

## **LESSON 4: POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE SPEAK**

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### **OBJECTIVE**

To identify and have self-awareness of positive and negative speak

### **DESCRIPTION**

Being negative is often a go-to response for students; they don't often notice what they're saying or the impact of what they're saying. We want to make students aware of their word choices and the fact that they do have a choice in which words they say. This is an opportunity to draw attention to positive and negative speak and to start creating self-awareness through exercises and debriefing.

**Time Management:** This lesson is structured for one class period. A class period is defined as 75 minutes. However, do not get caught up in fitting these exercises in a set time. All times are just suggestions. Improv doesn't conform to a time limit! If students are enjoying the exercises, let them go longer. The more they do them, the more they will experience and explore the concepts of the unit. Additionally, the time exercises take will depend on the discussions that occur during the debrief questions. Again, if you're having worthwhile discussions, don't cut them short to fit a schedule.

### **INSTRUCTION**

#### **1. Entry Prompt (5 minutes)**

- a. Students enter and respond to the entry prompt in their journals. If you don't use journals in your program, consider using the prompt as a discussion starter.
  - i. How do you respond when people speak positively to you?
  - ii. How do you respond when people speak negatively to you?

#### **2. The Rules of Engagement (1 minute)**

- a. Repeat the Rules of Engagement, or have students repeat them.

#### **3. Check-in (1 minute)**

- a. Close your eyes and identify how you're feeling. This is just for you and not to be said out loud.
- b. Fill in the sentence: I feel (blank). Be honest with yourselves. *I feel tired. I feel like I don't want to be here. I feel like I can't wait to start.*

#### 4. I've Got Your Back (1 minute)

- a. Have everyone move around the room, pat each other on the back, and say, "I've got your back."

#### 5. Positive and Negative Speak Introduction (5 minutes)

- a. See if any students will share their Entry Prompt responses to their positive/negative reactions.
- b. Ask students to identify positive words and negative words.
- c. Have students move about the room rather than standing in a circle looking at each other where they're more susceptible to judging one another. Ask students to say positive words aloud. Alternatively, you can have students provide a gesture rather than say them. Students move, ask them to say/gesture a negative word. Alternate between positive and negative words, ending on the positive.

#### 6. Warm-ups (10 minutes)

##### a. Point and Yes

- i. **Objective:** To say yes out loud
- ii. It's amazing how positive it can be to simply have your students shouting yes to one another.
  - Form a circle.
  - Start the round. Make eye contact with someone across the circle. Point at them.
  - That person, Person B, clearly and loudly says YES.
  - Once you have confirmation of the yes, begin walking across the circle toward Person B's spot. While Person A is moving, Person B must make eye contact with Person C and point at them.
  - Person C clearly and loudly says YES. The game continues on with people making eye contact, pointing, saying YES, walking across the circle, and switching spots.
    - Sometimes, someone tries to be funny and say no, and they see quickly how this brings the game to an immediate halt.

### Debrief

Ask students: How does it feel to hear all those yeses? Did you want to say no, but didn't feel you were allowed to? It's a good way to check in with students and see how they're feeling. It's also an opportunity for them to identify how often they wanted to say no.

## 7. Exercises (44 minutes)

### a. Yes, and

- i. **Objective:** Take a chance and say yes to people's ideas, even when we're inclined to say no
- ii. This is a great exercise to discuss the impact of words.
- iii. **Round 1**
  - Start with a round of No, because.
  - Everyone is in pairs: Partner A and Partner B.
  - This time, the pairs are going to write a letter home from camp.
  - Partner A will start by using the sentence starter "Today we . . ." And then they complete the sentence.
  - Partner B responds with "No, because . . ." and completes the sentence.
  - The two go back and forth, each of them starting their sentence with "No, because."
  - Let the game go for 30 seconds or so.

### Debrief

Ask students: How is the story progressing? It's usually not.

### iv. Round 2

- Keep the story the same: the pairs are going to write a letter home from camp.
- Partner A will start by using the sentence starter "Today we . . ." And then they complete the sentence.
- Partner B responds with "Yes, and . . ." and completes the sentence.
- The two go back and forth, each of them starting their sentence with "Yes, and."
- Let the game go for 30 seconds or so.

## Debrief

Ask students: Compare the two stories. What's the effect on your partner when you say yes? What's the effect when you hear yes? Which story was easier to tell? This is your chance to talk about what you're hearing in the room. When people are saying yes, I usually notice that there's a lot of positive body language going on. They're laughing, they're a lot louder and often more confident. It's a positive experience because that's the effect of yes. If you want to keep going with the *Yes, and* vibe, continue on and play *Yes, let's*. The description of this game is at the end of the unit.

### b. Should, Could

- i. **Objective:** To see how other word choices affect conversations. Word choice is so important.
  - Everyone is in pairs: Partner A and Partner B.
  - Partner A asks Partner B for advice about something regarding school.
    - Examples: studying for an exam, a book report, something homework based
  - Partner A shares a little bit about their situation. Partner B is going to give advice starting with "You should . . ."
  - This goes back and forth. Partner A shares a little bit about their situation. Partner B is going to give advice starting with "You should . . ."
  - After a minute or so, yell "SWITCH!"
  - Now Partner B will ask Partner A for advice, again, something to do with school.
  - This time, Partner A will give advice starting with "You could . . ."

## Debrief

Ask students: How was it to hear *you should* and *you could*? "Should" sounds more bossy, condescending, know-it-all. "Could" sounds more open, less of a demand.

### ii. Round 2

- Once you've gone through this, have students stand and close their eyes.
- Tell them, "if you were a statue labeled, 'You Should,' strike that pose. What would it look like?"
- Once you can see that everybody has struck a pose, invite them to open their eyes and look around the room (while still holding their pose).

