



## **Character and Emotion Class – Synopsis**

**In this class, students will focus on accessing emotion in-the-moment and building characters from emotional perspectives/behaviors to drive scenes forward.**

### **Week 1 – Reacting In-the-Moment**

**A scripted actor’s whole job is to make an audience believe that the emotional reaction they’re rehearsed is real in-the-moment. In improvisation, we have a leg up; we are all experiencing what’s happening for the first time.**

*Key Teachings:*

- You just have to be in the moment and react honestly to have a “good” scene and to be compelling and funny.
- You don’t have to tell jokes
- You don’t have to conflict
- In-the-Moment Acceptance of what’s given to you can be your funniest move; “Yes, I am” will evoke a better reaction than almost any clever line

### **Week 2 – Initiating Toward Emotional Reactions**

**All you need to start a scene is one thing: anything. Make one choice – a posture, an activity, an object, a location, etc. – and all other choices can flow out of that “anything.” The sooner though that emotion is on the table though the better, as it is how our characters feel about themselves, their surroundings and each other that will be what our scenes are “about.”**

*Key Teachings:*

- Emotional behavior/perspective should be the core of all improvisation
- Practicing emotion at the extremes in class will help make you comfortable accessing emotions on stage
- It doesn’t matter what the choice was if you commit.
- Choosing to *decide* without deference to “sense” can make for fun unique scenes.
- Make assumptions about *emotional subtext* to heighten emotions.
- The sooner we identify how a player feels the better – because that *feeling* can be heightened by the player and played *to* by the player’s teammates.
- The sooner we can identify how a player feels about *a something* the better – because that something can be heightened by the player to heighten the player’s emotion and that something can be referenced/heightened by the player’s teammates to force *the player* into a *reaction*.



### Week 3 – Building Scenes Through Emotional Reactions

**In any scene you have at least two different emotional perspectives to play from: Your Personal and Scenic Emotional Perspectives – How you feel about “I” and How you feel about “You.” Your Personal Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who I am, where I am and what I’m doing. Your Scenic Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who my scene partner is, where my scene partner is and what my scene partner is doing.**

*Key Teachings:*

- “Active” Scene Elements are the who, what, where, when, why, etc. that exist *in-the-moment* of the scene and can therefore evoke in-the-moment reactions from emotional players
- Letting emotion be our scene guide, all an improviser needs to decide is :
  - How to feel about “I”: How I feel about who I am, where I am and what I’m doing.
  - How to feel about “You”: How I feel about who my scene partner is, where my scene partner is and what my scene partner is doing.
- When in doubt, React!
- When in doubt, Repeat!
- Our “What” is emotional reactions to active elements. Commitment and repetition are the only “why” we need. But “Because” can elevate the emotional stakes of a scene with context.

### Week 4 – Being Affected/Establishing Stakes

**Reacting emotionally in-the-moment keeps our scenes effectively in the moment. You can’t calculate every change; you have to allow yourself (and your characters) to be vulnerable to the moment. React, and trust wherever it goes.**

**We choose to feel, reacting emotionally without deference to “sense.” But. Our emotional choices can be aided, informed and heightened by situational, behavioral and relationship-based endowments.**

*Key Teachings:*

- Be vulnerable to the moment
- Be dynamic to keep a scene progressing
- In conflict, “lose” and you will win
- Heighten the impact of your emotional reactions with choices that endow scenes with stakes



### Week 5 – Exercises for Staying Active

**Practice Two Person Scenes with an emphasis on emotionally engaging environment. When we *see, touch, smell* and *REACT* to our environment, the audience can, too. When we have *things* in our environment that *make* us feel, then we can build and heighten scenes with emotional reactions.**

*Key Teachings:*

- Weight, volume and tension are the key characteristics of mime object that help players and the audience “see” an object.
- Let your miming inspire a scene but do not let it dictate the scene. Mime gives us something to do so we're more than talking heads, but it shouldn't confine us.
- Environment is about more than objects. What sounds fill the space? What about the temperature, precipitation and/or density of the atmosphere?
- Be active in your scenes; don't regress to standing and talking stage center.
- Care about what's in-the-moment and in the space with your character.

### Week 6 – Leveraging Scenes for More Scenes

**A scene's stakes (situational, behavioral and relation-based) can be heightened *with more scenes*, especially when *emotions* are heightened, too.**

*Key Teachings:*

- Remember what's fun; Heighten what's fun through repetition
- We want to execute tag-outs in service of *emotional* stakes
- Being a bigger version of Player One; Do what Player One did bigger – always a trusty default
- Put the onus on initiating subsequent beats on those standing on the wings
- Use NAMES
- Elevate the situation
- Elevate character's defining behaviors
- Elevate themes
- Mapping - Lay the dynamic structure of one genre over the particulars of another genre to heighten thematic and narrative depths.

### Week 7 – Practice

**Hit unused lessons, revisit lessons that succeeded/struggled, introduce potential performance games/exercises and have fun.**



**Week 8 – Performance Prep**

**Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.**



## Character and Emotion Class – Class Curriculum

### Introductory/General Notes:

In this class, students will focus on accessing emotion in-the-moment and building characters from emotional perspectives/behaviors to drive scenes forward.

Anyone can talk about something on stage. Not everyone can react to in-the-moment stimulus on stage. The few, the proud, the brave improviser reacts boldly in-the-moment to make-believe and taps into the art's unique surprise.

Just react emotionally. Don't over-think an easy win. You don't need a motivation. You just need commitment to the moment.

Just be yourself. You have a wealth of information from your life. You've had a ton of experiences and met a ton of people with a ton of perspectives. We often try too hard to be *clever* when we could be leveraging *real* details that may come out of our mouths faster and arrive with greater impact. A scripted actor's whole job is to make an audience believe that the emotional reaction they're rehearsed is real in-the-moment. In improvisation, we have a leg up; we are all experiencing what's happening for the first time. So just react. Don't be in your head thinking about how you should feel or why we should feel. Just react. React without words until the words come. React without why until the why presents itself. If you commit to your reaction, that's all the "why" an audience needs. If you invest in your emotion, the audience will believe that you have a reason even if you don't have a motivation in mind.

### Week 1 – Reacting In-the-Moment

**Objective:** A scripted actor's whole job is to make an audience believe that the emotional reaction they're rehearsed is real in-the-moment. In improvisation, we have a leg up; we are all experiencing what's happening for the first time. So just react. Don't be in your head thinking about how you should feel or why we should feel. Just react. React without words until the words come. React without why until the why presents itself. If you commit to your reaction, that's all the "why" an audience needs. If you invest in your emotion, the audience will believe that you have a reason even if you don't have a motivation in mind.



**1.0 Introduction: Introduce the class and yourself**

*Suggested Exercises:*

CRAZY EIGHTS – Together (teacher included) everyone shakes out their limbs – right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg – in descending counts starting at 8 each and ending with 1 each.

NAME THUMPER – Going around the circle, each person (teacher included) associates their name with an action. Go around once more so everyone knows everyone else’s name and action. Then play progresses with an individual doing their name/action and then another person’s name/action; that person then does their name/action and then another person’s name/action; etc.

**1.1 Make Each Other Look Good: While a lot of this class will be focused on making individual emotional choices, we can’t forget that we always *improvise as a group*. Our guiding mantra should always be “making each other look good” through acceptance and support.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

AWESOME! – Around the circle, students say something about themselves and/or their day to which the rest of class enthusiastically responds, “Awesome!”

*Lessons:*

- **Acceptance is fun** – don’t waste time judging; the audience wants to see you enjoying one another

HEIGHTENING EMOTIONAL AGREEMENT CIRCLE – A player makes an emotional statement. It can be as simple as “I love it here,” “I hate the arts,” or “I’m uncomfortable.” Then progressively each person to the right heightens the perspective by agreeing with it – essentially with a “Yes, and.” “I love the beach.” “Yeah, I love the white sand.” “Yeah, I love getting my tan on.” Etc. The initiator gets the final addition. And then the person to their right starts with a new emotional statement.

*Lessons:*

- **Repeating Agreement is funny** – what’s better than one person who believes something strange? Two people who feel that same way.
- **Agreement fosters collaborative building** – many people united behind one emotional perspective will be able to heighten creative details to apexes beyond the reach of any single person.



***1.2 Be Yourself:* Without scripts, improvisers are dependent on what’s in their head – details from their lives and their personal ability to access emotion in-the-moment. The audience loves seeing us on stage. Let the audience see you to give them the ability to connect with you and ultimately root for you.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

CAFÉ SCENES – Two players sit in chairs facing each other. They are to have a conversation as themselves, trying not to worry about people watching them.

