

# Clowning!

*With*

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## **UNLEASH YOUR INNER CLOWN**

*Rudolph ain't the only one who can have a red nose!*

What would happen if you could live your life loving to get into trouble? In this playful workshop, participants will learn what is to be a clown, the place and importance of the fool in culture and history, and discover *their* own clown. Participants will engage in exercises and activities that will allow them to honor the now, obey impulse, and unleash inhibitions to become a wise fool. Our clowns are inside us, waiting for us to invite them to come out and play!

## **My Instructors**

The following exercises have been adapted from my work with clown educator's Jan Henderson, Shannan Calcutt and Sue Morrison and are based in the Pochinko Canadian Clowning Technique. Richard Pochinko's clown philosophy is based in Native American traditions in mask and clown and his other major influence was his work with Le Coq in Paris. My work has also been influenced by the teachings of Christopher Bayes and Mick Barnfather.

## **Things you will need for play**

- Tissue
- CD player
- Recommended CD's: Benny & Joon, Carmina Burana, The Full Monty Soundtrack
- Many colorful costume/fabric pieces, hats
- Colorful toys and props
- A large ball
- Noses (Order from [www.justclownnoses.com](http://www.justclownnoses.com))
- DVD of Mr. Bean

## **Some loving expectations**

1. Say YES! Be open and try new things.
2. Celebrate your failures by saying, *"Ta Da!"*
3. Often ask your students this question, *"Are you working at your maximum?"*
4. Give each other standing ovations and celebrate small breakthroughs.
5. Think like a four year old!
6. And remember... *"Don't be brilliant, be inspired!"*

## **Reflection Exercise**

### **K-W-L chart**

*Divide a piece of paper into 3 rows.*

**K:** Ask students what they already **know** about the art of clowning. I.e. **The Joey:** High status / "Straight man" **The Auguste:** Low status / "Funny man." What clowns do they already know of? I.e. The Three Stooges, Charlie Chaplin, Abbott & Costello, Mr. Bean etc.

**W:** Ask students what they **want to know** about clowning. I.e. how would you develop a clown set? What are the transferable skills? List possible productions where clowning could be used, such as: *The Mechanicals in A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

**L:** Ask students **what they have learned** during or after the lesson and record the responses.

### ***Performance skills developed through clowning***

- Physical comedy
- Mime
- Improvisation, Commedia, Standup
- Writing
- Understanding beats, rhythm and pacing
- The comedy rule of three, reversals of expectation and incongruity
- Commitment to emotion
- Exploring truthful impulses
- Connecting to an audience
- The art of listening
- Self realization

### ***Break out of your baggage & challenge your comfort zone!***

*Clowns believe they can do anything and their desire and curiosity to try new things is limitless. Therefore, it is important to start with these introductory exercises to challenge our inner critic.*

Have students find their own space in the room. Get them to visualize a material that they could get stuck in. What does it feel like? What texture is it? What color is it? With their eyes closed get them to visualize a way to break out of their 'shell.' Ex. being stuck in a pumpkin shell and scooping one's self out with a pumpkin seed. Have the students act these out physically and verbally. When they escape make sure they celebrate. After the exercise, get them to evaluate themselves. Did they work at their maximum? Have them repeat the exercise, but this time get them to challenge their comfort zones! Invite them to be louder and more physical. In essence, get them to 'drop kick their critics!'

### ***Ta da!***

*Students love to punish themselves when they make mistakes. We fear failure, but clowns embrace failure and let the problem become the solution.*

Students will begin by throwing a large (real) ball in a circle. The first couple of throws they will imagine that the ball is just a normal ball. The next couple of throws they will imagine that the ball is now made of glass. The final round of throws they will imagine the ball is a puppy. If at any time the ball falls the whole group takes a moment and says (awe) and

then immediately afterward the person that failed to catch the ball will loudly announce, “TA DA!” to celebrate their failure.

