

# DRAMA GAMES FOR BUILDING CONFIDENCE

## *12 Practical Confidence-Building Activities for Drama Classes*

### **Building Confidence in Drama Class**

Drama can provide middle & high school students with opportunities to become more comfortable speaking, moving, creating, and performing in front of other people. Confidence does not always come naturally, especially during the middle school years.

Some students may be comfortable performing from the first day of class. Others may hesitate to speak loudly enough to be heard, worry about looking silly, become nervous when everyone is watching them, or avoid making strong acting choices because they are afraid of making a mistake.

Building confidence in drama does not mean turning every student into the loudest or most outgoing person in the room. A quiet student can be a confident performer. The goal is to help students become increasingly willing to make choices, commit to those choices, express themselves clearly, recover when something does not go as planned, and allow themselves to be seen and heard.

The activities in this resource provide different ways to practice those skills. Many begin with the support of the entire group or a partner before gradually giving students opportunities to perform more independently.

### **Quick Reference Guide**

| Game                       | Primary Focus          | Time          |
|----------------------------|------------------------|---------------|
| Everyone Does It Too       | Confidence             | 5-10 minutes  |
| Make It Bigger             | Confidence             | 5-10 minutes  |
| Fortunately, Unfortunately | Confidence             | 5-10 minutes  |
| Expert for a Minute        | Confidence             | 10-15 minutes |
| The Applause Game          | Performance confidence | 5-10 minutes  |
| Yes, And...                | Confidence             | 5-10 minutes  |
| Walk Across the Stage      | Stage presence         | 5-10 minutes  |
| Say It Three Ways          | Confidence             | 10-15 minutes |
| Mistakes Are Welcome       | Confidence             | 5-10 minutes  |
| Character Introduction     | Confidence             | 10-15 minutes |
| Volume Ladder              | Vocal confidence       | 5-10 minutes  |
| Ten-Second Spotlight       | Performance confidence | 10-15 minutes |

## 1. Everyone Does It Too

Have students stand in a circle. One student steps slightly forward and performs a simple action. It might be a movement, facial expression, pose, sound, or a combination of several of these. As soon as the student finishes, the entire group enthusiastically repeats exactly what that student did. Continue around the circle until everyone has contributed something for the group to imitate.

This is a useful early confidence-building activity because an individual student is only alone for a few seconds. Whatever choice they make is immediately supported by the entire class. A student who makes an unusual movement or funny sound does not remain the only person doing it - everyone else does it too.

Encourage the class to reproduce each contribution sincerely rather than mocking or deliberately changing another student's choice. The exercise works best when students learn that the group will support whatever reasonable choice they make.

|                         |                                                                                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, physical expression, vocal expression, commitment, ensemble support |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                                         |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                                    |

## 2. Make It Bigger

Begin with one student performing a small, simple movement or facial expression. The next student repeats the same choice but makes it slightly larger. A third student makes it even bigger. Continue until the original movement has become greatly exaggerated.

For example, a student might begin with a small wave. The next student gives a larger wave. Eventually, students may be waving with their entire arms and bodies. You can also use short phrases. A student might quietly say, "I found it." Each successive student repeats the same line with greater excitement, physical commitment, or vocal energy.

The objective is not simply to become louder. Encourage students to explore how physical size, facial expression, posture, energy, and vocal choices can all make a performance stronger.

Middle school performers sometimes make extremely small choices because they are self-conscious about being watched. This exercise gives them permission to deliberately exaggerate and discover how much more expressive they can become.

|                         |                                                                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, physical expression, vocal expression, commitment, performance energy |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                                           |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                                      |

### 3. Fortunately, Unfortunately

Have students create a story together. One student begins with a simple statement, such as, "Yesterday, I decided to go camping." The next student continues the story by beginning with "Fortunately..." For example, "Fortunately, the weather was beautiful." The following student must begin with "Unfortunately..." Perhaps: "Unfortunately, I forgot to bring my tent." Students continue alternating between fortunate and unfortunate developments.

The structure gives students something to work with while still requiring them to improvise. They don't have to invent an entire story or scene by themselves - they only need to contribute the next development. Encourage students to accept what has already happened in the story rather than trying to erase another student's contribution. As students become more comfortable, challenge them to respond more quickly instead of spending too much time searching for the "perfect" idea. There is no perfect idea.

Part of becoming a confident improviser is learning to make a reasonable choice and move forward.

|                         |                                                                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, improvisation, storytelling, quick thinking, accepting ideas |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                                  |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                             |

### 4. Expert for a Minute

Choose a student to become the class "expert" on an imaginary subject. The topic can be intentionally unusual, such as training pet dinosaurs, communicating with squirrels, building houses on the moon, competitive pillow stacking, or caring for invisible dragons. The rest of the class asks the expert simple questions about the subject.

