

# Building the Ensemble Part One

Use this Lesson Plan at the beginning of the school year to introduce the concept of ensemble and what it means to work together.

## OBJECTIVE

To introduce teamwork and the act of working together.

## DESCRIPTION

Students participate and then reflect on exercises where they have to work together. The outcome of the exercise depends on them behaving as an ensemble.

## MATERIALS

- Ensemble Expectations Handout
- Writing Reflection Checklist

## INSTRUCTION

1. Journal Prompt: What does it mean to be part of an ensemble?
2. Take your students through the following warm ups. They have been specifically chosen because they encourage the principles of ensemble that will be explained later in the lesson. At this point you don't need to explain the principles, just go through the exercises. As you warm up, coach students to stay focused and pay attention to their surroundings. This is not the time to chat and catch up. This is the time to get ready to work.
  - **Walk the Grid.** Actors walk in straight lines through the space. When they turn, they must turn at 90 degree angles. As they walk, introduce different environments: tightrope, through Jell-O, snowstorm, heat wave, blustery wind, quicksand, icy road. Coach students to pay attention and to be aware of others as they move through the space.
  - **Following.** As students walk the grid around the space, conscious of their surroundings, students choose another person to follow. They must follow at a distance and not let on who they're following. On a cue from you, everyone stops. Who can guess their follower? To take this exercise to the next level, everyone has to follow two people at a time.
  - **Copy Walk.** While students are walking the grid, being conscious of their surroundings, and following another person, they are going to copy that person's walk. What about their walk is unique and specific?
  - **Go Stop Clap Jump.** An excellent exercise for listening and focus. There are four commands: Go, Stop, Clap, Jump. The actions that go with the commands are:
    - **Go:** Move forward.
    - **Stop:** Stop Moving.
    - **Clap:** Clap your hands.
    - **Jump:** Jump in the air.

Once you've run through the obvious command/actions change it up. When you hear Go, you stop. When you hear stop, you go. When you hear clap, you jump. When you hear jump, you clap. And then make it even more difficult. When you hear go, clap. When you hear jump, go, and so on.

- **Mirror.** The mirror game is a tried and true exercise. Students work in pairs facing each other. Partner A leads, coming up with a flow of action. Partner B has to mirror that action. At a cue from you, the lead switches to Partner B with Partner A mirroring. The two have to pay attention, support each other and work together to make the mirror flow.
  - **Mirror Variations.** There are lots of ways to change this exercise up.
    - **Finding a Partner:** Instead of students choosing their own partners, students move about the space. When you cue them to stop, their partner is the first person they make eye contact with.
    - **Delay Mirror:** Partner B has to wait 3 seconds before starting the action. Can Partner B remember what came before? Is Partner A supporting Partner B by moving slowly and deliberately with clear actions?
    - **Group Mirror:** Once the pairs have tried the game, have each pair join a second pair so they form a diamond with everyone facing in the same direction (instead of inwards to each other). The leader starts the flow of action and at one point makes a quarter turn to the left. When everyone does this, it creates a new leader who must take over the flow. Everyone needs to pay attention to when the leader turns.
3. Ask for four volunteers to come to the front of the class for an improv. Their job for the improv is to put together an Ikea table and chair set. Each person in the scene has their own personality and acts accordingly. Let the improv go for a minute or two, coaching students to stay in their characters to the utmost. The four personalities are:
    - **A** has been building Ikea furniture forever. They feel they're the best at it, the star furniture builder. Everyone should take their orders.
    - **B** could care less about helping. If someone else is struggling, they won't lift a finger.
    - **C** wants to follow the instructions exactly. It frustrates them greatly if someone wants to skip a step.
    - **D** wants everyone to work together.
  4. Afterwards discuss with the class what the procedure looked like. Did it go smoothly or was it a bit of a mess? Why was it a mess?
  5. Explain to students that being a part of a play is not unlike building a piece of furniture. There is a plan to follow: the script. There are the individual pieces that have to work together: the cast and crew. There is an eventual outcome: the performance. And if everyone has different agendas or if everyone involved is focused on themselves instead of working together toward a goal, the process can become a mess.
  6. Explain to students that to be part of a play is to be part of an ensemble. Ask students, "What does the word 'ensemble' mean to you?" Highlight for students that though sometimes the word ensemble is used to describe the chorus, a better description is "the parts that make up a whole." Meaning, it takes everybody working together on a project to make it work - the united performance of a united group. That is what it means to have a sense of ensemble.
  7. Give students the *Ensemble Expectations Handout*. This handout outlines what is expected of students working as part of the ensemble in a play.
    - **Look and Listen:** An ensemble actor pays attention on stage and off. They are watching and listening.
    - **Support:** An ensemble actor is ready to support their fellow actor. If a line is dropped, they help get the scene back on track. If someone leaves a prop on stage by accident, they pick it up.
    - **Community:** It's not about I or me. An ensemble actor belongs to a community, a community that works together. It's about the whole production (or the whole performance) not the individual pieces.
  8. **Circle Exercises:** Take students through the following circle exercises. Each exercise implements the principles of the ensemble: Look and Listen, Support, Community. Circles work well to promote the ensemble principles. Work with large circles of 10 to 15 participants. The circles should be large enough that it takes every person working together to make the exercise successful. Students can see each other when in circles, and the energy of the exercise is contained.
    - **Perfect Circle:** Actors work together and form a perfect circle. Coach students to talk to each other and to work together to make the circle perfect. If the shape is odd, encourage students to look at what they're doing and fix it.  
Once the circle is formed, students break away, run and touch the wall, then come back to form the perfect circle again.  
Repeat the exercise (form the circle, break away and return) but this time students have to create the circle without speaking. How do they communicate non-verbally?

