

UNIT 4

Special Topics in Theatre

- CHAPTER 14 ♦ Mime, Pantomime, and Clowning 268
- CHAPTER 15 ♦ Interpreting Literature 286
- CHAPTER 16 ♦ Storytelling 315
- CHAPTER 17 ♦ Readers Theatre and Radio Theatre 329
- CHAPTER 18 ♦ Puppetry, Shadow Play, and Masks 345





CHAPTER 14

Mime, Pantomime, and Clowning



Chapter Outline

- LESSON 1 ♦ Mime and Pantomime 269
- LESSON 2 ♦ Clowning 279

Spotlight on Terms



- ♦ auguste clown
- ♦ character clown
- ♦ clowning
- ♦ grotesque whiteface
- ♦ mime
- ♦ mimesis
- ♦ neat whiteface
- ♦ pantomime
- ♦ pantomimus
- ♦ whiteface clown

Pantomime, mime, and clowning are closely related. They all express dramatic ideas without words. All three arts require imagination, concentration, observation, sensory awareness, and rhythmic and expressive movement—the personal resources you learned about in Chapter 3. In this chapter, we will explore the similarities and differences among mime, pantomime, and clowning, focusing on the techniques and impact of each art.



Mime and Pantomime

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Define mime and pantomime.
- ◆ Understand and identify similarities and differences between mime and pantomime.
- ◆ Research mimes and their art.
- ◆ Prepare and present pantomime exercises and activities.

Warm Up



While sitting at your desk, perform the following imaginary actions without talking: writing a letter; picking up a glass of cold water; drinking a cup of hot chocolate; eating a jumbo chocolate chip cookie in three bites.



Can you communicate effectively with facial expressions and gestures? If so, you might enjoy being a mime.

The words mime and pantomime are often used interchangeably. They are, however, two different arts. Even experts often disagree on their definitions, resulting in different interpretations of these two skills. Mime comes from the Greek word **mimesis**, meaning “to imitate an activity.” Mime’s main activity is movement, and its content often deals with the complex meanings and forces of life. Pantomime comes from the Latin word **pantomimus**, meaning “all gestures used in support of a theme.” Pantomime revolves around character and plot, using imaginary props and people to tell a story.

Mime and pantomime are similar, however, because they are both ways to communicate by gesturing, a form of acting without words. In both arts, the actors portray characters and scenes through facial expressions and body language that the audience can easily understand.

Many performers believe that the techniques and styles in pantomime are fewer than in mime, with mime involving more body control and dramatic movement. Mime has many different styles, including rituals, commedia dell’ arte, silent acting, and French classical mime. Pantomime uses mime techniques to communicate and create characters and plot to its audience.

An important difference between mime and pantomime is the content of the ideas being presented. Pantomime usually has simple and chronological story lines, such as brushing your teeth, playing a tuba, watching a tennis match, or stepping on a piece of gum. Mime is more complex, based on theme, illusion, and plot, requiring a higher level of communication between the performer and the audience. And even though pantomime must be accurate, clear, and performed with precise movements, it does not require the intense study, discipline, and body training required of mime. To explain the contrast in the



The most famous mime in the world is probably Marcel Marceau.



A talented mime can make you believe he is actually doing what he is only pretending to do.

mime

the silent art of using body movements to create an illusion of reality.

two arts, let's use Marcel Marceau, the well-known French mime. He uses pantomime when he performs the famous scene of his character, Bip, at a party, but he uses mime when he produces his intense facial expressions and body movements to communicate a struggle with some force of nature.

We will now look at the two arts in greater detail.

Mime

Mime is the “silent” art of using body movements to create an illusion of reality. The word “mime” can also refer to the performer of this art. Mime is a very old form of theatrical expression. In fact, mime has been the most common dramatic expression in many cultures. The dances at tribal gatherings around campfires, performed by prehistoric people, used elements of mime. Mime shows were presented before performances of Greek tragedies. Phyrhic dances of the Greek warriors were examples of mime. Romans used mime in their dramatic presentations, which were often based on mythology. Early performers of mime were minstrels, jugglers, dancers, and acrobats. These examples help explain another definition of mime—an art that lies somewhere between drama and dance.

During the sixteenth century, mime was popular in France in the form of the famous *commedia dell'arte*, which spread to all of Europe in the seventeenth century. In the nineteenth century, Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Deburau from France and Joseph Grimaldi from England developed mime techniques, and both will be remembered for their contributions to this art.

