**Laser Beams**

**Time: approx 10 minutes.**

**How to Play:**

1. Have your students form pairs. One person needs to wait outside the room. If there aren’t enough students to form pairs you, as the teacher may need to play.

2. Each pair needs to stand opposite each other. They can spread out around the space. They can also be at varying heights. The one thing that is most important is that they must maintain eye contact with each other and remain facing each other. This becomes the laser beam.

3. Place an object somewhere in the room that is surrounded by the “laser beams.”

4. The student who is outside the room enters and needs to work through the obstacle course to try to get to the beam. They need to strategise and think about which is the best possible way to get to the object without crossing a beam.

5. If the student crosses a beam the student pair, whose beam has been crossed must say “Buzz!”

6. The student mustn’t cross a beam more than three times or they are out.

1. Start by having each student sit on a chair in a circle.
2. Facilitate a discussion on how people communicate. Some questions to ask might be: do we just use words to communicate? What else do we use to communicate? What happens if we don’t use all these things to communicate? How has technology changed the way we communicate?
3. Ask a student to volunteer to stand in the middle of the circle. They must also remove their chair from the circle. There should now be one less chair than there are student’s sitting in the circle.
4. The aim of the game is for the student’s sitting in the circle to switch places with another student sitting opposite them in the circle. The only catch is, they must not speak, use hand gestures or facial expressions. Only their eyes can be used.
5. When the student’s decide to switch the student standing in the middle of the circle must get to one of the seats before the other student thereby potentially changing who is in the middle of the circle.
6. 1. If you have a large group, split them into two smaller groups and have them make a circle facing inward. They also need to be shoulder to shoulder.
7. 2. Have everyone place their arms outstretched into the centre of the circle.
8. 3. Each person must then grab the hand of two different people. This will create a big looking mess of arms and hands in the centre of the circle.
9. 4. The aim of the exercise is to now try to untangle the knot*without* letting go of any hands.
10. 5. Once the group has succeeded (and this may take some time), try it again but this time *without any speaking at all.*
11. At the end of the exercise, discuss the differences between the first situation where you were allowed to communicate and the second situation where you were not.
12. It is a really interesting exercise to see how people react to problems and who steps up and leads when needing to deal with them.
13. Have student’s stand in a circle.
14. Move around the circle in a clockwise direction for the next lot of steps.
15. Each person needs to come up with a simple action. They demonstrate that action to the group by saying, for example “Let’s brush our hair.”
16. Everyone in the circle repeats “Yes, Let’s!” in unison and completes the action.
17. Continue around the circle until everyone has had an opportunity to offer.
18. Have student’s form two circles. Make sure the students on the inside circle are facing those in the outside circle.
19. Have eack pair talk to each other for about three minutes.
20. Have the student’s in the outside circle move two people along in a clockwise direction.
21. Repeat Step 2.
22. Repeat Step 3.
23. Repeat Step 2 however this time the pairs move out of the circle and find a space in the room to talk privately.
24. Student’s return to one large circle standing next to their final partner.
25. Each student must share with the class what they learnt about their partner.

1. One person waits outside the classroom.

2. The remaining student’s form a circle and close their eyes.

3. The teacher selects one student to be the murderer by squeezing them on the shoulder.

4. Everyone opens their eyes and the person waiting outside is let into the room and circle.

5. The person in the centre of the circle has three chances to guess who the murderer might be.

6. The murderer’s job is to wink at different people around the circle. As each person gets winked at they must die an active, dramatic death.

You might also like to try having the entire class guess who the murderer is rather than one particular student.

**Freeze and Justify**

The Granddaddy of 'em all.  Just about everyone who has ever had an acting class knows this one, so I'll be brief.

The group sits or stands around the acting space.

Two people enter the space and begin to improvise a scene, with dialogue and as much physical action as possible.

At any moment, anyone else in the group may shout, "FREEZE!"

The actors freeze instantly and exactly.

