

# Creating an Object and Storymaking Through Pantomime

A Drama Lesson Plan Developed for Grade Levels Six to Eight by Genie Eaker

## Lesson Overview:

This lesson introduces students to the concept of physically creating objects and suggesting environments and scenes through pantomimic technique. Students will learn that in pantomime the actor is trained to act out the story/character with movement instead of words. Working collaboratively, students will research and create a scenario with a beginning, middle and ending. They will also explore the role of the director, discuss the art of pantomime, and compare pantomime to other art forms.

## Length of Lesson:

Three 50-minute class periods

## Instructional Objectives:

Students will:

- Develop skills in communicating through physical movement (pantomime).
- Define the concept of improvisation.
- Demonstrate how a story may be told through pantomime
- Explore pantomime as a means of expression and storytelling.
- Explore the role of the director.
- Learn to research, create and work with a scenario.
- Compare and contrast the art of pantomime with other art forms.

## Materials:

- An instrumental CD or tape with soft, relaxing music.
- Access to world folk tales and historical stories for research through selected books or free sites offering folk tales on the Internet.
- A video clip of Marcel Marceau or other noted mime. A good source is *The World of Mime Theatre*, a site “devoted to the promotion of Mime as a specialized theatrical art. Its goals are education, information exchange, entertainment, and providing the opportunity to connect people involved and interested in Mime Theatre around the world.” This site also has excellent mime videos available for purchase.

## Procedures:

### I. Part One: Pantomiming an Object

#### A. Opening Demonstration of Mime Techniques

Arrange the classroom space so that students have space to move around. Tell the students that you are going to play an “improv” (improvisation) game called “the magic box” to share with them. Share information about Viola Spolin's *Improvisations for the Theater*. Walk around the “box” and behind it to define its space. Then show the height of the lid by touching it with your hands. Lean on it by bending your elbows (as if you are doing a push-up), demonstrating the illusionary mime technique of leaning. Open the lid as you would open a large suitcase, and let the lid rest in an open position toward the students. Look through several objects before bringing one out of the box to demonstrate. A telescope, like a sea captain of old would have had, is a great example. Go around the box and demonstrate the movement of the ship's deck, and then the size and shape of the telescope. Open it out fully to show its moving parts, and then look through it, still indicating the movement of the ship on the waves. When you finish, put the telescope back in the box, and close the lid. Invite the students to raise their hands and tell you what illusion you were creating.

**Defining Mime:** Explain to students that this type of silent acting is called "pantomime." Tell them that pantomime is a way to communicate without using words. Instead, you use your face and your body to help show actions, thoughts, or feelings.

#### B. Guided Practice for Students

Tell the students that they will now each pantomime an object. They will get up one at a time and select an object from the “magic box.” Before they begin, discuss the need to learn the technique of demonstrating the size of the object they are pantomiming, the weight of the object, and the shape of the object. They will need to show whether it has movable parts, whether it is alive or inanimate, etc. This helps the students when they are thinking of an object they might choose, makes the game more accessible for all students to understand, and makes the pantomime technique clearer.

After all the students have participated in pantomiming an object, ask them if they think it would be possible to tell an entire story using pantomime.

### II. Part Two: Using Pantomime Techniques with a Partner

#### A. Task Assignment

The teacher will now help the students develop the ability to work with a partner using pantomime techniques. Using the same “magic box” concept, ask them to imagine that the box is an old trunk in an old house. Pair them (or have three if it isn't an even-numbered class) and ask them to create a scenario using the following framework:

“You are going into an old, old house. Decide how you get in--do you find an old key on the front porch, do you climb through a window? Show us that the house is dark and dusty. Show us that you go into the attic and discover lots of stuff, including an old trunk. Is it locked? What do you each find in the trunk? When you leave, are you hurrying because you hear something, or do you tiptoe out carefully?”

## B. Guided Team Practice

Give each team about 10 minutes to discuss their scenario. Walk around and help them with the decisions that may hold them up---whose idea do they use at what point, etc.? Encourage them to share the planning and to use some of each person's ideas.

When they have about 5 minutes left, call "5 minutes." Help anyone who doesn't seem ready to move into final plans.

## C. Team Performances for the Class

Have students view each other's scenes. Give positive support for examples of specific movement qualities that are most clear and detailed in order to help the other students learn to slow down, to share the scene, and to be more specific about demonstrating the size, weight, shape and purpose of the objects.

## D. Discussion of Team Performances

After viewing each scene, lead the students in a discussion of how the pantomime helped to tell the story without words.

