



## On Common Ground

### Using Drama Activities to Help Youth Appreciate Differences

#### I. Tips for Getting Started

- a. Use drama games to help students get to know each other, to either focus or energize, or to improve group dynamics.
- b. Begin with activities that are “low risk, high reward.”
- c. Never force anyone to play. Sometimes watching an activity can be just as valuable as playing.
- d. Activities in beginning level sessions should move from Large Group, to Small Group, to Pairs, to Individual.
- e. Use creative ways of making pairings and small groupings, so that students work with others outside their circle of friends.
- f. Provide opportunities for reflection. “Was that activity difficult to do- why?” “Did you notice anything new about your partners?” “If you did it again, would the experience be different for you?”
- g. Model constructive criticism and give your students the vocabulary to provide feedback to others.
- h. Post the rules of play, and refer to them often.
- i. “Side-coaching” will allow you to keep the game moving, provide moral support and on-going positive feedback.
- j. Your students will build skills over the course of time. Provide developments that make the game more challenging.

#### 2. Making Respectful Accommodations for Players with Special Needs

An accommodation is an individualized learning support that promotes access to learning. It frequently means modifying expectations for the participant. An accommodation might involve providing additional supports by changing the ratios of adults to students in a group activity. It may also mean lengthening the amount of time it takes someone to complete the activity, or modifying the activity so that the student with the disability can partially participate in it. An accommodation should be used if it will physically, socially or emotionally support the inclusion of the person with a disability in an activity.



Examples:

For a student with a developmental disability, you can:

- Keep directions simple, organized and sequenced.
- Speak slowly and clearly.
- Stay in the students' visual field when demonstrating activities.
- Gently guide the student through the activity so they experience the feel of the task.

For a student with limited mobility (like use of a walker or wheelchair) you can:

- Be sure that physical barriers in the room have been removed.
- Find out if the student would like assistance in movement activities.
- Adapt movement activities to include students who use wheelchairs.

For a student who has a vision impairment:

- When giving verbal directions, be specific. Avoid using words like "this" "that" and "over there."
- Address the players in your group directly and by name.
- Use printed materials or pictures that are clear, uncluttered and easy to see.
- Use large print on handouts.

For a student with speech and language delays:

- Be a good listener.
- Present directions in complete sentences.

For a student with social or emotional disorders:

- Be clear about the structure of the activities.
- Don't change the schedule or activities abruptly. Let them know in advance if there is going to be a change in plans.
- Allow the student to make choices, from a limited number of options.
- Allow the student to pull back from an activity.



For a student who is deaf or has hearing loss:

- Know the degree of the hearing loss and what it means to the student.
- Be sensitive to positioning the student next to the person who is speaking, and have a cue to signal the student to look to you before you begin giving directions.
- Provide visual cues such as pictures and symbols.
- Demonstrate activities, rather than just verbally describe them.

### **3. Games that Break the Ice**

#### **Stringing Together a Conversation**

Give each player a piece of string cut into a certain length. Ask them to find the person who has a piece of string the same length as theirs. That person will be their partner. They should introduce themselves to each other.

#### **Something Terrific About Me!**

Once students are in pairs, ask them to share “something terrific” about themselves with their partner. Mingle the students around so they learn terrific things about several people. You can ask them to introduce their terrific partners to the group.

#### **Toilet Paper Game**

Pass around a roll of toilet paper and ask each player to “take as much as they need.” After the roll has gone all the way around the circle of players, tell them that they will share one personal trait for each piece of toilet paper that they are holding.

#### **Value Clarification**

Everyone sits in one part of the room facing the largest open space. You explain the game, and put signs with the words “agree” “unsure” and “disagree” around the room. Everyone is to listen as you read a statement. They move to the sign that reflects their opinion about the statement. Be sure to remind the students before playing that this is a chance to show respect for other people’s opinions, and to practice being nonjudgmental. They will be able to learn about others, and themselves by answering the questions. After you ask the questions, you can either move on to the next one, or allow the groups to discuss and present their feeling to the rest of the group. If you do this, you will have to be a strong facilitator so that everyone is treated with respect. Prepare a list of questions that



is relevant to your group ahead of time. A good question is one that will put some people in the room in each group.

