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# Theater Games and Group Problem-Solving Exercises for the Foreign Language Classroom

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*School for International Training*

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THEATER GAMES AND GROUP PROBLEM-SOLVING  
EXERCISES FOR THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

LARRAINE RUTH WRIGHT

MAT VIII

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Masters of Arts in Teaching degree at the  
School for International Training, Brattleboro, Vermont

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This project by Lorraine R. Wright is accepted  
in its present form

Date: August 17, 1977

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## ABSTRACT

Eric Descriptors -- Language Arts, Second Language Learning, Theater Arts.

This paper is a handbook of initiative games, theater games and improvisations especially adapted for use in the foreign language classroom. It includes games for small children, older children and adults. It can be used with classes of all levels. The games are described with recommendations for their use. Background information on the theory behind theater games, their use in the classroom, and an annotated bibliography of further sources are included.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my principal advisor, Michael Jerald for providing encouragement and humor; also, Ruth V. Hazzard, who first introduced me to the fun of theater games.

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Many of the games are traditional theater exercises that I have adapted for the foreign language classroom. The following came directly from other sources. (See the Annotated Bibliography for the complete notation.)

1. Five Changes and Name Six from Viola Spolin's THEATER GAMES
2. Alibi from A.L.W. Rees' "Games and Question Practice"
3. Positive/Negative Characterization from Brian Way's DEVELOPMENT THROUGH DRAMA
4. Apology from Victor Miller's THEATER'S DIFFERENT DEMANDS
5. Robot from Eva Kraus-Srebic's "Classroom Games in the Compulsory School"

In addition, I was first introduced to the following games and improvisations by the American Shakespeare Festival Theater: Telegram, Partner Pictures, Meet & Greet, Sell Your Group, Life Story.

## INTRODUCTION

My practical experience using theater games in my own classroom took place largely during my student teaching experience in Mexico and at the School for International Training with International Students of English. At the Instituto Cultural Americano in Orizaba, Mexico, I used many of the games with all four of my classes. In general, I had ten students per class and classes were one hour in length. My youngest class was a group of five - eight year olds. I began using games with this group out of desperation. It was very hard for them to sit still for the entire hour. They had a tremendous amount of energy, and I found it was necessary to keep them busy physically in order to keep their attention while they were verbalizing. On some days, it was necessary to let them get up and dance and sing to let off a little steam. It was necessary to switch activities after about five minutes due to their extremely short attention span. They were at an age where their rote learning ability was strong. They learned lyrics quickly and aptly imitated stress and intonation. They loved to play games and do short role plays.

My other class of children consisted of adolescents between the ages of ten and twelve. This class was greatly diversified by level and spirit. The class contained some quick, aggressive students and some very shy, reserved students. The class, as well, was going through a sexual crisis

exemplified by the fact that the boys would not touch, speak or sit next to the girls and vice versa. In the beginning, there was little communication. I found that initiative games were instrumental in bringing this class together but were not without their problems at first. I tried Scramble on a day when three different sets of people just happened to barge into my classroom for one thing or another. Each time, everyone shrieked (at being seen touching a person of the opposite sex) and ran back to their seats. It took a great deal of patience on my part, but I feel the success of the game was a break-through for them. They liked the game and asked for more and soon were responding to each other with a gentleness that found its way into the rest of the classroom activities. Other games were used effectively to maintain interest and to introduce or reinforce grammatical structures and vocabulary. This class had little creative command of English at the beginning of the course, although some of the students had been studying English for four years. After eight weeks, they were successfully doing simple improvisations. Of course, their skits were not nearly as sophisticated as my advanced adults' class were; but they were spontaneous and uninhibited. I found the only problem with games in this group was when we tried a competitive team game. The teams got so excited about winning and losing that things got totally out of control. I decided to de-emphasize team games, play down competition, and play up cooperation.

I also taught two courses of adults. One group was at the advanced level and all the members had spent some time in an English speaking country. The class was all women, mostly friends, all from the same social and economic background. They felt comfortable and at ease with one another right from the start. They did exceptionally well with role-plays and improvisations. I found theater games were perfect for them as they needed and responded well to creative conversation situations.

My second adult group was at the low intermediate level. They were from widely varied economic, social, and educational backgrounds. They were aged from sixteen to fifty years old and encompassed a wide range of linguistic abilities. This class did not respond well to games. I feel this was due to a basic inhibition Mexicans feel when they are with people of economic backgrounds different than theirs. I worked hard to create security for this group and to bring about cohesiveness, but I made little progress. As a result, we played fewer games in this class than in the others.

I did two sessions of theater games with advanced multinational students of English during the spring semester at the School for International Training. Each session was about two hours. Each of these classes had approximately ten members. They seemed to enjoy the games, but I felt that the improvisations, in general, did not work well. I feel that it is essential to build on these exercises and games slowly and lead up to the improvisations as a culmination of the

other games. An improvisation without this support does not work well. For example, the initiative games should be used first to get the group working together and responding to one another, and then move into theater games. When the group is working comfortable together, an improvisation may be attempted. A specific and well-structured improvisation is necessary at first. The improvisations in Part I have been put in an order in which they may be used.

There are three other concerns which a teacher should consider before attempting a theater games session. The first is discipline. I have always presented these games seriously and have expected my class to take them seriously as well. I have never encountered any problems. The personal investment of the students in these games tends to create great involvement. It is essential, however, to watch your pacing. Keep things moving, but don't forge ahead if things don't appear to be working. Be willing to leave it and come back to it another day.

The second concern is that of physical space. I have done these games and exercises successfully both indoors in a fairly small classroom and outside. Less space is needed than one would think, but it is necessary to maximize the space you have to work with. An open space can be created by stacking chairs in one corner, pushing desks to the edges of the rooms and so on. Also closely related to physical space is the concern of dealing with the outside world.

