Nonverbal Communication Exercises

How do we communicate without words?

- **Gestures List.** Ask students: *How do we communicate without words? What are some common gestures?* Divide students into groups and ask each group to come up with as many ways of nonverbal communicate as they can in 1 minute (eg: shrug, hands on hips, finger to lips, shake head, nod head, make a face, smile, wink).

- **Silent Scene.** Divide students into pairs. Each pair creates a one-minute scene that takes place in one location and has a problem that needs to be solved. Neither person in scene talks. All communication must be nonverbal. Can the audience guess the content of the scene without any dialogue to help? Remind students to refer to the gestures list.

- **Nonverbal Communication.** Give students a list of sentences and have them come up with a way to nonverbally communicate them. Remind students to refer to the gestures list.

- **Nonverbal Emotions.** Students choose an emotion out of a hat. They present this emotion in a wordless piece where they enter a space, then sit, get up, and leave the space. Their goal is to “show” their emotion well enough that the audience can guess. *(For example: Happiness, Sadness, Anger, Surprise, Fear, Jealousy, Boredom, Disgust, Nervousness, Excitement, Relaxation, Tenseness, Stress, Fatigue).*

- **Nonverbal Picture Prompt.** Show students a picture of a person. What is their body language communicating? Write an inner monologue for this character.

- **High Status/Low Status.** Have students walk around the room and explore the physicality of high status and low status. What defines a high status body? What defines a low status body? How does this character walk? How does their physicality affect how they interact? Divide students into pairs with one high status character and one low status character. Each pair presents a nonverbal scene that shows their status.

- **Subtext Scene.** Divide students into groups. Create a scene in which at least one character has lines that say one thing while their body language tells a different story (eg: a student tells another student they are happy that they won the contest, but their body language is tense, with arms folded across their body).

- **Good Listener/Bad Listener.** Have two volunteers come up to the front. Person A has to tell Person B a story. The first time through, Person B is a “good listener.” Ask students what a good listener looks like? How do you communicate engagement nonverbally? Do the scene again with Person B telling Person A a story. This time, Person A is a “bad listener.” What does a bad listener look like? What is their
physicality? How do you communicate boredom nonverbally? Ask the audience if they see the difference.

- **One Talker/One Not.** Divide students into pairs. Have each pair create a one-minute scene that takes place in one location and has a problem that needs to be solved. Person A is allowed to speak their lines, but Person B can only use gestures, body language, and other nonverbal communication. Afterwards, switch roles so that Person A is the nonverbal communicator.

- **Judging.** Ask students: *Have you ever judged someone by what they look like or by how they move before you talk to them? What is it about someone’s physicality that affects you?* Have students create a scene in which a character is judged not by what they say but by their nonverbal communication.
Nonverbal Communication

Come up with a way to nonverbally communicate these sentences.

1. Go away!
2. Good job.
3. Will you marry me?
4. I have something to say!
5. Turn left.
6. Mister, can you help me?
7. You must be quiet.
8. Don’t interrupt me!
9. I’m so excited!
10. This sucks.

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High and Low Status

*How do high and low status characters act?*

**High Status**
Not afraid to touch or be touched. Initiates contact (eye contact, physical contact, or verbal contact). Body is physically open. Walks in straight lines. Takes time getting to their destination. Confident. Finishes a complete thought on a complete breath and in a complete sentence. Has a positive outlook. Has power. Has a large or small bubble of personal space but is not afraid to have that bubble of space broken.

**Low Status**
Does not like to touch or be touched. Does not make or initiate contact of any kind (eye contact, physical contact, or verbal contact). Body is physically closed off or protected. Does not walk in a straight line. Rushes or moves slowly to their destination. Touches their hair, clothes, or face while they talk. Does not finish a complete thought on a complete breath or a complete sentence. Gives away their power or has no power. Has a small bubble of personal space because they feel they shouldn’t take up much space OR a large bubble of personal space because they want to keep others away.

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Nonverbal Picture Prompt

Look at the person in each picture. What is their body language communicating? Write an inner monologue for each character.