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## USING PROPS

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If you're in a familiar place right now, stop and look around you. You're probably surrounded by things you've seen a thousand times before. Perhaps some belong to you, or maybe they belong to people you know. Most likely, many of these objects bring to mind particular memories, and some might even elicit an emotional response.

Just as objects can trigger specific thoughts, props can trigger an actor's creativity. Let's say you're given a pencil and then asked to improvise a scene in which it plays a major part. What might you do with a pencil? Your most obvious choice is to write with it. You might write a letter or a grocery list. If you're a bit more creative, you might use the pencil for something other than writing or drawing. You might pry open a lid or maybe punch holes in the top of a shoebox. You're only limited by your imagination.

On the following pages is a list of groups of three common objects. To run the improvisations, select two or three players, assign them three props to be used in the scene, and have them take the stage. Don't suggest role relationships, conflicts, obstacles, or any kind of setting. Their characters and actions should simply evolve from the function and use of the props. Each item must play a key role in the scene. This will be challenging since the items in each group purposely have no obvious connection to each other. At the end of the improvisation, the audience should be able to easily identify which three items were central to the scene.

These scenes may be performed with or without the actual props. If the props are not available, the players can simply pantomime the use of them. As a fun alternative, if you have the actual

props available, tell the players to use the prop for something other than its intended purpose. This will force the actor to stretch his imagination even further. For example, a pencil might be used as a conductor's baton, a knitting needle, a dart, or anything else its shape and size might suggest.

Use the following questions to guide your discussion of the improvisations:

- Were you able to easily identify which three objects were central to the scene?
  - Was each prop truly a key element of the improvisation?
  - Did the players make creative use of their props?
  - Would you have used the props differently?
1. shoe, book, dinner plate
  2. broom, can opener, toilet paper roll
  3. feather duster, potted plant, clock
  4. gravy boat, dental floss, golf ball
  5. pillowcase, stapler, wire hanger
  6. car keys, buttons, rubber band
  7. pencil sharpener, ashtray, string
  8. toothbrush, ice bucket, mousetrap
  9. coasters, lightbulb, curtain rod
  10. thumbtacks, washcloth, thermometer
  11. rolling pin, notebook, nail clippers
  12. dog collar, paper clips, cocktail shaker
  13. wallet, vase, hammer
  14. alarm clock, toilet brush, cookie sheets