

Addendum A

Leader's Guide



THINK OF THIS as a safety net, a suggested agenda for ten sessions with your young actors, lasting ninety minutes to two hours each. It is for ten- to thirteen-year-olds but the age spread can be larger than that.

These sessions can be scheduled every day for two or three weeks or spread over a period of a few months. Since there will be requests from the kids to repeat many of the exercises, there's probably enough material in this guide for twenty sessions if you have a large and lively group. And, of course, there are more exercises throughout the book that you can use in the sessions or substitute for any of these. Since there may be more listed here than you'll have time to do in any given session, we've marked the most popular ones with a star (*).

After you have completed the ten sessions, you can do a demonstration of skits and exercises for friends and relatives. Then before you begin work on a full show of some kind, do additional sessions using more advanced exercises and games that you invent yourself or select from the book. Use this guide also as a source of activities for periods of preparation and rehearsal of scenes and shows.

SESSION 1

At the beginning of the first meeting, if you are all new to one another, start with a game:

1. Circle of names

Purpose: To develop concentration.

Goal: To learn one another's names (at least first names).

Procedure: Everyone sits around in a circle. You start by saying your own first name and then add "and I like...." Fill in whatever you want: pizza, hiking, music.... Go around the circle clockwise. Each person in turn repeats the name of each person

who has gone before (starting with you, the leader) and what that person likes. He (or she) then adds his own name and what he likes. The last person has the hardest task, but everyone will be asked to help or correct one another's memories as you go, so it's a challenge for all.

2. Ask everyone to begin thinking about what kind of show to do at the end of the ten weeks or ten meetings.

3. The "business" meeting: deal with any necessary problems, elections, announcements.

4. Establishment of rules: No violence allowed, no hurting one another. Whoever is talking must be heard by all. Therefore, everyone's responsibility is to speak loudly and clearly, and to keep quiet when someone else is speaking. Do not speak for someone else. Each must speak for himself or herself.

5. Relaxation

Purpose: To get rid of tension.

Procedure: Have everyone stand and shake out all parts of their bodies. Then stand very loosely and take a few deep breaths. Now have them stretch out and make themselves as big as they possibly can without touching anyone else. Now ask them to make themselves as small as they possibly can.

6. Many ways to do things

Ask the children to line up and then, one after the other, sit in a chair in the front of the room, each in a different way...backward, squatting, on one leg, etc. This demonstrates how many good ideas they can have.

7. Explanation of the system to the group

Here's a brief version of material covered in Chapter 2. Go over it with the children using any available visual aid.

We learn about the story through the answers to the five Ws: Who, What, Why, Where, and When.

How do actors tell the story? By the words they say and what they do with their voices and bodies, their behavior.

What determines that behavior? Their response in reaction to the sensory and emotional information or stimuli in the story. That is, to what the characters see, hear, smell, feel, and taste, in the story, whether real or not.

When they're not real (not real rain or cold or pain) what makes the actors respond? They make believe they are real. They relax their bodies so that they can concentrate. They think hard about the details of the imaginary stimuli—the rain, the cold, the injury—and try to see, hear, feel, taste, smell these imaginary things with their bodies. They let themselves react in whatever way is natural and believable.

8. Red ants *

Purpose: To demonstrate how we respond physically to imaginary sensations.

Procedure: Ask everyone to stand up and imagine that there is a swarm of red ants starting to crawl on their feet and legs, biting them. Observe their behavior and point out that acting without using the whole body is like playing the piano with one finger.

9. Concentration on a real object

Purpose: To develop sensory awareness.

Goal: To find and describe as many sensory elements in the object as possible.

Procedure: Pass around an apple or give each child a cookie or a small box of raisins. Call out one of the senses for each to explore in relation to that object—for instance: "Touch." If it's an apple, the child's responses will likely be, "Hard, round, smooth, a soft spot near the stem," and so on. Continue going around to each child until you feel all have exhausted the search or until the time you've allotted has expired.

10. Remembering senses *

Purpose: To develop sensory memory and imagination.

Goal: To remember past sensations.

Procedure: Name the five senses and ask for volunteers to describe something in terms of each particular sense. For example:

The sight of colors in a sunset

A sound that's scary—a scream, a shot

A smell they always recognize—garlic, a bakery

A taste they love—fudge, popcorn, the touch of velvet, or warm water, the feeling of being scared or angry

11. Translating a sensation into physical action

Purpose: To respond to sensations physically.

Goal: To move around and relax after sitting.

Procedure: Ask everyone to stand and stretch as if they've been in a cramped box for hours; or they've just awakened; or they're on top of a mountain; or they're blind.

12. Writing names

Purpose: To "physicalize" and focus the imagination.

Goal: To loosen up bodies and sharpen sensory imagination.

Procedure: Ask everyone to move simultaneously to a position where each has enough space. Each person writes his or her name in the air with different parts of the body: elbow, chin, shoulder, toe. Then they all write on various imaginary surfaces such as a steamy window, a dirty car, a recently finished painting. They can use different imaginary tools: a foot in the sand, a pen, or a paintbrush. They can write the name as if they're a teacher using chalk on a blackboard, a president signing an important treaty, a child just learning to write, and so on.

