

CONCENTRATION & FOCUS GAMES

FOR DRAMA CLASS

10 Practical Activities for Listening, Observation & Ensemble Awareness

Why Concentration Matters in Drama

Actors need to remain aware of what is happening around them while keeping their attention inside the world of the scene. They must hear how a scene partner delivers a line, notice movement and physical choices, remember blocking, respond to unexpected moments, and remain involved even when they are not speaking.

The games in this resource isolate concentration, listening, observation, reaction, and ensemble-awareness skills so students can practice them in a low-pressure setting before applying them to scenes, improvisation, rehearsals, and performances.

Quick Reference Guide

Game	Ages	Group	Time
Count to Twenty	10 and up	5 or more	5–10 minutes
Zip Zap Zop	9 and up	6 or more	5–10 minutes
What Changed?	8 and up	Any	5–10 minutes
The Mirror	8 and up	Pairs	5–10 minutes
Pass the Clap	8 and up	6 or more	5–10 minutes
Silent Lineup	9 and up	6 or more	5–10 minutes
Group Stop & Start	9 and up	6 or more	5–10 minutes
One-Word Story	9 and up	5 or more	5–10 minutes
Who Started the Movement?	9 and up	8 or more	10–15 minutes
Three Changes	9 and up	Pairs	5–10 minutes

1. Count to Twenty

Recommended Ages	10 and up
Group Size	5 or more
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Concentration, listening, ensemble awareness, patience

Students sit or stand in a circle and try to count from 1 to 20 as a group without establishing a speaking order. Anyone may say the next number, but students may not signal who should speak. If two people speak at the same time, the group returns to 1. The challenge encourages students to slow down, listen, and become aware of the entire ensemble.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Increase the target to 25 or 30. For an additional challenge, seated or stationary students can try the exercise with their eyes closed.

2. Zip Zap Zop

Recommended Ages	9 and up
Group Size	6 or more
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Focus, eye contact, reaction time, ensemble awareness

Students stand in a circle. One student makes clear eye contact with another person, gestures toward them, and says “Zip.” That student sends “Zap” to someone else, and the next sends “Zop.” The Zip–Zap–Zop pattern continues around the circle. Students must remain attentive even when the action is elsewhere and communicate clearly through eye contact.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Gradually increase the speed while maintaining accuracy. Once the group is comfortable, an optional “Boing” can send the turn back to the person who just passed it, requiring the original word to be redirected to someone else.

3. What Changed?

Recommended Ages	8 and up
Group Size	Any
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Observation, visual memory, concentration, attention to detail

One student becomes the observer and studies another student for about 20 seconds. The observer then turns away or briefly leaves while the other student changes one visible detail, such as a sleeve, shoe, watch, hairstyle, posture, or another small feature. The observer returns and identifies the change.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Allow two or three changes, or have students work in pairs and alternate roles.

4. The Mirror

Recommended Ages	8 and up
Group Size	Pairs
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Concentration, observation, physical awareness, partnership

Partners face one another. One student leads with slow, deliberate movements while the other mirrors those movements as precisely as possible. After a minute or two, students switch roles. The goal is careful observation and partnership rather than trying to surprise or outpace the other performer.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Remove the assigned leader and have both performers move together so smoothly that an observer cannot easily determine who is leading.

5. Pass the Clap

Recommended Ages	8 and up
Group Size	6 or more
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None

Skills	Eye contact, timing, concentration, reaction, ensemble awareness
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Students stand in a circle. One student turns to the person beside them, and the pair makes eye contact and tries to clap at exactly the same moment. The second student then turns to the next person and repeats the process, sending the shared clap around the circle. The focus is on responding to a partner rather than anticipating mechanically.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Reverse the direction of the clap, or allow students to send it across the circle using clear eye contact.

6. Silent Lineup

Recommended Ages	9 and up
Group Size	6 or more
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Nonverbal communication, problem-solving, concentration, ensemble cooperation

Challenge students to arrange themselves in a specified order without speaking. Possibilities include birthday month and day, height, alphabetical order by first name, or number of letters in a first name. Students may gesture and communicate physically but cannot talk. When the group believes the lineup is correct, check the result.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Choose categories students can communicate safely without requiring anyone to reveal information they would prefer to keep private.

7. Group Stop & Start

Recommended Ages	9 and up
Group Size	6 or more
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	Open space
Skills	Peripheral awareness, concentration, movement, ensemble connection

Students spread throughout the room and walk at a comfortable pace. There is no leader. When one person stops, the rest of the group notices and gradually stops as well. Someone eventually begins moving again and the group follows. Students work toward becoming responsive to the whole room without turning the activity into a race.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Challenge the class to stop and start so smoothly that an outside observer cannot easily identify who initiated the change.

8. One-Word Story

Recommended Ages	9 and up
Group Size	5 or more
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Listening, concentration, storytelling, accepting ideas, ensemble cooperation

Students sit or stand in a circle and create one story together, contributing only one word at a time. Each student must listen to what has actually been established rather than planning a contribution too far in advance. The exercise emphasizes accepting the story as it exists when each turn arrives.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Remind students that the objective is not to create a perfect or especially funny story. The concentration challenge is more important than the quality of the finished plot.

9. Who Started the Movement?

Recommended Ages	9 and up
Group Size	8 or more
Time Needed	10–15 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Observation, peripheral awareness, concentration, ensemble coordination

One student is the detective and turns away or briefly leaves. Another student is quietly chosen as the movement leader. Everyone copies the leader's repeated movement. When the detective returns to the center, the leader periodically changes the movement and the group follows while trying not to reveal who is initiating the changes. The detective tries to identify the leader.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Encourage the leader to leave enough time between changes for the group to establish each movement.

10. Three Changes

Recommended Ages	9 and up
Group Size	Pairs
Time Needed	5–10 minutes
Materials	None
Skills	Observation, memory, attention to detail, partner awareness

Partners observe one another carefully for about 20–30 seconds, then turn their backs. Each student changes three visible details about their appearance. When they face each other again, each partner tries to identify all three changes. The activity asks students to notice and remember specific details rather than simply looking in a general way.

Variation / Teacher Tip: Instead of changing appearance, one partner can establish a physical pose and then alter three details such as hand placement, head angle, weight distribution, or facial expression.

Helping Students Connect the Games to Acting

Concentration games become more useful when students understand why they are doing them. After an activity, spend a minute discussing what made it difficult and what helped the group improve. Students may recognize that they needed to slow down, watch more carefully, listen instead of planning ahead, notice people outside their immediate field of vision, or trust their partners.

Use those observations as a bridge into scene work. Ask whether students were truly responding to another person or merely anticipating a cue, what physical information they noticed, and how their performance changed when they became more aware of the ensemble.

Concentration Does Not Mean Ignoring Everything Else

Young performers sometimes interpret focus as concentrating so intensely on their own lines or actions that they stop noticing everyone else. Drama asks for something broader. A focused actor knows what they are doing while remaining available to what is happening around them. They listen, notice changes, respond to new information, remain aware of the space, and stay involved even when another performer is speaking.

Using These Games in a Middle School & High School Drama Class

You do not need to use all ten games in one class. One or two activities followed by scene work will often be more useful than moving rapidly through a long list. A short concentration game can work especially well at the beginning of class, after an energetic or distracted transition, or immediately before partner scene work.

The same activities can return throughout the year. Once students know the rules, less time is needed for explanation and more attention can be placed on the acting skill underneath the game. The challenge can also grow with the students as their concentration and ensemble awareness improve.

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