*Lessons:*

- **Share your opinions** – We avoid “getting to know one another scenes” in improv because they end up being boring as players focus on figuring each other out instead of boldly committing to what they already *know*. A bold emotional statement immediately charges the scene with something interesting.
- **No questions** – questions are invitations for information; statements *are* information. Get to the information. Instead of asking “What do you do?” say “I’m a lawyer.”
- **What you *did* or what you *will do* is ultimately less interesting than when we talk about the *present*** - We are talking about the present when we talk about what we *feel* or what we *care about*.
- **Focus outward and react** – What do *you* see? How do *you* feel about that? Don’t be in your head thinking about what to say; focus on your partner and share observations and feelings.
- **Be vulnerable** – honest reactions are endearing; be endearing instead of calculating

CONVERSATION PARTY – Players stand on stage in multiple groups of two or three people. Players are “at a party” as themselves, speaking as themselves to other who are also themselves. The teacher conducts focus from one conversation to the next.

*Lessons:*

- **Be specific** – You don’t have to try so hard to be funny. You just have to be specific. The surprise inherent to improvisation is made even more satisfying when we’re specific in-the-moment.
- **React** - The audience reaction of “I would have said that,” or “I know a woman who would have said that,” is such a satisfying response for any performance medium. In improvisation, that power is compounded as the audience knows that your reaction was “your” reaction in-the-moment.
- **Connect** – don’t just sit in your head waiting for your next turn to speak, *listen* to what’s going on around you, let it seep in and affect you.
- **Juxtapose** – we don’t have to discuss our differences or negotiate out one “truth.” A party group who loves cats standing next to a group that loves dogs doesn’t



need to engage in a fight. The audience sees both groups and wants both heightened next to each other.

**1.3 Be Confident: Confidence is what separates the AssCats that can do whatever they want to grand applause from the college improv troupes who sink even great moves with desperation. The audience needs to see you comfortable in improv’s chaos so they can relax and enjoy it all.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

HERE’S WHAT I KNOW – One player takes the stage with everyone else in the audience. Audience, with teacher moderating, asks the player very technical or nonsensical or just *hard* questions. The player presents him/herself as an expert in all areas and is therefore able to confidently respond to all questions.

*Lessons:*

- **Emotions are always trump** – A maniacal laugh. A dismissive ‘pshaw.’ Even an awkward misdirection. All of these non-informative but *emotional* responses keep a player in control.
- **Decisiveness is king** – struggling to the right answer is rarely as satisfying as quickly deciding on any answer.
- **Commitment is all the sense you need** – players can get hung up on thinking through responses that “make sense.” Forget sense. Just make a choice and stand by it confidently. Commitment to making a decision despite sense will make your response sound “right” even if it isn’t and/or it’ll focus the scene on your “wrong” character instead of the Q&A “stuff,” which is awesome.
- **Committed, You Can Stand By Yourself** - you can be on stage alone for 30 seconds or for five minutes. Commit to yourself. Don’t rely on meeting your scene partner center stage before the scene starts. You can be alone.

I AM SUPERMAN – Everyone stands in a circle. One at a time, each player will enter the circle, say “I am [NAME] and for the next 30 seconds, I am Superman” at which point the teacher will start a timer and the player does whatever they want until the time is up at which point everyone claps and the next player takes the circle. Players around the circle are NOT to interact with the player in the center. The player in the center should be encouraged to do something they’ve been told they need to do more of on stage. Do mime. Be emotional. Stand still. Doesn’t matter.

*Lessons:*

- **Surrender to your group** – let go of ego, let your team know that you’re ready and willing to commit to being awkward in front of them.
- **It sucks to be alone** – don’t let your fellow players suffer on stage alone. Get out there and support each other.



**1.4 Acceptance and Commitment: “Yes” is arguably the greatest emotional statement there is. Watching a player accept a belief given to him/her by another player is a fun surprise. When the player continues committing to that perspective the audience is engaged in rooting for the performer in a way unique to improvisation.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

YES, YES I AM – Form lay-up lines on either side of the stage. The player on stage left endows the player on stage right with a strong emotional perspective (“You think Ringo is the best Beatle”). The player from stage right accepts the perspective (“Yes, I do”) and commits through several lines of dialogue (“He voices Thomas the Tank Engine” / “I own every Thomas trinket there is”).

*Lessons:*

- **“Yes” is funny** – there’s a surprise unique to improvisation in watching a player accept a perspective thrust upon him/her. The “Yes” of acceptance stands to be funnier than anything else even the cleverest person might have responded with.
- **Specificity heightens the funny of acceptance** – “Have you ever eaten a train, piece by piece, *after* you derailed it with your penis?” “Yes – for charity.”\* When we *negotiate* the bizarre, we (and the audience) get bogged down trying to make sense. When we accept the bizarre, we (and the audience) explore and heighten fun worlds where the bizarre is “real.” [\* thank you Mr. Show]



## Week 2 – Initiating Toward Emotional Reactions

***Objective:*** All you need to start a scene is one thing: anything. Make one choice – a posture, an activity, an object, a location, etc. – and all other choices can flow out of that “anything.”

The sooner that emotion is on the table though the better, as it is how our characters feel about themselves, their surroundings and each other that will be what our scenes are “about.”

Leading with emotion is a hugely powerful way to ground a scene in-the-moment. Don’t over-think an easy win. You don’t need a motivation. You just need commitment to the moment. Just react emotionally.

### 2.0 Warm-Ups: Revisit names, build energy and concentrate energy

*Suggested Exercises:*

CRAZY EIGHTS

NAME THUMPER

CIRCLE OF SEQUENCES – A player points at another and says any word. That player points at another player and says another word inspired by the first. This continues until every player says a word and points to another player, with the final player to contribute pointing back to the first player to contribute. This is Sequence One; repeat it continuously until the group is comfortable with it. Establish a Sequence Two the same way, and then a Sequence Three. When players are comfortable with each Sequence individually, tell them that they now will be keeping them all going at once. Start with Sequence One and then tap the player starting Sequence Two on the shoulder, then tap the player starting Sequence Three on the shoulder.

*Lessons:*

- **Focus outward** – can’t be in your head freaking out; have to be ready and waiting for your turn
- **Be sure you’re heard** – enunciate, make eye contact, and pointing helps
- **Each individual is 100% responsible for the success of the group** – if a sequence is dropped, even if you didn’t drop it, pick it up

*Variations:*

- **Names** – Make Sequence One “Your Name” and Sequence Three “Their Name” to add to potential confusion so as to force increased concentration



**2.1 Emotional Heights/Depths: We need to be able to exhibit the highest highs and lowest lows on stage so we need to practice emotion at the extremes to become comfortable in that space.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

EMOTION TO 11 – Teacher gives students an emotion. Around a circle, students engage in that emotional perspective, ramping up from 1-10 to 11. You'll need to be attentive in this one since people tend to hit walls here. They really need to go bonkers and forget to make sense in what they're saying. If someone really clams up, offer to do it with them, alongside them. Use your judgment to know when to push and when to let it go.

*Progression:*

- Give big, round, easy emotions, "happy, sad, fear, anger"
- Push people, gently "more, bigger" to discover and emote. Don't be mean. Do it with them if they struggle.

*Lessons:*

- **Exude the emotion physically** - 11 in sadness is rolling on the floor and weeping
- **Push it past comfortable** – being vulnerable enough to share big emotions can be hard, but we have to trust each other and the safe place to “go big” in practice. Support each other with applause.
- **Being bored or unaffected is hard to heighten** - care

**2.2 Emotional Reactions: If you are to “choose one thing” entering a scene, emotion is always a strong choice. It doesn’t matter what the choice was if you commit. And choosing to decide without deference to “sense” can make for fun unique scenes.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE– Player One makes a decision of what emotion they will use to react to Player Two through. Then Player Two says *anything*. And Player One has the previously decided upon emotional reaction to the *anything*. (“I have a dog” / “Fucking Christ!”)

*Lessons:*

- **A committed emotion will always trump sense** – if you just feel you never have to explain how/why you feel what you do.
- **Any emotion works** – if we try to “understand your motivation” before making a choice about how to feel, you’ll end up in a scene that’s been done a million times before. But, if you make a choice about how to feel before any context is established, then that scene has the potential to be different than any that’s been seen before (“I’m the first Johnson graduating college” / “Ooooh, my god. I’m so scared”).



- **Repetition is the only justification you need** – Don't waste your time negotiating which feelings are valid; just heighten the emotion you chose to feel (If you choose to cry when your partner says, "I'm five," don't stop crying to explain why; just keep crying.)

