ENHANCED COMMUNICATION THROUGH IMPROVISATION WORKSHOP
Defiant Monkey Improv
Karen L. Eichler and Andrew M. Spragge

ABOUT THE ARTIST(S)

Defiant Monkey Improv is a two-person improvisational comedy group that creates on-the-spot theatre based on audience suggestions and participation. Performers Karen L. Eichler and Andrew M. Spragge are experienced improvisers, actors, corporate trainers and teachers who love to have as much fun as possible.

Karen has improvised on stages across the country and in Canada since 1997, working with ComedySportz of Buffalo and The Second City in Toronto. In addition, she has been a children’s performer and storyteller with The Wondermakers and Dramatic Solutions since 2000. Karen has a Master's Degree in Education and has been a university professor since 1997, most recently teaching Public Speaking and tutoring writing.

Andy began improvising in 2005 with Improv Buffet and ComedySportz of Buffalo, though he had been acting (with scripts) since 1984 when he played the lead role in The Elephant Man. An accomplished actor, director, children’s show performer and corporate trainer, Andy is also a graphic designer and worked as an elementary school science and math teacher.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Excellent communication is one of the most highly valued skills there is, and the great news is that it can be practiced and improved! Improvisational artists understand the need for clear, confident, audience-focused communication, and Defiant Monkey Improv can show your students that they, too, can have what it takes. After having participated in Defiant Monkey Improv’s Enhanced Communication through Improvisation Workshop, students will have increased confidence, creativity and trust in their own ideas. Students will be able to articulate the importance of thinking about your audience and how your audience may change the delivery and content of your message. Students will begin to realize the importance of listening, and they will continue to practice this skill. Students will know the sometimes overwhelming fear of speaking in public can be controlled and they will have the beginnings of a personal set of tools to help train those butterflies in the stomach.

The Enhanced Communication through Improvisation Workshop is not just for students, either. Teachers, administrators and all staff will find improvisation to be one of the most fun ways to improv communication skills.
EXPERIENCE: All Defiant Monkey Improv’s Monkey Around workshops begin with an introduction to improvisation—what it means, what it means to perform improv, what skills an improv performer needs, etc. Students will see professional improvisers take their suggestions and create instantaneous theatre.

UNDERSTAND: At the Enhanced Communication through Improvisation Workshop, students will then explore communication—what it means, how it is used, when it works well and when it breaks down. After having experienced an improvisational performance, students will be able to point out how improvisers use communication and how important it is to them, and to anyone.

CREATE: Students will participate in improvisational warm-ups to loosen creative muscles and have them experience working together as a group. Eye contact, clear voices, and body language are important.

The students will go through a variety of improvisational games and scenes where they will discover for themselves the most important parts of communication. How many exercises a group may use depends on the size of the group as well as the length of the workshop. Hundreds of warm-ups, exercises and scenes await! Students may participate in some of the following:

- **Anyone Who**—good communication stresses the importance of knowing your audience. This circle exercise will call upon students to think of an accomplishment they have achieved and ask if anyone else has achieved it as well. “Anyone who has written a story.” “Anyone who has read a book more than 400 pages long.” “Anyone who has ever gotten a trophy.”
- **Story**—can a group tell a story together? If they’re listening well and willing to work as a team, they can!
- **Scene in Four Frames**—students will break into small groups to tell a story without words, using only still “frames” of their own design. Using all your resources, thinking of your audience, and filling in knowledge gaps are just some of the lessons students will be able to pick out themselves.

CONNECT: No matter where life takes you, you must communicate. Success in school, at work, with friends and with family depends upon clear, understandable communication. Giving and receiving information is so important in all we do, but most people never consciously try to improve their skills. Students will see how improved communication can help them in their personal and school lives, and when they enter the workplace they will think back to the key life skills they learned and smile because they had so much fun learning them with Defiant Monkey Improv!

GRADE LEVEL: Grade 4 - Adult
CURRICULUM CORRELATION:

The Arts

Standard 1: Creating, Performing, and Participating in the Arts
• Students will give suggestions to help direct improvisational scenes.
• Students will participate in improvisational warm-ups and scenes.
• Students will learn the basics of improvisation.
• Students will become more confident performing in front of others.
• Students will learn how to perform to an audience.

English Language Arts

Standard 1: Language for Information and Understanding
• Communication is an essential part of good teamwork.
• Improvisers communicate in many different ways, such as through mime and storytelling.
• Clear organization helps your audience understand your ideas.

Standard 4: Language for Social Interaction
• Working together will help students understand others’ points of view and the need for communication.
• Creating characters that use other voices—different tones, styles, and accents—can help with speech.

Career Development & Occupational Studies

Standard 1: Career Development
• Students will be introduced to improvisational theatre.