During the twentieth century, the art of mime was further developed by the actor-director Etienne Decroux, often referred to as the father of modern mime. Decroux was the teacher of Marcel Marceau, widely regarded as the master of the arts of both pantomime and mime. Other mimes during this period include Jean-Louis Barrault from France (who became France's greatest stage performer), the famous silent film actor Charlie Chaplin, Paul J. Curtis, Claude Kipnis, Robert Shields, and Lorene Yarnell. Other names associated with mime that you may recognize are Mummenschanz, W. C. Fields, Stan Laurel, Red Skelton, Jerry Lewis, Dick Van Dyke, Jackie Gleason, and Lucille Ball.

Mime techniques are often difficult and demanding to do. They involve a system of exercises and technical strategies of dramatic movements. The mime takes movement and expression beyond simple activities. Trained and skillful mimes create a world of imagery to communicate with their audiences. They create characters, scenes, and even complete plays using only the movements of the body in a world of silence. The mime's physical training and hours of preparing theme, plot, and illusions result in a complete art form—a sophisticated presentation through which the mime and the audience may share a wealth of human experience.

To be a successful mime, you must understand not only *how* to do an action but *why* to do it. Making what you cannot see into something visible through movement is just the beginning of mime. This lesson will not turn you into a Marcel Marceau or any other expert in mime, but

Without ever needing to say a word, silent-screen star Charlie Chaplin (here, tipping his hat to a police officer in *City Lights*) made millions of people laugh and cry.



it will help you understand the art form. To become an accomplished mime, you would need to study, perform, and perhaps become part of a mime troupe, a group that is dedicated to the art of mime. It would also help to be guided by a director or teacher willing to give the necessary time and expertise to such an endeavor. This lesson can only give you a taste of mime by introducing this complex theatre form.

Pantomime

pantomime

the use of mime techniques, acting without words, to tell a story.

Pantomime is the extended use of mime techniques in telling a story. Other definitions might include “acting without words,” “non-verbal communication telling a story,” or “telling a story in chronological order using only gestures.” A definition that you will probably add to this list if you have not experienced pantomime is “an art that is fun.”

The history of pantomime goes as far back as primitive man. Cave-men told their hunting stories and other adventures using their body movements to express themselves. Pantomime was a popular form of entertainment in ancient Rome. A single actor often played many roles in the form of interpretive dances accompanied by a chorus who told a story from mythology. In medieval times, characters in the miracle plays used pantomime to communicate the good and bad of humankind. Fairy tales and folklore provided material for the pantomimes. The three major characters from these story lines were usually the hero, the dame (an old woman), and the heroine. The elements of pantomime consisted of happy endings, spectacular events, and lavish costumes and scenery. The goal of all the characters was to be at peace with each other and keep harmony among the players. Pan-



Mime is the art of creating the illusion of reality and the art of imagining the world together with others.

Claude Kipnis

Pantomime is closely related to juggling and acrobatics. Throughout history, people have been entertained by artists such as this "jack in the box" at the Drury Lane Theatre in London, who have specialized in pantomime, juggling, and acrobatics.



“
The art of pantomime is the language of the heart.
Marcel Marceau
”

tomime is still used in England in farces (comedies performed mostly for laughs) staged around Christmas.

Participating in pantomime will help you develop your confidence, personal resources, and stage techniques. Realistic pantomime requires time, study, and self-discipline, but it is fun. For the theatre student, pantomime is easier than mime. You don't have to be highly trained or skilled to use pantomime. It is basically an art that requires concentration on details in movements and expression. As you master pantomime, you will discover that an expressive body is one of the actor's greatest assets onstage. Physical skills are needed to be able to communicate with your audience. Studying and using pantomime techniques that enhance muscular coordination, poise, and facial expression will help you be more successful.

Pantomime is extremely effective with an audience because people are more inclined to believe what they see than what they hear. This is why an actor's facial expressions and body movements must support the scene. Suppose, for example, that a character onstage approaches a haunted house. An audience will be more likely to believe the house is haunted if the actor's body is shaking and hesitating as he walks up to the front door. Pantomime is an effective and powerful acting skill. This is why your stage movement and pantomime activities in class should be clearly communicated with simplicity, accuracy, consistency, and exaggeration. We will discuss these four elements when you learn how to prepare a pantomime.

In pantomime you should show, not tell, what is happening. You must visualize in your mind the images you want to project to your audience. For example, if you want to pantomime brushing your teeth, in your mind's eye see your toothbrush (size, shape, color), the toothpaste (size, color, weight, shape, amount you squeeze out), and the movements that you normally make in performing this activity each day (brushing up and down, to the sides, or around and around).

Make your actions clear and exact so that your observers are never in doubt about what is happening in your pantomime. You do not want the audience to see any movement or action that is not well planned and prepared.

Begin your preparation by selecting an idea or story line for your pantomime. You might think of a situation you have experienced, such as a stuck locker or a dripping ice-cream cone. The structure of a pantomime story line is prepared with the three basic parts you have already studied—the beginning, middle, and end. These three parts can also be defined another way—an introduction (introduces the character), a conflict (establishes a problem), and the resolution (solves the problem). For example, in the beginning you will want to use your body and face to let the audience see the character you are portraying. Your character would encounter a problem in the middle of the pantomime and resolve it in the end. (See Figure 14–1 for a sample story line.)