**2.3 Emotional Decision Making: We don't need it "all figured out" the moment we step on stage. Make one choice and then build other choices on top of that choice.**

**We can start with emotion and build the details of our character around that. Or, we can start with a detail and build an emotional character from there.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

ENDOWMENT WALK – students walk around the space as themselves. Teacher gives prompts for them to make choices from (see *Progression* below). Teacher asks additional questions to flesh out the characters. Teacher has students reset, returning to walk around the space as themselves again. And repeat.

*Progression:*

- Have players change elements of their personal walk to see how it affects the way they feel
  - Change your rate – speed up, slow down
  - Change your size – is your walk big or small?
  - Walk with a different body part forward
  - Change your spine
  - Be an animal
  - Walk like someone you know
- Ask the class to try on a different:
  - Emotion
  - Posture/Physicality
  - Desire (I want...)
  - Perspective (I like..., I hate...)
  - Environment
  - Action
- Ask questions to flesh out the character. Basically "if this, then what"; for example, how do you feel about the action you're doing, or how does that desire affect your walk?
- Ask students to speak in their character's voice – calling out students individually to contribute
- Tell students to acknowledge each other's presence to discover their 'status'

*Lessons:*

- **Don't let starting a scene be intimidating** – all you need to start is one choice
- **Seek to establish emotion** – as emotion will drive our scenes, we don't want to stop our character development until we establish that emotional perspective.



Character ≠ Emotion. You can be a lispy hick, but until you make a choice about how that lispy hick *feels* you'll be hard pressed to heighten the stakes of a scene.

**2.4 No Pressure Initiations: Students shouldn't be intimidated to start a scene. They don't need to think of a perfect initiation; they just need to get out there and "choose one thing."**

**Players can feel very anxious about initiations. It is important for a teacher to balance emphasizing "strong initiations" and underscoring that "failure" isn't possible – all you need to start is "anything."**

*Suggested Exercises:*

ANNOYANCE-STYLE SCENE STARTS - Have the class form a line across the back of the stage. Call out one name. That person should immediately take the stage and "take care of themselves" with a choice about their emotion, posture, environment, activity, etc. The moment you call that name, another improviser should be coming out on stage as well. That person must also "take care of themselves" with a choice. Players expand on their choices, most importantly establishing and heightening their *emotional perspective*. Run through this several times until you are confident everyone will take care of themselves right out of the gate and, eventually if not immediately, get to emotion.

*Lessons:*

- If I'm picking my nose, what does that say about my age? If I'm forty-five and picking my nose, where am I? If I'm forty-five and picking my nose in a restaurant, am I embarrassed?
- **A scene needs information. But expand on what you've already got. Commit to it.**
- **Reactions are powerful.** Note the scenes where a player's choice to have a strong emotion evoked laughter/etc. from the audience.
- **You don't need motivation to have a feeling**

BAT SHIT ACCEPTENCE LAYUPS – Rapid fire players enter the stage from the wings. One player initiates with...whatever comes to mind; it can be crazy, it can be "lame." The other player agrees with the world of that initiation no matter what it is. Ex: I just saw a monkey eat its head; Me, too! I, uh, well, yeah; Totally.

*Lessons:*

- **Whatever is said, accepted and committed to will work.** Don't put pressure on yourself to provide gold up top. And don't keep that anxiety from letting you start scenes.

SOUND STARTS – From the wings in layup lines, one player enters stage making any sound. The other player can mirror that sound or provide a sound of his/her own. Rather than explain the motivation behind the sounds, the players just need to double down on their sounds, ideally finding the emotion of the sound.



*Lessons:*

- **Don't wait until you're center stage to make a sound.** The scene starts the moment your foot's on stage.
- **Trust that repetition of an emotion/sound is all the "reason" you have to provide for what/how you feel.** Commit, don't explain.

**2.5 Emotional Initiations:** The sooner we identify how a player feels the better – because that *feeling* can be heightened by the player and played *to* by the player's teammates. The sooner we can identify how a player feels about *a something* the better – because that something can be heightened by the player to heighten the player's emotion and that something can be referenced/heightened by the player's teammates to force *the player* into a *reaction*.

*Suggested Exercises:*

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL STATEMENT CIRCLE – Around a circle, everyone makes a Self Contained Emotional Statement. It can be as simple as "I love it here," "I hate the arts," or "I'm uncomfortable." *Note:* the SCES might seem stiff but damnit it works.

*Lessons:*

- **It's a statement.** Not a question shifting the responsibility of providing information to your partner. There's a period. It's definitive.
- **It's an *emotional* statement.** Emotion is one of our three key tools; let's get to it.
- **It's establishes an *emotional reaction*.** You need to feel and, for the *reaction*, you need to give that feeling a direction. Give X the power to make you feel Y.
- **Being self-contained, the statement places you on solid ground without dictating the scene to your partners** - Mick Napier urges us each to "take care of yourself" without confining the scene. Allow your partner the choice of whether to mirror you in some fashion or to take on something entirely their own. Being self-contained is increasingly an imperative the larger a group you have on stage.

SELF CONTAINED EMOTIONAL LAY UPS – One player initiates with a Self Contained Emotional Statement. Another player joins with a line of their own and then both players leave stage.

*Progression:*

- **Agree.** Player Two adopts the same emotional perspective as Player One with a Self Contained Emotional Statement of his/her own.
- **Juxtapose.** Player Two has a Self Contained Emotional Statement of his/her own that can be related or totally unrelated to Player One's.
- **Feel. React. Double Down and Heighten your Emotional Reactions.** Repeat. And Scene.



## Week 3 – Building Scenes Through Emotional Reactions

***Objective:*** In any scene you have at least two different emotional perspectives to play from: Your Personal and Scenic Emotional Perspectives – How you feel about “I” and How you feel about “You.” Your Personal Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who I am, where I am and what I’m doing. Your Scenic Emotional Perspective = How I feel about who my scene partner is, where my scene partner is and what my scene partner is doing.

### **3.0 Warm-Ups:** Build energy, concentrate energy and emphasize the importance of emotion

*Suggested Exercises:*

CRAZY EIGHTS

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EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE – Around a circle, every player just has an emotional reaction. They don’t need words – they can just make an emotional sound. Have them go around and then go around pushing their emotions to 11.

**3.1 Personal Engagement:** If you were all by yourself on stage, how would you feel about who you are, where you are and/or what you’re doing? Finding an emotion and an *active* scene element to feel that emotion toward can be the continued catalyst for a successful scene.

If I say, “I love cats,” I’m just emoting. If I say, “I love *this* cat,” I’m emotionally reacting. If we make the object of our emotion *active* in the scene – actually tangible/ observable/ repeatable on stage – then we have something to *react to* instead of just *talk about*.

What is it *specifically* that we’re feeling about who we are, where we are and/or what we’re doing? What is it *specifically* that we’re feeling about who our scene partners are, where they are and/or what they’re doing? If we make a decision to connect our feeling to a tangible/observable/repeatable *anything* on stage, we can progress the scene by heightening our feeling *and* that “anything.”

*Suggested Exercises:*

PERSONAL ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player engages an emotion and makes explicit what it is that is evoking that emotion.

*Example:*

- I love this cat
- I hate pulling weeds
- Des Moines, you’re impressive
- I’m proud of my shoes



- I'm afraid of my face
- I'm sad I have no friends

*Lessons:*

- **Specificity breeds details** – when you know what you're feeling and what you're feeling *about*, then our creative minds have a clear direction to explore.
- **Active elements keep us physically active** – it's much harder to sit still when you love *this* cat than to sit in a chair and talk about loving cats.
- **Connecting our emotion to an active scene element can make us react through rather than think through our scenes.** More of that element evokes more of our emotion and we can play Pavlovianly.
- **Don't wait to be joined before making a choice** - We don't *need* anyone else. You're never alone on stage, even if you're the only improviser not on the wings; you have a world to explore and to react to.

**3.2 Scenic Engagement: How do you feel about who your scene partner is, where your scene partner is and/or what your scene partner is doing? Finding something active about your scene partner to *feel* about will help facilitate a scene you can both *react through* instead of *think through*.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

SCENIC ENDOWMENT CIRCLE – One by one around a circle, each player turns to the player to their left, engages an emotion and makes explicit what it is about the player to their left's character that is evoking that emotion.

*Example:*

- I love your hat
- I hate how smug you are
- You dead-lifted 200 pounds? Impressive.
- I'm proud you're my son
- I'm afraid of your soul
- I desire your friendship

*Lessons:*

- **Give gifts** – it's much more fun to be endowed with information (“Ugh, you got fat”) than to be burdened with requests for information (“What are you doing?”).
- **Want something? Feel the absence** – to avoid head-butting, don't “demand,” focus on “desire.” You can want something from your scene partner, but you don't want to become hog-tied fighting for what you want. How does not having what you want *right now* make you feel?
- **Give the gift of freedom** – if you tell me, “I hate how smug you are,” I don't have to directly respond to your feeling; I can focus on what I'm smug about (“I'm a golden god”) or I can do anything I want (“I'm tired of this wallpaper”). You don't want your scene partner to feel constrained to address or discuss your



feeling (which is more likely the case with “Stop being smug,” “Why are you so smug?” or “Let’s talk about your smugness.”)