### **Ice breakers!**

#### **Drowning hands**

Have students walk around in the space. Make sure they shake hands with everyone. Then say ‘you will drown if you do not make contact with someone’s hands at all times.’ Students will quickly alternate from hand to hand to hand.

#### **Exercises that bring out the inner child!**

##### **King, Queen, Horse & Princess**

Have students walk around the space. Randomly call out: ‘King, Queen, Horse or Princess.’ Students will immediately pair up by choosing the closest person to them and striking the pose that you have commanded.

The King pose: Person #1 is standing and pretending to knight person #2. Person #2 is on the ground bowing to person #1.

The Queen pose: Person #1 is holding person #2 in their arms as if to carry the Queen over a puddle of water.

The Horse pose: Person #1 is on all fours on the ground. Person #2 is sitting on their back.

The Princess pose: Person #1 is kneeling and looking into #2’s eyes while holding their hand. Person #2 is standing and looking into #1’s eyes with love.

##### **Catch the Bacon**

Divide the class into 2 lines facing each other. Number off the participants. The person standing across from you is your opponent and shares the same number as you. The teacher stands in the middle and holds a scarf. The teacher will call out a number i.e. #4 and both number 4’s will run and try to get the scarf from the teacher. If you win the scarf you receive a point for your team. If you win the scarf and as you are running back to your line you get tagged from your opponent the other team will win that point. The game usually goes to ten points.

##### **Simon Says**

The teacher is ‘Simon’ and will call out a variety of tasks. Ex. pat your head, jump on one leg, walk backwards etc. The only time you obey the task is if the command is preceded by the words, ‘Simon Says... dance in a

circle.’ If you do the task without hearing the ‘Simon Says’ you will receive a gentle hit or a hug from the teacher.

### **Listening to your body exercises**

#### **Space walk**

Begin walking and fill all the spaces in the room. Be aware of the space in front of you, beside you and behind you. Own your space. When the teacher claps their hands together you will stop walking. When the teacher claps the second time, you will move only your head to one side or the other. When the teacher claps the third time, you will begin walking in the direction that your head is turned.

#### **Stop-Go-Squat-Jump!**

Begin walking around the space. If the teacher says ‘stop’ you will keep walking. If the teacher says ‘go’ you will stop. You will do the opposite of the teacher’s command.

#### **Cirque Train**

Form a single file line. The person at the front of the line will be the first leader. They will begin moving in a way that they find fun and everyone will follow. When they run to the back of the line the second person in line will become the new leader. The new leader will change the movement but will be inspired by the former movement. It is important to get out of your head and into your body.

### **Read Jan Henderson’s hand out on CLOWNING!**

- *Discuss clown logic!*

#### **Clap & cheer for charm**

*Clowns live in conversation with the audience. This exercise allows students to perform for each other and teaches them that charm or stage presence is about truly believing that you have gifts to offer.*

Begin with a circle. Everyone will clap for the person who volunteers to enter the center of the circle. The performer will make eye contact with everyone in the circle. Then they will get the audience to stop clapping. They will take a beat and a breath before they perform their unique skill. This unique skill could be anything from singing to touching their toes to playing an invisible guitar. The gift is in selling yourself and believing that you are having a great affect on the cosmos. Everyone in the circle will go crazy with applause after the completion of the unique skill. The performer will again make eye contact with everyone in appreciation for the “conversation” before returning to the circle. The next person enters the circle and we clap (repeat)...everyone should go!

### **Tissue activity**

*Clowns see the extraordinary in the ordinary. Clowns and children see the world with endless possibility.*

Give each student a tissue and have them improvise all the different objects the tissue can become, for example: a mini-Superman cape, a bow tie, an airplane, etc. Remind the students that they are to be inspired, not brilliant. The best way to have a great idea is to have many ideas.

### **Bragging!**

Get into pairs and take turns bragging about all the things that you do well. Do not apologize for anything! Use great adjectives and make statements.