The person who stopped the scene taps one of the actors on the shoulder.  The actor sits down and the new person takes his or her position exactly.

The new person must now initiate a new and DIFFERENT scene.  The scene must flow naturally from the positions of the two bodies, and it is the new person's responsibility to communicate to his or her partner and to the audience what the new scene is about.

At any moment another person may shout, "FREEZE!" and it begins again.

**Pointers**

With some groups it is necessary to make a rule that no one may freeze a scene until the situation has been clearly established and both actors have contributed.

With groups of kids I sometimes have them take turns saying, "Freeze!"  In other words, as a scene goes on, only one person is allowed to freeze it.  Then when he does, the next person is allowed to freeze it, and so on.

If you have a reticent student, you can shout "Freeze!" for him and then coach him as necessary.

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**The Martha Game**

I have no idea who Martha is or how this game got its name.  Works best with a group of 8 - 12.  With a larger group, divide them into two teams.

Group stands outside a designated performance space.

One person runs into the space, forms her body into a statue and announces what she is, as in "I'm a tree."

Instantly the next person runs on and forms something else in the same picture.  "I'm a bench under the tree."

The next person further adds to the picture.  "I'm a bum on the bench."

"I'm a dog peeing on the tree."

"I'm the newspaper the bum is sleeping under."

Etc., until the whole group is part of the picture.

Start again.  And again.  Etc.

Coach this to go very, very fast.  There is no time to think--just go!

If there are two teams, they alternate.

**Pointers**

Fast, Fast, Fast!

Make sure a different person starts each picture.

**Variations**

After a while, you might say, "Okay. . .on a count of three this becomes a moving picture!"

Or even, "A moving, talking picture!"

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**What Are You Doing?**

Lots of zany fun.

Group gets in a line at the edge of the playing space.  The first person enters the space and begins to pantomime a simple activity--for example, brushing his teeth.

The second person runs on and says, "What are you doing?"

The first person may answer anything EXCEPT what he is actually doing.  In our example he might say, "I'm washing the car."

The moment the second person hears the answer, she must begin to pantomime the mentioned activity.

The first person goes to the end of the line and the third person runs on and says, "What are you doing?"

Etc.

**Pointers**

The person acting MUST NOT STOP until he or she has answered the question.  Side coach to make sure.

The new person MUST START IMMEDIATELY when the answer is heard.

The answer MUST NOT be what the person is doing, but, for convenience, it should also NOT be something that LOOKS LIKE what the person is actually doing.

**Variations**

After a while, add to the original formula, "I'm \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."  It can become, "I'm \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."  Eventually it can become, "I'm \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ with a \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ while \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_."  (For example, "I'm painting the barn with a codfish while snorkeling."  It doesn't have to make sense.)  The second person must begin to act as soon as she hears even PART of the answer.  (In the example, we should see her painting the barn even before she hears that she's using a codfish.  When she hears about the snorkeling she'll have to adjust.)  Side coach to make sure they get all three details into their pantomiming.

You can play this as a tournament if you want.  Two people bounce the question back and forth until one of them "fouls" by repeating himself, stopping the action before answering the question, not starting the acting in time, or answering the truth.  A new challenger steps in, and so on until all but one person have been eliminated.

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**Everyone Who. . .**

More of a warmup game than an improvisation game.  A little like musical chairs.

Everyone sits in a circle.  There should be one fewer chairs than people.

The person who is left in the middle ("IT") says something like, "Everyone wearing red."  or, "Everyone who has a brother," or "Everyone who is left-handed."  Any description that is likely to describe **some** and unlikely to describe **all**will do.

Everyone who fits the description must move to a different chair.

"IT" is also trying for a seat.

Usually a different person will be left standing, and become "IT."

In addition to being fast-paced and very physical (especially when played with highly competitive, creative adults), this game helps a cast to get to know each other, and it calls for strategy that depends in part on how well "IT" knows the others.  Great fun.