You may find it helpful to cover windows or doors leading out into a corridor to insure privacy in your classroom. Also, it is necessary to plan beforehand for dealing with outsiders that might enter your class. I usually asked my class to simply stop their activity and wait quietly. If the outsider wished to participate and the class felt good about him doing so, then we all worked together, otherwise people who came to observe were asked to leave.

The third concern is with the evolutionary nature of these games. I found it helpful to keep evaluative notes on each session to make additions and changes on my games for future use. Evaluative sessions with the class can be useful as well. A prepared list of questions pertinent to each game, however, is more useful than general questions such as "Did you like it?" Evaluations by the group may be difficult at first. Particularly, you may encounter a group whose educational training taught them that students do not offer critical comments to their teacher. Also, a group below the intermediate level may have great difficulty verbalizing complicated thoughts. Therefore, evaluations might be more fruitful if done in the student's native language. Student evaluations plus your own observations and notes will allow you to amend and adapt the games to your own specific purposes and use them in an ever-increasing variety of ways.

In many of the classes where I used theater games, I used them to introduce or reinforce grammatical structures or new vocabulary. The following list includes games played and the context in which I used them:

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## PART I

### GAMES FOR OLDER CHILDREN AND ADULTS

#### INITIATIVE GAMES

Initiative games were developed by Karl Rohnke for the North Carolina Outward Bound School. They are designed to provide concrete experience in problem solving, group dynamics and leadership, and to bring groups into situations where interaction is not only organically encouraged but necessary.

There are no set solutions for initiative games, only a general goal for each. How a group works within the rules given is part of the problem and part of the learning experience. It is important to stress that there is no competition involved between players. If you are working with more than one group, the groups do not race against each other to see who can solve the problem first. Each group discovers its own solution by use of their creative intellect and unique resources of each of its members. If the group is unable to solve the problem, all the better. Never provide or suggest a solution. An unfinished problem is an inspiration and a challenge. The group will certainly want to try it again at a later time.

Follow up discussions are as important as the game itself. Questions for discussion should be: "What happened?" "How did you feel about it?" "Why didn't it work?" "What made it work?"

## 1. TOGETHER

The problem of getting a group off the ground onto a platform of some sort for ten to thirty seconds (depending on the group's ability) is presented to the group. They must provide the solution. For example, they might have everyone put one foot on the platform and by all hanging onto each other maintain their balance for ten seconds.

Recommendations: This is an excellent game to begin with because it needs few instructions. A platform may be made out of cinder blocks, a bale of hay, a tree stump or a piece of wood. The platform must be small enough so that not every member of the group can stand on it at one time. No other materials are needed. Verbal encouragement from the teacher may be needed from time to time. For example:

"Don't give up!" "Think of a different way you can approach the problem!"

## 2. SCRAMBLE

Divide the class into even numbered groups of around eight to ten people. Instruct them to stand in a circle shoulder-to-shoulder. Each person then raises his right hand over his head and joins it with another right hand from across the circle. Then each person joins left hands with a different person. The problem they must solve is to unscramble themselves without letting go of hands back to the original circle. (N.B. Some people will be facing inward and others will be facing outward in the final circle.)

Recommendations: This game generally takes about thirty minutes to complete. Verbal encouragement may again be necessary. Call out at intervals: "Don't give up!" "It can be done!"

### 3. TRUST WALK

Divide the class into pairs or threes. Each person takes a turn at being blindfolded and led around by another person. The blindfolded person is totally at the mercy of his seeing partner, and it is up to the seeing partner(s) to lead him and give him explicit verbal instructions that will guide him over and around obstacles. This game is over when everyone has had a chance to lead and be led.

Recommendations: This game is well suited for out of doors but can be adapted to the classroom by creating obstacles with chairs and desks, etc. Have the seeing partner introduce a variety of things to touch, taste and smell. The only materials needed are enough blindfolds for half of the group. Partners should switch after eight to ten minutes, at the teacher's command.

### 4. TRUST CIRCLE

Have your students form circles of about eight to ten people. One person stands in the center. He closes his eyes and holds his body stiff and falls slowly forward. He is then caught gently by the people on that side of the circle and pushed slowly backward so that he falls to the other side

of the circle where he is caught and gently propelled toward another part of the circle. The game ends when everyone has had a chance to be in the center.

Recommendations: It is recommended that the teacher show his trust of the group by being the first person in the center. This game must be played with the utmost seriousness; gentleness cannot be stressed enough. Follow-up discussion can focus on how people felt about the group before, during and after the game.

#### 5. SQUARES

Make a line of squares with chalk or masking tape on the floor. They should be large enough for a person to stand in. It is necessary to make one more square than the number of people in the group. Have half of the group stand on the squares at one end of the line, facing the middle, one to a square. The rest should stand on the squares at the other end of the line again facing the middle. The middle square should be empty. Each side alternates moving. A person may move one square forward or backward or two squares if there is some one standing on the square in front of them and the next square is empty. The object of the game is for the players to switch sides, end to end. There may never be more than one person to a square.

Recommendations: This game is almost impossible to solve unless each side elects a leader to direct the moves and then

abides by his decisions. This leader can be impeached at any time and a new one elected in his place. These hints can be suggested by the teacher at a time he deems appropriate.

## 6. ANIMALS

Blindfold each person in the group. Whisper the name of an animal to each person. Solely by making the sound of their given animal the group must arrange themselves in order from the largest to the smallest animal. For example: pigs oink and grunt, sheep ba-a-a, etc.

Recommendations: At some point, it may be helpful for the teacher to call out: "When you find an animal that is close to your own in size, stay next to it!"

## 7. SWAMP CROSSING

The group is given two planks and three supports (cinder-blocks, #10 tin cans, etc.). They are told that they must get their entire group across an alligator infested swamp by using the cans as pontoons and the planks as bridges. The pontoons can be stepped on alone but the bridges must be supported by pontoons before they can be stepped on. If anyone in the group falls in the swamp, the entire group must begin again.

Recommendations: For a group of eight people, the swamp should be approximately 50 feet in length.

## 8. MONSTER

A group of eight people must form a creature with only six legs and two hands touching the ground. They must move a distance of 12 feet thus assembled.