### **Doctor, Doctor**

Split the group into teams of 6-8. Have each group identify a “doctor” who steps away from the circle and closes their eyes. The rest of the group stands in a circle, holds hands and then twists themselves up without letting go of their hands or changing the grip. When they are all knotted up, they call for the “doctor” who does their best to untangle them, again without undoing their hands.

## **4. Games that Build a Team**

### **Trust Circle**

All players stand in a circle. One volunteer player stands in the middle of the circle, with their arms crossed over their chest and their eyes closed. They walk to the edges of the circle, towards the boundary of players. When they get near a player, that person gently sends them in another direction. The leader can cue the group to move forward or backwards.

### **Airport**

This is a variation of the blindfold trust walk. Set up an obstacle course in the room using objects and people. One student will play the “Airplane,” which is coming in for a landing in the airport. Another student plays the “Air Traffic Controller,” who must guide the airplane through the obstacle course with verbal directions. The airplane should make it all the way through the course without crashing or “denting a wing.”

### **Round of Applause**

Standing in a large circle, turn to the player next you and you both clap at the same time. Then that player turns to the player next to them and they repeat. It continues around the circle. Once the group has got it, they will be able to go faster, or even switch directions. Don't be too picky about the level of coordination of the clap if you have a group of students with varying abilities. Just be positive and encouraging and watch your group develop some team spirit.

### **Zip, Zap, Zop**

Still in a circle, everyone repeats the words “zip, zap, zop” three times all together. Send a bolt of energy in your hands with a strong forward motion



straight at someone else in the circle saying “zip”. You must make eye contact with them. They pass it to someone else saying “zap.” That person passes it on with a “zop.” There should be no pauses.

### **Half-Time Show**

This can be done as a large group, or separated into groups of 6 or 8 players each. They will create pictures, as if they were a part of the marching band during half time and were being looked at from above. They are not aloud any verbal communication to complete the challenges. Start easily with letters of the alphabet and basic shapes. Make the game more challenging by giving them shapes like a pirate ship and airplane.

## **5. Games that Mix it Up**

### **What Are You Doing?**

Make two lines. The front players in line face each other. The player in line one begins miming an activity (like brushing their teeth). The player in line two asks “What are you doing?” The other player continues miming their activity, but says they are doing something else (like reading a book), then moves to the back of the line. The player in line two begins miming the new activity (reading a book) and the player who is now in the front of the line one asks “What are you doing?” The player in line two continues their activity, but says they are doing something else (like eating a sandwich), then goes to the back of the line. (and so on, and so on).

- The rules:
- \* Players may not repeat an activity that has already been mentioned.
  - \* Players only have a count of three to come up with a new activity.
  - \* Players must continue the original activity while saying the new activity.

### **Huggie Bear 1-2-3**

Players spread out around the room. The leader calls out “huggie bear 5, 1-2-3.” The first number called out is the number that the players must group up into, and they have the 1-2-3 count to do it. Repeat, changing the number and the speed at which it is called. Players that don’t make it into a group could be out, and they could come take the place of the leader.



### **Back Writing**

Players sit in a line, one in front of the other. The first person draws a letter or shape slowly and carefully on the back of the next person in line. This continues down the line. The person in front draws what he/she thinks the letter or number is (on a piece of paper). If it's not right, try and figure out where it changed.

Note: This game can be a competition between two teams.

### **Line Ups**

The goal is for the players to line themselves up, according to the rule you will give them, without talking or moving their lips to communicate with the rest of the group. The first rule is to line up according to height. Short on the left to tall on the right. Other rules include by eye color, lightest to darkest, alphabetically by last name, or by birth date.

## **6. Further References**

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