

Study Guide For Teachers

Bill Bowers
in
Mime Over Matter

Presented by
Young Audiences

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ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Master mime and Broadway veteran Bill Bowers brings his lively and thought provoking show to your school. *Mime Over Matter* explores a variety of subjects using music and pantomime. Bowers can tailor a performance to the specific interests or needs of your school. It's a perfect way to kick off a workshop or residency in mime and silent storytelling.

LEARNING GOALS

The students will:

- Develop a deeper understanding of non-verbal body language
- Observe how much communication occurs without words
- Experiment with movement to express thoughts and feelings non-verbally.

ARTIST INFORMATION

A native of Montana, Bill grew up under the expansive Big Sky of the American Northwest. A small-town boy with big dreams--and an even bigger imagination-- he graduated from Montana's Rocky Mountain College with the Dean's Cup, President's Award, and was Valedictorian. After graduation he headed East to New Jersey where he continued his collegiate studies and earned an MFA from Rutgers University's Mason Gross School of the Arts. As an actor, mime and educator, Bill has performed throughout the United States, Canada, and Europe. Bill's extensive training and heartfelt personal style of acting and pantomime have led him on a incredible journey from regional stage to tours, television, film, and Broadway. As a student of life, Bill continues to develop and hone his craft, by combining critically acclaimed stage performances in plays and musicals with tours of his original mime shows and educational workshops and residencies.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

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, Bugaku, and Kabuki dramas and Kathakali dance). Historically and today, many Native American communities weave mime into their religious and cultural lives.

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, and Robin Williams; as well as rock singer David Bowie all studied mime.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM

Please discuss the following topics:

- ◆ Theater etiquette
- ◆ Participation etiquette
- ◆ "Willing suspension of disbelief"

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....).

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.

VOCABULARY WORDS

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.

AFTER THE PROGRAM

1. 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.
2. Have students recall an everyday activity (brushing teeth, reading a book...) and try to show what they are doing without using any props.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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.
7. 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.

RESOURCES

www.bill-bowers.com
www.americanacademyofmime.org
www.marceau.org

Selected Bibliography

Alberts, David; *Talking About Mime*, Heinemann, 1995
Burgess, Hovey; *Circus Techniques*, New York, Thomas Y. Crowell, 1976
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
Montanaro, Tony; *Mime Spoken Here: a Guide to Personal Style of Performance*, 1995
Muir, Howard; *Improvisation and Mime*, Theatre Communications Group, 1998
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