

**Course Topic: Teaching Pronunciation****Course Instructor:**

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**Course Synopsis:**

There are many drama activities that actors use to warm up their voices and improve their projection, enunciation and overall vocal delivery. Many of these activities can be used with English language learners to help them improve different features of their English pronunciation, such as phoneme articulation, intonation, word stress, sentence stress, volume and pacing. They can also help our students learn how to express emotions and ideas correctly and accurately. In this session we take you through a variety of fun and effective voice activities for you to use with your students.

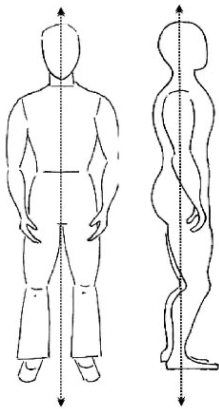
**Course Agenda:**

1. Why Use Drama Activities to Teach Pronunciation?
2. Posture and Breathing
3. Warming up the Vocal Instruments
4. Activities for Consonant and Vowel Production
5. Activities for Word and Sentence Stress
6. Activities for Intonation
7. Activities for Volume and Pacing
8. Activities for Expressing Emotion

## 1. Why Use Drama Activities to Teach Pronunciation?

Actors, to be effective at playing different characters, have to be very versatile with their voices. They have to speak at different volumes and pacing, and with different accents. This is how they earn a living. Drama teachers and coaches have developed many activities to assist actors in achieving range with their voices. Many of the activities and exercises can help language learners train themselves to accurately pronounce a new language.

## 2. Posture and Breathing



The ideal **posture** for good breathing and vocalization is:

1. Feet shoulder width apart.
2. Knees loose.
3. Hips over knees.
4. Spine pulled straight as if there were an invisible string through your body.
5. Shoulders slightly back.

To produce a voice which is deeper, more resonant, and which can carry from the stage to the very last seat in the audience, we breathe from the **diaphragm**. To help your students become conscious of breathing with their diaphragms, have everyone stand up and place their hands just below the rib cage. Have students feel the difference between breathing just with the lungs and breathing with the lungs and the diaphragm. Try the following activities with your students to make them aware of how much their vocal capacity increases when they consciously breathe with their diaphragm.

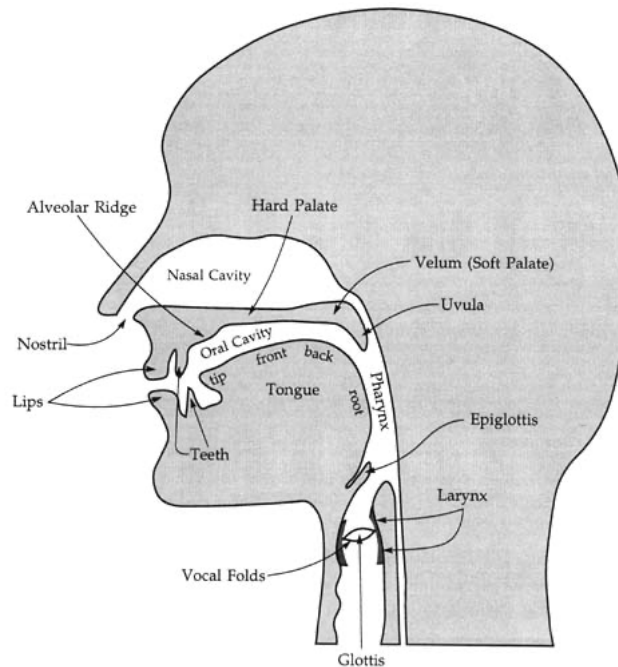
1. Hum, and keep the hum going as long as possible to fully push air from the diaphragm.
2. Make a repeated 'huh' from the diaphragm (huh, huh, huh...). Then change it to 'ha', 'hi' and 'ho' always focusing on pushing the air from the diaphragm.

We also need to be **conscious of** and **control** our breathing. Have your students try these activities:

1. Take a deep breath through the nose, hold it for a count of five, and then release the breath explosively through the mouth. Repeat this three or four times.
2. Take a deep breath through the nose, hold it for two seconds, and then count from one to ten in a whisper. Repeat this, counting from one to ten as loudly as possible.

### 3. Warming up the Vocal Instruments<sup>1</sup>

The following diagram illustrates all of the different tools we use to produce sound—the vocal instruments.



Some of the vocal instruments are muscles or are controlled by muscles, and like all muscles they need to be loosened up, warmed up and strengthened. The following are exercises that are used to loosen and warm up the vocal instruments.