13. Walking on different surfaces

Purpose: To sharpen sensory imagination in the whole body.

Procedure: As in Writing Names above, have everyone give one another enough space. Then they walk around on different imaginary substances, such as snow, hot sand, soft sticky tar, and sharp pebbles.

14. Transforming objects *

Purpose: To stimulate imagination and sensory responses.

Procedure: Pass an object such as a pen or pencil around to each person. Have each one use the object as if it's something else. For instance, a pen could become a baton, a thermometer, a spyglass, umbrella, a microphone, and so on. Keep going until the ideas run out.

15. Break up

Purpose: To strengthen concentration.

Goal: To demonstrate how fully and inventively a person uses his or her whole body to accomplish a clear goal—a *What*.

Procedure: Select two people and have one keep repeating a poem, quotation, or

song without breaking down in laughter. The other must do or say anything to make the first person laugh without ever touching that person. This could be giggling, wiggling, singing, making faces, saying bizarre things—anything. After a minute or two, unless the first person breaks up before then, they trade places. Then go on to other pairs.

SESSION 2

Review the system, and clear up any questions or misunderstandings. In a review of the five senses, ask everyone to examine his or her own hands for sensory details.

1. Relaxation

Tell everybody to relax just the little finger, or just the shoulders. Point out that they can feel the whole body tending to relax in that one effort.

2. Imaginary object

Purpose: To strengthen sensory awareness.

Procedure: Everyone does this at the same time, still sitting. Name for each person an imaginary object to hold, such as a kitten, an ice cream cone, a cup of hot chocolate, a sharp knife, a warm washcloth. Ask questions as they are holding them, such as: How heavy is it? What color is it? Does it feel soft? What is its temperature? How does it smell? Any taste? Can you hear it? Can you make any sound by tapping on it? Without answering aloud, all concentrate on answering the questions to themselves in their own sensory imaginations. Then have them put the imaginary object down or hand it to another person.

3. Homework

Purpose: To demonstrate the value of practice.

Procedure: Ask the kids to practice brushing their teeth for a week with the “other” hand—the one they do not normally use. Plan to discuss the results after a week.

4. Relays with imaginary objects

Purpose: To strengthen imagination and sensory awareness.

Goal: To physicalize imaginary objects.

Procedure: Ask ten kids to face one another in parallel lines of five each. They should line up in such a way that no one's back is to anyone watching. The first person in Line A pantomimes carrying an imaginary object directly across to the partner on the opposite line. After handing it to that partner, he or she takes the partner's place in Line B. The partner, pantomiming the same object, carries it back to first person's

place in Line A. The second person in Line A does the same thing with the partner in Line B, pantomiming a different object, and so on. If a partner can't guess what imaginary object is being pantomimed, he or she can ask before carrying it back. Next, let the kids in Line B originate the imaginary objects to carry and proceed as before (see page 13.).

5. Many ways to open a door *

Purpose: To spark the kids' imaginations and sensory awareness.

Goal: To find as many ways as possible to open an imaginary door.

Procedure: Line up everyone across the stage. Ask each in turn to pantomime opening a door. Challenge each to do it in a way that is distinctly different from any of the others. Continue until your time or their ideas are exhausted. A good variation of this exercise is to ask them all to find different ways to sit in a chair.

6. Slow motion *

Purpose: To strengthen observation and concentration.

Goal: To imitate a physical action perfectly in slow motion.

Procedure: Call three people to the stage. Ask one to do something fairly simple, such as pick up a book, leaf through it, put it down, and walk away. Ask the other two, in turn, to do exactly the same thing but in slow motion. Then have the rest of the group discuss what was accurately done and what was not. Next, with different actions, rotate the tasks among the three. Continue with several more groups of three. Encourage the kids to suggest other physical actions.

7. Mirror *

Purpose: To improve concentration and attention.

Goal: To keep the audience from knowing which person is the mirror and which is the one looking into the mirror.

Procedure: Send half the group onstage. Ask them to pair off and secretly decide which one should be the mirror. Then they line up facing each other and move together exactly, so that no one watching can tell who is leading and who following. This means the person "looking into the mirror" must move slowly and carefully enough that the partner can imitate the movements at the same moment they are being done and thus "be the mirror." After the paired actors have been moving together a while, stop them and see if the group watching could tell who was the mirror. Then bring the watching group on to try it. You can extend the exercise by calling out "Switch" several times while the pairs are moving, meaning that they

must switch roles without stopping. Sometimes you can call out “Switch” somewhat rapidly and often, so that they lose track of who was who and begin identifying with each other totally.

8. Physical Attitude *

Purpose: To demonstrate the many ways the whole body and voice can be used to find different Whos.

Goal: To say meaningless words but with a clear physical characterization.

