

Creativity Prompt Ideas for Comedy & Circus

As part of our recent work with Hull City of Culture's "No Limits" strand, which aimed to improve the engagement of children & young people with culture, we created a series of creativity activity ideas. These ideas are practical, adaptable to different ability groups and easy to incorporate into a wide variety of settings. They're very effective at inspiring pupils to think creatively, generate new ideas and use their imagination.

'Groups of' Game

Students walk around the room in silence and away from their friends. They don't have to circle; they can change direction and weave but they should be calm and avoiding contact with others. Teacher calls out an instruction and they must follow it within 10 seconds (or as appropriate):

- Teacher calls out a number (and a remainder of uneven numbers in class: 29 students = 5 fives and a four). Students have to both create groups of that size and then physically create their number using all members of the group's bodies. This can be an elimination game for the slowest group to react.
- Teacher calls out a number (as above) and students have to both get into those groups and then spell the word of that number physically using all members of the group's bodies.
- Teacher calls out a number (as above) and students have to both get into those groups and then create a mathematical equation that provides their number as the answer (10 – 5), 50/10, 2 + 3, etc, using all members of the group's bodies.
- Teacher calls out a number (as above) and students have to both get into those groups and then create an image of any connotations of that number they can think of: 5 gold rings, 5 fingers/toes, 5 past 2 on a clock, high 5, etc, using all members of the group's bodies.
- Teacher calls out a number (as above) and students have to both get into those groups and then spell the word of that number in a different language, using all members of the group's bodies.

Adapt this game so that teachers don't call out numbers of students to gather together but things they might have in common, such as:

- Football teams they support
- Favourite foods/scientific processes/bands/Subjects/periods of history/natural phenomena
- Birth months
- Phobias
- Pets in their household: dogs, cats, reptiles,
- birds, rodents, no pets, etc.
- Shoe sizes

Line-up Game

Students walk around the room (as above) but then have to organise themselves into lines, from one side of the learning space to the other. Give students 30 seconds to line up in silence according to their:

- arm lengths (assuming no physical disabilities)
- house numbers (1 – upwards, if have house names, after the numbers and in alphabetical order)
- birth dates (1st January – 31st December)
- favourite colours (following sequence of a rainbow)
- most embarrassing middle names (they don't have to reveal – it's only their perception of how embarrassing it is and allows them the fun of organizing themselves in a non-linear way)
- how much they like: sport, music, geography, ice cream, spiders, etc. Again, this is a non-scientific task that should generate lots of fun

'What is this?' Game

Teacher/students bring in a wide variety of ordinary and random objects. These objects 'become' other things that the class have to react. Objects can be passed around a circle and each person has to think of a new reality for a board rubber: mobile phone, sponge, walkie talkie, bar of chocolate, etc.

Teacher presents an object as something else and all others have to react: the board rubber is put on the floor and announced as a.....rat! React!

Zip Zap Zoom Story

Zip Zap Zoom game to warm up. Once the students are warmed up, we'll replace the Zip Zap Zooms with one word each of a spontaneous story. Teacher starts and says 'once' and looks directly at a student. They have to provide the 'upon' and look at another who provides the 'a' and so on. Reassure the class that we don't care how good the story is or how much sense it makes but we are freeing up language and spontaneity. If students are stuck, they should make a noise or repeat the word they've just heard and pass the movement on. Teacher controls the punctuation and can thus get us out of loops or complete confusion. Whenever a good, multi-syllabled or unusual word is used, teacher can award praise stamps (or whatever the corresponding rewards system is in the school). If it is used correctly, they get double points. Thus even a misused interesting word gets points. We are trying to break down the fear of big words and play with language. This will encourage students to select language more carefully. In order to keep the flow of the task, a TA could record the points and make a note of any interesting words to discuss later.

Undermining Despots, Tyrants and Media Moguls

This is a fun and simple way to get students thinking about bias and rhetoric. To begin with you can get students in a circle and play word association. It doesn't have to be high pressure but try to keep the pace up. When someone comes up with something inappropriate it is the whole class' responsibility to blow raspberries. Next, invite them to listen to you telling them a story and, when they think they've heard a lie, they can blow raspberries. It can turn into a team game, awarding points for correctly identifying lies and deductions for inappropriate raspberries. Next, pull up newspaper headlines and stories, translations of speeches by Hitler, Stalin, etc and, as you read them out, get them to blow raspberries where they see lies or suspect that spin is happening.

Exhibit Freedom

Link to 'Freedom Festival'. Students list as many things as possible that make them feel free. Encourage a wide range of ideas - from physical pursuits, to music, to being alone, to clothing, to political systems and so on. Using a large space and some of the outdoors, students create a huge exhibition of freedom that both challenges viewers to consider freedoms and encourages and enables them to actively partake in some of the activities. This is about play, playfulness and a sense of belonging so each 'freedom' should be physicalised to encourage participation; anything from active discussion to breathless physical activity. All sorts of maths can come into the organization, spacing and design of the exhibition.

Bring a Duologue to Life

Students must either find or create a duologue from the class novel, play or from two characters from history. They should bring the duologue to life in a space and then start to examine the relationship between the two by:

- Tying themselves together by a piece of string. When one feels a warmth to the other they should take a step(s) closer and if antagonistic, move further apart. If one is trying to persuade or manipulate the other, they can gently pull them towards them using the string.
- Giving one of them a satsuma to peel. This one must sit in the same position throughout the scene and speak as she peels the satsuma. She is allowed to stop peeling only twice and look up at the other character. Which two moments does she choose and why? Do audience members agree? When would they suggest? What happens when you give the same task to the other character?
- Removing the dialogue and leaving only the movements, expressions and gestures?
- Presenting the scene behind a curtain so all we have is the voice?
- Following each line of dialogue with a line of sub-text: what the character is really feeling.

Use Smells as Physical Stimuli for Extreme Characterization

Students stand in a line with their eyes closed. The teacher walks down the line wafting smells in front of their noses (coffee, chocolate, vinegar, etc.) Students are instructed to inhale and react spontaneously and extremely: whatever their immediate reaction to the smell is they should physically exaggerate and then freeze in that shape. When all are frozen and with eyes still closed, teacher advises students that this freeze is now a character and they should start to move as this character, keeping that same exaggeration. They can start to make noises, greet each other and develop an attitude: snobby, friendly, subservient, etc. Teacher chooses a variety and the class develop them into Commedia dell'Arte style caricatures with clearly defined roles and physical attributes. These can then be put into a variety of role play situations together. Speech is optional and silent movie music would accompany it very satisfyingly. Option to then study Commedia will follow. This obviously links to Drama.