The expert's job is not to give correct answers. There aren't any. Their job is to answer confidently and remain committed to the idea that they know exactly what they are talking about. Keep each student's turn short - perhaps 30 seconds to one minute - so the activity doesn't feel overwhelming.

This exercise can help students discover that improvisation does not require them to know what they are going to say before they begin. Sometimes confidence comes from accepting the first reasonable idea that occurs to them and committing to it.

|                         |                                                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, improvisation, speaking, quick thinking, characterization |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                               |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 10-15 minutes                                                         |

**Teacher Tip:** Keep questions playful and supportive rather than trying to "stump" the expert. The purpose is to help the student succeed, not expose them when they don't have an immediate answer.

## 5. The Applause Game

Create a small performance area at the front or center of the room. One at a time, students enter the space and perform one extremely simple action. A student might strike a dramatic pose, take an exaggerated bow, perform a silly walk, make a facial expression, say a short phrase, or simply walk into the space, look at the audience, and wave. When the student finishes, the entire class applauds.

The activity intentionally makes the performance requirement very small. Students are practicing the experience of entering a performance space, having everyone's attention for a moment, completing something, and receiving a positive response. For students who are uncomfortable being watched, even this can be a meaningful step.

|                         |                                                                              |
|-------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Performance confidence, stage presence, audience awareness, ensemble support |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | A small performance area                                                     |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                                 |

**Teacher Tip:** Establish beforehand that every student receives the same enthusiastic support. The applause isn't a judgment about who gave the "best" performance. It represents the ensemble supporting someone for being willing to participate.

## 6. Yes, And...

Divide students into pairs. Give each pair a simple imaginary situation, or allow one partner to establish it. The first student makes a statement such as, "We're building a spaceship in the backyard." The second student accepts the idea and adds to it: "Yes, and we're going to fly it to Mars." The first student continues: "Yes, and we're taking our dog with us." Students continue building the situation by beginning their responses with "Yes, and..."

Explain that the words are training wheels for an important improvisational habit: accepting what a scene partner establishes and contributing something new. Students who lack confidence sometimes reject ideas because they don't know what to do with them. "Yes, And..." gives them a simple strategy. They don't need to invent the entire scene - they only need to accept one idea and add one more.

|                         |                                                                 |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, improvisation, listening, acceptance, collaboration |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                         |

|                         |              |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes |
|-------------------------|--------------|

## 7. Walk Across the Stage

This exercise sounds simple because it is simple: ask students to walk across the performance space one at a time. For some middle school students, however, simply being watched can feel uncomfortable. In the first round, students do nothing except walk from one side to the other. Encourage comfortable posture, a natural pace, and looking where they are going rather than rushing across the space to finish as quickly as possible.

In later rounds, add a simple acting choice. Ask students to cross the space as if they are extremely confident, late for something important, trying not to be noticed, entering somewhere for the first time, or carrying wonderful news. The simplicity allows students to concentrate on what it feels like to occupy a performance space while people are watching them. Over time, the goal is for standing or moving in front of an audience to begin feeling less unusual.

|                         |                                                                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Stage presence, confidence, posture, physical acting, audience awareness |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Open performance space                                                   |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                             |

## 8. Say It Three Ways

Give students a short, ordinary line such as:

- "I can't believe you're here."
- "Where did you put it?"
- "We need to leave."
- "I already told you."
- "Are you sure about that?"

Ask a student to deliver the same line three different ways. For example, "We need to leave" might be performed as frightened, excited, annoyed, or secretive. Students can work with partners first before volunteers - or eventually everyone - perform for the group.

Because the words remain the same, students don't need to worry about inventing dialogue. They can concentrate entirely on acting choices such as tone of voice, facial expression, pace, volume, posture, and movement. Encourage students to make each version distinct enough that an audience could recognize that something has changed even if they weren't told the emotion beforehand.

|                         |                                                                                   |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, vocal expression, emotional choices, characterization, interpretation |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                         |                                     |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Short lines supplied by the teacher |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 10-15 minutes                       |

### 9. Mistakes Are Welcome

Explain to students that this activity has an unusual rule: when someone makes an obvious mistake, the group celebrates it. Begin with a simple activity the class already knows, such as passing a clap around a circle, repeating a movement sequence, or rapidly naming items from a category. Eventually, someone will hesitate, say the wrong thing, move at the wrong time, or lose track of the sequence. Instead of reacting with embarrassment, the student can raise their hands and say, "I made a mistake!" The group responds with a quick cheer or applause, and the activity continues.

