

# SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH IMPROVISATION

**A workshop for using performance-based improvisation to embody and activate sustainability within any discipline or area of study**  
**First presented at the Center for Teaching and Learning at the University of Colorado (CU) by the Students of Performance for Community Engagement**  
**Taught by Professor Beth Osnes-Stoedefalke**  
**On Oct. 28, 2025**  
**Contact: [Beth.osnes@colorado.edu](mailto:Beth.osnes@colorado.edu)**

**Description:** Themes of sustainability can be integrated into any discipline or area of study through the creative use of improvisation. Research demonstrates that engagement in creativity-- through art forms like improvisation-- contribute to the cultivation of positive social and academic outcomes. Active and embodied forms of learning can energize your classroom by (1) shifting from passive listening to active participation, (2) helping all learners dynamically grasp concepts of sustainability related to your course, and (3) building confidence and a sense of belonging. Experience sample activities and gain guidance in adapting these approaches to your course material. This workshop will be co-facilitated by students in Beth Osnes-Stoedefalke's course, Performance for Community Engagement.



**What is Sustainability:** the practice of meeting present human needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, taking into consideration environmental protection, economic viability (transformation), and social equity.

**What is Improvisation?** the activity of performing something not planned or scripted using whatever can be found. Usually shortened to "improv," it leans into spontaneity within an ensemble in which agreement builds on the co-creation of a story or action.

**Student Groups each explored how SUSTAINABILITY matters within a given Discipline/Subject using IMPROV! Here's how they did that:**

- 1) Create a warmup Improv activity that's fun, active, and builds confidence to introduce sustainability in this Discipline/Subject
  - 2) Create a setup for a short-form improvisation. These are brief, structured scenes with specific rules or constraints that support the participants' creativity. Build this off an aspect of sustainability related to that subject.
  - 3) Create a setup for a long-form improvisation. These are longer, less structured scenes with some parameters but allow for much more freedom of expression, wider exploration, and collective imagining. Build this off an aspect of sustainability related to that subject.
  - 4) Create reflection questions to deepen understanding and create praxis— (theory + Practice = PRAXIS!)
- 

**Improvisational performance has many qualities that benefit sustainability.**

Though these two domains might seem unrelated, the mindset and practices of improvisation can foster more adaptive, inclusive, and resilient approaches to sustainability. Here are key qualities from improvisation that are particularly useful:

1. **Adaptability and Flexibility**
  2. **Collaboration and Active Listening**
  3. **Creativity and Innovation**
  4. **Resourcefulness**
  5. **Equity and Inclusion**
- 

**Disciplines and Areas of Study That Have 3 Part Improv Activity**

***Grab and Go Modules to Use in Your Class!***

- Conservation**- Species Match Up
- Business**- Living Sculptures
- Psychology**- Free Association: Yes, and...
- Women and Gender Studies**- Sustainability and Gender Machine
- Natural Hazards**- Sustainable Storybook
- Food**- Improv on Bananas Going Extinct Due to Climate Change
- Education**- Improv for 1<sup>st</sup> Day of School for Climate Migrant

**Reach Out for Support or with Questions and Ideas—**

**Contact: [Beth.osnes@colorado.edu](mailto:Beth.osnes@colorado.edu)**

**SPIKE Center for Sustainability Education  
University of Colorado**