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*VCE Unlocked Workshops*  
**Impro Melbourne**  
by  
Teacher Resources  
2023

Ideal for VCE students



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## ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource has been created to provide teachers with curriculum links to the Victorian Curriculum, and includes some preliminary and post show ideas and activities as to how to extend their experience of **VCE Unlocked**. The activities are designed to be open-ended and multi-ability. They may need differentiation for your specific cohort.

The performances and workshops included in the Arts & Education program are designed to offer students engaging arts experiences with strong links to the Victorian Curriculum and VCE subjects where appropriate. Each Arts & Education program varies in its purpose and content and as a result the scope for integration across the curriculum varies.

If you have any questions about this resource, its content or its implementation within your classroom please do not hesitate to contact the Arts & Education team at [education@rav.net.au](mailto:education@rav.net.au)

## ABOUT REGIONAL ARTS VICTORIA

Regional Arts Victoria inspires art across the state. Through creative facilitation, touring, education, specialised resources, artistic projects and advocacy, we develop and sustain creative communities and artistic practice all over Victoria.

Regional Arts Victoria is an independent, not-for-profit, membership-based organisation working in long-term partnerships with every level of government, fostering contemporary and innovative regional cultural practice across five decades. We advise and impact on decision-making across multiple portfolios and levels of government.

Regional Arts Victoria is the peak body for regional artists and arts organisations, and the leading organisation for regional creative practice in Victoria.

### PARTNERSHIPS

Regional Arts Victoria facilitates the partnerships, the organisations and the practices that create new work.

- Regional Cultural Partnerships
- Creative Arts Facilitators
- Membership program
- Devolved grants programs
- Resources, workshops and events
- Sector advocacy and leadership development

### PROGRAMMING

Regional Arts Victoria nurtures the experts who foster local artistic experiences and stimulate young minds.

- Arts & Education Program
- Connecting Places
- Touring programs
- Education resources
- Industry development resources and events
- Sector advocacy and leadership development

### PROJECTS

Regional Arts Victoria presents major artistic projects that build local artistic leadership and legacy.

- State-wide projects including Creative Workers in Schools, *Small Town Transformations and Artlands Victoria*
- Internal Creative Professional Development programs
- Sector advocacy and leadership development

## ARTS & EDUCATION

For over 50 years, Regional Arts Victoria has been the leader in providing educational arts experiences for children and young people across Victoria. Each year we offer a range of performances and workshop programs to schools throughout regional and metropolitan Victoria, with COVID-Safe planning in place across our entire program.

The Arts & Education program aims to encourage young people to develop their creativity and enhance awareness and participation in the arts through accessible arts learning opportunities. Our program is designed to engage, educate, challenge and delight students from foundation through to VCE using a range of creative approaches. With a selection of high quality, immersive arts experiences, we pride ourselves on providing relevant and exciting activities for children and young people that are complementary to the Victorian Curriculum. To support educator learning we offer professional development opportunities to complement our programs.

For general enquiries please contact: [education@rav.net.au](mailto:education@rav.net.au)

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE PROGRAM

Impro Melbourne offers 2 VCE online workshops through Regional Arts Victoria, which are either live streamed or in the classroom interactive experiences for students.

These workshops are focused on VCE Drama Units 1-4. However they can be adapted for Years 9 and 10 to work on performance and character development in consultation with teachers. While each VCE workshop has a particular focus, there are common exercises which will be used in both the workshops and other exercises that are specific to the workshop delivered in your school. In the lead up to your workshop Impro Melbourne will work with the teacher to prepare and offer pre-activity suggestions, specific to the needs of your cohort of students.

Available workshops:

### CREATING AS AN ENSEMBLE

Semester 1 workshops focus on devising Ensembles and would be suitable for students studying VCE Unit 1, 2, and 3 Drama. These workshops can also be adapted to suit the Victorian and Australian Curriculum – Levels 7-10

This 90-minute workshop builds an understanding of the conventions and dramatic elements that are used as part of the creation of the Ensemble tasks of VCE Unit 1, 2 and 3 Drama, and will give your students tools to use in their playmaking to help them develop their best possible work. Depending on the needs of your classroom we can run the workshop as a way to begin the devising process, or, if the students already have a stimulus to work on, we can tailor the workshop around that stimulus.