- **Clap Wave:** The goal of this exercise is to send a continuous clap wave around the circle. The first person turns to the student on their right, makes eye contact and tries to clap in unison with that person. The second person turns to the student on their right, makes eye contact and tries to clap in unison with that person. Everyone has to be ready to make eye contact, and clap, keeping the rhythm of the clap going. How quickly can the group send the wave around the circle?
  - **Group Jump:** Students in the circle jump together and then land. They must land at the same time. The first time they do this, encourage students to use a countdown to initiate the jump/land. Once they succeed with the unison jump/land students repeat the exercise, this time without speaking. Once they succeed with that, students try to land without making any noise with their feet. Finally, how high can they jump and still land quietly and in unison?
  - **Manhole cover:** Everyone in the circle bends down in unison and together they mime lifting a huge manhole cover to shoulder height. The manhole cover is as big as the circle. Keep the aspects of mime in mind: consistency, shape, and weight. One side of the circle can't get ahead of the other. The first time they do this exercise encourage students to talk it out and communicate with one another. The second time, they complete the exercise with only non-verbal communication.
9. **Written Reflection:** Students reflect on the nature of ensemble and the exercises they participated in during this lesson. Each reflection should address the following questions:
1. What does it mean to work together in a play?
  2. Why is everyone in a play part of the ensemble?
  3. What are the expectations of those in an ensemble?
  4. What was your favourite exercise today?
  5. Where did you struggle today?

## ASSESSMENT

### Reflection Rubric

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# Ensemble Expectations

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## WHAT IS AN ENSEMBLE?

- The parts that make up a whole.
- The performance of a united group.
- It takes everyone working together to make a project work.

## WHAT IS EXPECTED OF EACH MEMBER OF AN ENSEMBLE?

### LOOK AND LISTEN

An ensemble actor pays attention on stage and off. They are always watching and listening.

### SUPPORT

An ensemble actor is ready to support their fellow actor. If a line is dropped, they help get the scene back on track. If someone leaves a prop on stage by accident, they pick it up.

### COMMUNITY

It's not about "I" or "me." An ensemble actor belongs to a community. A community that works together toward a goal. Focus on the whole performance, the whole production. Not just the parts.