Procedure: Ask one person at a time to say a common nursery rhyme like “Jack Be Nimble” as if she is “this kind of person.” Then, to demonstrate, you simply take on a strong physical attitude, such as vehemently shaking your finger at someone, or slapping your forehead in anguish, or being in a prayerful attitude, or doubling over with laughter.

(This is one of the most popular exercises we’ve used.)

9. Where *

Purpose: To activate sensory awareness of place and environment.

Goal: To imagine as many sensory details of a particular place as possible.

Procedure: Ask someone to name a place. Ask different people to call out whatever element of that place pertains to the particular sense you name. For example, the place called out is the beach. You say “smell,” and someone in the group says “salty air.” Then you say “hearing,” and someone says “waves breaking.” Continue until their ideas fade.

10. Acting in a Where *

Purpose: Increasing awareness of physical surroundings.

Goal: To make the kids’ location clear by their behavior in an imaginary place.

Procedure: Send one person onstage to choose a Where and whisper the choice to you. Without telling anyone else or using any words or real props, he or she begins to behave as if he or she were in that place. As the others figure out where the person is, they each whisper their guess to you to verify. If they are right, they come up and join in the activity in that place—not necessarily doing the same thing, but anything they might be doing in that same place. For example, tell one girl secretly to be a cheerleader on a football field. She starts leading cheers (but without words), and the others join her and follow the cheers, or run onto the field as players, or sell hot dogs, and so on. Continue until everyone has joined in onstage after solving the Where.

SESSION 3

1. Relaxation *

Purpose: To relax the whole body.

Procedure: Ask all to stand. Talk them through tightening all the muscles, beginning with the toes and working up to the tops of their heads. Then they reverse direction and start letting go, relaxing the tension in each part of the body starting with the scalp and moving down to the toes. They take deep breaths, bend over slightly, and shake out the body.

2. Who am I, Where am I? *

This very popular exercise is fully described on page 29. Each actor chooses a specific answer to the question Who, What, Why, Where, or When, and describes its sensory details without naming it; the others guess the answer.

3. Homework

To sharpen your actors' observation of people, ask them to watch people's walks before the next session and bring in an imitation of one of them then. They should watch what people do when they're just standing and talking, and be prepared to do it and discuss it.

4. Picking up an object *

Purpose: Using the senses to stretch the imagination.

Goal: To find as many ways as possible to pick up an object.

Procedure: Place an object—a book, a glove, a ruler—in the center of the stage. Have the group line up on one side of the stage and walk across it one at a time, pick up the object in the center, put it down or carry it, and walk offstage. (They put the object back for the next person's turn, of course.) Trying especially to use the different senses, they must find different ways to handle the object, as if...

it's beautiful. (Sight)

there's a knocking inside of it. (Hearing)

it smells weird. (Scent)

it's mouth-watering. (Taste)

it's sticky, burning hot, or delicate. (Touch)

For instance, some of the ideas kids have generated with a scarf include wiping up a spot, shining shoes, shielding themselves from the rain, and waving for help. One

used it as a shawl, another as a picnic cloth, and one decided it was filthy and threw it down again.

5. Where directions from the group

Purpose: To get practice in giving and following directions.

Goal: To explore a Where possibility fully with a partner.

Procedure: Select a pair of kids and suggest to everyone Where they are. Ask the others to give the pair specific directions as to what they see, feel, hear, and smell in the location you've suggested. Without using any words, the two respond as fully as they can to the directions, moving around trying to sense and act out whatever the others call out. Do this with other pairs of kids. Stop them after a short time, unless they're begging to continue.

6. Circle: 1 to 50 *

Purpose: To promote ensemble skills.

Goal: To build from one extreme to another gradually.

Procedure: Have the group stand in a circle. Going around one person at a time, count from 1 to 50: The first person whispering "1" as quietly as possible, the next person saying "2" a little louder, the next speaking louder still, and so on up to 50, the loudest. Each one must be careful not to make such a big jump in volume that the group reaches the extreme of loudness before the number 50 is spoken. But also take care not to do the opposite, making each increase so tiny that the last numbers to be said require large jumps in volume. The group can repeat the same exercise but with different extremes: from loudest to softest; from Mona Lisa smile to falling on the floor laughing; from slightly concerned to terrified; and so on. The kids should justify to themselves silently the reason for the amusement, terror, or rage, as they're doing it. Or give them a justification to keep in mind as they say the numbers.

7. ABC game *

Purpose: To explore how people respond to each other, and to begin working on the Who.

Goal: To learn how to pick up another person's tone or attitude.

Procedure: Ask two people to sit or stand facing each other and begin saying the alphabet together, alternating the letters as if they're having a conversation (that is, one person says, "A," the other says, "B," and so on.) The first person at the start chooses an attitude, for example: "Can't wait to tell this funny story," or "You told a lie about me that makes me furious." The second person must pick up that same attitude while saying the next letter. Gradually, starting with the letter M, the first

person must change to the opposite attitude and, as the second person says the letter N, must reflect this change in attitude. They continue until they've said the whole alphabet. It's as if they are having an entire conversation, changing their minds in the middle of it. Next, let the couples trade places, and then give others who want to play a chance. This exercise may seem difficult, but kids like it and find it easy.

