish the who/what/where?”

“You guys are nailing it today. Alright. Our last rule today is DO SOMETHING. I kind of struggled figuring out where to put this in the unit, but obviously I decided to tackle it today. I think that this will help take away some of the anxiety in building an actual improv scene. The first exercise we’re doing is called **Crisis Situation**. Today I have brought with me some super random items. Now these are my personal property, so please be gentle with them. So, two at a time, you will get up with your item. Each person has a problem that they need solved, and the other person’s item will solve it. Can I have two volunteers read this example for me, please? Great!”

Hand out an item to each student while explaining. Have two volunteers read example.

“You see how it works? Be creative in your solutions. They don’t have to make perfect sense; you just have to be quick and make a decision. Alright! Everyone will take a turn, but do I have any volunteers?”

Do exercise and discuss afterwards.

“Alright. Everyone can sit down in a semi-circle facing forwards. The next exercise is called **Change**. We may do this one a couple of different times with volunteers. Could I get two people to come up to the front, please? Great! Now, can I get a suggestion for a scene? We need a who/what/where. Awesome! Now, actors, you have your given circumstances. You will start the scene just like normal. However, I will periodically call out “Change!” If I call out change, the person who just spoke/performed an action will have to change what they have done. They can change their words, their physicality, their emotion, etc. Any questions?”

Play a couple rounds.

“What did you guys as an audience notice about this activity? How did you feel as the improvisers? Nice! Okay, have any of you played **Freeze** before?”

If students have, let them explain. If not:

“This last one is a really fun exercise, and it’s one of my favorites. Two people will start out in the middle of the circle. We will give them a physical task to begin the scene with. They will start the scene and make physical choices in their acting. When one of us in the circle calls out “Freeze!”, the actors in the middle have to freeze right where they are. The person who called out freeze will go into the middle, tap out one of the actors, and assume the position that the original person was in. However, now it is a new scene with new characters doing something different. If two people call out freeze at the same time, they will both go in. Questions?”

Let students play and then discuss.

“Can I get a volunteer to tell me the importance of the “Always Say Yes” rule? How about the other two? Did you guys find anything especially difficult today? Could you see yourselves using any of these rules in scripted acting? How? You guys did so awesome. Let’s go back to the standards real quick.”

Standards

Ask the students to return to the list of standards aligned to this lesson. Read aloud the standard and ask the students: "Can someone tell me how we addressed this standard in what we learned today?"

Continue this process for all of the standards, helping where needed to be sure students understand.

"Excellent. You guys rocked it today. Next class we will be going over three more rules of improv. We will also be doing trust falls, so if you are uncomfortable with this activity, please come and see me after class and we can discuss some alternative options. I also need everyone to bring a t-shirt with them to the next class (I will explain why then). Please come to class dressed appropriately and ready to have some fun! Have a nice afternoon, guys!"

Supplemental Materials

3 Lines Example 1

Person A: Captain, we have apprehended the suspect.

Person B: Good work officer.

Person A: He's in holding room A, and I think he's ready to talk.

3 Lines Example 2

Person A: Pat, put your phone away.

Person B: But Teacher, I finished the assignment already!

Person A: Please go grab a book from the shelf; you know there's no texting in class.

Crisis Situation Example

Person A: My wife left me and I'm stuck here with this t-shirt.

Person B: I got robbed and all I have left is my good looks.

Person A: Here's my t-shirt; you can sell it and make some money.

Person B: Erm... Marry me.

Lesson 3 – Second Three Lesson

Lesson Objectives

- Students will learn the next three rules of improv
- Students will demonstrate the rules in action
- Students will reflect on how the first set of rules combine with the second set

Essential Questions/Global:

How can we apply the rules of improv in other areas of acting?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

Why are the next three rules important to learn if one wants to be good at improvising? How do these new rules fit in with the rules learned in the last class period?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand that learning the rules builds a solid foundation (and that to break the rules you have to first know the rules).

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to build trust between themselves and their peers through different exercises. Students will also be able to integrate more action into their improve scenes and fight the urge to plan.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will discuss why they think the three new rules are important to learn. We will also talk about how these rules still tie into the first three rules. Students will provide scenarios that these rules are useful in improv and/or other situations.

Summative Assessment

At the end of the unit, students will perform in multiple improv scenes demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the rules. Students will also take a short quiz.