Recommendations: The number of arms and legs can be adjusted accordingly to different size groups.

## 9. NINE LEGGED RACE

Have your students form circles in groups of eight. Each person then has each of his ankles tied, so that each of his legs is joined to the ankle next to him (i.e. his right ankle is tied to the left ankle of the person to his right). The group is then given a large bucket of water or a tray with several cups of water on it to carry. They must move together without spilling the water for a short distance.

Recommendations: The water on the tray should be heavy enough so that all have to work to support it. The group can be told that the water is an essential life-saving serum that they must deliver. One more leg tie than the number of people playing is needed.

## THEATER GAMES

Theater games were invented to help drama students develop skills needed to effectively put on plays. Among the many skills acquired are the ability to become another character by gaining sensitivity to the roles and emotions of other people, the development of trust and cohesiveness within the acting troupe, observation, concentration and self confidence. These skills are not unique to acting but valuable in the foreign language classroom as well.

The teacher may use theater games to create security in the class. Playing another character gives the student a chance to put on a "mask" and assume a role which will allow him to adopt an accent, make mistakes without embarrassment, and risk making a fool of himself. Adult language learners, in particular, feel such a degree of anxiety that they think they appear ridiculous or mentally inferior if they make mistakes in front of their peers. Assuming another role can provide the security needed to dissolve these fears.

In addition, these games often have the effect of letting a slower learner, one who has great difficulty in grasping structure and usage, be a "winner". This is a great ego-booster and helps build personal confidence that carries over into other aspects of the class. Of course, the teacher's role cannot be underestimated. He has to show a genuine interest in his students and encourage them to be interested in each other. He must encourage participation without pushing and yet always allow a student the right of non-participation if

he feels ill at ease. The teacher must never pass judgment on a student's efforts. Viola Spolin (Spolin, 1963) says, "For a teacher to effectively teach using theater games, he must leave behind the language and attitudes of authoritarianism. All words which shut doors, have emotional content, attack a student's personality or keep a student dependent on the teacher's judgment must be avoided." If judgment is withheld, anxiety in the class will be greatly reduced.

Besides fostering security, theater games are useful in a variety of other ways as well. They provide a chance for everyone in the class to get involved actively at the same time. They take the emphasis off the individual. They stress problem-solving and promote creative thinking. Piaget (Piaget, 1953) says, "Teaching means creating situations where structures can be discovered. It does not mean transmitting structures which may be assimilated at nothing more than the verbal level." Theater games provide these situations. Finally, they can be used to effectively introduce or reinforce grammatical structures or new vocabulary in an interesting and stimulating way.

#### 1. MIRROR

Each student should find a partner and stand up facing him. One person elects to be the leader and the other the follower. The roles will switch after five minutes. The leader initiates an action and describes it, and the follower

mirrors it as if they were the person's reflection and repeats the description. For example: "I am raising my arms slowly, I am clapping my hands."

Recommendations: This is an excellent warm-up exercise which should get students to tune into what another person is doing and saying. The actions can be as simple or complicated as the level of the student permits. Good for practicing the present progressive tense.

## 2. PASSING ACTION CIRCLE

The teacher performs a simple action and describes it either before, during or after the action takes place. For example: I am taking off my right shoe, or I took off my right shoe or I will take off my right shoe. The next student repeats the first person's action, describing it and then adds one of his own. The game continues around the circle quickly with the last person doing and repeating all the preceding actions.

Recommendations: This game should be played as quickly as possible. If a student forgets a former student's action, the originator should react it immediately. Great for ages nine to thirteen. If the class is more than ten people, it would probably be better to use two smaller circles. Otherwise, the game tends to get boring and drawn-out. Use the originator of the action to make corrections for the others. Good for practicing present progressive, past or future tenses.

### 3. FAMOUS PERSON GAME

Each person is given a secret personality, the name of a famous person or one well-known to the entire class. Everyone then walks around and mixes with the other members of the group. In every way, by their gestures, the way they walk, the things they say, their accent, they try to portray their secret identity. In addition, any member of the class can ask any other member yes or no questions. For example: You may ask someone, "Are you an artist?" but you cannot ask, "What do you do for a living?" The object of the game is to discover the secret identity of every person.

Recommendations: This game can be played successfully with any level class although you might want to run through some questions they might want to ask with an elementary group. For example: Are you dead? alive? a writer? a politician? etc. Encourage your students to talk in small groups in different areas. Good for practicing questions that ellicit personal information and negative structures.

### 4. FIVE CHANGES

The whole group sits in a circle and one at a time each person describes in detail what they are wearing. All the students try to focus in closely during these descriptions. When everyone has finished, one person leaves the room. The rest of the class makes five changes in their personal appearance. For example: two people switch t-shirts, one

person parts their hair differently, two people exchange watches. Then the person comes back into the room and tries to identify as quickly as possible the changes. Each person gets a chance to go out of the room.

Recommendations: It is best to establish a two minute time limit for identifying changes to keep the game moving. This game is good for all levels and ages. Good for practicing "clothing" vocabulary.

#### 5. MACHINE

One student decides on a large object or organism and begins by going to the center of the room and becoming a part of that organism. He will initiate a simple repetitive action that he feels is representative of the larger object he is part of. As soon as the nature of the object becomes clear to another person, he joins the first person, by fitting his action to the first persons. One by one the entire group joins together. Ask each person to think of what they are made of and then to find a sound to add that suits his action. Have the machine slow down, freeze, or speed up. Have them begin making a new product.

Recommendations: Useful to get a group working together or to remind them of the need of working together to make a language class a success. Verbal encouragement is helpful: "Think like a machine." "Develop a mechanical rhythm." "Feel all your parts moving together." Good for all ages and levels.

## 6. OCCUPATIONS

Each member of the class chooses an occupation which he then acts out for the other members of the class. For example: a barber, a fireman, a traffic cop, or a nurse. Each person keeps a list of what he thinks each of the other's occupations are. At the end of the game, the person who has guessed the most correctly wins.