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# Writing Reflection Checklist

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NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

Reflect on the nature of ensemble and the exercises you participated in today. Address these questions:

What does it mean to work together in a play? Why is everyone in a play part of the ensemble? What are the expectations of those in an ensemble? What was your favourite exercise today? Where did you struggle today?

**Length:** One page

CHECK OFF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS AS YOU WRITE YOUR REFLECTION.

	I understand this assignment.
	I have completed the assignment in full.
	My assignment is the appropriate length.
	I have written in full sentences and complete ideas.
	I have proofed my reflection for spelling mistakes and grammatical errors.
	I have made detailed observations.
	I have made connections between my personal views and the lesson.
	I am satisfied with my final product.

# Building the Ensemble Part Two

Use this Lesson Plan at the beginning of the school year to introduce the concept of ensemble and what it means to work together.

## OBJECTIVE

To introduce teamwork and the act of working together in a theatrical context.

## DESCRIPTION

Students participate and then reflect on exercises where they have to work together. The outcome of the exercise depends on them behaving as an ensemble. This series of exercises add elements of theatricality.

## MATERIALS

- Choral Speaking Checklist

## INSTRUCTION

1. Choose one of the warm ups from Part One to start the class.
2. Review the Ensemble Expectations from Part One: Look and Listen, Support, and Community.
3. Take students through these exercises. Each activity employs the principles of ensemble and adds in elements of theatricality. They range from tableau to choral speaking. All the activities require small groups. Mix up the groups with each exercise. Don't let students work with the same people all the time.

### Family Portrait

- Groups have one minute to form a family portrait. Everyone in the group must be involved. Coach students to talk about the story their portrait will tell. Think about the different types of families - the people in the picture don't necessarily have to be related. Possible families: accountants, circus performers, criminals, librarians. How can everyone pose to visually demonstrate the family?

### Fairy Tale Tableau

- Groups have one minute to create a tableau (a frozen picture) from a well-known fairy tale. Can the class guess the fairy tale simply by looking at the picture? This activity can be done with nursery rhymes, holidays, moments in history, moments from the play they're reading in class, etc.

### Objects

- Have students walk neutrally around the space. Then call out an object for each group to form. The group members run together and then must work together to create the object. All members of the group must participate. Possible objects: washing machine, lawnmower, photocopier, sofa, Christmas tree, wheelbarrow, sprinkler system, snowblower, grandfather clock, rocket ship.

## Slo-Mo

- Each group picks a location where there is a lot of activity: restaurant, baseball game, racetrack. The aim of the activity is to present the action of the location in super slow motion. Coach students that everyone has to move at the same speed, and to make the actions as clear as possible. Those watching should be able to guess the location. Encourage students to look at each other, to feed off of each other, to match each other's speed.

## Horse Race

- This activity can be done both silently and with sound. The group is watching a horse race. Those observing should be able to see a clear beginning, middle and end to the race by how the students follow the action. The group has to discuss and decide on clear reactions for each member of the group. What relationships are there between those watching the race? Who wins? Who loses? Coach groups that the race should last at least 30 seconds.

## Group Household Chores

- Each group decides on a household chore that can be done in pairs (such as folding sheets) or groups (cleaning a specific room). Coach groups that they must work together on the chore. Once they have established the specific actions of the chore, play around with it. Have groups do the chore at quarter speed, regular speed, then double speed. Then do the chore at different ages – Start as toddlers, then teens, adults, 100-year-olds. How does a three-year-old fold sheets? How does an elderly person do the same? Most importantly, how do the students act and react to each other as they complete the chores in different variations?

## One Word Storytelling

- This is a traditional improv game where small groups tell a story one word at a time. An excellent listening and focus activity because the story has to make sense even though it's being told one word at a time. Possible story titles: To Cheat or Not to Cheat. Lost in the Big City. Cupcake Wars. The Secret Super-Smart Model.

## Choral Speaking

Unison choral speaking fully employs the principles of ensemble. Students need to listen to each other, support each other and act as one to make the piece work.

Choral speaking is the act of the entire class speaking the same text at the same time.