### **Childhood photo**

*Childhood represents the freedom that anything and everything is possible.*

Have students bring in their favorite childhood photo to share with the class. Ask them why they love it and remind them that the essence of their child is still alive and within them today. See if they can get glimpses of who their clown might be from the photo.

### **Greatest fantasy**

Your clown can be connected to your childhood fantasies. Have students introduce themselves as their greatest fantasy. Students can do this exercise with or without words. Better to show us than tell us!

### **Guided imagery of childhood**

*Freedom comes when we are not constantly questioning ourselves. Kids don't think, 'I shouldn't be crying right now-they just cry.' Childhood is the idea that everything and anything is possible.*

Get students into a relaxed position on the floor with eyes closed. With their mind's eye get the students to visualize favorite moments from their childhood using the following list as a guide. The music from the CD *Benny and Joon* is very inspiring to underscore this activity.

- Events: Camping, Christmas, birthdays, Halloween, etc.
- Favorite movies
- School memories
- Food
- Books
- Songs
- Best friends
- Pets
- Activities: Best and least favorite?



### ***The nose ritual***

After completion of the guided imagery exercise, hand out a nose to each student. Get students to start with eyes closed holding the mask/nose in their hand. What does it feel like? Smell like? Tell them that the nose represents hopes, fears, dreams, belief, heart (emotion driven and accepting all feelings and thoughts), play, now (in the moment-no future, only intention, no past, only experience.) You can put other words into your nose: freedom, cunning, mischief, joy, magic.

You may be a **JOEY**: leader, no guilt, in power, vain, beautiful, manipulator or an **AUGUSTE**: follower, silly, goofy, innocent, playful, vulnerable, victim!

Get students to place the nose on and remind them that once the nose is on that they must treat their mask with respect. I.e. don't wear the nose on your forehead, or swing it around and always turn away from the audience before putting on/off the mask. Once the nose is on talking should cease.

### ***The costume***

The room should look like a child's playground. Place colorful hats, shoes, fabric, costume pieces, toys and props all over the room. Again, students should not speak from this point on; however, being vocal and physical should be encouraged. Invite the students to find the costume pieces that feel most right. The Native Americans believe that the nose opens one up to the spirit world and it is important to protect your head energy with a hat. Makeup can be worn or not. Their clowns should all look very different and should not look like the traditional circus clown, but more of an expression of their inner fantasies.

### ***Face off!***

In pairs take turns mirroring each other's facial expressions.

### ***Clown walk***

Now get students to find their personal clown walk. Invite the students to explore the way their costume informs their movement. Allow the face to follow the body. Exaggerate all movements. Try moving in slow motion. Strike poses. Use sound. Get students to move with happy hips, shy feet, nervous head, fighting shoulders etc. Again, get them to find the walk that feels the most right.

### ***Introducing your clown***

This exercise can be done as a group improvisation or individually. If done individually, have the student come out in clown and make eye contact with everyone in the audience. The teacher will then side coach with the following sample questions. Playing a group game of **YES LET'S** is a great exercise to do in clown!

- Show us everything you can do with your costume.
- How goofy can you be with your skirt?
- How do you enter and exit a room?
- How would you be flirtatious?
- How noisy can you be?
- What would you do if you wanted to surprise us?
- You don't sing, but I heard you were an unusual singer. Sing in that unusual way.
- Show me the winning photo that you took on "America's next top model?"
- I heard you were a jewel thief; show me your mission impossible moves?
- You invented a dance move that the Russian ballet company is now using in their next production of "Swan Lake". Show me that dance move.
- Show me the instrument that you play.
- How neutral can you be?
- I heard that you are a great rapper!
- Let me see your audition for the film called, "The end of the world!"

### ***Child's play & the tour of what this isn't***

Students will now explore the room as if seeing it for the first time. Get students to explore the possibilities in every prop. Students can also play with one another. The rules are simple: No hate or malice, vocals only with no words, enjoy everything and when you get bored do something else.

