The Art of Improv Workshop
with Somebody's Hero

The Somebody's Hero players will work with students in 3rd-6th grade to teach them the basics of improv! Students will exercise skills in speaking, listening, language, and stagecraft, all in the guise of playing fun games. Students from the workshop may be included onstage during the Somebody's Hero performance!

Due to the inherent nature of individual, group, and genre storytelling, cooperative role-taking, and theater games, the Somebody's Hero Improv Workshop can easily fit into any curriculum.
With fun and easy-to-learn and perform improv games and exercises, Somebody's Hero
teaches kids to:

- embrace mistakes, trust and enjoy their own spontaneous imagination and knowledge with games like Zip Zap Zop, Association Ball, and Art Gallery.
- take turns, support and root for each other using group exercises like Zip Zap Zop, Word At A Time Story (L.6.3b., L.3.1f., L.4.3a.), and Catch!

- agree and listen as they build scenes, songs, characters, and stories together in games like 3-Line Scene, Character Swap (L.8.1d), Bad Rap, Directed Story (L.8.1d., L 6. 9, RL 7.3, RL 8.3.), Costume Mix-Up.

- recognize and use confident speaking and movement in front of their peers through games like Character Swap, Status Walks, Movies Lines.

- read, understand, and play with both nonverbal cues such as body language, facial expression, along with verbal cues such as tone and emotion in games like Subtext ball, Character Swap, Whatever You Do Don't, Gibberish Movie, and Directed Story (RL 8.3.).

- play with and use language, voices, formal and informal speech to express themselves and solve creative problems in real time in making new stories, new words, finishing sentences, and making associations in games like Directed Story, Character Swap, Movie Lines, and Emotional Orchestra.

- start, continue, and end stories through games like Fortunately/Unfortunately, Story Spine (L.9–10.1a, RL 6. 3.), New Ending, and Movie Lines.

- use empathy skills such as guessing emotions or thoughts, and trying on another's point of view through games like Thank You Notes, Emotional Orchestra, Whatever You Do Don't, and Heat and Weight.

- recognize the components of compelling storytelling through games such as: I know! I know!, Beep Beep, and Story-Color-Feeling.

- learn that pretending and creativity are linked, and start channelling their natural creative processes (play) into creating a live performance.

Improv and Play
  Improvisation, or improv – performance without a script - is incredibly fun. Playing together away   from a regulated sports field or a computer screen is rare these days, and there's nothing like   being part of a trusted and supportive group whose purpose is to make other laugh and have a   good time. Every time there's a suggestion, you get to witness someone take your idea and turn it   Into something more: a new character, a plot twist, a song. You'll surprise yourself, too,   discovering new talents and strengths. And every time you improvise you take away unforgettable   memories of perfect moments and hilarious mistakes.

Modern improvisation developed as a way to teach acting and writing to children and teens, and later it evolved as a tool for scripted rehearsal, collaboration, and refining full plays and revues. The most successful and well-known such company was The Compass Players, who founded The Second City in 1959 in Chicago, which has nutured actors, writers, and comedians for over 50 years, from Bill Murray, Alan Arkin, and Harold Ramis to today's top talent like Tina Fey, Steve Carrell, Steven Colbert, Michael Keegan Key and Jordan Peele, and Amy Poehler. Beyond the stage, improvisation is used today by leaders in business, the arts, medicine, and education to improve teamwork, interpersonal skills, creativity, self-confidence, communication, well-being, and even foster communities.

Further, Improvisation has long and rich roots in theater, storytelling, acting, writing, and performance, and owes a great deal to those arts. Every improviser is also an actor who can portray recognizable and relatable characters onstage. We are writers too, just on our feet, in real-time, using techniques from brainstorming, storytelling, dramatic structure, poetry, sketch comedy, and a knowledge of contemporary, classical, and children's canon. In addition, we are performing artists, and create a relationship with the audience the same way a storyteller, theater company, or stand-up comedian must.

