

Clowning Workshop Introduction

Hello, I'm Louise Peacock, and I'm Head of Drama at De Montfort University in England, and as part of the creativity project, one of the workshops that I've been running focuses on clowning. Now why might clowning be useful to you? It's not that I necessarily want to turn you into a clown, although I always think that that's a good thing, but rather that clowning gives us access to particular skills that might be helpful to you. And some of those skills are increasing our ability to be spontaneous, and increasing our ability to deal with things going wrong, because clowns regularly fail, but they don't have the same attitude to us to failure. They like to fail, they're happy when they fail. And if a little bit of that comfort with failing, can rub off on you, then I think that that would be a very good thing. So clowning helps us to be more playful, it helps us to be a little bit more confident, and it helps us to be more spontaneous, and those are all skills that might be really useful to you.

For this project, I've designed a clowning workshop, which works through three activities to help you develop your creativity, and your communication, and let's remember that communication isn't just what we say, it's about the way that we look at people and the way that we carry ourselves. Further down, you'll find the videos for the three activities. These activities deal with connecting with finding games and with dealing with failure through using a positive internal monologue. You can do these activities as part of a group or you can do them by yourself. They're so easy to do that you could do them practically anywhere. You could do them in a studio or a classroom. You could do them in your living room. You can do them in a park, anywhere with a little bit of space will be just right for you to do these workshops.

Clowning Workshop - Activity One

Here are the instructions for the first section of the clowning workshop. This section of the workshop focuses on warming up and connecting. If you're playing as part of a group, you can do an exercise called 'name tag'. In this exercise, you spread out around the space, and one person is it or the catcher, and that person stretches their arm out in front of them, and walks towards someone as if they're going to touch them. The person being walked towards can save themselves by calling out the name of any other person in the group. That person then becomes the catcher, and the first person relaxes. Normally, when groups play this game, they make lots of mistakes and there's lots of laughter and that's a really good way to warm up to this kind of work. If you're playing by yourself, you can't do that. What you could do is, for example, play with tongue twisters, any kind of exercise that might make you make mistakes, and learn to just relax into those mistakes and have fun with them.

The next exercise that we can do is called 'showing how you're feeling'. If you're working in a group stand in a circle and each person has to show very clearly, using their body and their face, how they're feeling. Whether they're feeling happy, or sad or angry or nervous. If you're working by yourself, you

can do this exercise to a mirror, so that you can see exactly how you look when you're trying to portray the different emotions.

If you're playing as part of a group, and there's enough room, one of my favourite games is called **Keepy Uppies** and to play this game, you need a softball, like a football or a beach ball. Spread out around the space and whoever has the ball has everybody's attention. That person then has to connect with all the other players by looking at them. And really look, don't just glance so that your eyes barely make contact but look at the person and allow yourself to see them and them to see you. When the person holding the ball has connected with everyone in the room, they throw the ball up into the air. Now the whole group is trying to keep that ball off the ground by knocking it upwards with their hands, their heads, their knees, their feet. Watch out to make sure you don't hurt anybody and count as you go and see how high you can count. The higher you go, the better connected the group is. It's another exercise where you'll make mistakes, the ball will fall to the ground, and you'll be disappointed, but just learn to play with pleasure and have fun, even if everything isn't going exactly as you want it to because that will help you to be more resilient and that will help you to be more creative.

The next exercise is called 'walk in and connect' and that's exactly what you have to do. So if you're working as part of a group, all but one person forms an audience. The one person leaves the space, go out through a door if there's a door that you can use, otherwise turn away from the audience, and then either come back through the door or turn back to the audience and come in and try and really connect with three or four people in the audience. Be as specific as you can. Don't just cast your gaze about wildly, but really focus on particular people to look at. When you've done that you can leave and then come back and ask the audience to put their hands up if they felt that they were connected with and check out how accurate you were. Did the people you looked at feel looked at? This is a really useful exercise for helping us to really look at people because sometimes that can be a challenging thing to do and so the more we practice it, the easier it gets.

The next stage of that exercise, if you can possibly find a clown nose like this one, which just sits on your nose like this, you can use a nose. If you don't have a nose, you could use a little bit of red face paint, or maybe a little bit of lipstick just to change the colour of your nose. Try the same exercise that you just did, but this time wearing a nose or with your nose painted. See if it feels different to you and talk to the audience about how they react differently to you when you look a little bit more like a clown.

Clowning Workshop Activity Two

The second section of the clowning workshop is called 'Finding the games and the importance of looks', and we're going to do a number of small exercises to develop these skills. Firstly, find the games in the clothes that you're wearing. Often, we just don't think about what they're wearing but clowns get very excited about everything in life and so if you've got something with a zip, maybe there's a game in the zip. If you've got pockets, maybe there are games in the pockets. If you've got something with a hood,

maybe you can find a game to play. You can develop these on your own, or you can develop them working with a partner, and sharing the games with each other and showing them what you found.

If you want to extend that game, you can start to look at maybe the games that you could find with a bag. Shoulder bags or backpacks are particularly good for this because they have straps, and they usually have pockets and so there's plenty for a clown like person to play with. And once again, you can do them by these by yourself or you can share them with a partner

Once you've worked as pairs, you can choose one of those two exercises and if you're working with a big group, you can bring them back to show to the whole group. And this will help you develop confidence in sharing material because you'll be working just with one person and then with more people. You can also find games in random objects. So, something as simple as a kitchen spoon or a sponge might open up your creativity and make you think in a more playful way about the things that you can do with simple, everyday objects.

Clowning Workshop Activity Three

The exercises in the third section of the clowning workshop focus on failure, and internal monologue, and these two things fit together really well. To practice failing, you can try an exercise called 'tripping'. Don't really trip, I don't want you to hurt yourself, but there's an exercise called the 'clown clock'. So the clown walks around the circle, and at some point in the circle, he or she trips. They react to the trip, then they go around the circle again, and trip at exactly the same point. Again, look at the floor, look at the audience, show them how you feel about this trip. The third time round, the clown is a little bit cleverer, and realises where the danger is, stops, comes up with a plan and a strategy for not tripping, doesn't matter what that is just be creative, and then the clown looks very happy with themselves for avoiding the trip, only to trip again, two or three steps further on.

To balance out failing, clowns developed something called an internal positive monologue and this is really unfamiliar for most of us. What you need to do is think positively about everything. So, if you make a mistake, you think 'I'm just the best one at making this kind of mistake'. If you always drop things, start to tell yourself that you're just the best person at dropping things. Instead of hearing a negative voice in your head, switch those thoughts to being positive, and you'll find that it makes a huge impact on your confidence and your ability to communicate with other people.