Reflection

In today's exercises, what came naturally and what did students struggle with? Why? Were students able to successfully integrate the new rules into their performances while still employing what we learned last class period?

Learning Plan

Direct Instruction

"Good morning class! How is everyone doing today? Awesome! So, who can tell me what we did last class period?"

Let students answer. Students need to say and define the three rules we learned from the previous class.

"Good memory, guys! That means that we have six more rules to go. Can anyone name any that we haven't talked about today?"

Wait for students to answer. If they are stuck, prompt them with hints.

"I know, it's a lot to remember. But the good news is, it's broken up into pieces, and by the time we're done, you guys will know the rules like the backs of your hands. Funnily enough, I happened to stumble across an article about a book of improv rules that the founders of the UCB wrote. Who can tell me what the UCB is?"

"That's right! I've printed us all a copy of the article so that we can read it together."

Pass out article. Read the article as a group by calling on students to read each paragraph.

"Do you guys agree with what they're saying about the necessity of having rules in improv? Were any of you surprised by anything in the article? What do you think about what Mr. Napier said about doing improv from a place of "play"? If any of you have questions about the UCB (or Groundlings and Second City), I am always available if you want to chat. Moving on! I hope you guys liked being up on your feet last class period, because we're doing the same thing today. I need everybody to stand up, push your desks back, and make a circle in the center of the room. We're going to do our stretches."

Guide students through stretches while everybody counts.

"Does everybody feel loosened up? Good! Now we're going to do a warm-up activity. This one is called **Greetings**. When I say go, you will all start walking around the room, just how you normally would. After a few seconds, I will ask you to greet your fellow classmates. It can be a handshake, a wave, etc. After you greet one and other, keep walking and greeting, but make sure you're listening, because I am going to give you additional instruction during the exercise."

Let students walk around and greet for thirty seconds or so. As they walk around, ask them to greet their peers with more specific instructions, like:

- Greet each other like a long-lost friend
- Greet each other like mortal enemies
- Greet each other like someone with bad breath

"Alright, good job guys! Now I'm going to put you in partners." *Pair students off.*

"How many of you have done trust falls before?"

Wait for response. If anyone knows, let them answer and explain what a trust fall is.

"Exactly! After I say go, I want you and your partner to find your own area in the room. You and your partner are going to take turns catching each other. I want you to start close, and gradually move farther and farther apart. Can I get a pair to volunteer to demonstrate what I mean?"

Have volunteers demonstrate with coaching.

"Any questions? Okay. Now I need you guys to remember: this is about building trust. You cannot let your partner down by dropping him/her. It's your job to know your limits, and if you feel like you are standing so far apart that you cannot hold their weight or that you might drop them, don't do the fall. I will be walking around the room checking in with you guys and setting up our next activity. Alright, go for it, guys!"

Let students to trust falls around the room. While they are doing their activity, walk around the room and set up an obstacle course with chairs/boxes/etc. for the next exercise (while also checking in with groups).

"Very nice, everybody. What did you guys think of this activity? Did anyone feel like they were going to be dropped? How hard was it for you to trust your partner? Do you think the falls helped you build a connection?"

"Okay! Remember how I told you to bring a t-shirt? When I say go, I want you to go and get yours and come back to the middle of the room. If you forgot to bring one, you can come grab one from me. Ready?... Go!" *Let students get shirts and come back.*

"Alright, I'm going to put you into new pairs." *Number students off and let them get into their new pairs.*

"This next activity is called **Blind Lead**. As you may have noticed, I have created an obstacle course around the room. When I say, one partner is going to take their t-shirt and secure it around their eyes so that they can't see. The other partner will then lead them through to the opposite side of the room using just their words; no touching. Make sure you avoid running into any obstacles or people. After you do that, you guys can switch so that each person gets to lead/follow."

Place pairs around the room so that they are spread out and each have a unique path. Let students play until each pair has done both roles.

"Awesome! I have to say, that was pretty entertaining for me to watch, at least. What did you guys think of this exercise? Did you find it easier to trust your partner as the activity went on? Was there any time when your partner let you down? How do you think an improv scene would be affected if you didn't feel that you could trust your partner(s)?"

