

Name: _____

Stage Combat Basics

This worksheet was created to accompany Episode 4 of Ovation Academy: Classes with Katy, and is designed to guide you through practicing the basic stage combat skills introduced in the video.

INSTRUCTIONS

Your challenge is to use your newly-acquired stage combat skills to stage a short scene with a partner that incorporates at least one punch and one duck. Remember, the number one rule in stage combat is **safety, safety, safety!!** You're going to need a partner for this activity, because it'd be pretty difficult to fight yourself. Make sure that both you and your partner have watched the entire video lesson before trying any stage combat. Also, double check the following:

- Make sure you have an **open space** without obstacles that you could run into
- **Wear comfortable clothes** that you can move around easily in
- **Remove all jewelry** that could get caught on your or your partner's clothes
- **Tie back long hair** that could get in your face and make it difficult to see

SET UP THE SCENE

First of all, decide on the situation for your mini-scene. Any time stage combat is used in theatre, it needs to have a purpose. People (and characters) don't just start fighting for no reason! For this exercise, **keep it simple**—just identify who your two characters are, what the relationship is between them, and why they are fighting (for example, a brother and a sister who are fighting because they both want to watch TV at the same time).

Who is Character A?

Character A is _____

Who is Character B?

Character B is _____

How do your characters know each other?

The relationship between our characters is _____

Why are Character A and Character B fighting?

These two characters are fighting because _____

Now that you have a basic idea of what your scene is about, use the space below to **write a few lines of dialogue** to use in your scene. Remember that it doesn't have to be long or complicated—just make sure to have a **beginning** where you establish who your characters are and why they're fighting, a **middle** where the fight happens, and an **ending** where you resolve the scene. The two characters don't have to make up at the end, but you have to end it somehow—even if that means one person leaves or they both hear something happen offstage that makes them stop fighting. **Keep it short!** Even five lines is enough to set up and resolve your fight. Don't do any fighting yet—just write down in the dialogue where the fight will happen.

CHOREOGRAPH THE FIGHT

Now that you know who your characters are and why they're fighting, you're ready to stage the fight! Follow the steps below one step at a time, and remember, **safety first**. Always make sure both you and your partner feel safe before you move on to the next step! Also, while you are figuring out the fight in this section, **practice at a ¼ speed (slow motion)**.

1. **Stance** - Face your partner and stand with your feet shoulder-width apart, left foot farther forward than the right foot and knees bent. Have your partner push lightly on your shoulder to check that you are grounded and won't tip over easily.
2. **Eye contact** - Establish eye contact with your partner, and make sure you are both clear about the plan for the fight. Decide together on the exact sequence of the fight, and write out the fight notation in the space below. Include any lines that happen during the fight, and remember that the arrow should be pointing towards the person who is receiving the action. Here's an example of a sequence:

CHARACTER A

CHARACTER B

Duck ←————— Right cross punch

CHARACTER A: Oh, no you don't...

Right cross punch —————→ React

3. **Distance** - Now that you're on the same page and you have a plan, take your fighting stance again facing your partner and measure the distance between you. Extend your arm toward your partner and make sure there is at least 6-8 inches between your closed fist and your partner's face. Remember that it's important to keep this distance during the entire fight.
4. **Cue, Act, React** - At ¼ speed (slow motion), practice the cue - act - react sequence. The sequences for a duck and a right cross punch are detailed below:

DUCK

Cue: Person A makes eye contact with Person B and raises their right fist to signal to their partner and to the audience what is coming.

Act: Person B crouches down to duck from the coming punch.

React: Person A moves their eyes to the space above Person B's head and swings their fist across that space. Remember to not swing your arm until after your partner has ducked!

RIGHT CROSS PUNCH

Cue: Person A makes eye contact with Person B and raises their right fist to signal to their partner and to the audience what is coming.

Act: Person A moves their eyes to Person B's right shoulder and swings their right fist across their face.