- Give the lyrics for a modern song to your students and have them read it aloud in unison.
- Discuss with your students:
  - Why is choral speaking a useful ensemble exercise?
  - How can we make the unison sound interesting to listen to?
  - How can we make choral speaking interesting to look at?
- Explain to students that when a large group speaks in unison, it's not enough to just say the lines. You have to listen to those around you so that the unison is clear. You have to work together to decide on vocal variety to make the piece interesting. Some examples of vocal variety are pitch, volume and pace.
- Take students through some examples of vocal variety with the song lyrics.
  - Start in a whisper and grow in volume.
  - Start loud and go soft.
  - Pick a line to say fast.
  - Pick a line to start out on a high pitch and move to a low pitch.
- Explain to students that when you present choral speaking, you can't just stand in a line. Think about physical shapes, such as tableau pictures, a specific gesture for a line, or a specific move.

- Take students through some physical examples with the song lyrics.
  - Create a tableau. What picture does the song represent?
  - Pick one line to add a gesture to. What would the gesture be?
  - Pick one line to add a movement to. What would the movement be?
- Take students through the song lyrics as a piece of choral speaking. Coach students to listen to each other as they speak in unison. Give them some examples of vocal variety and physical shapes.
- Divide the students into two groups. Each group has to pick a piece and prepare a choral speaking performance. Some example pieces are:
  - *Leaves of Grass*, Walt Whitman
  - *Spoon River Anthology*, Edgar Lee Masters
  - *The Raven*, Edgar Allan Poe
  - *The Jabberwocky*, Lewis Carroll
- Give each group the *Choral Speaking Checklist* to follow as they prepare their piece. Each group must include the following:
  - The piece is spoken in unison.
  - The piece employs vocal variety.
  - The performance has a physical element, be it through tableau, gesture or movement.
  - The performance is two minutes long.
  - Each group acts as an ensemble: Look and Listen, Support, Community.
  - Students are given class time to prepare their pieces.
  - Students present their piece to the class.

**Written Reflection:** Students reflect on what they have done in this class. How did today's exercises reinforce the concept of ensemble?

## ASSESSMENT

Reflection Rubric

Performance Rubric



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# Choral Speaking Checklist

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GROUP NAMES: \_\_\_\_\_

CHECK OFF THE FOLLOWING ELEMENTS AS YOU PREPARE YOUR PIECE.

	We understand this assignment.
	We have completed the assignment in full.
	Our choral piece is the appropriate length.
	We worked together to choose an appropriate piece.
	We have practiced speaking in unison.
	We have discussed and decided on where we will use vocal variety in the piece.
	We have discussed and decided on what physical shapes we'll use in the piece.
	We are satisfied with our final product.

NOTES:

# Building the Ensemble

## REFLECTION RUBRIC

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

	4	3	2	1
<b>Comprehension</b> The nature of ensemble. All questions are addressed.	Demonstrates thorough understanding of the task.	Demonstrates solid understanding of the task.	Demonstrates some understanding of the task.	Demonstrates little understanding of the task.
<b>Effort</b>	Reflection is detailed and goes beyond the length requirement.	Reflection is detailed and meets the length requirement.	Reflection has some detail and meets the length requirement.	Reflection is not detailed and does not meet the length requirement.
<b>Depth of Content</b>	Focused, thought provoking reflection contemplating class discussion and personal views beyond the assignment.	Thoughtful reflection on the lesson contemplating class discussion and personal views.	Some commitment to completing a thoughtful reflection. Some contemplation of class discussion and personal views.	Superficial content. Answers are unfocused, with minimal work. Little contemplation of class discussion and personal views.
<b>Personal Connection</b>	Demonstrates thorough connections between their personal views and the lesson.	Demonstrates solid connections between their personal views and the lesson.	Demonstrates some connection between their personal views and the lesson.	Demonstrates limited connection between their personal views and the lesson.
<b>Commitment to Presentation</b>	Excellent attention to form and presentation. Reflection is easy to read. No spelling or grammatical errors interfering with understanding.	Solid attention to presentation. Reflection is easy to read. One or two errors in spelling and grammar but do not interfere with understanding.	Some attention to form and presentation. Reflection is mostly easy to read. Several errors in spelling and grammar that sometimes interfere with understanding.	Little attention to form and presentation. Reflection is difficult to read. Many errors in spelling and grammar that interfere with understanding.