To make your pantomime believable, you will want to use some of these key elements in preparing and presenting your pantomime—simplicity, accuracy, consistency, and exaggeration. Simplicity of your

Figure 14–1

Sample Pantomime Story Line.

Character and Location: Frustrated businessman at bus stop

Conflict: Wristwatch doesn't work

Resolution: Throws down the watch

Imaginary Props: wristwatch, briefcase

Step-by-Step Pantomime:

1. Businessman hurriedly walks to bus stop.
2. Looks up and down the street, frowning.
3. Puts down his briefcase, crosses arms, and looks disgusted.
4. Glances at watch and taps toes impatiently.
5. Looks up and down the street again. This time he shields his eyes to look farther up and down the street.
6. Looks at his watch and begins pacing up and down the sidewalk.
7. Looks at his watch again, stops walking, and stares like it has stopped.
8. Listens to his watch by holding it up to his ear.
9. Frowns at the watch. Then taps at the imaginary watch with his fingers.
10. Shakes his watch arm; listens again.
11. Holds the watch away from him and frowns.
12. Shrugs his shoulders, unhooks the watch band, and throws it down on the sidewalk.
13. Looks up and down the street to see if anyone is watching.
14. Jumps on the watch and stomps on it. Smiles and shakes his head as if satisfied.
15. Picks up briefcase and begins to walk away, shaking his head as if disgusted with the entire experience.
16. Suddenly stops, turns back to the watch, cups his ear, and listens.
17. Returns and picks up the watch.
18. Holds the watch to his ear and acts surprised.
19. Puts down briefcase, fastens on the watch, and holds up wrist as if to listen. Looks very proud as he beams at the watch.
20. Picks up the briefcase and walks down the street shaking head, amazed as he looks at the watch.



Lucille Ball was such a talented pantomime artist and comedienne that her *I Love Lucy* shows are being enjoyed on cable television networks over forty years after they were first produced.

story line will help the audience understand what is happening in your presentation. Don't cloud the story with too many details. Accuracy in pantomime makes the presentation believable and precise. Consistency keeps all the items in a pantomime the same size, shape, weight, and in the same place. Exaggeration makes the actions in pantomime bigger than life, helping the audience see your action with more clarity.

To achieve clarity in your pantomime, try the following techniques: *focus*, *reach*, *take*, *accent*, and *release*. If you focus (visualize) and then reach (approach) for your object (for example, an imaginary glass of water), it is easier for your audience to follow your action. Don't forget to take (establish space) and release (let go of) your object. However, 80 percent of your pantomime is the accent, showing size, shape, weight, level, texture, temperature, and any other detail that will lead to clarity of movement. When all of these techniques are used together with simplicity, accuracy, consistency, and exaggeration, you will succeed in pantomime.

After you have prepared and rehearsed your pantomime activity, your teacher may ask you to use other traditions of pantomime in your presentation. These include wearing clothes that are black, white, and sometimes accented with red; soft, flexible black flat shoes; and white makeup to neutralize the performer's face. The whiteface has only been associated with pantomime during the twentieth century.

Through movement and expression, you can create a whole world of characters, objects, and places in the story, your pantomime. Remember to focus and concentrate, using all of your senses so that the audience can see what you are performing. You, as the pantomime artist, must be totally absorbed in this world to satisfy yourself as well as your audience.

ACTION



Harpo Marx was the brilliant pantomime artist who helped make the Marx Brothers movies among the most popular comedies of the 1930s and '40s.

1. Famous Mimes. After researching one of the following mimes, report on his life and work either in written or oral form.

- | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|
| a. Marcel Marceau | g. Laurel and Hardy |
| b. Jean-Baptiste Gaspard Deburau | h. Harpo Marx |
| c. Etienne Decroux | i. Claude Kipnis |
| d. Charlie Chaplin | j. Jerry Lewis |
| e. Buster Keaton | k. Jackie Gleason |
| f. Harold Lloyd | |

2. Mime Films. Visit the school library, your community library, or the local video store and locate any films about mime or films in which the leading actors use mime throughout the movie.

3. Warm-Ups for Pantomime Activities. Use the following exercises to prepare for pantomime activities. Concentrate on learning to control your body.

- a. Loosen up your body by rolling your head to the left and right, shrugging your shoulders up and down, swinging your arms in cir-

cles, swinging your legs forward and backward, rotating your wrists and hands, rotating your ankles and feet, shaking your hands, and moving your fingers and toes one by one in an exercise motion.