Because the demands of improv are so great, to be writer-performer-director all at once, we turn not only to our parent traditions, but to sports psychology as well. Improvisers must work solo and with a team under stress while maintaining and balancing inner and external focus, tension, and impulsivity. Pre- and post- show team and individual warm-ups are common, just like in team sports.
Training methods are also explicit and rigorous. Fundamental techniques like supporting, creating characters, and being specific ("Give it to her" vs "Deliver my signet ring to Vivian") are drilled under coached feedback until second nature. Complicated forms like improvised songs or improvisation in a genre such as Shakespeare, C.S.I. Crime Scene Investigation, or a dark romantic comedy must be researched, analyzed, and re-engineered with team strengths and weaknesses in mind. Whenever possible, teams record performances and watch their "game tape" with a critical eye to see progress, bad habits, and new discoveries.

The best scripted performances aim to look spontaneous despite being safely rehearsed, scripted, blocked, and lit. Improvisation, quite oppositely, starts with that spontaneous excitement and danger, and aims to appear magically scripted. Great improv has the excitement of a had-to-be-there sporting event or terrific story: What's going to happen next? Wow will it turn out for the people I'm rooting for? How are they going to get out of this?! Even more, because the show is shaped by the audience's responses and suggestions, they also feel part of it, responsible, just like a sports fan, or playwright.

Improv is set apart by the willingness and rewards of the performers and audience to allow discoveries in the moment. It's theater without a net. When we succeed, it's magic, no one
believes we didn't write it, and we all win. If we fail in the earnest attempt to make up an entire musical or detective story or spy-thriller, we're the Chicago Cubs. We're the home team; we lost,
but we have the fans' backs, so they get ours.

Improv drives home the fact that art is right there in front of everybody, for the taking. Passive arts separate artist and audience, participant and recipient, dreamers and players from seat-slouchers
and nodded-off-in-the-second-act. Improv invites the audience to engage at every level, from imagination, suspension of disbelief, emotional investment, to sing-alongs and full-on on-the-stage playing. If we want 'art' to stop being a dirty word, or to have people identify with it, then we've got to be ready to put ourselves on the line and play with anyone, anywhere.

Improvisation can look like anything. A Broadway musical, a live game show, a sitcom, a movie, modernized Shakespeare, or a one-woman-show. What makes it improvised is that it's made up. There is a spectrum of improv. At one end, we call our shots like Babe Ruth, setting specific challenges for our show in front of the audience. "This next scene will turn into a cartoon.", "Could we get the title of a James Bond movie to improvise?", or "When the host rings the bell, all the players must switch characters and continue from that point." Rather misleadingly, this is called 'short-form' improv, though it doesn't have anything to do with time. The most common short-form style is the game-show format popularized by the British and American shows "Whose
Line Is It, Anyway?" The audience's suggestions and game rules push the players to greater feats of improvisation as they struggle and sparkle to make everything make sense.

In contrast, towards the 'long-form' end of the improv rainbow, players are more open to discover what their scenes and show will look like once it's started. To paraphrase Robert Frost,"Long-form improv is like playing tennis with the net down." Again, it doesn't matter if your play for 5 minutes or 50 minutes, it's just the degree of openness to discovery of the players and show that determines if it's called short or long form. The challenge for long-form improvisers is to be able to portray specific and believable characters, relationships, and situations that are interesting for their own sake, and then to also have the flexibility, teamwork, and skill to find and follow what's uniquely funny or compelling about each individual scene. A heartfelt conversation might naturally involve a farcical chase, or a couple stereotypical characters who are a little smarter than we expect might sing a biting satirical song. Watching the best improv is like watching the best of anything: we're constantly switching between being caught up in the spectacle and the marvel of the skill required.

The Games

Zip Zap Zop,
Bring the students standing in a circle.

Instructor says 'zip', then passes an imaginary ball to the students.
That student says a new word (in order, 'zip', 'zap' and 'zop') then passes the ball to another student.

Association Ball -
bring the students standing in a circle.
instructor says a word, then passes an imaginary ball to the student.
That student says a new word that the previous word makes them think of, then passes the ball to another student.
Note: If everyone isn't getting a turn, have students put up their hands if they haven't gotten a ball yet.

Story Spine -
A story is told one person at a time using the following pattern:
Once upon a time there was _____,
And every day _____,
Until one day when _____,
And because of that _____,
and because of that _____,
and because of that _____,
until finally _____,
And every day since _____ .