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Introduction

The purpose of this book is to give theatre teachers the tools they will need not just to play a game or teach an exercise, but also to actually understand the reasons they are doing so and the practical benefits of each exercise. This book will also enable teachers to hold a group discussion when necessary, and guide them on how to ask leading questions. So if you are looking for a quick-fix basic game book for drama, this is not the book for you. However, if what you are looking for is something that delves deeper into exercises and their purposes, then read on.

Acting teachers, directors, and instructors at all levels will find many uses for this book. I have discovered many of the activities included here to be just as effective with intermediate students as they are with novices. Also bear in mind that the information and instructions in this book are not hard-and-fast rules; you are free to adapt any exercise to suit your needs. If you disagree with my suggestions, you are under no obligation to borrow them. In fact, if I can get you, the instructor, as well as the students to think, then I have doubly served my purpose.

Many of these games have multiple names; I did not invent any of them. I may have adapted and molded some of them, but they lend themselves to this kind of treatment and you should feel free to do the same. As teachers we must aim to stretch our students in every possible direction and empower them with skills and knowledge — that is the task of this book.

You will find that I use the term “actor” and masculine pronouns consistently throughout the book. This is not because I am sexist, but simply because it is less cumbersome than saying “actor/actress” or “he/she.” Please do not take offense, as I am using the terms in their generic sense. (That sounded like a poem!)

Also, you will often see me refer to “the stage” and “the audience.” If you are working in a classroom, any area you designate can be the stage. The audience is wherever you decide to put them. The terms are just reference points, but obviously you will not always have the parameters of a formal theatre within which to work. This is just another opportunity for you to improvise.

Again, I did not invent these games. I have discovered them over the past fifteen years, mainly from workshops I have taken. Notice I did not say acting workshops. I have utilized activities from all walks of life

and adapted them to the needs of actors. I have also included activities that I was taught as a child. Whether these activities were originally intended for actors or not, it has been my mission to adapt every single one of them to have relevance for the student of acting.

You will notice that I describe the participants using many different terms. This is because I want you to get a taste of how applicable these exercises are to myriad people. Although I wrote these activities with actors in mind, they can be used in many different fields. A theatre director who is using a game before rehearsals might say, “I need two actors to come up onstage,” whereas a business employer who uses a selection of these activities to enhance team spirit in his or her company might say, “I need two volunteers to come to the front of the room.” An English teacher who uses a character exercise to help the class better understand the characters in a book they are reading might say, “I need three students to come forward and demonstrate this game.” We constantly need to ask ourselves, “Who is my audience?” By this I mean, “Who are we trying to affect with these activities?” I find it beneficial to use terminology that will envelop the target audience I am working with.

I have broken the book into chapters to give you some idea of how and where the activities can be used. Again, these categorizations are not set in stone. An activity I have put under “Concentration and Focus” might fit just as well under “Imagination.” These labels are just guidelines to help you get on track. Incidentally, you will notice that I have cross-referenced several different chapters, linking an activity in one chapter to an activity in another chapter. This may at first seem redundant; however, the subject matter is so important that I chose to approach some areas again from different angles.

In regards to the information under the “Purpose” subheadings, you may notice there is a great deal of repetition. It is important for actors to train and retrain concepts until they become second nature. Dancers do not learn the basics and then forget about them, they constantly go back to them. You’ll also notice that I’ve separated the “Discussion” and “Purpose” subheads in this book. This is for your benefit, but you should blend the two as you see fit. The point is to encourage you to think outside the box. Look at the suggestions I’ve given and add your own. Remember, much of what you want to teach will also be picked up through the actual doing of the activity. Break a leg and enjoy!