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**Pinocchio**

This is a really great way to start a rehearsal on a physical high.  It is a physical warmup/stretching exercise with dramatic content to keep it focused.  It is named after the wooden puppet.  (Sometimes at Christmas I do this with my young students and call it The Nutcracker.  I suppose Pygmalion would work too.)  It consists basically of a narrative pantomime of the wooden puppet SLOWLY coming to life.   What follows is approximately what I say.  (This one I did create.)

Right now you're made completely of wood.  Your arms and legs are carved from a single piece of wood.  You can't move any part of yourself at all.

Now the magic spell has begun.  It begins at the top of your head.  The spell moves down slowly until your head down to your eyebrows is flesh and blood.  Try and move your eyebrows.

The spell keeps moving down.  Now you can move your eyes!  All your life you've been staring straight ahead, and now you can look to the sides.

The spell gets to your ears and your nose.  See if you can wiggle them.

The spell gets to your mouth.  You can smile.  It feels strange at first, and probably looks pretty strange too, but you grow more comfortable with it.  Try some other facial expressions as well.

Slowly you discover that you can turn your head.  Careful!  You can look up and down carefully as well.  Look!  You have feet!  This is the first time you were ever sure.

The spell reaches your shoulders.  But remember, your arms and hands are still attached to your torso, since you are carved from a single piece of wood, so you can move ONLY your shoulders.  Try some circles.  Do you feel a tingle up and down your spine?  That's the magic working.

The spell reaches your chest.  You can puff it out like a soldier.

Your elbows can move now, but still not your hands.  As the spell goes lower, see if you can pull your left hand away from your body.  Ooofff!  You did it.

Bring your hand up to your face and study it.  See if you can move the fingers.  Wow!  You've never seen anything so beautiful!

See if you can get your right hand free as well.  Does it move too?

The spell has reached your waist.  Carefully bend forward, to the side.  See if you bend backwards.  See if you can make a circle.

The spell reaches your hips, but your knees are still locked together and your feet are still attached to your pedestal.

The spell gets to your knees.  See if they bend!

Reach down and see if you can pull your left foot free.  Ooofff!  Point the toe.  Flex the foot.  Make little circles.

Now see if you can get your right foot free.

You're all real now!  See how you can move.  Careful at first--these are your first steps!  Let's find all the ways our new bodies move!

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**Murder Mystery**

This one's complicated, but it can be really fun for an advanced group. I don't do this with my elementary students, but when I get a chance to play it with the folks in the performing troupe to which I belong, I just love it.   It's a little like a cross between the board game "Clue," the kids' game "Whisper Down the Lane," and the parlor game "Charades."  Central to the game is the idea that there has been a murder, and the task is to discover **Who** was murdered, **Where**they were murdered, and **How** they were killed.  (Think, "A noun is a person, place, or thing.")  The order is important, as you will see.

The group divides into two teams.  Team A leaves the room, and Team B brainstorms a person, place and thing.  (For example, Shirley Temple, in Burger King, with a butter churn.)

The first person from Team A enters, and Team B tells her the three things.

The second person from Team A enters.

The first person must communicate all three items without speaking.  The twist is that the second person can't speak either, so there is no way for the first person to be sure she has communicated successfully.  The second person may indicate through sounds, humming or gestures that he does or does not understand--he may even try to "restate" an item in a different way to be sure he has it, but no language of any kind is permitted.

When the second person thinks he has all three items, the next person enters, and the message is passed on in the same way.

When the last person in Group A thinks she has figured out the three items, she announces her conclusion--which is almost never identical to the original information.

The teams switch roles and the process is repeated.

**Pointers**

It is a good idea to establish at least a little bit of "Charades Code" to start with.  For example, holding up one, two, or three fingers can indicate which of the items--person, place or thing--is being performed at a given time.  Usually the three items are enacted one at a time.  It is not necessary to act out the actual crime.  (In the example, you might hum "The Good Ship Lollipop" and mime curly hair for Shirley Temple, eat a pretend hamburger after indicating a crown for Burger King, and then mime churning butter.  It is not necessary to mime clubbing poor Shirley with the churn--and in fact it will probably confuse the issue by making the "churn" look less like a churn.)

