

# VANCOUVER THEATRESPORTS® LEAGUE

TEACHER'S STUDY GUIDE

## ABOUT THE COMPANY

Vancouver TheatreSports® League (VTSL) began in 1980 and is now a local institution and a worldwide phenomenon, producing and staging some of the most daring and innovative improv in the world. Boasting six International Improv Comedy Awards and starring in several television specials, VTSL first opened their doors at the Back Alley Theatre, where they consistently drew capacity crowds. They continue to wow audiences at the New Revue Stage on Granville Island performing to more than 200,000 enthusiasts yearly, 4 nights a week, 52 weeks a year.

Vancouver TheatreSports® League's improv tournament at Expo '86 provided an impetus for the present worldwide interest in TheatreSports®. The improv techniques pioneered by Vancouver TheatreSports® are now used for everything from corporate training to TV parodies.

The names of VTSL players



and alumni are a veritable who's who of the North American entertainment and improv scenes. Award winning performers, TV celebrities and international personalities have filled out the ranks of VTSL's fast thinking players, including Ryan Stiles and Colin Mochrie (*Who's Line Is It Anyway*), Ellie Harvie (*The New Addams Family*), Dean Haglund (*The X-Files*, *The Lone Gunmen*) and Nancy Robertson (*Corner Gas*) to name a few.

In 1997, Vancouver TheatreSports® won the Jessie Award for Excellence in Interactive Theatre for High Schools with their

production of Free Willie Shakespeare. VTSL also produced and directed the Jessie Awards for 5 years and is set to produce and direct the Jessies in 2007. In addition to their award-winning main stage shows, VTSL presents over 225 corporate events yearly, producing custom-tailored shows for corporations, associations and not-for-profit organizations at conventions, awards nights, and anniversaries. VTSL also offers a corporate training program which focuses on enhancing teamwork, communication, creativity and innovation in the workplace.

## THEMES:

- COMEDY
- CREATIVITY
- EMPOWERMENT
- IMAGINATION
- IMPROVISATION
- INTERACTION
- LISTENING SKILLS
- NARRATIVE
- SPONTANEITY
- STORY TELLING
- TEAMWORK

## ABOUT THE PERFORMANCE

**Instant Improv** – The audience provides the inspiration in the form of

suggestions, and the improvisers provide the entertainment in the form of hilarious improvised scenes. Instant Improv allows the audience to see their ideas instantly transformed into reality. Whether

reconstructing the story of an audience member's first day at school or a recess mishap, each Instant Improv performance is as unique as its audience. **For audiences grades K-12**



## ABOUT THEATRESPORTS®

Keith Johnstone, a co-founder of Loose Moose Theatre in Calgary, originated the TheatreSports® format over thirty years ago. He took the art of improvisation and

turned it into a 'sporting event' using the format of two teams in competition for points awarded by judges. Each team is given a variety of improvisational challenges

and the audience provides the particulars of character, situation, activity, problem, etc. Audience participation is an essential part of the fun, and the actors' spontaneity

and quick-wittedness can reach awesome heights. These games can be played individually or as part of a TheatreSports® competition.

VTSL'S *INSTANT IMPROV* INCORPORATES SOME OF THE FOLLOWING GAMES IN SCHOOL PERFORMANCES:

### **Interviewing the Expert**

The audience provides the name of a sport and a vegetable. In a talk show setting, one actor is the interviewer and the other is an expert on, for example, tennis played with carrots; or how to use potatoes in rock climbing.

### **Emotional Roller Coaster**

The actors choose who the characters are and what they are doing. The audience supplies three emotions such as suspicion, fear, and joy. The facilitator calls out the first emotion and the scene starts in this mood. When the next emotion is called out the actors must find a good reason to shift into the new mood.

### **Open Scene**

The audience provides two actors with a problem. The actors choose the location and an activity, then start improvising. The third person enters the scene to complicate or resolve the situation.

### **Scene Beyond Words**

The audience supplies a location. The actors choose who they are and what the problem is, then improvise, playing their emotions in full, but without using words.

### **Complaints Department**

The audience provides the name or type of a store. One actor is the supervisor in the Complaints Department. All the others choose their characters and their problems and come to speak to the person in charge.

