

Interactive Theater

To use interactive theater skits as a training tool, trainer or actors can act out a skit that reflects a particular issue or problem, such as one based on a critical incident (regarding communication difficulties, intercultural differences, etc). Following the skit, actors/actresses stay in character and answer questions from the audience, in order to help figure out what the issues are and some possible reasons for what was happening in the skit. After that, more explanations and materials can be provided by workshop facilitators about the issues. It is helpful to do some kind of icebreaker with the audience before doing the skit (such as Cross the Line) to warm up the audience.

described by Alice Wu, adapted from methods used by the Cornell Interactive Theater Ensemble

SKIT: Are you mad at me?

*Props - comb, scissors, tape, markers, pencils, paper, book
Susie and Alice*

Susie: Hi! I'm Susie and I'm a sophomore in college. I'm so happy I got an international student as roommate this year. My roommate Shu-Hsien is easygoing, a good listener, nice, and always ready to try new things.

Alice: Hi. I'm Shu-Hsien, but you can call me Alice. I have a really nice American roommate, Susie. She always explains things about Americans and America to me, like American culture, and she also tells me about American slang and idioms that I don't know.

Susie: Alice is as easy to get along with as the American roommate I had last year. The only things I notice are that she wants to study more than I'm used to, and sometimes she borrows my stuff without asking first.

(Alice picks up a comb near Susie and starts to use it. Susie rolls her eyes.)

Susie: (to audience) Now I'm working on a project for a history class - I have to do quite a lot of artwork for it.

Alice: (to audience) I'm studying for a psychology test.

Susie: (to audience) My scissors are too dull to cut out the paper for my project.

(To Alice): Sorry to bother you while you're studying, but could I use your scissors for awhile?

Alice: Sure. (she opens her desk drawer and hands Susie the SCISSORS.)

Susie: Thanks, thanks a lot.

Susie: (to audience) These markers are not going to do the trick.

(to Shu-Hsien) **Sorry to bug you again, but these markers are too fat. You know those colored pencils you have? Would it be OK if I used them for my project?**

Alice: (gets up, gets them off the shelf) **Help yourself** (goes back to reading)

Susie: **Thanks!**

Susie: **I must be driving you crazy, but have you got any glue or tape? I promise I'll buy you another roll.**

Alice: (hands Charlie a roll of TAPE on her desk) **Use as much as you want. I don't need it.**

Susie: **I appreciate it** (mumbles as she goes back to her project.)

(Alice goes back to her reading, then looks over at Susie a few times with a puzzled look, then looks at her steadily.)

Susie (puts finishing touches on her work)

(to audience): **I notice Alice is watching me.** She looks up from her project at Alice. **She's still watching me. I wonder why?**

Alice (in a worried tone): **Are you mad at me?**

Susie: (surprised) **Of course not. What makes you think that?**

Facilitator leads the Q&A with audience, who ask the characters questions.

What culturally based misunderstanding has taken place between these roommates?

1. In China good friends do not generally use such polite language with each other unless they are annoyed.

2. Shu-Hsien really meant, "I am mad at you." She was irritated by the frequent interruptions of her study for such trivial reasons. Chinese people frequently use this type of indirect, opposite-meaning question to express irritation with others, much as an American might sarcastically say "Excu-u-use ME" to someone who is being rude.

3. Chinese people place a much higher value on learning than do Americans. It is considered extremely rude to interrupt a student who is engaged in studying. That Susie interrupted Shu-Hsien three times in such a short period of time convinced Shu-Hsien that Susie was deliberately annoying her and must have been angry.

4. Shu-Hsien didn't understand why Susie didn't just take the things she needed. Among Chinese roommates who are friendly with each other, there should be no need to ask permission to use items of such small value.'

adapted from a critical incident on pg. 45 in Turning Bricks into Jade, Brislin et al., IC Press, Yarmouth, ME.