



These games are intended to be played five weeks in a row so students can build confidence in them. Before each game, always make sure to have a conversation about what a good ensemble does to take care of each other, and how to ensure everyone feels safe and comfortable.

Sometimes, the games are disasters at first. This can be a wonderful learning opportunity. A game is never over until we can talk about what went well and what didn't go well. If there was a problem (usually children shouting at each other about getting the game wrong), brainstorm ways to be a better ensemble when we play next time.

Conversation is just as important as the games themselves. The skills that are built in these games are foundational for everything in this curriculum. Give students the opportunity to know what they're working on; they deserve to know that learning can be fun! An ensemble is like a muscle: You have to work on it diligently to become strong. Sometimes we make mistakes, and good ensembles are forgiving of one another and open to change. It can be helpful to talk about sports teams and television crews that work well together. Working as a group is one of the most important skills we can build in our lives.

Game 1 (Unit 1): Build a Song

Level 1

Students sit or stand in a circle. One person makes a noise, and everyone echoes the noise back. Go around the circle until everyone has made one noise.

Level 2

Students sit or stand in a circle. One person makes a noise (noise 1), and everyone echoes the noise back. Another person makes a noise (noise 2), and everyone echoes the noise back, then adds the first noise as well, so we hear:

Person 1: Boom.

All: Boom.

Person 2: Clack.

All: Clack. Boom.

Repeat with three noises in a row. Then "wipe the sound board clean" and start again. We hear:

Person 1: Boom.

All: Boom.

Person 2: Clack

All: Clack. Boom.

Person 3: Blam.

All: Blam. Clack. Boom.

Leader: WIPE THE SOUND BOARD CLEAN!

Person 4: Peep!

All: Peep!

Person 5: Plip.

All: Plip. Peep.

Level 3

Repeat all the steps in Level 2, but get to five noises in a row.

Level 4

Just like Level 3, but add motions to the sounds.

Level 5

Students break into small groups of five. They each go through the process of building a song together (Level 4), without a teacher leader. Small groups each present their songs to the class.

Game 2 (Unit 2): Build a Machine

Level 1

One person stands on the stage and creates a sound and a motion that can be repeated (for example, saying “bam” and raising and lowering a hand repeatedly). Another person joins the first person on stage and creates another sound and motion to add to “the machine.” The only requirement is that the second person must be somehow touching the first person, to make sure the machine remains a unit. While the two people are moving as a machine, ask a third person to join as a new part of the machine. Add a third person. Then “wipe the stage clean” (stop the machine and have everyone on stage return to their seats) and build another machine.

Level 2

Build a machine with five people instead of three before wiping the stage clean and starting again.

Level 3

Begin with Level 2. Have the audience observe the machine and offer suggestions as to what this machine might do or be for. After that, the audience may make suggestions about what the machine might change to make it more interesting. Allow the machine to adjust according to the constructive criticisms of the audience.

Level 4

Try to create a machine that involves more than half the class. Allow the rest of the students to observe the machine, and then walk up to specific parts of the machine and suggest changes. The machine may adjust. Then the audience must collaborate to come up with a name for the machine.

Level 5

Have students create machines in groups of five. Give them five minutes to decide what their machine does, what it is called, and how it moves. Small groups present their machines to the class.

Game 3 (Unit 3): Zip Zap Zop

Level 1

Students stand in a circle. Student 1 says, “Zip.” Student 2 says, “Zap.” Student 3 says, “Zop.” Go around in a circle saying these words as fast as you can, taking turns. Students should look to the student next to them when saying their word, like they are “passing” the word around the circle. See how fast you can get around the circle saying “Zip,” “Zap,” and “Zop.”

Level 2

Students stand in a circle. This time, instead of passing the words “Zip,” “Zap,” and “Zop” around the circle, have students make eye contact with each other and pass the words ACROSS the circle. They can clap in the direction of the person they are passing the word to.

For example, if the circle included, in order, Abby, Britney, Carl, Deante, Evan, Faye, and Gene, this might happen:

Gene (looking across the circle at Deante): Zip.

Deante (looking across the circle at Britney): Zap.

Britney (looking at Evan): Zop.

See how quickly you can pass the word, and remember, eye contact matters. It’s easy to get confused when you’re standing across from each other.

Level 3

Incorporate “Elephant.” Students may still send “Zip,” “Zap,” or “Zop” across the circle, but at any given time, they may also send “Elephant.” If a person receives an “Elephant” command from across the circle, they must put their hands in front of them like a trunk, and the people on either side of the trunk must each become ears (by stretching their arms over their heads). The elephant trunk then gets to decide if she would like to send a “Zip,” “Zap,” “Zop,” or “Elephant.”

Level 4

Incorporate “Racecar,” “Bunny,” and “Palm Tree”:

Racecar: The middle person is the driver, the people on either side are the wheels on the car.

Bunny: The middle person is the bunny face and legs, the people on either side are the tall ears.

Palm Tree: The middle person is the trunk, the people on either side are swaying leaves.

Now the middle person may choose to send “Zip,” “Zap,” “Zop,” “Racecar,” “Bunny,” “Palm Tree,” or “Elephant.”

Level 5

Allow a few students to invent their own additions to the game and add them to the options of things to send around the circle. Our students have come up with everything from “Gym Teacher” to “Pokemon,” so the sky’s the limit. As long as they can teach their idea to

everyone, anything's game. We recommend adding just three, or having students break into small groups and inventing their own version of the game to play with each other.

Game 4 (Unit 4): Freeze

Level 1

Two students pantomime doing an activity (like raking leaves) on the stage. The teacher yells, "FREEZE!" The two students on stage freeze. Students in the audience raise their hand to volunteer. One volunteer is called onstage and taps one of the frozen students on the shoulder. The student who has been tapped sits back down, and the third student assumes the second students' position on stage. The teacher comes up with another activity that the students look like they might be doing (like dancing). She yells, "UNFREEZE!" The students begin pantomiming the new activity, as if that's what they'd been doing all along.

Level 2

Level 2 is the same as Level 1, except that instead of having the teacher pick the new activity, the third student picks the activity. It should look like this:

(Shondra and Keisha pantomime bowling.)

Teacher: FREEZE! (Looking around) Kelly, what do you think they could be doing instead of bowling?

Kelly: They could be monkeys in a zoo!

Teacher: Great!

(Kelly walks up to Shondra and taps her on the shoulder. Shondra sits down. Kelly takes her exact position.)

Teacher: UNFREEZE!

(Kelly and Shondra pretend to be monkeys at the zoo.)

Levels 3–5

Now, add words; begin to create short scenes. By the fifth class, allow students to go onstage without telling you what they're going to do. They are improvising scenes at this point, and trusting each other that they will give each other gifts. For example:

(Ben and Matt are cutting each others' hair.)

Ben: Your hair is going to look so good.

Matt: Totally. I can't wait to see it.

Teacher: FREEZE! (They freeze.) Tonya, go for it.

(Tonya taps Matt out.)

Teacher: UNFREEZE.

Tonya: Wow, Dad, thanks for this great massage.

(Ben starts to give Tonya a massage.)

Ben: You deserve it, kid!