Standard 3a: Universal Foundation Skills
• Communication, including listening, is an essential skill for the workplace.
• Students will not only see fast decision making skills in action, but they will be asked to make such decisions themselves.
• Students will become increasingly comfortable speaking in front of others.

Health Education

Standard 3: Resource Management
• Students will learn how to make the most out of their own skills and the skills of different team members.

GOALS

• Introduce students to improvisational theatre.
• Learn how to communicate more effectively.
• Become better listeners.
• Lessen fears of speaking in public.
OBJECTIVES

• Participate in improvisational exercises and scenes.
• Recognize how communication works and how messages may be received by an audience.
• Learn that listening is an essential skill that can be improved with practice.
• Become more aware and more confident public speakers.

GETTING READY FOR THE WORKSHOP

• Discuss what is expected and acceptable behavior for an effective workshop.
• Introduce students to the concept of improvisation and improvisational theatre.
• Allay fears about performing and emphasize the relaxed atmosphere of the workshop’s learning environment.
• Students can write a short journal entry reflecting on their own expectations for the workshop and on their possible fears regarding public speaking and communication.

ON THE DAY OF THE WORKSHOP

• Review acceptable workshop behavior.
• Students can relax with an exercise used by improvisers:
  o Deep Breathing—direct students to close their eyes and inhale from the bottom of their lungs, hold for a count of three, then release. Breathe deeply three times.

AFTER THE WORKSHOP

Additional communication exercises:

• The Knot—not only is this exercise great for teamwork, but it also forces participants to be very specific about their directions. Circle up. Everyone takes the hands of someone else in the circle making sure no one is holding both hands of the same person—now you’re part of a giant knot! Your job is to untangle yourselves without letting go.
  o Variations: can be performed silently. Some knots are more difficult than others—if it becomes too much, let go of ONE pair of hands.
• What Am I Describing?—you will need blank paper and pencil. Students pair up. Student #1 is given a piece of paper and a pencil. Student #2 faces away so he or she cannot see the paper. Student #2 is given a slip of paper with an object’s name and must describe that object to Student #1 so that student may draw it well enough to recognize the object.

Improvisational warm-ups before speaking before an audience:

• Word Association—students circle up, and toss a ball. The first player will say a word (any word will do) and the player to whom the first is tossing will word associate and say any other word that comes to mind—there are no wrong answers! Emphasize eye contact—very important!
• Tongue Twisters—have students offer their suggestions and write them on the board so everyone can say them “three times fast!”
• Deep Breathing—direct students to close their eyes and inhale from the bottom of their lungs, hold for a count of three, then release. Breathe deeply three times.
Ideas for additional public speaking work:

• **Pageant Question**—make a list of real pageant questions and have students give one minute impromptu speeches answering those questions.

• **Give and Get Awards Show**—have students practice giving and receiving awards. Begin by brainstorming what good presenters and recipients of awards should do and by watching examples of award giving/receiving. Make sure you have an old trophy to use as the “award”!

**EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

• What are the components of communication?
• Why is “attitude” more important than “aptitude”?
• What are the benefits of truly listening?
• What are ways you, personally, can overcome fear of speaking in public?
• How can you put your audience first?
• What are ways you, personally, can improve your communication?

**FURTHER STUDY**

**Vocabulary:**

• **Improvisation**—the art of acting without a script and without preplanning. Making it up as you go along, using your imagination.

• **Listening**—to pay attention, to make an effort to understand.

• **Mime**—acting without speaking. Using your facial expressions and body movements to create scenes.

• **Summarize**—to express in concise form, to show your knowledge by being able to restate in a brief way. Helps you to understand the main idea.

• **Teamwork**—a cooperative effort on the part of a group of people acting together for a common cause.

• **Title**—the name by which a work is known. Could be a novel, a short story, a movie, a song, etc.

**Websites**

Some of the exercises and scenes described on these websites will be similar to ones we use or similar to each other. Improv games have a strange way of changing names as they get passed along, though they are the same.

• **Free Drama** [<http://freedrama.net/improv.html>]. Lists some improvisational games as well as free plays for kids.

• **Kid Activities, “Improv Games and Exercises”** [<http://www.kidactivities.net/post/Improv-Games-and-Exercises.aspx>]. A few basic improv games (and a few misspellings…) and some basic improv information.

• **Theatre Games** [<http://www.creativedrama.com/theatre.htm>]. Decently described improv games usable for kids. Simpler format than other sites (easier to figure out!)

• **Six Minutes: Speaking and Presentation Skills** [<http://sixminutes.dlugan.com/>]. Though designed for adults, there are many great articles about public speaking that can be helpful for students of all ages.

**Books:**
• **101 Drama Games for Children: Fun and Learning with Acting and Make-Believe** by Paul Rooyackers (1997)
• **101 Improv Games for Children and Adults** by Bob Bedore (2004)
• **On Stage: Theater Games and Activities for Kids** by Lisa Bany-Winters (1997)