Drama requires performers to keep going when things don't happen exactly as planned. A forgotten word, missed entrance, awkward improvisational choice, or unexpected reaction doesn't have to ruin a performance. This exercise helps make mistakes less threatening by treating them as an ordinary part of learning and performing.

|                         |                                                                          |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, resilience, spontaneity, recovery, willingness to take risks |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                                  |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                             |

**Teacher Tip:** The celebration should never become an excuse to laugh at another student. Keep the response positive, brief, and consistent for everyone.

### 10. Character Introduction

Ask each student to invent a simple character. They don't need an elaborate backstory. Give them just a few things to decide: the character's name, something the character likes, something the character dislikes, and one unusual fact about them. Students can have a minute or two to think before beginning. One at a time, students enter the performance area as their character and introduce themselves to the class.

Encourage them to consider how the character might stand, move, speak, and look at the audience. A nervous character might behave very differently from an extremely confident one. An exhausted explorer might enter differently from a famous magician. Keeping the introduction brief makes this a manageable first step toward solo character performance. As students become more comfortable, classmates can ask the character one or two simple questions that the performer answers without leaving character.

|                         |                                                                       |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Confidence, characterization, speaking, improvisation, stage presence |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                               |

|                         |               |
|-------------------------|---------------|
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 10-15 minutes |
|-------------------------|---------------|

### 11. Volume Ladder

Choose a simple phrase for the class to say together, such as "Welcome to our show" or "I have something important to tell you." Begin at a very quiet - but still voiced - level. Repeat the phrase several times, gradually increasing the amount of projection. Talk with students about the difference between projection and shouting. A useful performance voice should be clear, supported, and directed toward the audience without straining the throat.

Next, allow individual students or small groups to practice delivering the phrase to different parts of the room. Can someone at the back hear every word clearly? Does the speaker remain understandable as the volume increases? Students who become nervous in front of others often allow their voices to become smaller. Practicing projection separately from a scene allows them to become more familiar with using a stronger voice before adding character, blocking, memorized lines, and other acting demands.

|                         |                                                                |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Vocal confidence, projection, articulation, audience awareness |
| <b>What You Need</b>    | Nothing                                                        |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 5-10 minutes                                                   |

**Teacher Tip:** Never encourage students to force their voices or continue if speaking becomes uncomfortable. Projection should feel supported rather than strained.

### 12. Ten-Second Spotlight

Create a designated performance area and explain that each student will have the spotlight for only about ten seconds. Give students a very simple prompt. They might enter as a character, react to discovering an imaginary object, perform a dramatic pose, celebrate winning something, deliver one short line, or silently show an emotion. After approximately ten seconds, the performance ends and the next student takes a turn.

The short time limit is intentional. A student who finds solo performance intimidating knows that they aren't being asked to sustain a scene for several minutes. They only need to commit to one clear choice for a few seconds. As the class becomes more comfortable, prompts can gradually become more challenging or the performance time can be increased.

The goal isn't to evaluate who creates the most impressive ten seconds. The goal is to give every student repeated experience entering a performance space, making a choice, and discovering that being the center of attention for a moment is something they can handle.

|                         |                                                                               |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Skills Practiced</b> | Performance confidence, stage presence, commitment, improvisation, creativity |
|-------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

|                         |                                               |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| <b>What You Need</b>    | A small performance area and optional prompts |
| <b>Approximate Time</b> | 10-15 minutes                                 |

### **Building Confidence Gradually in Drama Class**

Performance confidence usually develops through experience rather than a single successful activity. For students who are especially hesitant, consider beginning with exercises where everyone participates together. Everyone Does It Too and Make It Bigger allow students to experiment without remaining individually in the spotlight for very long.

Partner activities such as Yes, And... provide another step because students have someone else helping to carry the scene. Exercises such as The Applause Game, Walk Across the Stage, and Ten-Second Spotlight introduce brief periods of individual attention without requiring students to perform an entire scene.

As confidence develops, Expert for a Minute and Character Introduction ask students to sustain an idea for longer and respond more independently. Teachers can adjust these activities based on the personalities and experience levels in their classes. Students do not all need to progress at exactly the same pace.

Confidence also does not require students to stop feeling nervous. Even experienced performers can feel nervous before stepping in front of an audience. A more useful goal is helping students discover that they can speak, move, create, and continue performing even when they feel a little uncomfortable.

### **Creating a Supportive Environment for Young Performers**

The way classmates respond to one another can have a major effect on whether confidence-building activities actually build confidence. Before beginning these games, establish the expectation that students support reasonable performance choices. Laughing because a scene is genuinely funny is very different from laughing at someone because they took a creative risk.

Applause, encouragement, attentive listening, and respectful participation can help create a classroom where students become more willing to experiment. It can also help to remind students that drama class is a place to practice. Students are not expected to make every acting choice perfectly. Trying something, discovering that it does not work, adjusting, and trying again are all part of learning to perform.

The safer students feel making choices in front of one another, the more freedom they have to develop as actors.

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