8. Who—exercises

Purpose: To learn more about characterization.

Goal: To explore different behaviors according to what kind of person a character is.

Procedure: Have the whole group line up on one side of the stage. You or the kids in the group give each person in line a different Who. Ask each one to walk across the stage, stop in the center, and then continue across as if he or she is that character: an old person, a sales clerk, a cop, a lost child, an athlete, a thief, and so on. Continue until everyone has done it.

9. Who—exercise in pairs

Purpose: To develop characters by how they relate to each other.

Goal: To explore how different people behave with someone like themselves.

Procedure: Assign Whos to two actors. Ask them to walk across the stage from opposite corners, meet in the middle, and shake hands saying only each other's names. By their behavior they create the characters you assigned. Then they walk on to the opposite corners. Use some Whos from this list or your own:

buddies	enemies	politicians
rock stars	suspects	drunks
soldiers	cops	spies

Next, repeat with the group calling out the Whos.

10. You are what you do

Purpose: To find a character's behavior by what that person does.

Goal: Build characters not from adjectives (characteristics), but from verbs (actions).

Procedure: Teach your young actors that they can't truly act an adjective, but they can act verbs: what that person does. Ask them to write on slips of paper the kind of person they like most, according to what that person does. On other slips they write the kind of person they dislike the most, according to what that person does. For example: "I like the kind of person who helps when you're in need." "I dislike the

kind of person who won't share anything." Tell them not to sign the slips—no one should know what anyone else wrote. Next, send about four or five onstage to do an improv. Give them a situation—for instance, one is a clerk in a music store and the rest are all trying to buy the last two copies of a hot new CD. Or you can ask the others to give the group a situation to play—that is, a Where and a What. Now have each person draw one of the slips of paper out of a hat and make his or her actions fit the kind of character described on the slip. After a few minutes, stop them and ask the viewers if they can tell what each actor's slip of paper said. Have other groups of four or five draw other slips and do other improvs suggested by you or the group.

11. Homework

Remind the kids that they should have been brushing their teeth each day with the "other hand," and that the group will discuss that in another session.

SESSION 4

1. Relaxation

Ask everyone to make themselves as loose as cooked spaghetti or wet laundry. Then they imagine they are lying in the most restful space they can imagine, such as:

in a hammock	on a waterbed
in a pile of leaves	in tall grass
on a lawn chair	on a cloud

2. Homework

Tell the kids to review in their imaginations every night before falling asleep a strong sensory event from that day—a clap of thunder, the pain of a fall, a surprising taste. Give them an example of your own, recounting all the sensory details as specifically as you can. Tell them you will discuss them in the next session.

3. Observation of people

Ask your young actors to do the walks they've observed (as previously assigned as Homework in Session 3) and discuss them. Examine the specifics, asking what kind of person might walk like that. Next, ask them to show you what they've observed about what people do with their bodies when they're just standing and talking to one another. Discuss this, and ask them what people do, especially with their hands. Look for the Ws that explain or cause the observed behavior.

4. Different "As ifs" with one spoken line

Purpose: To learn that there are as many ways to say the same thing as there are to do the same thing.

Goal: To endow the same spoken words with different meanings, depending on the situation and five Ws.

Procedure: Ask the kids to say, "It's raining," and to imagine an "As If" that you give them—that is, have them imagine the sensory elements of the given "As If" while saying the line. For example, as if the person...

wants to go on a picnic.
is a farmer who has been suffering through a drought.
is running into the room soaking wet.
is a TV weather forecaster whose prediction was wrong.
is homeless.

Let them take turns, and keep it up as long as it's working. You can change the given sentence and have the kids choose the circumstances. Another "As If" could be imagined as they say "hello" into an imaginary phone and then repeat it. By the way they say the second "hello," let others know who is calling: a best friend, a doctor with bad news, a teacher, a pesky kid brother, a sales person, someone they thought was dead, and so on.

5. The Machine *

Purpose: To strengthen ensemble skills.

Goal: Find imaginative yet logical ways to fit bodies and sounds together to create one large "machine."

Procedure: This theater game is described at length in Chapter 9 (page 168). Ask one child to begin making a repetitive sound, like "beep-beep," while doing some repetitive movement, such as moving an elbow up and down, as if a part of some machine. Then ask the others to join in with other mechanical sounds and movements that will go with the first child's. They need not be a specific machine—just an all-purpose contraption with gears, wheels, pistons, and so on, along with noises. As others join in, the first person should intensify his or her sound and movement. The others follow suit until they are all at fever pitch. The first actor then leads them all to gradually wind down and bring the machine to a halt.

SESSION 5

1. Relaxation

Concentrate on relaxing the jaws, shoulders, hands, temples, and small of the back.

2. Discuss questions, assignments, and the sensory event you asked them about in Session 4.

3. Building up the five Ws *

Purpose: To learn how to find and follow the essential elements of a story.

Goal: To fill a simple activity with behavior that reveals a story, using the five senses.

