

**Study Guide**  
**For a Mime Residency**  
**by Jef**

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## DEFINITION OF THE WORD "MIME"

The origin of the word mime (rhymes with "time") is the same as that of imitate, mimic, and pantomime. It can be used as a noun, meaning a person who does mime: "I am a mime." It can also mean the art form: "The standard definition of mime is the art of silent communication, although it is both silent and noisy these days. Do some mime for me." Or it can mean a skit, sketch, or act which utilizes mime: "Red Skelton and Marcel Marceau did a mime about a parade." Used as a verb, to mime means to act out a story, an idea, or a feeling: "Let me mime a turtle in a hurry." Finally when used to describe an imaginary object it can be an adjective: "Here is some mime food." In our English language today, we use the words mime and pantomime interchangeably: they mean the same thing.

When I teach a workshop, depending on the age of the participants, I define mime as "Using your body to say something," or "Non-verbal communication." This broader definition allows the students to understand that everyday gestures as well as the body language of our feelings are a good starting point for understanding the art form of mime.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF MIME

Mime has been with us since the first cave people acted out their experiences of the hunt. The ancient Greeks used mime in religious ceremonies (the word "mime" is derived from the Greek language). Two thousand years ago the Romans staged popular mime performances in the arena and made mimes the priests of Apollo. Many African cultures currently incorporate mime into their community celebrations and religious rituals. For centuries, many Asian cultures have blended mime and masks into intricate dances, dramas, and storytelling (Noh, Bungaku, and Kabuki dramas and Kathakali dance). Historically and today, many Native American communities weave mime into their religious and cultural lives (Cherokee Eagle Dance).

During the European Middle Ages, mime remained a part of religious instruction, particularly in mystery and morality plays. In the sixteenth century, mime emerged from churches and came back to the stage and into the streets for pure entertainment in the form of the Italian Commedia dell'Arte. One of its cast of stock characters was called Pierrot, the clown fool, and another was known as Arlecchino (Harlequin).

A man in nineteenth century Paris named Deburau expanded the traditional Pierrot from a minor slapstick character to the center of serious drama. Without a word, he acted out stories about Pierrot, his life and love. He was the first modern European mime.

The French mime, Marcel Marceau, came up from this tradition started by Deburau, adding some modern French influences to make his whimsical character called, "Bip." In the United States, the modern mime tradition begins with the silent films of Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, and other film artists of the twenties and early thirties. Today we see mimes on T.V. like Red Skelton and Bill Irwin. Actors Dick Van Dyke, Jackie Gleason, and Robin Williams; as well as rock singer David Bowie all studied mime.

**JEF**

Currently Jef performs as a mime and mask theater as *The InterACTIVE Theater of Jef*. He also teaches mime, ensemble techniques and composition through educational residencies and performs *Stories & Mime* with storyteller Louise Omoto Kessel.

Jef apprenticed with with C.W. Metcalf and Tony Montanaro, with brief instruction from Jacques Lecoq. His other studies include: acting with William Hickey, period dance and style with William Burdick, ballet with Beverly Shalomith, modern dance with Carol Richards, commedia dell'arte at the Del'Arte School, and clowning with Ezekiel Peterhof. Other skills gained along the way include juggling, unicycling, stiltwalking, maskmaking, and gourd crafting.

From 1976 to 1993 Jef was a member TOUCH, North Carolina's touring mime theater ensemble. With TOUCH Jef created, collaborated on, directed, and performed over fifty mime theater works, touring thousands of performances to audiences throughout the southeastern United States. They performed in hospitals and prisons, day care centers and college fine arts centers, in concert halls, and on television. They appeared at Lincoln Center's Out-of-Doors Festival in New York and the Alternate ROOTS Festival in Atlanta. The North Carolina Symphony and the Charlotte Symphony both commissioned TOUCH to create and perform original works in concert with them. In 1990, TOUCH received the North Carolina Theater Conference Award For Excellence In Theater for Youth.

Jef has appeared in two UNC-TV special productions with the North Carolina Symphony: *TOUCH Brings Music to Life*, and *Carnival of the Animals*. When his movement/mime skills have been needed, he's also appeared in productions by other theater companies, including: as the plant, Audrey II in Atlanta and Raleigh productions of *Little Shop of Horrors*; as The Mute in Flat Rock Playhouse and Temple Theater productions of *The Fantasticks*; as a street performer/juggler in the opera *Pagliacci*; and as a dog, an alien, and a mime in productions of the Jelly Educational Theater. From 1995 through 1999, Jef was the Managing Director for the Jelly Educational Theater. For three years, Jef performed as the mascot for the Durham Bulls Baseball Team, Wool E. Bull.