### ***Emotional rollercoaster***

*Clowns take pleasure in every emotion and every thought is articulated for the audience.*

Have students find their own space in the room. The students will do the following exercises with increased physical and vocal intensity. All exercises will start at level 1 and will build to level 10. Keep asking students if they are "working at their maximum!" The students will not use words, but will use vocals. They must always stay focused on the activity even if it is too scary or sad. Remind the students that they must play for you (the audience) and each other not to the floor or for themselves. For example:

- Pick flowers with sadness at level 2. As if these were the flowers that your lover gave you and you are no longer together. Now at level 5, etc.
- Paint toenails fearfully at level 1. As if at any moment your hangnail may come loose and then there will be blood everywhere. Now at level 8, etc.



- Paint a picture happily at level 3. As if you know it is going to be sold for a million dollars. Now at level 1, level 9, etc.
- Other emotions and attitudes to try: Puzzled, bored, jealous, lusty, tired, cautious, knowledgeable, worried, angry, confused, arrogant, naughty.
- *This activity can also be done with the following scenario: The love of your life broke your heart (sadness) and now you are going to write your partner a letter (anger) and now that you have let your anger out you see yourself in a mirror and realize how fantastically gorgeous you are (admiration) and then you see someone across the room that you think is cute (flirtation).*

### ***Do that funny thing you do!***

Walk around and point at people and say, '**You are the funniest person in the entire world!**'

With a partner ask them to, '**Do that funny thing that you do!**' Then say, 'No, that's not it, do the funny thing'... eventually when they have done many things... say YES! 'That's it, the funny thing!'

### ***Applause***

This game is about being in the 'crap' and in failure mode. It teaches the essential clown technique of connecting to the audience. As a clown you have to listen to where the audience will take you. This exercise prevents you from being too much in the number and not enough with the audience. Do not talk... just make many physical offers. Play with optimism and take the 'egg on your face.' This game is like hot/cold with the audience telling you what is working and what is not. The participant leaves the room while the audience decides what the task will be. The simple task may be: Wave and then bow, jump in the center, be a chicken. *Variation:* A series of actions and then a line of text. The audience through clapping cues informs the participant if they are getting close to the action that they have chosen for them to act out.

### ***DANCE OFF! Or Clown Flocking!***

1. *Off-stage decide the order*
2. *One clown comes out and then the teacher calls NEXT! Now dance with each other and for the audience.*
3. *Next clown comes out. All 3 dance.*
4. *This is life and death competition! You want to WIN!*

5. *The teacher then tells the clowns to freeze and asks the audience... 'Who are you looking at?' If you were not being looked at... Change your strategy.*
6. *Make choices!*
7. *You could be the worst dancer and win!*

### **THE COW EXERCISE with CARMINA BURRANA**

- Clowns begin by bringing the audience into their world.
- You love cows... you can't stop dreaming about them.
- It's a beautiful day and then suddenly you smell something.
- It's cow pooh!
- You see a farmer's field in the distance.
- Go to the red barn
- Place your hand on the door.
- You vibrate with excitement... you can feel the 100 cows behind the door.
- You open it up... 100 cows rush out... you love it!
- Then you see your cow... you love her. Embrace her!
- The farmer kicks you out
- Say good-bye to your cow
- Now get out
- Come back and say one last good-bye to your cow (you can use a word or a look)
- Remember to articulate the thoughts for the audience. Share everything with us.

### **Runway model**

Have all clowns model as if they were on the catwalk!

### **Reflection**

**EXPLORE:** What did you do today that you loved?

**QUESTION:** What did you question from today?

**FURTHER:** What is something you would like to develop further?

*Only three of you have been summoned by the drama Gods to share with the group the most valuable lessons from today. You know if you are the chosen one. When you feel ready come into the center and speak to the group.*

### **Frozen 'Aha Moment!'**

Choose a moment from today where you felt particularly enlightened or creative or special or funny etc. Where did that moment happen in the

room and what were you doing at the time? Go to the place in the room where you had that 'aha' moment and strike the frozen action picture. The room will look like a statue museum of moments.

