NY State Thespian Festival Improv Frenzy 2021
____as developed by Improv Artist Joy Weir

The basic skills of improvisation do not necessarily result in comedy.
Students will be judged on their mastery of improvisational skills,
not the level of comedy achieved in each scene.

Improv Teams: Schools may enter up to four students as their Improv Team, however, students will perform in pairs. In teams of three, one student may perform twice.

Adjudication Criteria:
- Listening
- Three Improv Essentials
- Forwarding
- Plot Progression

(See below for a more detailed description of each element listed.)

Rules:
- Students will be given a total of 5 minutes and 30 seconds for their scene.
    - The time begins once the students draw their improv essential.
    - Students will have up to 30 seconds to set their scene and can use up to four chairs. This time is to be used to move chairs and create their playing space. Students are not permitted to talk about or plan their scenes in any way.
        - After 30 seconds, the adjudicator will notify the students and they must begin their slate.
    - After the scene is set, students will slate their performance with their names and school information.
    - Students may use all of the remaining time to complete their scene.
        - There is no time minimum, however it is suggested that students aim to use at least 3 minutes of their scene time. This is merely a suggestion for practice.
- Students will draw one of the three improv essentials from a predetermined list to inspire their scene.
- Students who go over their allotted 5 minutes and 30 second time will be disqualified.
    - Students may request that an adjudicator give them an indication of 1 minute remaining.

Adjudication Criteria Further Detailed:

In describing the adjudication elements, we will use an example of an improvisation performed by Student X and Student Y in which one student is asking the other to a school dance.

Listening (4 points):

Listening is essential in improvisation.
Students should be listening and reacting appropriately to the **offers** given by their scene partner. **Offers** are the new information given by an actor.

> One **offer** provided may be student X telling student Y,
>> *"I was asked to the dance by James."*

This is essential new information for student Y.
They now know that they must convince student X to forego the other date.

> An example of poor **listening** skills would be for Student Y to miss this new information by saying:
>> *"I know you don't have a date yet, so you should just go with me."*

Three Improv Essentials (4 points):

This is the **"Who"**, **"What"**, and **"Where"**.
These are three questions that must be answered in the beginning of a scene in order to establish the world of the scene.
Each pair will draw one of these elements to inspire their scene.

> The **"Who"** refers to the relationship between characters. Students should quickly indicate who their characters are to each other. It is a best practice that characters know each other and are not strangers.

>> This can be achieved by referring to one another with a **explicit cue**;
>>> *"Student X, I am glad we're classmates this year"*
>> Or this can be deduced through listening and **conversational cues**;
>>> *"Student X, wasn't Mrs. Dempsey's test hard on friday?"*

> Both of these cues establish that the characters are classmates. **Conversational cues** are typically an example of a further mastery of this skill.

> The **"What"** refers to what the students are currently doing. Any activity can be a "What", from packing up their books at their locker to checking their Instagram feed. A best practice is to choose an active "What" that requires movement.

>> **"What"**s can be explicitly stated,
>>> "Hey, are you getting your gym bag?"
>> Or "**What"**s can be indicated through movement. This will require miming objects in the room.

> Students will **not be judged on their execution of miming the activity**, however if the "What" is not clear through observation of the miming activity, it may result in a lower score.

> **"Where"** refers to the location in which the scene takes place.

>> **"Where"**s can be stated with **explicit clues**,
>>> *"I'm glad you were in the hallway!"*

Or **"Where"**s can be implied through **conversational cues**,
"Do you want to walk to Mrs. Dempsey's class with me?"

Both of these cues establish that the characters are in the hallway. **Conversational cues** are typically an example of a further mastery of this skill.

SAMPLE EXERCISE TO LEARN THE THREE IMPROV ESSENTIALS:

Have your students begin an improv. They will have 3 lines to establish the who, what, and where. The goal is for the lines to make sense together. Encourage them to use explicit cues at first. After they deliver their three lines, ask them to reflect on how else they may have been able to establish these three essentials in more conversational ways.

Have the students replay the same scene with 5 lines. Gradually give them more lines to work with until they have found ways to incorporate some of the conversational cues they reflected on.

Forwarding (4 points):
This is sometimes referred to as **"Yes, And".**
Forwarding refers to moving a scene forward during an improvisation. Good improvisers use **offers** to progress the plot of a scene.

The **"Yes"** portion refers to taking in new information as fact. Good improvisers **never negate** new information.

An example of **"Yes"**ing the offer provided by Student X is Student Y saying,
"I never knew James liked you."
An example of **negating** the offer provided by Student X is Student Y saying,
"James would never ask you to the dance."

The **"And"** portion refers to giving a scene partner a new offer, adding to the established world of the scene and progressing the plot.

An example of **"And"**ing would Student Y saying,
"I wanted to go to the dance with you."
Now both Student X & Student Y understand where the scene is going.

An example of keeping the scene **stagnant** and not forwarding the action would be Student Y saying,
"Cool. What are you wearing?"
This doesn't give either scene partner any new information about where the scene is going in terms of plot progression.

3

Plot Progression (4 points):

Every successful improvisational scene has a **beginning**, **middle**, and **end**.

The **beginning** of a scene should last about 45 second to 1 minute. The beginning should estable the three improv essentials and set us up for the middle of the scene.

The **middle** of a scene should last about 1 to 2 minutes. The middle consists of two important elements; **rising action** and **conflict**.

> **Rising action** is the portion of the scene where tension rises and the audience receives hints about what the conflict is.
>
> > Using our example, **rising action** may be Student Y mentioning they don't have a date yet. They might talk about how they wish they could just go with a friend instead of asking someone they don't know very well.
> > This gives the audience a hint that Student Y wants to ask Student X to the dance.
>
> **Conflict** is just two opposing forces in a scene. It does not necessarily mean an argument or fight. The goal is to give the audience someone to root for or relate to.
>
> > The forces can be **external** to the scene partners relationship, such as Student X wants to go with James.
> > Or the forces can be **internal**, such as Student X doesn't want jeopardize their friendship with Student Y.

Both of these conflicts are acceptable, however when using **external** forces involving a character outside of the scene remember it is essential that the scene remains about the characters in it. Though Student Y wants to go with James, the actors should focus on the reasons why Student Y doesn't want to go with Student X.

The **end** of a scene should last about 1 to 1.5 minutes. The **end** should include a **resolution** to the conflict established in the middle of the scene.

The **resolution** should show or tell the audience where the characters in the scene will go from here.

Execution (4 points):

This is the overall execution of the scene. Scene partners establish concentration and commitment to moment-to-moment choices; integration of voice, body, and emotions create a believable character/ relationship that tells a story.

Final Scoring:

A school/organization's final score is determined by the average score of both teams by all adjudicators. All participants will receive written feedback.