

Classroom Improv Games: Instructions & Learning Connections

The Core Improv Pillars

1. Reframing Failure: Celebrating the mistakes knowing that's how we all learn
2. Cohesion: Bringing us all together
3. Making Each Other Look Good
4. Creativity in Play: Knowing our best learning happens when we are in a positive place

Game 1: Zip Zap Zop

Purpose & Pedagogical Reasoning

- Learning Connection: Focus, Presence, Reframing Failure, Cohesion.
- Why It Works: Grounds students in the physical present moment rather than an anxious, future-oriented headspace. It trains the brain to recover quickly from mistakes without ruminating, embodying the principle to "act before you think".

How to Play

1. **Setup:** Have the entire class stand in a circle.
2. **Sequence:**
 - Person A points directly across the circle to another student, makes eye contact, and says "**Zip!**"
 - Person B immediately points to a new person and says "Zap!"
 - Person C points to someone else and says "Zop!"
3. **The Rule:** The strict pattern order is always **Zip Zap Zop**
4. **Celebrating Mistakes:** If someone hesitates too long, says the wrong word out of sequence, or loses focus, the entire group cheers or takes a bow together, and immediately restarts the energy.

Teacher Reflection / Debrief Question:

"How did it feel when the group cheered for mistakes instead of pointing them out?"

"What did you notice about the difference between trying to plan your next word versus just staying in the moment and reacting?"

"How might adopting this 'cheer the mistake' mindset change how we approach tough assignments or group discussions later in the term?"

Game 2: Mirroring

Purpose & Pedagogical Reasoning

- **Emotional Focus:** Co-Regulation, Attunement.
- **Why It Works:** Ideal when direct verbal performance or public speaking creates high anxiety. Physical attunement activates empathy and bonding, naturally lowering heart rate and helping students feel seen without verbal pressure.

How to Play

1. **Setup:** Divide students into pairs facing each other. Remind students of the importance of making each other look good!
2. **Sequence:**
 - **Person A** is the initial leader and begins making **slow, smooth, fluid physical movements** with their arms, hands, and upper body.
 - **Person B** follows as closely as possible, acting as a mirror reflection so that an outside observer cannot tell who is leading.
3. **Variations:**
 - **Role Switch:** Switch roles so Person B leads.
 - **Leaderless Mirroring:** Challenge pairs to move together without deciding who is leading, relying entirely on mutual sensitivity and attunement.

Teacher Reflection / Debrief Question:

"What made it easier to stay synchronized with your partner—moving faster or slowing down?"

"When your partner was leading, how did you signal to each other—without words—that you were fully tracking them?"

"How did making eye contact (or avoiding it) change how connected or synchronized you felt?"

Game 3: "Yes, And" (Location & Offer Game)

Purpose & Pedagogical Reasoning

- **Emotional Focus:** Positive Reframing, Mindfulness, Collaborative Mindset.
- **Why It Works:** Replaces defensive/anxious "Yes, but..." responses with active acceptance ("Yes" = accepting current reality) and creative addition ("And" = exercising autonomy and building on your partner's reality). Demonstrates mental flexibility—allowing students to realize they don't have to stay stuck in rigid thinking.

How to Play

1. **Setup:** Students work in pairs or small groups. Establish a single shared location (e.g., a campsite, an underwater research station, an attic, a kitchen).
2. **Sequence:**
 - **Student A** brings an imaginary item into the space with physical action and a clear statement: "Look, I brought a huge telescope to our campsite!"
 - **Student B** accepts the reality and adds a new item/detail using "Yes, and...": "Yes! And I brought this star map so we can find hidden constellations tonight."
 - **Student C (or A)** continues: "Yes, and I brought hot cocoa in a giant thermos so we stay warm while stargazing!"
3. **The Rule:** No denying ("No, that's not a telescope") or blocking ("Yes, but it's raining so we can't look at stars"). Every contribution is treated as a valid gift.

Teacher Reflection / Debrief Question:

"How did it feel when your partner built directly onto your idea instead of changing the direction?"

"How did knowing that your partner couldn't say 'no' change how confident you felt making an offer?"

"How can we bring the 'Yes, And' mindset into our classroom discussions, peer feedback, or group projects?"

Game 4: Fortunately / Unfortunately

Purpose & Pedagogical Reasoning

- **Emotional Focus:** Resilience, Perspective-Taking, Adaptive Thinking.
- **Why It Works:** Teaches students that unexpected obstacles ("Unfortunately") can be accepted and creatively reframed ("Fortunately"). It builds cognitive agility and reinforces that challenges are manageable parts of any story or situation.

How to Play

1. **Setup:** Pair students up or sit in a circle.
2. **Sequence:**
 - **Student A** starts a narrative with a neutral or positive opening statement: "Today, our class is going on a field trip to the zoo!"
 - **Student B** adds an obstacle starting with "Unfortunately...": "Unfortunately, all the animals escaped their enclosures!"
 - **Student A (or C)** reframes the situation starting with "Fortunately...": "Fortunately, they all just wanted to attend our school lunch party!"
 - **Student B** continues with "Unfortunately...": "Unfortunately, they ate all the pizza before we arrived!"
3. **Goal:** Alternate back and forth fluidly, keeping the story moving without getting stuck on obstacles.

Teacher Reflection / Debrief Question:

"When an 'Unfortunately' moment happened, how quickly were you able to find a 'Fortunately' solution?"

"How does treating a setback as just another 'plot point' in a story change how stressful or permanent it feels?"

"How can using a 'Fortunately / Unfortunately' lens help us stay flexible when working on group projects or navigating unexpected changes at school or work?"