

5 Fun and Effective Ways to Help Young Actors Project Vocally

“More volume, Sasha, more volume!!”

How many times have you found yourself shouting this from the audience when rehearsing with your young actors? If you’re like me, MANY TIMES.

By far one of the biggest challenges when rehearsing with kids is getting them to speak loud enough for the audience to hear. It’s not natural to speak in a “stage voice,” so it takes practice and a lot reminding.

Below are 5 fun and effective ways to get your young actors to keep their vocal energy up!

1. Utilize Blocking. If a scene allows for it, consider staging kids a little farther apart if they have a dialogue exchange. Often if kids are right next to each other they’ll automatically resort to their normal “talking to a friend” voice. However, if they’re farther apart on stage, their natural inclination will be to speak louder. This is particularly effective if you have a hero/villain conflict.

2. Arden the Ant. I often rehearse in an auditorium where there is almost always a clock high up on the far back wall. I like to invent an imaginary character, Arden the Ant, who lives up on that clock and has the tiniest ears. Arden LOVES stories, and so badly wants to enjoy the play. Make sure you speak loud enough so that Arden can hear! Do it for Arden! (No clock? Try an exit sign, a school banner, etc.)

3. Imitation. Imitation is sometimes a quick and easy way to help a kid understand what it feels like to speak at a loud volume. Tell the actor to copy exactly how you say the line. First say it in a normal, quiet voice (the actor repeats). Then say it in a super loud projecting voice (the actor repeats). Tell the actor to remember that energy, that’s what every line should feel like.

4. Student Volume Test. Ask an actor who isn’t in a scene to sit in the back row of the auditorium. Tell him his role is the “volume tester.” Every so often, say “freeze” during rehearsal, turn toward the kids in the back row, and say “volume test!”. The kid will either put thumbs up or thumbs down, depending on whether he could hear the lines. Adjust accordingly. (Another option is to have a full rehearsal where you tell all the actors if you’re not in a scene, you should sit in the back row of the audience. After rehearsal, have them reflect on what they thought about the volume. This will help them understand WHY it’s so important to speak loudly.)

5. High Energy Warm-Up. Before a performance, it’s important that kids are in a high-energy mindset. As close to the curtain time as you can, lead a warm-up that gets them pumped up vocally and physically. Practice making dramatic expressions and lead an ensemble building high-energy call and response.