## **Tragedy is the question. Comedy is the answer!**

### **My journey into clown**

Clowns? Terrifying! Why would anyone want to study this ridiculous art form? Before my enlightenment I used to think that clowns were only for children's birthday parties, scary movies, the circus, clown-a-grams and McDonalds.

### **My limited perception of clowns...**

**Costume must include:** Big red shoes, polka dot jump suit, colorful wig, big foam nose, white face makeup, perhaps a blue or black tear.

**Tricks must include:** 25 clowns squeezed into a VW Bug, multi-colored handkerchiefs that never end, water-squirting flower, and a buzzer handshake.

I decided it was time to face my fears of clowns! I took a course with clown instructor Jan Henderson based in Canada and my life as a theatre artist was transformed. My clown *Bara Naked* was born and my myths about clowning were dispelled. I learned that clowning is about revealing yourself through mask and that my clown was simply me, but in extreme nature. Clowning is laughing at the beauty of how ridiculous we are!

Clowning is a beautiful theatre practice and the following article written by my mentor Jan Henderson best captures what it means to clown and to be creative.

### **The art and philosophy of clowning**

In a lifelong search for meaning, I have found the clown to be the best, all-encompassing metaphor for the human condition- an uncompromising mirror to look into for glimpses of the truth. We look at the clown and see ourselves - our hopes, dreams, fears, and virtues, our flaws and our process. Clowns show us how, as a species, we get into trouble- without ever meaning or wanting to- and how we sometimes stumble onto sublime solutions to our problems. The Fool has eyes to see, and heart to recognize.

Clowning isn't something we need to learn so much as something we become aware of in ourselves. Any time that we are curious, playful, or creative, we are in clown mode. When we are in a state of wonder or awe, surprise or amazement, we are in clown. Whenever we have hunches, act on impulse, or digress- we are in clown. Whenever we have strong

emotions, we are in clown. The clown lives in the place of laughing and crying at the same time.

The art of clowning involves much more than the slapstick and oversized shoes of the traditional circus clown. The character of The Fool is an essential ingredient of human society- a universal archetype found in some form in all cultures and in all times. The Clown is the “puer aeternus”, the eternal child in all of us- the innocent who sees things as they really are and not as convention decrees, who can be counted on to tell us, in the loudest possible voice, that the emperor’s not wearing any clothes. It is the part of us that has never grown up, that lives in the heart and in the moment, with no past to regret and future to dread- the part that only wants to play, completely free of responsibility – and yet is willing and able to save the world if necessary.

The clown takes everything literally and personally, questioning everything under the sun except itself, blithely flaunting the egg on its face and the heart on its sleeve. With the best of intentions and no thought of failure, it leaps naively into danger- getting knocked down over and over- but never failing to get up and try again. It is the embodiment of hope in the face of hopelessness, and possibility in the face of the impossible. It blissfully ignores the obvious and somehow convinces us of the wisdom of folly, and if, as I suspect, we are here to bear witness to the universe, the clown aspect of ourselves provides the best color commentary.

Clowning is about the freedom that comes from a state of total, unconditional acceptance of our most authentic selves- “warts and all”. It offers us respite from our self-doubts and fears, and opens the door to joy. And the best part is, we are all already our clowns. They are here inside us, waiting for us to recognize them so that they can come out and play.

Jan Henderson

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## Have fun playing!

