

Trent Arterberry • Think Bigg • Study-Guide

Educational Content

Think Bigg is a program of mime, storytelling and puppetry which introduces children to humankind's oldest form of communication. It helps children to become aware of their bodies and their imaginations as powerful tools of self-expression.

Students first learn about the various components of non-verbal communication, including gesture and body language. Later they become involved right in their seats learning classic mime techniques like tug-of-war, the wall and the balloon.

In *Roboman* we see a familiar mime illusion updated with music and live sound effects. In *Scuba Dude* we see three characters resolve their conflicts in an undersea environment. *Mr Bigg* is a unique example of imaginative puppetry.

Synopsis of Program

Roboman

—Ratcheting Roboman discovers the limits—and reaches—of his own body.

Scuba Dude

—In this undersea adventure, Scuba Dude fends off sharks only to nearly succumb to the pain of a broken heart.

TV

—Who is watching whom in this tale of media manipulation?

Balloon

—The audience learns this illusion in their seats as Trent shows how to use it to create an entire story.

Suggest an Object

—The audience gets a chance to make suggestions which Trent improvises.

Easy Mime

—A volunteer performs a mime duet with Trent and is rewarded with a full white-face make-up.

Mr. Bigg

—Trent creates the “world’s greatest



dancer” with a three-foot-tall puppet and a medley of toe-tapping tunes.

Suggested Audience Behavior

As with any theatre performance, Trent requests that during the show no photographs or video be taken. In order to enjoy this show students must really pay attention. Although Trent will speak to the audience, much of the show is non-verbal, and students will understand it from his facial expressions and body language. It is important that students focus and keep noise to a minimum. We also encourage students to enjoy the show, and to laugh and applaud at appropriate times.

Pre-Performance Activities–Discussion

- Discuss appropriate audience behavior, as described above.
- Ask the children if they know what mime is, and arrive at a definition.
- Ask if the children can think of any mimes on TV or movies today (Mr. Bean). Ask if they can think of a performer who uses a lot of facial expres-

sion (Jim Carey).

- Define illusion, and ask if the kids can think of a performer who uses mime illusions (Michael Jackson and the moonwalk).
- Think of some ways that people communicate without words in everyday life.
- Tell children that one hundred years ago movies were silent, and that there were great mime/clown stars such as Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton.
- Read a book about robots, marine life or mermaids, appropriate to the grade level, to stimulate interest in one of the themes in the show
- A good book for primary audiences is Remy Charlip’s *Fortunately*, which Trent often performs in the show.

Glossary of Terms

The following terms are either taught directly or implied by the performance. An introduction or review of them would be a good pre-or post-show activity.

Mime—the art of telling a story through movements of the body.

Gesture—a movement of the hands or body that communicates or emphasizes an idea or feeling.

Posture—a shape of the body that expresses an attitude or character.

Illusion—the appearance of something happening that is not really happening.

Isolation—moving one part of the body separately from the rest.

Character—a type of person. A participant in a story.

Conflict—the dramatic struggle of a story created by opposing needs or desires of the characters.

Environment—the place or setting where a story occurs.

Improvisation—the act of performing a scene without preparation.

Post-Performance Activities— Educational Goals and Questions for Discussion

The educational goals of *Think Bigg*:

1. To introduce the concept of a “live performance” structure and what it means to be an audience.
 - *How do you know when sketches begin and end?*
 - *How do you know when to applaud?*
 - *How is this performance different from TV?*
2. To demonstrate and make conscious the expressive ability of the human body.
 - *Give examples or show how Trent communicated his feelings with his face and body.*
3. To introduce and teach several techniques of classic mime which create the illusion of action and allows the mime to tell a story.
 - *Name some of the illusions that Trent used to tell his stories.*
 - *Practice some of the illusions the students learned during the show.*
4. To teach elements of theatre such as character, environment and conflict.
 - *Identify these elements in the Scuba Dude scene.*
 - *Identify these elements in some other familiar stories.*
5. To introduce mime as an art form.
 - *What are some of the skills that would be required to be a professional mime?*
 - *What would it be like to travel around doing shows for schools?*
6. To demonstrate story-theatre performance, and the structure of beginning, middle and end.
 - *Think of some stories that might make good story-theatre tales.*

Mime Illusions

Following are some mime illusions that are introduced in the show. After seeing them, teachers can use these instructions to teach the illusions to students.