- b. Stretch your body up and down. Bend your body forward and backward.
- c. Put your palms together and apply force when you push them together.
- d. Practice sitting and walking with proper posture. As you sit and walk, keep your body straight but easily erect and relaxed.
- e. Become aware of body tensions and tightened muscles you may have. Concentrate on reducing these through daily relaxing thoughts and exercises.

4. Learning to Relax. Find your space in the classroom and lie down on the floor. As appropriate and calm music is played, relax and relieve any tension in your muscles. Start with the toes and go to the top of your head. Tense up your muscles and then relax them. Compare the difference in the tension and the relaxation of the muscles. Focus on your body parts. Become aware of how your body responds to the music and how the body can move. Your teacher will take you through several exercises to relax the body.

5. Movement Carousel. Your teacher will show you various ways to get from one place to the other. For example, your teacher may walk, run, hop, jump, and skip from one side of the room to the other. Notice every detail of your teacher's movement. Now imitate the movements you just observed. You may work in pairs or groups.

6. Object Focus. With your classmates, create a list of small objects—for example, a toothbrush, blow-dryer, comb, toilet brush, needle and thread, fingernail file, watch, and contact lens. Mentally focus on an object named by another student. With your mind's eye, see yourself using the object. Note the difference between actually using the object and the mental image of using the object. Name large items now and repeat the process.

7. Detailing the Object. Choose one of the objects in exercise 6. Perform in front of the class, pretending that you are using this object. Pay close attention to details. Try to make your performance as believable as possible.

8. Music Pantomime. Listen to some music and react to the sound of the music. For this activity, work in groups of three, four, or five. Develop a story to the music, including a beginning, middle, and ending.

9. Where Are You? Discuss places that people go. The first volunteer secretly chooses a place that has been discussed and imagines all the senses that would make him or her aware of that place. After preparing mentally, this student approaches the acting area and begins to illustrate where he or she is. Students who think they know what the place is may join in with more and varied movement appropriate to the place. The whole class may join in if they believe they know where the imaginary place is. After the activity, discuss what actions were pantomimed

OUR THEATRE HERITAGE

Historical and Cultural Perspectives

Musical Theatre

Theatre has always been closely associated with music, movement, and dance. For example, in early Greek theatre, music was used to underscore the meaning of many of the lines delivered by the chorus. It was not until the twentieth century, however, that we found a separate genre of theatre known as *musical theatre*. This is a type of theatre that is actually a product of the United States!

Experts believe that musical theatre developed out of two specialized forms of theatre—vaudeville and burlesque, which provided popular entertainment throughout most of the 1800s. Originally burlesque featured dramatic sketches and songs that made fun of the legitimate theatre. Vaudeville was always filled with music and other variety acts, including acrobatics and comedy scenes, but had more of a tone suitable for family entertainment.

The popular musical theatre of today actually started by accident! In 1866, the New York producers of a melodrama entitled *The Black Crook* decided at the last moment that their play was not ready to open. At the same time a theatre where a ballet was to open burned to the ground. In a frantic attempt to save both productions the dancers from the ballet were added to the plot of *The Black Crook*, and the show opened. The resulting production was so successful that producers began to create new productions that combined fully staged dance numbers with fully developed plots. Musical theatre was born!

Audiences loved musical theatre. Star performers such as George M. Cohan and composers such as



Vaudeville shows, which entertained large audiences with musical numbers and comedy sketches, were among the first steps in the development of the great American musicals.

Irving Berlin and George Gershwin specialized in this new form of theatre. These new musicals had a uniquely American perspective of the world and expressed and supported the nation's growing sense of nationalism around the time of World War I in a way that no other medium could. For example, Cohan's "Yankee Doodle Dandy" and "Over There" as well as "Grand Old Flag" played a great role in keeping American spirits up before and during the years of World War I.

At first, the plot lines for musicals were little more than frameworks to hold the musical numbers together. In the late 1920s, however, musical plots became much more structurally sound. These new plots usually consisted of modern, humorous stories. Some of the most popular musicals written

during these years were by Rodgers and Hart and Lerner and Lowe. By 1943 when the musical *Okla-homa!* opened in New York, the theatre was in the golden age of the American musical.

During the years after 1940, the musicals dealt with a wide variety of subject matter, from the life of Annie Oakley in *Annie Get Your Gun* to Shakespeare in *Kiss Me Kate*. As time passed, the musical's plot content began to change. In the late 1960s, many musicals became more like musical revues, which feature many songs with little, if any, dialogue. *Hair*, the first major musical of this type, staged in 1967, was built around a theme more than it was built around a unified story. These "non-story" motivated musicals became known as *concept musicals*. ■

and who did what. Correct errors and discuss mistakes. Continue this pantomime activity with several more places.