Recommendations: A time limit of two minutes per person should be set to keep the game moving. Good for all ages and levels. Good for practicing names of occupations and workers.

## 7. JET FLIGHT

Place on the floor or the blackboard a number of pictures of individuals and let each member of the class choose one. They then adopt the personality of the person in their picture. They are told that they are on an airplane en route to New York City from Mexico, D.F. The flight is five hours. It is necessary to meet every person on the plane and determine their occupation, background and why they are going to New York.

Recommendations: It is best to use a variety of pictures of all kinds of people. Allow three to five minutes for each person to study the picture they have chosen and to develop an interesting story. People should walk around the room and talk in small groups. This game is best played with

intermediate or advanced groups. Good for eliciting creative conversation.

#### 8. HAPPY LANDING

The class is told that each of them will take a turn being the lone survivor of a ship that has exploded. The survivor has been blinded in the explosion, but has escaped in a small row boat. A single dockworker, who witnessed the explosion, will try to guide the blinded survivor to safety through a narrow channel filled with reefs and rocks. The teacher then sets up boundaries for the channel sides and length. Have the survivor stand at one end blindfolded and the dockworker stand at the other end. The other students kneel, stand or sit throughout the channel and become the rocks and reefs. When the survivor docks successfully or bumps into a rock or boundary, both he and the the dockworker lose their turn. At this time, the rocks change positions. The game continues until everybody has had a turn as either the survivor or the dockworker.

Recommendations: Keep the channel short enough so that the game moves along quickly. Good questions for a follow-up discussion might be: "How did you feel about being blindfolded?" "What kind of directions were easy to follow and what kind were difficult?" "As the game continued did it get easier to give directions?" This game can be done with all ages and levels. Good for practicing giving and receiving directions.

## 9. ADJECTIVE CHARADES

This game follows traditional Charades' rules except instead of acting out movies or book titles, each team acts out adjectives. Each team makes up a list of adjectives for the other team to act out. One member of the team acts it out while the rest of the members of the team try and guess it.

Recommendations: It is necessary to place a one minute time limit on each charade. This game can be done with all ages and levels. Good for reviewing adjectives.

## 10. TELEGRAM

Divide the class into pairs. One person elects to be the parent and the other person the child. The child is away from home and wants something. The parent resists giving it to him, and a series of short communications via telegrams is established between them. Each person may write a total of 100 words. They may send as many telegrams as they want as long as their total number of words does not exceed 100. A time limit should be set by the teacher as well. The end of the time period may be signalled by the teacher by saying: "The telegraph office will close in five minutes."

Recommendations: Discussion following the game should begin with the question "How many children got what they wanted?" It is helpful to have each pair read their telegrams out loud. Then, "How did people get what they wanted?" "What other tactics were tried and failed?" This game can also be played

verbally. The telegrams can later be corrected by the group and the mistakes examined.

#### 11. PARTNER PICTURES

Have each member of the class choose a partner to work with. On a blank sheet of paper, have each person draw his partner as a plant or animal. Then have each person make up a list of feeding instructions and describe the habitat of the plant or animal to go with their picture. Share these with the group.

Recommendations: This game will get the best results after the group has been working together for awhile and everyone knows each other pretty well.

#### 12. MEET AND GREET

Divide the class into two groups and have them line up along the opposite sides of a room. One at a time, the players at the front of the lines walk around the room until they meet in the center where they greet each other and then go to the end of the opposite line. The lines should move rapidly. Each greeting should be spontaneous and totally different. The greeting may be either verbal or non-verbal. After everyone has had a chance to meet and greet two or three times, give each person a card which will tell him who he is and his relation to the person opposite him in line on the other side of the room. For example: former lovers, a boss

and a fired employee, seal and trainer, bank robber and teller etc. Again each will meet and greet trying to portray their role.

Recommendations: The initial exchanges should take place rapidly and be short. Verbal encouragement may be needed. The teacher might call out at intervals, "Focus on your greeting" "Who are you?" "How do you feel today?" A follow-up discussion might focus on greeting styles, what people try to say in their greetings, etc. Good for practicing greetings in different social situations.

### 13. ADVERB GAME

One person goes out of the room. The rest of the group chooses an adverb. For example: sleepily, ravenously, lazily, proudly, daintily, solemnly, etc. The person then returns and requests people in the group to do things in the manner of the adverb. For example: "Greet John in the manner of the adverb," or "walk across the room ..." or you are a stewardess on a plane, serve drinks in the manner of the adverb." He must guess from their actions what the adverb is.

Recommendations: It is best to set a time limit of about five minutes for each adverb. This insures that the game will not get bogged down. This game works best with groups at the advanced level. Good for reviewing adverbs.

14. LIFE BOAT

The group is told to imagine that they are on a large ship crossing the Arctic Ocean. The ship has just hit an iceberg and is sinking rapidly. There is only one lifeboat, and it will only carry five people. Each person must make a convincing case to the rest of the group as to why he should be allowed to go into the lifeboat and live. They may be asked to come up with an answer to this question by relating it to their own life, or they can be told to use their imaginations and adopt a new personality.

Recommendations: This game is excellent for producing an interesting and stimulating conversation. It can be used with intermediate or advanced speakers. The number of people to go in the lifeboat can vary with the size of the group. With a group of ten, approximately forty minutes should be given for the group to reach a decision. With a larger group, it would be best to divide into two sections. Good for practicing modals (should, would, could, must).

15. I AM GOING TO...

The teacher brings a number of objects in a shopping bag to class. Each student, one at a time, withdraws an object from the bag and says where they are going and what they are bringing. For example: "I am going to the beach, and I am bringing my bathing suit." Each student repeats what all the others have said before him.

Recommendations: The name of localities should be introduced earlier by showing pictures of the city, the country, the jungle, the desert, etc. The repetitious nature of the game makes it ideal for student-correction of errors. The originator of a statement can be used as a model. It is best played in a small group of five to six people so that the game moves quickly and is not boring. Good for practicing the present progressive tense.

