

Classrooms without Scripts: Using Improv in the Second Language Classroom

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BLOG: Your language-teaching mission, should you choose to accept it, is to find new resources and strategies for your modern foreign language or ELL classroom.

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Big Ideas

- Improv (creating spontaneous-ish scenes) is an engaging and different way for students to show the teacher what they know
- Improv allows all students, regardless of ability, to participate and be successful
- Improv is easy to implement into the classroom, as long as an emotionally safe environment is established
- Improv allows students to tell stories that incorporate people that look, sound and act like them, because they are the ones creating and performing it

What is improv?



See: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/what-is-improv

Community – Drama/improv creates a sense of community in the language classroom (Angeliannawati, 2019; Badie, 2014; Keränen, 2019; Lobman & Linqvist, 2007; Perone, 2011; Piccoli, 2018; Smith & McKnight, 2009)

Communication – Students are able to communicate better when using drama/improv to learn a language (Florea, 2011; Galante & Thomson, 2017; Keränen, 2019; Perone, 2011)

Creativity – Drama/improv lets both students and teachers be more creative (Belliveau & Kim, 2013; Cristea, 2019; Lenters & Smith, 2018; Piccoli, 2018; Rojabi & Mustofa, 2021)

Confidence – Students become more confident in their use of the target language when engaged in drama/improv activities (Atas, 2015; Even, 2004; Galante, 2018; Gillette & Perry, 2021; Kurtz, 2011; Perone, 2011; Piazzoli, 2011; Piccoli, 2018; Smith & McKnight, 2009)

Cultural sensitivity – Drama/improv allows students to better understand different cultures, as well as their own (Angeliannawati, 2019; Belliveau & Kim, 2013 ; Bournot-Trites, et al., 2007; Gillette & Perry, 2021; McGovern, 2017; Ntelioglou, 2011)

Carrot (not stick) – Students are more motivated to learn a language when engaging in drama/improv (Bournot-Trites, et al., 2007; Cahmann-Taylor & McGovern, 2021; Lenters & Smith, 2018; Piazzoli, 2011; Smith & McKnight, 2009)

Content knowledge – Drama/improv improves student’s understanding of the target language (including grammar) (Angeliannawati, 2019; Even, 2004 & 2011; Kurtz, 2011; Lobman & Lundquist, 2007; Mochizuki & Ortega, 2008; O’Gara, 2008)



So what does this look like in the classroom?



Context-exploration phase: exploring the need for a grammatical structure

Activity or game:

Scaffolding provided:

Grammar phase: explicit or co-constructed



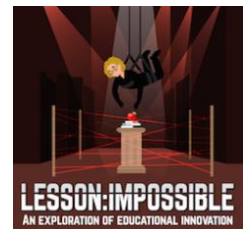
Story phase: students create prompt, using the grammatical structure

Scene structure/prompt:

Presentation:

Students reflect on their

Materials needed/notes:



Improv Games



BOOGERS!: IMPROV GRAMMAR GAME

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WHAT IS IT? IMPROV GRAMMAR GAME

