JUST IDEAS
EMBODIED LEARNING EXERCISES

Name Gumbo

This game is always a great way to begin the first day of a class. If possible, do this game AFTER everyone already has a nametag on, for an extra challenge.

1) **Demo:** ask a volunteer to come up and demonstrate with you
2) Shake each other's hand and introduce yourselves. "Hi, my name is Martin." "Hi, my name is Juan."
3) (be DRAMATIC!!) Say: "Now, in this game, every handshake summons a magic fairy that SWITCHES our names around. As soon as we shake hands, my name [pointing to yourself] becomes 'Juan', and you [pointing to the volunteer] are 'Martin'. So, now we have to re-introduce ourselves."
4) Repeat, with your new names. "Hi, my name is Juan." "Hi, my name is Martin."
5) Explain to the group that next, you would find someone else to introduce yourself to again, but now with your NEW name [i.e. yours is now 'Juan']
6) **Play:** Have everyone stand up and find someone to introduce themselves to. Let the game continue for a few minutes.
7) FREEZE! Now, the new goal is now to receive your original name again. This happens when someone who received your name meets you, and after the magic exchange, you become YOU again. When this happens, you can take a seat. Not everyone will be able to find their name again, so just let this go on for a minute or so, til enough have found their name and the rest are confused.

**For an added challenge, introduce yourselves with your name AND favorite food, or some other piece of information.

REFLECTIONS:
> How do you feel?
> What made this game so hard, personally and as a group? [i.e. listening to people when they talk, hearing their words rather than instinctively looking at their nametags]
> *An exercise in Listening*
> What is the difference between *hearing* and *listening*?
> Set a classroom precept to make an effort to not just hear, but *listen* to one another as we engage in deep dialogue about these texts
> How did it feel to introduce yourself as someone else? At the end, how did it feel to find your name again? How did it feel to *not* find your name?
> Introduce the "Rule of Confusion": *If we are not prepared to be a bit confused/unsure ["beginner's mind"], and ultimately to find comfort in that confusion, then we are not prepared for change. This game is a rehearsal for frustration, uncertainty, and change.*

Watch live demo: *https://youtu.be/RCN7Mw-ZQ30*

Counting Game

The goal: count to 10 as a group. Easy, right?

1) Everyone stands in a tight circle, shoulder to shoulder, facing inwards.
2) Collectively take a deep breath, then exhale. Upon exhale, everyone closes their eyes.
3) **Goal:** Count to the number 10 as a group.
   Rules: Only one person may say a number at once. If more than one person speaks, the group must start again from number 1. No other talking or movement is allowed, aside from the verbal counting. Every time you have to start over, repeat the inhale/exhale.
4) If the group is struggling, set the goal as 5 first, then push it up to 10 later. If too easy, make the starting goal 15 or 20.

REFLECTIONS:
> Open the floor to the group first: How do people feel? Any initial thoughts/reflections?
> What made it hard? [i.e. hesitations, fears, expectations] What made it easier? Did you use/develop any tactics? When/Where were there tension peaks?
> Discuss the *collective conscience/psyche*

René Magritte ("This is not a pipe")

1) Choose any object - *i.e. folder, water bottle*
2) Say: "This is clearly a folder, right? I'm going to place this folder on the floor in the middle [if the desk seats aren't already arranged in a semicircle, have everyone stand up and form a circle]. Now, I'm going to summon that magic fairy that flipped our names around…" – be *theatrical* – "and now, it's not a folder anymore. It's anything BUT a folder. Show me what it is."
3) People come up one at a time and demonstrate what the folder has become. Ex. someone holds it over their head like an umbrella, someone opens it up and types on it like a laptop, someone rides it like a skateboard
4) Continue for at least 10 people. Try to encourage quieter people to come up. When people seem to be getting stuck, insist on 2 more. Those are often the best ones!
5) **Challenge:** repeat with a more complex object, such as a chair

REFLECTIONS:
> What are your immediate reactions to this game?
> How did your perception of the object change over time? Did the object in question appears less and less like that object / more ambiguous over time? What did it feel like to see an object as something other than what you've always seen it as?
> Who gets to name/define this object as "a folder"? Who gets to name things in general? What functions do names, and even language in general, serve? → *describe the inspiration of this game: René Magritte's famous painting series, "The Treachery of Images" – specifically the painting of a pipe, with the words*