“So I think you guys understand how important trust is in improv. Let’s move on to the second rule for today, “Don’t Explain, Show”. This next exercise is called “**What Happens Next**”. We’ll play this one as a group, so everybody, get in a circle.” *Let students circle up.*

“In this exercise, one volunteer stands in the circle of the room and is given a task (like “she makes a bowl of oatmeal”). After she makes the bowl of oatmeal she asks, “What happens next?” Someone from the circle then suggests a new action for the person in the middle to perform. The goal is to string the actions together so that they make a coherent story. Any questions?”

“Great! We will play multiple rounds, but who wants to be in the middle first?”

Pick volunteer and play a couple rounds.

“Good job, guys! Can any of you tell me why we’re doing this exercise for the “Don’t Explain, Show” rule?”

“Totally! Now this next exercise is kind of like the last one, but we’ll play it with four players. Let’s all sit facing the front of the room while I explain. Let students sit down. This exercise is called **He Said She Said**. Two people are in the scene, and two people narrate the action of the characters. This one is a little bit more complicated to explain, so I typed up an example script. Can I get four volunteers to get up here and do a demonstration for the rest of the class, please?”

Let volunteers read the script. Then call on students to play a few rounds of the exercise without a script. The scenes should be longer than the example (they should have a beginning, middle, and end).

“Actors in the scenes, how did it feel to have someone else prompt your actions? Narrators, how did it feel to come up with the actions? Did having the narrator affect how you acted in your scene? How did it feel to watch as an audience member?”

“Those are all really great observations! Our last exercise for this rule is called “**Fast Forward**”. In just a second, I’m going to divide you up into groups of three. Each group will take a turn doing the exercise in front of the class. When it’s your group’s turn to perform, you will be given a relationship and a goal. During the scene, I will call out either “fast forward” or “rewind,” and your group will either have to jump forward in time or rewind to a flashback. Any questions?”

Divide students into groups of three.

“Do I have any brave souls who want to go first?”

Let students go up, picking the order if necessary. Each group needs to perform.

“Nice work! How did those scenes feel to watch as audience members? How did it feel as improvisers? Why do you think this rule exists?”

“You guys are doing a great job today. Our last rule for this class period is “Don’t Plan.” I think that this is a really fun rule, so don’t be scared. This first exercise is called **Surprise Movement**. When I say, you are going to stand up and start walking around the room. When I say “stop,” each of you needs to stop walking and make a sound/movement/gesture/etc. Repeat the gesture until you know what you are (whether it’s a cat, dishwasher, tree, whatever). I will then say “go,” and you may continue walking until I say “stop” again and you do a new movement. The idea is that you not preconceive, but just let the action happen. There is no wrong way to do this (unless you’re planning). Any questions?”

Let students play until they get into the groove.

“Okay, are we all feeling a little more spontaneous? What did you guys struggle with in this activity? Did you discover anything about yourself?”

“This next exercise is called **Blind Line Offers**. I’m going to number you guys off so that you share a number with only one other person. When I call your number, you will come up to the front of the room. Each person will make a physical and a vocal offer. That means that you will do something physical (like swinging a golf club) while also making a statement (“Gee, I sure can’t believe that the Russ finally got his big promotion). It is then your job to justify the offers of both improvisers and figure out what the scene is about. I will stop you when I feel you have done this. Since this is another one that’s a bit difficult to explain, I have an example. Can I get two volunteers to come up and demonstrate, please?”

Let volunteers demonstrate. Then, call out numbers until everyone has gone.

“Great! Can anyone tell me how this exercise is teaching us to be spontaneous? How easy was it for you to put both offers together to make a cohesive scene?”

“Interesting! Now, I’m pretty excited for the next exercise, because I think it’ll be a lot of fun for you guys. This one is called **Emotional Family**, and it’s played in groups of four.” *Put students into groups of four.*

“When your group goes up, you will be given a family activity. Try to establish your characters and relationships quickly, because after you do this, I will freeze the scene. The class will then pick one of the characters and endow them with an emotion that the character will suddenly be overcome with. The scene then unfreezes and continues (with the added emotion). We will freeze four times, endowing a character with an emotion each time. It is the improvisers’ jobs to justify their emotion in the scene. Any questions?”

Do exercise so that each group gets a turn.

“Way to commit, guys. How did being endowed with an emotion mid-scene affect you as an actor? Did you ever catch yourself planning? Did your plan ever take a different turn than expected?”

