

# Improvisation Games

*From the Viola Spolin Theatre Game File*

## Building a Story

### FOCUS

On full kinesthetic (physical) attention to the words of a story.

### DESCRIPTION

Large group sits in a circle. Sidecoach chooses one player to begin telling a story. The story can be known or made up. At any moment in the story, the sidecoach points at random to players who must immediately pick up where the last player left off, even if in the middle of a word. For example: first player, "The wind blew . . ." second player, "the hat off his head." Players are not to repeat the last word of the previous storyteller.

## Camera

### FOCUS

To perceive stage life fully.

### DESCRIPTION

Two players, #1 and #2. Who, What, Where agreed upon. Director calls out the name of one player at a time who puts head-to-foot focus on the fellow player as through as though he is the camera. Action and dialogue are not to stop, but to continue throughout these camera changes, as the sidecoach calls upon each player

## Dodge Ball

### FOCUS

On keeping the ball in space and out of the head.

### DESCRIPTION

Count off into large (ten players or more) groups. Each group agrees on the type of space ball. Players standing in a circle try to hit a center player with the ball. If the center player is hit, he changes places with the player who threw the ball. It is foul to hit a player above the waist.

## Dubbing

### FOCUS

On following the follower, with the voice of one player and the body of another players becoming as one whole (single) player.

### DESCRIPTION

Two or three players (Sub-team A) choose players of corresponding sex to be their voices (Sub-team B). This whole team (Sub-team A plus Sub-team B) agrees on Where, Who and What. The voice players gather around a microphone with a clear view of the playing area, where the body players go through Where, Who and What. The voice players reflect the onstage activity through the dialogue. The body players move their lips as if speaking, but are to use silent Gibberish; no attempt to mouth exact words! Both sub-teams follow the follower in voice and action. Have the voice and body players exchange places and continue the same Where, Who and What or choose a new one.

## Follow the Follower

### FOCUS

On following the Follower.

### DESCRIPTION

Teams of two. One player becomes the Mirror, the other the Initiator. Sidecoach will start the players playing Mirror, calling "Chang!" at intervals for players to reverse positions. When players are initiating and reflecting with large body movements, Sidecoach will call "On your own!" Players then reflect each other without initiating. This is tricky---players are not to initiate but are to follow the initiator. Both are at once the Initiator and the Mirror (or follower). Players reflect themselves being reflected.

## Follow the Follower #2

### FOCUS

On exact reflection of initiator's movements.

### DESCRIPTION

Count off into teams of four. Two players initiate movement; they are called "Subteam A." The other two reflect; they are called "Subteam B." This game starts exactly as the original Mirror except that one person is added to both sides. For example: a barber shaving a customer; the two other players reflect their movements. After a time, reverse roles. When players are moving freely, changes will not be called and players follow the follower.

## Gibberish-English

### FOCUS

On communication.

### DESCRIPTION

Teams of three---two players and a side-coach. For introductory demonstration, leader can be the sidecoach. Players choose or accept a conversation. When conversation begins to flow in English, the sidecoach is empowered to call "Gibberish" and, even if caught in the middle of a word, players are to change to Gibberish until coached back to English. Conversation is to flow normally and advance in meaning. Players may break in on or interrupt one another only in English.

## Gibberish Interpreter

### FOCUS

On following the follower with Gibberish.

### DESCRIPTION

Variation A: Teams of two. One player speaks a foreign language and gives a speech or lecture to an audience (the class members) in Gibberish. The second player understand the speaker's language and is the interpreter for the audience. Speaker pauses to let the interpreter translate what was said into English for audience understanding.

Variation B: Teams of three. Two players speak different languages (both use Gibberish). The third player understands both languages and acts as interpreter: the interpreter listens to one player and, turning to the other, translates what was communicated using English. The second player then responds to the first player's communication using Gibberish, which the interpreter translates for the first player, again using English. Conversation continues back and forth between the two foreigners through the interpreter who always speaks English. (Two interpreters can also be used.)

## **Gibberish: Selling**

### **FOCUS**

On communicating to an audience.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Single player, speaking Gibberish, sells or demonstrates something to the audience. Allow one or two minutes clock time per player.

## **Gibberish: Teaching**

### **FOCUS**

On communicating.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Teams of three to 10 players. Team agrees on Where, Who and What so that players are in a teaching-learning situation. Examples: 1. Where=first grade classroom, Who=teacher and students, What=learning to read; 2. an anatomy class; 3. airline hostess class. All speech is in Gibberish.

## **Hold It!**

### **FOCUS**

On holding a facial and bodily expression through a series of Wheres, Whos and Whats.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Four players (even division of male and female desirable). Have players sit in playing area. Ask each to give a short statement of attitude such as, "Nobody loves me." "I never have any fun." "I never met a man I didn't like." "I wish I had nice things." Players are to work for a full facial and bodily expression of their phrase. When achieved, and body expression takes over, side-coach "Hold it." Players are side-coached through a series of Wheres, Whos and Whats (nursery school, elementary school, graduation day, a double date, old people's home—the events of a lifetime). Players are to hold the physical expression of the attitude through all the changes.

## **Mirror**

### **FOCUS**

On exact mirror reflection of the initiator's movements.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Players count off into teams of two players. One player becomes A, the other, B. All teams play simultaneously. A faces B. A reflects all movements initiated by B, head to foot, including facial expressions. After a time, positions are reversed so that B reflects A.