Procedure: Send six people to one side of the space, and put a chair in the middle of it. Ask them each to enter in turn and move the chair without using any words. Each does it in a different way, revealing different answers to the questions Who, What, Why, Where, or When, and using as many sensory elements as will fit. For example:

One actor simply moves the chair.

A second moves the chair showing Who he or she is—an elderly person, perhaps.

A third moves it showing What he's doing—maybe reaching a socket to change a bulb.

A fourth moves it showing Why he's doing it—perhaps feeling anxious in trying to please a customer.

A fifth moves it showing Where—perhaps at a table in a restaurant.

The sixth moves it showing When—maybe at the end of a very hard day.

Next, select five people to move the chair. The first one moves the chair showing Who the person is. The next uses the Who and adds the What. The other three continue to build on the action, adding another W, until the fifth person combines them all. For instance:

Who: An old person with an injured leg.

What: She or he stumbles on the chair and thrusts it aside in an effort to get out.

Why: She feels she must reach her grandchild before flames do. She is very frightened.

Where: In a burning building.

When: A very dark night.

Another exercise is to have five other kids move the chair, this time each making a different choice and doing all five Ws at once. As these are done, you and the group can comment and discuss.

4. Entrances *

Have the kids line up and give each a different verb to do as they enter: i.e. amble on, back on, charge on, drop on, ease on, flee on, etc. Then ask each to make an entrance

onstage in a different way, using the five Ws and senses, as above. This time they needn't follow any order. Just let them keep coming on, one after the other, as long as their ideas flow. Give them some time beforehand to think about and plan what they intend to do.

5. Saying their own names

Purpose: To introduce vocal color.

Goal: To put meaning into the way things are said.

Procedure: Everyone sits and relaxes for this "As If" exercise. Ask each, in turn, to say his or her name as if...

correcting someone.
being arrested by the police.
meeting someone.
volunteering for a dangerous job.

sick with a sore throat.
afraid people will laugh.
reading it in Braille.

Let the kids invent other "As If"s to try.

6. Two people saying each other's name

Purpose: To introduce dialogue.

Goal: To convey meanings and relationships by the way even simple things are said.

Procedure: Up to this point we have seldom allowed dialogue because young actors tend to use just words instead of behavior to tell a story. Have two kids go onstage, enter from opposite sides, meet in the middle, greet each other, and say each other's name as if...

warning of danger.
one is almost deaf.
reading a newspaper announcement of an award.
believing the other had died.

The group can continue to provide other ideas for the actors. Next, ask pairs of actors to meet and greet each other saying each other's name. Their voices and behavior should tell as much as possible about their relationship. Suggest that they are...

conspirators
competitors
teammates
employer and employee

business wheeler-dealers
victorious
best friends
consoling each other after
a disaster

Continue working in pairs as long as they choose or time permits.

7. Who—focusing on body parts

Purpose: To free the body and imagination while exploring a Who.

Goal: To create a characterization based on a common description using the name of a part of the body.

Procedure: Get four or five kids on their feet and give each one a description to use as a basic characterization. They will play someone who...

sticks his nose into everything.
leads with her chin.
is all thumbs—or all ears.
elbows her way into a crowd.
is stiff-necked—or keeps a stiff upper lip.
carries the world on his shoulders.
is weak-kneed or strong-arms everybody.

Then to help them improvise, ask the group to give them a situation suggested by What, Where, When, Why—for example, watching the Olympics (What), in a garden (Where), on a cold day (When), or in a hurry (Why). Stop them after a few minutes and let another group try it with another situation.

SESSION 6

1. Relaxation

Have everyone lie on the floor, totally relaxed with their heads resting on a rolled-up jacket or pillow for protection. Walk around checking at random, lifting an arm here or a leg there to make sure it's limp and loose.

2. Homework

Discuss the brushing of their teeth with the “other hand,” which they should have been doing since Session 2, and also their observations of walks and groups standing (from Session 3). Point out the value of practice and observation. An actor, like a good reporter, should be curious about people and things. Discuss those sensory memories you asked them to think about before going to sleep each night (Session 4).

3. Assigning of skits *

Ask your young actors to start planning and rehearsing short skits together outside of the sessions. They will start performing them for the group after a couple of sessions. If there's time at the end of a session, let them go off in small groups into separate areas to rehearse their skits. Let them choose their own “skit-mates” or

assign skits to different groups, or let some do monologues. You can suggest one-word themes for their skits, such as:

celebration	friendship
fear	respect
teachers	parents
snow	hospitals

4. Nursery rhymes with different Whats *

Purpose: To let a situation inform the way something is said.

Goal: To make action or a situation clear through physical behavior and delivery of lines.

Procedure: Ask each member in turn to say a nursery rhyme, such as “Jack Be Nimble” or “Hickory, Dickory, Dock” and show what they’re doing as they’re saying it. Some say the rhymes as if they were barking phone orders in an office, or trying to understand a recipe while cooking, or trying to win a race, or stealing secret papers from a safe, and so on. Get them started and they’ll find plenty of ideas of their own. Let them continue until their ideas run out or the time is up.