Standards

Ask the students to return to the list of standards aligned to this lesson. Read aloud the standard and ask the students: “Can someone tell me how we addressed this standard in what we learned today?”

Continue this process for all of the standards, helping where needed to be sure students understand.

Reflection

Questions for reflection:

What was your guys’ favorite exercise of the day? How do you think trust affects improve scenes? What about scripted scenes? How do you think last week’s rules play into this week’s rules? What’s the biggest thing you struggled with this class?

“Excellent. You guys did great again. Next class we will be going over the last three rules. Once again, please come to class dressed appropriately and ready to have some fun! Don’t forget, we have our final performance coming up. Not next class, but the one after. Please see me if you have any questions. See you all next class!”

Supplemental Materials

“He Said She Said” Example:

Actor A: I think I’ll go for a run today.

Narrator A: He said as he tripped over his jogging shoes. (Actor A trips over jogging shoes)

Actor B: You’re such a klutz.

Narrator B: She said as she dropped her glass of water. (Actor B drops glass of water)

NY Times Article (Print copies for each student)

https://www.nytimes.com/2014/02/23/arts/upright-citizens-brigade-writes-its-book-on-improv.html?_r=0

Lesson 4 – Third Three Lesson

Lesson Objectives

- Students will learn the last three rules of improv
- Students will demonstrate the rules in action
- Students will reflect on how all nine rules work together to make good improv

Essential Questions/Global:

How does knowing the rules give an improviser power in their scenes?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

Why are the final three rules important to learn if one wants to be good at improvising? How do these new rules fit in with the rules learned in the last class period?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand that learning the rules builds a solid foundation (and that to break the rules you have to first know the rules).

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to build trust between themselves and their peers through different exercises. Students will also be able to avoid the pitfalls of arguing and asking too many questions in a scene.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will discuss why they think the three new rules are important to learn. We will also talk about how these rules still tie into the first six rules. Students will provide scenarios that these rules are useful in improv and/or other situations.

Summative Assessment

At the end of the unit, students will perform in multiple improv scenes demonstrating their knowledge and understanding of the rules. Students will also take a short quiz.

Reflection

In today’s exercises, what came naturally and what did students struggle with? Why? Were students able to successfully integrate the new rules into their performances while still employing what we learned last class period?

Learning Plan

Direct Instruction

“Hello everyone! How are we all doing today? Are you guys excited to learn the last three rules of improv today?”

“Like the last two periods, we will be doing zero desk work, so I need you all to push everything back and circle up in the center of the room for stretching.”

Lead students in stretching.

"Is everyone nice and limber? I'm feeling a little tricky today, so we're going to do a warmup that involves a bit of math. I call this exercise **Odd One Out**. When I start playing the music, you will all start walking around the room (you can dance, have fun). When I stop the music, I will call out a simple math equation (like $2+2$ or 5×1). You then need to get into groups that consist of the answer to the math problem (ie a group of 4 or 5). If you find yourself without a group, you have to shout "I am the odd one out!" while doing a dance of your choice. Once the music starts again, you may continue walking around until it stops and you form groups once again. We will play a few rounds. Any questions?"

Play a few rounds until students are warmed up.

"Great! Now, we only have three rules left to cover today. Who can tell me what they are?" *Let students answer. Give hints if needed.*

"That's right! We're going to start today off with the "No Fighting" rule. Can someone tell me why they think this rule will be important to learn?"

"Exactly! The first exercise that we're doing is called **Leave for a Reason**. This exercise is to be done in total silence. When I say "go," you will all begin walking around the room. As a group, you will need to find a reason to "leave the room." Since I can't actually send you out of the classroom, we will consider crossing this line at the back of the room "leaving the room." All players should leave at the same time, and the reason why you are leaving should be clear to everyone. Remember, there is no talking. Any questions? Okay. Ready? Go!"

Let students play until they find a reason to collectively leave the room.

"How was that exercise for you guys? How did you all eventually figure out how/why to leave the room? Did you struggle with not being able to talk? Why? How do you think that this exercise applies to the "No Fighting" rule?"

"This next exercise is called **Commercial**. Let's all sit down facing the front of the room." *Give students a second to get situated.*

"I have brought with me seven random objects. Based off of the name of the exercise, what do you guys think we'll be doing?" *Students should be able to guess.*

"That's right! I'm going to divide you into pairs. As a team, each pair will come up and perform an infomercial where they try to convince me to pick up the phone and buy the random object that they will be given. Remember, you and your partner are working together. No arguing allowed. Any questions? I don't know about you guys, but I'm in the mood to spend some money."