16. EMERGENCY

The following problems are read to the group and each student is asked to describe his solution to the rest of the group:

- A. You have just found out that the dam behind the town where you live is cracked and about to collapse. The town must be evacuated. You have 45 minutes to select a suitcase of personal possessions. What will you take?
- B. You have volunteered to spend the next ten years in an isolated Arctic outpost. For this, you will be well-paid and become famous. All your needs such as food and warm clothing will be met. You may take with you a single box of possessions not to exceed 100 pounds. What will you take?

Recommendations: A good game for gaining insight into one's own personal values. A discussion of values might follow. This can also be an effective writing assignment.

17. NAME SIX

One player stands in the center with the rest of the class around him in a circle. The people in the circle pass a small object from hand to hand. When the person in the center with his eyes shut claps his hands, the person holding the object must retain it. The center player then calls out a category (U.S. cities, states, clothing, animals, foods, etc. or adjectives, adverbs, nouns, etc.). The player who has the object must start it on its way immediately. Before the object has been passed around the circle twice, he must name six objects that belong in that category. If he cannot, he then changes places with the person in the center.

Recommendations: If your circle is large, you may only want to pass the object around once. The number of objects can also be increased or decreased. Good for practicing clothing, food, animals and other vocabulary.

18. ALIBI

Two students are suspected of committing a crime. The details of the crime are outlined by the group. The two suspects leave the room and are given five minutes to prepare an alibi that will prove they were together elsewhere at the time of the crime. They then return one at a time to be interrogated by their classmates acting as detectives. Two secretaries may be appointed to note questions and answers (Where were you? What were you wearing?). Their answers should, of course, corroborate, for if there is any discrepancy, they will be charged with the crime.

Recommendations: This game will work best with intermediate and advanced students. Good for practicing questions.

19. TWO LINE ADJECTIVE PLAY

Each player is given a card with an adjective on it (sleepy, grouchy, conceited, etc.). The group is asked to produce a cumulative story with each player given two sentences. These sentences should be said in a way that portrays the adjective they were given. At the end of the story, the group is asked to identify each person's adjective.

Recommendations: This game is appropriate for all ages and levels. It would be best to have enough adjectives on hand so that the game can be played twice. Good for reviewing adjectives.

20. BLIND STATUES

Divide the class into two groups. One group will be the artists and the other group will be clay. The artists choose a theme to dedicate their statue to (love, war, motherhood). The clay group will be blindfolded. The artists give verbal directions to guide the pieces of the statue into place. When the statue is finished, the blindfolds are removed.

Recommendations: This game helps to develop a sense of respect for another's work. Good for all ages and levels.

21. SCAVENGER HUNT

It is necessary to have a group of about twenty for this game. Each person is given a list and told to search for

someone in the room who:

1. is wearing red underwear
2. likes spinach
3. was born in April
4. has owned a turtle
5. speaks three languages, etc.

Recommendations: Excellent game for getting acquainted. Good for all ages and levels. Good for practicing questions and negatives.

## IMPROVISATIONS

An improvisation is a play in which the players together create their own dialog around a simple plot. This plot can be built around a story, a poem, props, an opening line or a conflict situation. The improvisation can be taped and used as a source of student-created material. A written transcript of the play is then made by the teacher for later use in studying grammar points. Corrections can be made by the teacher or other members of the class. This self-made material should have more meaning to the student since he has made a personal investment in its creation.

The problems that can be expected to arise in doing improvisations are myriad and will require patience and understanding on the part of the teacher. First, the teacher must be ready for inexperienced groups to produce formless improvisations. They will seemingly have no beginning or end. People may talk all at once, often incoherently, followed by long, confused silence. There may be tremendous difficulty from the observer's point of view in following the "plot." However, the group will certainly know what they're trying to do and when asked will be able to explain it in great detail. In general, improvisations should not be attempted with a group that is not used to working with each other. In addition, instructions need to be specific, and the improvisations need to be well-structured when they are first introduced.

Second, if you divide your class into small groups and have each perform for the rest of the class, often the latter group will not use their planned improvisation and will substitute a spur-of-the-moment new one. This might be discouraged by requesting that the players see their original plans through.

A problem could occur if you ask your class to perform their improvisation for an outside group. The class is its own audience and outsiders detract from the full concentration a player must maintain to make an improvisation work. In addition, follow-up discussions should be steered away from critical appraisals and concentrate more on how people felt about their improvisation, whether it worked, and why or why not.

Improvisations provide a time in the classroom for creative conversation, without correction, when the teacher can step outside the group and listen to and observe their progress. A time without correction can be an important step in providing security in the classroom. Some students may feel less threatened dealing exclusively with other learners and should have that opportunity. It is important for the teacher to make it clear to the class that this is indeed a time for work without correction, where communication is placed above correct grammatical usage.

## 1. ROLE PLAYS

Divide the class into groups of two or three people. Each group is given a problem to solve and each person in the group must assume a role in the process. These problems are then resolved in front of the rest of the group as if the group solving the problem were in a play. Everyone should be given five to ten minutes to read through their problem and prepare. The teacher and dictionaries can be used as resource materials. The following are a list of sample role play situations:

- A. Juan is twelve years old and has a younger brother, Pepe, who is nine. Juan has made the rule that Pepe is never to borrow Juan's things without asking. It is Saturday afternoon and Pepe wants very much to meet his friends at the movies, but it is already late and he might miss them if he walks. The rest of the family is not at home. He takes Juan's bike without permission and while he is at the movies, it is stolen. Now, he must return home and confront Juan who has already discovered his bike missing and suspects Pepe has taken it.
- B. You are the mother (or father) of a sixteen year old daughter. Good grades are very important to you, and you constantly stress that your children should study hard and become doctors or lawyers.

You are Maria, the daughter. You don't like school and last night you watched television instead of

studying for your history exam. As a result, you thought it better to cheat than to fail the test. Unfortunately, you were caught by the teacher and have been suspended from school. You now must go home and tell your mother.

