Two Drama Games for Physicalizing Vocabulary

Richard Silberg, Berkeley Unified School District and U.S. Department of State’s English Language Programs

**Bippity, Bippity, Bop and Build it Break it**

*For video examples of this and other English Language Teaching through Drama ideas check out my website richardsilberg.com*

*Email: richardrjs1010@gmail.com*

**Bippity, Bippity, Bop**

This is, without a doubt, my student's favorite drama game. We use it a lot. I use it as a warm-up, as an end of class get together, and as a language development activity. Here are the basics:

Students stand in a circle. The leader points to a student and says one of many commands. The video will show what it actually looks like

1. **Bippity, Bippity Bop**: Students job is to interrupt the caller-responding with the word "Bop" before the caller finishes her/his sentence. (you know they love to interrupt.)
2. **Bop**: Students job is to say absolutely nothing--remaining silent
3. **Surfer**: Student who is pointed to mimes a surfer riding on a surfboard. The students on the immediate left and right
are to turn to the "surfer" and mime waves. Bonus points for vocalizing a surf guitar ala Dick Dale

4. **Elephant:** Student who is pointed to mimes the "trunk" of an elephant. Those on either side turn to the trunk and create huge ears with their arms.

5. **Bowl of Jello:** Student who is pointed to mimes that weird, semi liquid/solid gelatinous desert. The students on either side turn to the "jello" and use their arms to create "containers", holding the jello in it's place.

6. **Charlie's Angels:** based on the old American TV series about women spies. No way to describe--here's an image:

![Image of Charlie's Angels](image)

If a student makes a mistake, they take a knee, and the game continues. This means the next person remaining over must now participate in the tableaux of surfer, elephant, etc. Sometimes I play it until only a few remain. Sometimes I just play it for a period of time (say 5 minutes). It really depends on my energy. It is challenging for students to take on the role of leader, but it is possible.

This is the basic game. Once these rules are established then you can use this to introduce and/or review vocabulary. I have used it with my long term English Language Learners
as well as newcomers. In groups of 3, students use the basic format to create what I call Bippity, bippity, bop tableaux of target vocabulary. I have used it for vocabulary from literature, as well as concept words like freedom, oppression, you name it. Groups will present these tableaux to the class and everyone learns them (just a few at a time, otherwise it is overwhelming) and we use it for review.

**Build it, Break it**

Groups of 4 or 5 work well, but this can also be done with smaller groups if necessary. Students are given a prompt to build a whole group statue (it can be frozen as in a tableau, or it can move a bit as needed, (as in bippity, bippity, bop) generally the fewer directions the better as you might be surprised by their inventiveness. I start off with things that are concrete, or tangible, and gradually build in complexity: chair, table, bridge, bicycle and traffic were ones I used successfully. Students have a set period of time (one minute works well) to create their sculpture. I then call out "build it" and each group, simultaneously, builds their version of "chair". Have them hold it for a 5 - 10 seconds and call, "break it" and they return to actor’s neutral. Repeat so they have it in their bodies. Then add another object for them to do, with the same process, but now they have two to create: “Chair--build it.... break it”. “Bridge--build it break it...”

After you have 5 objects and the students have rehearsed we do a gallery walk type performance with one group
performing all of them (with the teacher/leader calling build, it break it). Then, move to the abstract ideas. Here's a list of some that I have done:

Table
Bridge
Traffic
Bicycle
Chair

Art
connection
important
Analysis
Routine

In the coming weeks I'm going to experiment with using this activity for the students to build physical embodiments of some school-wide academic vocabulary concepts that we will be using in all of our subjects at the middle school I teach at:

Analyze
Collaborate
Demonstrate
Cause and effect
Characteristic
Perspective
Evidence
Interpret
Specific
Elaborate
Inquire
Claim