- **Give the gift of dynamite** – If you say, “Your tap dancing makes me so horny,” you better believe I’m going to tap dance.

**3.3 2 Person Scenes Heightening Emotion: Establish an emotional perspective, heighten the emotional perspective through reaction to active details, and edit – That’s scene.**

We want to avoid negotiation, conflict and the tepid, talked-out “discovery” that stagnates scenes’ growth.

*Suggested Exercises:*

ENDOW AND HEIGHTEN LAY-UPS – Player One initiates from stage left. Player Two initiates from stage right. Both players heighten what they initiate. After a few lines back and forth, teacher calls “Scene” and two new players start the exercise.

*Progression:*

- **Personal / Personal** - Player One engages a personal emotional perspective and Player Two engages a personal emotional perspective.
  - **Disparate initiations...**
    - Player 1 – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
    - Player 2 – (looking around in panic) “I heard it again.”
  - **Complementary initiations...**
    - Player 1 – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
    - Player 2 – (flipping nostalgically through a big book) “Those were innocent times.”
  - **Mirrored initiations...**
    - Player 1 – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
    - Player 2 – (playing with a yo-yo sadly) “siiiiggghhh.”
- **Scenic / Scenic** - Player One engages an active aspect of Player Two with an emotional perspective and Player Two engages an active aspect of Player One with an emotional perspective.
  - Player 1 – I want to kill you and steal your life.
  - Player 2 – I laugh at your weakness.
- **Personal / Scenic** – Player One engages a personal emotional perspective and Player 2 engages an active aspect of Player One with an emotional perspective.
  - Player One – (staring forlornly at the Cat’s Cradle he works with his fingers) “sigh.”
  - Player Two – “Oh, I’ve had it with your attitude, mister.”
- **Scenic / Personal** – Player One engages an active aspect of Player Two with an emotional perspective and Player Two engages a personal emotional perspective.



- Player 1 – I want to kill you and steal your life.
- Player 2 – Oh, hey, my Diamond of the Month Club package arrived!

*Lessons:*

- **Don't give up your thing** – heightening our individual choices together is all we need to move the scene forward. Trying to “figure out” how our things mesh, fighting each other's thing or dropping our thing in favor of our partner's thing robs scenes of their potential.
- **Commitment avoids justification** – explaining why two people are on stage often saps the energy from a scene. When two players commit to simply heightening their choices, no one will question the juxtaposition of even the most mismatched initiations.
- **Reactionary statements avoid negotiation** – when we're not comfortable with and/or don't understand what's happening on stage, we revert to asking questions that often bog down scenes. Simply making choices moves us forward and making *emotional* choices helps statements stand without defense (“What do you mean, I'm a pig?” versus “Oh, I'm a pig. You're a dirty whore.”)
- **Heightening avoids conflict** – “I want to kill you”/ “I want to kiss you.” If these are the initiations, we don't want to debate or argue – *heighten the feelings*. You don't have to address the disparity between feelings right away if ever. Heighten conflict/tension by heightening your part of it. Addressing/discussing conflict/tension takes the dynamite out of the scene.
- **Make Scenic/Personal Initiations less rare** - it can be fun for Player Two to choose a personally grounding emotional perspective despite Player One's attempt to initially engage her in his thing.

TWO PERSON SCENES – Player One initiates from stage left. Player Two initiates from stage right. Players heighten what they initiate. Have players decide BOTH how they feel about “I” and “You” – engaging an active endowment about themselves AND about their scene partner.

*Lessons:*

- **Bored? React!** – don't know what to do in a scene? Have an emotional reaction to an active element.
- **Lost? Repeat!** – I scream. Why? I don't know. So I keep screaming, heightening the emotion of the scream. Don't stop what you're doing to make “sense” of it; Find “sense” through continuing doing what you're doing.
- **Be affected** - There's power in reacting in-the-moment to another player's perspective/actions/choices. When we don't react to a fellow player's move that deserves a reaction we risk pulling the rug out from under the scene.
- **Feel first, understand second (if ever)** – don't wait to “understand your motivation” before making a choice about how to feel



- **Never trapped by your choice** – while players should be encouraged to push their heightening before changing course onto a new thing, players should never feel trapped by the things. “I love my teddy bear.” I heighten why I love my teddy bear (“He doesn’t judge”) but I don’t have to react only to teddy. “I really love my fluffy duck.”/ “He doesn’t give a shit.”

### **3.4 Additional Scene Exercises: The following set of exercises provide students additional ways of initiating and navigating Two Person Scenes.**

#### *Suggested Exercises:*

BLIND SCENES – Player One starts engaged in the environment (with an action, object, atmosphere, etc.). Player Two, starting with his back to the stage, has the first line of dialogue.

#### *Lessons:*

- **Commitment is the only justification you need** – If players’ initiations don’t align, they don’t have to make sense of why they’re together. They can just accept and heighten what’s happening.

EYE CONTACT SCENES – Players One and Two have to make *statements* back and forth without breaking eye contact. For the sake of the exercise, these scenes can consist of two players standing center stage as talking-heads.

#### *Lessons:*

- **Harder to assert when pressured** – We tend to want to ask questions or make weak statements when forced up against our scene partners. We have to be (*or at least “seem”*) confident even in the face of demanding insecurity.

EMOTIONAL SUBTEXT LAY-UPS – Make assumptions to heighten emotions. “Have you seen my wallet?” “I get it; I’m not fiscally responsible!” Seeking to use emotions to drive scenes, we can make our partner’s contributions *matter* even if they don’t initially resonate. Player One comes off a lay-up line with a very innocuous line (“Oh, look, a mushroom”). Player Two makes that line matter by making a strong assumption about what that line could mean (“I’m sorry I told you about me tripping on shrooms”).

#### *Lessons:*

- **Don’t feel pressure to explain the subtext/Commitment trumps sense** – “What a beautiful sunset”/ “I’ll never cheat on you.” All that matters is that Player Two thought up a “cheating” subtext from Player One’s “sunset” it doesn’t have to be justified.



- **Don't defend; heighten** – Player One needs to make assumptions, too. “What a beautiful sunset”/ “I’ll never cheat on you”/ “I knew it. You’re cheating on me”/ “That you would think I could ever cheat on me is inexcusable.”

“YES, BECAUSE” SCENES – Player One makes a *statement* about they feel about herself or her scene partner. Player Two heightens that feeling by making explicit the reason why Player One feels like she does (“I’m afraid of roller coasters” / “Because I dropped you as a baby”).

*Lessons:*

- **Feeling Comes First** – Don’t wait on your motivation before feeling something. Let feeling something, and the repetition of that feeling something, lead to an understanding of “why” (if needed at all).
- **Stay In-the-Moment** – Commitment to reacting to the last thing said will keep us committed to the moment and focusing outward
- **Take a beat** – the best thing about emotions is feeling them. We don’t have to respond verbally right away. Take a moment to be affected, to *feel* the impact of the line. And do it without maybe before knowing “the impact of the line.”



## Week 4 – Being Affected/Establishing Stakes

***Objective:*** Reacting emotionally in-the-moment keeps our scenes effectively in the moment. You can't calculate every change; you have to allow yourself (and your characters) to be vulnerable to the moment. React, and trust wherever it goes.

We choose to feel, reacting emotionally without deference to “sense.” But. Our emotional choices can be aided, informed and heightened by situational, behavioral and relationship-based endowments.

***4.0 Warm-Ups:*** Build energy, concentrate energy and explore the power of being affected, reacting in-the-moment to provided stimuli.

*Suggested Exercises:*

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REACTION CIRCLE – Player One turns to Player Two on his left and drops a line with the intention of getting a reaction (“I’m pregnant”). Player Two reacts. Then Player Two turns to Player Three to try and get a reaction with a brand new line.

*Variations:*

- Players react as “honestly” as possible – being authentic engages an audience whether a player is reacting “as they would in that situation” or through such a committed character as good actors can
- Players choose the emotion to react through before the line is said – what matters is that we commit to reacting in-the-moment
- Players use the same line multiple times – players’ relationship can inform the reaction and heighten the reaction
  - “I’m pregnant” – to husband, boyfriend, mom, boss, etc.

