

Communicate! Collaborate! Create! Mime!

A Theatre Arts, Healthful Living, and English Language Arts Residency

for

Second Through Eighth Grade Students

by

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Sheila Kerrigan

Ms. Kerrigan is a mime, director, teaching artist, and author of

The Performers' Guide to the Collaborative Process. She performs her show for children, *The Scientific Mime, or What's Up With Gravity?*, and her show for adults, *Mime Explains String Theory!* She conducts residencies in schools, after-schools, colleges, and community settings and leads professional development sessions for teachers and teaching artists. She served on Alternate ROOTS' Resources for Social Change Training Team, and has taught *Community-Based Performance* at Duke University. She facilitates the creation of original performances with community groups. As co-director of TOUCH Mime Theater for 17 years, she collaboratively created twenty original performances and toured the eastern U.S.



Sheila has conducted residencies for arts councils and universities, performed and taught in prisons, juvenile detention centers, hospitals, in corporate settings, street festivals, and on television, and has directed for Jelly Educational Theater. She is president of the Southeast Center for Arts Integration, and she was a North Carolina A+ Fellow for 15 years.

Suggestions for Classroom Activities Before the Mime Residency

- 1) Discuss mime, its definition and history. Below is some information you can use:

Definition

The origin of the word **mime** (rhymes with time) is the same as that of **imitate**, **mimic**, and **pantomime**. In ancient Greek, **pan** or **panto** means everything, and **mimos** means to imitate, act, or dramatize, usually without words, and sometimes as a burlesque or farce.

It is used as a noun, meaning a person who does mime: "I am a mime." Many mimes create invisible objects and suggest whole worlds by using only their bodies to communicate.

It can also mean the art form: "Mime is the art of silent communication, although not all mimes are silent."

Mime as a noun can also mean a skit, sketch, or act which involves mime: "Red Skelton did a mime about a parade." "Do some mime for me—show me the wall."

Used as a verb, to mime means to act out a story, an idea or a feeling: "I will

Skeleton did a mime about a parade. Do some mime for me—show me the wall.

Used as a verb, to mime means to act out a story, an idea or a feeling: “I will mime a turtle in a hurry.”



Finally, it can be an adjective: “Here is some mime food. Eat up!”

We use the words mime and pantomime interchangeably; they mean almost the same thing.

Commedia dell'Arte troupe *Gelosì* in a late 16th-century Flemish painting ([Musée Carnavalet](http://www.musee-carnavalet.com/), Paris) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Commedia_dell'arte

History

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. 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 story-telling. Many Native American communities today 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**, with its cast of stock characters, one of whom was Pierrot, the clown/fool.

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**, (who died in September, 2007) came up from the tradition started by Deburau, adding some modern French influences to create his whimsical character called, “Bip.”

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Marcel_Marceau

In the United States, the modern mime tradition begins with the silent films of **Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd**, and other film artists of the twenties and early thirties who got





Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd, and other film artists of the twenties and early thirties who got their start in Vaudeville.



Marcel Marceau as Bip.

Charlie Chaplin

Contemporary Mime

Contemporary mime does not always have to be silent—many mimes use music, and dialogue. Some mimes use masks, props, and sets to create their imaginary worlds.

Some performers who use mime in their work are/were **Michael Jackson** (his moonwalk is a mime technique), **David Bowie** (he studied mime), **Red Skelton, Dick Van Dyke, Robin Williams, Shields and Yarnell**, the Swiss mask group, **Mummenshantz, Cirque Du Soleil, Blue Man Group** and the **Mentos and Coca Cola** guys. **Hip hop dance** and **break dance** incorporate many mime techniques like the robot, the wave, the moonwalk, isolations and separations.

- 2) Talk about every-day **gestures** we use to communicate without words. Ask students to show some gestures they are familiar with. (**Gesture**: a motion of the body or part of the body to express or emphasize ideas, emotions, etc.) Some common gestures to start off the conversation are: waving, “Hi;” crooking the finger toward yourself to say, “Come here;” showing agreement or approval with a thumbs-up; making a face to show, “Yuck!” Different cultures use different gestures to mean different things; if you have a multi-cultural classroom, this could be an entrée into conversation about different cultural communication norms.
- 3) Talk about how we express different emotions using our faces and bodies. Ask students to show how they would sit if they were feeling happy, sad, scared, angry. Note that different people do different things for the same feelings. Have students look around and identify specific differences in how others are expressing their emotions—what is different about the posture, the placement of feet, legs, arms, hands, heads, and the facial expressions?
- 4) Have students remember an every-day activity and show what it is without using any props; have them mime the objects. This exercise can be changed to show some activity you’ve never done, or something you are good at, or a place you’d like to go, or a word that starts with a certain letter or phoneme, or a scene from a story you’ve been reading—just about anything can be mimed.
- 5) Show a video: (See resources list at end.)

After viewing a film, discuss the ways the artist uses movement and image to communicate, how or if the silence contributes to the power of the communication, what is lost and what is gained by using non-verbal communication, and how the audience is affected.

After Residency

Enriched Assessment Activities:

- Students write and illustrate a story based on the mime pieces they created, including information about character, place, action, conflict, and resolution. They read their stories to the class. Class members give positive critiques.
- Students in groups create and perform for the class a mime piece that summarizes a story they have been reading

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Selected Resources

Books

- Hamblin, Kay, *Mime, A Playbook of Silent Fantasy*, Garden City, NY Doubleday, 1978.
- Kerrigan, Sheila, *The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process*, Portland, NH, Heinemann, 2001.
- Kipnis, Claude, *The Mime Book*, New York, Harper and Row, 1974.
- Montanaro, Tony, *Mime Spoken Here, The Performer's Portable Workshop*, Tilbury House, 1995.
- Spolin, Viola, *Improvisation for the Theatre*, Evanston, Ill. Northwestern University Press, 1963.
- Towsen, John, *Clowns*, New York, Hawthorn Books, 1976.

Videos

An excerpt from my children's show, "The Scientific Mime, or What's Up With Gravity?"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5r-thWzzg8o&t=67s>

A lecture-demonstration about mime from "The Mime Who Talks!"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=furR1Y9jBTw&t=5s>

ET The Mime:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPMBV3rd_hl

Clown Princes of Hollywood, 27 minutes.

Charlie Chaplin: excerpt from *The Circus* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79j84xYelZI>

Charlie Chaplin: excerpt from *Modern Times* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPSK4zZtzLI>

Charlie Chaplin: excerpt from *The Gold Rush*, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gY0DOnNK3Wg>,

Charlie Chlaplin: *Shanghied*, 25 minutes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fWtSXX35ObI>

Charlie Chaplin: *The Tramp*, 25 minutes, or *The Kid*, 52 minutes.

E. Reid Gilbert and Robin Pyle's *The Art of Mime*, 30 minutes.

Buster Keaton's *The General*, 55 Minutes, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHlBMKtgPOA>

Marcel Marceau: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XEsfpRrfXf4>

Tony Montanaro: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5bEGiJUgr4>

Jacques Tati's *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LwilYoJx5Es&t=56s>

Mamako Yoneyama's *Baggage*.