## **INTRODUCTION TO CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

Mime uses the creative instrument everyone has: our body. We all can use our bodies to express our ideas and feelings, including those of us who don't speak English well, or who have trouble reading. Jef has many years of experience teaching mime in classrooms, and one truth keeps appearing: children who are struggling academically often excel in mime class. Please keep an eye out for your gifted physical learners. Offer them opportunities to use their creativity and expressive bodies in your class. It will thrill them to excel at something in school.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES**

### **EVERYDAY BODY LANGUAGE**

Talk about everyday gestures we use to communicate without words. Ask students to show some gestures they know. (Try "Come here," "Pew!," "Stop!," and "I don't know.") Have them think of other gestures. Ask them to think of jobs where people use gestures to communicate. (construction site directing a crane operator, parking cars, directing traffic...).

### **WE SEE AND UNDERSTAND BODY LANGUAGE INSTANTLY**

Talk about how we express different emotions using our faces and the way we move our bodies. Ask students to show how they would sit if they were happy, sad, scared, angry, etc. Note that there are no correct, right, or wrong answers here. Different people do different things for the same emotion. Have students look around for differences.

### **WE CAN OBSERVE AND ANALYZE BODY LANGUAGE**

The word imitate derives from the same root as the word mime. Have students pick someone everyone knows (from outside the classroom) or an animal, and try to imitate the way she/he/it walks, moves, sits, and gestures. Make it a guessing game if they are good at it: have one student do the imitation while others guess who it is.

### **IMAGINARY CIRCUMSTANCES**

Have students recall an everyday activity (brushing teeth, reading a book...) and try to show what they are doing without using any props.

### **IMAGINARY OBJECTS**

Have students think of a specific object they know how to use (pencil, baseball bat, glass of water...) and try to show what they have without using any props.

### MIME SKETCHES

Have students make up a short mime sketch with a partner and show it to the class. Have the audience describe what they saw. Focus all comments and descriptions on discovering how to better communicate the mime idea presented, rather than about any portion of the sketch that did not work.

### MIME INTERPRETATIONS

Have the students mime a story they have read- sort of a mime book report. They could also mime a story they have written, or a drawing they have created, or a poem.... They could also mime the poem, story, etc, while it is being read.

### RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Have the students look up and report on one of these subjects: mime, pantomime, juggling, body language, non-verbal communication, anatomy, kinesics, sports medicine, clowns, circus skills, or vaudeville (as well as any of the styles of theater mentioned in the enclosed history of mime section).

### PHONICS REINFORCEMENT

Play a version of charades where words that begin with a particular, known phonics sound are acted out. You can actually play charades using almost any category from your curriculum.

### STATUES

Using a list of words (vocabulary list...spelling list...) say a word and have the students become a statue that embodies the meaning or activity of that word. This can also be done as moving statues.

### **SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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- Enters, Angna; On Mime, Middleton, Connecticut, Wesleyan University Press, 1965
- Felner, Mira; Apostles of Silence: the Modern French Mimes, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984
- Kerrigan, Sheila, The Performers Guide to the Collaborative Process, Heinemann, 2001
- Kipnis, Claude; The Mime Book, New York, Harper & Row, 1974
- Montanaro, Tony; Mime Spoken Here: a Guide to Personal Style of Performance, 1995
- Muir, Howard; Improvisation and Mime, Theatre Communications Group, 1998
- Stolzenberg, Mark; Exploring Mime
- Straub, Cindie and Matthew; Mime: Basics for Beginners, 1984

### **SELECTED MEDIA RESOURCES**

- The General*; a film by Buster Keaton
- The Goldrush, Shanghaied, The Tramp, The Kid*; or any other films by Charlie Chaplin
- Illusions* and *Mime Spoken Here*- videos by Tony Montanaro: excellent for self teaching mime principles and techniques
- The Mime of Marcel Marceau* and *Pantomimes*; both great examples of mime by Marcel Marceau
- Mr. Hulot's Holiday*; a film by Jacques Tati