"This is not a pipe" (ceci n'est pas une pipe) inscribed underneath, as well as the painting of an apple captioned, "This is not an apple" (ceci n'est pas une pomme).
> *Questioning what is known/accepted*
> *Critical thinking skills*
> Can talk about the perception of the same objects/ideas depending on language [i.e. the gendering of nouns, sentence structures, agency]
> *Non-verbal communication*: using images can help us deconstruct lingual power structures (thus allowing room for speakers of other languages), and communicate more precisely across cultural divides in order to identify collective struggles and reimagine them.
> *Activating *radical imagination*: if we can imagine things as other than they are, we can re-imagine those things that are oppressive, and change them.*

Watch live demo: *https://youtu.be/yh7BYgY8rrM*

It's A What?
[a rendition of **René Magritte ("This is not a pipe")**]
1) Choose any easy-to-handle object [*i.e. pen, water bottle*]
2) Hold the pen out for everyone to see, then choose it to be *anything but* a pen [*i.e. a back-scratcher*], and say, "It's a back-scratcher." The rest of the group has to say, "It's a what?", after which you repeat, "It's a back-scratcher." The group repeats, "It's a what?!", and you repeat once more.
3) Pass the object on to the next person, and they dub it something else [*i.e. a key*]

REFLECTIONS:
> Same reflections as above for **René Magritte ("This is not a pipe")**
> **Note: the repetition of this game is important, as it adds to morphing/restructuring of the object into other things

Slow Motion Race
It's a race – except the slowest person wins!
1) Everyone lines up at one end/wall of the room, shoulder to shoulder
2) Mark the "finish line" (something not far away, *i.e. the opposite wall of the room*)
3) **Rules:** You must always be moving directly *toward* the finish line (can never go backwards). You must *always* be in motion (can't ever *not* be moving). One foot must always be off the ground. Each foot should land with at least the heel ahead of the other foot's toes. You must pick up your feet above your knees. When you break a rule you must take another step forward.
4) The person who reaches the finish line *last*, wins.

REFLECTIONS:

> What made this race different from any other race you may have done?

> *Concentrated energy / focus*

> Since whatever is not prohibited is allowed, did you interpret the rules in any special way to your benefit?

> How does it feel to be moving *slowly* in a "race," *i.e. when a 'known' thing is inverted*?

> What instincts did you have to suppress (and were there ever moments in which they won over)?

> What underrated/undervalued skills does this race make you appreciate? Responses to this question can get very broad, and go beyond just the race itself.

Watch live demo: *https://youtu.be/oDl8EOg9fll*

Opposites Game

1) Everyone stands up, anywhere around the room.
2) Explain that you are going to give a command, and everyone must follow. Say you'll start with basic ones: Walk, Stop, Clap, Spin
3) Keep tossing out commands until people have the hang of it.
4) Say that everyone now has to do the "opposite" of what you say. If you say walk, they must stop, and vice versa. Clap means spin, and vice versa.
5) As people then get the hang of that, throw in new commands. Have them make up their own command pairs. You can even have someone else lead.

REFLECTIONS:

> What made this game challenging (or if it wasn't, what do you think could have been challenging for others)? How did it get easier? *Problematize the answers - pick out words like "instinct," "learned," "body" (order-taking is in the body)*

> *The difficulty of countering words that are so engrained/assumed.*

> Are we programmed/mechanized by modern society and/or societal structures? *The underlying mechanics of our instincts and learned behaviors.*

> What else do we do everyday or often because everyone else does? Or because people who are labelled like us (men, black people, etc.) are told or expected to do so? *Being conscious of the rules we unthinkingly follow, discerning when to follow them and when to disrupt them*

> *Thinking about how deeply yet imperceptibly our society runs on trust*

Watch live demo: *https://youtu.be/WrQNBJMO3ts*

Word Sculpture

A good time to do this exercise is when people feel stuck on abstract themes/words/ideas. This game allows for an uncovering/clarification/redefinition of certain cultural ideas and societal perspectives.