HITCHHIKER – One player starts, driving a bus, expressing an emotional perspective (“I love the South”). A second player enters the scene, boarding the bus with a contrasting emotional perspective to the driver (“The South scares me”). Gradually the driver accepts and embraces the hitchhiker's perspective, and the two come into agreement. a third player enters as a new hitchhiker, boarding the bus with a new contrasting emotional perspective (“I think Mississippi's beautiful”). The driver and the first hitchhiker gradually accept and embrace this new perspective. Repeat with another hitchhiker.

*Variations:*

- Let the driver leave and have the car rotate around as more hitchhikers are added



**4.1 Losing:** The best tool in avoiding conflict? Losing. Losing is such a powerful skill. One, it allows players to disengage from talking-head arguments. Two, the losing player wins in the audience's eyes – don't ever underestimate the endearing quality of a player who is willing to be affected

**Bite your tongue. Swallow your pride. Engage in an unrelated shiny active element on stage. Be the dynamic character and the scene's about you. Your scene partner will hurry to be affected also because the audience reacted so favorably to you. Or, your scene partner will support your dynamism by feeding you fuel to heighten your dueling emotions.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

TURN THE OTHER CHEEK – Prepare contrasting pairs of scenic desires on slips of paper (“Love me”/ “Leave me”; “We have to stop rocking”/ “Never stop a’rockin’”; “I need you to understand my truth”/ “I’ll never believe your lies”). Instruct players to initiate fully believing in their given desire. Build tension, sure. But the first player to acquiesce wins. And the exercise's focus is understanding how “losing” affects the scene.

*Lessons:*

- **Giving in ≠ Giving up** – If you acquiesce, that doesn't mean you've given up on your desire. You can return to it. And you can acquiesce again. The dueling emotional reactions are what makes you a dynamic character.
- **More than one character can be dynamic** – “Love me”/ “Leave me”/ “Okay, I'm leaving”/ “Stay.” That's fun.

**4.2 Attract, Don't Fight:** Will your scene partner not agree to your awesome idea? Don't fight him on it. Show him why what you want is superior. This not only disengages argument but it also engages active scene elements.

**You want your older brother to build a sandcastle with you. He doesn't want to. Have so much fun building a sand castle on your own that he *has* to come engage with what you want.**

**You want your life partner to come to home. She doesn't want to. That's okay. You're having so much fun at home that you don't need her. She'll come home.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

ATTRACT, DON'T FIGHT – Prepare contrasting pairs of personal desires on slips of paper (“I want quiet”/ “I want to blast this song”; “Wake up”/ “Let me sleep”; “Being healthy is awesome”/ “Cigarettes make me cool”). Instruct players to initiate fully



believing in their given desire. Build tension, sure. But the first player to disengage the argument by engaging what they want by themselves with positive emotion wins. And the exercise's focus is understanding how "attracting" with emotional engagement into active scene elements progresses the scene more successfully than argument and/or negotiation.

*Lessons:*

- **Positives progress; Negatives stagnant** – Remember that agreement fosters collaborative building. If your fellow player doesn't want to play your game, that's fine; have fun without him. The fun will move the scene forward. Disagreeing roots the scene in static emotion. Dynamic characters breed dynamic scenes.
- **More than one character can be dynamic** – "Build a sand castle with me"/ "Let me read my book"/ "Okay, I'll have fun building a sand castle alone"/ "Great. I'll enjoy engaging this book solo"/ "Let me read a line" / "Let me build a spire"/ "Come back and build with me"/ "How could you leave this book? It's awesome." That's fun.

**4.3 Stakes: Our "What" is emotional reactions to active elements. Commitment and repetition are the only "why" we need. But "Because" can elevate the emotional stakes of a scene with context.**

**"Stakes" come in many forms – and we want to apply emotion to all of them.**

**Situational Effects** – The impact that success or failure of a particular circumstance's efforts portend to have on players'/a player's feelings. "We have five minutes to defuse this bomb or we're dead."/ "I don't want to die."

**Defining Behaviors** – while a player who is doing something for the first time is dealing with Situational Effects, a player who is doing something for the hundredth time is defining herself as a person, and a player who is doing something for the first time after having done something else a hundred times is being affected. The audience loves *knowing* our characters; it allows them to react with us in-the-moment. We can build stakes by heightening patterns of emotional behavior.

**Relationship Status** – "I don't like your shoes" gains weight in the context of the relationship between "I" and "you." What if "I" is a neighborhood kid? A boss? A romantic conquest? How we feel about the relationship can heighten the stakes of our emotional reactions to active elements.



*SITUATIONAL Suggested Exercises:*

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE – Players initiate two person scenes with the wildest, crazy-detailed quests/needs that they can imagine. “It is left to us janitors to slay the dragon.” “Build me a robot that makes robots and runs on souls.” They seek solutions. They pursue options.

*Lessons:*

- **Try, don’t discuss** – “I don’t know if this will work.” Shut up. Try it.
- **All that matters is that you feel** – care about what you’re doing. Experience successes and failures emotionally. The Matrix was totally predicated on the intricacies of plot (and special effects) and when plot failed, there was no emotion (too *cool*) to carry it. *Because* “The Flux-Capacitor” was the only sense Back To The Future needed; it had Marty and Doc.
- **Confidently engage environment** – explore your wild premise beyond words. More often, the stranger the world, the more we hang back from making physical choices (I’m “a pilot” but I don’t know how to fly a plane so I’m scared to engage the cockpit’s control”). Do *whatever* confidently and deliberately (How do you build a mainframe? “Like this. Ugh. Umph. Twist. Torque. Here.”)
- **Get Satisfaction** – We often unnecessarily fear achieving our wants to avoid dealing with what lies on the other side. When that fear has power over the scene it stagnates. What happens when you give the guy who wants a robot a robot? What if you left when someone demands that you “get out of here”? What if you can suddenly do the thing you couldn’t do? Especially if we have emotionally committed characters, we can feel comfortable exploring the other side of our obstacles.

*Variations:*

- Lead and/or break into exercise with a few environment warm-ups – “What are you doing?”, “Mighty Isis,” “Build a room,” “Environment/Dialogue Sequences,” etc.

*BEHAVIOR Suggested Exercises:*

(BUT) YOU ALWAYS/NEVER – Player One initiates to Player Two with a statement starting with one of the following variations:

- You Always...smile
- You Never...pick up your trash
- But You Always...read my mind
- But You Never...eat fast food



Player Two accepts the reality of the endowment. Player Two should *feel* about the endowment (Not being able to smile makes me sad). Player Two should *heighten* the endowment by elevating/expanding the details (“I feel like Prometheus stealing Doritos Tacos from the gods!”).

*Lessons:*

- **You’re *that* guy; how does it feel?** – Don’t just be Comic Boy Guy; love all things comics; despise books without pictures.
- **Actively experience** – Don’t just talk about what you’ve done or what you will do; engage the active elements of the present moment.

YOU ALSO / I ALSO – Every line of dialogue must start with either “You also…” or “I also…”. Heighten the details through an emotional perspective. Accept the endowments, engaging physically and in the present.

- “You Also have booger hanging.” “You Also have no tact.” “I Also am disgusted by you.” “I Also have bad gas.”
- “I Also paint amazingly.” “You Also live in a mansion.” “I Also make computer chips without practical purposes.” “I Also want to sell crap for millions.”

*Lessons:*

- **Start in the middle** – Making assumptions jump starts our scenes. Choosing to react emotionally to and with those assumptions turbo charges our scenes.
- **Actively experience** – Don’t just talk about what you’ve done or what you will do; engage the active elements of the present moment.
- **Can’t argue with these endowments**

*RELATIONSHIP STAKES Suggested Exercises:*

DECK OF CARDS – Prepare a deck of cards that includes a different number/face card for every player (there should only be one King, one 2, etc.). Players take a card and put it face-out on their forehead without looking at it first. Then all players walk around the space. Players work out their respective status through mimed deference and/or dismissal. High and low cards typically get established first, with the in-between cards struggling for consistency. It doesn’t have to become worked out cleanly before it’s edited.

*Lessons:*

- **Show status without words** – If you see an Ace, you should be deferential. If you see a 2, you can be dismissive. Paying attention to how other people react to you versus others can help you to determine your status.

*Variations:*



- **Do it without cards** – have students choose a rank in their heads and then attempt to interact consistently to determine how the whole class would rank in order
- **Vary suits** – mix red and black cards (still only one King, 2, etc.). See if that figures into how people chose to react to one another.

BAG OF EMOTIONS & RELATIONSHIPS – Player One takes a printed slip of paper out of the pre-prepared “Emotions” bag (“I’m hypnotized by your charm”). Player Two takes a printed slip out of the pre-prepared “Relationships” bag (*Your scene partner is your baby sitter*). Player One initiates (with the line of dialogue or an approximation). Player Two has an emotional reaction to Player One’s emotion through the filter of the given relationship (explicitly explaining the relationship or not). SEE APPENDIX FOR EXAMPLE LINES.

