

# CASE STUDY



## Quick Facts

### Location:

Finkl Academy [Co-ed]  
2332 S Western Ave.  
Chicago, IL

### Class Level:

1st Class in 2011:  
7th Grade  
2nd Class in 2012:  
7th and 8th Graders  
Ages: 10-15

### Frequency:

once a week for 5 weeks.

### Curriculum:

Each class two hours:  
1st hour improv; 2nd hour stand up.

### Objective -

Introduce students to stand up and improv; encourage writing, reading and public speaking; encourage critical thought of their world; and provide a safe environment to be a kid and be heard without distractions.

### References:

**Mrs. Karla Russell**  
Teacher at Finkl Academy [KJ  
Russell@cps.edu]

### Ms. Soli Santos

Professional Comic  
[solisantoscomedy@gmail.com]

## FINKL ACADEMY – LIL' COMIX KIDS COMEDY CLASS

2332 SOUTH WESTERN AVE., CHICAGO IL

### Inspiration

Inspired by a volunteer opportunity, to read to a second grade classroom at Finkl Academy here in Chicago; Mona Aburmishan wanted to know if teaching comedy in the same school for the older classmen would be possible.

As a stand up comic who has taken courses at Second City for comedy writing and improvisational acting as well as the Feminine Comique at the Lincoln Lodge, Mona could see the potential for connecting kids and comedy. Similarly she wanted to explore the possibility of offering kids between the ages of 10-15 years old a five-week course in stand up comedy and improvisational comedy. Would kids be interested in learning the art of joke structure and improv? What are some predicted and unforeseen outcomes of a course where they are asked to assess the world around them through reading, writing and public speaking in a witty fashion for humor and entertainment? Finally, would this group be interested in helping promote and produce a final comedy show at the end of the five weeks for their peers and parents?

Amazingly, for two hours a week Mona voluntarily taught comedy while unknowingly empowering a class full of young inner-city students to freely pursue their dreams in an environment where gang violence, drug and shootings are commonplace.

### Idea and Concept

Mona Aburmishan approached the Philanthropic Committee at her firm, which had a longstanding relationship with the Finkl Academy. She provided background on her experience as a student of comedy as well as a professional comedienne performing throughout Chicago and other cities in the US. Immediately the committee liked the idea and approached the Finkl Academy liaison and teacher Mrs Karla Russell. In an interesting twist, Mrs. Russell had also graduated from Second City's school of Improv and loved the idea. She helped Mona gain support from the Academy Faculty and staff as well as offered her class as the first to take the Kids Comedy Class [see first showcase poster at top left].

The class would meet once a week for five weeks for two hours. The first hour was dedicated to playing well known, youth appropriate improvisational games such as Freeze and Zip-Zap-Zop; to name a few. The second hour was dedicated to teaching students the forms of stand up, joke structure and story telling. Many tools and guidelines came from *The Comedy Bible* by Julie Carter. Writing soon became a very large and exciting component of the class.

At the end of the five weeks, a class production and comedy show was produced at Finkl Academy during school hours where the interested students performed for their peers, parents and family as well as faculty and staff during the school day. The firm Mona worked with provided the promotional materials such as fliers and artwork [see top left corner]. The students were encouraged to invite parents and family members as well as create the show's layout and program agenda.

### Intended and Unforeseen Results

As a result to the class students became comfortable speaking in public as well as performing in front of their peers. Students also displayed a level of confidence and compassion as they assisted each other in their joke ideas and improv acting. Students that received constant praise in their jokes and ideas soon became leaders amongst their group and were often asked to contribute ideas and help tighten up a joke. Similarly,

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these leaders were also known to take charge and perform first at the beginning of class, making it safe for timid students to perform afterwards.

Most importantly, it soon became apparent that through their connection students began to display more 'youth appropriate ideas' and the façade of a tough gangster washed away. The kids, it seemed, felt comfortable in the space to be a kid. The topics of drugs, sex, gangs and violence typical of the surrounding community, television programming and video games no longer provided as the focal point of their comedy.

### Benefits

Students became

- More confident speaking publically;
- Comfortable expressing their ideas;
- Quickly avoided cursing, topics involving violence, sex, drugs and gangs; while still critically analysing the world around them;
- Began researching background to make their jokes stronger by gaining more information on a subject they were interested in;
- Began to write more observational humor and assessments of their family, school and overall environment;
- Displayed more compassion and respect towards their peers through assistance with joke ideas, structure and improv acting topics or accents;

### Going Forward

The Kids Comedy Class continue to run in the Fall Semester of 2012 and Spring Semester 2013 at the Finkl Academy. However, this year the syllabus and course outline will be tied to the US Common Core Standards for education and development as outlined <http://www.corestandards.org> as well as more efficiently document the results of our course as it fits into the Understanding by Design format. In addition to Mona, two additional locally based male and female comedians have been invited to assist in classroom instruction and discussion.

Mona has been asked by the world famous Laugh Factory owner and comedy guru Jamie Massada to help head-up the Chicago Chapter of their well known 27 year old Comedy Summer Camp for kids at the new Laugh Factory here in Chicago.

Mona is looking forward to introducing the Kids Comedy Class to the Chicago Public Schools after school program.