

Speaking spontaneously

4

David Heathfield offers some quick-change improvisational roleplays involving strong emotions.

Improvisation involves students creating spontaneous drama. Some of the most enjoyable and productive improvisational roleplay activities have students changing roles, and often partners, at least twice (and frequently several times!) in quick succession. This is much easier than it sounds and generates energy and positive dynamics. Students shake off their inhibitions and, at the end of an activity, are often surprised at how imaginative they have been. Of course, students need a framework within which to be creative, but, as you can see in the activities below,

this should be minimal. The creative content comes from the participants, and this makes activities of this kind motivating and personal. Changing roles can also enable them to explore situations from different perspectives (see *Personal problems* on page 9).

At first students may be uncomfortable about having so much freedom in the language classroom, so tight classroom management skills are needed. These activities require very clear instructions and good time management. Your lively input in the role of facilitator is essential for them

to work. While preparing, try to visualise the activities, ie where the students are sitting, standing or moving at each stage.



David Heathfield is a freelance language and communication skills trainer and drama worker. He also teaches at Exeter University English Language Centre, UK. His book *Spontaneous Speaking: Drama Activities for Confidence and Fluency* will soon be published by DELTA.

nizmat33@hotmail.com

Being left out

Aim: To practise negotiating in social situations

Time: 10–15 minutes

- 1 Ask the students to stand in pairs in a large circle around you. Say: 'You're with your best friend in the city centre and you both really need to catch the bus. The bus stops. I'm the driver. Sorry, but there's only room for one ...' After a minute, start to put pressure on them, in your bus driver role, to decide who's coming and to get on the bus.
- 2 Ask the students to make new groups of three. Say: 'You're with two close friends at a theme park. You've been waiting one hour for the last ride of the day on the Super Rollercoaster. I'm the supervisor of the rollercoaster. I'm sorry, but there's only room for two more ...' After a minute, put pressure on them, in your supervisor role, to decide who is going to take the ride and to get on.
- 3 Ask the students to make new groups of four. Say: 'You're at home with your three flatmates and there's a knock at the



door. Hello, I'm Chris Stevens from the BBC. You're live on national TV and you've won a fantastic 60-minute ride over the city with me, Chris Stevens, in a helicopter. There are four of you? Well, there's only room for three, so who's coming?' Again, after a minute, put pressure on them to decide who's going in the helicopter.

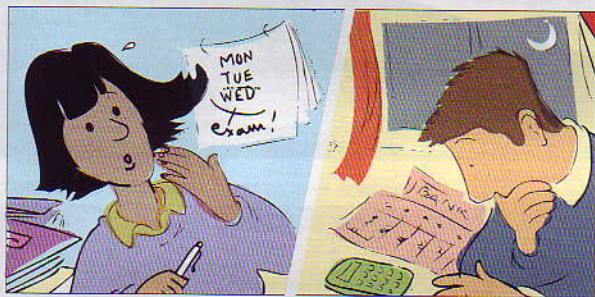
- 4 Invite the whole class to comment on how it felt to be left out, how it felt to leave someone out and how decisions were made. Some students may have found some alternative solutions to the dilemmas. Some groups may be willing to perform an extract from their scenes.

Personal problems

Aim: To create a short drama about personal problems and giving advice

Time: 25–35 minutes

- 1 Ask the students to sit in pairs and to decide who will take the role of Alex and who the role of one of Alex's friends. Say: 'Alex has a friend called Charlie, who is very worried about an exam in three days' time, but Charlie doesn't want to talk about it. Alex, talk to another friend about Charlie's problem and decide how you can advise and help Charlie. Charlie is not here. You have two minutes, OK? 3–2–1 Action.'
- 2 After two minutes, ask all the 'Alex' students to stand up and sit next to a new partner. Say: 'You are no longer Alex. Alex is not here. Your partner is Charlie and you are one of Charlie's friends. Charlie knows that Alex has a secret money problem. Charlie, talk to this other friend about Alex's problem and decide how you can advise and help Alex. You have two minutes to do the scene, OK? 3–2–1 Action.'



- 3 After two minutes, ask all the 'Charlie' students to stand up and sit with a new partner. Say: 'Now you are Charlie and Alex and you are both going to talk about your partner's problem and give advice. Remember that these problems are very personal, so you need to be very careful about what you say and how you say it. At first you might not want to talk about your own problem because you think it's private, but you should listen and accept some of the advice. 3–2–1 Action.'
- 4 After about five minutes say: 'It's a few days later. You're talking about your situations. Did you follow your friend's advice? What happened? Has the situation changed at all? What's going to happen next? 3–2–1 Action.'
- 5 After another five minutes or so, invite feedback and comments from the whole class. You can ask for volunteer pairs to perform an extract from their final scene, where one of the characters reveals what has happened since they started following their friend's advice. This might lead to a discussion about how some people resolve personal problems by sharing them, while others keep their worries to themselves.

Expressing emotions

Aim: To practise expressing strong emotions

Time: 10–15 minutes



- 1 Explain to the students that they are going to communicate some strong feelings in a series of one-minute scenes. Tell them to find a partner. For the first situation (*grief*), say: 'You are going to tell your neighbour that you have found their beautiful cat dead in the street. 3–2–1 Action.' It is not necessary to allocate roles as they are established the moment one of the pair initiates the exchange.
- 2 After each one-minute scene, stop all the pairs and ask them to find a new partner. Ask them to do as many of the scenes below as seem appropriate. The briefing should be short and clear. Don't mention the emotions given in brackets below. Finish on a high with the last one.
 - You find out that your child has secretly taken some of your money without asking and spent it on expensive computer games. (*Anger*)
 - You're on a safari holiday in Africa. You go for a walk in the evening with your friend. Suddenly you are standing face-to-face with a dangerous-looking lion. (*Fear*)
 - You're lost at night in a big city where you don't speak the local language. A big man comes up to you and asks you in English if he can drive you back to your hotel. (*Mistrust*)
 - It's your best friend's birthday. You arranged to meet him or her outside the cinema at 8 pm but you've forgotten all about it. Now it's 8.30 pm and the telephone rings. Your friend has missed the film. (*Guilt*)
 - Two years ago you lost your favourite watch which your grandfather gave you. Your neighbour has just found it and comes round to tell you. (*Delight*)
 - Your student friend always studies really hard but has failed an exam. (*Sympathy*)
 - Your teacher tells you that you have passed an exam that you thought was very difficult. (*Satisfaction*)
- 3 Elicit the types of strong feelings (possible answers are indicated in brackets above) which were acted out by the students. Invite comments on how it felt to express strong feelings in English.