Answer any questions. Ask for pairs to volunteer or pick pairs until everyone has had a chance to go.

"Now we're going to take it up a notch. You will be working in groups of three (that I will pick), and this time you will have a problem to solve. This exercise is called "**Call from Charlie**". This may be too old of a reference, but do any of you know who Charlie's Angels are?"

Let student explain if anyone knows.

“Well, they’re characters from an old TV show and then later a movie. Basically, they’re three women who fight crime for their secretive, private boss, Charlie (whom they’ve never met in person). Charlie would call them up with a mission, and then they would have to go and fix the problem. In this exercise, you guys are not the women from Charlie’s Angels; you’re Charlie’s new top team. Before the scene starts, the audience will give you a suggestion of the mission you need to complete for Charlie. The scene will start with you receiving a phone call from Charlie and will end once you’ve found a solution. Remember. The rule we’re focusing on right now is “No Fighting”.”

Divide students into groups of three. Let groups go up and play until every group has had a turn.

“Good job, guys! Those were really nice scenes. Before today, how easy or hard did you think the “No Fighting” rule would be to follow? Did your assumptions turn out to be true? Why do you think we avoid fighting? Is it possible to still have an interesting scene that doesn’t revolve around conflict between the two main characters?”

“The second to last rule we’re going to cover is “Make Statements”. The first exercise that we’re going to play may seem counter-intuitive, but it is called **Without Question**. We’ll stay in your Call from Charlie teams for this one. In your groups, two people will be in the scene while one person acts as the audience. The person watching will give the improvisers a suggestion containing a relationship and a goal. The improvisers will then perform a short scene (1-2 minutes) where they try to accomplish the goal without asking any questions. The groups will rotate who watches/performs until all three people have done a scene with each person in their group. Any questions? Get them in now! Alright! Each group can find a spot in the room and get started! When your group is done, please put your hand on your head so I know you’re finished.”

Walk around room and work with groups individually.

“Awesome! How did you guys think that went? Did you find that you ask more questions than you realized? How did not asking questions change the momentum of the scenes? Why do you think we want to avoid asking too many questions while performing improv?”

“The other exercise that we’re playing to practice “Make Statements” is called **Who Where Why Am I**. Each round we will pick one person to leave the room. While that person waits outside, as a class we will provide:

- Where the scene is and when (era) it is
- Who the improviser is portraying (either a person or a profession)
- A problem that person has.

Ex: Britney Spears has time traveled back to Russia in the 1950s and needs to get back to present day.

We will then pick an additional 2-3 people to be in the scene. They will go onstage and get in place, and then the person outside will come in. By the end of the scene, the odd person out will have to figure out the three given circumstances the class picked out without asking any questions. We’ll play this a couple different times, and everyone is expected to participate in at least one scene. Any questions?”

Let students play until everyone has gone.

“What did you guys think of that activity? How do you think the scene would have gone if the odd person out was allowed to ask questions? As an audience member, which way do you prefer?”

“Now this last rule is my favorite rule. Have fun! I know that we’ve been stressing the importance of learning the rules and techniques of improv, but I want you guys to remember that it’s supposed to be fun. We’re playing onstage with character and story. It’s practically impossible to have a “perfect” improv scene, so remember: if you’re having fun, the audience probably is too. So now we’re just going to do a few exercises, and I want you guys to not worry so much about following the rules. Focus on having fun and being in the moment.”

Exercises and the descriptions:

- **Make More Interesting:** Divide students up into groups of three. Have them go onstage and give them the who/what/where of the scene. The scene starts, and every time the teacher claps their hands, the performer has to make the action that proceeded the clap more interesting (bigger, bolder, etc.) without advancing the scene (kind of like “Change”). After the second clap, the performer is allowed to advance the scene. Do exercise until every group has gone.
- **Typewriter:** Students stay in their groups of three. One student is the Narrator and has a mimed typewriter. The narrator starts the scene by reading aloud from the book that they are typing. After setting up the scene with a few sentences, the actors take over and portray the characters/action that the narrator has set up. The narrator is allowed to step in at any time with flashbacks, new characters, different location, etc.
- **The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly Advice:** Have volunteers go up in groups of three. The audience provides a question or problem that they need advice on. The three players then go down the line. One person provides the good advice, the next provides the bad, and the last the ugly (really bad) advice.