C. You are eighteen years old and while at the university in Mexico, you have fallen in love with another student. Now you must return to your hometown and tell your boyfriend of four years that your relationship has ended. He loves you very much and will take this news very hard.

D. While on the way to meet your husband for lunch, you took a short cut down a one-way street the wrong way and smashed into a parked car. In your rush to leave the house, you forgot your license and registration. Your husband has warned you that if you are late in meeting him one more time, he will cut off your shopping allowance. You now have to deal with a stern policeman as well as the irate owner of the dented car as quickly as possible so that you can still meet your husband on time.

Recommendations: These situations can be adapted to fit any class or age group and can be used effectively as a starting point in recognizing cross-cultural differences. (Ways of punishing children in different societies, ways of dealing with the law, sibling quarrels, etc.). Other people in the

class may be asked to offer different solutions to the problems. The students must be asked to try to solve the problem in as realistic a way as possible. What would they do (have done) in that situation?

2. Read or tell your class the story of The Blind Man and the Elephant (Lillian Quigley, New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1959.) The story is about six blind men who go to visit the Rajah. On the way, they encounter an elephant. Each feels a different part of the elephant and likens it to something different. (The side is like a wall, the trunk is like a snake, the tusk is like a spear, the leg is like a tree, the ear is like a fan, and the tail is like a rope.) Each man argues that he is right and a great fight ensues. The Rajah comes along and stops the fight and explains that each has only felt a small part of the elephant. On their way home, the six agree that to learn the truth they must put all the parts together. Have your class, in one or two groups, put on an improvisation of the story.

Recommendations: A variation would be to have your students write stories with a moral and then choose one of them to improvise around.

### 3. GRAB BAG

Divide into groups of four or five people. Each group draws a slip of paper out of four different bags. One bag has the name of places (a motel office, toy shop, haunted

house, laboratory, abandoned mine shaft, etc.). The second bag has specific times (Saturday afternoon, Christmas morning, your birthday, midnight, Halloween, first day of school). The third bag has names of people (Santa Claus, Columbus, A policeman, bus driver, a housewife). The fourth bag has weather conditions (a blizzard, fog, a hurricane, a hot day, the tropics). Each of the groups then combines the four slips of paper into an improvisation. The groups should be given fifteen to twenty minutes in which to prepare and then take turns doing them for the rest of the group.

Recommendations: The teacher might also provide costumes, accessories, props and noisemakers.

#### 4. POSITIVE/NEGATIVE CHARACTERIZATION

Divide the class into groups of three. One person will play the role of a customer who has been shopping all day and is fed up with everybody and everything. The second person is a shop assistant who hates working in the store, dislikes most customers and dislikes this particular customer especially because it is nearly closing time. The third person is the store manager, a sour, scrooge-like person who likes making money but dislikes people, especially customers who arrive late after the cash register has been balanced. Have the groups act out an improvisation between the three characters all at the same time in different parts of the room and then repeat them for the rest of the class. When all the groups have finished, have them react the scene except this time the

customer will be a rather shy person, who is anxious not to bother people. The assistant is new on the job and anxious to make a good impression on both the customer and the manager. The manager has not found it easy to get good shop assistants, likes this one, and is anxious to be helpful in every way.

Recommendations: Questions for a follow-up discussion might include: "Which scene was easier to act out?" "Did you find it was easy to switch character?" "What is the relation between emotion and acting?"

#### 5. APOLOGY

Have each student write a brief letter of apology to anyone for anything real or imagined. Give them approximately fifteen minutes to do this. Have each student read his letter out loud. Choose one student to bring his letter and come sit in front of the group. Another student then sits with his back to him. The second student will be the recipient of the apology. The student with the letter has decided not to write after all but to telephone and ask for forgiveness. The students improvise the scene.

Recommendations: Possible questions for discussion might be, "What changes took place between the letter and the phone call?" "What new information did the audience learn?" "What did you learn about the character of each player?" "What does one person do or say that makes someone else react in a particular way?" This improvisation could be a good

time to talk about letters, telephone calls and what we say when we apologize.

#### 6. PAPER BAG SKITS

Fill two or three bags with five or six objects that have no relationship to each other whatsoever. Each bag may contain the same objects if the groups are working in separate areas. Each group has to do an improvisation using all of the props in their bag. Each person in the group must have a part in the play. The groups should be given ten minutes for planning and then they must perform them for the rest of the group.

Recommendations: The teacher and dictionaries can be used as resource materials. The improvisation can also be centered around a grammar point by explaining that they must use as many tag questions as possible during their improvisation.

#### 7. RELATIONSHIPS

Divide the group into pairs and have each pair decide in secret what relationship they will have with each other. For example: one relationship might be a mother with a sick child or two soldiers in a trench before a big battle. Each pair then takes a turn acting out their relationship in front of the group for two or three minutes. At the end of this time, the group guesses at the relationship.

Recommendations: A good starting question for discussion might be, "What first gave you an idea of what the relationship

was?" A variation of this improvisation is to have the pairs choose a locality and act that out instead. For example: a church, an operating room, or a whaling ship. Props can be used to indicate the physical characteristics of their environment.

#### 8. MOCK INTERVIEW

Several students are interviewed to fill an imaginary vacancy with the other members of the class acting as the interviewing board. The board confers and chooses the best applicant.

Recommendations: Good discussion questions might be: "Why was the applicant chosen?" "What roles do job applicants take on?" Good opportunity for discussion about interviewing, presenting skills that would be useful in gaining employment, and competition.

#### 9. AT A RESTAURANT

The group agrees on a single topic of conversation and then proceeds to eat and drink a large meal at a restaurant keeping up this continuous conversation for ten minutes. A discussion of place settings, how to signal the waiter, tipping, etc., should precede this exercise.

Recommendations: It is recommended that the class first discuss phrases and vocabulary typical to restaurants. This is a good place to introduce such realia items as restaurant placemats

and menus. This game can be played in other localities as well, for example: at the travel agent's. It may be done in pairs instead of with the whole group.