10. Moving the Object. Divide into groups. Your purpose in this assignment is to move a large imaginary object (for example, a large mirror, a computer, a couch, or a large dog) without using words. Each group decides what it will be moving. Note all the details of the imaginary object in your group discussion. You may tell the rest of the class the object you are going to move, or you can let them guess. When it is your team's turn, work as an ensemble and move that object skillfully. After you have moved the object, discuss with the class how you went about moving the object.

11. Guess Who? Choose one of the following characters, and then pantomime the actions of that character. After each performance, the class can guess what character was pantomimed.

- | | |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| a. doctor | k. chef |
| b. painter | l. waiter/waitress |
| c. football player | m. clown |
| d. nurse | n. baby |
| e. television announcer | o. senior citizen |
| f. cowboy | p. model |
| g. actor | q. painter |
| h. teacher | r. sculptor |
| i. parent | s. photographer |
| j. principal | t. explorer |

12. Zoo Time. Choose one of the following zoo characters, and then pantomime the actions of that character. Your classmates will then try to guess the character after allowing time to pantomime each animal.

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------|
| a. elephant | k. frog |
| b. dog | l. turtle |
| c. cat | m. fish |
| d. lion | n. bird |
| e. pigeon | o. tiger |
| f. bat | p. flamingo |
| g. snake | q. monkey |
| h. camel | r. cow |
| i. chicken | s. gorilla |
| j. duck | t. pig |

13. Carpet Ride. Spread a blanket or sheet on the classroom floor, or imagine a carpet on the floor. Divide into groups of four or five. When it is your group's turn, jump quickly on the "carpet" and pantomime the actions needed in one of the following scenes.

- a.** in a terrible rainstorm
- b.** among beautiful clouds
- c.** in the snow
- d.** stranded in the middle of the ocean
- e.** lost in space
- f.** watching doctors perform surgery
- g.** playing in a hot tub
- h.** in a raft attacked by sharks
- i.** being attacked by killer bees
- j.** caught in an elevator
- k.** having lunch at a hot dog stand

- l. watching a sports event (football, basketball, tennis, soccer, and so on)
- m. performing ballet on stage
- n. at a 1950s dance
- o. at the beach sunbathing and swimming
- p. in a covered wagon
- q. in a rocket taking off
- r. on a roller coaster
- s. fishing on a boat
- t. snow skiing
- u. waterskiing

14. What Do You Wish For? Your teacher will place a box in the middle of the classroom floor that will represent a large well. Volunteer to enter the playing area, drop something imaginary into the well (box), make a wish, and then pull out something related to your wish from the well. For example, throw in a coin and take out several dollars, throw in seeds and take out flowers or vegetables, or throw in words from your mouth and take out a book. You must pay close attention to the details of the object you choose to pantomime.

15. How Are You Feeling? Pantomime the following physical feelings and emotions. (*Hint:* It is easier and more effective if you think of a situation when you have experienced this emotion or feeling.)

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|
| a. bossy | n. caring |
| b. angry | o. confused |
| c. happy | p. lonely |
| d. sad | q. shy |
| e. frightened | r. cheerful |
| f. sly | s. suspicious |
| g. excited | t. panic-stricken |
| h. jealous | u. tired |
| i. mischievous | v. sick at your stomach |
| j. bored | w. stubbed toe |
| k. disgusted | x. surprised |
| l. triumphant | y. embarrassed |
| m. tense | z. rejected |



With some makeup and a wealth of facial expressions and body movements, a mime or pantomimist can tell a story or express a profound idea.

16. Scenes for Pantomime. Pantomime one of the following scenes as a solo activity. Use only 1 or 2 minutes to plan your activity. Announce the title of the scene, or let the class guess what is happening. Repeat the activity with a partner.

- a. walking a dog
- b. washing a dog
- c. writing a letter, sealing it, and mailing it
- d. driving a car
- e. changing a flat tire on a car
- f. brushing your teeth
- g. making a peanut butter sandwich
- h. setting a table
- i. turning on a computer and using it
- j. painting a picture
- k. climbing a hill
- l. hiking in the woods
- m. playing football, baseball, soccer, basketball, tennis, or golf
- n. swimming

- o. teaching someone how to swim
- p. learning a dance step
- q. teaching someone how to dance
- r. playing an instrument
- s. teaching someone how to play an instrument
- t. watching a sad, funny, or scary movie
- u. building a campfire
- v. feeding a pet
- w. taking out the trash
- x. washing dishes
- y. cleaning up your room
- z. waterskiing or snow skiing



LESSON 2

Clowning

LESSON OBJECTIVES

- ◆ Define clowning.
- ◆ Relate the history of mime and pantomime to clowning.
- ◆ Identify three types of clowns.
- ◆ Participate in clowning activities using imagination and creativity.