Using either pre-prepared stimulus material, or the stimulus you have already provided to your students, we use practical improvisation exercises that lead students through a process of playmaking techniques: brainstorming, improvising through exploration of physicality and sound, editing, and refining. By the end of the workshop, students will have created a short piece of ensemble performance work, with ideas of how they can continue to use improvisation to develop more of their performance.

The focus of this workshop for senior students is around: unlocking creativity, being playful, exploring ideas through improvisation, how a sound or movement can have dramatic significance, and how to use constructive criticism and peer observation.

The workshop builds an understanding of the dramatic conventions and theatrical elements that form part of the Ensemble and Solo tasks of VCE Unit 3 and 4 Drama and will give your students a process to follow to develop their best possible work.

*VCE Links: Drama with a focus on VCE Unit 1 to 4 Drama.*



## WORKING SOLO

VCE Drama Unit 1, 2, and 4.

This workshop focuses on creating Solo performance work, for VCE Units 1, 2, and 4. Our Impro Melbourne teacher will discuss individually with schools which key skills areas will be most beneficial to students, depending on which part of the play-making process they are at.

This workshop can be used to open up the process of creating solo work or can be tailored to specific skills required to devise work for each student's chosen Solo Performance Exam Structure.

The workshop can be tailored to work on the following skills areas:

- **Characters:** using expressive skills to create differences in physicality and voice.
- **Transformation:** transformation techniques to help students explore transformation of time, character and place in performance
- **Using dramatic elements and conventions:** how to incorporate sound, rhythm, stillness and silence to develop an effective performance, including how to use the stage space, how to use transitions effectively and theatrically to build performance and build a narrative

The workshop is a maximum of 90 minutes, so it is ideal to focus on 2 of the key skills above for the most benefit, rather than try and cover everything.

VCE Links: Drama with a focus on VCE Unit 1, 2 and 4 Drama.

## ONLINE WORKSHOP TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Impro Melbourne can also deliver VCE Unlocked workshops online if requested, using the online program your school is most comfortable with e.g. Zoom, Google hangouts, Windows teams, etc. Before the class, the teacher will be in contact to confirm your technical platform and requirements to ensure we work with you so that the students get the most out of the workshop. The delivery method of the workshop will be adapted to suit your setup.

At least 15 minutes is required prior to the session beginning for the technology to be set up and tested, ensuring that everything is working so as not to cut into the session time. It is recommended that the session be scheduled after a class break to help this be achieved. If this is not practical with your schedule, we can also arrange another time to trial the setup and solve any technical issues.

## ABOUT IMPRO MELBOURNE

Impro Melbourne is the longest-running improvisational theatre company in Melbourne, whose purpose is to boldly expand the use of improvisation in theatre and education.

Since 1996 Impro Melbourne has produced all forms of improvised theatre from short game/scene style formats through to full length 50 minute to two hour fully improvised shows, exploring genres like Shakespeare, musicals, film noir, murder mystery and non-naturalism. They currently produce the global impro format Theatresports™, as well as Keith Johnstone's two other competition formats Maestro™ and Gorilla Theatre™. These formats are licensed through the International Theatresports™ Institute and Impro Melbourne is the Victorian license holder. Impro Melbourne has also produced shows for the Melbourne International Comedy Festival for the past two decades.

In 2004 they developed a schools' program which has now become a highly acclaimed series of demonstration shows and workshops for primary and secondary students managed by Regional Arts Victoria. Impro Melbourne's reputation continues to grow as they travel across Australia and overseas.

The company has performed and taught in Asia, Europe and North America. In 2005 they ran the first International Improvisation Festival in Australia, bringing in players from North America, Europe, Scandinavia and Japan. They continue to share their innovative techniques with the impro world and will never stop searching the globe for inspiration.

## THE PERFORMERS

Key performers in the company have been working as actors and improvisers in Melbourne, Sydney and overseas for over 15 years, on the stage and in TV and film.

The Schools Players:

There are currently 12 performers who deliver the schools program. All of our schools performance ensemble are regular cast members of our productions of Theatresports™, Maestro™, Gorilla Theatre™, and perform and create new improvisation formats. All performers attend regular training and seek to constantly improve the standard and quality of our work. The Impro Melbourne schools cast is committed to promoting a passion for improvisation, performing and theatre among students.



