

Role-Play Guidelines

1. Add “Suspension of Disbelief” to the Class Rights and Responsibilities prior to beginning the role-play. Explain to the class that this means they are willing to open their minds and accept that the scenario is one that could exist in the world and that the actors participating are doing their best to portray characters that are not themselves. Be clear on what they are agreeing to, such as: *willingness to stay focused and serious; willingness to believe in the reality of the scene; willingness to take risks and participate.*
2. When using role-play give the characters’ names that are different from those in your class (or school/organizational community). When possible, give student’s the choice of the character names. Silly names are fine so long as they feel appropriate to the educator.
3. Set the scene for both the actors and audience to make sure that everyone knows what is going on. Ask questions of the class like: “what are these characters dealing with?”; “what do they want from one another?”; “how would you describe this situation in your own words?” etc.
4. Make sure the actors understand their roles and have thought about them prior to presenting them to the group.
5. Give the observers or audience something concrete to look for as they watch the role-play.
6. If the scene is not coming to its own resolution guide the actors to find an ending. This can be done through verbal instruction or by having one of the student observers tap the shoulder of one or two of the actors currently in the scene and taking over their role. This technique is often called “freeze tagging” or “tapping in” and can be a great way to involve more students in a role-play and/or fix a scene that is not working without making the actors performing feel bad.
7. After the scene is completed have students reflect on how the scene felt both in role and out of role.
8. After the scene is completed ask the observers or audience to reflect on what they saw and how it felt to watch the scene.
9. Always process the scene! Ask open-ended questions so that the entire class can reflect on the scene and deepen their own understanding.

10. Remember that you are the educator and are in control of your classroom! Just because your students are out of their seats and learning kinesthetically does not mean that they are running the classroom or that chaos will reign supreme. Set clear guidelines from the start that, at any point, if you say “freeze” or clap your hands or blow your “director’s whistle” that all action must stop immediately and that your voice is the only one that should be heard. Only give the students as much freedom as feels safe and comfortable for you and the class. You know best what will and will not work with your group. Trust your gut first and foremost.

Additional Guideline for Improvised Role-Play

1. Remind students that improvised scenes do not need to be funny. It is more important to remain true to the scene and the character than to get a laugh. If students are giggling freeze the scene and ask the audience if the scene feels realistic and what needs to change in order for the scene to be successful. You can ask the same types of questions to the actors: “Does this scene feel realistic right now?”; “Do you feel like your character would be laughing?”

Four Tips for Establishing a Safe Classroom Space When Using Role-Play

1. *Model the behavior you seek* – A great way to build trust with your students is to explain from day one that you will never ask them to do something you would not feel comfortable doing yourself. Model not only the expected behavior but also the level of enthusiasm and involvement you seek from the group. Don’t just tell students what you expect, show them.
2. *Be firm, clear and fair* – Discipline should never be about the humiliation or judgment of children. Rather, use the teachable moments they award you to offer guidance about responsibility and healthy decision making. You are the adult in the situation and power-struggles lead to nothing but frustration and wasted time. Nothing kills the safety of a space faster than the destruction of trust between student and teacher.
3. *Maintain leadership* – When doing any drama establish from the start what the cue is going to be for the students to freeze or return to themselves. This can be anything from a clap of the hands to a ringing of a bell to a call and response cue that you create as a group. The important thing is that you feel as though you have control over the class even when

they are moving around or acting silly. If a scene is not going in the direction you want, or a group is not taking the activity seriously enough, you can either redirect them through questioning (see “Questioning” section for tips) OR freeze the scene. Even though you are encouraging students to play does not mean you are not in control of the class.

4. *Have fun* – Using humor and compassion as a means of getting a point across is much more effective than lecture. Also, the more energy you bring to the table the more likely the students are to match or beat your levels of enthusiasm.

“Mantle of the Expert” Guidelines

Before beginning any “mantle of the expert” role-play offer students the time to set the space so that it looks like the meeting hall/court room/political interview/student council meeting. This creates additional buy-in for the students and can help keep them involved in the scene.

- 1) Choose a role that enables students to demonstrate the learning you want them to acquire. For example, if you want them to demonstrate knowledge of the male anatomy in role, make them a doctor who is giving a demonstration to his/her colleagues.
- 2) Choose a role that gives decision-making power to the students:
 - Judges
 - Committee Heads/Members
 - Parents
 - Teachers
 - Social Workers or Psychologists
 - Reporters or Blog Experts
 - Doctors
 - Advice columnists or students who have expertise in solving parent problems, advice for bullying issues, internet issues etc.
- 3) Ask students to choose a different name for themselves that is reflective of the role. For example, if you have made the entire class psychologists at a conference together, have them all pick a new name that starts with “Dr.” If they are parents have them be Mr. or Mrs. ____.
- 4) Props can really help to set the scene and create buy-in for the students. Something as simple as “Hello my name is,” name-tags or

small costume pieces like eyeglasses or scarves can be a wonderful addition to the role-play.

Teacher in Role Guidelines

A great way of examining tough issues in the classroom is for the educator to take on the role of the “troubled” or “at-risk” youth and to set the students up as “experts giving advice.”

1. Be clear on your objectives. What is the learning you want the students to grasp?
2. Give students time to brainstorm questions for your character before you enter “in role.”
3. Decide on the setting with the group. Allow the students to decide how they want the room to look so that it is believable.
4. Have the students decide on their role.
5. Be clear on what their task is during the enactment and what role you will be portraying.
6. Be clear when and how the drama will begin. If the scene starts when you enter, or turn the lights on, or put on your jacket, make sure the cue is obvious and known to the students.
7. Remember that you are in charge and can stop the drama at any time if believability has been broken. If students are struggling freeze the scene and ask what needs to happen to make the drama more believable. Once the group is ready to resume, go back into role and pick up right where you left off.

Questioning

Leading Students through Questions:

The following are some possibilities to help guide the group in either processing or successfully completing the drama.

- Questions that establish suspension of disbelief (Prior to beginning any role-play or character work the following questions should be asked to create student buy-in and establish clear expectations) *A student should not be encouraged to participate in the role-play until he/she has agreed to suspend disbelief.

Examples: Is everyone willing to suspend their disbelief and commit to the scene/characters? ; How are the characters different from you? ; What will you need to do to make this scene realistic?

- Questions that seek information (Set up a situation where the group needs to know more and therefore becomes more invested in the drama)

Examples: How does a doctor move that is different from the way you move?; What is the name of our conference?

- Questions that supply information (Questions can be used as a means of guide the group without stopping the flow of the scene)

Examples: Why would your character be carrying a gun if he/she doesn't want to harm anyone? ; Will we need cell phones? ; If a person is laughing when they say 'no' how would the other person know they are serious?

- Questions as classroom management (The hardest thing about these types of questions is walking the fine line between continuing the drama and maintaining order in the class. Avoiding the use of a controlling tone can help aid this process.)

Examples: Did you all hear what this person just suggested? ; As a doctor I'm sure you know that if a person in your position shares personal information about their patient that they are breaking the law....