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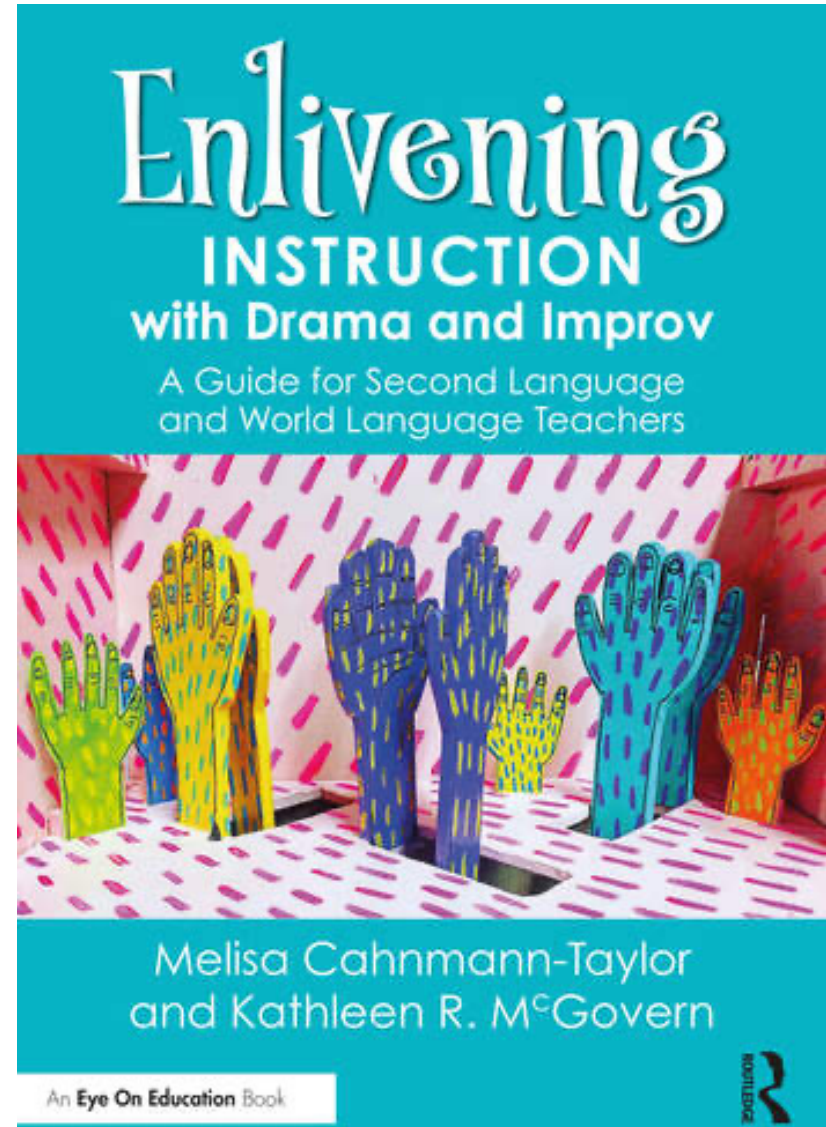
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WHAT ARE YOU DOING? IMPROV GRAMMAR GAME

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Enlivening INSTRUCTION with Drama and Improv

A Guide for Second Language
and World Language Teachers

Melisa Cahnmann-Taylor
and Kathleen R. McGovern

An Eye On Education Book




Introductions!

Person A:

- Introduce yourself: "Hi! I'm [name & title]"
- Give a "gift" to Person B: "Here is a/an ---"

Person B:

- Take the "gift", say "thank you for the **[adjective]** ----" 
- Introduce yourself: "Hi! I'm [name & title]"
- Transform the gift, make a new one, give it to Person C: "Here is a/an ---"

Context-exploration phase: exploring the need for a grammatical structure

Activity or game:

Scaffolding provided:

Grammar phase: explicit or co-constructed grammar lesson(s)

Grammar target:

Lesson:

DRAMA GRAMMAR

Adapted from Even's (2004) [Dramagrammar](#) framework

Story phase: students create scenes based on a prompt, using the grammatical structure

Scene structure/prompt:

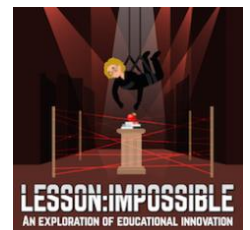
Presentation:

Reflection phase: students reflect on their experiences

Focus of reflection:

Method:

Materials needed/notes:



Free Scenes



- Students are given a 'prompt'
- Students are given time to create a scene (I usually allow class materials as reference)
 - Translanguaging and cooperative skills
 - Time to ask questions, puzzle things out
 - Students feel more confident
- Students present the scenes to the class

See: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/prompts-for-free-scenes