Warm Up



In your journal list the places where you have seen clowns performing. Answer why you think clowning is still a popular form of entertainment.

clowning

the art of entertaining others by provoking laughter, requires the use of personal resources, an understanding of human nature, effective timing, and comedy techniques.

People need to laugh, and laughter is always contagious. In fact, studies have shown that laughter is the best medicine; people actually live longer if they laugh a lot. Thus, the clown's art is one of the best prescriptions for an audience.

Clowning is an art closely related to mime and pantomime. The difference involves the clown's costume, makeup, and goal—to provoke laughter from the audience. Clowning requires the performer to use many skills and talents to provide entertainment. A clown provides an audience with a reason to laugh (the clown's actions and routines) and a way to laugh with others. A clown might be an actor, storyteller, juggler, humorist, acrobat, puppeteer, ventriloquist, magician, or all of these rolled into one. At the heart of the clown's performance is the art of pantomime. Clowning also requires the use of personal resources, an understanding of human nature, effective timing, and good comedy techniques. Clowning demands commitment, physical skills, and acting ability. The clown must mirror life—both comedy and tragedy.

History records clowning being practiced as far back as Greek burlesque (mockery) and the Roman stage. Court jesters, the clowns of the Middle Ages, were talented performers. Many were skilled dancers, acrobats, and musicians. Shakespeare gave the clown respect when he provided lines for him. The clowns were used to relieve the tension in tragedies. In France and Italy, the clowns were great acrobats and colorful figures. (They were named Pierrot and Harlequin in France, Pantaloon in Italy.)

Generations of children have laughed at Bozo the Clown.



Red Skelton began his career as a movie comedian in the 1940s. He regularly performed pantomime sketches on his popular weekly television show in the 1960s.

Today, clowns play a major role in the circus. The first true “circus type” clown, Joseph Grimaldi, was never in a circus. He was a man of the theatre and a mime artist. Many clowns are now named after Mr. Grimaldi; they are referred to as “joeyes.” Other masters of clowning have been Emmett Kelly (famous for his sad-faced hobo character), Joe E. Brown, Red Skelton, Jackie Gleason, Carol Burnett, Dick Van Dyke, and Jim Carrey, popular in today’s films. These experts and others have provided hours of entertainment and laughter for millions.


Clowns must have a good sense of humor and a clear understanding of how to communicate while entertaining an audience. The clown’s suspense, wit, ability to surprise, and ability to interact with an audience are all related to the clown’s humor.

As clowns perform, they create situations for the audience to think about—to wonder what’s going to happen. For example, a circus clown might follow a tiny dog around in circles. He stops, watches the dog, and pulls out a gigantic bone and the audience is probably eagerly wondering what the clown is going to do next.

The goal of the clown is to convince the audience that the entire act is being performed on the spur of the moment. But only through many weeks of rehearsal and planned action can the clown accomplish the task of presenting a “dumb” and funny show that makes the audience think that the act was effortless. The ultimate reward for the clown is an audience response of joy and pleasure.

Characterization is at the core of the clown’s preparation and presentation. Clowns must look within themselves to develop a character uniquely their own. Whatever they do for the audience must fit this character. Although each clown usually plays only one character, clowns can assume any number of roles. The makeup, costume, and movements are usually standardized and always depend on the character.

Because much clowning is acrobatic, clowns must be in complete control of their movements. Exercises and rehearsals are essential.



“
It’s meat and drink for me to see a clown.
William Shakespeare
”

OUR THEATRE HERITAGE

Historical and Cultural Perspectives



Symbolism

Visual artists have personal preferences for the exact materials they want to use to create their art. In the same way, theatre artists have stylistic preferences about the way they will employ theatrical elements in their productions. For example, not all painters create their images using oil paint, although oil paintings are very popular. The same is true of the theatre artist. While realism was the most popular style of theatrical production, other theatre artists felt strongly that a “slice of life” was not the best use of theatrical space or time.

One of these early departures from realism was a movement known as *symbolism*. This movement, which began in France in the late 1800s, had followers from all around the world. These artists disagreed with the realists about what the proper subject matter for a play should be. The symbolists thought the mysteries of life should fill our stages. They believed that questions about the reasons for living, man’s place in the universe, and the potential of the human spirit should be the basis for theatre. In the symbolists’ theatre, objects used as symbolic images, rather than the concrete actions of realistic life, filled the stage. Poetry and eloquent language, rather than common speech, made up their dialogue. They believed that by using styles far removed from the images and dialects of daily living, their plays would speak a stronger and clearer message.