Isolation:

The basis of mime technique is a move called isolation. When we isolate a part of the body, we move it separately. For example, we can isolate the head by moving it forward and backward (like a chicken).

A little more difficult is isolating the head side to side. Start by bringing your hands up over your head, putting your fingertips together. Pretend that you are whispering secrets to you and listen to each elbow by sliding your head towards the elbow.

Practice in front of a mirror. When you can do it, slowly bring your arms down and keep your head moving side to side.



If you can move your head side to side, add in the forward and backward movement, and you will get a circular head isolation. This is an eye-catching move that will impress your friends and...scare your enemies!

The Wall:

The wall illusion is probably the most effective and recognizable mime illusion, and the easiest to learn.

Start by placing your hands on the wall, fingers outstretched, hands hard and flat. When you take one hand off the wall, let it relax. When you put it

back, make it hard and flat, slapping it into place, one hand at a time. (Make sure the other hand stays hard and flat on the wall.)

Now try a little isolation. Keep your hands in place as you move your body side to side. Try to feel your hands touching the wall as you move your body.

Now let's put it all together. Move your right hand to the right about twelve inches. Then move your left hand to the right twelve inches. Bring your body up to your hands by stepping with the right foot, then the left. The rhythm should be hand, hand, step, step; hand, hand, step, step. Practice in front of a mirror to help you see if you are doing it correctly.

The Balloon:

Take the balloon out of your pocket and shake it out. Hold it in both hands and stretch it out. Try to feel the resistance as you stretch the balloon. Place the balloon to your lips, and hold it with your fingertips. Begin to blow and use your hands to show it filling with air. Each time you blow a breath your hands move outward a little with the expanding balloon.

Now use your hands to trace the circular shape of the balloon from top to bottom. Take the balloon from your lips with one hand, and with the other, stretch the end of the balloon, wrap it around, and tie it nice and tight.

Hold the balloon in one hand to the side of the body. The balloon begins to float up into the air, and your hand goes up with it. Use your other hand to pull your arm back down. The balloon pulls your hand and arm up a little further, and you pull it back down.

Next the balloon pulls your hand, your arm and your shoulder, and you pull it back down.

The last time it pulls your hand, arm, shoulder and pulls your body up to your tiptoes. Let go of the balloon, watch it float away, and wave goodbye.

The Robot:

The robot is a fun and familiar mime illusion. This illusion is an extreme example of isolation. The robot moves one part of the body at a time. Like turning the head to right, then center, to the left, then center. Make each movement crisp, and pause between each movement.

Try not to blink the eyes, and keep them from focusing on anything so that they stay in the center position as if they were painted on. If the eyes move around, it will give you away. Another way around this is to use sunglasses. This will prevent your audience from seeing the movement of your eyeballs.

Try moving an outstretched arm up and then back down in front of your body. Move from the shoulder so that the elbow and wrist joint remain frozen. Be sure to keep the hands (and the rest of the body) rigid. Use a sharp start and stop to the movement. This gives the move a more mechanical look.

Turn the full body a quarter-turn, in one piece, by pivoting on the heels. Turn right, then center, then left, then center. Pause between each movement.

Turn the body a quarter-turn to the right. Bend forward from the hips, over the right leg, keeping the back and neck straight. Turn the head to the left (where the audience would be). Use movements of the forearm to bring the body back up (as if you were jacking up a car). Raise your arm, wave to the audience by turning the hand at the wrist. Drop your arm to the waist and bend from the hips to take a bow!

Mime Improvs and Sketches

The following activities are designed to help students exercise expressiveness, imagination and to create simple scenes:

Tug-of-War Duet

The purpose of this exercise is to allow kids to put together a simple sketch emphasizing beginning, middle and end,

cooperation with a partner, and expression of emotion.

