

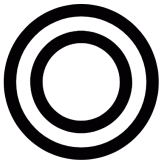


Mirroring for Empathy

Mirroring is a common theater exercise that helps bring *presence* to actors; it's a form of listening with your body. When an actor can authentically connect with another actor in the present moment, that's when "the scene comes to life." The same is true off stage; when we connect to the present moment with others, we come to life. A core aspect of empathy is to feel what others are feeling. In this exercise, we will practice embodying different shapes, postures and gestures in order to "be present" with the people around us and to feel what they are feeling by carefully reflecting their movements, as if we are their mirror image.

Directions:

Divide the class into two groups. One group will be the inner circle facing outwards, one group will be the outer circle, facing inwards. Allow for ~3 feet between the circles.



The two groups will take turns leading and following. Each student should be directly across from another student. Start with the inner circle as leaders and the outer circle as the ones mirroring. Then alternate. **note - each student is creating their own unique gesture for their partner in front of them.*

Example

Step 1:

Inner Circle, Make a 3 second gesture for sweeping the floor.

Outer Circle, Mirror that gesture back to the inner circle. (as if you are an instant replay)

Outer Circle: Make a gesture for being Lost.

Inner Circle: Repeat that gesture.

Step 2:

Now we are going to mirror in real time. We will follow the leader as they make their gesture. The leader must move in slow-motion in order for the follower to track the intricacies of the movement.

Inner Circle Leads first. Make a gesture for opening the windows

Outer Circle follows in sync, trying to mirror both the pace and intricacies.

Now Switch, Outer circle leads a gesture and inner circle follows along simultaneously.



Step 3:

Rotate the two circles a couple cogs so everyone has a new partner. Repeat with new gestures.

Step 4:

Now that everyone's had a chance to be a leader *and* a follower, we are going to practice both at the same time. In essence, you will both be leading and following your partner in the present moment.

Prompts

- Washing dishes
- Birdwatching
- Petting an animal
- Putting on makeup
- Offering a gift

Emotional Prompts

- Sad while feeding ducks
- Curiously searching for something
- Afraid of Bigfoot aka Sasquatch

Tips

Start with a delayed mirroring of a gesture, then go to real time.

Start with “everyday” gestures and advance into emotions and more complex scenarios

Express to students that the point is to mirror the gesture back as close as humanly possible to the original gesture. **Pay attention to posture, facial expressions, speed and quality of movement, etc.**

Extensions

See what happens when both become leaders and followers at the same time. Try it without prompts and just follow whatever movements the leader makes.

Reflection Questions:

How did it feel to embody another person's version of sadness?

What did it feel like to really slow down and be both leading and following?

How might a practice like this help people become more empathetic?