#### 10. METAPHORS

Discuss the meaning of several common American proverbs (Don't put all your eggs in one basket, a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush). Then have small groups draw a proverb from a paper bag and design an improvisation in which their proverb is used as the final line.

Recommendations: This improvisation could easily be worked into a larger unit on American folklore.

#### 11. SELL YOUR GROUP

Divide into small groups and have each group prepare an advertisement or commercial to sell your group or your group's services on television. The rest of the group will form the television audience.

Recommendations: This might be a good time to discuss the role of television in the United States and to examine advertisements and commercials to see what messages they are subliminally carrying.

#### 12. LIFE STORY

Have each person write one page about an important experience in their life. Then, divide into groups of four

## PART II

### GAMES FOR CHILDREN - AGES FIVE-EIGHT

#### THEATER GAMES

The use of theater games is especially important in the classroom for children. Children thrive on spontaneity and have a natural tendency to fantasize that should be encouraged and promoted. Children particularly love to be someone else, model the adults they see around them, and be an important person. They love to think up their own games in which they take a situation from real life and play-act it. This play-acting is extremely important for a child's growth. It allows them to express strong emotion and as a result, become sensitive to the effect of emotion on other people.

The games should be mature enough to challenge a child's interest, yet simple enough for them to understand. A short planning session in which simple and clear instructions are given helps to insure the success of the game.

#### 1. RHYTHM GAME

Everyone sits in a circle and each child is given a color (or a number, etc.). The teacher starts the rhythm--two claps on knees, two claps with hands and then he points to himself and gives his color, and then points to someone else in the circle and names their color. Without losing rhythm, that person must give his color at the appropriate

time and point to another person and give their color.

Everyone claps in rhythm throughout the game.

Recommendations: Be sure to start off very slowly until the group knows the rhythm really well. Good for practicing colors, numbers or fruits.

2. PUT YOUR HANDS ON YOUR... (head, arm, leg, foot, eyes, etc.)

Everyone stands up. One person calls out: "Put your hands on your head" and the last person to do it has to sit down. The last person left standing is the winner and gets to call out the directions in the next game.

Recommendations: The teacher should start calling out the directions until the children know them really well. Otherwise, the game goes too slowly and the children lose interest. Excellent for reviewing the parts of the body.

3. SPACE EXPLORATION

Give directions for children to explore the space of a room by calling out: "Run to a corner!" "Jump to the window!" "Sit down!" "Stand up slowly!", etc.

Recommendations: After the kids learn all the different verbs, choose a different leader every day to give the directions. This game can be played in a surprisingly small amount of space. Good for practicing the command form and adverbs and can be adapted for use with the present progressive tense.

#### 4. DEAF AND DUMB SPELLING

Divide the class up into two teams and have them line up on opposite sides of the room. The teacher needs to have a list of words that the children have studied. The game follows traditional spelling bee rules. Give the first player a word. If he spells it correctly, a new word goes to the first player on the opposite team. If he misspells it, he sits down. The variation to this game is that instead of vowels, the player makes one of the following motions:

A - raises his hand

E - raises his foot

I - points to an eye

O - points to his open mouth

U - points to the teacher

For example: if the word to be spelled is table, the player does the following: says T, raises his hand, says B, says L, raises his foot.

Recommendations: This game must be played rapidly and players should be spelled down fast. Children must have prior knowledge of the letters of the alphabet. Good for developing spelling skills.

#### 5. ROBOT

Choose one child to be the robot. The teacher or another child winds him up saying: "one, two, a robot are you!" After that his classmates give him instructions such as: "Robot walk!" "Robot draw a flower!" and after he has performed

these actions, the pupil stops him by saying: "Stop Robot!" Competition can be added to the game by giving the robot a point for each task he completes. When it is time for the game to end, the class releases the robot by saying: "One two, three, four, you aren't a robot anymore."

Recommendations: This game can be introduced early after the presentation of only a few verbs. This gives the students the opportunity to begin using them creatively right away. Good for practicing the command form of verbs, directions and prepositions.

#### 6. BIG/LITTLE

Have each child find a space big enough to contain him with arms and legs outstretched. Tell each child to make himself as big as possible. Face big, mouth big, hands big, toes big, etc. Next, ask him to be very small. Demonstrate by curling up in a heap with your arms wrapped tightly around your body. Then tell him to make himself big again and then small, inhale on big, try to blow himself way up and then shrink down on little by exhaling. Next, tell him to change as rapidly as he can from big to little, inhaling and exhaling.

Recommendations: This game can be used to demonstrate and reinforce the adjectives big and little and to give each child a sense of his physical self in space. Verbal encouragement should be given throughout. For example: "Try to touch the four corners of the room."

## 7. OPEN/CLOSE

First have the children close their hands into fists and then open them wide. Next close them one finger at a time and open them one finger at a time. Finally, open all ten fingers in a line from one side to the other like a peacock's tail. Next, open and close these ten fingers as rapidly and smoothly as possible.

Recommendations: Good for practicing the command form of verbs.

## 8. ROLE PLAYS

Divide the class into pairs. Give each pair a problem to solve and then act out in front of the group.

- A. You and your best friend have had a serious quarrel and are not speaking to each other. Now he is having a birthday party and has invited all the other children in your class except you. You really want to go to the party. You have decided to call him on the telephone about a school assignment and try to get him to invite you to the party.
- B. As a punishment, your parents have suspended your television watching for one week. You have just discovered that there is a special on tonight about Indians that you really want to see. You plan to go to your father and try to persuade him to let you see the show.

C. The stolen bicycle role play. (See page 31,  
letter A in Part I.)

9. IMPROVISATIONS

Simple improvisations can be constructed around a number of typical fantasy situations that children indulge in on a day to day basis. Some suggestions for improvisations are:

- A. At a restaurant - children can be cooks, waiters and customers.
- B. On a bus trip - children can be the driver, ticket takers, and passengers.
- C. At the store - children can be the shop manager, assistants, cashiers and customers.
- D. House - children can be fathers, mothers, children and grandparents.
- E. At the doctor's office - children can be doctors, nurses, sick people and receptionists.