5. Thoughts while speaking and thoughts while listening

Purpose: To learn to think as the character while talking.

Goal: To give different meanings to a simple phrase.

Procedure A: Ask each child to say “I’m coming” while thinking a different thought. One might be thinking, “Don’t leave without me.” Another might think, “For the tenth time.” And another, “I’ll never be ready on time.” And another, “I hate to do this.” You can give them the different thoughts, or let them supply their own. If they supply their own, make sure you know what the thought is, so you can tell whether they’re doing it right. When actors are really thinking their character’s thoughts, they’re always more believable. Don’t overwork this. Move on after you’ve made your point.

Procedure B: Ask a child to say a line to another in different ways, and ask the other to describe what the child feels as he or she hears it.

6. The preceding thought

Purpose: To learn how to find the best ways to say the lines.

Goal: To make line readings more real and truthful.

Procedure: While they’re all seated and relaxed, ask all the kids, in turn, to speak a

line, such as “Where is everybody?” or “This is incredible.” But before each one says the line, give an example of a thought or situation to consider that will affect how the actor speaks the line—for example:

They’re all a bunch of morons.	Something’s wrong here.
I’m trapped! Help!	Deserted!
Is this a surprise party? Great!	Finally, I’m home.

You can keep changing the line and the previous thought, perhaps after every five people have tried it.

7. Freeze! *

Purpose: To stimulate a rapid imaginative process.

Goal: To create and tell a situation quickly that fits the position in which the actors find themselves.

Procedure: Send four or five actors onstage. Ask each one to move at random in any bizarre, silly way possible and to keep doing that until you call out “Freeze!” At that word the actors must stop in exactly the position they were in when you called it out. Then, when called on by you, each must (without moving) answer the five Ws—who he is, what she is doing, and so on. For instance, if one stops when he’s down on his knees, he might say, “I’m a student looking for my assignment paper under my bed, and I’m late for school, and I might get kicked out because the teacher hates me anyway.” The kids move freely and think quickly when “Freeze” is called. This is fun, but not too easy. Don’t push anyone to do it who isn’t ready.

8. Nonsense sentences

Purpose: To learn how to make dialogue fit any situation.

Goal: To give as much meaning as possible to meaningless sentences by applying the five Ws.

Procedure: Give two people each a card with the same set of nonsense sentences written as a dialogue between characters “A” and “B.” The sentences could mean practically anything, depending on the situation. Ask the actors to go off together to make up a situation and then come back and act the scene for the group using the nonsense sentences only. Here are two sample dialogues:

SAMPLE 1

A: Here, let me.
B: I’m O.K.
A: But I want to.

B: No, really.
A: But why?
B: You don't have to.
A: I know that, but...
B: Stop worrying.
A: I don't feel right.

SAMPLE 2

A: You go first.
B: Oh, no, you go.
A: I really can't.
B: Sure you can.
A: Why don't you.
B: I don't feel like it.
A: Please!
B: Why is it important?
A: It just is!

Some situation choices could include the following:

Lifting and trying to move a heavy object.
A parent trying to help a child with homework.
Fighting over the TV remote control.
Trying to bandage a bad cut.
Firefighters placing a ladder.

There are more examples of nonsense sentences and choices on pages 71 and 72. Explore as many of the five Ws and use as many sensory elements as possible in the playing of the scenes. Have a number of dialogue cards ready. They will all want different dialogues, and they might want to make a choice. Keep going as long as you have time. Some sentences can be just numbers, and the actors doing them could be drawing lots for doing a dangerous deed, playing Bingo, or trying to open a bank vault—and so on.

SESSION 7

1. Relaxation and trust *

Purpose: To develop trust among a group of actors so that staying relaxed is possible.

Goal: To fall relaxed, knowing that the others are trustworthy and will catch the falling actor. Also, to be a dependable catcher.

Procedure: Teach the kids that trust is necessary for actors to work together. For an exercise that develops a strong sense of ensemble, separate people into groups of six or so. Ask them to form a tight circle and put a seventh person in the center of the circle. Person 7 must turn around and around, reciting something from memory, such as a poem or a song. Then he (or she) simply falls backward, sideways, or forward, with eyes closed, whenever he wishes to. The people in the circle must be ready, willing, and able to catch the center person and never let him fall completely or be hurt. The person in the center must simply fall in any direction, keeping his feet in the same place, trusting that someone will be there to catch him. You must take great care to ensure that the circle is small and tight with no empty spaces. Floor padding is very strongly advised, just in case.

2. Group counting *

Purpose: To get in tune with one another.

Goal: To count—one person saying one number at a time—as high as the kids can go without duplicating any numbers.

Procedure: Everyone stands together in a circle. If there are more than ten kids, divide them into two circles. One person, unassigned, starts counting with the number 1. Another, anywhere in the circle, says “2,” another, “3,” and so on. No one knows who is going to say the next number. But if two or more people say the next number at the same time, the whole group must go back to the beginning and start again at 1. The kids must try to sense when someone else is or is not going to say the next number, and when to go ahead and say it. Continue as long as there is time and the group is having fun.