Remember **not to lean forward!** If you have measured the distance, there's no chance that you will actually hit your partner as long as you are careful to not lean forward when you swing your arm. Put your whole body into it by turning your body as you swing your arm, just do not lean forward.

React: As Person A's fist passes the bridge of Person B's nose, Person B turns their head to the right as if to react to the punch.

5. **Knap** - Now it's time to add the knap, or the sound you create to make a stage punch, slap, or kick seem more real. First, practice the knap by itself outside of the fight sequence. Bring the palm of your left hand up and clap it against the palm of your right hand. Slide your left hand past your right hand up to the left side of your face, as if you just got hit on the left side of your face. Remember to keep your elbows tucked in so that the knap is not obvious to the audience. After you practice the knap a few times to get the sound you want and figure out exactly how it works, try incorporating it into the fight sequence, still at $\frac{1}{4}$ speed. You should create the knap when the punch crosses the bridge of your nose, so that it happens at the same time you turn your head.
6. **Vocal** - To add a sense of realism to the punch, be sure to add a vocal reaction. There should be some kind of vocalization from both the person throwing the punch and the person receiving it.
7. **Angles** - The final step to choreographing your fight is to figure out how to angle yourselves correctly so that the audience can't see that the person isn't actually getting hit. The best way to do this is to place the person who is getting "hit" with their back to the audience.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE PRACTICE

After you've figured out the fight sequence and both you and your partner feel safe practicing it in slow motion, you're ready to speed it up a little bit, one step at a time. First, try it at $\frac{1}{2}$ speed, which is a little faster than slow motion. Once you both feel safe at $\frac{1}{2}$ speed, move to $\frac{3}{4}$ speed, which is almost full speed, but not quite. Remember to **check your distance** again every time you practice! Now you're finally ready to try it at full speed. But remember, even stage combat at full speed is still **slower than actual combat!** Slowing down the moves and making your cues more exaggerated gives the audience time to catch up and understand what's going on. Once you've got the fight sequence by itself at full speed, try it in your scene. But remember, safety ALWAYS comes first—never start fighting until after you've made eye contact with your partner and you are sure that you're far enough away from your partner that you won't actually hit them (it's better to be too far away than too close!).

I hope you had fun learning and practicing a bit of stage combat! I can't wait to see all your awesome work. Don't forget to **share your videos with us** so we can see what you've been working on!

If you have any questions, don't hesitate to reach out at OvationTC@gmail.com, and I will get back to you as soon as I can.

Happy "fighting!"

Katy

If you loved this activity...

ABOVE AND BEYOND

Stage another mini-scene with a little bit longer fight sequence—maybe you have two ducks and three punches, with some lines in the middle of the fight. With a longer sequence, however, remember that it is just as important to write down the entire thing and practice it at $\frac{1}{4}$ speed, then $\frac{1}{2}$ speed, then $\frac{3}{4}$ speed, and finally full speed. And you have to do it exactly the same way every time so that your partner knows what to expect—fight choreography is **NEVER improvised!**

KEEP ON LEARNING

This exercise covered just the most basic, foundational aspects of unarmed stage combat. As you can probably imagine, there is so much more to learn! Below, you will find a couple of great video resources that cover different parts of stage combat that you can check out if you're interested.

Learn techniques for **falling safely** from a professional stuntman: <https://youtu.be/rMds59dFM8I>

Stunt coordinator Anthony Vincent discusses **fighting for film**: <https://youtu.be/bUBEtE5ehlQ>

Fight director Paul Dennhardt talks about his job **choreographing and and teaching sword fights** for the Illinois Shakespeare Festival: <https://youtu.be/ZU2N2Ej8L-0>

Broadway fight director Ron Peretti explains the importance of **storytelling and safety** in stage combat: <https://youtu.be/y8bW7w5OztE>

Fight director Jeff Colangelo discusses **rhythm in fighting**: https://youtu.be/d1__cJ-fzY4