



A NOTE FROM PAM NOLTE

Taproot Theatre Co-Founder, Actor, Teaching Artist

I was asked to begin a new kind of theatre class in 2011 when Taproot Theatre was invited to partner with the PNA's Greenwood Senior Center and their program called "The Gathering Place". The Gathering Place program was created for individuals diagnosed with Early Stage Memory Loss (ESML), and it became a testing ground for creative improv and imagining in the moment. These group activities literally re-ignite the memories that reside deep in the areas of our brains that are unaffected for years even as memory loss continues to decline.

The Emmy nominated mini documentary, "A Healing Act" features two different types of classes that Taproot Theatre now teaches throughout the region. The first is an improv class led by Rob Martin, Taproot's improv director. We call these classes "Re-ignite the Mind with Improv." The second class (led by myself) moves at a slower pace allowing more conversation and sharing in the midst of the games. We call this "Re-ignite the Mind with Imagination"

Now, how can you use these same games and imagination explorations in your home today?

Well, for starters, warm up your own imagination with the following exploration: Ask yourself where would you like to be right now? Close your eyes and picture it! Activate your senses by imagining the sounds, smells and favorite images at your chosen destination. If you chose a favorite vacation spot, you'll already find your body relaxing as you take an imagination vacation.

I've attached a number of fun games and exercises for you to enjoy together with family and friends. Is grandma or grandpa in a different location? Use Zoom or Facetime to bring them into the fun. Do they have Early Stage Memory Loss? No problem. They'll be using their emotional memories, distant past memories and procedural memories to play right along with you.

Have fun!



“IN THE MOMENT” GAMES

Begin by Saying YES!

Any kind of improv or imagination adventure starts with saying “Yes” to whatever your partners in play bring to the room, so let’s begin with yes. Start your “in the Moment” session by saying YES to each other. It can be as ordered or as chaotic as you want it to be. Say it loud, say it soft, say it in a different language, say it with movement, say it dancing, sing it...say it anyway you like...just enjoy saying it together. We live in a world of NO in this COVID-19 time. Enjoy saying YES!

Note: *You are agreeing **together** to say YES to whatever the other players bring! If you feel the need to create boundaries to create safe spaces for different ages in the group, make those boundaries simple and clear before you begin.*

FIRST GAME: SILLY STRETCHING

Every theatre class, even an improv imagination class, begins with warm-ups, and very few of us are getting enough exercise during our COVID-19 days, so let’s warm up our bodies while we warm up our imaginations.

Instructions: Each player chooses a body part to stretch and gives it an imaginative, silly new name. The other players repeat the stretch.

Example: The first player might choose to stretch toes and call them twinkles. The player then shows the other participants how to stretch their “twinkles” and tells them how many times to they will stretch them. After demonstrating the stretch, the other players copy the movement and stretch their twinkles. If you’re playing on Zoom, Skype or Facetime, think of all the fun parts of your face and head you can stretch. Eyes, tongue, nose, ears, neck...just be sure to give the stretches a goofy fun name before you begin the stretch!

SECOND GAME: WORD ASSOCIATION

For this game find a soft ball, stuffed animal or other soft item that can be thrown.

Instructions: Player holds item, makes eye contact with another player, says a word and tosses the ball. The “catcher” receives the ball, re-states the word the “tossers” said, then makes eye contact with another participant, and says a word that “goes with” the first word.

Example: *Jump* might associate with *Jump Rope* which might associate with *Child* which might associate with *Lollypop*... etc.

Speed Game: Get the toss going as fast as possible. This time, don’t repeat the tossed word. Just associate a word and go! Word associations don’t have to make rational sense, they are simply the first word that comes to mind in the moment. The faster you go, the funnier it will become. Enjoy the laughter!

Note: *We tend to over-think in our culture. The point is NOT to think, simply to respond. Are you playing online? The tosser simply says the name of the catcher and sends a word. That individual gives a word association, then names another person to toss the next word to.*

THIRD GAME: LET'S BE!

This game is perfect for outside play or a larger room where players can move!

Instructions: A player begins the exercise by saying “Let’s be _____(insert noun) the other players play the action until another player begins a new action.

Example: The first player says “let’s be dancers”. The players in your group then say together, “Yes! Let’s be dancers!” Players then move in any way the word inspires them to move. At any time, another player can start a new action by saying “Let’s be” with a new active noun. A player might say baseball players and an entire imaginary game may begin in your space. *(Just make sure there’s enough space to run the imaginary bases!)* Suggestions can include animals or even inanimate objects. If someone says Let’s be mushrooms, be MUSHROOMS and enjoy the fun. Remember, it’s all about saying YES to whatever the player tosses out. Online? Just go for it and see what you can create in the moment!

FOURTH GAME: IMPROVISE AND CREATE A STORY

In this game players will create a brand new story together. The sky is the limit for imaginations on this one!

Instructions: The first player begins the story by saying, “Once upon a time...”and adds some storyline. That player passes the story to the next player, who continues the story with the words, “And every day...” Then that player then passes the story to the next player, who continues the story with the words, “But one day...” Play continues through the story structure with each of the remaining players adding a line that begins, “Because of that...” or “Until, finally...” When you get to the last player in your group, they have to wrap it all up with the words, “And ever since then...”

Example: Try the structure with a nursery rhyme like Jack and Jill Went Up the Hill. Tell it with the structure as given in the rhyme the first time. Then mix it up for imagination and fun!

- Once upon a time... there were two friends named Jack and Jill
- Every day... they went up the hill
- But, one day... Jack fell down
- Because of that... he broke his crown
- Because of that... Jill came tumbling after
- Because of that... now make it up! What comes next?
- Until, finally... add some more!
- And, ever since then... finish the new silly story!

Or to use another example: “Once upon a time... a bear (or a space ship or an evil sorcerer) appeared in our back yard. And every day...” The point is to adapt this exercise to your COVID-19 group! Children and grandparents will love playing a game like this together online. Tired parents in need of a laugh with their kids? This one’s a given!

Have a wonderful time “In the Moment” with these starter games.