

At the Improv.

SIX drama speaking activities for the EFL/ESL Classroom

by Lindsay Clandfield

The following six activities are all based on drama activities that are used by actors to warm up or rehearse. Some, such as *Greetings*, are already well known in the English language classroom. Others are a little less common, but nonetheless a lot of fun. Improv stands for improvisation. Ideally students should be given little time to prepare these activities. They are all intended for fluency practice. As such many are more suited for higher levels. Suggested levels follow each activity.

Greetings: All students start milling about the room. Ask them to greet each other, perhaps just by shaking hands. Students just shake hands, move on, and greet the next student they meet. Then ask the students to greet each other in a more specific way. Possibilities are: *like a lost friend, like someone you don't really trust, someone you hate, an ex-boyfriend or ex-girlfriend, someone you are secretly in love with, someone with bad breath.*

LEVELS: all, except total beginners

Channel Hopping – For this activity you need a remote control as a prop. Divide the class into groups and give each different group “channels” or “television shows”. Possibilities include a soap opera, a sportscast, a reality show, an action movie etc. Point the remote at one group and pretend to “turn on” the channel. The group must provide the speech of the channel or show they represent. After a while, “change” the channel by pointing to a different group. The first group stops and the second one begins. Tell the students that you are very picky and will change the channel if you get bored! On another day you can give the remote control to a different student who can “channel hop”.

LEVELS: pre-intermediate and up

Alphabet Dialogue This is an activity which consists of 26 lines of dialogue. The first line starts with a given letter (say 'R'). The reply to that line must start with an 'S', and so on, until the whole alphabet has been covered (you can leave out the letters K, Q, X and Z unless you want to make it really challenging!). After 'Y' comes 'A'. Students that hesitate, or use the wrong letter 'Die'. The next student continues the dialogue. One possibility is to give several “filler” or “hesitation” words or sounds in English that they could use: (see below)

A- ahh, anyway
B- but
C- come to think of it
D- doesn't that mean...?
E- Errr
F- Fine, but...
G- Good point.
H- Hmm...
I- I'd say...
J- Just a minute...
L- Let me see,
M - Mmmmm

N - Now, as I was saying...
O - oh, but...
P - Put another way...
R - Right...
S - So...
T - Talking about...
U - Ummm
V - Very interesting, but...
W - Well...
Y - Yes, I know but...

LEVELS: intermediate and up

Dubbed Movie – Ask two or more students to do a role-play. You could give them a location, or tell them to pretend to act out a scene from a film that all the students know. The catch is that the students don't speak, although they can move their mouths as if they are speaking. Two or more students sit in front of the action, and do the speaking. You might want to give them time to prepare this depending on the level of the students.
LEVELS: intermediate and up

The Good, the Bad and the Ugly Advice: Nominate or ask for three students. They form a line (or sit down in a row). The class asks questions or gives problems for which they need advice. Each of the three students provides a different kind of advice: good, bad, and really bad (ugly) advice. Switch the roles around so that different people get a chance to provide different kinds of advice. If the 'bad advice' is really bad, then the 'ugly advice' should be even worse. This is very good for practising modal verbs for giving advice (should, ought to, must).
LEVELS: pre-intermediate and up

The Fortune Teller with Two Heads: Nominate two students to be the fortune teller. People from the class can ask them questions about the future. The catch is that the fortune teller must answer the question one word at a time per student. So the answer will be something like this:

Student A You
Student B Will
Student A Meet
Student B A
Student A Beautiful
Student B Frog.....

This is quite challenging because the fortune teller's "heads" cannot consult each about what they are going to say. Hilarity often results! This is very good for practising future structures, such as *will* or *be going to*.

LEVELS: pre-intermediate and up