## VCE DRAMA STUDIES: UNIT 1 - 4

To aid in building confidence in using play making techniques, Impro Melbourne's VCE Unlocked workshops are designed to get students doing that work 'on their feet', rather than sitting and 'thinking about' or 'talking about' what they might do, trying to edit and write in their heads.

Instead of trying to create the whole piece before 'rehearsing it', we encourage students to take one or two smaller components and 'play'- using improvisation exercises and structures, to experiment, and then discuss what ideas came up and note down what was strong or could be useful in the final piece. This process brings in editing and refining of ideas. Our teachers also encourage students not to put pressure on themselves to create everything at once, in the right order, but instead to take a looser creative approach that can lead to discovery, then editing, scripting and refining.

### PREPARATION BEFORE THE WORKSHOP:

In order to get the most from your VCE Unlocked workshop, your students should be familiar with the Tasks in Units 1-4 so they can link exercises to the tasks they will be working on.

Students should also be familiar with the key terminology involved in the VCE Drama tasks so that discussion can be ongoing through the workshop using these terms:

**Conventions:** what is meant by Transformation (Character, Time, Place), and the application of 'symbol' – a meaning that is not literal – which allows performers to communicate ideas through actions, gestures, language, vocal or facial expression, object, costume, set pieces or heightened movement.

**Dramatic Elements:** what is meant by Climax, Conflict, Contrast, Mood, Rhythm, Sound, Space and Tension.

**Expressive Skills:** Voice, Movement, Gesture, Facial Expression

**Performance Skills:** Focus, Timing, Energy, Actor- Audience relationship



## TECHNIQUES USED AND EXPLORED IN THE WORKSHOPS

NOTE: Each workshop delivered will be particular to your student cohort, their needs and the type of workshop. Exercises will also vary depending on the time available, student skill level, and areas we are asked to try and cover in the workshop. Each Impro Melbourne teacher will also bring their own knowledge, gained by years of work both locally and internationally. The following are examples of processes and exercises that will be common in each of the workshop types.

We strongly suggest that teachers attending also take their own personal notes in the workshop, to take advantage of any material included beyond what is detailed in these notes.

### VCE UNLOCKED: CREATING AN ENSEMBLE

Processes used in the workshop:

- Brainstorming: using butcher's paper with a central WORD and allowing students to riff off that word without censoring the thought process. This technique can be applied to unpack elements of a stimulus.
- Improvisation: using improvisation exercises and structures to explore ideas generated from brainstorming
- Editing and rehearsal: making choices on the work created through improvisation, then repeating to refine and focus.
- Outside Eye: having students watch each other's work and give feedback: to develop their critical eye. This will help students in the analysis area of this study, learning how to express opinion and give feedback.

#### Workshop Activity:

##### **Knife and Fork:**

Working in pairs or groups of 3, students are given an image and must create that image as a tableau/still picture. Teacher uses a countdown (5-1) to get students creating quickly and without judgement.

Images can start as general: e.g. A knife and a fork, a picture on a picture hook, the last 2 hairs on a bald man's head. Then they can become more specific to the chosen stimulus.

*Once the group are working on pairs they can be recombined into groups of 4 and 5, the groups that are creating their ensemble. Continue to feed images. At the end of the exercise each ensemble group can discuss images they created and whether or not they want to keep some of them as part of their piece, or if it sparked other ideas.*

#### Workshop Activity:

##### **I am a Tree:**

This exercise explores stage picture and uses techniques such as symbol, 'titling' and naming what part of the picture each player represents – a Brechtian/story telling technique.

Exercise:

- Person A begins by moving into the performing space and announcing - "I am a Tree". Then they take up the physicality of their 'tree' shape.
- Person B enters and adds themselves as a second element, announcing what they are and placing themselves in appropriate position – e.g. "I am a leaf on a branch", "I am a child sitting under the tree", "I am a bird on a branch"

- Person C enters and adds a third element to the picture: “I am the sun”, “ I am the wind”, “I am the swing on the tree”
- Person A then says “I will leave the ....” And nominates one of the other two people to stay. Person A and the other player then leave and the nominated player stays and announces again what their offer was and a new picture/tableau begins – e.g. “I am the sun” and it continues from there.

