

# Skit Masters

Grade Level: 3<sup>rd</sup> grade and up

Possible class environment: theatre class, language arts, health class

Time commitment: 5 class periods to do complete lessons plan

Shortened version: 1 class period - Discussion only, using sample skit presented below

### **Overview:**

Skit Masters is a creative, hands-on approach to teaching children about living with a disability. Leading up to Dress Up 2 Cure Day, students can work on their skits, then perform them for each other on the day of the event.

Skit concept: Students get into small groups of 3-5 to write a short skit (no more than 2-3 minutes). They will then perform the same skit four times, each time with a “twist.” The twist is that one of the characters in the skit loses an additional skill (the ability to walk, talk or use their hands) for each run-through of the skit. This is a powerful way to learn empathy for the disabled, as well as creative problem solving.

### **Required Materials:**

- Students will only require pencil and paper to write down their skit, as well as any props they would like to incorporate into their skits.
- Three bandanas for each group (optional). These will be used to visually represent the loss of each skill: speech; hand use, and mobility.

### **Goal/Purpose:**

- To expose students to living with a disability.
- To think creatively about how to interact with someone with special needs.
- To work on creative writing and public performance skills.

*We welcome video copies of your students' performances!*

*You may also use this as a writing exercise. Have your students learn to write in “skit” format, using dialog and “stage” direction, etc.*

## **Background:**

Girls with Rett Syndrome are severely disabled. They have no hand function or speech. Most cannot walk and suffer from uncontrollable seizures and pain. They require total 24-hour care. Yet these girls are very smart and very brave.

Many disorders students are familiar with only affect one aspect of someone's communications ability. For instance, a blind person may not be able to see, but can compensate through their speech, hearing and motor skills. A deaf person can use sign language. A Down Syndrome child can speak, walk, and use their hands.

We often take for granted the three core skills: ability to communicate through a form of speech, the ability to manipulate your hands/fingers, and the ability to move around successfully to go where you want to go.

By slowly stripping a student of each of these abilities, not only will the disabled person have to adapt, the group will need to adapt to HIM/HER.

## **IDEAS FOR ADAPTION (to guide students):**

Let's use a simple skit idea to show you how this works. You may use this solely for your own preparation, or walk the class through these scenarios after they have written their skits as an example.

### **SKIT #1**

*Four friends at a playground trying to decide whether to play basketball or soccer. They vote. Basketball wins. They walk over to the basketball court, pick teams and start to play.*

### **SKIT #2**

Loss of speech: (tie a bandana over the student's mouth to visually represent his handicap)

Without a way to communicate through voice, there are options to explore such as:

- Writing
- Sign Language
- Pointing
- Pantomime

*Four friends at a playground trying to decide whether to play basketball or soccer. They vote. (The disabled student writes down his vote – "basketball"). They walk over to the basketball court, pick teams (Disabled student points to who he wants to play with), and start to play.*

### SKIT #3

Loss of hand function:

(tie a bandana around Disabled Student's wrists behind his/her back to visually represent this new handicap)

Without speech or hand function, the options for communication are drastically reduced. Now the students can explore new ways to communicate:

- Eye blinking
- Other sounds, like tongue clicking, stomping, hand banging
- Looking at YES / NO flashcards to make choices/give opinions
- Moving toward an area of interest, i.e. move to fridge to show hunger

*Four friends at a playground trying to decide whether to play basketball or soccer. They vote. (The disabled student walks over to the soccer ball and whacks it with his head/foot/elbow—he chose soccer because he cannot use his hands to play basketball). They walk over to the soccer field, pick teams (Disabled student gestures with his head to the friend with whom he wants to play), and they all start to play. Running is more difficult without use of arms.*

### SKIT #4

Loss of gross motor skills:

(tie a third bandana around both ankles together to visually represent this handicap)

Without the ability now to walk or move with much purpose, the options for participation in a group setting are almost non-existent, especially to a group that is unaware of the person's cognitive ability and alternative ways to engage with a person of severe need.

*Four friends at a playground trying to decide whether to play basketball or soccer. They vote. (The disabled student looks either to basketball or soccer ball to vote). They walk (they have to carry the disabled student) over to the basketball court, pick teams, and start to play (the Disabled Student cannot play).*

*What can the Disabled Student do now that he cannot play? The usual answer is "watch."*

**This is where the best opportunity for creative thinking comes into play.**

Here are three suggestions for the above scenario:

- The Disabled Student can be the "starter" – place the ball in his lap for him to "push" and roll off to get the game started.
- Place a bell nearby for the Disabled Student to ring when someone scores a point. Or to call the time.
- Push the Disabled Student in their chair to go after the soccer ball.
- Change activities altogether and do something the Disabled Student would like, i.e. listen to cool music or run races pushing his/her wheelchair.

## **Procedures:**

### **DAY ONE – Create and write skit**

#### **Preparation**

Topics for discussion:

- What is your favorite activity?
- Do you do this activity alone or with others?
- Do you need any special materials or equipment?

*Option: create a results table on the board to list/tally the different favorite activities and whether they require other people or equipment.*

#### **Assignment**

Break the class up into groups of 3 or 4. Ask each group to write a short (2-3 minute) skit about something they would regularly do with a group of friends. You do not have to tell them about how they will be using their skit to adapt to a person with disabilities. This way, the skit will be a genuine reflection of an everyday peer interaction.

### **DAY TWO – Learn to adapt to new challenges**

#### **Preparation**

Focus in on activities on the list from DAY ONE that students did NOT use in their skits to discuss the actual skills you need to participate in each activity: speech, hand use, mobility.

Topics for discussion:

- How does this activity use each of these skills?
- What is the one skill you could not live without?
- Do you know anyone with a significant handicap?
- What are some handicaps you know about?
- Talk about physical vs. mental handicaps.
- How can you overcome some handicaps?  
(i.e. special wheelchairs, prosthetics, Braille, sign language, etc)

#### **Assignment**

Break students back into their groups and review the sample skit detailed in the “Background” section of this lesson. Then ask each group to work on how they are going to adapt each version of their skit. They will need to discuss the following:

- How will we need to change what we say?
- How will we need to change what we do?
- What new items will we need to make this successful?

## DAY THREE – Organize and practice skit as a performance

Give students time to write out each version of their skit with complete dialog and action descriptions. Allow students to practice their skits.

## DAY FOUR – Final performances

Performance day! Students can perform within the class for each other, or you may wish to have them share their “stories” with other classes or grades.

## DAY FIVE – Follow Up

### Discussion

Discussion topics: (the depth of this will vary by age group)

- How did this make you feel? From the perspectives of the “friends” and from the “Disabled Student.”
- Imagine on top of all of that, you were in pain, had to take multiple medications, had an aide with you at all times to feed you and clean you.

### Worksheet

Complete the “20 Things You Can Do” worksheet included as a separate curriculum download. This worksheet supplies 20 ideas for spending time with someone with special needs, then asks the student to think of five more!

*If your class would like to “adopt” a particular girl with Rett Syndrome (if you are not already aware of someone in your community), we can help you find someone. Or visit [www.girlpower2cure.org/thegirls](http://www.girlpower2cure.org/thegirls) to pick someone to “adopt.”*

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Questions? Comments? Suggestions?

Please contact:

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