*Lessons:*

- **Relationship informs feeling** – whose mouth a line came out of can determine whether we like the sound of it or not. But a relationship’s description is not enough; we have to decide how we *feel* about that relationship.
- **Status** – the regard to which we hold our scene partner’s emotional opinion can determine our reaction. Is her opinion inscrutable even if you disagree? Is he such peon that nothing he says could be right? Do you bite your tongue or speak your mind? Do you take advantage or show mercy?
- **Allow emotions to coexist; don’t mute conflicting desires** – a boy sits across from a girl, pining silently while coolly attempting to flirt: that’s a drama aided by a camera’s close-ups. A boy sitting across from a girl shouts, “I love you,” only to then remember that she’s cooler than he is so he self-consciously retracts his assertion: that’s a comedy that explodes on stage.

DUOLOGUES – the teacher/class interviews a pair of players sitting on stage who have known each other for a very long time. Players can assume/endow *anything* about the other and, while emotional reactions abound, nothing is *surprising* to either of them.

*Lessons:*

- **“Day in the life” Not “The Day When”** – it’s more fun watching a couple who should break-up exhibit all the behaviors that indicate the “because” they should break up than for the couple to directly address they should break-up and argue about it. Accepting a relationship often means accepting the relationship’s permanence. Remember that in scenes where you’re trying to change another person. Suffering the present is being affected, which is more in-the-moment than demanding or negotiating. Accept being affected – *everything he does*



*annoys me, and that's clear to the audience and my scene partner, but I'm going to explore being annoyed instead of trying to not be annoyed*

- **Let familiarity breed emotion not mute it** – knowing you don't have to solve the problem should enable you to explore the problem with emotions at 11. "It really upsets me that my husband sleeps around, I hate it today and I'll hate it tomorrow, but that's my burden. When I say, I do, I mean it."

## **Week 5 – Exercises for Staying Active**

***Objective:*** Practice Two Person Scenes with an emphasis on emotionally engaging environment. When we *see, touch, smell* and **REACT** to our environment, the audience can, too. When we have *things* in our environment that *make* us feel, then we can build and heighten scenes with emotional reactions.

***NOTE:*** If you want to do the Double Blind Scenes in this class, I would suggest you **BRING A BLANKET or SHEET**

**5.0 Warm-Ups:** Build energy, concentrate energy and introduce the class' emphasis on mime.

*Suggested Exercises:*

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**5.1 Mime:** Weight, volume and tension are the key characteristics of a mimed object that help players and the audience "see" the object.

*Suggested Exercises:*

MAGIC CLAY – Around a circle, a player builds a mimed object "out of clay" and then hands the object to another player who emotionally reacts to it while interacting with it and then molds the "clay" into a brand new object. And repeat.

*Lessons:*

- **With practice, mime work becomes instinct – So practice.** When you're engaged in an everyday action (brushing teeth, doing dishes, etc.) be conscious of your movements and the objects' characteristics. Then try to mime those activities without the objects.
- **Really picture what you're creating**



- **If something's not clear to you, don't avoid it, feel the responsibility to make it clearer for everyone else**

MAGIC CLAY WEAPONS – #1: Around a circle, a player mimes a weapon and then uses that weapon to safely and respectfully “kill” another player in the circle. The killed player then makes his/her own weapon and kills someone else.

#2: Around a circle, a player mimes a weapon and then targets another player they want to kill. The armed player approaches the target but then experiences an emotional change of heart and just hands his/her weapon to the next person in the circle. Repeat.

**5.2 Environment: Have students practice initiating and building two person scenes with emphasis on establishing an environment.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

MIMED SEQUENCE / DIALOGUE SEQUENCE - Two players on stage are given a suggestion of location. Each player, in mime - without interacting or trying to tell a story - must define five objects in the space. Then have players go back to their starting positions. Tell them to go through their sequence of mimed interactions now with dialogue and reacting to one another, BUT without talking about what they are doing.

*Progression:*

- Players will struggle not to talk about what they're doing; stage coach quickly to get them re-centered if they go too far down that rabbit hole.
- Players will stop engaging environment and devolve to talking heads once they reach the end of their sequences; encourage them to keep engaged, developing new environmental elements while building on dialogue

*Lessons:*

- **Activities gain weight in conjunction with the dialogue** – don't undermine subtext by making it explicit; let the audience make connections between what's being done and what's being said.
- **A stage picture makes scenes more interesting** – simply moving around the space and engaging in the environment – even if nothing is explicitly addresses or explicitly drives the scene – will make players engaged in dialogue more interesting to watch.
- **Engage environment, rest your tongue** – if we have something to do, we don't have to rely so hard on our words



DOUBLE BLIND SCENES – The Instructor and the TA split the stage by holding up a blanket or sheet. Players One and Two start engaged in the environment (with an action, object, atmosphere, etc.) on either side of the divider. When the blanket is dropped and pulled away, the players can engage in dialogue (though they don't have to rush to speak). They should act as though they were capable of seeing each other the entire time.

*Lessons:*

- **No justification necessary** – If players' environments don't align, they don't have to make sense of why they're together. They can just accept and heighten what's happening.

**5.3 Active Emotion Exercises: See your environment. Endow. And have an emotional stake in the details.** Don't be the improver who initiates a scene by running to center stage and delivering a premise. Don't be an improviser in a scene where two players stand shoulder-to-shoulder, cheating-out, and talking about something not in-the-moment. Don't be a point in the arch of a group game where improvisers stand in a semi-circle and discuss a topic.

*Suggested Exercises:*

WE GOTTA – Two players on stage. Player One turns her back on Player Two and closes her eyes. Player Two engages a mimed activity – *any* activity; he can be defusing a bomb or doing laundry. Player Two should attach an emotion to his activity but he should try and do it noiselessly. Once Player Two has established his activity (and emotion), he initiates with “*We gotta...[defuse this bomb/do this laundry].*” Player One then turns and emotionally engages something active in the scene. “*My fear's reflected in the bomb's shine.*” / “*I love folding little socks.*” And the scene continues by heightening those emotions in reaction to more of those active elements. *The ticking bomb/laundry clock makes Player Two feel more of her emotion. And the reflection/clothing makes Player One feel more fear and love respectively.* The Players can certainly react to each other's active endowment's as well. **The key to the exercise is having players attach emotions to active elements in the scene such that more of those active elements will evoke more of those emotions in reaction.**

***Mechanical notes:***

- Player One can pre-load an emotion in her head while waiting on Player Two. She can decide to be happy or angry about whatever it is Player Two will say before he says it. Or she can just choose an emotion the moment Player Two provides the “*We gotta...*” line. Players can talk about how it felt to do either approach in the scene's debrief.
- Player One needn't be literally *entering* the scene every time. She is turning into the scene for the purposes of being kept unaware of Player Two's physicality, but having turned she can (and should) act as though she's been facing the scene the entire time.



- “We gotta...” is not the best scene initiation. It thrusts a premise on the scene and the joining player. It often sets up a problem to solve or a situation to traverse. But an aim of the exercise is to focus on the moment even if you’re being propelled toward a future moment.

*Lessons:*

- **Our goal is to react through rather than think through our scenes.** Improvisers are often in-their-heads thinking through scenes. What’s happening? What’s my motivation? Where should this scene go? If we attach an emotional reaction to something physically sharing the stage than “if this then what” equals “more of that something makes me feel more of my emotion.” Then something is already “happening” on stage. Then your commitment to repeating your emotion is all the “motivation” you need. And then the scene heightens and evolves in-the-moment rather than according to some plot.
- **“Reaction” implies stimulus.** Improvisers know they need to emote. In an attempt to ratchet up a scene an improviser might say, “I love you” or “I hate you.” Good intentions. And certainly I stand by my assertion that you should *feel* before you’ve decided on “why” you feel. But if you attach your “love” or “hate” to something active in the moment – even if it is simply *whatever* the other player did or said before your emotional statement, then that “whatever” becomes a catalyst for more of that emotion. You might be able to play with a vague sense of emotion, but you can make a **game** out of cause-and-effect if you can be triggered into more of that emotion when attached to a defined “cause.”
- **Seeing is believing.** Improvisers like to stand stage center and talk, putting on the onus for the scene’s humor on their lines. If you’re a great, clever actor, maybe this works fine for you. I prefer to watch improvisers engage their physical world. Committed to seeing, feeling and otherwise experiencing their environment, players discover *inspired* lines. For example, two players argue about the need to produce architectural drawings. When one player decides to just draw, she produces a spiraling squiggle and a bold dot. Then looking at her drawing, the player announces that she’s produced a spiral staircase and a fireman’s pole.
- **You can not want to do something; do it anyway.** Player One turns to join Player Two’s “We gotta clean this house” initiation with an “Ugh. Cleaning up sucks.” Fine. But Player One better still engage in cleaning up the house. What’s funnier? Watching two players argue or watching Player One submit to cleaning up while physically feeling the “suck” of every moment?
- **Forget screenwriting; be a producer.** “When I sneeze, garlic comes out!” Clever. “Achoo! Ahh! Garlic!” Better – shown not told.
- **Words smerds.** Saying you feel one way has less impact than feeling that way. In reaction to Player One finding a plush dog on stage, Player Two explains, “Stuffed animals freak me out.” Clever. If in reaction to Player One finding a



plush dog on stage, Player Two shouts, “Yeargh!” – then there’s actual dynamite on stage, not just the promise of potential dynamite.