1. Teacher has students practice tug-of-war as Trent demonstrated in the show. Tell the students to feel the resistance of the rope and pull the rope using their full bodies. Exactness of technique is not important.
2. Have the students work in pairs.



- Allow time for each pair to put together a tug-of-war routine.
3. Tell the kids that the sketch should open with a bare stage, and the first action is for the kids to walk on.
 4. The kids then acknowledge each other and convey a challenge. Some “posturing” and “attitude” are appropriate here.
 5. They each pick up their end of the rope and commence. Emphasize that they need to really pay attention to each other so that they are pulling and getting pulled in synch.
 6. They need to agree on an ending where one wins. Ask the kids to convey how they feel about winning/losing.
 7. Have the kids rehearse, and then show to the class.

Statues

The purpose of this game is to help the kids to loosen up, think on their feet, work together, and use their bodies in expressive ways.

1. Students work in groups of three.
2. The teacher calls out a cue word: e.g. *beach, family, football, zoo, test, on the moon, or underwater.*
3. The first group runs across the room and forms a tableau (frozen group picture) that represents the word.
4. The teacher can comment on what makes the tableau effective, and what can make it more so.

Objects

The purpose of this exercise is to help students create a short mime sketch by personifying inanimate objects.

1. Students work in groups of three.
2. In the same way that Trent did in the show, the students will create a mime of an object.
3. One or two students may be the object and the other/s will be people interacting with or manipulating the object.
4. The teacher should give the assignment, and allow five to ten minutes for the students to prepare.
5. As the students are preparing the sketch, teacher should move from group to group and make sure students have a workable idea. Help the students to come up with a very simple idea, and help shape the choreography of the sketch.
6. Make sure that the sketches are clear, and have a beginning, middle and end.
7. Encourage the students to find some “personality” in the objects, as they personify them. Also look for imaginative ways to suggest aspects of the object.
8. Have the students show their sketches to the class.



Trent and Nate at home in Sooke, BC, September, 2007

Trent Arterberry

During his 35 year career, Trent Arterberry has performed for thousands of audiences across North America, Europe and Asia. He thought he was going to be a doctor, like his dad, but instead he decided to study mime, eventually training with the renowned French master, Marcel Marceau.

When Trent first started out, he opened for major recording artists including Marvin Hamlisch, B.B. King, Spyro Gyra and the Kinks. He opened Julio Iglesias' first North American tour, including four nights at New York's Radio City Music Hall. His largest audience was in the old Maple Leaf Gardens in Toronto in front of 15,000 people.

One unusual assignment was posing for photographs inside the giant ocean tank of the New England Aquarium, where a sea turtle bit him on the bottom. Another photo shoot was for a Capital Records album cover where he appeared on a frozen Walden Pond in the middle of winter in a leotard and tights. He had to run inside after five minutes so that his hands wouldn't freeze.

Trent has played at hundreds of colleges in the US, and was named Campus Performing Artist of the Year. He has

also played around the world on luxury liners including the world cruise of the QE2 and the SS Norway Comedy Cruise.

Trent currently resides on Vancouver Island, British Columbia with his wife, Bev, his son, Nate, and a little black dog named Madison. Nate used to be a mime, but he has since begun talking. He also wears clothes sometimes.

Trent's hobbies include kayak surfing, bicycling and hiking. He enjoys photography and downloading music from the internet. He also enjoys touring his show to school and family audiences across North America.

Bibliography

The following books by Claude Kipnis and Richmond Shepard are the best books available on mime technique. Please note that they are written at an adult level. The Ben Martin book is a beautiful collection of photographs of Marcel Marceau, the greatest theatrical mime of the 20th century.

Claude Kipnis. The Mime Book New York: Harper and Rowe Publishers, 1974.

Richmond Shepard. Mime: The Technique of Silence. New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1971.

Ben Martin. Marcel Marceau, Master of Mime. New York: Paddington Press, Ltd., 1998

• We would appreciate any feedback from teachers as to how to improve either the performance or the study-guide. Please contact:

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