WARM-UPS FOR DRAMA CLASS OR REHEARSAL

Young actors have to be taught about focus: the ability to stay in a role and be believable while acting with or performing for their peers.

Budding thespians have to learn what it means to listen with focus. And, very importantly, they must learn that every role onstage is equally important to the success of a show. That’s the meaning of ensemble. Since these concepts are easier to understand if you actually experience what they mean, here are three fun theatre warm-up games that help student actors focus, listen to each other and build teamwork.

1. **The Counting Game**
   **Objective:** To learn focus and listening skills.

   Have the actors stand in a tight circle. Tell them they have to count to 21, one number at a time, one actor at a time, in random order. It has to happen spontaneously, so going around the circle in order is out of the question. This sounds so easy, but it isn’t. If two actors say a number at the same time, the counting has to start over. You will notice them really start to listen to and look at one other. They will be giving each other the same focus in the game as they need to give each other onstage.

2. **Ball in the Air Game**
   **Objective:** To work together and focus excess energy.

   This theatre game is as simple as can be, but it’s a useful tool that’s also lots of fun! Get a large ball, like a beach ball. Challenge the actors to keep the ball in the air for as long as possible. Give them a goal—say 30 hits—then increase the number of hits required as they get better. Think it sounds easy? It’s not, especially with rules such as the same person can’t hit it two times in a row. This basic exercise requires focus and teamwork while generating a lot of laughter. And what could be a better warm-up than a few chuckles during a focused, hands-on activity?

3. **Musical Chairs, Drama Style**
   **Objective:** To build an ensemble and think on your feet.

   Have all the actors except one sit on chairs in a loose circle, facing inward. There should be no empty chairs. Leave plenty of room between chairs. The last actor stands in the middle of the circle. His objective is to get a chair. He does this by saying something like, “Anybody who is wearing athletic shoes, move!” And everyone who answers that description has to get up and find a chair that is not next to them. The chair-less actor in the middle of the circle now runs to an empty chair. Whoever ends up without one is the next to stand in the middle of the circle, and the process is repeated with a different prompt. After they run out of clothing, eye color, etc., the questions will get more creative and also informative, such as “Whoever loves Sondheim, move!” (Make sure they know that they can’t be nasty or hurtful or they’re out of the game.) This simple game builds group cohesion and helps an ensemble get to know one another better.