Recommendations: You can make signs and props to make these situations more realistic.

## SINGING GAMES

### 1. WHERE IS THUMBKIN? (to be sung to the tune of Frere Jacques)

Lyrics: Where is Thumbkin? Where is Thumbkin?

Here I am. Here I am.

How are you today? Very well, Thank you.

Run away. Run away.

Repeat using pointer, middle finger, ring finger and pinkie.

Directions: Line 1 is sung with both hands behind your back.

During line 2, you take your hands out from behind your back one at a time with your hands in fists and your thumbs up.

During line 3, you bend your thumbs at the joints, one at a time to indicate talking to each other. During line 4,

put your hands back behind your back one at a time. Repeat for verse two with your index finger extended.

Recommendations: You may substitute, "See you tomorrow" for "Run away," if you prefer. This song can be effectively worked into a dialogue between two people meeting on the street.

### 2. THE FARMER IN THE DELL

Lyrics: The farmer in the dell

The farmer in the dell

Hi ho the derry-o

The farmer in the dell

II. The farmer takes a wife (repeat as above)

III. The wife takes a child

IV. The child takes a dog

V. The dog takes a cat

VI. The cat takes a rat

VII. The rat takes the cheese

Directions: The children all join hands and skip in a circle around one person in the center who is the farmer. During verse 2, the farmer chooses a second person to come out of the circle to be his wife. The wife then chooses a child, the child a dog, etc. By the end, there will be seven people in the center.

Recommendations: Pictures of people and animals can be used initially to cue the new verses until they are learned by heart. Good for practicing the names of animals.

### 3. I'M A LITTLE TEAPOT

Lyrics: I'm a little teapot short and stout  
Here is my handle, here is my spout  
When I get all steamed up, I just shout  
Tip me over and pour me out.

Directions: Everyone stands up. During line 1, they show that they are short and stout by describing their shape with their hands. During line 2, they make a handle by putting one hand on their waist, and a spout on the other side by extending their arms, palms up. During the last line, everyone leans toward their spout side as if they were being poured.

### 4. HOKEY POKEY

Lyrics: Put your right foot in, put your right foot out  
Put your right foot in and you shake it all about  
You do the hokey pokey and you turn yourself around  
That's what its all about

Continue with left foot, right arm, left arm, right elbow, left elbow, head, and whole self.

Directions: Everybody forms a circle and follows the directions outlined in the song. After the final line, everyone claps once before starting the next verse.

Recommendations: Useful in practicing the parts of the body and right vs. left.

#### 5. TEN LITTLE INDIANS

Lyrics: One little, two little, three little Indians,  
Four little, five little, six little Indians,  
Seven little, eight little, nine little Indians,  
Ten little Indian boys.

Directions: Divide the class up into nine units and assign them numbers one to nine. As each little Indian is called out in the song, the children stand up and sit down quickly. On the last line, everyone jumps up.

Recommendations: Useful for teaching and reinforcing numbers.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY OF RESOURCES

1. DeMille, Richard. Put Your Mother On The Ceiling. New York: Walker and Co., 1955.

A book of thirty guided fantasies to use with children ages 6-13. It could be adapted for foreign language use.

2. Draus-Srebic, Eva. "Classroom Games in the Compulsory School," ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING JOURNAL, v.31, #1, October 1976, pp. 19-23.

Several ideas for games, play acting and role-play for use with elementary school children.

3. Lindsay, P. "The Use of Drama in TEFL," ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING JOURNAL, v.29, #1, October 1974, pp. 55-59.

Talks about drama as communication of total expression. A good introduction to mime, role-playing and improvisation.

4. McSweeney, Maxine. Creative Children's Theater for Home, School, Church, and Playground. (S. Brunswick: A.S. Barnes & Co., 1974).

This book divides children's drama into three basic categories, imitative play, creative drama and theater. It also includes nine short plays for children and general directions for the staging and rehearsal of plays.

5. Miller, Victor B., and Wolf, Mary H. Theater's Different Demands: An Approach to the Classroom Teaching of Plays. (This booklet was developed in a Title III program (ESEA) and administered by the Connecticut State Department of Education and the American Shakespeare Festival Theater.)

This book outlines a drama workshop in 10 periods for actors with no experience. The book contains numerous games and improvisations as well as objectives for each session and discussion questions.

6. Project Adventure, Adventure Curriculum: Physical Education (Hamilton, Mass: Project Adventure, 1974)

This manual contains many of the initiative games that Karl Rohnke developed for the Outward Bound schools and later for an alternative 10th grade physical education course. It discusses their use and application. It describes as well the building and use of a Ropes Course. It costs \$4.00 and can be ordered directly from Project Adventure.

7. Rees, A.L.W. "Games and Question Practice," ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING JOURNAL, v.29, #2, January, 1975, pp. 135-143.

Twelve games to stimulate learners to form questions.

8. Spolin, Viola. Improvisations for the Theater. (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1963.)

An excellent handbook of teaching techniques and improvisations for use in workshops and classes. Contains the theory and foundation behind theater games, over 300 actual exercises sequenced for use and a special section on theater for children.

9. Spolin, Viola. Theater Games File. (St. Louis: Cemrel, 1975.)

A box containing cards with exercises and improvisations. Each card has directions for side-coaching and discussions. They are sequenced for use.

10. Walker, T.A. "Language Through Drama" ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING JOURNAL, v.31, #2, January 1977, pp. 141-145.

This article explores the use of improvisational drama as a medium for language teaching. These plays were tape recorded and used as a script for written exercises in idiom and usage.

11. Way, Brian. Development Through Drama. (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1967.)

This book covers all aspects of drama for school use at all age levels. It explores a number of exercises using imagination, sound and movement, characterization and improvisation to promote sensitivity of self and group.