3. Listening *

Purpose: To learn that listening is an important What—a strong action.

Goal: To listen actively, to make use of what was heard and to base choices on a perception of it.

Procedure: Ask someone to tell the group something she (or he) did at the beginning of the day, or within the last day or two, that involved the handling of objects—any objects. The others in the group must listen carefully while supplying in their minds the colors of the objects that are mentioned. Call upon one of the kids listening to tell the story back to the group supplying the imaginary colors of the objects mentioned. For example, a child says, “I got up, went into the bathroom, and picked up my toothbrush.” The person called upon will say something like, “I got up, went into the pink bathroom, and picked up my yellow toothbrush.” Call on different people to take turns talking and listening. You can also ask listeners to relate the shapes of objects. A popular variant is to have the speaker tell of an incident, true

or not true, and ask the listeners to say whether they think it was true or not, and why. Then ask the speaker to tell the group which it was.

4. What—standing still *

Purpose: To demonstrate that strong actions, or Whats, can be done in the actor's head without indicating to the audience what the action is. Indicating is fake acting: it's when actors cop out on use of the five Ws and the senses and just move the head, eyes, and body in some way to make the audience think they're really seeing, hearing, thinking, feeling without really doing so. In a way, it's lying to the audience.

Goal: To fulfill a mental action strongly while standing still, not making any movements.

Procedure: Only small instinctive movements that may arise spontaneously as a result of doing the mental task are allowed in this exercise. This way, an audience's trust and belief in the actor as the real character are built. Ask one of the kids to stand still, relaxed and not rigid. With the group listening, give your actor something to keep doing mentally while just standing there, such as:

Hearing a bizarre sound and trying to figure out where it's coming from.

Smelling smoke and trying to decide if it is dangerous.

Planning what to say to someone who hurt you yesterday.

Waiting to hear the outcome of surgery on a loved one.

Trying to make up an excuse for being late.

Ask the actor to keep doing that until it's clear and believable to the rest of the group. Ask the rest of the group to watch carefully and raise their hands as soon as they believe the actor is really doing what you asked. Next, ask for volunteers to come up, one at a time, to do the exercise. This is an illuminating exercise in which all the kids become quiet, focused, and involved. The reality they discover is often very moving.

5. Adjectives and verbs

Discuss adjectives in relation to developing a Who. Point out that adjectives can't be acted; they must always be turned into active verbs. Otherwise, the acting gets phony. For example, if a girl tries to act "shy," she becomes general and unreal. She must try to do whatever a shy person does in order to:

keep from being noticed.

avoid looking people in the eyes.

remain as quiet and unobtrusive as possible.

calm her nervous twitch.

Name some other adjectives and discuss with the group what that kind of person does.

6. Do skits for one another as time permits.

SESSION 8

1. Relaxation

Everyone takes deep breaths and loosens all muscles. All check their own muscles for tension.

2. Group mirror

Purpose: To improve ensemble work.

Goal: To stay absolutely together as all move slowly.

Procedure: Everyone stands in a large circle and does a large group "mirror." Let one person begin the movement with everyone mirroring him or her. Keep changing the leader. Ultimately, tell everyone to stay together without an assigned leader. The kids must concentrate on one another, stay together, relax, and "go with the flow" of the whole group. Do not continue this for too long, only until you feel the whole group is relaxed and focused.

3. Strong sensation *

Purpose: To concentrate and believe.

Procedure: While all the kids stand in a circle, ask them to think of a strong sensation and concentrate on it until they believe they:

- hear a piece of music.
- smell ammonia.
- feel hot water.
- taste a lemon.
- see oil reflecting colors in a puddle.
- taste buttered toast.

Continue only for a few minutes.

4. Improvs *

Purpose: To train the imagination, develop concentration and spontaneity.

Procedure: Ask people to form groups of about three to do improvs based on Who, What, and Where, which others in the group suggest. You add a Why and When to the suggestions. Prepare a list ahead of time on a card. (You can take ideas from historical events if your group is up to that: signing a peace treaty, marching for civil rights, dumping tea off British ships, and so on.)

5. Auditions—Part I *

Purpose: To strengthen reading aloud skills for younger children.

Goal: To bring color and meaning to words read aloud.

Procedure: Hand out sheets filled with numbered lines taken from stories or books. Ask a young actor to read one of the lines, and then ask him to read it again with an “As If” which you give him. For example: “Just then Pretzel’s face appeared over the edge of the hole.” After he has read it once, ask him to read it again as if it feels like a miracle, because it’s such a wonderful relief. You will find a list of these lines and As Ifs in Chapter 10.

Auditions—Part II *

Purpose: To strengthen dialogue-reading skills (for older students).

Goal: To make the five Ws believable and interesting while reading dialogue.