- **The choice is yours.** If you’re trying to “figure out” a scene, so is the audience. Everyone’s waiting for something to happen, but *you and your scene partner* are the ones with the power to make something happen. You don’t have to wait to react. Feel something about something. The sooner you do, the sooner there is a catalyst and a reaction on stage, and the sooner something is happening.
- **Being affected by something on stage breeds stakes.** It doesn’t even *need* to be “active” (though it helps). Two players on stage remark on how God and Jesus have been “going at it as of late.” Clever. But they never care about the schism; it doesn’t *affect* them in any way. Even if God and Jesus never materialize on stage, the players need to commit to how they are affected by what’s happening – not just by the potential outcome (which is not in-the-moment) but by what they perceive happens moment to moment. Consider: “God and Jesus are arguing; isn’t that nuts?” compared to “Oh, good point, God; time to smote your offenders. No, wait. Great point, Jesus; I’m turning the other cheek.”
- **Keep it active.** If you find yourself in a scene talking about something off stage or otherwise not in the present moment, it’s up to you to stake the scene on an active element. Another player forces you to sit down in a psychiatrist scene with a “Tell me about your mother” initiation? Say, “I hate anyone who gives me advice. That’s why I carry this knife.” Suddenly the scene’s on stage, not off stage in an imagined moment between parent and child.

I WAS JUST – Player One starts on stage alone. S/he explores the environment – engaging an activity. Most importantly, the player attaches a feeling to the objects and/or activity – Does she hate what she’s doing? Does he fear what he holds? The more the player engages the activity or object, the more s/he should feel about that activity or object. When Player One has clearly engaged the environment emotionally – and the coach can provide a signal if necessary – Player Two enters the stage. Player One initiates with “I was just…” cleaning the dishes / writing my last will and testament/watching this hilarious video/ etc. Don’t just explain; express how you feel about the environment you’ve engaged in. Player Two needs to emotionally engage the environment, too. And remember, Agreement is never a bad choice – feel what Player One feels, engage what Player One engages, have what Player One has (if Player One is pregnant, be pregnant, regardless of your gender). Player Two certainly does not have to mirror Player One’s emotional and physical engagement, but s/he to feel something about something. Until the scene is called, Players continue to see, endow and feel about their environment. And of course they can see, endow and feel about their scene partner’s actions and reactions as well. The purpose is to have improvisers focus outward on active elements and to feel about them. The struggle in the “I was just…” Exercise is that the a player risks giving up on emotionally endowing and engaging with the environment



the moment another player is there to stand center stage with arms by their side and talk with. In instructing this exercise, the coach should focus on encouraging players to balance engaging each other's actions and reactions with continuing to endow and engage with their surroundings.

*Lessons:*

- **What you started with is your rock.** You don't need another player on stage with you to have a scene, and you better not give up the scene you started the moment another player appears.
- **Be wary of creating too many scenes where Player One's reaction to Player Two is to cover up what s/he was doing and/or feeling.** It can be funny. But be sure to still engage the emotional activity. If you can oscillate between the activity you're emotionally compelled to engage and your desire to deny your actions and feelings because of the other player's prescience, fine. But remember, the audience prefers if your embarrassment is paired with reasons to be embarrassed.
- **Even when you create active elements on stage, they're still imagined, so it's too easy to fall into talking about them instead of "seeing" them.** Don't just say the toy firetruck is made of sturdy materials; feel the weight and density of those materials. Don't just say the toy firetruck is worn; notice the chipped paint. Don't just remember that the toy firetruck was annoying; be annoyed in the present by that high pitched siren you're hearing.
- **A Two Person scene is about those characters feeling, but they should care about more than each other.** There should be a reason each character is there doing that which doesn't hinge on the other character's presence.
- **Focus outward and feel about active endowments.**

THAT'S MY - Two players take the stage. One is designated as the initiator. The initiator must begin his/her line with "That's my..." and indicates a physical presence on or beyond stage. Importantly, the initiator should feel about the object s/he is addressing. The second player must also begin his/her line with "That's my...", indicates a physical presence for his/her object and feel about his/her object. The players don't have to refer to the same type of object – both don't have to have a grandpa, for example – but the scene is tighter if the two objects are at least related. The players though can have totally different feelings toward their objects; it's simply important that they feel something. Think of two dads looking through the glass at their new babies. Think about two people admiring their cars in a lot. Think about two parents watching their children play a sport. The purpose is to have improvisers focus outward on active elements and to feel about them. The struggle in the "That's my..." Exercise is that the object a player defines is passive unless the players emotionally react to the endowed details. Because the initiation doesn't carry any urgency (as in the "We gotta..." Exercise), players need to ensure their reactions to those endowed reactions keep the scene in-the-moment. In instructing this exercise, the coach should focus on encouraging players to endow their surroundings with details and to feel an impact of those details.



*Lessons:*

- Even when you create active elements on stage, they're still imagined, so it's too easy to fall into talking about them instead of "seeing" them. We can create funny details. But details the audience witnesses us discovering in-the-moment evoke laughter without having to be funny.
- **Caring trumps Creating.** We can create a detailed world that the audience can follow, but we can care about a world the audience can engage in. Emotionally invest in imagined stimuli.
- **Focus outward and feel about active endowments.**



## Week 6 – Leveraging Characters and Relationships in More Scenes

***Objective:*** A scene’s stakes (situational, behavioral and relation-based) can be heightened *with more scenes*, especially when *emotions* are heightened, too.

### **6.0 Warm-Ups:** Build energy, concentrate energy and emote boldly.

*Suggested Exercises:*

CRAZY EIGHTS

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EMOTIONAL REACTION CIRCLE

IMPRESSIONS - Impressions are a fun way to get into a fully formed character

*Variations:*

- Go around in a circle, have everyone say a person they do an impression of
- Move everyone to the right one spot, they do the impression of the person next to them
- Get two people up, they do the impressions of people they have no idea how to do impressions of

**6.1 Remember what you like; Repeat:** We have to listen and *retain* so we can return to and heighten established information. Memory is a muscle to exercise. But the exercise can be *fun* – focus on what makes you laugh, what engages you.

*Suggested Exercises:*

STORY STEALING – Everyone in a circle. One at a time, players enter the center and tell a true, personal, 30 Second Story. Once everyone has told a story, the teacher tells the class that players now have to enter the center and recreate someone else’s story. Every story should be revisited once by another player.

*Lessons:*

- **Don’t mock; mirror** – this is not about making fun of each other, it’s about making each other look good by remembering their story
- **Remember specifically** – remembering a few specific details will be more powerful than remembering everything generally
- **Remember reactions** – our emotional reactions are improv gold; focus on those when setting other player’s stories to memory
- **See what’s not shown** – recreating what our fellow players initially did subconsciously is great fun. How do they stand? How do they move? What do they sound like?



SCENE STEALING – Two players do a scene. Two different players redo the scene, repeating and heightening details, characters, stakes, and *emotion*.

*Lessons:*

- **We remember the good stuff** – they'll drop questions, carry over specifics, and remember good stuff, point that out
- **The bad stuff becomes good when we repeat it** – *make each other look good!* The first time is “random”; the second time is “purposeful”; the third time is “expected.”
- **Don't skimp on the emotion** - Player Two might have been simply overwhelmed during the Offer dialogue, but Player Three and Four heighten the emotion of being overwhelmed characters.

**6.2 Heightening Through Tag-Outs:** A “tag out” allows the audience to see how a character from a previous scene will react to another character/scenario/etc. We want to execute tag-outs in service of heightening the *emotional* stakes.

*Suggested Exercises:*

TAG OUTS –To perform a tag out, a player enters a scene in progress and literally tags the player that he/she will replace on stage.