Vocabulary/Grammar Prompts

Cat got your tongue
Hit the books
Take it easy

**5 subjunctive
sentence starters**

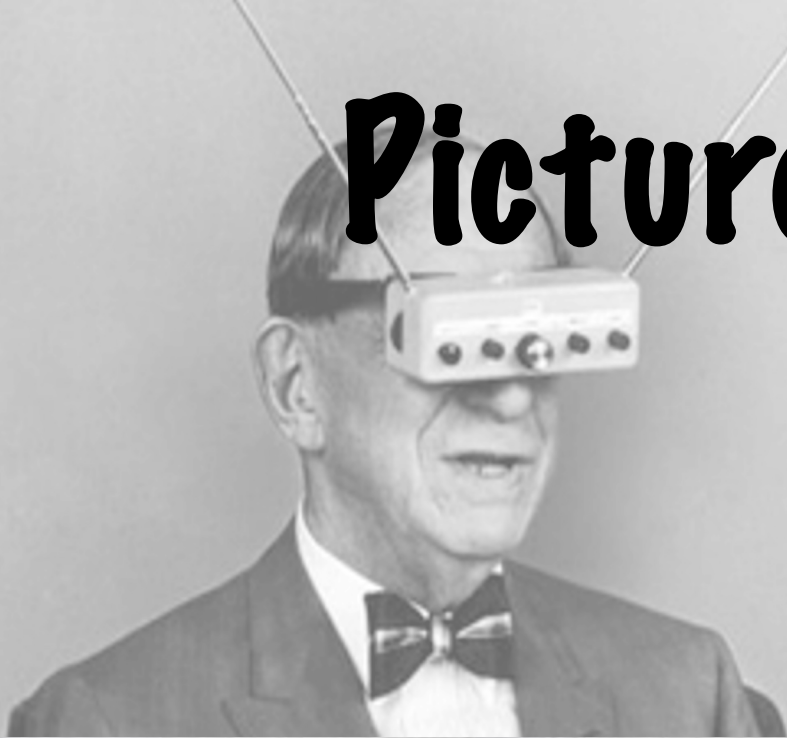
**Prince
frog
fairy godmother**

To play
To see
To eat

Character/Settings Prompts



Picture Prompts

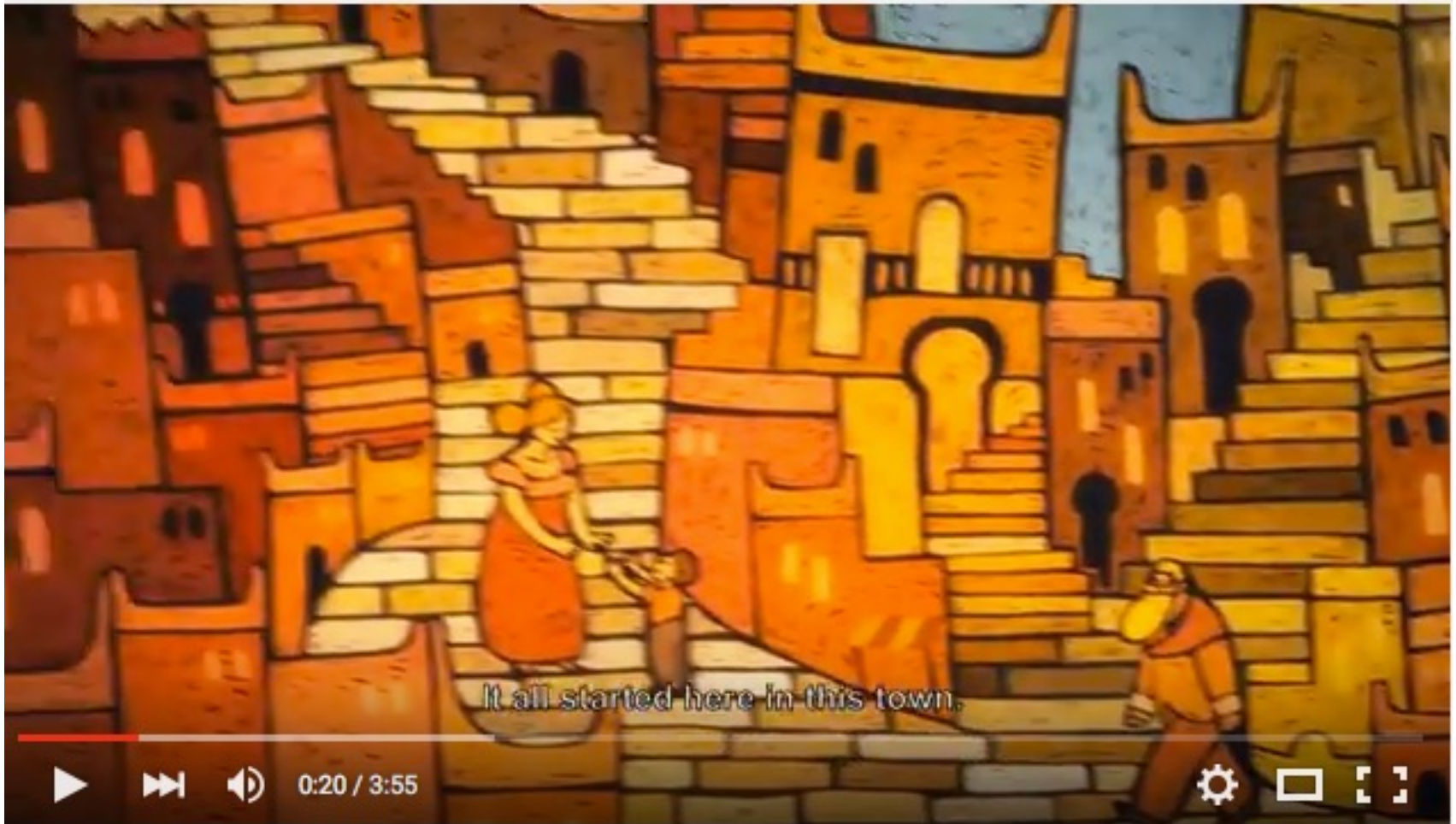


Preview Prompts