“Okay, great, you guys! I don’t know if you all noticed, but how did it feel not stopping to talk about each exercise after we did it? Did it help you get into an improv groove? Did you find yourself still thinking about the rules even though they were not the focus?”

“Great! Now let’s take a look and make sure that we met the standards today.”

Standards

Ask the students to return to the list of standards aligned to this lesson. Read aloud the standard and ask the students: “Can someone tell me how we addressed this standard in what we learned today?”

Continue this process for all of the standards, helping where needed to be sure students understand.

Reflection

“Awesome! How do you guys think today went?”

Questions for reflection:

What was your guys’ favorite exercise of the day? Who can give me two rules and an example of how they work together? (*get a couple of different answers*) How do these rules still work with scripted scenes? What about with life in general? What about scripted scenes? What was the hardest rule to learn? The easiest? Why?

If the students are planning a performance or sharing, choose the games together and take a moment to determine who will be performing in each game ahead of time.

“Good work today, guys! Remember, attendance next class is absolutely mandatory, as there is no way to make up this grade, and it is your final for this unit. Any final questions? Cool! Have a good day, and I will see you all next class!”

Supplemental Materials

None

Lesson 5 – Grand Finale

Lesson Objectives:

- Students will show understanding of the rules by taking their final exam
- Students will demonstrate use of the rules during an improv performance in front of their peers
- Students will reflect on how the rules of improv apply to theatre and life outside of theatre

Essential Questions/Global:

How can one take the lessons learned in this unit and apply them to other areas of life?

Essential Questions/Content Area:

How does getting in front of a live audience affect one's improv performance? How easy is it to apply the rules in a live performance situation?

Students Will Understand:

Students will understand that learning the rules of improv gives them the tools to perform in front of an audience and not worry about failing.

Students Will Be Able:

Students will be able to work together as a team and perform improv in front of peers from a different class while still following the rules we have learned in class.

Assessment

Formative Assessment

Students will discuss how they think the performance went and why.

Summative Assessment

Students will perform eight improv exercises in front of their peers and be graded on their attempts at following the rules as well as their overall attitude.

Reflection

How did being in front of a live audience affect the students? Did having the rules make them feel like they had more control of the situation? What did they succeed at? What needs more work?

Learning Plan

Direct Instruction

"Good morning, everybody! How are well all today? Are you guys excited to perform?"

"You guys are going to do great. First, though, we have a test that we need to get out of the way. Everybody get out a pencil or pen." *Pass tests out.*

"I think that the test is pretty self-explanatory; it should look very similar to the test we took at the beginning of the unit. You have about fifteen minutes to complete it. If you finish early, you can read or work on other homework quietly."

Let students work on the test for about fifteen minutes.

"Cool! It looks like everybody is done. Pass your tests to the left for me to pick up, please, and then make a circle in the center of the room for stretching."

Lead students in stretches and a quick game of Doors to warm up before the audience arrives. Students should basically be able to run the show themselves, but step in if they forget what comes next or who is in which scene. Since it is a performance situation, do not give any guidance during the scenes unless it is absolutely necessary. Let improvers bow at the end.

Reflection

“Okay! How do you guys think that went? Did anything throw you for a loop? Why? What was your biggest success and why? Was it different being in front of a live audience? How successful were you at incorporating the rules? Do you think you’ll use these rules in other areas of your life? How/why?”

Standards

Ask the students to return to the list of standards aligned to this lesson. Read aloud the standard and ask the students: “Can someone tell me how we addressed this standard in what we learned today?”

Continue this process for all of the standards, helping where needed to be sure students understand.

“You guys did a great job with this unit, and I’m so proud of you all. Any final comments? Alright! Again, good job! I will see you guys next class. Have a good day!”

Supplemental Materials

None

***Handouts and Supporting Materials
can be found on the following pages.***

Name: _____

Date: _____

Rules of Improv

Use this sheet for your notes. You will want to keep this paper, because this will be useful when you take your final for the improv unit.

