

# ACTING

# GAMES

# FOR

# IMPROV



**A POCKETFUL OF DRAMA**

**SAM MARSDEN**

**“This great guide to improvisation will stimulate players of all ages to find more freedom, creative expression and joy.”**

*Chris Heimann, Improvisation, Royal Academy of Dramatic Art*

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### **YES, LET'S!**

This is a simple, well-known drama game that gets to the heart of improv work. It breaks the ice, injects energy into the group, and puts people in touch with their spontaneity. Before playing, explain that in improvisation, we go along with other people's ideas. If someone says there's a fire-breathing dragon in the room, then there is! In improv we would not look at the dragon-seeing partner and say, "What dragon?" Rejecting an idea is what we call blocking. In this game and in all improv work, we accept. This game reinforces this mindset.

#### **For ages:**

3+

#### **How many students?**

Any number.

#### **How much time?**

Five to ten minutes.

#### **The space:**

A cleared classroom, drama studio, or hall.

#### **Materials needed:**

None.

#### **Let's play!**

Explain to the class that everyone goes along with whatever the idea caller calls out. For example, you might say, "Let's

all eat an ice cream,” and the class would reply, “Yes, let’s!” Then everyone would eat an ice cream. For the first few examples I might add a few questions to get students in the mood: “What flavor is your ice cream?” “Is it in a cone or a cup?” “Is it melting or frozen solid?” “Do you like to bite or lick your ice cream?” Give everyone a minute with their ice cream before you call out the next idea. You might say, “Let’s all pretend to be monkeys!” and the class would reply, “Yes, let’s!” before leaping into action. Then you may call out, “Let’s all go to the beach,” and the class would call back, “Yes, let’s!”

Explain there is no right or wrong in improvisation and that each individual gets to choose what they do. Once these foundations have been laid, you can ask students to raise their hands if they’d like to share their ideas. Explain that the only bad ideas are those that are violent in speech or action. Give each idea around forty-five seconds to play out. Some teachers allow students to call out, but in my experience, this can get a little chaotic, and some people’s ideas get only a few seconds to play out. I find it works better when the teacher takes the role of conductor. If you’re working with adults, hopefully they can handle calling out at appropriate times without the facilitator’s help!

## I FOUND THIS...

A fun acting game for all ages. It helps with listening and responding to one another.

### For ages:

6+

### How many students?

Two or more.

### How much time?

Five to fifteen minutes, depending on the group's size.

### The space:

A cleared classroom, drama studio, or hall. Students sit in a circle—chairs are preferable to the floor.

### Materials needed:

Enough chairs for everyone.

### Let's play!

Ask for a volunteer. Approach this volunteer and say, "I found this..." and finish the sentence with a noun: dog, cake, football-size egg, magic wand, diary, wedding ring, wallet, alien...all ideas are welcome! Ask the person you've approached to react to what you have found. Maybe they're surprised, afraid, in awe, or delighted. Hopefully a conversation will develop. It might go something like this:

“I found this dragon’s egg.”

“A dragon’s egg? You should return it, dragons are dangerous!”

“Oh my goodness, it’s hatching! What shall I do?”

“Put it down!”

“I can’t leave it!”

“What if its mother comes for you?”

“It’s not an it!”

“You can’t keep it!”

“I know, please come with me to take it back.”

In my experience, students take this exercise all kinds of places, from the mundane to the magical. Once the improv is over, the person who said, “I found this...” sits back down in the circle. The person who was receiving approaches someone else and says, “I found this...” changing the object to something new.

“I found this lost fairy,” they might say, holding their palms together, looking at a little fairy standing on their hands.

The game continues until everyone who wants a turn has had one.

### Going further

You can ask students to split into pairs and create their own improvisations with the starting line “I found this...”

Some students may prefer this over the circle version of the exercise, as they can plan before taking the plunge of performing in front of others. Once students have had a short time to rehearse (five to ten minutes), the pairs can go up to the front one at a time to show their polished improvisations. Make sure every pair gets a round of applause and a bit of positive feedback—perhaps some constructive feedback too, which the whole class can learn from. Try to encourage every pair to perform, but don't force anyone. If one person in the pair wants to perform but not the other, you might need to step in as an improv buddy.



## **SLOW MOTION/PLAY/DOUBLE SPEED/QUADRUPLE SPEED**

A fun warm-up circle game that explores different speeds.

### **For ages:**

6+

### **How many students?**

Any number.

### **How much time?**

Five to fifteen minutes.

### **The space:**

A classroom, drama studio, or hall.

### **Materials needed:**

None.

### **Let's play!**

Ask students to stand in a circle. They will stay in the circle throughout this activity and act out the instructions you give them. With each instruction you will say slow motion, play, double speed, or quadruple speed. For example, you might say, "Bake a cake, play," which means pretend to bake a cake at normal speed. After about thirty seconds you might change it to slow motion, and students will mime baking the cake in slow motion. After a little time you might say, "Double speed," and they will bake a cake at double speed.

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You can also change it to quadruple speed, and they'll bake the cake very fast.

You can also ask students to call out directions. If a student leads, I find it works best to choose one student and to let them take charge for a few rounds, then give someone else a turn. Some teachers might allow students to shout out ideas, but I find that can get a little chaotic. To get you and your students started, here are some ideas that work well for this activity:

- Wrap a present
- Brush your hair
- Paint your nails
- Write a difficult email
- Write a love letter
- Read a horror novel
- Read a romance novel
- Search your bag for your keys
- Knit a sweater
- Change a car tire
- Brush a dog
- Wash an elephant

- Peel a banana
- Make a magic potion
- Look into the future with a crystal ball