For additional information on clown or for workshops, contact me at:  
[www.tarabrodin.com](http://www.tarabrodin.com)

### Resources

#### **Books:**

- The History of Clowns for Beginners by Joe Lee.
- Permission to Play by Tara Brodin. Available soon on-line!
- Why is that so funny? by John Wright

#### **Practitioners:**

- Jan Henderson ([www.foolmoon.org](http://www.foolmoon.org))
- Shannan Calcutt ([www.Iamizzy.com](http://www.Iamizzy.com))
- Sue Morrison ([www.canadianclowning.com](http://www.canadianclowning.com))
- Mick Barnfather ([www.mickbarnfather.com](http://www.mickbarnfather.com))
- Christopher Bayes ([www.christopherbayes.com](http://www.christopherbayes.com))
- Richard Pochinko ([www.geocities.com/nion44/](http://www.geocities.com/nion44/))
- Mump & Smoot ([www.mumpandsmoot.com](http://www.mumpandsmoot.com))
- Eric Davis ([www.redbastard.com](http://www.redbastard.com))

#### **Companies:**

- New York Downtown Clown ([www.newyorkdowntownclown.com](http://www.newyorkdowntownclown.com))

#### **Productions:**

- Slava's Snow Show
- Cirque du Soleil

#### **DVD's:**

- Mr. Bean
- Charlie Chaplin
- Buster Keaton
- Lucille Ball
- Abbott & Costello

#### **Clown noses:**

- [www.justclownnoses.com](http://www.justclownnoses.com)
- Go to "Bulk clown noses"
- JCN2001 approx. (\$1.00/nose)

## **Practitioner's Pathway**

Tara is a theatre artist and international workshop leader. An experienced director and actor, she specializes in improvisation, physical comedy and modern clown, with an interest in playwrighting and singing. Her areas of expertise as a workshop leader are in devising original works and in unleashing an actor's sense of honest and spontaneous play.

Tara received her theatre training from the University of Alberta (B.Ed. Drama) and Grant MacEwan College (Theatre Arts). Furthermore, she has enriched her knowledge of world theatre traditions by travelling to study with renowned theatre practitioners. She loves comedy and has studied the art of improvisation extensively with the internationally acclaimed Rapid Fire Theatre Company in Edmonton, AB and The Upright Citizens Brigade in New York City. Tara is very passionate about the art of clowning and has studied with The New York Downtown Clowns, Christopher Bayes, Mick Barnfather and some of Canada's celebrated clowns: Jan Henderson, Shannan Calcutt and Sue Morrison.

Tara began receiving critical acclaim over a decade ago with her performance in *The Woolgatherer* that garnered the title: "Pick of the Fringe" at the theatre festival in Edmonton. She has written and performed her one-woman piece entitled *Neurotica* and is the co-author of a film noir/black comedy entitled, *Urge to Kill*. In the 2006 season of the Edmonton Fringe Festival, Tara directed MacIvor's *See Bob Run* to rave reviews. She also directed and produced Sherri D. Sutton's one-woman show *Don't Make Fun of Jesus* to sold out houses and standing ovations at the 2008 Edmonton Fringe. Currently Tara is creating her own solo clown show and is directing several new works for performance next year.

Tara has taught various styles of theatre and numerous forms of dance. She has led workshops and extended intensives with all levels of participants, from junior high to university, as well as educators and theatre professionals. A former IB theatre instructor and staff development leader, Tara implemented and trained staff in cross-curricular practice, thinking maps/learning strategies and best practices. Currently, she is freelancing as a workshop leader with [ISTA](#) (International Schools Theatre Association) and is an examiner for the IB theatre curriculum. An award winning educator, Tara's students have received numerous provincial awards and have participated in national competitions. Recently she worked with *Encore Ensemble Theatre* in France and devised an original musical, *Boat Boy* that toured to the Avignon Theatre Festival. In addition, Tara is writing a resource guide for educators entitled *Permission to Play!*

Currently, she is most excited about her role as the Artistic Director of *Break the Wall Productions*, a devising company that specializes in creating works that explode the conventional audience-actor barrier, and **Break The Wall** between us. [www.tarabrodin.com](http://www.tarabrodin.com)