Because of the symbolic use of props and set pieces, the mood of a symbolist play is often more



Comparing this scene from Maeterlinck’s *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1892) to the Ibsen scene on page 231 will help you see some of the differences between realism and symbolism.

dreamlike than it might ever be in reality. In fact, for the symbolist writers, it was more important to evoke a thoughtful mood or atmosphere than it was to tell a story. For example, water in the form of pools, lakes, and fountains is used to create a mysterious mood and to represent forces that both unite and divide people.

Even the characters in symbolist plays are different from characters in realistic plays. Symbolist characters are not written and developed to be individuals, but rather are created to represent a type of character found in society. In this way, the symbolists hoped to expose the way various forces or attitudes function in relation to each other.

For these same reasons, the symbolists did not believe that all of the details of a setting were necessary. All that was needed, in their minds, were the bare essentials—just those items that suggested the environment to the audience in a dramatic way.

Some of the most noted symbolists are playwrights Maurice Maeterlinck, who wrote *Pelléas and Mélisande* and *The Intruder*, and Paul Claudel, who wrote *The Tidings Brought to Mary*. These plays are excellent examples of symbolist plays. Some of the most noted symbolist directors were Paul Fort and Aurelien Marie Lugne-Poe. One of the English language’s best-loved poets, William Butler Yeats, was himself a symbolist playwright who created several outstanding plays and productions for Ireland’s Abbey Theater, the group that is now the Irish National Theatre Company. ■



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The most wasted day is that in which we do not laugh.

Sébastien Chamfort

”

whiteface clown

a clown whose makeup is an all-white face with features of black and red added for detail.

neat whiteface

a type of whiteface clown whose makeup is in proportion and looks normal in size.

grotesque whiteface

a type of whiteface clown whose makeup has exaggerated features.

Clowns must be sure of their movements (each scene must be carefully planned) and provide order in their performances, because the world of the clown looks like it is always in chaos. Movements must flow smoothly and skillfully. Timing is a flowing progression from one action to the next, with one action usually the result of the previous action. This cause-and-effect sequence must be established quickly in a clown's routines.

Clowns must have a vivid imagination and keen observation of others. They must be able to recall their senses skillfully and use complete focus and concentration while performing. They make each of their talents and personal resources conform to the art of clowning for a successful performance.

The clown must find an individual personality that makes his or her features unique from the rest of the clowns. Some well-known personalities include the Pierrot or Pierrette clown (whiteface and usually black and white costume), the court jester (colorful costume), the hobo (sloppy, baggy clothes), the rube (overalls, straw hat, plaid shirt, and red nose), and the policeman (Keystone Kop).

Makeup for the clown's face has changed over the years. Early clowns wore masks or nothing on their faces. Later, makeup and costumes replaced the masks. Both must fit the character that the clown chooses to portray.

There are three standard clown types, each with its own distinct makeup and costume. The first type is the **whiteface clown**, with an all-white face and features of black and red added for detail. There are two types of whiteface clown. If the makeup is in proportion and looks normal in size, the clown is called a **neat whiteface**. If the makeup used has exaggerated features, the clown is called a **grotesque whiteface**. The whiteface clown is the leader and the most commonly

From left to right: the neat whiteface clown, the auguste clown, and a character clown.



auguste clown

a rodeo or circus clown; a clown's makeup that is reddish brown instead of white. Makeup and costume usually consist of exaggerated designs and items, such as a huge painted mouth, accented eyes, a huge bow tie, large shirt and pants, and large shoes.

character clown

a type of clown who uses makeup and clothes to represent a specific person or image; for example, a tramp, hobo, Keystone Kop, and so on.

seen of the three types. A polished performer, the whiteface clown looks elegant and usually drives the action of the plot forward.

The second type of clown is the **auguste clown**. If you have ever attended a circus or rodeo, you have seen the auguste clown. The makeup is reddish brown instead of white. Makeup and costume usually consist of exaggerated designs and items, such as a huge mouth painted white, accented white eyes, a huge bow tie, large shirt and pants, and large shoes. The auguste clown makeup and costume look mismatched, and the clown's demeanor reflects this exaggerated appearance. Slapstick humor is the auguste clown's trademark.

The third type of clown is the **character clown**. An example is the typical tramp or hobo clown, whose makeup looks messy, dirty, and unkempt. Although the costume is skillfully prepared, it looks like it was found at the dump. The hobo clown wears sloppy, baggy clothes. Another example of the character clown is the policeman or Keystone Kop. The character clown usually plays the role of the loser or misfit.

Clowning is a wonderful art that requires intensive study and preparation, both mental and physical. Hours are spent perfecting routines, situations, scenes, and stories that take only minutes to present. The clown knows the importance of personal resources. The successful clown has imagination, understands human nature, and has a sense of both comedy and tragedy.

