

**Study Guide for a Performance of
The Scientific Mime, or What's Up with Gravity?
by Sheila Kerrigan**

About the Performer

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Sheila Kerrigan studied mime with CW Metcalf and Tony Montanaro and several other American & European mimes. She co-founded, co-directed and performed original work in twenty states with TOUCH Mime Theater. She directed original children's plays for Jelly Educational Theater. She is the author of *The Performer's Guide to the Collaborative Process*. She teaches mime, juggling and movement for the actor to young people. She teaches teachers how to use drama and dance to deepen learning in subjects like English, Science, and Social Studies. She works with youth to create original performances about ideas and issues important to the young people.

She is the president of the Southeast Center for Arts Integration. She has taught "Community-Based Performance: Where Art and Activism Intersect" at Duke.

About the Performance

The Scientific Mime! or, What's Up With Gravity? is a new show that combines the theatre art form of mime with scientific principles. It includes a silent mime piece, called, "Angela," a lecture-demonstration that connects mime stories to literary stories, and some juggling, including dropping, that inquires about gravity, force, and direction. The main piece explores forces and motion the way only a mime can. It is interactive—students will be encouraged to read aloud, repeat sound-and-motion gestures for key vocabulary, and perhaps participate in other ways, with prompting from the mime.

Ms. Kerrigan can lead a workshops with students that allow them to explore forces and motion with their bodies.

Some of the standards illustrated in the performance (From NCSCoS, Science):

2.P.1 Understand the relationship between sound and vibrating objects. 2.P.1.1 Illustrate how sound is produced by vibrating objects....

3.P.1 Understand motion and factors that affect motion. 3.P.1.3 Explain the effects of earth's gravity on the motion of any object on or near the earth.

3.P.2.1 Recognize that air is a substance that surrounds us, takes up space and has mass.

4.P.1 Explain how various forces affect the motion of an object.

4.P.3.1 Recognize the basic forms of energy (light, sound, heat, electrical, and magnetic) as the ability to cause motion or create change.

5.P.1 Understand force, motion, and the relationship between them.

5.P.1.1 Explain how factors such as gravity, friction, and change in mass affect the motion of objects.

7.P.1.2 Explain the effects of balanced and unbalanced forces acting on an object (including friction, gravity, and magnets.)

7.P.2.4 Explain how simple machines such as inclined planes, pulleys, levers, and wheel and axles are used to create mechanical advantage and increase efficiency.

Note to Teacher

Mime uses the creative instrument everyone has: our body. We can all use our bodies to express our ideas and feelings, even those of us who don't speak English, or who have trouble reading. Many of the children who shine when they do mime are kinesthetic learners, and they may struggle in sit-down class work. As a teacher, please keep an eye out for the children who show talent as mimes. Offer them opportunities to use their creativity and expressive bodies in your class. Let them mime a book report or act out a scene from history or embody a scientific principle.

Suggestions for Classroom Activities Before the Mime Performance

1)

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

English Language Arts RF.4 Know & apply grade-level phonics and word analysis skills in decoding words.

Origin of the Word "Mime"

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 farce.

Definition of Mime

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 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.



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

History

Theatre Arts Grades 3-8.CU.1 Analyze theatre in terms of the social, historical, and cultural contexts in which it was created.

Mime has been with us since the first humans 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 incorporate mime and mask 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 and clowning 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 2007) came up from the tradition started by Deburau, adding some modern French influences to create his whimsical character called, "Bip."

Marcel Marceau as Bip. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Marcel_Marceau

In the United States, the modern mime tradition takes off with the silent films of **Charlie Chaplin, Buster Keaton, Harold Lloyd**, and other film artists of the twenties and early thirties who got their start in Vaudeville.

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 people who used mime in their work were **Michael Jackson** (his moonwalk is a mime technique), **David Bowie** (he started as a mime), **Red Skelton, Dick Van Dyke**, and **Robin Williams. Shields and Yarnell**, the Swiss mask group, **Mummenshantz, Cirque Du Soleil, Blue Man Group** and the **Mentos and Coca Cola** guys all incorporate mime. **Hip Hop dancers** incorporate many mime techniques like the robot, the wave, the moonwalk, isolations and separations.



Charlie Chaplin

2)

Talk about every-day gestures and how we express emotions

Theatre Arts Grade 3.C.1.1 Use non-verbal expression to communicate elements of characterization, including age and physicality. Grades 4-5.C.1.1 Use a variety of postures, gaits, and mannerisms to express character.... Grades 6-8.C.1.1 Use physical movement & acting skills to express a variety of emotions...