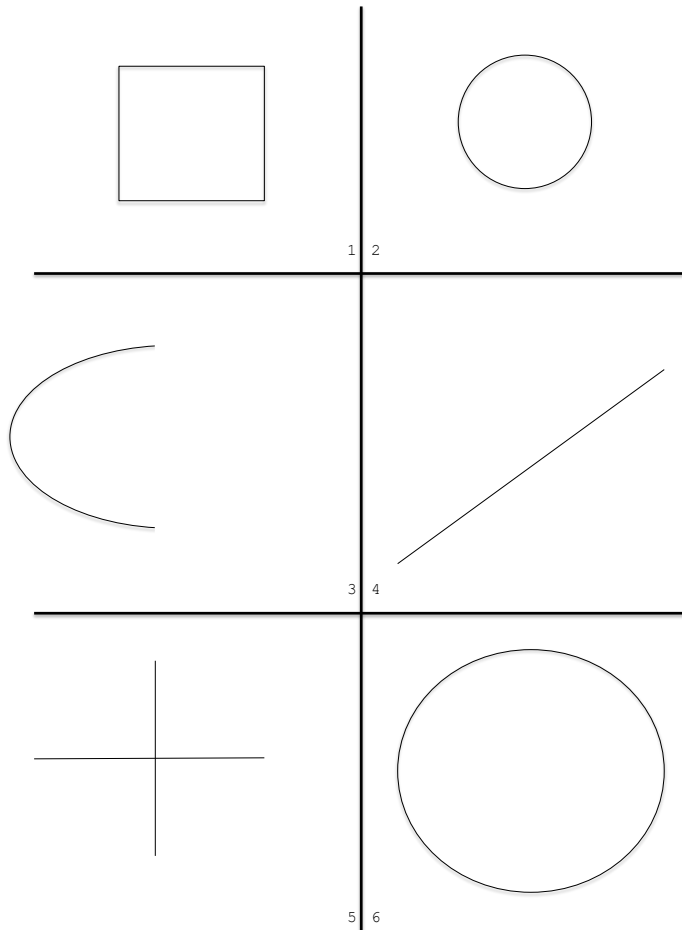
See: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/picture-stories

Movie Prompts



Fur - Animation Short Film 2011 - GOBELINS

Anything...



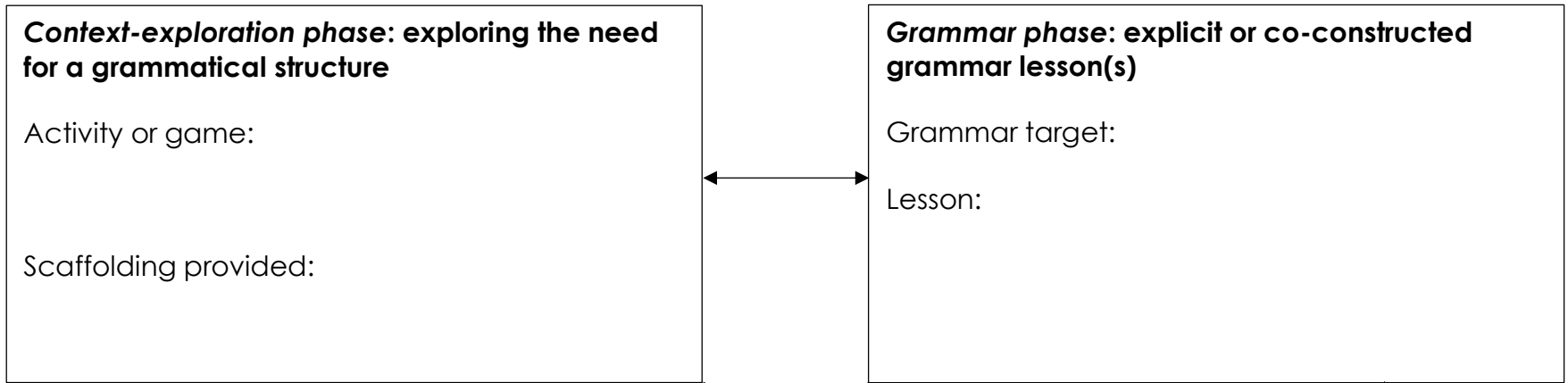
Source: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/shapesactivity