- Usually, they will see a lot of finger pointing.
- Have students close their eyes again and say, “if you were a statue labeled ‘You Could,’ strike that pose. What would it look like?”
- Once everyone has a pose, have them open their eyes (while still holding their pose).
- Usually, they have their hands upturned in a wide-armed, open gesture.
- Talk about and compare these two poses. They’ll usually laugh that there is so much more commonality in the two gestures.

### c. Park Bench

- Objective:** There isn’t an objective to this exercise; it’s how students play the game.
  - Students love this exercise!
  - Set three chairs at the front of the class.
  - Invite two students to sit on the left chair and the centre chair.
  - Invite a third student up to the front. This student will enter the scene bringing a strong character choice. This can be a voice, an emotional stance, a type of character.
  - The third student sits in the empty chair bringing their strong choice to the scene.
  - The other two students have to mirror that strong choice (character type, voice, emotional stance) and interact with one another.
  - Let this go on for a minute. At that time, the person in the left chair finds an excuse to leave.
  - After they leave, the other two players will slide down the bench, occupying the left and the centre chair, and a new student will come in and bring a new choice for the others to mirror.
  - **Observe:** What you are watching for is when students choose to play negative character traits and choose to use negative words out of context.
    - If this happens, this is your opportunity to side coach and encourage them to use the opposite. Encourage them to make a positive statement instead.
    - Half the time, students don’t even know they’re being negative.

## Debrief

The debrief happens in the context of the game. If we start seeing negative habits appear in how students talk to each other, it's our opportunity to discuss in the moment. It's not about calling students out, but having them recognize when they're doing it and allowing them to replay with a different choice.

This might be the most important tool you can give to your students—how to be aware of what they're saying to themselves and to each other and be aware of the impact of their words.

Take some time and listen to your students. What do they say about themselves? How do they give feedback? We want students to be effective responders, but if they're having trouble with positive speak, they're definitely going to have trouble with giving feedback to others.

### 8. Check-out (1 minute)

- a. Close your eyes and identify how you're feeling. This is just for you and not to be said out loud.
- b. Fill in the sentence: I feel (blank).
- c. Are you the same or different than you were at the beginning of class?

### 9. Exit Slip (5 minutes)

- a. In the last five minutes, students respond to the exit slip question and hand it in as they leave class.
  - i. Based on today's exercises, reflect on the impact of your words.

## ASSESSMENT

- Process assessment: How are students engaged in the lesson? (active listening, collaboration, discussion participation, effort)
- Skills assessment: How are students demonstrating skills? (e.g., focus, physical engagement, vocal engagement)

# IMPOWERMENT IMPROV UNIT

## ADDITIONAL EXERCISES

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*Support the Yes, and concept*

### Yes, let's

- Get everyone moving about the room.
- Call out an activity that everyone can do (e.g., "Let's go swimming!")
- The group responds by shouting "Yes, let's!" Then, wherever they are, they start swimming.
- Someone else calls out another activity (e.g., "Let's take a nap!")
- The group responds by shouting "Yes let's!" Then, wherever they are, they start napping.
- Someone else calls out another activity and so on, and so on, and so on.

**Note:** Each time an activity is offered up, it starts off with "Let's" and everyone must say "Yes let's!"

### Debrief

Ask students: How was this exercise for you? Were there any activities you didn't want to do? Was there a point in the activity that went on too long?

**Applying Feedback:** There are no wrong answers in improv. Everything is a building block. If you don't like someone's "offer" you find a way to make it work for you. For example, if someone says "Let's play chess!" rather than roll our eyes, say "Yes let's!" Then, play chess in a way that interests you, perhaps by playing speed chess or pretending to contemplate a move and constantly changing your mind.

### Gift Giving

*Applying Yes, and without saying "Yes, and"*

- Get everyone to pair up and decide who is *A* and who is *B* (if there's a trio, *A*, *B*, and *C*.)
- *A* mimes handing *B* an imaginary box.
- Based on the size/weight/shape of the "box," *B* opens the box and pulls out the gift, stating what it is (e.g., "A goldfish bowl!"). *B* then puts the gift on an imaginary shelf behind them before handing *A* a box to open.
- Continue going back and forth. Trios should go in a circle with *A* giving a gift to *B*, then *B* to *C*, then *C* to *A*, etc.
- After a while, they may start getting more scenic: talking about why they got someone a particular gift or playing with the object. Feel free to encourage this as they're putting Yes, and to work.

**Outcome:** “Yes” is fun and way easier to work with than “no,” but “yes” alone only gets us so far. We need the “and,” which makes this big, scary thing called improv less overwhelming. Plus the funny starts coming out: my giving someone an imaginary box may not be hilarious, but the fact that my partner pulls out a goldfish bowl might be or the fact that I say “I put spill-proof water in it so that the box wouldn’t get wet!”

## Gift-Giving Gibberish

- Get everyone to pair up and decide who is *A* and who is *B* (if there’s a trio, *A*, *B*, and *C*.)
- *A* mimes handing *B* an imaginary box.
- Based on the size/weight/shape of the “box,” *B* opens the box and pulls out the gift, stating what it is (e.g., “A goldfish bowl!”). *B* then puts the gift on an imaginary shelf behind them before handing *A* a box to open.
- Continue going back and forth. Trios should go in a circle with *A* giving a gift to *B*, then *B* to *C*, then *C* to *A*, etc.
- Stop everyone and tell them they are going to continue in Gibberish, a made-up language that they come up with on their own. Even if they speak another language (e.g., Spanish) they are not to speak that language, though it’s okay if their gibberish sounds like another language.

### Debrief

Ask students: How was it to have your words taken away? What other tools did you have to use to communicate what was in the box?