## **Play Ball**

### **FOCUS**

On keeping the ball in space and out of the head.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Players count off into two large teams. One team becomes the players while the other team is the audience. Then switch. Working individually within the team, players each start to toss any ball of their own choosing up and down, against a wall, etc. The balls are all made of space substance. When the players are all in motion, sidecoach with change the speed at which ball are moving.

## **Singing Dialogue**

### **FOCUS**

On singing all dialogue.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Two or more players. Where, Who and What agreed upon. All dialogue is to be sung.

## **Slow/Fast/Normal**

### **PART 1**

#### **FOCUS**

On exploring the Who, What and Where in different time frames.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Two or more players, Who, What and Where agreed upon. Players play a few minutes of the Who, What and Where in normal speed.

### **PART 2**

#### **FOCUS**

Repeat in Slow Motion.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Players go through the Who, What and Where again, this time in SLOW MOTION.

### **PART 3**

#### **FOCUS**

Repeat in Fast Time.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Players re-do the action as fast as they can.

### **PART 4**

#### **FOCUS**

Repeat in Normal Time.

#### **DESCRIPTION**

Players go back and replay the action.

## **Slow Motion-Freeze Tag**

### **FOCUS**

On moving in complete slow motion.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Many players. (If time allows, half the group is audience to the other half's playing.) After a short warm-up of Tag---Explosion Tag, a game of freeze tag is played in very slow motion and with restricted boundaries. Appoint the first "it." With all players running, breathing, ducking, looking, laughing, etc. in very slow motion, immediately upon tagging another player, "it" must freeze in the exact tagging position. The new "it" proceeds in slow motion and freezes in position as another player is tagged, who becomes "it." All untagged players must stay within boundaries and move in slow motion between and around frozen players (as around trees in a forest). Game continues until all are frozen.

## Stage Whisper

### FOCUS

On stage whispering; on whispering with full projection and open throat.

### DESCRIPTION

Teams of two or more players agree on Where, Who and What in which the players are forced to whisper to each other. For example, thief in a closet; lovers quarreling in church. Just before calling curtain, players might sit and pant for a few seconds in the playing area.

## Tag-Explosion Tag

### FOCUS

None for this traditional game.

### DESCRIPTION

Many players (half the group plays and half becomes audience). A regular game of tag is played within boundaries. Leader calls out "Not it!" Last player to call out becomes "it." Players may not step outside boundaries. When energy levels are high, sidecoach will add another rule that when tagged, player must take a moment to "explode." There is no set way to "explode."

## Three-way Conversation

### FOCUS

On simultaneously maintaining two separate conversations – speaking to one player while hearing another.

### DESCRIPTION

Three players, preferably seated. One player (A) is the center; the other two players (B and C) sit on either side of A. Each end-player (B and C) chooses a topic of conversation and engages the center (A) player in conversation as if the other end-player did not exist. Center (A) must converse with both B and C, holding up both conversations (responding and initiating when necessary) without excluding either end-player. In effect, center player (A) holds one conversation on two topics. End-player (B and C) converse with center player (A) only; no attempt to hear or enter into the other end-player's conversation is to be made. Rotate positions until each player has been the center player. To keep up the challenge, simple questions ("What do you think of .. ? Do you like .. ?) and answers to such should be avoided.

## Tug of War

### FOCUS

On keeping the rope in space as a connecting link between players.

### DESCRIPTION

Count off into teams of two. One team at a time, each player tries to pull the other over a center line, exactly as in playground Tug of War. Here, however, the rope is not visible but made of space substance.

## What's Beyond: Activity

### FOCUS

On showing (communicating) Where player has been and Where player is going.

### DESCRIPTION

One at a time, players enter, walk through the playing area, and exit. Without speech or unnecessary activity, player communicates what activity went on just before the entrance or will take place after the exit.

## Who Am I?

### **FOCUS**

On involvement in the immediate activity until the Who is known.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Whole group or large teams. One player volunteers to leave the room while the group decides Who player will be: for example, union leader, cook in the Vatican, circus barker, etc.---ideally someone who is usually surrounded by much activity or institutional life. Then the first player is asked to return and sit in the playing area, while the others, one at a time or in small groups, enter in relation to the Who and become involved in appropriate activity until the Who is known.

## Who Is the Mirror?

### **FOCUS**

To conceal from audience which player is the Mirror.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Teams of two. Before "calling," players decide which player will be the Initiator and which the Mirror. This game is played as in Mirror (A15) except that the sidecoach does not call out "Change!" One player initiates all movement, the other reflects, and both players attempt to conceal which one is the Mirror from audience players. When the two players are moving, the leader calls out the name of one player. Audience players raise hands if that player appears to be the Mirror. Leader then calls out the name of the other player for audience hands. Both players continue playing during the voting without stopping, until the vote is unanimous for one of the other player or stalemate is reached.

## Who Started the Motion?

### **FOCUS**

On trying to keep the center player from finding the leader who starts the motion.

### **DESCRIPTION**

Players stand in a circle. One player is sent from the room while another player is selected to be the leader who starts the motion. The outside player is called back, stands in the center of the circle, and tries to discover the leader who is leading the other players through different motions (moving hands, tapping feet, nodding head, etc.). Leader may change motions at any time, sometimes even when the center player is looking directly at the leader. When the center player discovers the leader, two other players are chosen to take their places.