Let's give it a try!

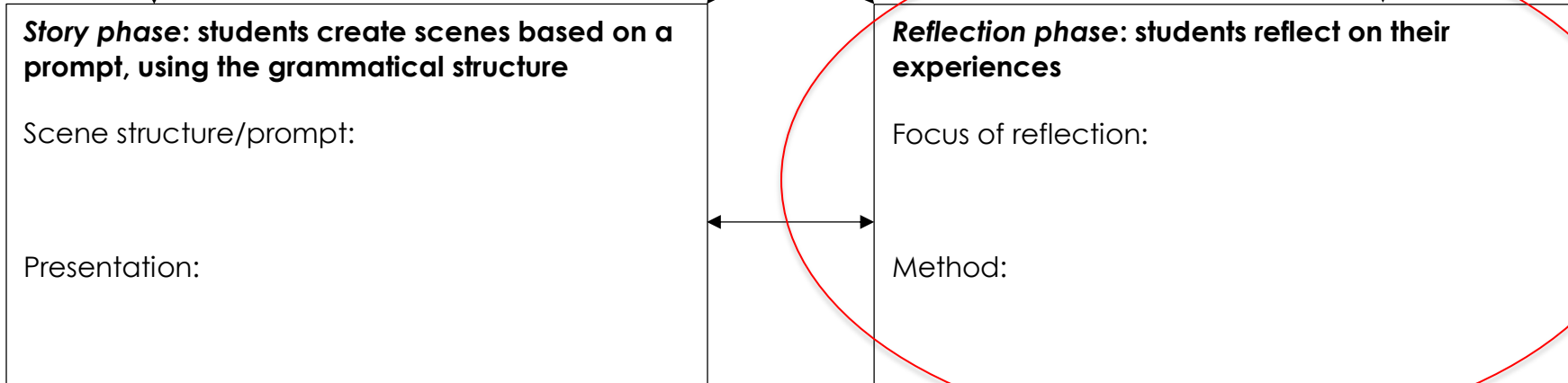


- ✓ 3 vocab words per group
- ✓ Each person must use at least 2 adjectives

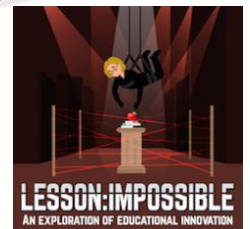


DRAMA GRAMMAR

Adapted from Even's (2004) [Dramagrammar](#) framework



Materials needed/notes:



Trouble-shooting & questions

- **How do you make time for this?**
- **What about all the grammar?**
- **Doesn't this only work with higher levels?**
- **What if my students don't buy-in?**
- **What if my colleagues think I'm crazy?**
- **??????????????**



See: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/addressing-arguments-against-drama

Less teaching = improved ability?!?!

- Ironically, for every minute I replace direct instruction of grammar with improv, my students' grammar improves...
 - grammar does not need to be taught and practiced exclusively in writing
 - grammar is learned based on need, not as an abstract concept
 - students are practicing and playing with grammatical concepts
 - students see other students modelling more advanced grammar



Starting slow

- **Start class with small warm-up games that reinforce grammatical concepts**

See: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/what-are-you-doing-improv-grammar-game

- **Add a game or scene to existing lesson plans in order to reinforce themes**
- **Adapt scripted role-plays with added improv**

See: www.lessonimpossible.com/blog/adapting-scripted-role-plays-with-improv