Music (hummed but not, of course, sung) can be extremely useful here.  I once saw a person act "Tinkerbell" by  three bars of the opening music from The Wonderful World of Disney and tapping an imaginary wand.  The person receiving understood instantly.  Commercial themes, television show themes, pop music--all are easily recognized and convey much.

If a group is good at the game, they will start deliberately choosing combinations of items that will be hard to guess, but at first a leader might want to veto items that are too obscure.  (Of course, half the fun of the game is that people get off on the wrong track, and since half of the group is always "audience" they are able to watch as the train comes derailed.)

It is very difficult for players familiar with charades to understand that not only the "giver" but the "receiver" as well must not speak.  Be sure to stress this.  You cannot, as in charades, verbalize your guesses so as to help the actor know how he's doing.

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**Hitchhiker**

This game combines improvisation with careful observation, and so makes a great rehearsal tool for serious improv performers who need to be able to see and imitate easily.  Plus it's lots of fun.

Set up four chairs to resemble the front and back seats of a car.

The first three people get in the car, leaving the rear passenger-side seat empty.

The three people in the car invent a scenario to explain their traveling together, and mime driving along, improvising a conversation, etc.

The next person in line enters the scene as a hitchhiker.  The hitchhiker must have a fairly clearly defined character.

The people in the car must stop to pick up the hitchhiker, but they improvise how politely they do it, etc., based on their characters.

Once the hitchhiker is in the car and a four-way conversation begun, everyone in the car begins to pick up the hitchhiker's personality and mannerisms.  (For instance, if the hitchhiker is paranoid, soon everyone is paranoid.  If the hitchhiker is drunk, soon everyone is drunk.  If the hitchhiker is excessively cheerful, soon everyone is, etc.)

Once everyone has fully taken on the new personality, the driver leaves the scene and everyone moves over one seat, so that the front passenger becomes the driver, the driver's-side rear passenger becomes the front passenger, etc.

Repeat with a new hitchhiker, who has a different personality.  (Until they have picked up the new person, the three in the car continue to play the first hitchhiker's personality.)

**Pointers**

If you feel the game has gone on long enough, just enter the scene yourself as a hitchhiker who is blind, or a small child, or something else guaranteed to cause a fatal accident once the driver catches it.

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**Look Up (Dude!)**

I call this game "Dude!" but most people call it "Look Up" or some other less exciting name.  It is an excellent focusing exercise, and is useful both for getting a cast to function as a unit and for evaluating how well an ensemble is working.

Stand in a circle.  Everyone look at the floor.

When the leader calls out, "Look up!" everyone must look directly into the face of someone else in the circle.

Most people will find they are looking at someone who is not looking back at them, but a few people will probably find that they are staring directly into someone else's eyes.

When this happens, these two people are "out," and must exclaim to each other, "Dude!" as they leave the circle.

Continue in this fashion until only one (or, if there's an even number in the group, two) are left.

At first this won't take very long, but after a while a group will get to the point where they can go for a long time without anyone being knocked out.  It takes a real psychic bond--essential also for real ensemble work.

**Variations**

If this is being used as a warmup and you don't want an elimination game (as I often don't) you can play so that any two who find themselves facing each other must shout, "Dude!" and change places as fast as possible.

Obviously the "Dude!" part is not required.  I just think it makes it more fun.

**Pointers**

With young performers, watch carefully so that they don't "cheat."  They may fall into a pattern, which will of course prevent anyone from going out, but it defeats the purpose of the game.  Stress that patterns are not allowed, and enforce it.  More mature actors should not need this push.

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**The Shakes**

I learned this game from a colleague.  I don't know where he learned it.  It's lots of zany fun.