ACTION



- 1. Clowning for a Week.** Your teacher will assign a day to learn how to apply clown makeup. Choose one of the three types of clowns and plan one type of clown makeup. Draw the features, colors, and ideas on paper. Then apply the makeup for the clown face. On a second day, plan and prepare a costume to match the clown makeup. Bring the costume to class. On a third day, work with a partner to play and rehearse a clown routine using pantomime. Use the plot elements needed for the routine. After planning and rehearsing for a clown performance on a fourth day, plan a field trip to an elementary school or nearby class to perform your clown routine. On the fifth day, be organized and use your time wisely when you perform for the children or other classes.
- 2. Another Clown Week.** Collect items for another clown week. Suggested items are hats, funny shoes, wigs, false ears and noses, various clothes, fabrics, and props appropriate to use in routines.
- 3. The Magician's Smelly Trick.** Plan, rehearse, and present the following clown scene. Two clowns are needed for the scene. One plays a magician and the other, a person from the audience. The magician pantomimes asking for an audience member to assist him with the trick. As this assistant comes forward, the magician communicates to the volunteer that after he sprinkles his "magic dust" on him the volunteer will pass out and not be able to get up alone. The assistant shakes his head in disbelief. The magician promises his assistant a gift (money, candy) if he can do it and proceeds with the magic act. The magician sprinkles "magic dust" but the assistant doesn't cooperate and passes out. After a few minutes the magician signals for a prop (one that represents an

old dirty shoe). The magician holds the prop close to the assistant's nose and the assistant finally drops to the floor. The magician lies next to his assistant who in turn pantomimes asking which one of them has passed out. The magician points to his assistant and pantomimes that now the assistant cannot get up alone. As his assistant gets up, so does the magician. The magician takes the gift and exits.

Working in pairs create another clown scene using this same format. Plan, rehearse, and present the scene for an elementary school class.

4. Clowning with a Prop. Choose one of the following props, and create a clown scene using it.

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|---------------------|--------------------------|
| a. gum | e. board |
| b. rope | f. pillow |
| c. newspaper | g. ball of string |
| d. bucket | |

5. Clowning for Fun. Work in groups of two or three, and create an original routine for clowning. You may use the following characters to develop your story line, or you may make up your own characters. Each person in the group can play a different character.

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------|
| a. football players | f. boxers |
| b. doctors | g. cave dwellers |
| c. models | h. robbers |
| d. cowboys | i. chiefs |
| e. young children | j. jugglers |

■ ■ SPOTLIGHT ON TERMS ■ ■

An important part of theatre is understanding the terminology, or vocabulary, used. Add the new terms and definitions to the vocabulary section of your theatre notebook or folder.

■ ■ FOCUS ON FACTS ■ ■

1. Define mime, pantomime, and clowning.
2. What are the similarities and the differences between mime and pantomime?
3. Where does the word *pantomime* come from and what does it mean?
4. What is considered to be the actor's greatest asset on stage in pantomime?
5. Describe a little of the history of clowning.
6. Why are many clowns referred to as "joeys"?
7. Name a pantomimist, a mime, and a clown.

■ ■ REFLECTIONS ■ ■

Discuss the following questions with your class or answer them on paper as instructed by your teacher.

1. How has pantomime played a part of your life? Be specific.
2. How important will pantomime be in your theatrical experiences?
3. What do you remember about clowns when you were a young child?
4. Other than at a circus, at what places and occasions would clowning be appropriate and beneficial?

■ ■ THEATRE IN YOUR LIFE ■ ■

1. Prepare a mime with a partner. Plot all the story elements (beginning, middle, ending, characters, and conflict) before rehearsing. Make the

actions clear, exaggerated, and believable. After preparation and rehearsal, present the story on-stage. Discuss the performance and evaluate it effectively. Possible story plots to use:

- A football coach is demonstrating how to block.
- You and your best friend both want to meet the new student.
- Your friend tells your secret to someone else, and it gets back to you.
- The clerk gave you the wrong change when you purchased a sweater.
- Your girlfriend (or boyfriend) is trying to teach you a new dance.

■ ■ ENCORE ■ ■

1. Attend a performance of a mime troupe. Use your personal resources to learn from the people who perform.
2. Attend a circus, and observe every detail of your favorite clown. If possible, visit with one of the clowns after the show.
3. Working as an entire class, pantomime playing individual instruments while music is being played. Now become an instrument and pantomime being played while music is played by your teacher.
4. Divide into groups and form a particular family—for example, a television family, cartoon family, or famous family. Pantomime getting ready for a family portrait and having your picture taken.
5. Divide into groups and choose a machine. Pantomime what the machine looks like, and pantomime the actions of the machine when it is turned on. Each member of the group must be a part of the machine. Examples are a carousel, tractor, copier, and computer.
6. Divide into groups and pantomime actions for one of the four seasons. Each member must be included and play a part in the planning and acting. Repeat this activity using holidays.