1. Yawn, opening your mouth as widely as possible. Next, yawn very loudly. Finally, yawn on a descending scale, then on an ascending scale.
2. Chew imaginary bubble gum, peanut butter, or toffee. Explore all the possible chewing movements:
  - up and down
  - side to side
  - chin out/chin in
  - gum/peanut butter/toffee is stuck
3. Stick your tongue all the way out. Point the tip down, then up, then left, then right. Finally make a circle with the tongue.
4. Buzz your lips, making a loud sound in the process.
5. Hum a simple song (e.g., Happy Birthday) through buzzed lips.

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from [www.theatrefolk.com/freebies/vocal-exercises.pdf](http://www.theatrefolk.com/freebies/vocal-exercises.pdf)



3. Say these sounds quickly from left to right, four times.

HA	HA	HA	HEE
KA	KA	KA	KEE
GA	GA	GA	GEE
YA	YA	YA	YEE
RA	RA	RA	REE
PA	PA	PA	PEE
TA	TA	TA	TEE
WA	WA	WA	WEE
ZA	ZA	ZA	ZEE

4. Say tongue twisters that feature the target vowel, using exaggerated articulation. Here are some examples (but, once again, there are many more available through an internet search of the term 'tongue twister').
- Toy boat (repeat this multiple times).
  - An annoying noise annoys an oyster.
  - Denise sees the fleece, Denise sees the fleas, at least Denise could sneeze and feed and freeze the fleas.
  - If Stu chews shoes, should Stu choose the shoes he chews?
  - He threw three balls.
5. Say short poems that feature either a wide variety of vowels or one or two target vowels. Alternate saying the poems slowly with exaggerated articulation and rapidly. Here are two possibilities. The first features a wide variety of vowel sounds and the second one main vowel sound.

To sit in solemn silence on a dull, dark dock,  
 In a pestilential prison, with a life-long lock,  
 Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock,  
 From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block!  
 To sit in solemn silence on a dull, dark dock,  
 In a pestilential prison, with a life-long lock,  
 Awaiting the sensation of a short, sharp shock,  
 From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block!  
 A dull, dark dock, a life-long lock,  
 A short, sharp shock, a big black block!  
 To sit in solemn silence in a pestilential prison,  
 And awaiting the sensation  
 From a cheap and chippy chopper on a big black block!

*by W.S. Gilbert of Gilbert and Sullivan from The Mikado*

Through three cheese trees three free fleas flew.  
 While these fleas flew, freezy breeze blew.  
 Freezy breeze made these three trees freeze.  
 Freezy trees made these trees' cheese freeze.  
 That's what made these three free fleas sneeze.

*from Fox in Sox by Dr. Seuss*

## Consonant and Vowel Production

1. Pronounce nonsense words that require the use of knowledge about how to articulate English phonemes. The poem *Jabberwocky* by Lewis Carroll is a good text for this.

**JABBERWOCKY** by Lewis Carroll

(from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There*, 1872)

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe:  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

"Beware the Jabberwock, my son!  
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!  
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun  
The frumious Bandersnatch!"

He took his vorpal sword in hand:  
Long time the manxome foe he sought --  
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,  
And stood awhile in thought.

And, as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

"And, has thou slain the Jabberwock?  
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!  
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!"  
He chortled in his joy.

`Twas brillig, and the slithy toves  
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;  
All mimsy were the borogoves,  
And the mome raths outgrabe.

International Phonemic Alphabet

i: spe <u>ch</u>	I pi <u>g</u>	U bo <u>o</u> ks	u: mo <u>o</u> n	Iə che <u>er</u> s (BR)	eɪ pl <u>a</u> ne		
e r <u>e</u> d	ə ba <u>n</u> ana	ɜ: bi <u>r</u> d	ɔ: co <u>r</u> k (BR)	ʊə to <u>u</u> rist	ɔɪ po <u>i</u> nt	əʊ bo <u>a</u> t	
æ c <u>a</u> t	ʌ Cu <u>p</u>	ɑ: a <u>r</u> m (BR)	ɒ bo <u>t</u> tle	eə ch <u>a</u> ir (BR)	aɪ cl <u>i</u> mber	aʊ co <u>w</u>	
p pre <u>s</u> ent	b ba <u>b</u> by	t ta <u>k</u> k	d dra <u>w</u>	tʃ ch <u>ee</u> se	dʒ ju <u>d</u> ge	k ca <u>sh</u>	g gra <u>p</u> es
f fi <u>sh</u>	v vi <u>p</u> er	θ th <u>re</u> e	ð fe <u>ath</u> er	s Sa <u>tu</u> rn	z ze <u>r</u> o	ʃ sh <u>o</u> e	ʒ mea <u>s</u> ure
m ma <u>i</u> l	n ne <u>w</u> s	ŋ wi <u>ng</u>	h he <u>a</u> rt	l le <u>g</u> s	r ra <u>cc</u> oon	w wo <u>rl</u> d	j ye <u>s</u>

## 5. Activities for Word and Sentence Stress

1. Review what a schwa is. Work with a list of familiar words. Say the words out loud and identify the schwas in each word. Practice saying the words with the correct word stress.
2. Say a poem with the strong version of all words (so there are no schwas). Say the same poem with the weak versions of words when appropriate. The following Dr. Seuss poem is a good one to use for this activity.