1. Always Say Yes:
2. Who What Where:
3. Do SOMETHING:
4. Trust Your Partner:
5. Don't Explain, Show:
6. Don't Plan:
7. Don't Fight:

8. Make Statements:

9. HAVE FUN:

Upright Citizen's Brigade:

Groundling's Theatre:

Second City:

Name: _____

Date: _____

Improv Pre-Assessment

Fill in the blank:

List the nine most important rules of improvisation (2 points each):

1) Alw__s __ay Y__

2) W_y, __ha_, Wh__e

3) Do __met_ing

4) Tr_s_ Y__r __ar_ner

5) Do_'t Ex_l__n, __how

6) __n't P__n

7) D__'t F__ht

8) M_k_ St__em_nt_

9) H_V_ __U_

Name at least one theatre famous for its improv: (1 point)

What is the scariest thing about improv to you? (2 points)

Name three famous people known for their improvisation skills: (2 points)

How do you think improv can help you in other areas of your life? (2 points)

___/25

Improv Pre-Assessment **Key**

List the nine most important rules of improvisation:

- 1) **Always Say Yes**
- 2) **Why, What, Where**
- 3) **Do SOMETHING**
- 4) **Trust Your Partner**
- 5) **Don't Explain, Show**
- 6) **Don't Plan**
- 7) **Don't Fight**
- 8) **Make Statements**
- 9) **Have Fun**

Name at least one theatre famous for its improv:
Upright Citizen's Brigade, Groundlings, Second City

What is the scariest thing about improv to you?
Any answer is correct as long as it is fully explained.

Name three famous people known for their improvisation skills:
Students will receive points as long as they have made at least an educated guess.

How do you think improv can help you in other areas of your life?
Students will receive full credit if they give a thoughtful and well-written answer.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Improv Post-Assessment

List the nine most important rules of improvisation (2 points each):

- 1)
- 2)
- 3)
- 4)
- 5)
- 6)
- 7)
- 8)
- 9)

Name at least one theatre famous for its improv (1 point):

What do you think is the MOST important rule to remember while improvising? Why? (2 points)

What was the hardest part of doing improv for you? Why? (2 points)

Pick two rules and explain how they work together. (2 points)

___/25

Improv Post-Assessment **Key**

List the nine most important rules of improvisation:

- 1) **Always Say Yes**
- 2) **Why, What, Where**
- 3) **Do SOMETHING**
- 4) **Trust Your Partner**
- 5) **Don't Explain, Show**
- 6) **Don't Plan**
- 7) **Don't Fight**
- 8) **Make Statements**
- 9) **Have Fun**

Name at least one theatre famous for its improv:
Upright Citizen's Brigade, Groundlings, Second City

What do you think is the MOST important rule to remember while improvising? Why?
Any answer is correct as long as it is one of the nine rules and it is fully explained.

What was the hardest part of doing improv for you?
Students will receive points as long as they have given a thoughtful response.

How do you think improv can help you in other areas of your life?
Students will receive full credit as long as they pick two rules we've studied in class and can fully justify their answer.

Final Performance Rubric

Rubric to be filled out after the final improv performance. Students will be graded based on their growth from the beginning of the unit to the end as well as on their final performance and overall attitude.

Follows the 9 Rules ___/10	Needs Work Student only follows one or two of the rules in their improv scenes. 0-2	Making Progress Student follows some of the rules in their improv scenes 3-6	Good Student follows most of the rules in their improv scenes. 7-8	Excellent Student follows all of the rules in their improv scenes. 9-10
Interaction w/Teammates ___/10	Needs Work Student makes little to no effort to be a team player or support their peers while in a scene. 0-2	Making Progress Student is sometimes a team player and occasionally supports their peers while in a scene. 3-6	Good Student is a team player and mostly supports their peers while in a scene. 7-8	Excellent Student is a team player and fully supports their peers while in a scene. 9-10
Attitude ___/10	Needs Work Student rarely/never volunteers and/or regularly has poor attitude in class. 0-2	Making Progress Student rarely volunteers and/or student only maintains good attitude during class sometimes. 3-6	Good Student volunteers to participate sometimes and maintains a good attitude during class. 7-8	Excellent Student volunteers to participate regularly and maintains a good attitude during class. 9-10
Final Quiz Grade ___/10	Needs Work Scored between 0-20% 0-2	Making Progress Scored between 30-60% 3-6	Good Scored between 70-80% 7-8	Excellent Scored between 90-100% 9-10

Total: ___/40