# Building the Ensemble Part Two

## PERFORMANCE RUBRIC

GROUP MEMBERS: \_\_\_\_\_

	4	3	2	1
<b>Comprehension</b> to put together a choral speaking piece.	Thorough understanding of the task.	Solid understanding of the task.	Some understanding of the task.	Comprehension needs work. Little understanding of task.
<b>Content</b>	The piece meets all the assignment requirements.	The piece meets most of the assignment requirements.	The piece meets some of the assignment requirements.	The piece does not meet the assignment requirements.
<b>Group Work</b>	Group works very well together beyond assignment requirements.	Group mostly works well together and meets assignment requirements.	Group sometimes works well together. Meets assignment requirements.	Group does not work well together and does not meet assignment requirements.
<b>Unison Speaking</b>	Group is fully focused on speaking in unison. The text is crisp and clear.	Group is focused on speaking in unison. The text is clear.	Group is somewhat focused on speaking in unison. The text is not always clear.	The group does not speak in unison. The text is difficult to understand.
<b>Vocal Variety</b>	Excellent choices in vocal variety. The piece was vivid and interesting from beginning to end.	Solid choices with vocal variety. The piece was interesting from beginning to end.	Satisfactory choices with vocal variety. The piece has interesting moments.	Vocal variety needs work. The piece was delivered in the same tone from beginning to end.
<b>Physical Shapes</b>	Excellent use of physical shapes using tableau, gesture and movement.	Solid use of physical shapes. Uses two of tableau, gesture and movement.	Satisfactory use of physical shapes. Uses one of tableau, gesture and movement.	Physical delivery needs work. No specific physical shapes were used in the piece.
<b>Energy</b>	Excellent energy and connection with audience. Great eye contact.	Solid energy and connection with audience. Solid eye contact.	Satisfactory energy and connection with audience. Some eye contact.	Energy needs work. Flat performance and does not connect to audience. No eye contact.
<b>Overall</b>	Excellent performance.	Solid performance.	Satisfactory performance.	Performance needs work.

# Building the Ensemble Part Two

## REFLECTION RUBRIC

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

	4	3	2	1
<b>Comprehension</b> How did today's exercises reinforce the concept of ensemble?	Demonstrates thorough understanding of the task.	Demonstrates solid understanding of the task.	Demonstrates some understanding of the task.	Demonstrates little understanding of the task.
<b>Effort</b>	Reflection is detailed and goes beyond the length requirement.	Reflection is detailed and meets the length requirement.	Reflection has some detail and meets the length requirement.	Reflection is not detailed and does not meet the length requirement.
<b>Depth of Content</b>	Focused, thought provoking reflection contemplating class discussion and personal views beyond the assignment.	Thoughtful reflection on the lesson contemplating class discussion and personal views.	Some commitment to completing a thoughtful reflection. Some contemplation of class discussion and personal views.	Superficial content. Answers are unfocused, with minimal work. Little contemplation of class discussion and personal views.
<b>Personal Connection</b>	Demonstrates thorough connections between their personal views and the lesson.	Demonstrates solid connections between their personal views and the lesson.	Demonstrates some connection between their personal views and the lesson.	Demonstrates limited connection between their personal views and the lesson.
<b>Commitment to Presentation</b>	Excellent attention to form and presentation. Reflection is easy to read. No spelling or grammatical errors interfering with understanding.	Solid attention to presentation. Reflection is easy to read. One or two errors in spelling and grammar but do not interfere with understanding.	Some attention to form and presentation. Reflection is mostly easy to read. Several errors in spelling and grammar that sometimes interfere with understanding.	Little attention to form and presentation. Reflection is difficult to read. Many errors in spelling and grammar that interfere with understanding.