[**Preparation:** before class, prepare a list of words related to the specific text selections/discussion topics that you want to expand on using this game. Start with a few easy words (these can be unrelated to the text/discussion), then move into the more challenging words. See below for examples]

1) Everyone stands in a circle, *facing outward, eyes closed.*
2) The game facilitator (intern or professor) stands outside the circle
3) You say a word out loud, and immediately begin counting down from three: "3 - 2 - 1!" Keeping eyes closed, everyone quickly shapes their hands, bodies, faces, or whatever body part(s) they choose into a physical representation of that word. On the number "one," everyone spins around to the center in a gesture/posture/other frozen physical enactment of that word. Their sculptures should already be formed as they spin to the center, so nobody changes their sculptures based on what others have done. The lightning-speed turnaround time fosters spontaneity and avoids over-thinking.
4) Holding their frozen postures, everyone can now take a moment to observe others' sculptures, and you/they can spotlight certain interesting ones.
5) Everyone turns back outwards, and repeats for each new word.
   a) Start with warm-up words that are easy to enact and straightforward: *sleepy, homework, birthday*
   b) Move on to more difficult/abstract words that are related to & will help contribute to the current class discussions: *justice, love, fatherhood, motherhood, human rights, anger, peace*
6) If time, allow volunteers to be the facilitator and pick a word. They can still remain in the circle and create a sculpture along with everyone else.

REFLECTIONS:
> Was there anything that surprised you about this activity?
> What were some interesting sculptures you saw in the group?
> What words were particularly challenging to manifest? What words were you unsure about?
> Did you learn anything about your/others' perceptions of certain words or ideas through this exercise? Discuss how the images not only depict the word, but also underlying systemic feelings/thoughts/oppressions.
> Has your understanding of any words/ideas been clarified and/or expanded?

Watch live demo: *https://youtu.be/GJPFi5RB6Qo*

Story-Telling

1) Pick one volunteer to be the "story-teller," and four people to be "actors." The others will be the audience.
2) The story-teller improvises a story, anything as realistic/unrealistic as they choose.
3) As they narrate the story, the four actors must concurrently act it out.
4) **Discuss / Reflect**
5) Then, pick one scene for the actors to recreate, and stay frozen in that pose

6) The "audience" walks around the frozen actors as though in an art gallery, pretending they are seeing and interpreting this "sculpture" without any context. Allow people to observe in silence for a couple of minutes.

REFLECTIONS:
(Potential discussion points, depending on the trajectory of the game)
> What stories did you create about the "sculpture"? What did you see/think?
> *Discuss projections, stereotyping*
> Race / other related systems of oppression

Image Theater

(similar to **Story-Telling** and **Word Sculptures**)
1) Two volunteers strike up a pose that depicts a scene/moment of their choosing
2) The audience must guess what they are depicting

REFLECTIONS:
> Similar discussions as above: projections, contextual knowledge/biases

Cocktail Party

To supplement discussion of a novel/story that involves some prominent characters.
1) Everyone is at a cocktail party! A few volunteers stand outside the room, while the others stay inside at the party. They are standing around, socializing, etc.
2) You as the teacher go outside and assign each volunteer a character. They must enter the room one by one and pretend to be their assigned character -- but they cannot say anything!! The other guests can talk, interact with the new arrival, etc., until they can guess who the person is.
3) Once the party identifies the character, the next person comes in from outside in the same way.

REFLECTIONS:
> In character analysis, it is interesting to see which characters are harder to distinguish from each other, which are more obvious, etc.
> What traits of the characters became more prominent/apparent/clearer through acting

Haikus

If your class finds itself in some kind of heated debate, or even a stalemate situation, Haikus are a beautiful route to take. It helps the flame-throwers channel their thoughts more appropriately and concisely, while also giving the quieter students a platform to express their unspoken thoughts.

Haikus are Japanese poems with 5 syllables in the first line, 7 in the next, and 5 again in the last. Here are a few examples from an MDC class in August 2019.

Love, never endured
Pain was always at the door
But life is my cure.
****

Soulmates together
Hearts harmonizing as one
Our beautiful love
****

Love's only weakness
Is also its greatest strength.
It defies reason.

Watch live demo: *https://youtu.be/zjH35kZNwmc*
See more student work: *https://newnarratives.philosophy.columbia.edu/just-ideas/student-work*

Exquisite Corpse

An especially provoking activity if you're discussing a book/story with a few distinct protagonists (each section of the paper would represent a different character).

1) Each person gets a piece of paper, and folds it into three equal sections
2) On the top third, each student draws a head. Encourage students to be as abstract/creative as they want. Doesn't even have to look like a head! That will just be the top part of whatever the final figure is. When done, must draw 2 lines on the next section for where the person should start the torso drawing (sort of like marking where the "neck" is).
3) Then, fold up the paper so that the top third drawn on is hidden behind the others, and the middle section is facing up (with the two guide marks)
4) Everyone passes their papers to the left. Now, everyone is drawing a "torso" sort of section, starting where the last person left their marks.
5) Repeat for the third section, the legs.