*Online adaptation: you can use the whole class to form the picture if you are unable to split into smaller groups or the class can watch three people play. Although the students can't get into each other's space they can hold the shapes on camera and visualise the interconnectivity.*

Coaching Tips and development:

- Performers should always re-announce who/what they are when the new picture starts. This allows the players watching to ‘re-set’ and see new possible offers.
- This ‘titling’ process also brings in the performance elements of beyond reality as required in the task.
- Once students are confident with the exercise, they can use it to explore elements of their stimulus, they can also bring in more metaphoric and metaphysical elements: e.g. “I am the fear of failure”, “I am the sadness in the heart”, “ I am the thought of revenge”.

## VCE UNLOCKED: WORKING SOLO

### Workshop activity

#### **Creating a Character:**

##### **Leading with parts of the body**

Students move around the space, using different parts of the body to focus on then allowing that body ‘part’ to lead movement. See how that changes physicality, breath and think about the type of character that would move this way. ●

E.g. start with students walking neutrally as themselves. Offer a part of the body to focus on and that now leads movement. For example – the nose. Students must let their nose lead them everywhere.

*Online adaptation: We have found the best way to play this online is by talking the students through the exercise and getting them up and moving in their house without their camera on. Allowing them to explore and create without feeling like they need to perform.*

Coaching Tips:

- Allow this to change your physicality / Don't forget to breathe / What is a name for this character? / Where does their voice come from, can you hear it? /
- Other parts of the body to experiment with: leading with the chest, leading with the pelvis, leading with the forehead, having one leg that is stiff, having sore hips. Having sore hips is helpful if the student wants to play a much older character. This naturally slows down movement and vocal quality.

### Workshop activity

#### **Accelerating Sound Circle:**

A warm-up exercise to get students using bigger physicality and sound. This can get students used to being ‘larger than life’

- Form a circle

- One person turn to next person in circle and makes a small movement (e.g. shrug shoulders) and a small sound.
- Next person takes what they received and passes it on making it a little bigger.
- Then continuing around the circle, growing bigger and bigger and shifting and changing.
- Then instruct students to start lowering back down and see how subtle it can become.
- Students should use sound not words.

*Online adaptation: When playing online pick the order beforehand, for instance, Sally passes to Mark, Mark passes to Luther etc. so the students know who they are receiving the sound and physicality from.*

Workshop Activity:

**Character Transition Practice:**

Different ways of changing from one character to another.  
Choose 2 characters that interact in your Solo:

Begin by finding the strong physical position for each character, their body shape and voice.

- The SNAP change: take up the physical position of one character – teacher claps their hands – immediately change body position to the other character. Practice doing this while staying in the same spot.
- The MORPH change: take up the physical position of one character and as the teacher counts from 1-5 slowly change from one character to the other.
- The SHARED OBJECT/LINE change: use the passing of one object between characters or a shared line of dialogue to change from one character to another. For example: the Wicked Queen and Snow White – use the handing over of the apple. Queen “here you are my dear, have this..” ‘Apple!’ says Snow White as she takes it.

*This allows students to practice expressive skills and to use space economically without having the step side to side to change character. It can be done on the spot.*

## FURTHER READING

### BOOKS:

Impro; Improvisation and Theatre by Keith Johnstone, Published by Methuen (paperback) or Faber and Faber (hardcover)

Impro for Storytellers by Keith Johnstone. Published by Methuen (paperback)

Improvisation for the Theatre by Viola Spolin Northwestern University Press

Theatre Games for the Classroom by Viola Spolin Northwestern University Press

Impro Wisdom by Patricia Ryan Published by Bell Tower

Acting on Impulse by Carol Hazenfield (2002)

Viewpoints by Anne Bogart and Tina Landau Theatre Communications Group; (August 1, 2004)

The Mastery of Movement by Rudolf Laban. Revised by Lisa Ullmann. Available on Amazon and Book Depository. (4th edition, 2011)

### ONLINE:

Impro Melbourne <https://www.impromelbourne.com.au/education/program>

Frantic Assembly (UK physical theatre company). Videos of exercises they use when creating ensemble work

Building blocks for devising:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BC9uJrY9Bh8>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gUqZPfGIX6U&t=69s>

Rash Dash (UK company). Devising masterclass, Under and Over:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=47QhuLMLDL8>

Contact the Arts & Education team at [education@rav.net.au](mailto:education@rav.net.au) with further questions or, even better, examples of your work!

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