Procedure: Bring several prepared cards with speeches from plays on them. Pass them out for the kids to read, think about for a while, and act out for the group, one at a time. (Some examples can be found on page 121.) Each actor must read a card, determine the five Ws of the situation, and decide what the Who (the character) is thinking and means by the speech. Then everyone reads his or her lines aloud to the group as genuinely and fully as possible, using the body in any way to assist in the reading. Give each actor some direction—perhaps a limitation that fits the situation to make the audition more specific and real. For example: “Play it as if she’s in a big hurry,” or “Now as if you are telling them the best news you’ve ever heard.” Then ask the actor to do it once more, following your directions.

6. Perform skits for each other. See the suggested themes and topics on page 15.

SESSION 9

1. Relaxation *

All lie on the floor and hold each arm and leg in the air as long as possible, then drop it to floor. Take a deep breath.

2. Review of senses *

Ask one person to remember an incident and to describe only the emotional feeling that resulted (fear, anger, joy, jealousy) in physical, sensory terms, but not necessarily the incident that caused the feeling. Suggest that the rest of the group

empathize with the feelings being described. Talk the person through the process by asking questions: “What happened to your breathing?” “Did your mouth get dry?” “What did your hands want to do?” The group can also ask questions or add specifics.

3. More improv

Purpose: To strengthen imagination, responses, and spontaneity.

Goal: To increase the urgency in a situation.

- Procedure: Select two people for an improv. You and the group decide on a Who, What, and Where to give them. You or anyone in the group keep adding different Whys and Whens for each pair to play to “raise the stakes” each time they do the improv. In other words, continue to give them more and more urgent reasons why they must do what they’re doing. Time periods should represent deadlines to accomplish it: “If you don’t find it by tomorrow you’ll be expelled,” or “You gave it to your friend, but she’s on her way out of town,” and so on.

4. More nonsense sentences *

Purpose: To prepare for the show they will all do for their parents and friends.

Procedure: Please refer to Session 6, number 8.

5. Ruin my day, or poor soul *

Purpose: To have some fun.

Goal: To tap into the kids’ mischief-making creativity.

Procedure: Ask one person to sit on a bench as if he (or she) is waiting for a bus. Then ask another person to enter and do something that spoils the day for the first person and causes him or her to leave the stage. Play a loud radio, sing weirdly, whistle in his ear, burp loudly, push him off—anything except hurt him or her. The second person sits down to wait for the bus and then the third person enters to ruin the second person’s day, and so on. Let them each have at least one turn (they’ll want more—kids love permission to be gross). Keep it up as long as you have time and patience—this one’s popular!

SESSION 10

1. Relaxation *

Lie on the floor and relax thoroughly, as in the previous session.

2. Start to review and decide together what to do in a demonstration show to which parents and friends have been invited.

The demo can consist of examples of the work you have all been doing together: exercises, improvs, games, and skits. It can be held on the day or evening of your last session, or whenever convenient. Next, split up into small groups to plan more skits for a later session. The themes for these skits can be assigned by the leader or decided on by the various groups. The members can rehearse the skits on their own, anytime before the next session.

3. Justifying three moves

Purpose: To learn to think and act quickly and spontaneously, and to follow directions while justifying them.

Goal: To make three arbitrary moves fit logically into a pattern of recognizable behavior.

Procedure: Select one actor at a time to do three unrelated movements: reach an arm up, stomp a foot, turn around—anything. Then ask the actor to repeat the moves but to justify them, or put them into a reasonable context, and to describe them to the others as part of one or several of the five Ws and the senses. For example, doing the above three movements in order, the actor could pretend to be a child trying to be called on by the teacher and angry when overlooked. Other movements can be incorporated, so long as all three moves are done in the same order and are a part of the whole process. This exercise is harder than most, but can be quite rewarding. (If your group seems to you too young and inexperienced, don't try it.) Sometimes actors tend to plan ahead and thus lose spontaneity by preconceiving the moves to fit a justification. If that seems the case, have the group give suggestions to the actor about what moves to do and even about how to justify them. If it goes well, have your group extend the third position of the exercise into an improv, using some of the five Ws and senses.

4. Space rebound

Purpose: To think and act quickly in relation to one another.

Goal: To turn strange positions into a logical sketch or situation.

Procedure: This exercise, an extension of the game Freeze! (Session 6), uses more people and is more complicated. Ask two kids to start moving, alternating but one at a time, into any strange position in relation to the strange position of the partner. They keep up the alternating moves until you stop them with a clap. The players must then improvise based on whatever screwball positions they find themselves in at the moment. The resulting scene need only be a few lines long until they can establish some sort of situation. From one position an actor might start pretending to be

a sculptor working on the partner as the statue. Or they might start pretending to be in a gym working out. Whoever gets an idea first, begins. Tell them that turning to the partner and saying "What are you doing?" is not allowed. After they've all had turns, if they want to do more, you can do a group space rebound. Have about five kids move in turn, and when you clap, all start an improv.

5. Repeat

Repeat the most popular games and exercises if you have time to fill. Then plan and rehearse the demonstration, checking on who will do what in what order. Determine who will move what furniture or props; assign the places for waiting, entering the stage, and exiting; and run through the skits and improve them if you can. And wish them a good show!