### **Fairytales**

The audience provides the title of a well-known fairy tale and the actors enact it as an improvisation. Each actor can play several roles, and for optional chaotic good times, once the scene is complete, they may repeat it in a two-minute version, then one-minute, then thirty seconds, and finally, ten seconds.



## ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

### CREATE YOUR OWN STORY

This game is very simple and can be played with students as young as kindergarten, but older students and even adults can benefit by its sheer simplicity. It can be done with two people, a small group, or even an entire classroom. Participants can do this exercise either verbally or by writing out their contributions to the story. Just fill in the blanks.

Once upon a time, there was a \_\_\_\_\_

And every day \_\_\_\_\_

Until one day \_\_\_\_\_

And because of that, \_\_\_\_\_

And because of that, \_\_\_\_\_

And because of that, \_\_\_\_\_

And in the end, \_\_\_\_\_

*(Add as many 'And because of that' lines as needed.)*

### WARM-UP EXERCISES

**Firing Line** (Groups of 4) — One actor faces a line of three others. In turn, they fire words at the single person who has to reply with the first word that comes to mind (free association). The three do not associate but think of words as different as possible.

**Circle Stories** (Groups of 4–6) — Create a title for the story. One actor starts with one word, the next actor adds another word, and so on as the story is built round the circle making grammatical sense while producing a story that is logical on its own terms. Don't judge — just listen and go with the flow. Pairs and small groups can practice this exercise until they think almost as one and the stories become vivid and fun. This exercise can be done with single words, short phrases, or complete sentences.

**Orchestrated Stories** (Groups of 4–6) One actor is chosen as the conductor of the orchestra. As the conductor points to different players, that player tells part of the story for as long as the conductor wishes to let them continue. It could be for a full minute, or it could be just a few seconds.

### BASIC IMPROVS

**Solo Activity** (1 actor) — Choose a common daily activity like making a sandwich or washing the dishes. Use props if available. While performing this activity tell a story describing an event or incident from your past.

**Job Interview** (2 actors) — Two actors are required. One in the interviewer, the other is the applicant. Only at the start of the scene should the actors be informed as to what the job is that the applicant is being interviewed for. The more creative the job, the better. For example, Time Machine Operator, Food Taster for the Queen, etc.

**Beginnings** (2 or 3 actors) — One or two of the actors perform wild, arbitrary movements and, on a signal such as a whistle, the actors freeze while the remaining actor(s) must explain what it is they are doing by observing the body positions.



## SUGGESTED READING

Atkins, Greg: Improv! A Handbook for the Actor, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Heinemann, 1994.

Barker, Clive: Theatre Games, New York, Drama Book Specialists.

Chilver, Peter: Teaching Improvised Drama: A Handbook for Secondary Schools, London, Batsford, 1978.

Hodgson, John and Richards, Earbest: Improvisation.1, London, Methuen, 1996.

Johnstone, Keith: Improv: Improvisation and the Theatre, London; Boston: Faber & Faber, 1979.

Spolin, Viola: Improvisation for the Theatre: A Handbook of Teaching and Directing Techniques, Evanston, Ill., Northwestern University Press, [1990] Updated edition.

## HOSTING THE PERFORMANCE

The company will arrive at your school approximately 30 minutes before the show is scheduled to begin. They will need:

1) Minimum 10' x 15' performance area 2) Table and 2 chairs. 3) PA system may be used if available.

The performance will run approximately 50 minutes with an optional 10 minute Q&A immediately after. The company will be able to clear out of the performance space within 15 minutes.

Please have a staff member introduce the group and say a few words of thanks afterwards.

## TEEN IMPROV CAMP 2007

This two week/ half days course is aimed at the High School student willing to work hard at play. Creativity, openness, humour, valuing the ideas of others, self-confidence, and the art of listening are all skills that can be applied to many different areas of the arts, any career path and life in general.



Teen Camp registration includes 3 complimentary tickets to one of our Wednesday or Thursday night shows.

2007 Dates: July 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 and July 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and Sunday July 22nd Performance (time TBA)

Grades 7,8,9—9:30 AM to 12:30 PM Grades 10,11,12—1:00 PM to 4:00 PM

Location: New Revue Theatre Granville Island, Vancouver

Cost: \$330

Call 604-738-7013 for more information and to register.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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