AATE + Westtown School
Theater Anywhere: A Cookbook of Activities

Alex Ates interviewing Mimi Yin

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>> Alex Ates: Hi, everyone! My name is Alex Ates from the Westtown School. And today, I'm talking with Mimi Yin. Mimi, thank you so much for being here, it's really quite an honor. I'm curious, what's your recipe?

>> Mimi Yin: I've been working over the summer with a bunch of colleagues from NYU on, I guess, like, quick little party games we can play on Zoom with students. They're almost like little mixer-type things. So, I'm just going to quickly go over them because there's like a whole bunch.

>> Alex: Sounds great!

>> Mimi: So, the first one is called Say My Name, and the idea—I'm just going to screen share, we can, oh, oops—I can't actually screen share, it's disabled, so I'll just skip over it!

>> Alex: Oh!

>> Mimi: It's okay! It's okay. It's fine. So, basically, what you do is you have everyone enter Zoom with their video off and their mic off. So, all you can see are a bunch of rectangles with people's names on them. Actually, in Zoom, you can actually rename yourself, like, all the time. You can be constantly changing your name. And the idea is to try sustain as long a conversation as you can by just changing your name—at whatever rate you want to. This works better with, at least, three people. And it's interesting because it's different from a chat, where people take turns. Because one person can say one thing and kind of leave it there for five minutes. And it's something that doesn't leave the conversation ever.

The second exercise that we've been doing is mirroring exercise where—this works better with at least four or five people, but also works really great with 10 to 20 people—and, you're all in Gallery View and you basically pick a person at random to start mirroring. So you do, as close as possible, exactly what they're doing, right? And, the more people there are, it gets harder to know exactly who's copying you and who you're copying. Are you copying someone who's copying you? And so, are you really copying yourself? So, it's a little bit of an exercise in self-awareness and awareness of other people being aware of you.

The third exercise is, sort of, a spin-off of that, which is playing with the idea that in Zoom, unlike in person, you can't tell that somebody's looking at you because to really look at somebody, to really make them feel like you're looking at them, you have to look at the camera, at which point you can't really see the people in Zoom. So, the idea behind this exercise is to pick somebody, again at random, and try to make eye contact with them. And when you, somehow, feel like maybe they're trying to make eye contact with you, which it is impossible to actually know that, you private text them, you private chat them, something complementary like "You're so smart. You're so funny. You're so beautiful. It's a little bit of a game in reciprocation. And what that sort of process is and how it's kind of broken into these scenarios where people lose that physical feedback loop.

The fourth exercise, this sort of gets increasingly intense, the fourth exercise is called monologues and we've tried different variations where the person talking dims their screen, so they're talking into a void—or—the people listening dim their screens so all that they hear, they kind of know the person is there talking, but they only hear their voice. And the tricky part about this is that the person who's talking who has the monologue role, needs to be responding to something that's not easy for them to make a joke about, and say something clever and have a pass. So, the way that we've dealt with that is: First, you have to talk for at least three minutes, you run out of clever and cute things to say after three minutes and the truth somehow starts tumbling out. And, secondly, the question has to be about something sort of sacred to you that is hard for you to be kind of just be "haha" about. So, one of the questions that we found to be very effective was to ask people to tell us about their mother. It's one of these things where it's a pretty complex relationship that we have with our parents, and after you've sort of

run out of the things that are polite to say, interesting things come out.

And then the last exercise is kind of a mash-up of Chat Roullette and the confessional booth. So, at some point, usually, you want to wait until about two-thirds of the class, or whatever experience you're doing. You abruptly and randomly plop everybody into a two-person breakout room—without any warning. The best scenario to do it is in the middle of the conversation about something meaty, and then—all of a sudden—they're just alone with one other person. So, the Chat Roulette aspect of it, is obviously all of a sudden you're one-on-one with somebody that you didn't expect. But it's not the same as Chat Roulette because it is somebody you're familiar with. It's not a complete stranger on the internet. It's somebody that you just spent a huge amount of time with and now, you find yourself alone with them. That's also something you can—it's interesting when you give people 30 seconds of that, it's also interesting when you give people five minutes of that. And then the idea is, whatever happens, there's no real directive of what you're supposed to do in the space, when you come back out, that's when you have the group conversation about: "What did you do with that time together?" And how that conversation evolves is sort of interesting. So, that's what we've been working on.

>> Alex: Wow. I love those. They strike me as almost being little experiments as well.

>> Mimi: Yes, they're friendly psychology experiments.

>> Alex: Wow. Well, thank you so much for those, Mimi. They're really fascinating and definitely I can see them being applied in the classroom in so many different ways and yielding so many different results. Thank you for taking the time to share these recipes and your expertise and I wish you well, and all the best, in these times.

>> Mimi: Same here. Thank you.

>> Alex: Thanks, Mimi.