Everyone stands in a circle.  One person begins to develop "the shakes" in one particular, localized part of his body.  (For instance, his foot might begin to shake violently.)  After the shakes are fully developed, that person "throws" the affliction across the circle to another person.  Eye contact is important here, so that it is clear who is being "thrown" to.  The new person "catches" the shakes in the same body part.  Gradually the shakes move to a different body part.  (For instance, the tremor might travel up the leg until it eventually comes to rest in a hand.)  Once the affliction is firmly established in its new location, the victim "throws" it to another person, etc.  Try not to repeat any body part exactly.  (It may be necessary, of course, to repeat "foot," but maybe the shakes themselves are different, or it locates in a particular toe or something the second time.)  Continue to play until everyone is running out of ideas.

**Pointers**

It is okay, and in fact encouraged, to get creative.  I once had a whole group in hysterics when I "shook" my brain.

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**Mr. Hit**

I learned this lesson from a colleague in an improv troupe.  It is supposed to be a way of learning the names of a group, and it works, but it is also great (and exceedingly difficult) with a group whose names are already familiar to each other.

Stand in a circle.  One person announces, "I am Mr. Hit!"  Mr. Hit begins walking directly (but slowly, at first) towards another person in the circle, with his hands out in front of him like a zombie.  If he touches (hits) the person, they are "out" and must leave the circle.  The only way the intended victim can stop Mr. Hit is to call out the name of another person in the circle before any contact is made.  No fair running away.

Once a name is called out, that person instantly becomes Mr. Hit and begins advancing on a victim.  (He doesn't have to announce that he is Mr. Hit after the first time.)  Again, the only way the victim can save himself is by calling out a name.

Continue play until all but two people have been eliminated.  It gets harder and harder, because as people are "out" the fund of names grows smaller.  You can't say the name of a person who is out--it must be someone who is still in the circle.  It sounds easy, but it isn't.  It is very difficult to think with Mr. Hit bearing down on you.

This is great, if frustrating, fun, and although, as I've said, I think it is great for any group, it is also hands down the most effective "name game" I know.  Something about the sheer panic you feel when Mr. Hit is coming at you and you can't think of a name to say really makes those names stick in your head.  Doesn't work with little kids.

**Pointers**

Gradually move faster, but never really fast.  It's quite scary enough without that.

Some groups find that they have to change the name of the game to "Mr. Tap" to avoid injury.  You know your group best.  There's really no reason to do more than lightly touch the victim.

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**Whole Zoo Duck Duck Goose**

This is a wacky game I made up one day when it was too hot to stay indoors and we'd finished the days lesson.  It's silly and fun.
Everyone sits in a big circle.  One person is "it" and begins to walk around the circle, tapping each person on the shoulder.  But instead of saying "duck" each time, he or she must name a different animal each time.
Just as in regular "Duck Duck Goose," when "it" says "goose" the person tapped must chase him or her around the circle.  If "it" can run around and sit where the "goose" was sitting, there is a new "it."  If the "goose" catches "it," then he or she must stay "it."  All this is just as in regular "Duck Duck Goose."  The difference is that both runners must run as whatever animal was mentioned just before "goose."  (For example, if "it" had said, "cow, pig, dinosaur, owl, slug, goose," you'd see two slugs slowly chasing each other around the circle.
Anyone hesitating while naming animals is out.  Also, anyone not being the correct animal is out.

**Variations**

Sometimes I just play regular "Duck Duck Goose," but with different animals instead of just ducks.  It really is harder than the regular way because hearing all the different animals can make you miss the goose.

**Pointers**

Even though it is fun when the teacher plays along, I usually stay out of the game so I can act as a judge.  This avoids disputes about how much hesitation is too much and whether people adequately become their animals.  (It's not fair if "it" is caught because she is really being a slug and the "goose" isn't.)
Often I have the new person be "it" each time, whether the old "it" is caught or not.  That way everyone gets to play.  My students understand that the real point is the animal pretending.