### **Happy Birthday To You!** By Dr. Seuss

If we didn't have birthdays, you wouldn't be you.  
If you'd never been born, well then what would you do?  
If you'd never been born, well then what would you be?  
You might be a fish! Or a toad in a tree!  
You might be a doorknob! Or three baked potatoes!  
You might be a bag full of hard green tomatoes.  
Or worse than all that... Why, you might be a WASN'T!  
A Wasn't has no fun at all. No, he doesn't.  
A Wasn't just isn't. He just isn't present. But you...  
You ARE YOU! And, now isn't that pleasant!

3. Everyone stands in a circle. The teacher provides the sentence that everyone is to say, for example, "It is too cold to go outside without a coat on." Students take turns saying the same sentence but with a different word in the sentence stressed. The first student stresses the first word, the second student stresses the second word and so on. Once every word in the sentence has been stressed, discuss as a class how the meaning changed when each word was stressed.
4. Recite poems with a clear rhythm. Tap out the rhythm of the poem as you recite it. Identify how both the word stress and the sentence stress create the rhythm in the poem. The poems of Dr. Seuss are also good for this. Here is one possibility.

### **Oh, the Places You'll Go!** By Dr. Seuss

You have brains in your head. You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself any direction you choose.  
You're on your own. And you know what you know.  
And *YOU* are the guy who'll decide where to go.

You'll get mixed up, of course, as you already know.  
You'll get mixed up with many strange birds as you go.  
So be sure when you step. Step with care and great  
tact and remember that Life's A Great Balancing Act.

And will you succeed? Yes! You will, indeed!  
(98 and  $\frac{3}{4}$  percent guaranteed.)  
Kid, you'll move mountains!



## 6. Activities for Intonation

1. Everyone stands in a circle. One student says a simple sentence or phrase, such as “Thank you” with a particular intonation. Everyone takes turns, going around in a circle, saying the sentence with exactly the same intonation. The next student says another simple sentence or phrase with a particular intonation, for example “That’s so cool!” and the activity is repeated. Keep going until each student has had the chance to start the intonation circle.
2. Everyone stands in a circle. The first student says an emotion word with the appropriate intonation, for example “sad” with falling intonation. Students take turns repeating the emotion word and copying the intonation. The next student says another emotion word with the appropriate emotion, which all students then mimic. This continues until all students have had a turn.
3. Students work with a partner and think of something that happened to them recently. They tell their partner the story but in gibberish. They must communicate the story using the intonation and stress they apply to the gibberish. They can also use gestures and facial expressions to communicate their story. Their partner must guess their story and retell it in English.

## 7. Activities for Volume and Pacing

1. Recite a poem or other text, getting progressively faster. Recite the poem again, starting quickly and getting progressively slower.
2. Recite the first line or verse of a poem or other text, starting softly and getting progressively louder. Recite the next line or verse starting very loudly and getting progressively softer.
3. Sing or speak the song “Row, row, row your boat”. Make each line different from the one before, either in terms of volume or pacing.

## 8. Activities for Expressing Emotion

1. Students stand in a circle and take turns saying the numbers 1 through 20. So student one will say the number 1, student two will say the number 2, and so on. Students who say the numbers 1-5, must convey the emotion of happiness through word stress, intonation and volume. Students who say the numbers 6-10, must convey the emotion of anger. The numbers 11-15 are sadness and the numbers 16-20 are excitement.<sup>2</sup> Once students are comfortable with the activity, add more emotions and switch emotions more quickly.
2. A student is throwing a house party. Each person is assigned an emotion. The students arrive at the party one at a time. When each person arrives, the other people already at the party must take on the emotion of the person who arrived. So the first person is happy. Then a sad person arrives and both people must be sad as they walk and talk. Then an angry person arrives and all three people must be angry. Go through the same process in reverse as people

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<sup>2</sup> Adapted from <http://www.dramatoolkit.co.uk/drama-games/item/character/hash>

leave the party. Discuss how changes to stress, intonation, pacing and volume of what they say can change the emotion they are expressing.

3. Give every student a copy of the same poem to recite together. Each line of the poem will be said with a different emotion. The emotions do not need to correspond with the content of the poem. As a variation, have students stand in a circle. Going around the circle, have each student read one line of the poem with a particular assigned emotion. Discuss how changes to stress, intonation, pacing and volume of the line can change the emotion they are expressing. The poem entitled, "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost is a good poem to use for this activity.

**The Road Not Taken** by Robert Frost

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh  
Somewhere ages and ages hence:  
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,  
I took the one less traveled by,  
And that has made all the difference.

**Thanks for participating!**

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