*Lessons:*

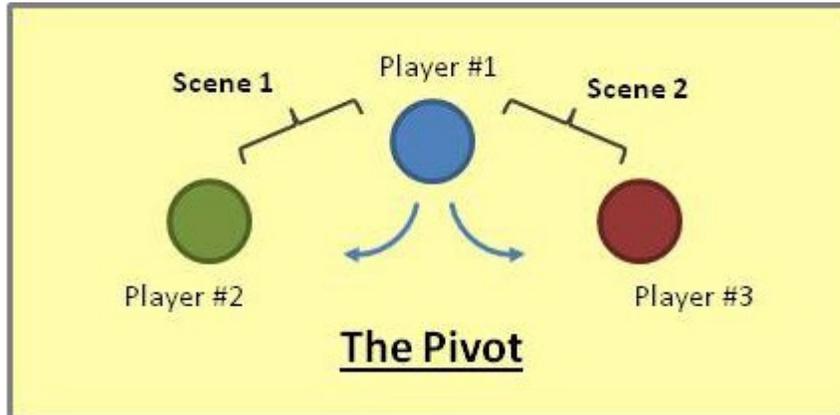
- **Being a bigger version of Player One; Do what Player One did bigger** – always a trusty default (You were excited by snails? I'm going to be *really* excited by snails).
- **Keep it Active / Avoid Being a Psychiatrist** – we don't want to rehash the previous scene (“Tell me about your feelings for snails”/ “Remember? In the last scene when you liked snails?”). Initiate with active elements that can affect characters emotionally in the present moment.
- **Wherever You're Taken, Trust In You** – If Player Three takes Player One's snail lover to see the animated movie Turbo, Player One is expected to heighten his *excitement*. Player One can relax in knowing that wherever he's transported he just needs to trust in his emotional reactions.
- **Elevate the Details** – A player who fears action figures can be terrified of *all* little versions of things. A player obsessed with her eyebrows can obsess over everything she trims. A tenant complaining to her absentee landlord can also complain to an absentee God.

*Variation:*

- **Pivot (Swivel/Barn Door) instead of Tag Out** – Rather than Tag Out and Tag Back In, the Pivot allows two scenes to happen without players having to leave stage. For example, Player 1 is telling Player 2 all about his success in last night's



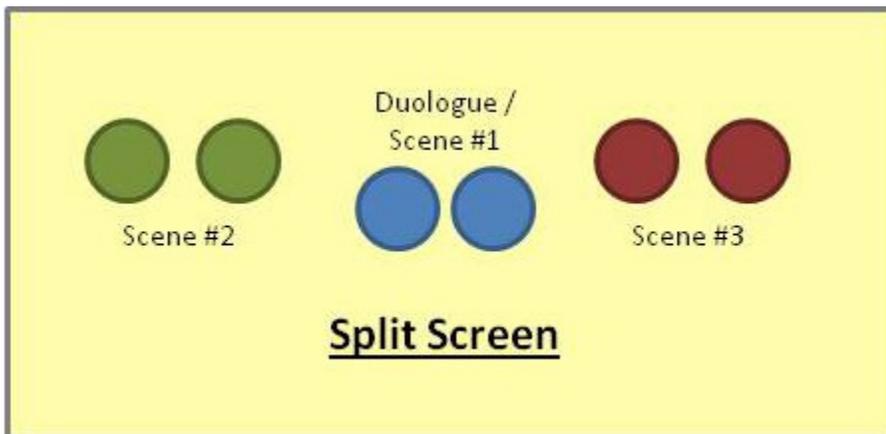
date. Player 3 enters stage on the other side of Player 1 from Player 2 to initiate a look into the actual date. Player 1 can *pivot* between scenes from his central position – turning to Player 3 to do the date scene and then turning back to Player 2 to continue exalting his date prowess. Players 2 and 3 do not have to leave stage when they’re not in play, they just have to remain frozen or neutral.



**6.2 Heightening Through Spilt Screens:** The Split Screen enables a team to heighten relationship dynamics in a way that makes for a sexy stage picture. Several different scenes can coexist on the same stage. **We want to execute split screens in service of heightening the relationship stakes.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

**SPLIT SCREEN** –To perform a split screen, Player 3 and Player 4 start a new scene in a different area of the stage from Players 1 and 2. This new scene should heighten the relationship stakes of the initial scene with new characters and/or circumstances. For example: In the initial scene, Democratic campaigners remain optimistic despite clearly being in a red state. In the split screen, two Apostles remain naively optimistic about what people in Sodom are willing to give up to follow Jesus.





**6.4 Subsequent Beats: The stakes of one scene can be used as inspiration for initiating new scenes.**

*Suggested Exercises:*

SUBSEQUENT BEATS – Two players do a scene (edited early by the teacher). These two original players go to the wings. A Player Three initiates a new scene, explicitly soliciting the participation of Player One, Player Two, Both Players One and Two, or Neither Players One nor Two.

*Lessons:*

- **Put the onus on initiating subsequent beats on those standing on the wings** - the players in the original scene need to be focused on the scene in play; those on the wings have the time to think up an initiation. When players from the originating scene initiate their own subsequent beats, it is too likely that they will over-prioritize plot or simply repeat what they did originally.
- **Use NAMES** – it’s easier to solicit the participation of Player One if you can say, “Hey, Jack...”
- **Elevate the situation** – Spies stealing secrets? Have mountaintop-sitting, spiritual gurus stealing life’s secrets. Have Moses steal the Commandments.
- **Elevate character’s defining behaviors** – Player One is an enthusiastic baseball commentator; Have him do color commentary at his accountant day job; Have him narrate as he video tapes his son’s birthday
- **Elevate themes** – In lifting the *reactions* from the originating scene’s players and situation, we give those reactions wider applicability and telegraph to our fellow players that we are heightening the *theme* represented in those reactions. (A sailor’s wife awaiting her husband’s return would have a great scene with a dog awaiting his master’s return from the store).
- **Mapping** - Lay the dynamic structure of one genre over the particulars of another genre to heighten thematic and narrative depths. Two male improvisers talk about cars or sports while really talking about women and/or sex. Play the emotional dynamic of a young man asking a father for his daughter’s hand over the particulars of a teenager asking his dad for the car keys – “Boy, what are your intentions with my sedan?”



## Week 7 – Practice

**Objective:** Hit unused lessons, revisit lessons that succeeded/struggled, introduce potential performance games/exercises and have fun.

## Week 8 – Performance Prep

**Objective:** Run through the group’s “Class Action” showcase set with notes.

Students don’t have to perform, but hopefully they’ll want to.

Teachers can design any performance that showcases their class’ skills.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Tell students not to wear flip flops, hats, or clothing with logos/etc. on them. Players, especially ladies, shouldn’t wear anything that would keep them from being able to follow and do anything any other player does.

MONTAGE – A run of scenes and subsequent scenes, edited and continued by the group.

*Lessons:*

- **Callback** – revisit and heighten details and reactions from earlier in the run
- **Variance** – vary the emotional energy, scene length, scene type, cast size, etc.

THREE TRANSITIONS – With a huge group, a montage of just two person scenes can be tedious. So the Q1 2014 class used the following format.

*Progression:*

- **Two Person Scene** – the first scene is a two-person scene based on a suggestion
- **Two Person Scene Wipe** – editing the scene in progress with a physical wipe, players can initiate brand new two person scenes
- **Tag Outs** – to heighten an established player’s personal game, a new player can enter stage, perform a “Tag Out” and have a two-person scene with the established player.
- **Split Screen** – to heighten a scenic game between two established players, new players can initiate another two person scene on a different part of the stage, drawing focus.



**APPENDIX**

Emotion/Relationship Exercise

You disgust me.	Your scene partner is your boss
I'm hypnotized by your charms.	Your scene partner is your babysitter
You make me nervous.	Your scene partner is your spouse
You crack me up.	Your scene partner is God.
I don't believe you.	Your scene partner is your child.
You scare me.	Your scene partner is your twin.
I'm incredibly attracted to you.	Your scene partner is your creation.
You're my hero.	Your scene partner is some dumb kid.
I wish I never met you.	Your scene partner is your parent.
I want to be just like you.	Your scene partner is your jailer/warden.



<u>Losing /Attracting Exercise</u>	
“Love me”	“Leave me”
“We have to stop rocking”	“Never stop a’rockin”
“I need you to understand my truth”	“I’ll never believe your lies”
We have to get out of here.	We can’t survive out there.
Wake up.	Let me sleep.
Let’s name him Perry.	Let’s name him Gus.
I quit.	We need you.
This sucks.	Suck it up.
You will date me.	I will never date you.
“Being healthy is awesome”	“Cigarettes make me cool”
“We should play in the sun”	“We should stay in the shade.”
Cats are the best.	Dogs are the best.



TV is the most informative medium.	Reading is the best.
Let's take our Honeymoon at the beach.	Let's take our Honeymoon in a ski lodge.
I want this job.	You'll hate it here.