- How did the actor's movements help to show you what was happening in the story?
- What objects did the actors create in the scene?
- How did the actors use pantomime to suggest an environment (the old house/ attic)?

## E. Peer Assessment

After watching each other, guide a discussion of each performance. Give the students a list of qualities to observe and evaluate. Talk about positive critiques. Remind them of the "two pluses and a minus" rule when offering suggestions. Let the performers listen to and reflect on other students' assessments.

## III. Part Three: Presentation, Evaluation and Closure

With your students, view the video clip and discuss the story that is performed. Ask the students questions about the similarity of mime to dance, and differences and similarities to other styles of acting. Point out movement qualities and conventions of mime.

**Choosing a Story:** Divide the class into groups. Ask each group (1) to research a folk tale from different cultures, or (2) to select a familiar historical story that could be told without words. They should look for a simple plot structure and strong characters, as pantomime and dance don't include dialogue. The story line needs to be simple and visual.

**Director's Role:** Appoint a group leader who will serve as the director. Have the group read about and discuss what a director's role in an informal or formal production is. The director will help develop each scene so that the plot and relationships in the story are clear to the audience.

**Rehearsal:** Have the students sequence the plot of the story into three scenes---a beginning, middle and ending scene. Have each group rehearse their story, with the director blocking the scenes and coaching the scenes for gestures, character movement, and clarity of the plot.

**Presentation:** Have each group share its pantomime story for the class. (Have them identify the story that they are pantomiming before they start the story.)

**Evaluation and Closure:** Have the other groups find positive clear movement concepts in each

other's work in an evaluation following each group's performance. Ask for constructive ideas to clarify rate of movement, how the actors could share the scene more, and what objects and ideas need to be sharpened so they are clearer to the audience.

### **Part IV. Teacher's Assessment:**

Evaluate students' ability to:

- research and select an appropriate story.
- create and work from a scenario with a beginning, middle and end.
- work in a group in a collaborative manner.
- communicate a story through pantomime.

### **Sources:**

Spolin, Viola. *Improvisations for the Theater*, [www.spolin.com](http://www.spolin.com)

### **Standards Addressed for Grades 6-8:**

- I. STORY MAKING/SCRIPT WRITING. Script writing by the creation of improvisations and scripted scenes based on personal experience and heritage, imagination, literature, and history.  
Students will
- B. Create characters, environments, dialogue, and action through improvisation and writing, both individually and in groups.
- II. ACTING. Acting by developing basic acting skills to portray characters who interact in improvised and scripted scenes.  
Students will:
- A/B. Demonstrate acting skills such as memorization, sensory recall, concentration, breath control, effective vocal expression, and control of isolated body parts.
- E. Act as an improvised or scripted character in an ensemble.
- IV. DIRECTING. Directing by organizing rehearsals for improvised and scripted scenes.  
Students will:
- A. Respond appropriately to instructors' directions and side coaching in improvisations, theatre games, and other theatre activities.
- B. Explain the roles of the director and the production staff in theatre.
- C. Direct rehearsals of scripted monologues, scenarios, scenes, or short plays for informal or formal performances.
- V. RESEARCHING. Researching by using cultural and historical information to support improvised and scripted scenes.  
Students will:

- A. Apply research from printed and nonprinted sources to plan writing, acting, designing, and directing activities.

VI. CONNECTING. Comparing and incorporating art forms by analyzing methods of presentation and audience response for theatre, dramatic media (such as film, television, and electronic media), and other art forms.

Students will:

- A. Integrate the vocabulary of theatre into classroom discussions, planning, and informal and formal performances.
- B. Compare theatre to visual arts, dance, music, and other disciplines.
- D. Compare and contrast the use of visual arts, dance, music, or electronic media to enhance a classroom performance.
- E. Demonstrate an understanding of the collaborative nature of theatre.

VII. VALUING AND RESPONDING. Analyzing, evaluating, and constructing meanings from improvised and scripted scenes and from theatre, film, television, and electronic media productions.

Students will:

- A. Use appropriate audience etiquette during theatre performances.
- C. Analyze and critique theatrical productions, both live and electronic.
- D. Analyze a classroom performance on the basis of characterization, diction, pacing, and movement, and then make suggestions for improvement.

VIII. RELATING TO HISTORY AND CULTURE. Understanding context by analyzing the role of theatre, film, television, and electronic media in the community and in other cultures.

Students will:

- A. Identify theatrical contributions from a variety of historical periods and cultures for use in informal or formal productions.
- B. Analyze the relationship of historical and cultural contexts to published plays and improvisations.