We use **gestures** 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: 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, a discussion about gestures and their meaning could be an entrée into conversation about different cultural communication norms.

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?



3) Show everyday activities

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.

4) Show a video:

- Sheila Kerrigan: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xns7RRpDFTg>
- ET The Mime: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPMBV3rd_hl
- Charlie Chaplin’s *The Circus*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=79i84xYeIZI>,
- *Modern Times*: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfGs2Y5WJ14>, *Gold Rush*, 55 minutes, *Shanghied*, 25 minutes, *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=VCU3zYLDtSw>
- Marcel Marceau’s *The Mime of Marcel Marceau*, or *Pantomimes*.



Buster Keaton "The Cameraman"1928. Image courtesy MPTV.net

- Tony Montanaro's *Illusions*.
- Jacques Tati's *Mr. Hulot's Holiday*.
- Mamako Yoneyama's *Baggage*.
- *Clown Princes of Hollywood*, 27 minutes.

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 by the use of movement and image to communicate.

Books on Mime

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.

Audience Etiquette For Theater Performances

- Turn off, tune in. Switch off your electronic devices. Don't take photographs or text during the show. The performer can see you.
- Listen and watch attentively!
- Shhhh. • Don't talk, eat, or drink. It's not TV. Real people are up there. No snacking. Throw away your gum.
- Laugh. If it's funny.
- Cry. If it's sad.
- Open your mouth like you're really impressed. If you're really impressed!
- Clap! (But in the right places). For musicals, it's fine to clap after songs. For dramas, though, reserve clapping for intermission, breaks and the final curtain. At the end of the show, you want to do something so the actors know you liked it, so clap.
- Got to go? Use the restroom before the show. If it's an emergency, quietly excuse yourself and leave the theater. But only if it's an emergency.
 - Most importantly, enjoy the show!

What to say to an actor before a show

Wish Them Well. Say, “Break a leg!” Though it doesn’t sound nice, it is. To an actor, “break a leg” means “good luck.”
What to say to an actor after a show. “Great show!”

About Theater

Some important terms to know about a play or a musical:

- **Setting** (where does the story take place? when?)
- **Characters** (who are the people?)
- **Plot** (what happens?)
- **Theme** (what is the Big Idea?)
- **Structure:** Acts and Scenes (how is the play “built”?)
- **Style** (how again: - realistic? fantastical? futuristic? – etc.)

Some important **people** who make a play or a musical happen:

- **Playwright** (writes the play)
- **Director** (works with the cast and crew to make it all come together)
- **Actors** (the **cast** of the show)
- **Designers** (design the costumes, set, lighting, and sound)

Some elements of theater

- **Set:** The theater space—furniture, walls, windows, doors, scene— the set tells where and when the play happens
- **Props:** objects that actors pick up and use on stage, like teacups, knives, forks & spoons
- **Costumes:** What the performers wear—costumes communicate character, time, place, status
- **Lighting:** Communicates mood, time of day, weather, and also sheds light on the stage.
- **Sound:** Music and sound effects, as well as amplification of the actors’ voices.

Suggested Classroom Follow-up Activities

1)

Questions for Discussion After Performance

Theatre Arts Grades 3-8.A.1 Analyze literary texts and performances.

What have you learned about mime, body language, and gestures?

English Language Arts Grade 3.SL.3.2 Determine the main ideas & supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats... **Grade 4.SL.4.4** Report on a topic or text...using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes...**Grade 5.SL.5.2** summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media & formats...

What did you understand was happening during the silent mime (“Angela”)? What story was she telling? Who was she? Where was she? What objects did you see? What was the sequence of events? What happened to her? How did you figure that out? (How did you infer that?) What clues did she show that allowed you to make an educated guess about what was happening?

How is mime different from and similar to other genres of theatre? How is it different from the audience’s point of view? Were you watching in a different way? How would you describe your experience as an audience member?

2)

Theatre Arts Grades 3-8.C.1 Use movement, voice, & writing to communicate ideas & feelings. C.2 Use performance to communicate ideas & feelings.

Have students make up a short mime sketch, with a partner or two, and show it to the class. Have the audience describe what they saw using only positive language: What I saw; what I felt; what I thought; what I liked; what might make it better.

3)

Have students mime a story they have read or do a mime book report. They can also mime a poem, or do a mime to a song, or mime a dream they had, or mime a historical event or use their bodies to mime a scientific concept like the water cycle or land forms or the solar system or magnetic force or basic tools like levers.

